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Moving towards sustainable multilingualism: key developments and challenges

The article discusses the issues of introducing a multilingual component into the process of foreign language teaching in Russian Non-Linguistic University. The author combines the concept of multilingualism with the unique position of English and tries to harmonize their co-existence in the trilingual experimental workbook «Multilingual Guide to the English Speaking World», which changes the traditional approach to the study of Foreign Languages by implementing simultaneous multilingual immersion into English, German and French. Moreover, further development of students' multilingual world-image is realized by bringing together the cognitive, linguo-cultural and socially-oriented approaches in the language classroom through a number of innovative pedagogical technologies and educational methods.

Key words: multilingual component, non-linguistic university, multilingual world-image, innovative pedagogical technologies, educational methods.

Multilingualism is a common and increasing phenomenon in present day society, which can be studied from different perspectives. It is understood as «the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to engage, on the regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives. [1] A working definition might therefore be for the individual to be proficient in three or more languages and to have at least one (first) language in which this individual is fully literate at the end of the university education. To be bilingual or multilingual is not the aberration <...> it is rather a normal and unremarkable necessity for the majority in the world today [1]. The advantages that multilinguals exhibit over monolinguals are not restricted to linguistic knowledge only, but extend outside the area of language.

Educational System from primary to tertiary education have a special responsibility for enabling and facilitating students' development of their multilingual and intercultural competences and skills. If we go back to the mid-1990-s, it was recommended that a national language education policy should aim at offering Russian citizens the opportunity to learn one foreign language in addition to their mother tongue, and that foreign language (English, German or French) was learned in the course of compulsory education.

However, especially since the turn of the millennium, socio-economic and political developments have changed and the role of English as *lingua franca* has stepped up. Nowadays the innovated system of education should increase the individual multilingualism until every citizen has practical skills in at least two foreign languages in addition to his or her mother tongue. It is time to evaluate the link between national policy and the area of languages.

Multilingual and polycultural scenario obviously presents new challenges for Russian higher education, which are closely connected with the language competences for the employability of graduates, their mobility and personal growth. It should be encouraged in teaching and research throughout the higher education curriculum. And it may be a very well-considered decision to use English as *lingua academica* more than as a detriment of multilingualism and linguistic diversity.

The question is how to combine the concept of multilingualism with the unique position of English and harmonize their co-existence? No doubt that English tops the list of five most widely spoken foreign languages not only in Russia but all over the world since it appears that two out of three terrestrials (67 %) consider English one of the two most useful languages for themselves [3; 15]. In the First European Survey on Language Competences from 2012, it appears from the conclusions that in «most educational systems, the first target language, is English, and even in educational systems where it is the second target language, performance in English tends to be higher than in other languages. Further evidence of the particular status of English comes from the students' questionnaire responses, their reported perception of its usefulness, and their degree of exposure to it and the use of it through traditional and new media» [2].

Since English seems to be so ubiquitous, many people tend to think that they do not need other languages. So the concept of one plus a minimum of two foreign languages for studying is still the overarching aim within Russian higher education and still far from realization.

Other European languages which are also very popular for studying in Russian higher school and useful for interacting on the global arena include French and German. And if the responsibility of higher education is to develop the professionals of the future it should become aware of the fact that our graduates must be multilingual.

The procedure of making Russian students multilingual can be based on the idea of language mediation that is the process of using a foreign language learned (FL_1) to master other foreign languages (FL_2 , FL_3 etc.), and, more precisely, — a special kind of interactive activity; conveyance of a semantic content from one language into another one/ones, with due consideration for the recipient's socio-cultural specifics. Thus, people speaking fluent English as a foreign language may penetrate different languages of the world and learn them based on a mediation language or through the English-language culturological prism. However, if you are a native speaker of the other European language, e.g. German, French, Spanish, etc., these languages may also serve as mediators since they represent one and the same Indo-European language family. Actually, it's time to change the traditional approach to the study of Foreign Languages by implementing simultaneous multilingual immersion for the purpose of sustainable functional multilingual acquisition which can be exciting, cognitive, effective and very important modern life skill.

Multilingual person is one who makes an effort to seek out new experiences rather than just accepting what is dished out in front of him. Thus the strength of such person is in his intelligence and his tongue.

Moving towards multilingual education there is a special need of creation the innovative workbooks and new approaches which are far from traditional ones. Let us suggest the following things: one — in the form of a book, the other — in the form of interactive classroom.

At first, it is necessary to mention a very unusual experimental workbook «Multilingual Guide to the English Speaking World» [4] which reflects the way of polycultural thinking. Designed for the multilingual students of Intermediate level, the above mentioned workbook is rich in pictures and photos and uses the full range of colours. The language is fairly simple and straightforward; the authentic materials have been carefully selected and summarized, with the aim of building a linguistic foundation and easy format for the students' intercultural acquisition.

