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CULTURE AS A KEY CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Abstract. This paper concerns a methodologically significant issue that reveals the underlying processes of the development of scientific knowledge in the field of methods of teaching foreign languages. It introduces the *concept* as a basic unit in “conceptology” and “linguconceptology”. The study identifies the values and key (threshold) concepts in the field of foreign language teaching methodology and shows how the evolution of a key concept demonstrates the development of scientific knowledge. The object under study is the concept of “*culture*” in the linguistic educational perspective. The factors that determine the transformation of the concept are justified. They are linked to a change in educational paradigms.

Keywords: *concept, culture, lingvodidactic values, axiosphere, postmodern stage of language teaching methodology, information paradigm.*

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КУЛЬТУРА КАК КЛЮЧЕВОЙ КОНЦЕПТ МЕТОДИКИ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ

Аннотация. Статья посвящена методологически значимой проблеме, раскрывающей основные процессы развития научного знания в области методики преподавания иностранных языков. Автор рассматривает концепт как базовую единицу «концептологии» и «лингвоконцептологии». В исследовании определяются ценности и ключевые (пороговые) концепты в области методики преподавания иностранного языка, в нем показывается, как эволюция концепта способна продемонстрировать развитие научных знаний. Объектом рассмотрения является концепт «культура» в лингвообразовательной проекции. Автор обосновывает факторы, определяющие трансформацию данного концепта. Данные факторы связаны с изменением образовательных парадигм.

Ключевые слова: *концепт, культура, лингводидактические ценности, аксиосфера, постнеклассический этап методики преподавания языка, информационная парадигма.*

INTRODUCTION

Conceptology is a field of knowledge in linguistic studies, which has manifested itself in the researches of recent decades. It is understood as a section of interdisciplinary cognitive science (Karasik 2005), which studies concepts – mental units of consciousness, operational units of memory, conceptual systems, quanta of structured knowledge (Popova, Sternin 2001). The interest in concepts as fragments of a picture of the world – a person's ideas about the surrounding space – is not accidental. The anthropocentric paradigm, which determined the turn of scientific thought to human consciousness and actions, provides for an increased interest in describing the mental processes that are responsible for cognition (from the Latin *cognito* “knowledge, cognition”) of a person – the process of cognition, mental processing of information. Although the concept analysis often conflicts with modern forms of theory building, it is a creative source for theorising that accepts the unstable, political and context-bound nature of ontology (Berenskoetter 2016).

Since this vector of knowledge development, which predetermined the triumph of the anthropocentric paradigm, turned out to be very attractive for updating / modernizing / changing scientific ideas, there was an urgent need to extrapolate cognitive models of interpreting scientific phenomena to various researches in humanitarian areas: philosophy, history, political science, and even education. Conceptology develops most intensively in the depths of linguistics and cultural studies, as well as cultural linguistics, the synergy of these scientific fields. It is the “linguconceptology” that is under most intensive studies today, setting the task of developing classical structural and functional semantics, enriching it with data from the field of cultural studies, cognitive science, sociology, history and other related fields of knowledge. Linguconceptology, thus, aims to study mainly the national-cultural part of the mental lexicon – concepts, the expression of which is represented by a practically unlimited number of language units (Vorkachev 2014). The study of these phenomena turned out to be very productive, since the model (based on the methods of component analysis and field theory) of description and comprehension of complex mental units is characterized by cultural specificity and expressed by means of language. Attempts to discredit the linguoculturological orientation of research in general and linguconceptology in particular (Pimenova 2013) could not reduce their heuristic validity and, therefore, significance.

AIM OF THE STUDY

It becomes necessary to identify key concepts in various areas of knowledge. The aim of the study is to examine the key concept of “culture” in the context of language teaching methodology, to establish the dynamics of the development of this concept, to link it with changes in the leading paradigms of this field of knowledge.

DATA & ANALISES

The very idea of describing, categorizing, classifying the units of the mental level of a person's lexicon is thus incredibly productive. Its productivity during the modern era of postmodernism has only intensified, since it is today that science is in the state of synthesizing what was

previously not correlated and not matched (due to taboo): rational and irrational, synchronous and asynchronous, systemic and variable, collective and individual.

The established methodology of describing concepts attracts the attention of scientists from other fields of knowledge. Thus, historical conceptology deals with historical concepts that have been established and function in the sphere of historical discourse (Møller 2015). Appeal to the concept is manifested in the science of education. In Russia, we observe a rather contradictory and at the same time interesting tendency – the development of the theory and practice of teaching through immersing a student in culture through language, called “linguoconceptology” (Karasik, Krasavsky and Slishkin 2014). American scientist Ebru Turker writes about the role of conceptual and linguistic knowledge and the frequency of L1 in the acquisition of L2 (Türker 2016). The concept is treated as a method in educational and social science inquiry (Taguchi, St. Pierre 2017), the role of “concept maps” in teaching adult learners is substantiated (Biniecki, Conceição 2015). Researchers develop criteria for determining the adequacy of a given concept for a given task in social practice and scholarship (Howie, Bagnall 2018).

