

## **SPECIFICS OF LINGUISTIC-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AND EXPATRIATES IN THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING ENVIRONMENT (AS EXEMPLIFIED BY NON-PHILOLOGY STUDENTS AND FRENCH EXPATRIATES)**

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**Background/Objective:** The article covers the aspects directly related to linguistic-cultural adaptation. The purposes of this article are: studying and systematizing publications on general cultural and linguistic-cultural adaptation; describing the deliverables of linguistic-cultural adaptation of non-philology students and French expats; identifying the theoretical and practical bases for the elimination of the linguistic culture shock.

**Methods/Statistical Analysis:** The descriptive, analytical and pedagogical observation method, i.e. an analysis of the work and discussions with students, have been used. In 2012-2016, first-year students (120) of the faculties of economics and law taught at the RUDN and French expats (60) were interviewed.

**Findings:** Using the empirical method, the authors have demonstrated that the improvement of the general proficiency in Russian as a foreign language takes on crucial importance in overcoming the subsequent linguistic shock when transferring from pre-university education to its main stage.

**Improvements/Application:** The results can be used in developing curricula and educational multimedia materials, teaching relevant courses in education and philology departments, and in the frame of in-service training for specialists in Russian philology.

The outcome can be used in updating the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Interaction, Linguistic-Cultural Adaptation, Linguistic Culture Shock, Russian as a Foreign Language.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years in Russia, different aspects of cultural adaptation and culture shock have been extensively studied; socio-cultural features of foreign students and trainees in Russia and the readiness of the Russian society to collaborate with students, trainees on its territory have been explored.

The research on the linguistic adaptation processes when including foreign students in the training process at different stages of learning, exploring

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opportunities to optimize psycho-pedagogical and didactic adaptation on the basis of the system inspection, including pedagogical observation and the study of the experience of predecessors is an important task (Chesnokova, 2012; Somova, 2015).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Describing the problems of adaptation and intercultural/cross-cultural interaction, in 1954 E. Hall and G. Trager introduced the concept of ‘intercultural communication’, and in 1960 K. Oberg introduced the concept of ‘culture shock’. Today, these commonly known terms are represented in an extensive interdisciplinary research having a huge corpus of literature (The Global Intercultural Communication Reader, 2014; *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*, 2012; Ward, 2014).

Although in recent years articles concerning intercultural adaptation in higher education system have been regularly published, linguistic-cultural adaptation holds a much less space in such studies (Zhou, 2008; Young, 2014). At best, it is only indicated, most often serving only as part of an overall adaptation integrative model. For example, describing their integrative model of adjustment and adaptation of foreign students in the international university (Newcastle University), developed in May 2016, Alina Schartner and Tony Johnstone presented their model, where the necessity and the importance of linguistic-cultural/linguistic adaptation are stated generally, but it has not been developed per se. However, the authors actually did not allot such a task (Schartner, 2016).

In the Russian science, for a long time closed to the actual comparative studies of other cultures, the book by V. Kostomarov and Ye. Vereshchagin ‘Language and Culture’ became a first step (Vereshchagin, 2005), and thereafter, the foundation of cultural linguistics was laid (Shaklein, 2012).

### **RESULTS**

The novelty and originality of the results is that:

- Emphasis is laid on the course of overall proficiency in Russian as a foreign language, including linguistic-cultural material, not offered within other courses;
- In contrast to the existing methods of ethnically oriented and regional linguistic-cultural adaptation, the article proposes the model of general linguistic-cultural adaptation with the traditional Russian method for learning a language through the culture;
- It has been proved that the RFL overall proficiency skills improvement is crucial in overcoming the subsequent linguistic shock when transferring from pre-university to the main stage of training and further linguistic-cultural adaptation of students;

- For the first time, the theoretical and practical bases for removing linguistic culture shock in French expats have been revealed; the importance of strengthening the motivational factor to study Russian as a foreign language by means of presenting linguistic and cultural material specifically organized on the basis of the original proprietary methodology.

The attained results actualize the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language and the Russian civilization, curricula and multimedia courses, will help in developing the first textbooks and teaching aids of Russian as a foreign language and cultural linguistics for French expats.

