

Teaching culture-oriented linguistics by native Russian speakers in Western Mongolia as a factor in sustainable Russian-Mongolian cross-border development

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Abstract. The article describes the intercultural interaction of the population of Mongolia and assesses the role of the Russian language in it. An analysis of the linguistic and cultural aspect of the content of Russian language teaching in Mongolia is provided in the paper. In the course of the study, we found that 94% of the Ulgii and Khovd students did not use the Russian language in situations of real communication, and Russia's perception is based on false images and negative stereotypes about Russia. This fact is a barrier to international and cross-border cooperation between Russia and Mongolia. To overcome such negative trends, the authors propose to update the content of linguistic studies, covering scientific and industrial achievements of Russia and its regional diversity. Based on the analysis of foreign native speakers' activities and their own experience in the implementation of projects to promote the Russian language in Western Mongolia, the authors propose an alternative mechanism for attracting native Russian speakers to teaching abroad to create conditions for sustainable cross-border development.

Keywords: speaker, native speaker, language, Russian language, image

1. Introduction

In 2018-2019, with the support of the "Russkiy mir" Foundation, the Gorno-Altai State University is implementing projects to promote the Russian language in schools in the cities of Western Mongolia's regions Ulgii and Hovd bordering on the Altai Republic. In the process of project implementation, it was found that, despite the close proximity to the Russian border and visa-free travel between countries, the vast majority of students did not have experience interacting with native Russian speakers and did not use it as a means of communication. Therefore, they saw neither the meaning of its study nor the prospects for its use. The emerging linguistic and cultural barriers lead to the separation of countries, the violation of both general interstate and private cross-border links.

V. I. Terentyev conditionally divides the inhabitants of Mongolia into "Soviet Mongols" who received education in Soviet Mongolia or the USSR and positively related to Russia, and the contemporary generation that is unfamiliar with Russian culture and has a negative or neutral attitude towards Russia. The largest Russian Center of Science and Culture in Asia (RCSC) is engaged in cultural work in Mongolia. However, it is firstly oriented towards the society of "Soviet Mongols," officials and Russian compatriots, and practically does not involve the new generation in the cultural field of Russia. The educational work of the United States, China, South Korea, and Japan to promote their languages

and values in Mongolia is carried out at a different level: teachers are native speakers (only 99 Peace Corps volunteers in Mongolia are in March 2019) [1]; the best students receive scholarships for semester and annual trips abroad; a diverse grant system is put in place [2].

In the non-profit sector of Mongolia, in comparison with other countries, Russia is represented slightly. So, out of 12 thousand registered non-profit organizations (NPOs) [3] only three organizations are significant NPO from Russia: "Organization of Peace and Friendship of Mongolia," "Mongolia-Russia Friendship Society," and "Russian Foundation." The following NPOs have leading positions in the Mongolian society: those under the control of the US "Peace Corps," "Cross country," "Globe International and Transparency," "Waldvogel", "Better World", "Fund of Asia", "International Republican Institute," "K. Adenauer Foundation," and others. Activities of the only Russian religious organization, the Holy Trinity Parish of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ulan Bator, is incomparable with the active missionary work of the American Christian organization "World Vision," "Adventist Development and Relief Agency" (ADRA), "Mongolian Evangelical Alyanse," "Center of Muslims of Mongolia" [4], and numerous mosques received support from Turkey and Arab countries.

Also, the Russian business is presented not in the best way. Russia's direct investment in Mongolia is \$182 million at the end of 2018. This is more than 33 times less than investments from Canada and 25 times less than those from China. Russia occupies the 13th line of Mongolia investors [5]. The business also carries out educational expansion in Mongolia through private South Korean and American universities. There are no educational institutions established by the Russian business in Mongolia.

The example of losing mutual development of Mongolia and Russia is indicative. Until 1990, this country was under exclusive influence of Russia. But for the modern generation of Mongolia, Russia has become an incomprehensible and more distant neighbor than the United States, South Korea, or Canada. Due to both historical and contemporary reasons (such as China's ambitions to restore the borders of ancient Chinese empires, the US's desire to use neighboring states to destabilize the situation on the borders of Russia and China, etc.), these tendencies can lead to conflicts both within Mongolia and in the conflict of third countries [4].

