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A DIASPORA PUPIL IN A DIALOGUE WITH A LANGUAGE (LANGUAGES) AND CULTURE (CULTURES) IN RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE LESSONS

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Abstract. The article is concerned with the issues of development and preservation of ethnic identity of Russian-speaking school children in Latvia studying the Russian language (mother tongue) under the conditions of diaspora. The authors, relying on the results of research activities, are convinced that one of the most important sources of preservation and development of Russian-speaking ethnic identity with the schoolchildren is the inclusion in the content of the school course “Russian language and literature” intracultural and intercultural dialogues.

Key words: Ethnic and cultural identity, national minority schools, a diaspora pupil, intercultural and intracultural dialogue, linguocultureme, linguo-culturological competence, tasks of culture-related nature.

1. Introduction

Formation of the child’s personality and cultural identity in the context of school education is a complicated process, and, especially, if a pupil from a diaspora is concerned. What value orientations should a pupil have when graduated from a high school in diaspora? Should the person perceive himself or herself as belonging to one’s own ethnic group? Or as a member of two cultures? Or should one be fully integrated into the culture of the country of residence? The analysis of school education systems in different countries as well as opinions of ordinary people suggest that there are not and there could not be unambiguous answers to those questions.

The purpose of this article is to acquaint teachers, methodologists, authors of textbooks and other interested readers with experience of involving Russian-speaking schoolchildren of Latvia in a dialogue with the facts and values of Russian culture and cultures of other peoples, and the experience accumulated by the authors in the creation and practical implementation of Russian language and literature textbooks in primary school of national minorities of Latvia (grades 4-9).

2. Methodology

In this article the authors analysed Russian language and literature Standard of School Education and textbooks in primary school of national minorities of Latvia (grades 4-9) using descriptive analysis (Loeb, Dynarski, McFarland, Morris, Reardon & Reber, 2017). A particular attention was given to the analysis of the cross-cutting themes, of the texts as belonging to its specific historical, literary and cultural environment, of the effective strategies for working with the culturological senses represented in texts. Besides, the authors summarized the didactic experience of modern strategies for working

with culturological senses and used the method of pedagogical observation. In the process of diagnosing the development of pupils cultural openness, we conducted conversations with schoolchildren, analysed and evaluated the results of their creative works and projects. We also took into account the activity of pupils in extracurricular activities related to ethnographic holidays and traditions.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. A new Standard of School Education Subchapter

In 2018, Latvia adopted amendments to the Education Law and developed a new Standard of School Education involving the transition to education in schools of national minorities (incl. the schools, where the Russian-speaking pupils study) to schooling in the state (Latvian) language. According to these amendments in elementary school, only a part of the subjects the schoolchildren will study is in Russian. Starting from the 7th grade, 80% of the subjects will be taught in Latvian, and in grades 10-12 all the teaching will be in the state language. Exceptions apply to the study subjects related to the cultural identity of national minorities, such as Russian language and literature in the grades 1-9. This reform will come into force on September 1, 2019, and the transition period will be complete by the end of the 2021-2022 school years (Kompetenču pieeja mācību saturā, 2018).

The implementation of this educational model actualizes the issues of spiritual-semantic self-identification of adolescents and young people - representatives of the ethnocultural minorities of Latvia (Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, etc.). In recent years, scientific research has been increasingly concerned with the issues of crisis, "drift" or "loss" by modern young people (including schoolchildren) of their own ethno-cultural identity. Especially often, according to researchers, this occurs when adolescents or young people live in a multicultural and multilingual environment. It is obvious that the sociocultural environment of the reformed Latvian school, in which the personality of a child is being formed, a child being a representative of a national minority, will make it more difficult to develop "mental constants" formed by family education. The more so, for the reason that many parents, who are currently representatives of the ethnocultural minority, are themselves experiencing a crisis of cultural identity, not having time to adapt to the rapid sociocultural changes. When it comes to the child of the diaspora, the motivation for the preservation and development of their identity depends not so much on the child as on his parents. Are the parents interested in having their child fully mastering the first (native) language, what role do they assign to this language in the child's future life?

3.2. The family and the school and ethnocultural identity

The authors A. Dzhalalova, N. Zorina, I. Kostyukevich of the study "Development of Parent Involvement Models for Bilingual Pre-Primary School and Bilingual Kindergartens" conducted in 2016-2017 among parents of Russian-speaking preschoolers and elementary school pupils in Latvia, Finland and Estonia, stated the following:

- all parents surveyed expressed their interest in having children properly learn Russian;
- responding to the question of why the child needs Russian in the future, the parents so distributed the proposed answers in order of importance: 1) to remain Russian (to preserve identity), 2) to use Russian for their hobbies in their free time; 3) to have Russian friends, 4) to belong to the Russians, 5) to be able to use the Russian language at work, and 6) to acquire education in the Russian language (Dzhalalova, Zorina, Kostyukevich, 2017: 35-37).