## **DISCUSSION**

Migrant workers and expats, culture shock, socio- and linguistic cultural adaptation – all these new words and concepts were included in the Russian socio-cultural reality relatively recently, with the change of the socio-economic picture of life in Russia in the mid-1990s: migrant workers – with the collapse of the Soviet Union and an open labor market emergence in Russia, expats – with Russia's integration into the global socio-economic system. Both are faced with adaptation and integration problems in the Russian socio-cultural environment, and overcoming the language barrier is common for them.

Changes in linguistic-cultural situation in the new states of the former Soviet Union – the search for a national and cultural identity – have led to a deterioration of the Russian language positions: the number of schools teaching in Russian has decreased; a generation with poor Russian language proficiency has grown up. And, although in the Soviet and the post-Soviet space the national-Russian bilingualism (Russian/native languages) has been existing; it is often only the knowledge of everyday Russian language, not supported by written language. All this creates problems in adapting to the requirements of the academic environment, especially to mastering the scientific speech, the language for specific purposes. Therefore, a teacher of Russian as a foreign language (RFL) in higher school at the present stage is bound to learn the allied trade of a teacher of Russian as a second language, actualizing, *inter alia*, the techniques by E.D. Polivanov of the 1920-1930s, which he developed for teaching Russian in national schools of the USSR.

Also, with greater involvement of Russia in the processes of economic and financial integration and globalization, there have appeared a significant number of foreign experts working in various fields of the national economy, and, almost simultaneously – labor migrants, primarily from Central Asia. The algorithm for studying the dependence of the migrants' behavior in the new socio-cultural environment on the national norms and traditions was developed in the early twentieth century by F. Znaniecki and W. Thomas, but the problems of their linguistic-cultural adaptation have not been sufficiently studied yet.

With signing the 1999 Bologna Declaration and joining the Bologna system in 2003, the modernization of higher education in Russia commenced in the framework of creating a single European educational space for foreign students receiving abroad and in Russia itself education of different levels and specializations; international student and academic exchange has significantly expanded.

There are over 173 thousand foreign students from different countries who study in Russia. The total number of foreign students in Russia as of the beginning of the 2015/2016 academic year amounted to 237,538 people (5% of the total number of students in the Russian Federation). The political and ideological criteria of motivation for studying in Russia, having prevailed in the Soviet era, have been replaced by economic, pragmatic criteria: the teaching excellence in Russian universities and a lower tuition fee compared to the US, the UK, and some European countries, the employment opportunities to get a job in one of the joint venture companies operating in the Russian market upon graduation, etc.

For all the above social groups, their residence in Russia presents common difficulties – they are in a foreign cultural environment.

As is known, the beginning of cooperation with representatives of another culture is a severe stress for an individual. The phenomenon of the acute psychological discomfort that occurs when a person enters a different cultural environment is commonly referred to as ‘culture shock’. Being educated in another country in a foreign language is a particular case of intercultural cooperation.

The Russian scientists, especially in recent years, have quite heavily explored the characteristics of the phenomenon.

There are various concepts that describe the phenomenon of human integration in a foreign cultural environment, i.e. acculturation, adaptation, adjustment. *Adaptation* as a multidimensional phenomenon is the subject matter for a number of human sciences from philosophy to medicine. It is defined as the process and the result of a relationship development between an individual and the social environment. A multidimensional nature of the process allows considering it as the process of linguistic-cultural adaptation carried out by means of the Russian language and in the course of its study, which applies to the entire period of the Russian language studies in higher school, including spontaneous and methodically organized influence of the language environment, as well as life in the Russian social environment.

The authors are considering only the aspects directly related to linguistic-cultural adaptation because the climate, adaptation to the Russian mode of life, the Russian cuisine and the pace of living are mutual concerns for students, expats, and migrants.