The present state of affairs necessitates an increase in the Russian presence in Mongolia. The Russian culture and geopolitical strategy seek peaceful mutually beneficial coexistence of nations. Acquaintance of the Mongolian population with this position and creation of an adequate image of Russia in the eyes of the younger generation are a condition for the future sustainable Russian-Mongolian cross-border development. This work is devoted to teaching linguistic studies by native speakers of Russian as an effective tool for intercultural education.

2. Materials and Methods

We conducted this study in three stages. At the first stage of familiarization with the problem, we analyzed the scientific literature on the problems of Russian-Mongolian cooperation and interviewed colleagues who had experience of visiting Mongolia. Based on this, we conclude that one of the main reasons for the growing cultural alienation of the two countries is the lack of experience of communication with native Russian speakers among the schoolchildren.

To confirm this hypothesis, in April-May 2018, with the support of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, we carried out the first project to promote the Russian language in the cities of Ulgii and Khovd, which covered 15 schools, 1 university, and the Russian Language Learning Center (a RCSC branch in Ulgii "World of Friends"). Over 2,000 students and 35 Mongolian teachers of Russian as a foreign language (RFL) took part in the project. In the course of this project, we used the following research methods: observation, analysis of approaches, means, and content of teaching Russian as a foreign language in Mongolia, conversation with students and teachers, development of educational materials and their experimental approbation. During the project, our initial hypothesis was supplemented by the absence of adequate information about contemporary Russia. Also, during the project, we analyzed the work of foreign speakers on language teaching.

In January-May 2019, the study continues with the implementation of a similar project to promote the Russian language in Western Mongolia with the support of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation. As part of this project, we are developing additional materials on linguistic studies of Russia, we are testing materials during experimental studies, their discussion and correction.

3. Results

Native speakers are part of the so-called “soft power” formulated by J. Nye and reflecting the main trends in the spread of political influence by the United States. “Soft power” implies the formation of a positive image of the United States, around which a value system is built, which allows one to further transmit this image [6]. At the time of the study or in the last three years, in the cities of Ulgii and Khovd, native speakers from the USA, Turkey, Switzerland, and the Philippines worked on a long-term basis in each educational institution, but there were no native Russian speakers. Communication with the project team was the first act of communication in Russian as the language of real communication for 94% of students. As a result of the study, we identified the following factors hindering the Russian-Mongolian cross-border cooperation:

1. The lack of Russian language speakers in the learning process has turned the Russian language into a non-working tool of communication. Therefore, there was no motivation to learn it. This situation was in opposit to the English language, as the language of live communication, opportunities, and business. The lack of live communication in Russian also affects the quality of future teachers training at the Khovd University.
2. One of the main incentives for choosing the Russian language for studying in high school in Ulgii is the possibility of obtaining a quota for studying at a Russian university. In Ulgii, between a quarter and a third of high school students chooses Russian. For the first time, the Russian language classes for older schoolchildren were opened in Hovda in 2 of 7 schools only in September 2018. (Before that, the Russian language was studied only within the framework of the mandatory minimum as a second foreign language in 7-9 grades).
3. The linguistic and cultural content of teaching in Russian is based on folk tales, classical literature, and limited images of St. Petersburg and Moscow as cultural and historical centers. The lack of relevant information about scientific, industrial, technological successes of Russia, about geography, regions of Russia, and its multinationality leads to the mythologization of Russia, the creation of a false image as a kind of fairy-tale country, alienated from the contemporary world, stuck in ancient times. And Russian is perceived as a language of mononational communication.

Overcoming negative stereotypes is possible through the development of materials on the topics: Russian geography, industry, the Altai Republic as a region bordering Mongolia, space exploration, scientists and inventors of Russia. In conditions of lacking financial and human resources, we will consider how Russian native speakers can compete with other languages in Western Mongolia and provide a social basis for future sustainable cross-border development using the theme “Industry of Russia” as an example.

