

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

Fiction in School Textbooks as Reflection on English Culture

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Abstract

This article analyzes classical and modern works of fiction in English textbooks for grades 10-11 (recommended for work at school by government) as material for analyzing the cultural characteristics of the country to which the author of the works belongs. National character is one of the most significant features of the culture. It is true for the English culture as well as for the Russian one and may seem one of important features to be studied and discussed in class.. The article gives prominent features of classical and modern fiction, reveals its impact on the students of 10-11 grade of the Russian secondary schools and figures out why it is important for the English textbooks. Students find the features of the national character from classical and contemporary fiction, get in contact with culture of the foreign country and analyse the authentic material in general. The article also points some questions for discussion which are to be solved later by more thorough research.

Keywords: fiction, English textbook, culture, 10-11 grade.

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Introduction

Understanding the culture of the country of the foreign language (English as a foreign language taken into consideration) is especially important in high school, since students already have a well-established basic knowledge of aspects of a foreign language (vocabulary, grammar and phonetics being the basic aspects of learning a foreign language). Having possessed the knowledge they already have, students take a keen interest

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in cultural differences especially in authentic tests as it makes them closer to reality. In addition, it is the presence of knowledge that helps to understand the cultural characteristics of the country of the foreign language: customs and traditions, peculiarities of the national character, peculiarities of the geopolitical position of the country, and much more.

As Tareva and Galskova (2013) write, at present, the student, especially at higher levels, is no longer aimed at the usual acquisition of knowledge in the field of language, but at the formation of skills and abilities in the field of intercultural communication. In the process of forming such skills, in their opinion, the strengthening of the context, problematization and situationality of training helps, when the student must make such a decision (whether to study the language for the sake of the language or to know it to communicate to solve practical real-life tasks). Scientists do not deviate from a textocentric approach to learning, they only point to the transition from a textual paradigm to a discursive one, i.e. the text (best of all authentic) becomes not just a means of gaining knowledge, but also a product of analysis, in which it is required to carefully consider the facts and reasons for the appearance of a given text product, as well as, if possible, recreate the events of that time and understand the reasons for certain actions of the heroes.

Purpose and objectives of the study

One of the tools for constructing a portrait of the culture of the country of the learned language, of course, is fiction. It is in it that typical linguistic means are preserved, the choice of which makes it possible to form a portrait of a national character as part of a culture and a portrait of a culture as a whole. Assuming that English fiction is a source of knowledge about the English and their customs and traditions, we conducted a study to find out how fiction is represented in high school textbooks and how it reveals the culture of the foreign language country, namely:

- what works of art of which authors are presented in textbooks;
- how works of art are presented in the textbook, that is, how much they are adapted and how the degree of adaptation affects the cultural component in literary texts;
- what elements of culture are found in the studied texts of fiction.

Literary texts presented in the textbooks of grades 10-11 were chosen as the research material, since in them the elements of culture are presented implicitly and authentically.

By the implicitness of culture in literary texts, we mean that the authors of the textbook do not obey their point of view and cultural stereotypes, and by authenticity we mean that the studied literary texts are the fruits of the

labour of representatives of the English-speaking culture (namely, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

Literature review

Many scientists (Yazykova (2020), Izotova and Nikolaenko (2017), etc.) emphasize that the ability of the reader of a fictional text to conduct a so-called dialogue with the author depends on many factors (his life experience, literary erudition, developed critical attitude to reality, and much more). That is why in this article we are talking about high school textbooks, that is, about the addressee (high school students), who, as subjects of the educational process, can analyze art tests from the point of view of their cultural component already at that level of abstraction when the main cultural processes inherent in the text (typical national traits, humor, etc.)

As Yazykova (2020) emphasizes, the principles of intercultural communication in the process of teaching foreign languages, although stated in the Federal Educational Standards, are poorly implemented in textbooks and books for teachers, which consider pedagogical activities in stages and should pay attention to the analysis of the elements of the culture of the language being studied.

Ter-Minasova (2019) adheres to the same approach, saying that co-learning of the language and culture of the people is a prerequisite for mastering a foreign language. Without background knowledge about the world of the foreign language, you cannot actively use a foreign language. In this regard, the literary text provides an opportunity to consider the world not only in synchronicity, but also in diachrony, since the works written in certain years bear the imprint of the historical events of those years, which helps us understand how current events developed and why this particular path of development was chosen the country of the foreign language. She also emphasizes that the decline in literacy in the field of fiction, noted among the modern generation of students compared with students 20-30 years ago, even when using other sources of information about English culture (cinema, the Internet, foreign language lessons as such) leads to impoverishment images of representatives of a different culture, which can create certain problems in the field of intercultural communication.

As Izotova and Nikolaenko (2017) write, work on a literary text can be carried out under certain conditions, namely:

- the teacher demonstrates to students the products of culture and carries out their culturological analysis, while identifying the similarities and differences of cultures, thus removing stereotypes of perception of the value system of a foreign language culture, while students learn to correctly understand the behaviour of carriers of a

foreign language culture and empathize with its participants;

- the teacher offers a number of exercises aimed not only at mastering linguoculturological knowledge, but also at forming an active life position in students against cultural inequality, provided that they realize the uniqueness of their own culture;
- the teacher organizes the educational process in such a way that students can use the received intercultural knowledge for a deeper knowledge of themselves and their own culture.