Naturally, adaptation in a broad sense and linguistic-cultural adaption in particular depend on the ethno-psycholinguistic features and the individual skills of a student. There are numerous studies on various types of adaptation in the

Russian academic community, the adaptation problems of various ethnic groups, in particular, within developing an ethnic-oriented methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language. However, it is only N.V. Pomortseva who directly deals with linguistic-cultural adaptation, although her research covers only philology students and represents one of the possible options for the pedagogical and didactic adaptation system (Krotova, 2015; Pomortseva, 2009).

The adaptation processes research when including foreign students in the training process at different stages of learning, exploring opportunities to optimize the psychopedagogical and didactic adaptation on the basis of the system inspection, including pedagogical observation, studying the experience of predecessors, analysis of the students' speech works and conversations with them are an important task.

What is commonly meant *by linguistic-cultural adaptation* is the process of acquiring values, norms, patterns of behavior, people's actions and language patterns of a culture associated with stepping beyond the circle of their own language and a contact with a foreign mentality (Pomortseva, 2009).

Linguistic-cultural adaptation is closely linked with other forms of adaptation, such as social and socio-psychological adaptation of foreign students, with the process of formation of foreign students' readiness to higher school training, with the adaptation to a different pedagogical style, etc. As part of linguistic-cultural adaptation, it is possible to talk about *linguistic culture shock* as a particular instance of a culture shock.

Linguistic-cultural adaptation is one of the most pertinent types of adaptation for foreign students – from habituation, adjustment, to readiness/capability of the educational activity in Russian language in a multicultural learning environment and life in the Russian-speaking environment.

The main question in this situation is: will a foreign student be able to achieve the target goals in another country? It depends both on themselves and on the host society and culture.

A foreign student needs to get used to the new educational system, to the new language of instruction and communication, to the international character of the learning circle, etc.

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) holds a special place among the other universities of the country: since its establishment, the number of foreign students has not been less than 50% percent of the total number of students. Currently, students from 148 countries across the world study therein. Multinationality and multicultural environment in full concordance with the mission of the university have turned it into a unique institution of higher education.

In RUDN, it is established foreign students' fraternities that are in charge of socio-cultural adaptation, special programs aimed at reducing the culture shock and help in embracing the new culture are developed, Center for adaptation of foreign citizens has been created.

The research of linguistic-cultural adaptation has a practical orientation. RUDN teachers undertake a lot of work for didactic prevention of culture and linguistic shock, learning the adaptation specifics of foreign students of different attendance modes in the Russian-speaking environment. The problems of cross-cultural adaptation were the focus of the All-Russian Congress of the Association of Foreign Students in Russia, held also in RUDN in May 2016.

At the Department of Sociology of the Russian Peoples' Friendship University on the basis of RUDN sociological laboratory, a research of foreign students' adaptation to the conditions of life and studies in Russia was carried out in 2004.

As a result of this research, it was found that a contradiction between the preparedness of foreign students to the educational information perception and the requirements of higher education is the main problem of the foreign students' successful engagement in the academic activity.

Researchers have proposed a conceptual *model of the preparedness* of foreign students for educational and professional activities in higher school, which includes the following components: *motivational, cognitive, operational, emotional-volitional, and informational* (Vitkovskaia, 2004).

According to the authors, it is the operational (possession of a linguistic apparatus for professionally significant information uptake) and the informational (speech, pragmatic, and object competence) components that to a larger extent ensure successful adaptation, including linguistic-cultural one.

Understanding the new educational system is an important aspect of foreign students' adaptation to the academic environment, and quick and effective acquisition of the Russian language is one of the main preconditions for preparation of foreign students. The better a language is being mastered, the more successfully adaptation is proceeding. Language in such training comes across as a code, as a tool to penetrate into the Russian way of life, the Russian mentality. Each stage and component of the educational process are aimed at achieving the common integrative goal – not only the Russian language acquisition, but also the student's self-actualization as a subject of knowledge, culture; the formation of a secondary linguistic identity.

Specific goals and objectives of teaching Russian language to international students at different stages are formulated on a case by case basis, which does not only motivate the educational activity, but also includes an understanding of its expedience and necessity, the communicative significance of the cognition process itself, of the learning and cognitive activity, and engaging students in active learning. The need for rapid, intense acquisition of the relevant language skills and expertise requires a focused approach to the selection and organization of educational material.