The theme “Industry” consists of a political map of Russia, 24 cards with product images and 24 cards with product descriptions, manufacturer and place of production (see Fig. 1). The relevance of this topic is due to the fact that even the citizens of Russia consider their country to be industrially backward, despite the fact that it occupies a number of leading positions in many industries. Thus, data on production in the field of aviation, automotive, high technology, energy and food industry were new to the project volunteers, citizens of Russia, they were surprised and forced themselves to look differently at their country. In this communicative-informative game, first of all, students should identify images with descriptions. During verifying the correctness of the first task, students find the place of production on the map, then the game continues in the form of memorization, and then there is a quiz being attached to a political map in order to find out the necessary places of production. As part of this communicative linguistic-cultural game, students learn about unique industrial objects of Russia in various industries,

which is an important element in breaking down negative stereotypes about Russia and forming a positive image.

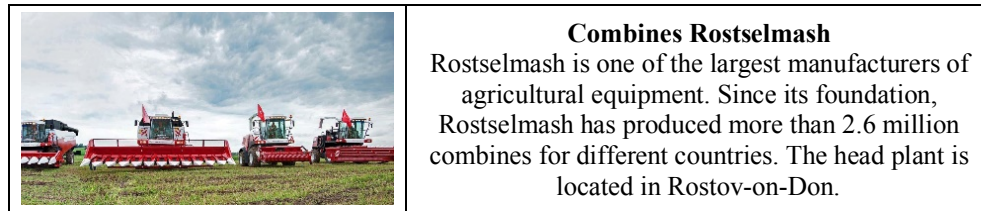


Figure 1. An example of cards on the topic “Industry of Russia.”

As a result of conducting games on these topics, 96% of students said that most of the provided information was new to them, and 92% changed their attitude towards Russia to a more positive.

Based on the analysis of foreign volunteer programs, ways to more effectively use their advantages and minimize drawbacks, we suggest organizing the promotion of the Russian language abroad with the help of volunteers who are native speakers. In the shortest possible time, they must create a competitive environment for studying the Russian language, its popularization and raising the prestige of Russia. The principles we propose to attract volunteers to promote Russian as a foreign language should be based on the following provisions:

- Before being sent abroad, volunteers should receive a methodical portfolio containing a set of linguistic and cultural studies materials for a series of lessons on current topics that demonstrate Russia as a contemporary, scientifically, industrially and informationally developed power, striving for peaceful cooperation with other nations throughout its history;
- Selection of volunteers should be supplemented by a training course with introduction to a volunteer toolkit and training in teaching Russian as a foreign language;
- Volunteers work as a team of 2-4 people (optimally, 3 people) with students in mini groups, in order to engage each student in real communication;
- Volunteers are not sent to an educational institution, but to a specific region in order to maximize the coverage of all educational institutions and all groups of students;
- Cost optimization is carried out by attracting volunteers and organizing their training courses in the border regions of Russia, using the opportunities for visa-free travel, which would also contribute to the development of cross-border relations.

4. Discussion

In the process of implementing the first project, the hypothesis was that the main reason for the poor quality of learning Russian was the lack of live communication with native speakers. However, during the first project and analysis of foreign native speakers' activities, it was found that another weighty reason for losing interest in Russia is the scarcity and falsity of the image of Russia in minds of younger generation. In this connection, the decision to introduce linguistic topics and ensure coverage of the maximum number of target audiences was made. 100% positive feedback from students and teachers about the methods of presenting linguistic information in an interactive form by a native speaker determines its effectiveness in increasing their motivation to learn Russian as a foreign language. It encourages the younger generation to visit Russia and plan further interactions with its inhabitants.

5. Conclusion

The lack of practice in using the Russian language as a means of live communication, the outdated image of Russia in educational materials on the Russian language as a foreign language, coupled with the difficulty of learning Russian, create problems for further sustainable cross-border development. The inclusion of linguistic studies on the current state and regional diversity of Russia, the intensive teaching work of a native speaker in the region with the maximum coverage of the target audience should facilitate the emergence of the Russian language on par with other languages.

These conditions are necessary for the maintenance and development of good neighborly relations and the intensification of relations with partner countries. Foreign citizens, who do not only know the Russian language and culture, but also familiarize themselves with Russia as an advanced and diverse state, strive to develop contacts with Russia and its inhabitants, pay attention to Russian-made goods, see prospects for business cooperation.

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