

# Electronic Textbook of the Russian Language for Foreigners as a Multidisciplinary Phenomenon

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## ABSTRACT

The article offers a justification for the need to create electronic textbooks of Russian as a foreign language, the problem of correlation of language and cultural information in educational materials is studied. There have been strategies of linguocultural correlation as well as holistic and reductive strategies of presenting the image of the country of a studied language pointed out using methods of applied linguocognitology, contextual and conceptual analysis methods, on the example of foreign textbooks of Russian as foreign language textbooks. The author analyzes tactics of implementing the strategy of linguistic-cultural correlation, in particular: the tactics of rejecting linguistic-cultural information in favor of pure grammar and the tactics of rejecting ethno specific linguistic-cultural information in favor of general humanistic (civilizational) problems and values. There has been opposition of two cognitive strategies – reductionism and holism studied. Herewith, the reductionist strategy is understood as the tendency to reduce (truncate) and the resulting simplification of the objective picture of Russian reality. The author identifies tactical ways of implementing the strategy of reductionism: aspect character of the presentation of linguistic-cultural material; geographically and chronologically limited description of Russian reality.

It is emphasized in the article that importance of a holistic strategy in forming a multi-faceted and full-fledged image of the country of the studied language, which is achieved by using an interdisciplinary approach to highlighting the facts of Russian reality in Russian language textbooks. There have been tactics of a holistic strategy highlighted: coverage of different aspects of life of Russian society (household sphere, political structure, education, science, sports, culture, art, and many others); indication of geographical latitude of the country; a combination of tradition and the current state of Russian life; demonstration of linguistic and national diversity of Russia; description of linguistic and stylistic diversity and the phenomenon of polylinguism.

It is indicated in the article that the holistic strategy helps to neutralize simplistically negative and stereotypical views of Russia – on the one hand, the development of cross-cultural communicative competence, on the other hand, teaching inter-ethnic tolerance and respect for foreign linguistic cultures in general. The author notes that there are opportunities for electronic educational environment for creating and implementing Russian language textbooks that meet requirements of a holistic approach to the presentation of the image of the country of the studied language and requirements of multidisciplinary approach.

**Keywords:** *Russian as a foreign language, multidisciplinary, e-textbooks*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Russian language and culture are taught as a single discipline in many universities around the world, and history and literature of Russia are also not studied separately, that determines a special status of the Russian language textbook for foreigners. This textbook becomes almost the only source of information about the country of the language being studied, especially in the situation of learning outside Russian reality. At the same time, Russian language teaching abroad is carried out with the

help of authentic textbooks, i.e. created by teachers-foreigners.

Some of these textbooks present a very ambiguous image of Russia. Authors often portray it as a country that lacks scientific, technological and social progress, that has no prospects for successful economic development, that is populated by rowdies, drunkards and extortioners (see also: Dziuba, 2019; Eremina, 2019; Pirozhkova, 2019).

This is probably due to penetration of negative and ambiguous information about the past, present and even future of Russia from global media and political communication into international educational content,

which strengthens negative stereotypes about the Russians and their lives.

In modern international political context, it is particularly important to identify cognitive strategies that determine the specifics of selecting linguistic- cultural materials for Russian textbooks in order to form a positive image of Russia in the world community, which will help to neutralize the confrontational strategy that is promoted by some influential political players in the international arena and penetrates the educational sphere. It is obvious that the conceptual-axiological content of foreign language textbooks that are used in international space should correspond to the principles of intercultural mutual respect and tolerance.

1.2. Learning a language is impossible in isolation from its culture and the mentality of native speakers of this language. E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov note: "a foreigner cannot do without familiarizing with our periodicals and with the great Russian literature, since they are, first of all, facts of national culture, and secondly, they are the most important sources of information about national culture.

Therefore, connecting up these genres of literature to acculturation of a foreigner is absolutely necessary" (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, 1990, 114-115). However we can confirm that there is a tendency abroad to study any language in isolation from its culture. The main arguments of this approach are statements about the need to learn a foreign language as a world, international one (a language of international level is necessary for communication in multicultural environment, it is more important to know the language itself, and not the culture behind it); on the impracticability and practical complexity of studying ethnic cultures in multilingual education (simultaneous study of several languages makes it almost impossible to master features of different cultures).

There is a number of textbooks abroad that, to the full extent, reflect such cognitive attitudes, but the authors of such educational materials do not offer strategies for neutralizing cross-cultural conflicts that may arise in communication if ethno-specific norms of speech behavior are not observed.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVE**

The above factors contribute to the objectives of the study – methodological and educational.

