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CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND THE RISK OF CULTURE SHOCK: IMPLICATIONS FOR INNOVATIONS IN CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

This study investigates the multiple effects of cultural differences on people's attitudes towards nonnative cultures and implications for English as a foreign language classroom. Through its mixed quantitative and qualitative design, the present study aims to gain insights about the potential influence the situations of culture shock have on actual lesson planning by pre-service foreign language teachers at the university. In particular, this study construed how the examples of cross-cultural misunderstanding in conversations between Belarusians and competent English speakers can be incorporated in the instruction.

Key words: cross-cultural communication; student driven cross-cultural research; innovation; foreign language assignment.

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МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ РАЗЛИЧИЯ И РИСК КУЛЬТУРНОГО ШОКА: ОСНОВАНИЯ ДЛЯ ИННОВАЦИЙ В РАЗРАБОТКЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОГО КОНТЕНТА

В этом исследовании изучается влияние культурных различий на отношение людей к иным культурам и обусловленные ими особенности преподавания английского языка как иностранного. Данная работа направлена на выявление ситуаций культурного шока и изучение возможности применения полученной информации в планировании уроков будущими преподавателями иностранных языков. В частности, в статье рассматривается, как примеры межкультурного непонимания в разговорах между белоруками и компетентными носителями английского языка могут быть включены в обучение говорению.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация; кросс-культурные исследования; инновации; задания по иностранному языку.

Introduction. In this article we consider the situations of cross-cultural misunderstanding between proficient English speakers and Belarusians that are able to provoke culture shock, and the ways a foreign language teacher can incorporate them in learning materials and assignments in the classroom.

Theoretically, the acculturation theory explains the reasons, symptoms and stages of culture shock which is defined as “a state of bewilderment and distress experienced by an individual who is suddenly exposed to a new, strange, or foreign social and cultural environment” [1]. This is a phenomenon that many travellers experience when visiting a new country. However, there is a scarce student driven research about modern realia in conversations among young people in different cultures, and the ways these data can be incorporated in lesson planning.

This study generally purports to enhance cross-cultural awareness fostering greater understanding and appreciation of diverse English-speaking communities and to suggest possible innovations in foreign language teaching. In essence, the study sought to answer three research questions: (1) What are the situations which are able to lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding? (2) What is the relationship, if any, between these situations and foreign language syllabi in school in Belarus? (3) How can the obtained data be embedded in scaffolding materials, and incorporated in monologic and dialogic tasks in the foreign language classroom?

In the study we used a survey, interview, case study, and content analysis as research methods. We see the significance of the study in the modifications in the instruction based on the student driven research data. This study examines the relationship between true life situations of cross-cultural misunderstanding, foreign language syllabi and innovative tasks, namely receptive and productive speech exercises.

Main part. This study was done in 2024 at a university that follows the foreign language teaching curriculum in Baranavichy, Belarus.

To answer the first research question we considered three cases. The first case investigated the language differences and their effects; in the second case we researched the situations of culture shock among Russian speakers in British host families; the third case was about the situations of culture shock which foreigners experienced in Belarus.

Case 1. The survey was designed to gather data from individuals who had experience with both American and British English. This study was aimed to identify linguistic and cultural differences between American and British English which led to culture shock. The survey was done online via Instagram and language learning forums in the public group in Telegram, targeting individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. A total of 22 responses were collected on the next questions:

- (1) How would you rate your familiarity with American English on the scale from 1 to 5?
- (2) How would you rate your familiarity with British English on the scale from 1 to 5?
- (3) Have you ever experienced difficulties understanding American or British accents? If yes, please describe?
- (4) What were your symptoms of culture shock: dealing with American or British dialects and accents?
- (5) What strategies did you use to overcome these challenges?

The analysis of the obtained data shows that 70 % of respondents rated their familiarity with American English as 4 or 5. Also, we found out that 50 % of the interviewees rated their familiarity with British English at the same level. 40 % of the informants faced challenges with American accents, and 65 % of them reported difficulties understanding British accents, and the respondents admitted that the consequences of misunderstandings resulted in culture shock (Figure 1).

