**THE MAIN ASPECTS OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is to identify and describe the main aspects of the sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook. The material of the study was 5 Russian language textbooks for foreigners of the Beginner level, and 5 textbooks on Russian phraseology for foreigners of the Intermediate level. The following research methods were used: critical analysis of the scientific literature on the textbook expertise; content analysis of Russian language textbooks for foreigners on the following aspects: analysis of topics and situations, analysis of sociocultural units, analysis of forms of sociocultural units presentation, analysis of the author’s attitude to the textbook sociocultural context (the image of the target language country); systematization of data obtained as a result of the analysis.

As a result of the study, the main aspects of the sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook (choice of topics and situations, selection of sociocultural units, forms of the sociocultural units presentation, author's attitude) and criteria for their expertise were highlighted. The criteria for the choice of topics and situations are the following: their presence or absence in the textbook, their conformity or discrepancy to the standards and requirements for each level of Russian as a foreign language. The selection of sociocultural units is carried out according to their presence or absence in the textbook, degree of representation of these units, presence or absence of parallels with other cultures. The criterion for analyzing the forms of sociocultural units representation is the presence or absence of sociocultural units in texts, exercises, as well as techniques ensuring their acquisition. The author's attitude to the sociocultural context can be defined by the image of the target language country which is created in the textbook, as well as by the form and emotional coloring (negative or positive) of the sociocultural units used by the author.

The results of the study can be used by foreign language teachers, authors and reviewers of textbooks, and specialists on applied linguistics.

**Keywords:** foreign language textbooks, sociocultural analysis; sociocultural units; image of the country.

**INTRODUCTION**

The problem of analyzing a foreign language textbook is significant for authors and reviewers of textbooks, teachers who select a textbook for a certain category of students, as well as researchers involved in comparing textbooks to describe the existing methodological experience and optimize education in accordance with the requirements of a modern life. In addition, in recent decades, a textbook is considered not only as a means of learning, but also as a cultural phenomenon of the nation [1], therefore the problem of analyzing a textbook becomes important for a wide range of researchers (cultural studies researchers, political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, etc.).

A.R. Arutyunov, I.L. Bim, V.V. Safonova, V.M. Yakushev, A. Cunningsworth, I. McGrath, B. Tomlinson [2-8] dedicated their works to the problem of analyzing a foreign language textbook. They have developed the basic principles of the textbook analysis, primarily related to the presentation of language and speech material in it. At the same time, V. V. Safonova, A. Cunningsworth, R. Rubdy raised the question of the sociocultural analysis of a textbook [4; 6; 9]. Thus, R. Rubdy, believes that during the textbook analysis it is necessary to get answers to the following questions:

* What aspects of culture are in focus?
* Are the materials relevant/suitable/appropriate to the learners’ cultural context and sensitive to their values and beliefs?
* Do the materials reﬂect awareness of and sensitivity to sociocultural variation?
* Does the book show parallels and contrasts between the learners’ culture and others? Is this done in a non-patronizing way?
* Does the course book enshrine stereotyped, inaccurate, condescending or offensive images of gender, race, social class or nationality?[9]

As you can see, R. Rubdy pays great attention to political and social correctness. In general, his questions show an orientation towards the creation of conditions for intercultural communication. However, the main aspects of the analysis of the textbook socio-cultural content are not identified; the above-mentioned researchers give general recommendations for conducting a sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook, without revealing the essence of each component.

**PURPOSE, MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The purpose of this article is to identify and describe the main aspects of the sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook.

The material of the study was five Russian language textbooks for foreigners of the Beginner level, and five textbooks on Russian phraseology for foreigners of the Intermediate level. All of them have been published in the last twenty years in Russia and are intended for teaching Russian in the conditions of the language environment. Their authors are predominantly native Russian speakers, citizens of Russia, in some cases foreign specialists have been included in the author’s groups.