2.1. The methodological task is to develop cognitive strategies and tactics for presenting a positive image of Russia in Russian language textbooks for foreigners

2.2. The educational- methodological task is to determine conceptual-axiological basis for selecting linguistic-cultural material about Russia for textbooks of the Russian language (historical facts, personalities, works of art and folk culture, etc.).

2.3. The methodological- technological task is to provide multidisciplinary textbooks of the Russian language for

foreigners with a technical basis for creating relevant to conditions of electronic educational environment.

## **3. ISSUES OF THE RESEARCH**

Key issues of the study are the following:

3.1. What strategies do foreign authors use for presenting the image of Russia in Russian language textbooks?

3.2. What are the ways of selecting facts of culture of Russian language for creating educational materials on the Russian language?

3.3. What recommendations can be offered to authors of foreign textbooks on the Russian language?

3.4. What opportunities of modern educational environment exist for creating and using multidisciplinary textbooks of the Russian language for foreigners?

## **4. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH**

4.1. To identify cognitive strategies and tactics for presenting a positive image of Russia in Russian language textbooks for foreigners.

4.2. To present some recommendations pointed at selecting linguocultural and linguistic material about Russia for Russian language textbooks.

4.3. To emphasize peculiarities of electronic educational environment that contribute to the effective use of multidisciplinary textbooks of the Russian language for foreigners.

## **5. METHODS OF THE RESEARCH**

5.1. While studying educational materials there have been disciplinary (linguocognitive and linguistic proper) methods used: conceptual and content analysis, reconstruction of cognitive strategies and tactics. In the course of work using continuous sampling method and content analysis there have been facts selected that represent linguistic-cultural phenomenon of RUSSIA in terms of compliance or non-compliance with reality, examples of violating the principle of linguistic-cultural correlation identified, the axiological component of the presented in textbooks information about Russia: positive and negative noted.

5.2. General scientific methods of comparison, generalization and induction allowed us to draw conclusions about the implementation of various cognitive strategies and tactics in textbooks for presenting the image of the country of the language being studied.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND THE RESULT OF THE RESEARCH

### 6.1. Strategy of linguistic-cultural correlation

One of the most important strategies of presenting the image of the country of the language being studied is the strategy of linguistic-cultural correlation, which assumes the presence of a distinct connection between language and culture. S. G. Ter-Minasova notes: "if ... to consider a language in terms of its structure, functioning and ways of mastering it (both native and foreign), then the socio-cultural layer or a component of culture turns out to be a part of a language or a background of its real existence. At the same time, the component of culture is not just unspecified cultural information communicated by a language. It is an indispensable property of the language, inherent in all its levels and all branches. Language is a powerful social tool that forms the flow of people into an ethnic group, forming a nation through the storage and transmission of culture, traditions, and social consciousness of this speech group" (Ter-Minasova, 2000, 14).

#### **Violation of linguistic and cultural correlation: substitution of cultural and mental components**

Despite obvious correlation of language and culture, in foreign textbooks on Russian as a foreign language, the authors present the history and culture of not Russia, but the life and traditions of the country in which this language is taught. This leads to **violation of linguistic and cultural correlation**.

Thus, in the textbooks of some Belarusian authors (Merenkova, Yaros and others, 2010; Varichenko, Kishkevich, Prokonina, 2019), offer linguistic-cultural information only about Belarus but not about Russia when studying the Russian language.

Such notable people as diplomat and poet Nikolai Gusovsky, diplomat and composer Mikhail Oginsky, book printer and scientist Francisk Skarina; artist Marc Chagall and writer Vasil Bykov are represented as figures of Belarusian culture.

Historical and natural monuments, objects of culture described in textbooks are exceptionally of Belarus: Church of Saints Simon and Helena in Minsk, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus, Victory square, metro station "Sportivnaya" in Minsk, the House Museum of poet Maxim Bogdanovich in Minsk, the Saviour-Euphrosyne Monastery in Polotsk, the House-Museum of artist Marc Chagall in Vitebsk, the Trinity outskirts, the Theater of Yanki Kupala, the Stalin Line Museum, lake Naroch in Belarus, Botanical garden in the center of Minsk, ecological conservation park near Brest, where there is a monument to the bison – a natural symbol of Belarus. On the pages of these textbooks there is no place for facts of Russian history and culture. Remarkably, if the textbooks reflect the reality in which learning takes place, but hardly a complete ignoring Russian history and culture, if there is a talk about learning the Russian

language. Thus, one of the tactics of implementing the strategy of ignoring linguistic and cultural correlation is **substitution of the cultural component**: the culture of other people, not the native speakers of this language, is transmitted by means of the language being studied.

