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Culture-Related Content in Russian Language Textbooks in the Field of Bilingual Education

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Abstract

This study investigates culture-related content in Russian language textbooks for primary school children with different levels of Russian language proficiency (native speakers, migrants, bilinguals, etc.). Textbooks play a central role in teaching and are supposed to be a platform that introduces cultural diversity, teaches tolerance and respect for other cultures. The study of cultural information incorporated in the textbook helps to identify the main and secondary components that influence the formation of sociocultural competence, national stereotypes, and autostereotypes. These issues are especially relevant in the context of bilingual education for young language learners since the process of their inculturation and socialization is in the initial stage. The material of the study is TIRTEC (Text-Image Russian Textbook Corpus) includes Russian language primary school textbooks. The method of content analysis, based on a conception of the 'textbook as a corpus' was applied. In order to determine how basic knowledge of the target language (Russian) is offered to learners, the data collected from the selected textbooks were analyzed according to the several "cultural dimensions" (product, person, tradition, proverb, idiom, etc.). These aspects were adopted to codify both verbal and visual culture-related content and were distributed on the scale of target and source cultures. Statistical analysis of data obtained according to each parameter revealed an imbalance in culture-related and pragmatic textbook content. On the one hand, other cultures are represented extremely sporadically in the Russian language textbooks, on the other hand, the image of Russian culture is mainly associated with folklore, fiction texts, and the cold climate. It can potentially be of interest to the textbook authors and editors aimed at creating a modern textbook.

Keywords: textbook corpus, Russian language textbooks, culture-related content, text-image corpus, bilingual education, evidence-based pedagogy, Russian language for young learners.

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Introduction

The textbook is a leading learning tool in the modern language classes aimed to develop communicative competence as the ability to interact effectively with others. The process of acquiring foreign/second language or mother tongue includes both linguistic and cultural issues (Kramersch, 1993; Lange & Paige, 2003). A language textbook is supposed to be a platform that introduces knowledge about own culture and highlights cultural diversity, teaches tolerance and respect for other cultures. Cultural awareness is extremely important for young language learners (aged 7-10) due to their processes of enculturation and socialization. It is especially important for learners that are surrounded by peers with a different background. Moreover, textbook can become a source of ethno / auto-stereotypes. In this regard, both textual and visual culture-related information obtained from the Russian language textbooks is a very significant source for designing an image of the particular country and the global world in general. Thus, evaluation of the types of cultural content and the appropriateness of the distribution of the cultural content in Russian language textbooks is quite important. This study examines how textbooks represent foreign and Russian cultures, on the one hand, and insert Russia as a target culture in a multicultural environment, on the other.

The Russian language coursebooks can be divided into several groups according to the target audience: for learners with Russian as a first / native language who study it in Russian primary schools (L1); for learners studying Russian as a foreign language (usually out of Russian community as second or even third (and so forth) language) (FL). There are learners between L1 and FL groups who are studying Russian in order to get bilingual proficiency: non-native Russian-speakers studying Russian as a state language, migrant children who are supposed to study in a Russia primary school, Russians out of Russian environment. Although these learners are very diverse, in this paper textbooks for them are united and tagged as L2 group, despite the fact they study Russian out or within Russian context (residing Russia). Such textbooks are normally based on the experience of creating L1 Russian language textbooks, as well as textbooks for national schools in Russia.

Russia has accumulated significant experience in interaction within a multicultural and multilingual environment because of its historical national diversity (the country comprised 190 nations). Russia has had an explicitly expressed interest in language planning as a means of modernizing, governing and culturally assimilating ethnic and linguistic minorities while simultaneously supporting certain aspects of a linguistic multitude (Grenoble, 2003; Lewis, 1972). In this area, Russia has had beneficial results in establishing a common state language and in creating multicultural environments (Marten et al., 2015).

