The Concept and Structure of the Textbook ‘Russian Mentality In The Language Picture of The World’

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Keywords: Mentality, Textbook, Text, Language Picture of the world, Assignment.

Abstract. The article discusses the purpose, principles of organization and structure of the English-language textbook, designed to reflect peculiarities of the Russian mentality in the language and intended for foreign students-philologists studying at the 4th year of bachelor’s studies at St. Petersburg State University.

A new course is included in the curriculum of foreign students for the 4th year of the Bachelor’s Degree at the Department of the Russian as a Foreign Language at the Philological Faculty of the St. Petersburg State University. It is a special seminar in English called ‘Russian mentality: the linguistic aspect’. The purpose of the seminar (24 academic hours) is to provide students with an idea of the language means that form the Russian language picture of the world and understanding the main features of the Russian mentality reflected in the language, compared to other foreign languages (or their native language and culture). As a result of the course, students should have the basic terminological apparatus necessary to discuss the issues involved and be able to express and argue their views on specific issues.

The basic textbook designed to help in mastering the course material is the manual formerly created by us: ‘The Russian mentality in the language picture of the world’. This textbook largely relies on the E. Zinovieva’s book ‘Russian mentality in the language mirror’ [1], focused on both foreign and Russian students and written in Russian. The presented new textbook has been designed for students fluent in English at A2 Level 1 (Pre-Intermediate) and above. Accordingly, texts and assignments to them are in English, which certainly determines not only the content and style of training texts, but also the selection of these texts for reading, as well as the nature of pre-text and post-textual assignments.

Discussing the problems of the Russian mentality, we rely on the definition proposed by V. V. Kolesov who uses rightly the term mentality in the Russian language as follows: ‘Mentality is a world-view in the categories and forms of the native language that combines intellectual, spiritual and volitional qualities of a national character in its typical manifestations in the process of cognition’ [2]. In order to show how the Russian mentality is embodied ‘in categories and forms’ of the Russian language, it was necessary to introduce and explain the terms ‘picture of the world’ and ‘language picture of the world’. The key term, through the prism of which the material is considered, is the term ‘language picture of the world’ in the textbook. The language picture of the world is understood as ‘a scheme of perception of reality fixed in a language and specific for a given language community’ [3]. To illustrate specific features of the Russian mentality we selected texts, showing the various fragments of the Russian language picture of the world, as well as illustrating the language means of the various levels involved in the formation of these fragments: lexical, derivational, phraseological and syntactic. The foregoing stipulates the structure of the textbook, which includes the introduction and two sections.

The purpose of the introduction is to raise a problem. Small texts (excerpts from diaries of Russian and German girls and differences in the salutations of different nations) illustrate the difference in mindset and behavior of representatives of different language cultures. Here is an example:
Text 1. From diary records of Russian and German schoolgirls

**TEXT**

**Tanya (the Russian schoolgirl):** Nicole doesn’t really try, even though I’m visiting her. Instead of giving me something to eat, she just asks me what I want: how do I know what I’ll like it? And it happens that you’re sitting half an hour with a glass that’s almost empty and no one else is pouring anything. Then I have been sitting for an hour and watching her washing the dishes. I guess we’re not going anywhere tomorrow because they expect me to offer to go somewhere, though when they were in Russia, we had an excellent cultural program for them. And when there were news on TV that were only about disasters, no one ever paid attention to me. And how can they watch it? There’s only politics. Who cares about this?

I was surprised that she knows so little, while studying in a grammar school. She doesn’t know a single poem by heart. Moreover she was very surprised when I recited poems of Goethe and Heine. She believed that these texts can only be analyzed. Why don’t we memorize them after the analysis?

**Nicole (the German schoolgirl):** Tanya is arrogant, spoiled and not interested in anything. At the table, she almost ate nothing from what we offered her. Even she didn’t drink up a glass. And then instead of helping me she sat and watched me clean off the table and wash the dishes. She didn’t react at all to our proposals to go out somewhere tomorrow. It seems she doesn’t care at all. I’m scared to mention that obligatory boring cultural program in Russia. She is not interested in anything at all. When we watched news, she didn’t even look at the screen. But after that, probably, to brag, she recited several poems in German, and then asked if I would recite my favorite poem. As if I should learn something by heart! It’s always possible to find everything in a book! It’s much more important to know where you can find and how to interpret it. Learning by heart is the Stone Age.