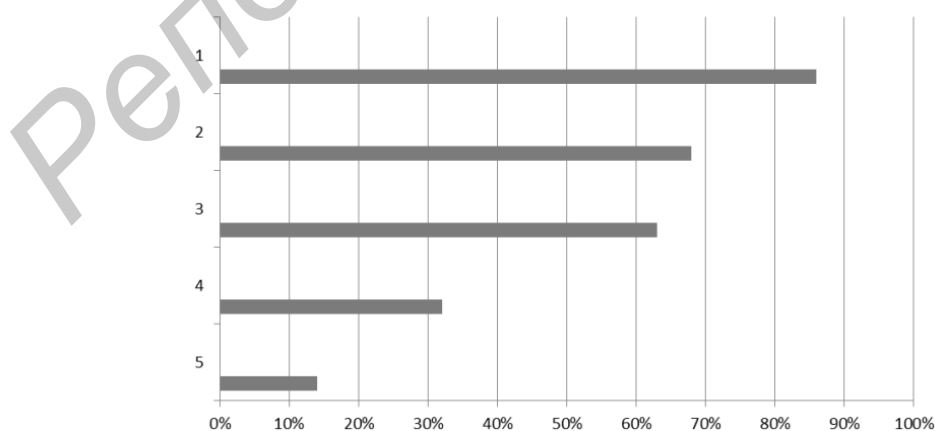


Figure 1 — Symptoms of culture shock resulted from the language specificity, where: (1) had no desire to communicate with native speakers (86 %); (2) had a feeling of nostalgia and homesickness (68 %); (3) could not work well (63 %); (4) had feelings of frustration and irritation towards native speakers (32 %); (5) had depression (14 %)

Also, we found out that the common strategies to overcome the negative consequences included: (a) watching movies and TV shows in both dialects (80 %); (b) engaging in conversations with native speakers (60 %); (c) using subtitles while watching the YouTube channel (50 %).

The results of this case prove that accents and dialects are able to cause culture shock. We see that navigating cultural and linguistic differences between American and British dialects can present a range of challenges: from communication barriers and misunderstandings to feelings of frustration and social anxiety. However, these experiences also foster curiosity and a desire to learn, ultimately enriching one's understanding of language and culture. By acknowledging and addressing these symptoms, individuals can enhance their communication skills and build confidence in engaging with diverse English-speaking communities. Embracing these differences not only promotes effective communication but also deepens cultural appreciation, turning potential obstacles into opportunities for growth and connection.

Case 2. In the second case we analysed the situations of cross-cultural misunderstanding in a family. To obtain the empirical data, interviews were conducted with three Belarusian students who had lived with host British families. The objective was to reveal their experiences and feelings regarding culture shock.

As a result of this case analysis, we found out that, firstly, British people tend to be more indirect in communication compared to the more direct style which is common among the Belarusians who tend to express their thoughts and feelings in a straightforward manner. However, in the UK, politeness and understatement are key maxims in a conversation. For instance, saying "not bad" can mean "quite good!" In the interviews, we found out that it took them some time to get used to this subtlety. One student noted that sometimes he had doubted whether he had been understood in the right way, because of the differences in communication styles.

Also, the students expressed surprise at types of dishes and meal times. Traditional British dishes like fish and chips and Sunday roasts were new experiences. For the Belarusians, lunch is seen as the main meal, it usually consists of several dishes: a salad, soup, cereals and porridge, and some meat or fish. Meanwhile in Britain, lunch is not the main meal: they can eat only sandwiches, vegetables and fruits for lunch. In the survey, one of the interviewees admitted that she was missing traditional Belarusian dishes like "draniki". Another student said that dinner was often served much earlier than they were used to, that custom led to culture shock due to some discomfort.

Another aspect of cross-cultural analysis was household norms. The students observed differences in family grounding traditions. For instance, British families often encourage independence among the youngest, which contrasts with the more collective approach in Belarusian families. Speaking about misunderstanding while living with a host family, it is worth mentioning that it is an inevitable part of adapting to a new environment, but it provides an opportunity for growth and networking. Communicating with foreigners and finding new friends will help a newcomer to adapt to target culture faster.