All this fully applies to the literary text in textbooks. Gerasimova (2016) notes that any textbook of a foreign language is at the same time a textbook leading the learner around the world of the foreign language; it is intended to stimulate and implement a dialogue between cultures, culture of the student of the foreign language and the culture of native speakers of the foreign language. It is the unadapted artistic text, being itself a part of the culture, that provides an opportunity to get acquainted with the culture of another country and makes it possible to both enjoy the cultural realities and analyze them, identifying certain patterns.

Methodology

Currently, there are a large number of methods and approaches to the analysis of literary phenomena and works of art. We will allow outlining only the main approaches, concepts and methodological systems proposed by some authors. It should be noted that the dialectical method does not lose its significance in the modern world, since it involves “consideration of any phenomena of reality in development and interconnection” and is actively used in the analysis of a work of art. A harmonious system of methods for researching a work of art is presented by the Russian professor N.S. Bolotnova (Ter-Minasova 2019). According to her scheme, methods of philological analysis of the text include general scientific methods (observation, quantitative analysis, modelling, experiment, comparative), general philological methods (transformational method, distributive analysis, contextological analysis, component analysis, compositional analysis, structural method, semiotic method, conceptual analysis); private methods (intertextual analysis, a method close to experiment, the word image method, semiotic-stylistic method, comparative-stylistic method) (Zheltukhina et al. 2016). Many foreign researchers in their work with students when analyzing a work of art are mainly guided by the following methodological base. They distinguish between the subcritical approach, which considers the main components of the work: the plot, the structure of the work, the characteristics of the characters, the atmosphere, style, thematic features, conflicts, functions of the title of the work, etc. (Bim et al. 1999).

After understanding the tasks defined by this approach, they turn to the analysis of the work using traditional approaches, among which the most in demand are historical-biographical and moral-philosophical (the

specifics of modern literature can be understood only by referring to the socio-moral climate of a society in which significant changes have taken place.

The literary texts in the textbooks, chosen as the object of research, fully reflect the features presented as the main educational texts with a cultural orientation in the work of Gerasimova (2016). These include:

- Authenticity (national characteristics of materials, rules of functioning in culture);
- Genre-stylistic and typological diversity (materials of different genres, styles and types, allowing to demonstrate the features of the functioning of linguistic means of communication, especially the variation of the language being studied);
- Labelling with foreign cultural concepts (reflection of concepts (national, individual, universal) as cultural units, including a value component).
- A variety of semiotic codes (different channels for presenting culturally significant information - verbal graphic and sounding materials, verbal-sign (schemes, collages), non-verbal-sign messages (drawings, illustrations, etc.)).

The conclusion obtained after analysis suggests that the degree of authenticity is appropriate to speak about culture preservice (less than 20% of the paragraph was reduced and paraphrased). Thus, the material can be the resource for culture analysis. The textbooks chosen for this research are included into the list of Federal admitted textbooks for comprehensive and specialized schools (English language as a foreign one). Three out of four are for comprehensive schools (Textbooks 1, 2 and 4). And Textbook 3 is for specialised schools. The textbooks were analysed separately (as a core of a methodological set of materials) for various reasons: firstly, the educational and methodological kit is not a compulsory means of teaching, while every student must have a textbook; the educational and methodological set is rather heterogeneous for different lines of textbooks, therefore sometimes an objective comparison is not possible, since somewhere there are additional books for reading, and somewhere they were not included in the set.

Results

A comprehensive analysis of textbooks for grades 10-11 (Afanasieva et al. 2007, 2008; Baranova et al. 2010, 2011; Biboletova et al. 2010, 2011; Vaulina et al. 2016, 2017) shows the presence of fiction texts by different authors that are not exercises and, therefore, are not adapted or partially adapted (comparison of the Flash Index in the paragraph of the original text and the text placed in the textbook shows no more than 20% of changes, which although it is a fairly high indicator of the adaptability of some texts, it allows preserving

cultural identity and style, as well as direct speech in the texts of works of art). Gerasimova (2016) names four informational aspects of educational texts, in which the culture of the country of native speakers is represented:

- background knowledge (system of values and norms, geographic features, traditions);
- material and spiritual achievements of culture;
- events and processes that are of formative importance for society;
- subjects of culture that are cultural property.

This degree of adaptation makes it possible to isolate elements such as background knowledge; material and spiritual achievements of culture as well as different cultural events; and subjects of culture that are cultural property. So everything is preserved here to some extent.