According to (Alexandrov et al. 2015), the percentage of children (aged 7-15) of “foreign origin” attending Russian schools is from 4% to 16% and is increasing every year due to migration processes. However, precise statistics about Russian proficiency levels within this group in different Russian regions are not collected (Klimenko 2014). Nowadays, Russian is a majority language, state language, a medium of instruction in all educational institutions in Russia, but a significant number of people from Russian regions adopt Russian as a non-native language. According to official statistics, 99.4% of the 138 million citizens participating in the Census (2010) are Russian speakers (80.9% are Russians), but in some regions, as many as 14-15% noted they do not speak the state language. Information from statistics does not shed light on the extent and purpose of Russian language usage: while schooling, working, consuming media, use it selectively in everyday communication only within the family or somehow else. Highly multilingual rural communities exist in the Caucasus region, most notably in Dagestan, known as the linguistic diversity hotspot of Russia (Marten et al., 2015). In some regions, such students study in Russian so-called national schools (where students study both Russian and their home language). In these schools, students study within a multicultural environment with particular language support (Khamraeva, 2016). However, in some regions, students study Russian using L1 textbooks and the most widespread series of textbooks is “Russian language” (1-4 grade) edited by V.P. Kanakina and V.G. Goretsky (Shurpaeva et al., 2019). In the Federal State Standard for the Russian language for primary schools (2015), the importance of the development of a highly diverse cultural environment is enshrined together with forming Russian identity with an emphasis on multiculturalism.

Based on such diverse experience textbooks using for L2 should highly correspond to the global context aimed to maintain comfort atmosphere in heterogeneous classes. Nevertheless, culture-related content in Russian language textbooks for different target audience was not precisely investigated. The OCED report argues: “teachers in schools with diverse student populations recognize that handling cultural diversity in class is difficult and requires preparation. Often, students differ not only in the knowledge and skills they have acquired in their early years but also in the strategies they use to approach and solve problems” (OCED 2015, p. 16).

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that providing appropriate learning materials (particularly culture-related content in the Russian language textbooks) for young language learners (YLL) are issues highly relevant for Russia.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The study aims to present a culture-related educational content analysis based on corpus linguistic methods. The main objectives are: to determine Russian culture and other cultures distribution in the textbooks (by

dint of verbal and visual content) and to highlight what parts of textbooks (texts, instructions, etc.) represent culture-related and pragmatic contents and how.

Literature review

Evaluating language textbooks based on some judgments of appropriateness of the linguistic content in line with visual content especially in textbooks for YYL. Objective data can be collected if we analyze the textbooks' corpus that is especially marked using pedagogical tags (Boulton, 2017; McEnery & Xiao, 2011; Tribble, 2015) and linguistic tags (Peksoy & Harmaoglu, 2017; Zhang et al., 2018).

To develop students' communicative competence at school, a textbook is supposed to be a platform that provides cultural diversity and tolerance. The sets of culture-related components reflected in textbooks are explicitly/implicitly delivered to learners as a "hidden curriculum" (Chao, 2011; Cunningsworth, 1995). Cultural and pragmatic content can be shown both in verbal and visual textbook elements. According to Ren & Han (2016) pragmatic content is not adequately presented in English language textbooks. The representation of culture-related materials influence learners' views of different cultures, however, Kim & Paek (2015, p. 101) pointed on "imbalances in the representation of cultural contents". The analysis of the cultural component in the structure of school textbooks is presented quite widely in relation to the study of foreign languages (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1994). The image of Russia and Russians is also separately studied in textbooks on Russian as a foreign language for adults (Miloslavskaya, 2012; Kulikova, 2017) and in L1 Russian language textbooks for children (Shurpaeva et al., 2019).

Thus, it is of interest to evaluate how cultural and pragmatic components are revealed in Russian-language textbooks for YLL with different Russian language proficiency. The detailed quantitative analysis sheds light on the types of cultural content and the appropriateness of its organization.

Methodology

Text-Image Russian Textbook Corpus for primary school (1th-4th grade, ages 7-10) has been compiled (referred to as TIRTEC in the following). TIRTEC is available. User conditions and downloads can be accessed here: <https://www.researchgate.net/project/TIRTEC-Text-Image-Russian-Textbooks-Corpus>. All selected textbooks has been annotated according to a specially developed set of textbook analytical tags (pedagogical annotation). Currently, the corpus includes 64 textbooks; the corpus volume is 1,413,519 tokens (according to the Sketch Engine's definition - word forms and punctuation marks (https://www.sketchengine.eu/my_keywords/token/)). All textual and illustrative components of textbooks are provided with metadata (author, publisher, year, target audience, etc.). Morphological marking was

done automatically in the Sketch Engine corpus tool (www.sketchengine.eu). The pedagogical marking of the corpus made manually allows correlating the linguistic and illustrative components with the structural blocks of the textbook, and allows separate culture-related and neutral units. Textbooks' content (verbal and nonverbal) is given in a table and each block has a link to the real textbook's page.