Finally, in the interview we touched upon the differences in social norms. We discovered that social events in the UK are often associated with pub culture, which is different from the more domestic events which are common in Belarus, where meetings and celebrations are traditionally held at home in an informal atmosphere. On the contrary, the British often meet friends in cafes and pubs.

So, this case revealed that culture shock went along a range of emotions from excitement to frustration. The life of students in the host British families was both challenging and rewarding, the students felt isolated initially but gradually adapted as they learned more about British culture.

Case 3. Here, we focused on the examples of culture shock which foreigners experience in Belarus. For this reason, we asked foreign students to describe situations of culture shock. As a result, we obtained the following examples.

The first example revealed the language barrier. It appeared that Russian and Belarusian languages are challenging to understand in oral and written speech. The students said that they had some difficulties in communicating, especially in the areas where the use of English was limited. Many signs and advertisements in these languages around the town (e.g., on the roads, in cafes, shops, post offices, etc.) create difficulties. The informants said that in public transport there was lack of English signs which created some difficulties for them. In our opinion, the solution to the problem of misunderstanding advertisements in Russian is the use of voice assistants (e.g., Siri, Microsoft Cortana, Yandex Alice, Google assistant), and translators such as Google translator, DeepL translator and vocabularies: Cambridge Dictionary, Longman Dictionary, Oxford Dictionary. It is also worth adding that using a currency transfer calculator-Price Helper helps to cope with the problem of not understanding prices. Using these tips will help reduce the risks of culture shock.

The second example was connected with social norms and etiquette. The respondents were confused to discover that greetings in Belarus could be formal, and shaking hands was a common practice among men. Also, they were shocked at the tradition to toast at a party, and the reject to toast could be perceived as impolite behaviour.

The third example of culture shock was public transport routines: they were confused about trains in Belarus. There are many types of trains abroad, including high-speed trains (e.g., Eurostar), regional and suburban trains,

in which services with a high level of comfort and convenience are well developed. However, high-speed trains are less common, and most trains have a limited comfort level in their opinion.

The fourth example analysed the national cuisine. The interviewees enjoyed new flavours, they were impressed by Belarusian unique dishes and surprised by unfamiliar ingredients and textures. Some of them said that they were surprised when recognized that Belarusian cuisine included a lot of dishes made of potato.

In the last example we considered the Belarusians' attitude toward foreigners. The students were puzzled by the fact that Belarusians in most cases avoid to keep eye contact. Foreigners also realized that the Belarusian people didn't use polite listening sounds in conversations to follow the conversation. Instead, Belarusians prefer to keep silent when they are listening to their conversational partners.

The obtained data can become a source for innovations in content development in the English language classroom.

To answer research question 2 (What is the relationship, if any, between these situations and foreign language syllabi in school in Belarus?), we studied the national documents of the country [2]. They run that the strategic aim of language education is the formation of students as subjects of intercultural communication through their mastery of foreign language communicative competence and the development of the qualities of a multicultural personality, which are in demand in the modern information society in the context of globalization. In particular, this research meets the objective to master the system of socio-cultural norms in target culture; the ability to identify similarities and differences between interacting cultures and take them into account in the process of intercultural communication [2, p. 141].

The obtained findings about situations of cross-cultural misunderstanding in native and target culture can engage learners in learning a foreign language, and contribute to the development of learners as subjects of intercultural communication. It can be done in the 11th form, when learners are to study the topic "Sociocultural portrait of the Republic of Belarus and countries of target language" [2, p. 123].

To answer research question 3 (How can the obtained data be embedded in scaffolding materials, and incorporated in monologic and dialogic tasks in the foreign language classroom?) we designed a set of assignments for the 11th grade in Belarusian educational institutions. As far as the requirements for monologic and dialogic speech, the syllabus indicates that English learners should be able:

– in 15–20 phrases, make prepared and unprepared reports on a topic, problem, situation; describe and compare objects, facts, phenomena; talk about what they heard, read and saw; combine description and narration with reasoning and expression of personal assessment; reason about facts, events, argue about point of view, draw conclusions. The recommended types of monologues are: description, comparison, narration, reasoning, value judgment (monologic speech);

– in 7–8 cues, justify their opinions, exchange factual and evaluative information with several participants in the conversation in the following types of dialogue: dialogue-questioning, dialogue-exchange of opinions, interview, dialogue-reasoning, and polylogue (dialogic speech) [2, p. 133–134].

