УДК 378.4

Intercultural Education
as a "Soft power" Tool

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Nowadays intercultural dialogue is regarded as one of key points in various fields of knowledge: philosophy, sociology, political science, linguistics, methods of teaching foreign languages. Despite the crisis of the idea of "interculturalism", the interest to the dialogue of cultures is not going down. On the contrary, it is becoming stronger and stronger. The status of intercultural dialogue is changing, its role as a social and human phenomenon is being revised. These changes are taking place due to the fact that the modern nature of international cooperation and cross-cultural communication is complicated by political, social, cultural processes caused by globalization, the opposition of civilizational values. The global society faces many challenges in the process of preparing younger generations to unexpected, often conflict-prone, complicated conditions of international cooperation and communication. There is a need to find specific tools that can reduce the intensity of confrontation, to diminish the devastating effects of modern globalization shifts and deformations. The article raises the question of the application of the intercultural approach as a soft power tool in university educational environment.

Keywords: soft power, soft power tool, university education, culturally-based approaches, intercultural approach.

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0051.

Research area: education; philology.

Introduction

In the conditions of the trends aimed at establishing a multi-polar world, tightening of international conflicts and irreconcilable differences between countries many research areas are being rethought. Some time ago these areas were very intensively developed, and, in fact, were regarded as "sacred" and there future was considered bright. One of such areas can be attributed to ideology of interculturalism, being often used in Russian and foreign practices of scientific and socio-political activities. As a core of this ideology serves the following position – an individual must be ready to participate

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in the dialogue of cultures, to communicate with representatives of another society, who is marked by the specific national mentality, his peculiar vision of the world. In the process of communication the interlocutors do not lose their national identity and recognize each other as bearers of different cultural concepts.

This would be infallible ideological concept is currently faltering, which is very noticeable at the level of various manifestations of life in a multi-polar world. Once veiled (non-obvious, implicit) strives of some national values to be leading, to dominate over others are becoming more and more conspicuous. This leads to cultural expansion, and even cultural imperialism (E.W. Said). Most clearly these processes manifest themselves in the field of education, which is not by chance qualified as one of the most effective areas of the application of "soft power".

Inevitably, a certain number of questions arises: *Education as an element of soft power – is it possible? What is the idea of interculturalism in the context of education? Does this idea acquire the status of an approach to education, to the formation of the consciousness of students as an instrument of soft power? If yes, what is the essence of this approach? In what educational context this approach can work effectively? What conditions must be created for it?* Answers to these questions can predetermine the development of educational systems, to specify and/or upgrade strategies, models of intercultural communication and, more generally, to define the possibility of influence on dangerous developments in the field of contemporary geopolitical transformations.

"Soft power" as an effective geopolitical means

Soft power is a phenomenon of the last decade. Its appearance as an antithesis of "hard power" in the scientific thesaurus as well as its relevance in a wide range of scientific knowledge have become

due to the complication of the situation in the geopolitical, geo-economic aspects of the world order, globalized crises, hence, complication of multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious life of a humankind. Potential, and in recent years a very real conflicting coexistence of different communities requires making decisions in the sphere of renovation of methods and tools to ensure world order, ensure the safe environment of human communities. Help comes from the arsenal of soft power, which is realized by means of culture, diplomacy, science, and education.

Canonically the soft power is defined as the ability of states to attract others to their side, seeking support for their own agenda in international relations by demonstration of their cultural and moral values, of the attractiveness of policies and the effectiveness of political institutions (Nye, 2006). In this sense, soft power is interpreted as the ability of a country to get the desired results in relations with other countries due to the attractiveness of the own culture, values, and foreign policy, rather than force or financial resources (Nye, 2004).

The mechanism of action of soft power is directly linked to the culture as a phenomenon that determines the existence of humankind: the soft power is associated with the culture of security, strategic culture, and general political culture. Equally close are ties between soft power and values: thanks to its application is the formation of certain values, both in the system that uses this power, and in the one that is affected. According to I.V. Radikov, "an important characteristic of the state, which has a 'soft power', is the creation, cultivation of certain values, attitudes, its specific political and economic model and promotion of all this within and outside the state borders" (Radikov, 2012: 19). Every citizen of the country can act as a promoter of the values that were generated by soft power. That is why it is important to educate (and do it deliberately) an

individual with humanistic orientations capable of ensuring his own security as well as the security of his society.

