PROJECT LEARNING AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Purpose.** The study aims to integrate theoretical and applied linguistic knowledge and a project method of teaching a foreign language thus assimilating socio-cultural stereotypes of the native and foreign languages in comparison.

**Methodology.** The article describes a project method that has been implemented in teaching English to young athletes. The study has made use of systematic, culturological, linguocognitive methodological approaches. The empirical base rests on the linguistic studies of terminological systems and socio-cultural stereotypes.

**The main results** of the research conducted are the following: improvement of the language skills of the students involved, building the understanding of the cognitive processes of language nomination in Russian and English in comparison in the students’ mind. Since these processes are based on the worldviews peculiar to each language, as a result of studying the nomination mechanisms, students add to their knowledge of the socio-cultural stereotypes characteristic of each of the above languages.

**Practical implications.** The applied method of involving students of non-linguistic specializations into language studies has as a result in the formation of a deeper understanding of the essence of the interaction of languages and peoples as social communities. This research area is prospective for further studies.

**Keywords:** developing learning; socio-cultural stereotype; students’ project design and search work; sports terminology; terminological nomination; language metaphor
ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ ПРОЕКТНОЙ
ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ В ПРЕПОДАВАНИИ ИНОСТРАННОГО
ЯЗЫКА В ВЫСШЕЙ ШКОЛЕ

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Цель. Статья описывает опыт применения проектного метода при обучении иностранному языку в неязыковом вузе, при котором вовлечением студентов неязыкового профиля в проектную деятельность достигается расширение их лингвистических и социокультурных компетенций. При этом реализуются основополагающие принципы дидактики, когда процесс подготовки студента его обучает, развивает и воспитывает. Цель исследования – интегрировать теоретико-прикладные лингвистические знания и проектный метод обучения иностранному языку для формирования у студентов осознанного восприятия языка через усвоение социокультурных стереотипов.

Метод и методология проведения работы. В статье описывается проектный метод, который был реализован в преподавании английского языка студентам спортивных направлений подготовки. Применяются системный, культурологический, лингвокогнитивный методологические подходы. Эмпирическая база опирается на исследования терминосистем и анализ социокультурных стереотипов.

Основные результаты: формирование у студентов понимания природы языковой номинации в русском и английском языках в сравнении, расширение познаний обучающихся в области социо-
культурных стереотипов, развитие чувства самоидентичности и критического мышления через участие в проектной деятельности.

**Область применения результатов.** Предложенная методика вовлечения студентов, не специализирующихся в профессиональном изучении языка, в лингвистические исследования имеет в качестве результата формирование у них более глубокого понимания сущности взаимодействия языков и его носителей – народов как социальных общин. Данное направление является перспективным и имеет не только образовательный, но и развивающий и воспитательный потенциал, что соответствует триединой цели педагогики.

**Ключевые слова:** развивающее обучение; социокультурный стереотип; проектно-поисковые работы учащихся; спортивная терминология; терминологическая номинация; языковая метафора


**Introduction**

Currently there is a demand for the education system to educate students capable of critical thinking. Today a student should be able to do analytical work so that to apply the results thereof in practice. This can be achieved, among other things, through developing learning. The foreign language teaching is no exception: elements of project activities which imply both an independent search for new information and increasing creativity of students, can be successfully included into the foreign language teaching in higher educational institutions at the non-linguistic departments.

The innovative potential of the educational institutions is closely connected with the research component of the project research activity of their students that contributes in its turn to the high standard qualification of the graduates [7]. At present in Russia there is an evident tendency at the institutions of education, both secondary and higher, to promote students’ project (research) activity [3]: the official website of the digital
scientific library Научная электронная библиотека E-library returns over 400 articles containing the key-words *project research activity* in the title published in 2023.

Within the concept of developing learning the major target of the process of education is viewed as to bring into action a potential of man [4]. Our experience of introducing elements of developing learning involving students of other than linguistic specialities into the linguistic study allows us to talk about the practical and scientific benefits for young researchers. The linguistic study plunges the students into the understanding of how a language functions, they master internal structural models of the foreign language: externally expressed grammatical typical constructions, cultural stereotypes of linguistic behavior, differences in the peoples’ worldviews. Thus, they realize and acquire understanding of an alien linguistic worldview.

**Purpose**

This study is considered relevant and has practical significance as it meets the acute requirements in the system of higher education to form a specialist who is capable of critical thinking. The article describes the experience of using the project method in teaching a foreign language in a non-linguistic department, when the involvement of students-non-linguists achieves further development of their linguistic and socio-cultural competencies. The fundamental principles of didactics are being thus implemented, i.e. the process of training teaches, develops and educates.

The research in the paper is based on the results of the author’s previous works in sociolinguistics of the correlation of linguistics and socio-cultural stereotypes, on the author’s comparative study of the linguocognitive models of phraseosemantic fields in Russian and English [5; 6]; on the author’s experience of studying the process of metaphorization as the process most vividly reflecting the internal work of the figurative picture of language [1], the relationship between languages, cultures [2], on the author’s experience of studying the nomination process [9]. Professional (special) languages and terminology can serve as vivid examples of metaphorical nomination. That is why students spe-
cializing in other than linguistic professions are quite able to grasp the worldview underlying a foreign language which they are learning and to compare it with their own. Thus, several tasks can be solved – the students are both developing their linguistic competence and widening their awareness of cultural differences and intercultural correlation. All this contributes to a deeper awareness of their culture and language. Besides, the students have a perfect opportunity to increase their research capabilities as young specialists.