One of the significant problems of conceptology in any sphere of its application is, according to scientists, the selection of *basic, key, threshold concepts*. Each scientific area solves this question in its own way. For example, among concepts objectified in a language, those that constitute the foundation of a language and the entire picture of the world are considered basic (Pimenova 2013). In historical conceptology, focused on the description of conceptual historical thinking, some questions nowadays are becoming particularly relevant, and the answers to them influence the solution and interpretation of sacramental problems of Russian historical science. From this standpoint, such concepts (expressed, by the way, quite metaphorically) as “Russian way”, “Russian soul”, “Russian power”, “Russian world”, etc. are key. These images, being seemingly historical realities, alienated from a personality, make up a kind of “world of history” (URL).

It is easy to see that the highlighting of key concepts is conditional and can hardly be strictly formalized in one or the other regulatory framework and, accordingly, generally recognized. Despite the objective difficulties, in each field of scientific knowledge a clear idea was developed about those value bases, meanings, and key ideas, without which the corresponding scientific picture of the world would be unthinkable. For language teaching methodology, one of such concepts (concepts) is *culture*.

Interpretation of culture in the conceptual dimension is a natural phenomenon. According to Yu. S. Stepanov, concept is a clot of culture in the human mind, how culture enters into the mental world of a person, and, on the other hand, concept is that whereby a person - an ordinary person, not a 'creator of cultural values' - himself enters culture, and in some cases influences it. Concept is the basic cell of culture in the mental world of a person (Stepanov 2000). It is obvious that the notions of culture and concept are inseparable, and the study of culture in the cognitive perspective is more than justified.

The concept of culture is considered in various fields of scientific knowledge. For example, it is studied in relation to the cultural evolution developed by Cultural Evolutionary Science (Palecek 2019). We are interested in the study of conceptual gestalt approaches to culture and education: “culture as pattern”, “culture as boundary”, “culture as authorship”, and “culture as critical dialog” (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane 2016). The use of threshold concepts and their application to teaching culture is being explored (Nahavandi 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Culture is a concept whose presence in the system and structure of language teaching methodology is natural: as of today, no one has the right to question its status as such. It is interesting to trace the historical transformation of the understanding of culture as a concept of language teaching methodology.

Culture at all times was an indispensable component of the science of foreign language teaching as a conductor of culture, as its fixative and a means of translation from one generation to another. The beginning of interest in culture as a linguistic concept is connected with the first attempts to describe translation methods of teaching foreign languages. In the depths of the translational method, attention is fixed to cultural facts transmitted by learner through the original classical texts. It must be admitted that in the ancient times of theory and methods of teaching, culture wore a certain collective image and was a manifestation of universal human values.

Later, in the classical period of development of language teaching methodology, culture has been considered in its rigid correlation exclusively with the country of the language being studied (the study of (another) language and (another) culture). This period has been lasting a long time. Even today, such an attitude to culture as a linguodidactic concept is, perhaps, predominant both in the minds of scientists and thinkers, and (which manifests itself most clearly) in the views of practicing teachers, textbook authors, and developers of e-learning resources and manuals.

With all the seeming inviolability of such an interpretation of culture as the key concept of language teaching methodology, at a certain point researchers had doubts about the validity of this point of view and even some of its danger. When culture of the target country becomes dominant, there are conditions for ethnocentrism and even cultural imperialism – imposing the principles of one culture on the other. The desire to consider all the facts of the world through the prism of one - the studied - culture, undoubtedly, causes damage to the native culture. It should be recognized that in this case the native culture is not withdrawn from the process of learning a foreign language. But its status in these educational conditions is rather secondary: being a means of learning, it creates only a background for understanding the similarities and differences when compared with the culture of speakers of the target language, for making decisions about the possibility of cultural transfer or danger of cultural interference.

The period of triumph and the maximum accentuation of the culture of the linguistic society under study as the key concept of language teaching methodology is coming to an end. The reason for this change of ideas within the conceptual sphere of methodology is the new key concept: it is not culture itself, but *the dialogue of cultures* that inevitably contact in the process of learning a foreign language, which is at the epicenter of attention of specialists in the field of methodology. Cultural imperialism has been replaced by the “spirit” of ethnorelativism, which implies an understanding of a foreign culture exclusively in the context of the native culture. It creates the basis for the dialogical consciousness of a linguistic person mastering a foreign language. At the same time, the picture of the learner’s world is enriched, being under the powerful influence of the double influence of a different culture, one’s own culture, and the interaction (dialogue) of these cultures (Tareva, Tarev 2017).