The first section of the textbook, ‘Theoretical framework for learning the concept of mentality’, introduces the terminology used, and the second section, ‘Fragments of the Russian language world, reflecting the peculiarities of the Russian mentality’, focuses on a direct analysis of the most illustrative examples of how mentality is reflected in the language by language means of different levels. Lexical means are presented in materials on the conceptualization of the time of day and perception of winter as the time of year; lexical-derivational means in a description of national-cultural differences in the assessment of appearance; phraseological means in texts on the interpretation of idioms with *spirit* and *soul* components, and grammatical when considering categories of politeness and person in the Russian language picture of the world. The majority of texts are constructed on a comparative description of fragments of the Russian language picture of the world with similar fragments of language pictures of the world of other cultures. As the comparative language background most often serves Chinese owing to the structure of the student’s contingent studying at our Department. Cf., the following excerpt from the textbook in question:

To reveal the representation of units of the lexical-thematic group ‘Winter’ in the Russian and Chinese language consciousness, a free associative experiment was conducted with Russian (50 people) and Chinese (50 people) informants.

Testees were Russian and Chinese native speakers aged 20 to 70 years with secondary or higher education. A stimulus-word was the noun ‘winter’. The respondents were asked to write all the associations that arise in connection with this stimulus. The experiment was aimed at determining the composition of the associative field ‘Winter’ in Russian and Chinese language consciousness.

The identified associative field ‘Winter’ is characterized by a large amount of reactions both in the Russian language consciousness (311) and in the Chinese one (466 different reactions).

The maximum similarity of the obtained associates is noted in such thematic groups as ‘phenomena of nature and their perception’, ‘colors’, ‘physical sensations’ and ‘clothes’.

Distinctions are observed in names and perceptions of time periods, names of holidays and their attributes; there are also associations connected with traditional drinks and food, psycho-emotional state and perception of winter, animal nominations, winter occupations and names of historical events. Case phenomena are nationally and culturally determined as following: lines from poems and songs, titles of literary works and movies.
The Russian winter is associated with three winter months: December, January and February. In addition, pupils and students associate winter with a school vacation and exam session. Common to all native speakers of Russian are associations with time of day: a winter morning, a cold morning, a frosty morning, a frosty day, winter evenings, a long night, a dark night, a starry night. At the same time, a morning cold, frost in a daytime, length of winter evenings and nights, night darkness and starry night sky at a frosty night are noted. In the Russian language consciousness, winter is the time of year that comes after autumn, hence the reaction is ‘after autumn’, and it precedes spring – the association is ‘spring is coming’. The school vacation association entails the association of childhood.

Associations of Chinese respondents only partially coincide with the Russian associations: winter vacations, season, short day, long night, season change, year end, schedule change, summer.

Texts of the textbook are supplied with pre-text and post-textual assignments. Pre-text tasks in the introduction appeal to life experience and knowledge of students. For instance: Your friends are about to go to Russia for the first time. What would you advise them to consider, what to look for, for example, how to behave at a party, how to greet each other, how to say good-bye, etc.?

In the main sections, these tasks aim to remove language difficulties, to develop an ability to explain key concepts of the text and to match them with synonyms. For example: What significant distinctions can be noted in the etiquette formulas used in the morning, afternoon and evening in Russian and in your native language? Post-text assignments are designed to check the assimilation of the text content, to bring students to discuss what they have read, to compare with the experience of their language culture, to correlate the terms of the English language with the terminology accepted in the Russian linguistics. For instance, some assignments are as follows: Explain the difference in the meaning of adjectives as ‘ethical’ and ‘etiquette’. Compose phrases with these words. What type of politeness (‘Russian’ or ‘English’) is closer to the norms adopted in your native culture? Does your native language have a modifier similar to the Russian word ‘please’? Is its use sufficient to ‘soften’ a statement?

Summary

The teacher working with this textbook has an opportunity to select texts for analysis in a classroom depending on interests of students and their level of knowledge and motivation. Written in English, which is international, the textbook, in our opinion, can help foreigners who do not have sufficient proficiency in Russian to become acquainted with the particularities of the Russian language culture.

References