It is known that ethnocultural identity "arises from the psychological need of a person to set in order the ideas about oneself and one's place in the picture of the world, the subconscious desire to overcome the rupture of the original syncretism, to achieve unity with the outside world, which is achieved in substituted forms (language, religion, politics, etc.) through integration into the cultural and symbolic space of society" (Malygina, 2018). According to B.D. Tatum, the concept of identity is a complex one, shaped by individual characteristics, family dynamics, historical factors, and social and political contexts (Tatum, 1997: 18). Under the conditions of the diaspora, the fam-

ily and the school (more precisely, the lessons of the Russian language and literature) become for the “Russian-speaking” schoolchild the main (and, often, the only) source of knowledge and ideas about Russian culture, awareness of their involvement in it, in other words - the development of ethnic and cultural identity. We agree with M. Esteban-Guitart, J.L. Lalueza, C. Zhang-Yu, M. Llopart that the purpose is not only legitimate cultural practices of students and their families, but also to guarantee the existence of these legacies in educational practice, in particular, and society, in general (Esteban-Guitart, Lalueza, Zhang-Yu, Llopart, 2019: 3). However, there are quite a number of problems here. On the one hand, the new Latvian Standard of Basic Education emphasizes that one of the tasks of school language education is to ensure “the pupil understands the role of the native language in the development of national identity and in preserving the cultural and historical heritage” (Kompetenču pieeja mācību saturā, 2018). While on the other hand, for mastering the Russian language and literature, in grades 1–9, only three hours a week are stipulated (in high school, these academic subjects are among the selective study subjects). Even in the current situation, when bilingual education models are being implemented in the schools of national minorities in Latvia, providing for much more lessons in Russian language and literature, we observe serious problems in the development of the cultural outlook of schoolchildren. Their knowledge of culture and history is poor and stereotyped. This concerns not only Russian history and culture, but also Latvian history and culture, despite the fact that the share of information about Latvian culture in the educational content is very large. One of the reasons could be seen like that: a prerequisite for the sociocultural and intercultural integration of the individual is the development of its positive ethno-cultural identity. In our opinion, the necessary balance between the positive ethnocultural identity and the sociocultural tolerance of Russian-speaking schoolchildren can be maintained by two dialogues: the pupil’s dialogue with the Russian language and Russian culture (intracultural) and the dialogue with languages and cultures of other peoples (intercultural) that are purposefully and consistently included in the study process. Not by chance language and culture are so close that are being identified as synonyms (Hsin, 2013: 2). It should be noted that Russian researchers and methodologists point out the extremely low level of cultural competence among many schoolchildren in Russia, the shift of cultural orientations to “low”, kitschy forms, and the loss of interest in high humanist ideals and models of Russian national culture. It seems that S.N. Tokarev is right, when explaining the current situation primarily by the fact that in the twenty-first century the child is in a special socio-cultural situation, which is characterized by a change in such factors of cultural development as:

- a) “the transformation of the axiological sphere of personality: the shift of priority into the area of material values;
- b) reducing the impact of school education and family education on the process of socialization of the school child;
- c) the increasing role of screen culture, media and information technologies” (Tokarev, 2011: 27) .

3.3. The didactic space of the dialogue

The problem of literature selection occupies an important place in modern pedagogical discussions. We share the view that text selections should include different voices and ways of knowing, experiencing, and understanding life. In this way, pupils can find and value their own voices, histories, and cultures (Crisp, Knezek, Quinn, Bingham, Girardeau & Starks, 2016; Boyd, Causey & Galda, 2015). When developing the materials for the textbooks, we proceeded from the assumption that a dialogue with the facts and values of Russian culture and the cultures of other nations will be necessary, first, to include in the process of mastering by pupils of their native language and literature at all its stages, i.e., “weaving” into the actual linguistic and literary aspects, and, secondly, it should be worthwhile to integrate the cultural content acquired by schoolchildren in Russian language and literature classes (taking into account the small number of study hours and the fact that in schools of

national minorities of Latvia, Russian language and literature are studied within the framework of one single study subject “Language and literature of a national minority”).

Such integration is successful if this dialogue is made use of in the following didactic space: in the framework of cross-cutting culturological themes; in working with texts of cultural character (texts of culture) and language units (morphemes, words, phraseological and syntactic units) containing the national-cultural component of meaning; in solving cross-cultural problems.