In recent years, the impact of soft power does not satisfy the constantly growing needs of the geopolitical strategies of the major powers of the world. Appeared and began to be actively used the concept of "smart power" – the ability to combine hard (force or economic coercion) and soft power to form a winning strategy (Nye, 2006). Attempts are made to «toughen» soft power at the expense of such tools and technologies, as "controlled chaos", "color revolutions", "information war", "cultural hegemony" (Shabalov, 2015). Moreover, the boundaries of soft power are blurred, which for the most part is localized in the "zone" of cognitive meanings in the cultural and civilizational strata. As a consequence, the moral challenges are aggravated that require revision of spiritual values.

Thus, there is a paradox: soft power is no longer soft, instead other aggressive forms and instruments of influence on a person and on the entire community are offered. Meanwhile, as it seems, not all the potential of soft power have been exhausted. It is still a part of the spiritual power of the state and society, capable of providing answers to external challenges and neutralizing or eliminating emerging threats.

Education as a tool of soft power

Education is recognized as one of the most effective tools of soft power. It is education that is responsible for the most obvious sphere of influence on an individual, providing not only impact but also interaction, dialogue, during which senses are formed, values are realized, and personal characteristics are shaped. The corresponding potential of the educational system has been successfully studied for a long time (D.N. Androsova, N.N. Bolshova, V.A. Masich, A.V. Torkunov and others). It is obvious today

that "only a developed educational system that meets the requirements of an innovative high-tech economy and integrated into the international educational and scientific environment, is capable of becoming one of the major competitive advantages of modern Russia in the 'global struggle for minds" (Torkunov, 2012: 86).

Many states rely on the educational system, seeing it as a model, attractive to potential consumers, a model that transmits lifestyle, values, and attitudes inherent in a particular society. In this case, there is a question of "export" of education – the dissemination of ideas and ideologies inherent in a particular socium/state, through educational processes and phenomena in the educational continuum, in the course of teaching the subject, development of specialty, in the context of specific areas of training. An example of this educational expansion is the spread of the dominant foreign language (today, as is generally accepted, English), which translates (sometimes implants) cultural values, and, in fact, aims to become a value.

Thus, University nowadays can rightly be considered not only as the system, aimed at preparing the young generation for life in a professional society, but also as a platform for application of soft power. This is the special mission of higher school – to serve as an ideological tuning fork, to affect the minds, to help strengthen and/or create a range of values that provide the security for the state, social life, and the human in the system of surrounding factors of instability and uncertainty.

Being aware of this, it is essential to take into account possible risks of the application of the educational system as a tool of soft power. Negative effects are very likely to take place, they will be revealed through the struggle for the right to determine the regulatory component of the world order in the structure of educational standards and programs. There rise the conditions

for non-productive and leading to negative consequences competition of values implemented into the educational content. There may occur (and probably it already exists) a situation in which there is a struggle for the "minds", battle for people.

In such circumstances, it is important to be very careful about introduction the approaches and strategies that have the potential to cause adverse effects from the use of education as an instrument of soft power. In this connection it is appropriate to dwell on how to develop over time the idea of teaching a foreign language in its (language) interaction with the corresponding culture. This will help to assess the potential of culturally correlated educational models that underlie the technology of soft power.

Teaching language and culture as one of soft power tools

Currently, the thesis of inseparability of teaching a foreign language from learning the culture of the target language country, its history, socio-cultural traditions, and peculiarities of the national vision of the world by native speakers is generally acknowledged in lingvodidactics. For a long time, up until now, it was believed that the lectures should broadcast the culture of the country of studied language. This is the basis for Culture Studies and Country studies classes, for socio-cultural approach, in which the native culture serves as a *means* for understanding *another* vision of the world, the means to ensure overcoming difficulties, identification of areas of cultural interference, defining of cultural gaps, and so on. Students learn non-equivalent lexis, acquire background knowledge, and through that they get acquainted with national customs, traditions, and realities of the country of the target language.