In practice, the authors have been faced with the fact that foreign students feel a *subsequent linguistic-culture shock* when transferring from pre-university

education to the principal university faculties, getting among the modern Russian-speaking young people, in a Russian-speaking learning circle. Mutual problems of modern foreign students are not sufficiently developed abilities to speak, to coherently express their thoughts after training at the preparatory faculty, i.e., to construct monologue utterance of both productive and reproductive types on a free or even on a pre-assigned topic. Similar difficulties are also experienced by Russian-speaking students from the CIS countries.

It should be noted that a lot of attention is paid to communication training in the academic, educational and professional spheres in the principal faculties. Teaching language for the special purpose is traditionally, if not to say stereotypically, considered to be more important. But, unfortunately, in specialized training classes teachers do not often require students to make detailed statements, limiting themselves to brief answers to questions, as well as use a written test form. This practice inhibits the formation of communicative competence both in educational, professional, and sociocultural spheres of communication. Therefore, improving the overall proficiency in RFL takes on great importance.

Although, as a rule, only few hours are allocated to this aspect in the philology department curriculum, it is these classes that primarily contribute to overcoming the linguistic shock when transferring from pre-university to the main stage of training and a further linguistic-cultural adaptation of students. It is at these sessions where one can and should develop and improve the skills of oral speech, teach the culture of academic and business communication, reading literary, journalistic, and popular scientific texts, familiarize with the Russian history and culture. Introducing the course of Russian civilization (traditional for the Russian linguistic and cultural studies learning a culture through the language), combining entertaining and educational components gives the opportunity to choose subjects of communication of interest to students, to draw parallels between the cultural and the historical phenomena in different countries, motivating students to rather lengthy statements.

Consideration for differences in cultural standards of the pedagogical process participants is an important factor of successful adaptation. A teacher does not only consider a student, but also themselves as a representative of a specific culture. The behavior of a teacher not aware of ethno-psychological characteristics of students, such as incorrect animalistic associations ('a dog is a man's best friend' for the Arab and Chinese has a compromised meaning), violation of the physical contact distance varying for different countries, different gesture perception stereotypes (thumb up is an insulting gesture for many non-Europeans) will inevitably cause a backlash in the audience. The effectiveness of the pedagogical process is also reduced by ignorance of the academic traditions of the students' countries.

Unlike the linguistic-cultural adaptation of foreign students, there has been little written on the adaptation of expatriate experts – expats. Expat is a slang word

for foreigners from Western Europe contractually employed across the borders of the European Union.

The linguistic-cultural adaptation of expats is a pressing problem. And the problem today has hardly been investigated, although there are enough textbooks of Russian as a foreign language for business people. An international expert should not only do a business, but also engage in communication, live in a different cultural environment. A certain level of language proficiency as a means of communication, the cognition of the host culture peculiarities by virtue of the language is a condition for successful adaptation. This level should be sufficient for integration, not only into the Russian professional, but also into the socio-cultural environment. Although, as noted above, the language barrier is a shared problem for all foreigners, integrating into the Russian socio-cultural environment, but, in contrast to the academic environment, the linguistic-cultural adaptation of expats is carried out only at the levels of a foreigner/trainee – the national professional environment and a foreigner/trainee – RFL teacher as a repeater and an interpreter of the Russian culture (N.V. Baryshnikov). Both a limited number of instruction hours allotted to studying Russian as a foreign language and the fact that the trainees are not bound with either a syllabus or a curriculum, involving various types of control, are also crucial concerns. For Slavic expats (from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and the former Yugoslav republics), the Russian language is not difficult, except for the presence of linguistic interference, typical of closely related languages.

Of course, in the frame of one article it is impossible to describe the problems of linguistic-cultural adaptation of all expat groups. As an example, there is a group of French expats (automotive, financial, shopping, and restaurant businesses in Moscow), living and working in Moscow.

Within this group, there are strong generational differences. Nominally ‘younger’ generation of expats (aged under 30 years old) tend to study the Russian language either in France, or in France and Russia during a language internship in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Their sufficient language competency along with a weak formedness of the communicative competence is worth mentioning.