**Disregard of linguistic-cultural correlation: refuse to present cultural facts.** Another tactic of ignoring the strategy of linguistic and cultural correlation in educational materials is the **complete refuse of authors to present facts of culture, history, geography, and administrative structure of the country of the studied language** in favor of "pure grammar" or in favor of highlighting only universal (psychological, social, everyday, etc., i.e., civilizational) issues and values. It is obvious that the textbook should not consist only of "naked" cultural facts, it should also reflect real, natural life, and should combine information about traditions and modernity, while it should remain an ethno-specific linguistic-cultural phenomenon, but not a universal collection of texts (monologues and dialogues) that can be translated into different languages of the world, and then teach these languages to representatives of any nationality with their help. Thus authors of Russian language textbooks published in Poland (Runowska, Sendhardt, 2018; Sendhardt, 2017) present facts of Russian culture very scarcely, often without any comment, choosing only traditional, stereotypical phenomena, for example: *Russian national costume, the Monument to Peter and Fevronia, Russian izba, pancakes with caviar, GUM, MSU, St. Basil's Cathedral, lake Baikal, parovoz as a symbol of Russian Railways, polar bear*. At the beginning of the textbook, the authors emphasize specifics of presenting educational material: first, the speech material is presented, then grammar, and then exercises aimed at consolidation of studied material and its inclusion in communication. This corresponds to the current communicative approach in teaching a foreign language. However, the authors' chosen tactic of complete refuse of ethno-specific material in favor of exclusively vital and civilizational values (V. I. Karasik's terms) remained without justification.

**Experience of other countries.** The authors of the Polish language textbooks actively include information about the culture, history, and geography of their country in the structure of their textbooks already at the initial stages of training. In one of the textbooks of Polish as a foreign language (Gałyga, 2011) students get acquainted with the representatives of Polish culture, politics, art in the first lesson (Andrzej Wajda, Wisława Szymborska, Lech Walesa, Maria Skłodowska-Curie, Frederic Chopin, Henryk Sienkiewicz); the second lesson is devoted to historic Polish cities; the third – to the Polish monetary signs; the fourth – to Polish national dishes; seventh lesson – to the national holidays of Poland and folk songs; the ninth – to the geography and administrative structure of the state; the tenth – to the main documents of Polish citizens. And this information about the country of the language being studied is useful, interesting and significant for the process of enculturation. The textbook itself becomes not just a collection of theoretical

information about the Polish language and exercises for learning vocabulary and grammar, but really a linguocultural phenomenon, a fact of Polish linguoculture.

## **6.2. Strategy of reductionism**

Some authors of foreign Russian language textbooks, however, do not deny the world significance of Russian culture, science, and art. However, they often present Russia in a stereotypical way, focusing exclusively on the traditional facts of linguo-culture and denying Russian progress. In such cases, the dominant strategy is reductionism, which is understood as a tendency to reduce (truncate) and the resulting simplification of the objective picture of Russian reality. This strategy is implemented in foreign textbooks as follows:

- the aspect of the presentation of linguistic and cultural material chosen by authors of these textbooks; for example, one of the manuals on reading in Russian by Chinese authors (Shi Techang, Wu Sujuan, 2006) reflects only domestic and economic sphere of Russian life, the authors have completely refused to cover the phenomena of history, culture, art, traditions and customs of Russia (Vesnina, Kirilova, 2019);
- in a geographically narrowed view of Russia: many textbooks of Russian as a foreign language cover only life in the central cities, text materials reflect the realities of Moscow, less often St. Petersburg, other cities and regions are not mentioned at all;
- in a chronologically limited description of the history of our Fatherland and life in our state: Russian reality, based on materials of some foreign textbooks, is filled only with the achievements of the past years, associated with the names of, for example, P. I. Tchaikovsky, Anna Pavlova, Yuri Gagarin and others, and traditional images and symbols, usually gone into the past (budenovka, Stalinism, the KGB, etc.). Obviously, the mentioned personalities and phenomena are the facts of Russian history and culture, however, the description of Russia, only in this vein, contributes to creation of an archaic, far from modern image closed to world achievements, a backward and undeveloped country; probably, to create a full-fledged and fair image of Russian reality in educational materials on the Russian language for foreigners, traditional themes and symbols need to be combined with achievements and realities of modern science and culture.

## **6.3. The strategy of holism**

Apparently, the most productive in this sense is a holistic strategy for the selection of educational material, in which the authors try to combine information about traditions of Russia and the contemporary development of the country, strive to highlight the different sides of Russian life, which allows you to create complex and multifaceted image that is different by its emergent nature. L. V. Bronnik emphasizes that "the principle of emergence

(integrity) ... expresses the requirement to correlate an object of highly specialized interest with the general picture of complex multi-level reality in which all phenomena and processes are interconnected and interacted" (Bronnik, 2009, 19).