In this process, it may be assumed that the students thoroughly know the native culture and do not feel the need to enlarge the corresponding knowledge and the vision of the world. The students are centered at acquisition of the information about the culture of another country, which sometimes leads to the assignment by the students (often involuntary) the idea of another culture uniqueness, its exclusivity, and even superiority in comparison with the culture of their native country. There are conditions for ethnocentrism, which could lead to the replacement in the students' axiosphere of their own values by other value settings, could orient at interiorization of another way of life. Under these conditions, the education leads to fading, and sometimes to replacement of the native students' cultural identity. Of course, such an influence on personality, its civil stance is destructive. This is the way how soft power can realize itself devastating individuality, and this is what to be afraid of considering the educational effect of foreign language education system.

At the same time, the idea of the interconnection between language and culture is so attractive in the system of foreign language education, and it can serve as a real and not imaginary tool for influencing the "minds" in order to develop civil position with simultaneous readiness for life in a multicultural and multilingual space. This is an educational situation which provides real equality of cultural specifics, mutually intersecting, dialogically interacting, complementing each other, but not over-emphasizing the benefits of one over the other.

Such a situation can take place with the application of the intercultural approach to foreign language teaching. This approach significantly reverses the traditional foundations and radically changes the idea of how to teach a foreign language in its interaction with culture. There is a change of habitual vision of the

object of teaching expressed by binary formulas "language ↔ country", "language ↔ culture", "foreign language ↔ mother tongue", "native culture ↔ another culture". Such primitive relationship is becoming more complicated, forming multiple educational orbits that intersecting and interacting, involve all these phenomena into a single space. As the result we can see the rejection of the traditional irreversible sequence of linear formula "acquaintance with the fact of different culture → transfer it into the native culture → comparison of the facts of the two cultures → assimilation of the fact of another language community". The process of learning and teaching is realized through the expanding spiral motion, providing cyclicity of the following processes:

(1) acquaintance with the fact of another culture →

(2) transfer it to the native culture and understanding of specific features of this culture →

(3) revaluation (comprehension, understanding)of the fact of the native culture →

(4) return from position (3) to the fact of different culture and rethinking on the basis of a comparison with the new knowledge of the native culture →

(5) rethinking on the basis of (4) of the fact of the native culture, but from the standpoint not of own ego but from that of a representative of another language community →

(6) acknowledgment of the facts of the two cultures as a full-fledged, equal, distinct, reflecting different visions of the world by different representatives of different language communities.

The specificity of educational activities in comparison with other Culturally-based approaches the intercultural approach is considered to be an innovation in teaching foreign languages methods (see details (Tareva, 2013)).

In this complex cognitive activity a language learner changes his usual way of perception of the surrounding reality, but not in favor of any cultural reality – native or non-native, but in favor of recognition of the multi-polar nature of the surrounding world. It is important to avoid negative evaluations that could lead to confrontational ideas, to conflict of values, to an even greater distancing of objectively existing opposites: "me – not me", "mine – alien", "we – they". These opposites are in the mutual intersection at which the object under study (a fact of culture, verbalized by means of a foreign language, and thus materialized, albeit speculative, in the opinion of the student) have repeatedly taken by the student through the prism of his experience, and this experience is measured from different foci, namely: *How do we see them? How do they see us? How do we see ourselves? How do they see themselves? Can I show my world so that my foreign interlocutor could understand it? Am I able to look at my own culture with the eyes of a foreigner?* and so forth. Such activity is very rich with complex operations, and is able to create such an images of the own world and of a strange/different reality in their dialogic relationship, that are so demanded in the modern world that is full of xenophobia and nationalistic manifestations. (Read more about intercultural foreign language education in (Intercultural foreign language education ... 2014).

According to the said above the objective of teaching, which is explicable in competency format, undergoes some changes: didactic strategies are aimed at developing *intercultural communicative competence* – the ability and willingness to recognize, understand, and interpret the native and another picture of the world in their interaction. On this basis is conducted the process of foreign language communication with representatives of different language community. This competence indicates that the person, who

possesses it, is ready for life in the complex world of ambiguous relationships, the world full of unpredictability and uncertainty. Because of that the Federal State Educational Standards of the Russian Federation, postulate that the ability to communicate on an intercultural level is regarded as a general cultural (universal) competence, obligatory for University students of all areas of training

Educational technologies of intercultural approach

We should also focus on *educational technologies*, which are able to implement intercultural educational strategies. They should rightfully include *the technology of intercultural commenting*, which consists of certain steps:

– identification of similarities and/or differences between the native and target culture,

– comparison of differences and their interpretation,

– verbalization of conclusions in the form of a comment, which reflects the personal experience of an individual, related to the perception of the world, manifestation of a personal vision of the world.