Table 1. Fiction authors in senior school textbooks

	Textbook 1 (Baranova et al.)		Textbook 2 (Vaulina et al.)		Textbook 3 (Afanasieva et al.)		Textbook 5 (Biboletova et al.)	
	10	11	10	11	10	11	10	11
English authors fiction	Wells Hilton Melvill .Asimov	Lofting Ballard Asimov Conan-Do	Escott Nesbit Conan-Doy Dickens Wells	Wilde Bronte Dickens Twain Hardy London Kipling Swift	Bernett Dahl Maugham	Jerome Priestley Twain Christie Swift Wilde	Wilson Elliot Asimov	Shelley Twain

Among the most popular fiction authors in textbooks are Mark Twain, Herbert Wells, Arthur Conan-Doyle, Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde, Jonathan Swift. Isaac Asimov. Their works are made in the genre of adventure, detective and humorous literature, which is certainly the reason for choosing these authors and these genres for training. Such texts motivate students to continue their studies, increase interest and provide an opportunity to solve questions in problem situations.

Most literary texts (50%) belong to the period of the 19th and 20th centuries, which, on the one hand, makes it possible to discuss historical realities in the context of the events taking place in the plot of the book, on the other hand, it provides an opportunity to use practically unadapted texts, since during this period the English language is no longer had that large number of historicisms and outdated words as in the texts of the 18th

century (3.5%), which, of course, had to be adapted. An equal number of authors (21.4%) represent the 19th and 20th centuries, respectively, which is also consistent with the positive idea of choosing these texts.

The works of Charles Dickens presented in Textbook 2, according to Bukreeva (2013), reveal children's images that embody the best human qualities. In contrast to the "doctrine of childish sinfulness" that existed in Victorian England, which declared a child sinful from birth, and from the age of fourteen bearing full responsibility before God for knowingly and unknowingly committed sins, Dickens defended the innate purity of a child, even if his inheritance was damaged. In the article "On education", he defined his pedagogical views as an educational doctrine of a complete and free childhood, based on the experience and interest of the child himself and the development of his individuality.

Another example is given by Fedorov (2017), who describes esthetism of Oscar Wilde, who considered beauty as a universal category, since it is the primary means of understandings the world. Wilde's dialogue, "Critic as artist" is considered as an expression of his program to establish English Renaissance. Wilde was the most characteristic representative of aesthetic romantic individualism.

The dominant features of the British in the display of national fiction of the 19-20 centuries, identified by Korshunova (2012), are manifested in the popular types of English literature of that time. These traits of national character can be conditionally divided into seven groups:

- restraint and equanimity,
- maximum persistence in achieving your goals (both material and spiritual),
- adherence to the principles of gentlemanly behavior (nobility, cult of women, law-abidingness, etc.),
- arrogance (idealizing your country and your language),
- conservatism in tastes and beliefs,
- efficiency, practicality and rejection of abstract ideas,
- a sense of humor and the ability to laugh at oneself ("understatement" as a prohibition on showing excessive seriousness, sentimentality, boasting and one's feelings, as well as "self-deprecation" as unwillingness to talk about one's successes and achievements).

Knowing these typical features, students at the senior stage of education, having mastered a sufficient set of lexical means, can already notice them in literary texts and they can sooner form an integral idea of the national

character and foreign language culture in general.

Discussions

The following issues remain for discussion:

- the first general question can be considered as follows: students choose one textbook from several declared in the federal list of textbooks. Should a certain list of authors of fiction be developed, based on which the authors of textbooks could acquaint students with the authentic literature and culture of the country of the foreign language?

To date, the analysis shows that the number of authors of fiction and the writers themselves remain at the mercy of the authors of textbooks. A situation arises in which some students can get acquainted with a large number of masterpieces of world fiction, others with less. Is this not a situation in which students are essentially not on an equal footing?

- the second issue is the absence of 21st century writers in modern popular school textbooks, since they show a more modern portrait of culture. Does this mean that certain cultural changes have not been reflected in textbooks for the modern generation of students? Certainly. However, let us take into account that among modern writers, a careful selection of works is also required, not only reflecting elements of culture, but also corresponding to many parameters that allow a literary text to become educational: adaptability, age-appropriateness, neutral style and, if possible, a small use of jargon and slangisms. and much more. Could there also be a 21st century writers list for high school English textbook authors? Perhaps such a solution would help when writing textbooks as such and introducing students to the modern cultures of the country of the foreign language.

- the third question of a debatable nature is the possibility of using the literary texts of the writers of the former British colonies, who in the period before the 1940s were officially the writers of the British Empire. On the one hand, they also show in their works they reveal the British character and culture, on the other hand, they show the colonial culture, which has its own substantive elements, its own specifics. To what extent is this specificity necessary in school education? Will the culture portrait of the foreign language be complete without this layer of culture?

These questions have yet to be answered by textbook authors, scientists and the public.

Conclusion

Thus, the emphasis so familiar to us in teaching a foreign language on the structural units of the language (lexical and grammar aspect) is now losing its priority in foreign language education. The need to use authentic literary texts at the moment is due to the fact that they can fulfil most of the stated tasks, which were mentioned above, and also have educational value.

Ignoring the historical and cultural conditionality of turning today to the works of world classical literature and, in particular, to the work of English writers, deprives society and each individual of another path in spiritual, moral and cultural development. The value-semantic field of works of art is saturated with the cultural peculiarities of the country of the foreign language and potentially contains answers to many questions about the national character, traditions and customs, as well as many other aspects of culture.

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