This workbook is designed for very practical purposes:

- firstly, to acquaint the readers with the English speaking countries in brief in the multilingual context;
- secondly, to intensify the students' language-learning motivation;
- and thirdly, to make students interested in the life of these countries so as to enlarge the intercultural competence because we are the parts of so many cultures.

As George Yule once wrote: «We develop awareness of our knowledge, and hence of our culture, only after having developed language. The particular language we learn through the process of cultural transmission provides us, at least initially, with a ready-made system of categorizing the world around us and our experience of it» [5; 267].

Another important aim of this workbook is to help the students to evaluate the progress in the international studies, to diagnose the drawbacks and to remedy them later. Thus, this book is a bridge to multilingual and cultural understanding between people [6]. Moreover, this workbook will expand the knowledge of the English speaking countries as well as train the multilingual skills in language switching, since English, German and French are equally significant in the international society. Therefore, a good command of these languages can give the students the threefold benefit over the mono- and bilingual people.

«Multilingual Guide to the English Speaking World» is divided into parts (Units) which make students familiar with the main aspects of British, American, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand way of life and to compare their own country to that of the English speaking countries. Each part of the book starts with a popular proverb or interesting saying anticipating the content of the unit and making the process of language studying truly absorbing.

The Background Knowledge section gives the definitions of many linguistic notions and answers the most common questions. It explains the up-to-date necessity of being multilingual; it clues the story of English language origin and its development into «lingua franca» in the XX century, and language-mediator in the XXI century; it describes the language tree and tells about languages in contacts.

Unit A offers the general information about the Commonwealth of Nations and five English speaking countries in the form of the profiles where one can find the essential facts about the official names of the countries, their attributes, status, government, area, territory, population, currency, etc. In addition, it is enriched with some little-known curiosities and other details which can encourage the students to comment, discuss, debate, and compare opinions on the given topics.

Unit B contains 36 blocks of Quizzes based on the pictures, photos, portraits and other kinds of illustrations and devoted to the geographical maps; the national flags; the coats of arms; the cultural symbols; the official residences; the native population; the invaders, discoverers and explorers of the new lands; the British Monarchs; the Royal House of Windsor; the national currencies; the plant life; the animal life; the emblems; the main public schools, colleges and universities; the famous places of interest and great tourists attractions; the best-known streets and quarters; the outstanding writers, poets, and literary masters; the famous artists and musicians; the prominent scientists; the celebrated actors and actresses; the modern singers and pop groups; the sport and sports organizations; some traditional costumes and uniforms; and etc. Quizzing serves as a device to reinforce learning and motivation. It may develop and increase students' awareness as well as their stock of knowledge.

Unit C includes map games, cultural puzzles, crosswords, anagrams and rebuses proving the saying: «Learning language can be fun!» This part of the «Guide...» is aimed at stimulating the students' active participation and making the process of language education quite entertaining. Moreover, the above-mentioned tasks can help to open students' mind and develop such skills as critical thinking and information analysis, creative initiative and wittiness, the ability to read between the lines and to think outside the box. As they say: «Mind is like an umbrella, useful when open».

Unit D consists of several interesting to know paragraphs aimed at the broadening of students' intercultural horizons through the studies of historical fact files about five English speaking countries: the history of the population; the historical chart of Great Britain; British Empire and its Monarchs; the Royal House of Windsor; the nominal roll of UK Prime Ministers and their role in the development of the country; the list of US Presidents with some biographical references; political and state leaders of Canada, Australia and New Zealand; the list of American states and their nicknames; the maps and other useful information.

At the very end of the book there are *Keys* for checking up and *Glossary* for pronunciation and meaning consulting. You may also find there a list of *References* and *Useful publications*.

Teachers can use «Multilingual Guide to the English Speaking World» quite freely, either following the order of the topics as they are presented or following their own teaching programme, since each unit is separate and complete and there is no increase in difficulty. They can train the students one, two or even three foreign languages at once, developing their bi- /multilingual competence and using English as a language-mediator for the linguistic and cross-cultural transfer. They may offer their multilingual students to scrutinize Units A and D in English, leading them to a discussion in German and carrying out the creative tasks of Unit C in French. Quizzes (Unit B) can be done as homework or as pair /group activities in class. That will be an amusing language-switching game in the context of cross-cultural education. Full-coloured pictures, photos and drawings will make the process of teaching demonstrative and easy for understanding. The valuable source of testing materials (Unit B) can be used for the revision and consolidation work. Last, but not least, the work book can play the role of 'edutainment' as it includes such a tricky part as Unit C.