Pedagogical annotation gives an opportunity of doing a detailed frequency analysis on the various bases. Textbooks for non-native Russian speakers were compared with textbooks for Russian native speakers and for foreign learners according to the whole bunch of tags: structure, type of text, type of illustration, type of cultural content, etc. For this purpose all textbooks were divided into 3 subcorpora: FL, L1 and L2. Moreover, such kind of annotation allows to calculate percentage of culture-related content distribution through a textbook. Table 1 shows the example of culture-related content annotation.

Table 1. Fragment of TIRTEC culture-related content annotation.

	structure	text type / origin	illustration	culture (verbal) / culture (visual)
<i>Мама купила туфли. “Фатима, вот туфли.” Фатима рада. Она сказала: “Спасибо, мама!” (Mom bought shoes. “Fatima, here are the shoes.” Fatima is glad. She said: “Thank you mom!”)</i> id: azn0_0332 / page 80	text	prose / constructed	content representation	another culture / no (neutral)
<i>Послушай, а затем прочитай узбекскую песенку. (Listen, then read the Uzbek song.)</i> id: azn1_0539 / page 67	instruction	-	navigation	another culture / no (neutral)
<i>Без труда не вытащить и рыбку из пруда. (Without difficulty, you can not take a fish from the pond.)</i> id:dron3_0118 / page 27	text	prose	-	Russian culture / -

To include the impact of multimodality on the educational materials, the verbal and non-verbal components of textbooks were annotated. Thus, the corpus may be defined as a “text-image corpus” (Tirilly et al., 2010; Yasin et al., 2012) as it highlights the correlation of text-image modalities.

This work was carried out as part of a corpus textbook study - the use of corpus technologies in the investigation of the textbooks’ materials that is marked and presented as a corpus. The corpus-based analysis allows to obtain objective data on the content of the textbook, to measure the balance of the material, helps to pose and solve methodological questions: the selection of educational content especially those referred to one culture (texts, idioms and vocabulary), the organization and connectedness of educational material presentation, distribution of verbal and non verbal materials. Culture-related content are recognized by experts as important criteria for textbook evaluation (Ren & Han, 2016; Chao, 2011) and, at the same time, can be assessed by statistical analysis of annotated textbook content.

The amount of culture-related content within a textbook should be reasonable to maintain a students’ socialization and adaptation as members of another community (Kramsch, 1993). On the first step, educational content (pictures and texts) were divided into two groups according to the culture representation: zero (neutral) culture-related content. Wherein culture-related content is distinguished into three categories: *Russian culture*, *Another culture*, and *Mixed representation of culture-related content*. On the second step, culture-related content were analysed according to the several “cultural dimensions” (product, person, tradition, proverbs, idioms, etc.). Cultural marking can be assigned at five levels: cultural products (objects), events, attitudes (perspectives), practices (ceremonies), and persons (Kim & Paek, 2015). For this paper criteria were remade as attitudes hard to reveal using corpus methods and practices were not presented in a selected textbooks. However, idioms, fairytales and other folklore fiction were revealed as Russian language textbooks full of such kind of educational materials. Russian cultural materials include information about life in Russia, Russian products, persons, etc. Another culture (source culture) materials refer to the learners' own culture (to those that is supposed to be the most suitable for L2 young learners or international). According to Russian language textbooks for bilinguals, the term *Another culture* combines information from several European cultures such as French, German and other cultures which are the main sources of Russian migrants. Mixed representations involve both Russian and other cultures which were revealed in one text or picture.

To determine the place of textbooks for bilinguals in the system of language textbooks according to the culture-related content evaluation, the series created for L2 learners in grades 1-4 (ed. by F. Aznabaeva; ed. I. Klyan-Nikitenko; ed. E. Kakorina) were compared, on the one hand, with the most popular series of Russian textbooks for L1 Russian learners in grades 1-4 (ed. V.P. Kanakina, V.G. Goretsky; ed. O.N.

Churakova, M.L. Kalenchuk; ed. T.G. Ramzaeva), and, on the other with popular textbooks for school-age children who study Russian as a foreign language (Soroka (ed. M. Avery), Stupenka (N. Gulamova). Full list of textbooks provided via this link: <https://www.researchgate.net/project/TIRTEC-Text-Image-Russian-Textbooks-Corpus>.

Results

Table 1 presents distribution of types of cultural and pragmatic components. It shows that the total amount of culture-related educational material in all textbooks in TIRTEC is quite low. Most of these textbooks are not focused on a concrete culture that makes these books appropriate for any kind of multicultural classes.