This strategy is potentially able to create a possibly contradictory, ambiguous, but full-fledged and multi-faceted image of Russia in Russian language textbooks. This strategy can be correlated with the following characteristics of educational materials: coverage of different aspects of life of Russian society (household sphere, political structure, education, science, sports, culture, art, etc.); geographical latitude in the coverage of Russian reality; combination of traditions and the current state of Russian life; linguistic and national diversity of Russia; lingua-style diversity and multilingualism (rational introduction of international and multi-style vocabulary).

Some contemporary foreign textbooks meet this strategy. Thus, the pages of Anna PADO's guide "Conversation 1-2" (PADO, 2019) contains fragments of literary works of classics and modern poets, provides students and listeners with information about works of classical art and information about trends of modern music, cinema, painting, architecture, describes the oldest books on clay tablets and encourage people to actively participate in book-crossing and use online bookstores. Combining tradition and modernity while choosing linguistic and cultural facts allows the author to create a versatile and full-fledged image of the country of the language being studied. The holistic strategy is fully implemented in the textbooks for Bulgarian schools "matryoshka" (Deyanova-Atanasova, Radkova, grozdanova, 2016; Radkova, Deyanova-Atanasova, Chubarova, 2017). These educational materials demonstrate the wide geography of our country and Bulgaria itself. From the texts of these textbooks, we learn not only about the Bulgarian capital-Sofia, but also about other wonderful cities in Bulgaria-Plovdiv, Pazardzhik, Burgas; the text "the largest cities of Russia" tells not only about Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also about Novosibirsk, Yekaterinburg and Nizhny Novgorod; it also gives information about the largest Northern cities – Murmansk, Zapolyarny, Norilsk; it also mentions the largest southern cities of Russia – Rostov-on-the Don and Volgograd; the textbook of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade presents a text about the main city of Siberia – Novosibirsk, its unique features that allowed the city to have entered the Guinness Book of Records.

In the section " the World around us: who lives nearby?" in addition to descriptions of pets and domestic animals, there is information about animals and birds that live in different regions of our country: about the camels, the Siberian husky dog, on the reindeer, Siberian tiger, etc. Arguments about fauna typical for different climatic zones of Russia, lead the authors of the textbook to the idea to get them acquainted with Russian applied art – Khokhloma, Zhostovo painted trays, in which Russian artists depict, flowers and berries growing in Russia. In the section " World around: where to go?" there have been vast Russian spaces of Russia described, information

about the wide geography of Russia is given: continents, plains, mountains, large rivers and lakes, the Far North, Arctic deserts, and oceans that wash over Russia. These and many other facts indicate a possibility of implementation of a holistic strategy in teaching Russian as a foreign language, and a variety of information about the target language country gives the textbook a multidisciplinary character, involving not only linguists, but also experts in geography, history, cultural studies, literary criticism, intercultural communication into formation of poly-spectra image of Russia.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The strategy of linguistic-cultural correlation, which assumes inter-related coexistence of the national language and culture, can be implemented in Russian language textbooks for foreigners using different tactics. The most productive tactic of full compliance of language and culture, however, in the educational literature there may be a disorder of linguistic and cultural correlation: substitution of a cultural component; refuse to cover the facts of culture, history, geography of the country of the studied language in favor of pure grammar (a language without culture); from the consideration of linguistic and cultural phenomena in favor of general humanistic values and universal psychological, social, and everyday problems. In foreign textbooks on the Russian language, one can also observe implementation of two strategies for present-

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However, implementation of a holistic strategy of presenting the image of the country of the language being studied in language textbooks requires certain technical capabilities, which technology of creating electronic textbooks can cope with very successfully today. These textbooks are characterized by the ability to access hypertext (i.e. Internet resources), which allows to include in the educational process a wide range of audio and video materials (including authentic) on Russian history, geography, culture, art, and science.

ing the image of Russia: the strategy of reductionism and holism, the most productive of which, in our opinion, is the holistic one. It requires an interdisciplinary approach to highlighting the facts of Russian reality and contributes to the formation of intercultural communicative competence, fostering inter-national tolerance and respect for foreign linguistic cultures.

The most effective means of implementing the presented concept of teaching Russian as a foreign language is an electronic textbook, which gives an opportunity to correlate educational materials with the requirements of a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to linguistic foreign language education in a full extent.

*Understand Russia: Cognitive Strategies of Teaching Aids in Russian as a Foreign Language”.*

- Speakers [Kognitivnyye strategii predstavleniya imidzha Rossii v zarubezhnykh uchebnikakh po russkomu yazyku kak inostrannomu dlya nositeley slavyanskikh yazykov], *Philological Class*, no. 1 (55), pp. 75–82. DOI 10.26170/fk19- 01-10.
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