Nominally ‘older’ generation (aged above 50 years old), normally, have not studied the Russian language, they do not often have liberal arts education, do not possess any special language learning skills, and often cannot even reflect on the subject of their native language.

The wives and children must be separately mentioned. The wives mostly do not work, but are actively engaged in social activities, more integrated into the Russian everyday communication environment; therefore, they are more motivated to study the Russian language and the Russian culture. School-aged children tend to go to French high school, where they study Russian as a foreign language. But either the native language or English, which is taught as a first foreign language in French school, remains the bridge language. Over the course of the French

community existence in Moscow, in fact, a 'little France' has been created, with its educational and medical institutions, shops, restaurants, clubs, cultural centers, etc. Blogosphere has been also created, where expats share their experience in adaptation in the Russian environment, give practical tips to beginners, try to work together to remove linguistic-cultural travails (Foreign native: Russia in the expats' blogs, 2012). The same can be said about expats from other countries, so there is a general tendency not to integrate into the Russian/Russian-language society.

Everyone has different objectives and motivation in studying the Russian language, each one chooses for them the level they can reach: from 'getting by' to improving the knowledge and a deeper penetration into the Russian culture. For some, it is a specific, somewhat snobbish, self-assertion: 'overcoming difficulties and suffering, I learn such a difficult language'. Nevertheless, some typical difficulties of the linguistic-cultural adaptation of French expats can be distinguished. This is Gallic centrism and the related kind of linguistic chauvinism, which is expressed, in particular, in pronouncing foreign words according to the rules of French phonetics. The language chauvinism is also manifested in the fact that the Russian language is traditionally referred to as an oriental language (in French bookstores, RFL books and Russian dictionaries are on the shelf next to the Arabic ones). The Russian language is also studied in the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations. Cultural clichés are worth noting, which over time have become difficulties inherent even in French Slavists: the Russian winter and frost every time and everywhere, the Russian vodka, Gulag as a generalized character and apparatchiks, smashing shot glasses after each toast, etc.; the miserable triad 'vodka-shapka-borshch' (de Loeper, 2012). But the main difficulty consists in a lack of necessary language environment, however strange this may sound: while at work, generally, either French or English is used as the communication and professional language, which is natural because English has acquired the actual status of lingua franca. The younger generation, who are able to perceive the Russian speech and participate in dialogues, have another problem on the spot, such as a strong influence of the 'new vernacular': phrases like 'Come on!', 'kind of', 'like', 'damn', untabooed obscene vocabulary – 'But Russians say so!' – litter the language, stand in the way of acquiring the Russian literary language.

Difficulties, typical of the French, with perceiving and writing Cyrillic, the Russian phonetics (sonorous 'P', pronunciation of 'X' and 'Ū', failing to differentiate the 'hardness-softness' opposition), inherent in the speakers of Roman and Germanic languages, grammatical difficulties (the case-prepositional and the verbal-aspect systems) hinder mastering the Russian language and, as a consequence, a successful and prompt adaptation.

Methods of eliminating these difficulties, based on a long-term experience, on the use of the comparative method, on the search for meeting points of languages (in Europe, this is a so-called 'European linguistic mentality'), on strengthening

the motivational factor to study the Russian language via presenting specifically organized linguistic-cultural material has been described by the authors in detail (Ovcharenko, 2013).

**About the tables**

In teaching Russian as a foreign language, the organization and presentation of the grammatical and lexical material in the form of various tables is methodically justified. These tables facilitate systematization, better retention and consolidation of the training material.