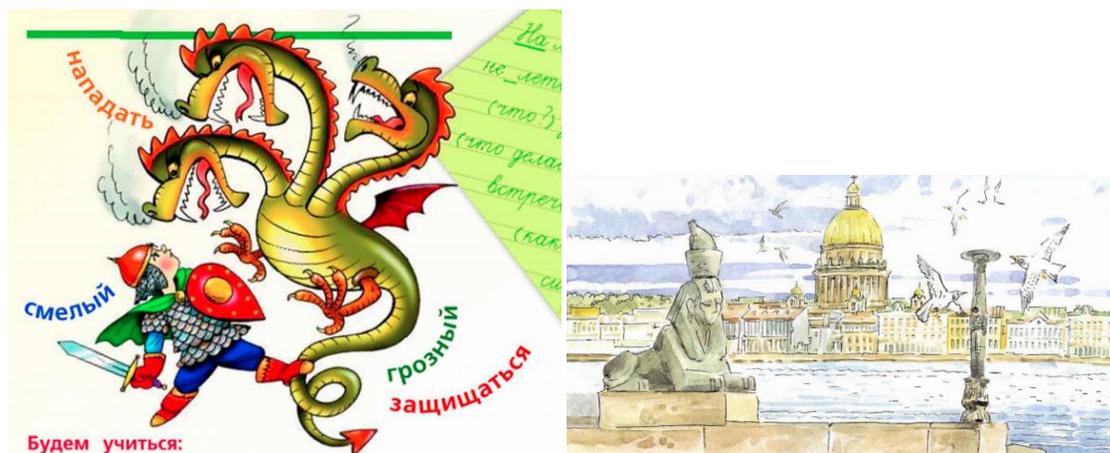
Table 2. The amount of culture-related content (verbal and non verbal) in subcorpus.

	L2 (%)		FL (%)		L1 (%)	
	verbal	non verbal	verbal	non verbal	verbal	non verbal
Russian culture	5.5	3.2	2.7	3.5	17	19.7
Another culture	1.2	0.5	0.3	1.1	0.3	0.2
Mixed	0.8	-	0.1	1	1.2	1.2
Neutral (zero)	92.5	96.3	97	94.1	78.8	76.8

According to Table 2 L1 textbooks have the highest score in representation of Russian culture and the lowest one in representation of other cultures. Taking into account the cultural diversity of Russia, such distribution is puzzling. It is noteworthy that the non-verbal cultural component in textbooks is more represented than the verbal one. This indicates a methodological feature of working with foreign children: first, they learn to listen and speak and then read and write. Thus, children can see the illustration for the Russian tale “Kolobok” or “Reпка”, but do not read these texts. L2 textbooks compared to FL revealed more culturally diverse content. It makes sense according to the learning aims, as foreigners are not able to interact with many cultural concepts, idioms, proverbs, and etc. However, the overall level of inclusion of the cultural component is very low which completely contradicts the focus of state programs (reflected in official documents) on the development of a tolerant attitude towards other cultures.

Visual material in the analysed textbooks is also quite low and referred to folklore or the most famous sightseeings (usually Moscow and St. Petersburg). In L2 textbooks, 3.2% of culture-related content is allocated to *Russian culture*, and only 0.5% to *Another culture*. Figure 1 shows examples of illustrations that were annotated as culture-related. L1 textbooks revealed the highest percentage of cultural pictures. This can be explained by the fact that in these textbooks there are many tasks for describing the paintings of famous Russian artists. Despite the fact that some of the paintings do not depict a cultural object, nevertheless, the painting itself has already become part of the cultural fund of Russia (for instance, “Girl with peaches” by V.A. Serov, “Golden autumn” by I.I. Levitan).

Figure 1. Culture-related picture in L1 textbook (ed. Kanakina 2 gr., p.39) and in L2 (ed. Dronov 3 gr., p.124)



Corpus analysis allows you to see which parts of the textbook most often have a cultural component. Since textbooks for L1 and L2 are used in a bilingual context of Russian language learning, we analyzed them

specifically for the inclusion of the cultural component. The most significant elements of the textbook (with a cultural component more than 15 times) were selected. Table 3 shows distribution of verbal culture-related content among structural components of L1 and L2 textbooks. Sign “-” means that there were less than 15.

Table 3. Culture-related content according to the structure of L1 and L2 textbooks.