The following textbooks of Russian as a foreign language for foreigners of the Beginner level were chosen: L.V. Moskovkin, L.V. Silvina “Russkiy yazyk” (Russian language), 2014; V.E. Antonova, etc. “Doroga v Rossiyu 1, 2” (The way to Russia), 2004; S.I. Chernyshov “Poyekhali!” (Let’s go!), 2016; M.N. Anikina „ Lestnitsa “ (Stairs), 2015; L.G. Belikova, etc. “Russkiy yazyk: pervyje shagi 1, 2” (Russian language: first steps 1, 2), 2016. The following textbooks on Russian phraseology for foreigners of the Intermediate level were chosen: E.E. Minakova “Sovremennaya russkaya idiomatika” (Modern Russian idioms), 2008; N.V. Basko “Russkiye fraseologismy v situatsiyakh” (Russian idioms in situations), 2011; T.P. Chepkova, etc. “Russkiye fraseologismy. Uznayom i uchim” (Russian idiomatic expressions. Get to know and learn), 2013; T.P. Chepkova “Znakomimsya s russkoy frazeologiyey” (We get to know Russian idioms), 2013; H. Walter, etc. “Russkaya fraseologiya dlya nemtsev” (Russian phraseology for German speakers), 2015. The criteria for their selection were the modernity and wide popularity in Russia and abroad.

The following research methods were used:

1. critical analysis of the scientific literature on the textbook expertise;
2. content analysis of Russian language textbooks for foreigners at the Beginner level and modern phraseological textbooks for foreigners at the Intermediate level on the following aspects:
* analysis of topics and situations,
* analysis of sociocultural units,
* analysis of sociocultural units presentation,
* analysis of the author’s attitude to the textbook sociocultural context (the image of the target language country);
1. systematization of data obtained as a result of the analysis.

**RESULTS**

During the textbooks analysis, we were able to identify four main aspects that are necessary for creating a socio-cultural context in the textbook (see Chart 1), which will be discussed in more detail below.

*Chart 1. Aspects of sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook.*

1. ***Analysis of topics and situations.***

The first aspect is the analysis of topics and communicative situations included in the textbook, during which the following features are determined: a) the presence / absence of sociocultural topics and situations in the textbook, b) their compliance / non-compliance with requirements for language levels and curricula and c) their universal and national-specific character. For example, the analysis of the textbook “Russkiye fraseologismy. Uznayom i uchim” showed the presence of sociocultural topics and situations and their compliance with the requirements for level B1, although the set of topics and situations is incomplete (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Analysis of the topics and situations selection in the textbook on Russian phraseology for foreigners of the Intermediate level.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TEXTBOOK TITLE | TOPICS AND SITUATIONS IN THE TEXTBOOK THAT COINCIDE WITH THE STANDARD B1 [10] | TOPICS AND SITUATIONS IN THE TEXTBOOK THAT DO NOT COINCIDE WITH THE STANDARD B1 [10] | TOPICS AND SITUATIONS IN THE STANDARD B1 [10] THAT ARE NOT REPRESENTED IN THE TEXTBOOK |
| T.P. Chepkova, etc. “Russkiye fraseologismy. Uznayom i uchim” (Russian idiomatic expressions. Get to know and learn), 2013 | University, Home, Family, Friends, Traits of character, Shopping, Sport and healthy lifestyle, Time off, Travelling | Cooking, Guests | Post office, Bank, Library, Theatre, Hospital and pharmacy, Speaking on the phone, Learning languages, Russian education, Nature, Ecology, Russian Federation, Outstanding Russians |

1. ***Analysis of sociocultural units.***

The nomenclature of sociocultural units was borrowed from the work of M. L. Vaisburd [11]. Analyzing their composition in a textbook, we fixed the degree of their representation in the textbook: the absence / isolated cases / a large number. The criterion “parallels with other cultures” is introduced to create a more complete picture of the sociocultural content of the textbook. The presence of this criterion takes on particular significance in the context of intercultural communication. An example of the sociocultural units analysis in the textbook “Poyekhali!” is presented in Table 2.