It is desirable to tabularize the most difficult aspects, the grammatical topic ‘An object and a person in space’ being one of them. This topic is particularly difficult for the French language speakers (expats and students) because French does not have an equally detailed verbal system for the description of spatial relationships.

place		position	
<p><b>IMPF.</b></p> <p>To be standing To be lying To be hanging</p>	<p>WHERE?</p> <p><b>In what?</b> <b>On what?</b> <b>Prep.C.</b></p>	<p><b>IMPF.</b></p> <p>To be standing To be lying To be sitting</p>	<p>WHERE?</p> <p><b>In what?</b> <b>On what? Prep.C.</b></p>
change of place		change of position	
<p><b>IMPF. – PF.</b></p> <p>To put – to have put To lay – to have laid To hang – to have hung</p>	<p>WHAT? WHERE?TO?</p> <p><b>Wherein to?</b> <b>Whereon?</b> <b>Acc.C.</b></p>	<p><b>IMPF. – PF.</b></p> <p>To stand up – to have stood up To lie down – to have laid down To sit down – to have sat down</p>	<p>WHEREFROM? <b>from what?</b> <b>Gen.C. WHERETO? on what?</b> <b>Acc.C. WHERETO? Into what?</b> <b>WHERETO? On what?</b> <b>Acc.C.</b></p>
<p><b>Is standing:</b> a plate, a cup on a table a book on a shelf a car in the yard, at the corner a table in the corner</p> <p><b>Is lying:</b> a fork, a knife, a spoon on a table a book on a shelf, on a table, in a bag a carpet on the floor, a coat on a chair</p> <p><b>Is hanging:</b> a coat in a wardrobe a curtain on a window a picture, a carpet on a wall an apple on a bough</p>		<p><b>To stand:</b> at a stop, in a subway car</p> <p><b>To lie:</b> on a bed, on a beach, in a bathtub/on the back, on a side</p> <p><b>To sit:</b> on a chair, at a table, in an armchair, on a bed, on a sofa</p> <p>*****</p> <p><b>To stand up:</b> from a chair, on a chair, from the bed</p> <p><b>To lie down:</b> on a bed, on a sofa/on the back, on a side</p> <p><b>To sit down:</b> on a chair, at a table, on a chair, on a bed, on a sofa</p>	
<b>OBJECT</b>		<b>PERSON</b>	

**Figure 1:** Object and Person in Space

## CONCLUSION

Summarizing all the above, it is possible to draw conclusions about those different and common things characteristic of the linguistic-cultural adaptation of students and expats. Overcoming the language barrier in the process of linguistic-cultural adaptation is a mutual problem for students and expats, adaptation depending on its solution. However, significant differences, both general cultural and specific, are observed. Expats are characterized by the absence of 'metropolitan shock', their being socialized, a capacity for independent living traditional for the young people of European western culture, higher education providing the ability to perceive scientific information. However, their linguistic-cultural adaptation is impeded by the language learning environment absence, insufficient training hours for the Russian language studies, and communication in their mother tongue/English in the professional environment.

While international students are characterized by poor level of being socialized and a cultural level insufficient for the perception of scientific information. However, they are immersed in the language learning environment, which certainly should accelerate and facilitate the adaptation.

The main condition and the best way/tool of adaptation is studying Russian as a foreign/second language for both specific, practical purposes, such as education, and for the speediest penetration into the Russian culture. The authors reiterate the importance of a country study/civilization course, which should be engaging, awakening interest in studying the Russian culture through the language.

In this regard, the national school of teaching Russian as a foreign language is to expand the corpus of aids for teaching Russian as a second language and Russian as a foreign language. This instruction material should contribute to the cultivation of a positive image of Russia, the formation of a sense of belonging to the Russian culture, fostering respect for the language and national values of the country. This is the way to the formation of dialogue awareness and mutual enrichment of a teacher and a student in the framework of the dialogue of cultures.

In the system of higher education in Russian as a foreign language, it is necessary to introduce a course of Russian civilization (traditional for the Russian linguistic and cultural studies learning a culture through the language), combining entertaining and educational components. Such a course provides the opportunity to choose the topics of communication of interest to students, to draw parallels between the cultural and the historical phenomena in different countries, motivating students to rather lengthy statements.

The main determinant of linguistic-cultural adaptation is studying Russian as a foreign/second language, not only for specific, practical purposes, such as education, but also for the speediest penetration into the Russian culture, raising awareness of the Russian language as an education component meaningful for a

personality, which constitutes a mutual exchange of social and cultural values as part of forming a culture of dialogue.

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