Structure of textbook	Another culture (%)		Russian culture (%)		Mixed (%)	
	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2
Text (exercise)	18.3	67.6	77.6	66.4	47.6	47.2
Sentence (exercise)	-	-	7.5	17.9	-	11.8
Words (exercise)	-	-	4.7	6.9	14.3	-
Instruction	5.8	14.8	4.5	6.9	7.1	27.8
Rule / additional information	3.8	-	6	7	21.4	14.8

An analysis of the structural components of the textbook showed that exercise' texts and instructions contain the biggest part of the cultural component. Also, exercise including separate sentences and words showed the presence of culture-related vocabulary. The reference information mainly included an explanation of pragmatics, therefore this element of the textbook also entered the table. Table 3 shows that in L2 textbooks *Russian culture* revealed in exercises (texts and sentences) and in instructions percentage is low. In a contrast *Another culture* and *Mixed culture* revealed a lot in instructions. This reflects the logic of the authors of the textbook: the basic information related to Russian culture is presented in the educational text, and references to other cultures or tasks for comparison are found in the instructions and questions. Russian culture in L1 textbooks represented almost completely in the educational texts. *Mixed culture* is revealed in additional information due to annotation rules (comments related to the Old Russian or Old Slavonic languages and the etymology of words were also tagged as *Mixed culture*. *Another culture* in L1 Russian language textbooks represented poorly. In addition, in these textbooks, both the textual and illustrative components are associated with the middle zone of Russia, so Russia is not represented as a

multinational country, but a rather limited image of the largest country in the world is created, which includes different climatic and natural zones.

Another culture-related content includes words and names relevant to the daily life of L2 (*плов 'pilau', круассан 'croissant', фондю 'fondue', штоллен 'stollen'* etc.). Russian culture presents via authentic texts as educational material (e.g., fairytales or poems written by Russian authors Pushkin, Mikhalkov, Barto, etc.). However, in some textbooks examples reflect stereotypes about culture (e.g., guitar with Spanish boy, croissant as a favourite sweets for French). Probably, it can provide some motivation and curiosity for students when learning. Usually culture-related content is hardly understandable without special comments. For example, a Russian fairy tales or cartoon heroes (*Винни Пух 'Winnie the Pooh', Незнайка 'Dunno'*), cultural objects (самовар 'samovar', печь 'stove') or features of traditional costumes (*сарафан 'sundress', кокошник 'kokoshnik'*) require additional information (a specific context) because these are not easily understood by YLL. However, such comments are not provided in the analysed textbooks and becomes additional load for teachers.

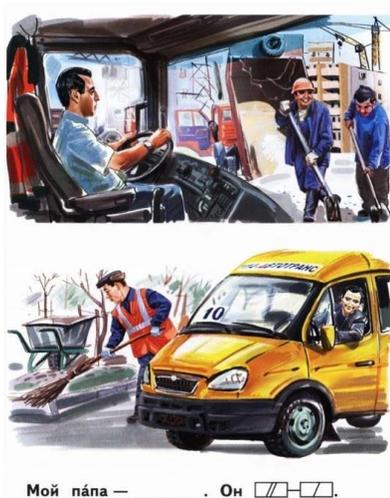
A great source of cultural information is folklore: proverbs, collocations, idioms. According to the data analysis, 38 % of all authentic educational texts in L2 textbooks are referred to folklore and 29% in L1 textbooks. In contrast, FL textbooks revealed quite low percentage of folklore texts (12%). Many folk wisdom are similar in different cultures. Despite the fact that the textual material gives examples of predominantly Russian proverbs about labor (*пшиши, да не спешии*), laziness (*Языком не торопись, а делом не ленись*), friendship (*мир не без добрых людей*) or study (*Без пословицы речь не молвится*). In questions to them, the authors of textbooks inspire students to share proverbs of their culture. This is beneficial in a multicultural class. Such textbooks material enriches topics for discussion among students from different areas (e.g. *Instructions* refers to the experience of different cultures: *Как в твоей культуре..., как на твоём языке, русские делают, а в твоей родной стране...*). It seems reasonable and beneficial in the textbook for L2 due to such content increasing motivation to study and immerse in another culture.

One of the most big culture-related vocabulary group is “product”. Most often, in textbooks, culture is represented through various objects (for example, *печь 'oven', ланги 'bast shoes', самовар 'samovar', платок 'shawl'*, etc.). Within group “person” there is Gagarin, Lomonosov, Pushkin and we also include names of characters (*Маша, Инна, Антон, Дима, Миша, Ваня*) and cartoon or fairy tales' characters (*Дед Мороз, Миша, Василиса, Иванушка, Илья Муромец*).