*Table 2. The sociocultural units analysis in the textbook “Poyekhali!”.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  CRITERIA FOR THEIR EXPERTISEGROUPS OF SOCIOCULTURAL UNITS | ABSENCE(0) | PRESENCE IN ISOLATED CASES (1-2) | PRESENCE IN A LARGE NUMBER(3 AND MORE) | PRESENCE /ABSENCE OFPARALLELS WITH OTHER CULTURES +\- |
| Historical events, events of social life | + |  |  |  |
| Customs and traditions (e.g. New year, holidays) |  |  | + | + |
| National cuisine (e.g. pel'meni, borshch) |  |  | + |  |
| Household items, everyday items, clothing |  | + |  |  |
| Authentic materials (e.g. money, transport schedule, menu, tickets, announcements) |  |  | + | + |
| Geographic objects (e.g. capital, cities, rivers, sights)  |  |  | + | + |
| Works of literature and art |  |  | + | + |
| Personalities |  |  | + | + |
| Idioms |  |  | + |  |
| Folklore (e.g. fairy tales, parables, songs) |  | + |  |  |
| Country symbols |  | + |  |  |
| Stereotypes |  | + |  | + |

In this textbook, sociocultural units are widely represented, covering various groups of realities (national cuisine, authentic materials, geographical objects, works of culture and art, personalities, idioms, folklore), symbols of the country, stereotypes. Geographical objects are mainly represented by St. Petersburg and its sights. Parallels with other cultures are carried out partially, but in sufficient quantities.

It is obvious that the intensity and degree of representation of the national component in the textbook depends on the quantity and diversity of sociocultural units. It is not recommended to evaluate the overall result of this analysis as positive or negative, since the expertise of this aspect may be different due to methodological or other goals.

An important parameter in the sociocultural units analysis is their relevance. It is logical that realities included in the textbook should reflect the current situation in society, the textbook should acquaint students with the modern life of the target language country, while outdated information can be useless, create a false impression of the country, lead to an artificial archaization of the educational process. To assess the relevance of certain realities, for example, works of art, personalities, we apply the principle of contemporary historicism, formulated by E.M. Vereshchagin and V.G. Kostomarov [12]. For example, some units related to the past (writer Leo Tolstoy, Swan Lake ballet) are still relevant, as they are significant phenomena of Russian culture.

In the modern textbook “Poyekhali!”, we reviewed, the following realities of Russian life lost their relevance: the exchange of foreign cash from speculators on the street (now there are ATMs everywhere), widespread smoking (in Russia several years ago a ban on smoking in public places was implemented), watching TV by children (now children more often use computers and gadgets), some city objects of St. Petersburg, mentioned in the textbook, no longer exist. As for personalities, the principle of actual historicism is successfully applied here, only time-tested personalities are given, and contemporaries that are popular at the time of the textbook publication are not mentioned.

1. ***Analysis of the sociocultural units presentation.***

The third aspect of the sociocultural analysis can be sociocultural units presentation in a textbook. The criterion for this analysis can be considered the presence or absence of sociocultural units in texts, images and exercises. It should take into account the author’s selection of methods of organizing active or passive learning of sociocultural units in exercises, since the use of such techniques indicates the importance of this material in the classroom and in the course, as well as special attention to the culture of the target language country. An example of this analysis of the textbooks “Russkiye fraseologismy v situatsiyakh”, “Sovremennaya russkaya idiomatika” and “Poyekhali!” is presented in Table 3.

*Table 3.* *Analysis of sociocultural units presentation.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TEXTBOOK TITLE | PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF SOCIOCULTURAL UNITS IN TEXTS | PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF SOCIOCULTURAL UNITS IN IMAGES AND CHARTS | PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF SOCIOCULTURAL UNITS IN EXERCISES |
| N.V. Basko “Russkiye fraseologismy v situatsiyakh” (Russian idioms in situations), 2011 | + | + | + |
| E.E. Minakova “Sovremennaya russkaya idiomatika” (Modern Russian idioms), 2008 | + | - | + |
| S.I. Chernyshov “Poyekhali!” (Let’s go!), 2016 | + | + | - |