Such a change in attitudes toward culture as a key concept of language teaching methodology is a consequence of changes in scientific paradigms that predetermined significant changes in various sciences, including theory and methodology of teaching foreign languages. The in-

formation paradigm has led to the emergence and strengthening of a particular image of cultural values and traditions, which, developing in accordance with historical conditions, are characterized by a state of uncertainty, chaos, unpredictability of the world and man in it. Under these conditions, it is the dialogue of cultures that is a particularly valuable concept, creating the basis for an intercultural educational ideology. Such an ideology manifests itself in the format of *an intercultural approach* to learning foreign languages. This approach assumes *taking into account in the learning process the obligatory interaction of contacting language and conceptual systems of communication participants – representatives of two linguistic communities*. Its dominant is equality and equivalence in the student's mind of two cultures that enter into interaction.

The idea of intercultural foreign language education, characterized by its strategies and tactics, is truly a breakthrough in the system of modernizing the processes of teaching foreign language communication to a person, who is ready to participate in complex communication processes with its possible (and sometimes quite real) conflict potential which is determined by the informational geopolitical paradigm. In such conditions, the content of the process of preparation for intercultural communication should acquire axiological characteristics, become spiritual-moral, emotionally valuable, “creating”, pragmatically charged. The implementation of intercultural ideology in the process of teaching will be able to influence the minds, positively influence the students' worldview, expanding it, making it multipolar. It seems that this ideology contains the “medicine” for xenophobia and ethnocentrism. In addition, it shows the way to achievement of cultural non-judgmental relativism as an episteme of modernity, openness – the proclaimed leading symbol, the imperative of the era of information paradigm.

Like any concept, culture changes due to the impact of the scientific field of knowledge of objective circumstances. Recent events in the world have defined the sudden “cooling” of the dialogue of cultures as values of methodology. Disputes arose over the question of what is the object of mastery of students – the ability to enter the dialogue of cultures or readiness for the “*non-dialogue*” of cultures. There were attempts to devalue the role of the dialogue of cultures, to perceive it as an unachievable dream, to prove that the dialogue of cultures is nothing but a myth (Baryshnikov 2016). Recently, much has been written about this in Russian and foreign science. The pages of journals (especially the journal “Dialogues in Human Geography”) host an active discussion on limits to dialogue (Rose-Redwood, Kitchin, Rickards et al.'s 2018), the possibilities of a culture of cosmopolitan dialogue (Qian 2018). Authors attend to the question of what it means to refuse dialogue (Wright 2018), to conscientiously disengage from dialogue (Mott, Cockayne 2018).

According to N.V. Baryshnikov, the dialogue of cultures is a beautiful metaphor. In fact, cultures do not dialogue with each other; verbal dialogue is carried out by representatives of different cultures, each of which has an individual level of culture. It is obvious that a genuine dialogue of cultures can take place only if representatives of different languages and cultures communicate, one of them is a carrier of the language of communication, and the other speaks the partner's native language at a sufficiently communicative level. Thus, the dialogue of cultures as a concept of teaching foreign languages is not justified, since there is no dialogue of cultures in the student audience, because the students and the teacher are representatives of one, in an integrated sense, Russian culture (Baryshnikov 2016).

Doubts of the author are clear. The theses of “monologue in dialogue”, meaning “inequality of cultures” and possible suppression of one culture by another, about the danger of politicization and ideologization of the teaching process in the context of a dialogue of cultures, are

shared by some Russian researchers (Tareva, Tarev 2017, Safonova 2018). However, even in such a complex context of its existence, culture does not cease to be a key concept of language teaching methodology. It is these new value meanings that show new facets of culture, give it an actual sound, which undoubtedly should reflect on the goals, content, principles, methods, techniques and means of teaching a foreign language.

CONCLUSION

Thus, developing and improving according to historically determined processes, the linguodidactic concept “culture” does not stand still, its substantive specificity changes, the scope of culture as an element of the system of teaching foreign languages expands. Summing up, one can conclude that overcoming the zigzags of the historical path of development of linguodidactics, the concept of “culture” as a linguistic value demonstrates an example of flexible adaptation to the requirements of the times and stages of development of scientific knowledge. It can be said with confidence that in the historical projection the concept “culture” will not lose its value potential and will serve for many years the idea of preparing the younger generation for life (socialization) in a multipolar world where value “wars” rage, where methods of “soft power” influence children's minds, where national identity and the formation of a civil Ego are undergoing serious threats.

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