Frequency analysis clearly highlights stereotypical ideas about the climate in Russia (snow is included in the 15 most frequent nouns in Russian language textbooks for L1 learners and bilinguals), and the list of

top 5 professions for migrants includes a driver and a seller. Figure 2 shows the example of exercise from textbook for migrant children ed. by Aznabaeva. Such content can create additional difficulties when learning in a multicultural environment.

Figure 2. Culture-related content with tag *Another culture* in textbook for migrant children (ed. Aznabaeva, ABC-book, p.11).



In addition, the pragmatic component in the Russian language textbooks was separately analyzed. Most often, pragmatic information (how to name person, meet, say goodbye, ask for forgiveness, and etc.) is included in textbooks content implicitly, and there are no special notes containing pragmatics. Making this content accessible to students is an additional burden for teachers. For example, for some YLL it is hard to distinguish usage of pronoun you (“ты” for informal situations and “вы” for formal context).

Discussions

Data analyses with corpus methods content of Russian language textbooks has revealed several issues in area of creating a balanced Russian language textbook for multicultural classes. On the one hand, students should have an access to the Russian context and have clear image of modern Russia and Russians. On the other, educational material should be interesting and relevant for them.

The cultural marking tag includes *Russian culture* and *Another culture* (source culture of the target audience or any other culture). This allows us to calculate the percentage ratio of units of Russian and other cultures, to analyze them. The category of Russian culture includes, in particular, specific names of household items (*samovar*, *stove*) or national costume (*kokoshnik*), historical figures (*Yuri Gagarin*),

characters (*Kolobok*), etc. *Another Culture* category includes, for example, the names of household items (*skullcaps, cauldrons*), tasks such as “*What is it called in your language?*”.

The most diverse textbooks according to Russian culture are those for L2 learners. It can be due to annotation’ rules, as all content with adjective Russian were marked with tag Russian culture. Nevertheless, FL textbooks seems to be the most neutral because target audience can be very wide.

Pragmatic information in Russian language textbooks for L2 learners is mostly represented implicitly. There are few tables with special recommendation on pragmatic information. The accessibility of such information can be difficult for YLL without special practise.

This data gives only a general idea of the imbalance and low level of reflection of culture in educational content. It is necessary to conduct a detailed study of vocabulary (collocations, theme of vocabulary, etc.) and illustrations in order to determine the most debatable components. Such study can give clear recommendations to improve the textbook in a way of preparing children to live in a modern conflict free diverse environment.

Conclusion

This study raised awareness of the importance of culture-related content representation and understanding by YLL in the modern Russian language textbooks as they highlight cultural similarities and differences, and puts Russia in a modern global context of a multicultural environment.

The corpus approach in the study of the textbook opens up promising areas for the application of such analysis: designing Russian and Another culture image for young language learners, studying the complexity level of textbooks, including culture-related vocabulary and collocations, analyzing the perception of illustrative material, development of a corpus-based language textbook evaluation methodology. This is especially important since there are no special requirements in the goverment documents for the percentage of the cultural component or its representation in textbooks (Order of the Ministry of Education..., 2009; Apparovich et al., 2000).

This paper presents a one criteria of a methodology of educational content evaluation based on a conception of the ‘textbook as a corpus’. Within TIRTEC, a series of Russian textbooks for L2 children was annotated and precisely analysed. This study provides initial data for compiling a methodical outline of a textbook for YLL according to the culture-related content distribution, which is a combination of several aspects:

- *Communicative aspect* – learning the Russian language for everyday needs while living in Russia (everyday communication). Content should include objects strongly referred to Russian reality;
- *Linguistic aspect* – the Russian language as a school subject (availability of subject terminology and vocabulary and grammar items and also important concepts). Providing clear explanations (including culture-related explanations (the etymology of words and idioms));
- *Sociolinguistic aspect* – the “door” to Russian culture. In a textbook for L2 learners, Russian culture should be presented in line with the learner's own culture to get acquainted with the different culture-related peculiarities and social context. Russian culture should be incorporated in a global world.

Statistically calculated parameters such as frequency of culture-related vocabulary, culture-related visual component appearance, pragmatic issues show good results while objectively evaluating textbooks for young learners with different levels of Russian language proficiency.

Further work should be focused on several issues on the development of a corpus-based language textbook evaluation methodology. The research questions should be connected with finding different abnormalities with textbooks' content, balance between folklore and modern fictions, balance in the representation of different nationalities.

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