Languages are the key component of human identity and should be learnt not only by studying the grammar or vocabulary rules, but also by learning in-depth about the culture, the history and the people who speak them. Thus, knowledge of languages is crucial for social cohesion and integration.

Let's now turn to one more important aim of language education — it is the formation of multilingual world-image which can help

- 1) the students to feel comfortable in multilingual polycultural environment;
- 2) the teachers to develop in their students multilingual sustainability and tolerance.

As famous experts on metaphor J. Lakoff and M. Johnson once said that national view of the world is highly metaphorical and quite often culturally bound; the most part of the conceptual system of a human being is structured with the help of metaphors [7; 93].

The learners' multicultural awareness of the linguistic and non-linguistic world-image is hence crucial and poses quite a challenge in the course of foreign language acquisition. Firstly, the understanding of cultural discrepancies contributes into the mastering of the second language, and secondly, broadens the frames of the learners' own non-verbal image of the world. In this connection, the metaphorical concepts analysis is thought to be an effective tool for grasping the universal and specific notions peculiar to a given culture. We believe that the students' ability to read between the lines, in other words, to think outside the box is the ultimate goal of a profound foreign language course.

The open mind means looking at issues from a number of perspectives, applying all thinking processes that strive to get below the surface such as questioning, probing, analysing, testing and exploring. All these techniques are covered with one single term which is called Critical Thinking. Using our critical mind is an

ongoing process which continues throughout our lives. We all have biases (areas of thinking where we have a 'blind spot'). Therefore, critical thinking is about becoming aware of our biases and challenging our own thinking. Critical analysis, thus, is a key activity in evaluation process which is about weighing up the strengths and weaknesses of a statement in order to decide how much it contributes to a particular body of knowledge in your subject, in other words, how well it reflects different sides of a concept.

To think critically is never to take something on 'face value' but to question and think independently about an issue in order to see the real meaning of an utterance what is, in its turn, the main idea of metaphor analysis.

Metaphors are conceptual due to their nature and realized in the language not only by means of linguistic entities but are reflected in all the spheres of our life. According to Kovecses Z. the latter are called *realizations of conceptual metaphors* [8; 63].

Authentic films can also be deemed as an available, easy-to-use and time-saving source of getting acquainted with other cultures via concept learning and conceptual metaphor analysis. Actually, contemporary cinematography offers a great variety of stories full of up-to-date problematic, cultural issues and just everyday situation descriptions, the language of which is rich in metaphorical expressions aiming at concept verbalization.

As you probably know, the vision of the world inside a certain culture is quite unique. And in the polycultural classroom this issue is especially important in the terms of the formation of a tolerant multilingual personality, capable of thinking critically while acquiring a foreign language, and as a result, a foreign culture. For this very reason, we are bringing together the cognitive, linguo-cultural and socially-oriented approaches in the language classroom and activate all the aspects mentioned through a number of innovative technologies and educational methods.

In relation to this, we would love to offer some ideas we came up with while elaborating one of our classes devoted to metaphor analysis in the multilingual classroom environment.

To begin with, you may suggest your students to watch the following episode and determine what universal key-concept is being discussed in it. (the dialogue is taken from the film *Something's Gotta Give*)

As you could guess a universal key-concept discussed here is the concept «*marriage, alliance*».

But what metaphorical expressions helped you determine the concept «*marriage, alliance*»

Erica: Ever been **married**, Harry?

Harry: No I haven't.

Erica: Wow. Now, why do you think that is?

Harry: Well, some people just don't **fit the mold**, and so far, you know ...

Erica: Hey, if it ain't **broke**.

Harry: Exactly.

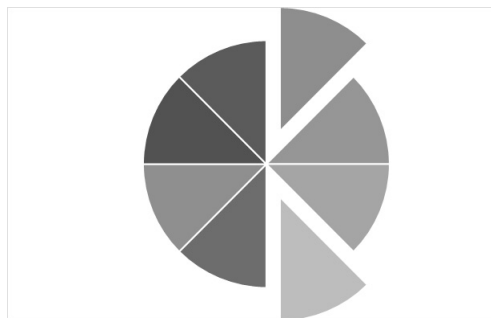
Zoe: Wait a second. Aren't you a famous **bachelor**?

Harry: Well, I wouldn't say I'm famous.

Zoe: Yeah, didn't I read an article about you in New York Magazine?

Harry: I guess some people find it interesting. I've escaped **the noose** for so long.

Then you may ask the students to express their own view of the concept existing in their native culture by writing some key associations on the pieces of a pie chart handed out to each student.



To contribute into the further concept development one might need to watch the following episode taken from *Pride and Prejudice* movie containing the priest's speech at a wedding ceremony (video).