Cross-cutting themes are understood as “single-issue educational content of a problematic nature, relating to some of the most important areas of human activity, which remains constantly present in the language studying process, performs an organizing function, has a hierarchical structure, and has a high linguistic, communicative and cultural value” (Digina, 2009: 100). The above topics, in our opinion, offer the best option to systematically and interactively “pack” the educational material into the study course of the Russian language and literature in terms of co-studying the people’s language and culture. Accordingly, the textbooks of the Russian language and literature (grades 4-9) include texts from which the schoolchildren learn about:

- decorative and applied Russian art;
- Russian traditions, ways of life, traditional festivities;
- Russian artists and their works;
- significant architectural sites of Russia and geographical locations;
- the personalities of Russian history, culture, science, etc.

Textbooks also pay considerable attention to texts that update the comparison of different cultural traditions. The proportion of such texts in textbooks is increasing, starting from the 6th grade, because it is from this age that the teenager moves from the emotional-figurative to the rational-logical, detailed perception of the world, and begins to reflect on the problem “Who am I?”.

First of all, these are texts that

- update universal concepts, allowing to compare both historical and cultural, and national cultural traditions;
- contain the interpretation of cultural archetypes;
- show samples of the dialogue of cultures, epochs and authors.

That is “the text selections include different voices and ways of knowing, experiencing, and understanding life. In this way, students can find and value their own voices, histories, and cultures” (Futterman, 2015). We shared Nussbaum’s belief that engagement with literature might “wrest from our frequently obtuse and blunted imagination an acknowledgement of those who are other than ourselves, both in concrete circumstances and even in thought and emotion” (Nussbaum, 1997: 111–112). Illustrations for the texts are to be provided by all means and often also the Internet addresses, where the schoolchildren can learn more about a particular cultural artifact. From grade to grade, the cultural information contained in the texts is getting more complicated.

3.4. Strategies for working with culturological senses

The search for effective strategies for working with the culturological senses represented in texts is based on the psychological peculiarities of information perception by modern adolescents. Taking into account that “the perception of the text ... depends not only on the quality of the text itself, but also on the personality of the subject perceiving it” (Stepanova, 2005: 26), it should be acknowledged that for a number of reasons diaspora schoolchildren are not ready for the correct and deep perception of the text of Russian culture with respect to the consciousness and personality. For our schoolchildren those works are some kind of “an archived file” storing “megabytes” of cultural senses hidden between the lines ...” (Mankevich, 2014: 74).

In addition, we take into account the information overload of modern adolescents, which adversely affects their ability to perceive and absorb knowledge, and reduces the level of motivation (Sosnovskaya, 2015: 221). It should also be taken into account that “it is important to use strategies

and skills as well as the learner's meta-cultural awareness are far more important here than declarative knowledge" (Marczak, 2010: 16). Besides, there is no getting away from the fact that modern schoolchildren as the representatives of the online generation, "digital residents" rely on a non-linear perception. According to R. Gross, "only now, in more recent times, a huge store of knowledge, wisdom and beauty, accumulated over the entire history of mankind, has become available to each of us and virtually immediately upon request" (Dryden, 2003: 145).

That is why the tasks provided for the texts are aimed at developing the following skills in the schoolchildren:

- explore the cultural information of the text (search, interpretation, evaluation, inclusion in own experience);
- find and use additional (scientific, objective) sources of cultural information to understand, clarify, supplement the information of the text;
- "reconstruct" the value representations of the nation, based on schoolchild's own ideas and the materials of sources;
- collate the facts of different cultures to build intercultural dialogue;
- use the information acquired in the pupil's own behaviour experience (verbal (speech) and non-verbal).

In the process of developing schoolchildren's ability to build a dialogue with the facts and values of Russian culture and cultures of other nations in the lessons of Russian language and literature, another basic didactic concept (along with the text) is the word (i.e., the didactic unit of the inclusion of the student in the context of the culture of the nation). The material of the textbooks contains tasks, designed to allow the children to analyse and compare linguocultures, find common and different in various nations' perceptions of such values as friend, friendship, happiness, joy, homeland, love, sky, soul, etc. In the course of the analysis, children learn, first, to work with different sources of cultural information: dictionaries (explanatory, etymological, phraseological dictionaries, a dictionary of symbols, etc.), reference books (encyclopaedias, illustrated albums), Internet sources, and others; secondly, to solve and formulate linguacultural problems, i.e. tasks that are aimed at "completing (or restoring) the missing fragments of the value picture of the world (as a fragment of the language picture of the world) in the thesaurus of the pupil's linguistic personality" (Mishatina, 2005: 39).