To prepare students for intercultural interactions, some innovations should be introduced in lesson planning and teaching materials. We suggest to develop speaking skills by using the following assignments.

1. To teach presentation skills:

Example 1. *Examine Figure 1, and in groups suggest some ways to eliminate the symptoms of culture shock. Critique the suggestions: think of the pros and cons for each idea. Then present your solution to other students.*

Example 2. *Watch a short video about British politeness and understatement, and compare the behaviour of the British and Belarusians in similar situations.*

2. To teach conversation skills:

Example 3. *After reading examples of cross-cultural misunderstanding in Belarus, English learners role play the situation.*

Situation: A conversation on the train.

A: An English speaker is visiting Belarus. She loves the country so much, but she is confused about the public transport routines, formal greetings in Belarus, and lack of signs in English around the town.

B. A Belarusian student meets an English speaker on the train, and discusses traveling experiences with her, recommends digital technologies that could be helpful while travelling across Belarus.

Example 4. *Debate the thesis "Visit to a foreign country is like a honey moon" The affirmative team suggests arguments for this thesis. The negative team suggests arguments against it (Keep in mind the cultural differences).*

Conclusion. This study illustrates that student driven research data which were obtained through surveys and interviews among Belarusians and foreigners, can become a source for better understanding of the phenomenon of culture shock. Also, we intended to show that the informants' answers are able to innovate the content of the English language syllabus on the topic "Sociocultural portrait of the Republic of Belarus and countries of target language".

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PECULIARITIES OF CODE-SWITCHING IN EVERYDAY SPEECH

Code-switching, within the realm of sociolinguistics and literary theory, refers to the systematic alternation between two or more languages or linguistic varieties within a single communicative context. It can be a powerful tool for both teachers and students, fostering a deeper understanding of concepts and facilitating communication.

Key words: code switching; the typology of code switching; the peculiarities of code switching; bilingualism.

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ОСОБЕННОСТИ КОДОВЫХ ПЕРЕКЛЮЧЕНИЙ В ПОВСЕДНЕВНОЙ РЕЧИ

Кодовое переключение в социолингвистике и теории литературы означает систематическое чередование двух или более языков или языковых разновидностей в рамках одного коммуникативного контекста. Это может быть мощным инструментом как для преподавателей, так и для студентов, способствующим более глубокому пониманию концепций и снятию трудностей при общении.

Ключевые слова: переключение кодов; типология переключения кодов; особенности переключения кодов; билингвизм.

Introduction. Code switching is a linguistic phenomenon in which speakers of two languages (i.e., two codes) switch between these languages while communicating with other people who share the same codes. In other words, code switching means a verbal action in which the use of two or more codes alternates in a single conversational episode. The changes are always unconscious and spontaneous, and users do not have to have the same facility with both languages. This phenomenon is intricately tied to cultural and social dynamics, serving as a linguistic strategy for individuals to navigate diverse identity constructions and convey nuanced meanings.

This practice is not merely a reflection of bilingualism or multilingualism; it serves as a social tool that enables individuals to navigate complex cultural landscapes, establish identity, and foster connections with diverse audiences. In an increasingly globalized world, where interactions span various cultural contexts, understanding code switching becomes essential for deciphering how language shapes our social interactions. This article will explore the nuances of code switching, its implications in communication, and the role it plays in expressing identity and belonging in our daily lives.

Main part. Code-switching is a common practice among bilingual or multilingual individuals. It plays a significant role in not only in everyday speech, but also in language education, particularly in multilingual classrooms. It serves as means of crossing barriers in communication and implementing mutual understanding.

Code-switching is often context-dependent. This phenomenon can occur in both spoken and written language. For example, the main sentence may be spoken in one language and a subordinate clause in another. Code-switching is a frequent phenomenon in mixed ethno-linguistic regions [1].

In the last fifteen years, a large number of studies have appeared in which specific cases of intra-sentential code-switching were analysed from a grammatical perspective, involving a variety of language pairs, social settings and speaker types. It was found that code-switching is a quite normal and widespread form of bilingual interaction, requiring a great deal of bilingual competence [2, p. 177].