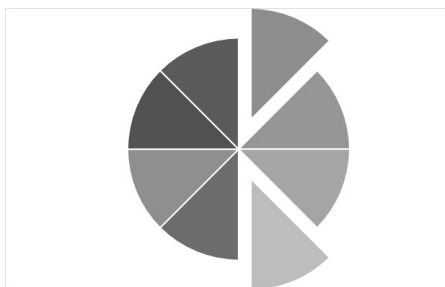
Then you should check out the metaphors in the given monologue:

*We are gathered here in the sight of God and in the face of this **combination** to join together this man and this woman; and this man and this woman are in **holy matrimony** which is an honorable estate instituted*

by God and the time of men's innocence signifying to us **the mystical union** that is between Christ and his church. First, it was ordained for **the procreation of children**. Secondly, as **a remedy against sin and to avoid fornication**. Thirdly, for a mutual society **help and comfort** that the one ought to have of the other **in everything** — prosperity and adversity, into which earlier state these persons present come now **to be joined**.

The exercise to follow up is to point out the main characteristics of the same concept peculiar to the English-speaking world image and verbalized in both video episodes.

Thus, the students complete another pie chart with the metaphorical expressions from the videos.



Finally, the students contrast both visions of the concept «marriage» linguistically presented in the native world image and the English-speaking one and state the detected differences.



After that students are asked to draw a tree, the trunk, the branches and the leaves of which reflect the main constituents of the concept in question. The main idea of this activity is to assemble a collective image of culturally-bound mental item. As a result the students depict a tree which belongs to both cultures: the native and the foreign one.

Thus in this lesson we have been following some methodological steps:

- 1) brain storming (looking for ideas in L₁ world image);
- 2) summing up the ideas (putting the pieces of the pie together);
- 3) studying authentic episodes (watching videos/reading extracts);
- 4) critical selection of the metaphorical concept constituents designing a polycultural objectification of the concept (listing all the cognitive components using one of the possible ways of their presentation).

In fact, the lesson described above is one of the possible means of contributing into both critical thinking skills development and peer cognition of the world image. By the world image we mean not only the target (foreign) language view of the world but the native conceptual system along with the same systems of other culture representatives, studying in the same group who make up this classroom a multilingual environment. Besides, through finding similarities and differences, universal ideas and completely unique ones, we learn, educate our students and ourselves and acquire foreign languages in today's fast growing multilingual and polycultural society.

There are plenty of other ways for the development of multilingualism in the university but the proposed substantial multilingualism is sustainable only if a normal student:

- a) has learned more than one foreign language;
- b) has the chance, accepts the necessity, and feels the obligation to use different languages in his/her everyday/academic/scientific, etc. life;
- c) develops respect and tolerance for all the other cultures and nationalities;
- d) loves and studies his/her mother tongue and native culture.

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Тұрақты көптілділікке өту: негізгі сұрақтар және мәселелер

Мақалада ресейлік тілдік емес жоо-да шетел тіліне оқыту үрдісіне мультилингвалды компонентті енгізу мәселесі талқыланды. Автор «мультилингвизм» концептісін ағылшын тілінің жоғарғы жағдайымен үйлестіреді және «Ағылшын тілді әлемге көптілді өткізгіш» атты үштілді эксперименталды оқу құралында олардың бірігіп өмір сүруін үйлестіруге тырысады. Бұл ағылшын, неміс және француз тілдеріне бірден мультилингвалды енгізу арқылы шетел тілдерін меңгеру туралы дәстүрлі ойды өзгертеді. Сонымен қатар студенттердің көптілді әлем бейнесінің ары қарай дамуы шетел тілдері сабақтарында инновациялық педагогикалық технологияларды және білім беру әдістерін қолдану арқылы когнитивті, лингвомәдени және әлеуметтік бағытталған тәсілдер арқылы жүзеге асады.

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Переход к устойчивому многоязычию: ключевые вопросы и проблемы

В статье поднимаются вопросы внедрения мультилингвального компонента в процесс обучения иностранным языкам в российском неязыковом вузе. Автор сочетает концепт «мультилингвизм» с привилегированным положением английского языка и делает попытку гармонизировать их сосуществование в триязычном экспериментальном учебном пособии «Многоязычный проводник в англоязычный мир», которое меняет традиционное представление об изучении иностранных языков посредством внедрения одновременного мультилингвального погружения в английский, немецкий и французский языки. Кроме того, отмечает автор, дальнейшее развитие многоязычной картины мира студентов реализуется путём совмещения когнитивного, лингвокультурного и социально ориентированного подходов на занятиях по иностранному языку с использованием инновационных педагогических технологий и образовательных методов.

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