This comment may be useful to the student in order to master his competencies in the professional sphere.

We consider interesting the use of *academic translation and interpreting* technology as a means of intercultural communication training. In this case, the academic translation and interpreting is a focused cognitive activity, in which there is in the mind of the student an integration of native and foreign language pictures of the world, which is realized in the process of understanding, and interpretation of the meaning of a foreign text (fragments) by means of the native language. The operational plan of the technology is based on teaching students to find in a foreign text interculturally significant fragments, to interpret and translate them (Annenkova, 2010). The problem-based nature of this training activity contributes to the formation and development of students' skills, abilities, and personal traits that make up the content of intercultural communicative competence.

Not less positive potential can be attributed to the so-called *onomasiological comparison* of culturally marked linguistic phenomena (e.g., phraseological units). This is the method of providing a specific vector of comparative actions: movement not from forms (linguistic symbols of target and native languages) to the expressed by these symbols meanings/concepts, but from concepts to the forms. In this case, the student performs the following actions:

– measures the universal for both cultures values / analyzes different axiological meanings,

– defines how, under what laws, these meanings "germinate" (materialize, objectify) in both languages,

– compares two language forms.

In this case the student constantly remains in the state of search, he makes discoveries, and this activity is able to implement a dialogue of cultures in his personal space.

There are other examples of productive technologies, contributing to the implementation of the dialogue of cultures, providing at the same time dialogical links between consciousness and perception of the world. There are studies devoted to the description of the main outlines of a *textbook, forming intercultural competence of students*. In such a textbook, as indicated by A.L. Berdichevsky, "it is necessary to create such a model of the culture of the country, which would act as an analogue of reality, that makes it possible to understand the mentality of the people

of another country and be a representative of this particular culture" (Berdichevsky, 2012: 22). The embodiment of such a system can become a textbook built on the scenario principle of its organization (Tarev, 2010).

The idea of interculturally pointed technologies is to emphasize the coexistence in one educational context of *two cognitive pictures* expressed through bilingual (native and foreign languages) *poly-, bicultural textual contents*. It is in these circumstances that the intercultural approach is able to act in strict accordance with the true meaning of soft power mechanism, forming a positive image of both cultures, creating conditions for dialogue from equal positions. It is in this situation that we can talk about the formation of genuine tolerance as a quality of a person who has not lost his own national identity, but has the ability to interact with different cultures and civilizations.

Conclusion

To achieve universal peace and harmony is an unreachable dream. There have been, are and there will be discordance between different states at the level of economic, political, and social processes and phenomena. To identify common sense at the level of intergovernmental relations can help the mechanism of soft power, the tools of which are aimed at low- or non-conflict positioning of this or that system of social existence. Education as an effective means of this mechanism is able to contribute to the goals of healthy competition, reduce the heating of ethnic and inter-state conflicts. Intercultural approach to the dialogue of cultures is able to form a personality that is ready to understand different pictures of the world, to rethink, from this position, his understanding of his own national space. The introduction of this approach in the system of higher education meets the urgent geopolitical challenges.

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Потенциал обучения межкультурному диалогу в контексте реализации стратегий «мягкой силы»

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Межкультурный диалог рассматривается сегодня в различных областях знаний: в философии, социологии, политологии, языкознании, лингвистике, лингводидактике. Несмотря на кризис идеи «межкультурности», интерес к диалогу культур не угасает, напротив, он становится еще более явно выраженным. Меняется статус межкультурного диалога, переосмысливается его роль как социального и гуманитарного феномена. Изменения связаны с тем, что современный характер международного сотрудничества и межкультурной коммуникации осложняется политическими, общественными, культурными процессами, вызванными глобализацией, противопоставлением цивилизационных ценностей. Общество оказалось перед вызовами, связанными с подготовкой подрастающего поколения к непредвиденным, часто конфликтогенным, осложненным условиям международного сотрудничества и коммуникации. Возникает потребность в поиске особых инструментов, способных снизить накал противостояния, уменьшить разрушительные эффекты современных глобализационных сдвигов и деформаций. В статье ставится вопрос о применении межкультурного подхода как механизма «мягкой силы» в образовательных условиях вуза.

Ключевые слова: «мягкая сила», инструменты «мягкой силы», образование в вузе, культуросообразные подходы, межкультурный подход.

Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.