1. ***Analysis of the author’s attitude to the textbook sociocultural context.***

The author's attitude to the sociocultural content of a textbook can be judged by the image of the target language country, which is created in the textbook, as well as by the form and emotional coloring (negative / positive) of the presented sociocultural units. Many researchers note the need to create a positive image of the target language country in order to increase the motivation to learn a new language and new culture [12, 13]; at the same time the sociocultural context of the textbook should not belittle somehow other countries, nationalities, races. This requirement is becoming more relevant in the modern world of new technologies, the rapid spread of information, active international contacts. The author's incorrectness - political or social - can also be expressed by negatively colored units of context. Training materials that generate conflicts, resentment or uncomfortable situations in the classroom destructively affect the learning process and create a negative attitude to the lesson, to the language, to the target language country.

Table 4 presents the criteria for the author's attitude to the sociocultural context, which can be specified. Otherwise, this parameter is subjective and the result of the analysis can be formulated as a brief description of the country image created in the mind of the student.

 *Table 4. Author's attitude to the sociocultural context.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   CRITERIA FOR THEIR EXPERTISE TEXTBOOK TITLE | POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE COUNTRY | PARTIALLY POSITIVE /NEGATIVE IMAGE OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE COUNTRY | NEGATIVE IMAGE OF THE TARGET LANGUAGE COUNTRY |
| N.V. Basko “Russkiye fraseologismy v situatsiyakh” (Russian idioms in situations), 2011 | + |  |  |
| E.E. Minakova “Sovremennaya russkaya idiomatika” (Modern Russian idioms), 2008 |  | + |  |
| T.P. Chepkova, etc. “Russkiye fraseologismy. Uznayom i uchim” (Russian idiomatic expressions. Get to know and learn), 2013 | + |  |  |
| H. Walter, etc. “Russkaya fraseologiya dlya nemtsev” (Russian phraseology for German speakers), 2015 |  | + |  |
| T.P. Chepkova “Znakomimsya s russkoy frazeologiyey” (We get to know Russian idioms), 2013 | + |  |  |
| S.I. Chernyshov “Poyekhali!” Let’s go!, 2016 |  | + |  |
| L.V. Moskovkin, L.V. Silvina “Russkiy yazyk” (Russian language), 2014 | + |  |  |
| M.N. Anikina „Stairs“ (Lestnitsa), 2015 |  | + |  |
| V.E. Antonova, etc. “Doroga v Rossiyu 1,2” The way to Russia, 2004 | + |  |  |
| L.G. Belikova, etc. “Russkiy yazyk: pervyje shagi 1, 2” Russian language: first steps 1,2. 2016 | + |  |  |

**CONCLUSION**

Thus, in the process of research, the following aspects of the sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook were highlighted: analysis of topics and situations, analysis of sociocultural units, analysis of the sociocultural units presentation, analysis of the author's attitude. Criteria for the expertise of the topics and situations selection are determined by the presence / absence of sociocultural topics and situations in the textbook, their compliance / non-compliance with standards and requirements for each level of Russian as a foreign language. The analysis of sociocultural units is carried out according to criteria of the absence / presence of sociocultural units in the textbook, the degree of their presentation, and the presence / absence of parallels with other cultures. The criterion for analyzing the representation of sociocultural units is the presence / absence of sociocultural units in texts, images and exercises. The author's attitude to the sociocultural context can be judged by the image of the target language country, which is created in the textbook, as well as by the form and emotional coloring (negative / positive) of the presented sociocultural units.

The development of main aspects of the sociocultural analysis of a foreign language textbook can be useful from the point of view not only of pedagogy, but also of cultural studies. A foreign language textbook can be considered not only as a learning tool, but also as a cultural phenomenon creating the image of the target language and target language country, as well as media, Internet, diplomacy, art, etc. [14]. The results of this study can be used by methodologists, foreign language textbooks authors, foreign language teachers (Russian as a foreign language in particular), reviewers, publishers, as well as sociologists and political scientists.

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