According to Moran (Moran, 2001), teaching content is supposed to embrace: (a) cultural information, (b) cultural practices (c) other people's perspectives, and (d) the learner's self. Based on this the depth of immersion in the cultural sense of linguocultures, the size of sources used and the analysis of the material of the sources, as well as the content of linguacultural tasks depend on the age characteristics of schoolchildren, the extend of their culturological experience. In the 4th and 5th grades, the pupils work with previously prepared mini-texts and linguistic and culturological tasks, adapted material from etymological and other dictionaries, in which the culturological information is already fully or partially processed (for example, the text with gaps, offering to complete the missing fragments). The schoolchildren are offered to formulate the problem and elicit what different nations have in common and/or what are the differences in the naming, understanding or perception of the same phenomenon or the object of the world around. For example, the tasks under the heading "Crossroads of cultures!" in the textbook for the 5th grade draw schoolchildren's attention to animal symbols in different cultures, similar and different names for the same household items, phenomena of the outside world, offering the children to explain the similarities and differences. In grades 6-9, linguoculturological activities of schoolchildren become more complicated, since significantly increases:

- the share of problem – solving tasks based on actual situations (often they serve as an illustrations to clash of cultures); the schoolchildren are offered to define a problem, to explain the reasons for the distinctions of the way certain phenomenon are perceived or evaluated; asked to find a solu-

tion, give reasons to support their point of view based on independent information search of and/or the culturological information given in the textbook;

- the number of creative tasks designed for the schoolchildren and offering to produce their own texts, cross-cultural tasks based on newly acquired culturological information (such as inclusion of the information into one's own speech, the ability to take the point of view of a member of a certain culture, to see the world through the eyes of that person).

Acquisition of the vocabulary of the language, enriching the vocabulary of the student, is undoubtedly more successful if the student masters the systemic connections of lexical units. Thematic group is one of the units of the lexical system (along with lexical-semantic groups and semantic fields). Thematic group are selected based on an extra-lingual criterion, which is essential for the school didactics of the language (as opposed, for example, to a lexico-semantic group), which is essential for the school didactics of the language. That is why culturological (vocabulary) material in textbooks of the Russian language and literature is compiled into thematic blocks (for example: Russian ethnographic (everyday) vocabulary, names and surnames and their origin, ancient Russian measures of length, means of transportation in Russia, Russian names of time periods (months, days of the week and under.), words – the names of emotions and feelings, etc.). In other words, the thesaurus approach was used in systematization of cultural lexis, the advantage of which is that the thematic vocabulary presented to schoolchildren “is a projection of a fragment of a picture of the world” (Mikhaleva & Maletina, 2014).

An important aspect of schoolchildren's lexico-cultural studies, starting from the 8th grade, is the study of literary translations. This activity is carried out in two directions. First, this is the analysis of texts that have received a "second birth" in Russian literature. Thus, the central problem that determines the study of the ballad works of V. A. Zhukovsky is the uncovering of personal content with which the poet has filled someone else's storyline. Secondly, a comparison of translations of the same literary source made by different poets is carried out. For example, eighth-graders compare the translations of R. Burns's poem “My heart's in the Highlands” by S. Ya. Marshak and the modern poet A. Kuznetsov and struggling to find out who of the translators managed to convey the flair and tone of the original source. The creative task of a comparative analysis of poems is to decide why R. Burns's deeply national and folk poetry, in the interpretation of S. Ya. Marshak, has become an integral part of Russian culture. Of course, there is no unequivocal answer to such a question. However, eighth-graders in the course of the studies come to the conclusion that the main reason can be the sameness of those spiritual problems that worried a Scotsman as much as they worry a Russian person.

The natural continuation of such activity is the creation of school children's own translations. Simultaneously the creative task facing the school children becomes more complicated: they need not only to correctly understand the content of the foreign language text, but also to convey the author's emotions and attitude to the prospective reader, that is, to look at the world from the value position of a representative of a different culture.

4. Conclusions

It should be emphasized that the results of diagnostics carried out in the course of practical implementation of textbooks on the Russian language and literature allow us to state not only the enrichment of knowledge and the improvement of pupils' skills, but also certain changes in their emotional value field, indicating enrichment of pupil's personal social and cultural experience. Creative work of schoolchildren, as well as the participation of children in project work and extracurricular activities related to ethnographic holidays and traditions, convince us that in the process of learning the pupils develop a personal cultural openness, which is, on the one hand, the basis for a deeper immersion of the student in a dialogue with the facts and values of the Russian culture, and on the other serves the basis for the development of socio-cultural tolerance ensuring the development of the ability of pupils to be involved into intercultural dialogue.

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