The main purpose of the study is to integrate basics of the linguistic nomination and socio-cultural stereotypes into the methods of teaching a foreign language to students of non-linguistic specialities through encouraging their project research work with language material.

The research objectives of the study may be represented as following: to analyze the efficiency of introducing project work with linguistic material into foreign language teaching to students of non-linguistic departments; to give an account of the experience of involving students into the project activity where some peculiar features of the terminological nomination in sport have been studied; to outline the prospects of sociolinguistic research as part of the foreign language teaching to students of non-linguistic areas.

Methods of study and theoretical grounding

We have made use of the following methods: pedagogical observation of the students’ activity in the course of the project work and metaphorical modeling, which the students carried out as part of their project and search work under the guidance of the supervisor. The work has been conducted at the Smolensk State University of Sports as a student research to reveal basic features of the terminological nomination in figure skating by the text material of the Russian and English languages in comparison. The peculiarity of the project is that it has attempted to demonstrate the abilities of the students training to be sport coaches and PT teachers to acquire a deeper knowledge of the linguistic problematic field. Thus, the object of the pedagogical observation thereof was the project activity itself where we tried to assess the students’ ability to
combine theoretical linguistics and professional competences of a sportsman to help the students better understand socio-cultural background in the sphere of sport and international relations.

First of all, it should be mentioned that the process of the terminological nomination (as far as the word complexes are considered) can be described as the creation of stable verbal complexes and has as its essence the ability to be reproduced as ready-made units (*phraseological reproducibility*). This main characteristic feature of such stable verbal complexes was proved in the Russian linguistics in the middle of the twentieth century: in [5] it was demonstrated that, although it is possible to find parallels in the works of Western linguists (based on the English language), however, the linguistic studies of the Russian language were among the first to substantiate the concept of the stable verbal complex as a linguistic phenomenon [11]. A stable verbal complex can be therefore represented as a linguistic unit resulting from *phraseologization* and having as its characteristic feature reproducibility in language and speech in the form of a ready-made unit [11, p. 100], all other properties of such a unit can be considered variable. The given approach views reproducibility as a single property common for all stable verbal complexes thus making the notion of a stable verbal complex universal. According to L.I. Roizenzon, the *phraseological reproducibility* is dichotomous by nature, which means reproducing of a unit in the same quality in a situation when the same and similar reproduction can be perceived in another quality [11, p.104]. This means that a certain ready-made unit can be reproduced as a stable verbal complex only because the same ready-made unit can also be perceived as a non-phraseological lexeme combination. In other words, there exists (or its existence is theoretically possible) a certain free lexeme combination, to which a certain stable verbal complex is opposed. L.A. Zhebrunova [5] proves that *complex terminological units* (i.e. composed of a several words) are stable word-complexes and can therefore be studied as phraseological units within the framework of phraseology (in its broad definition).

The further issue to be considered is the fact that stable verbal complexes are strongly associated with the expression of national-specific
(i.e. national-cultural stereotypes) in the language system. In Roizenzon’s theory of phraseologization, stability and reproducibility are the main characteristic of the stable word complexes [11]. In sociolinguistics, national-cultural stereotypes are characterized by the similar properties: ‘patterns’ refer to stability (reproducibility) at the level of structure; generalized statements reflecting basic concepts of the social ‘picture of the world’ refer to stable verbal complexes of various kinds; types of introduction of precedent texts refer to stability of the reproducible type.

In the process of learning, the unique experience of collective (ethnic) culture is being absorbed by ones who are learning. This has a significant impact on the personality development. In personalism, a personality may be displayed as a collection of unique, inimitable mental programs that are being formed through learning. Today boundaries of ethnic communities are being blurred due to accelerated developing of information and communication technologies, and there is evident linguistic expansion of the English language that certainly implies losing of the unique traits of the concept map inherent in the Russian language [14; 15]. Language guarantees unified transmission of information necessary for constant self-reproducing of an ethnic group – that is how the language codifying function should work. As language transmits cultural concepts, the linguistic superstructure appears crucially important in the structure of the ethno-cultural environment.

Thus, a single, ethically based concept map (‘map of the world in the head’) provides all the members of the ethnic group with a commonly shared psychological qualities and life configurations, in other words, a common cognitive orientation. This means exactly the known ‘ethnic self-consciousness’ (behavioral stereotype, the so-called ‘mentality’). A social stereotype is a culturally conditioned phenomenon. Social stereotypes are developed by the culture surrounding a person. In turn, the latter is being influenced by the stereotype. This is a specific example of the social behavior of members of a particular ethnic group. The term ‘stereotype’ is used by sociologists, ethnographers, specialists in psychology, ethnopsycholinguists and linguists.

Stereotypes are characterized by reproducibility. Reproducibility in a language acts on three main levels – in outer structures, in generalized
statements and at the level of texts. There are three types of stereotypes in the structure of the linguistic personality. The first type is typical syntactic structures; the second is generalized statements reflecting the basic concepts of the map of the world (various stable verbal complexes); the third type includes precedent texts. Some researchers believe that such specific cases as general phrases, journalistic standards (‘fashionable’ phrases); discourse phrases (reflecting ethnic and cultural behavioral stereotypes), typical figurative expressions-idioms, ethno-idioms (key figurative and topical systems and national cultural images), national symbols and several others should also be included here [8].

Obviously, when students are involved in learning a foreign language ‘from the inside’ and take part in the project activities, it adds to their analytical thinking and helps them to see differences in the ‘maps of the world’ of their own tongue and the one being studied. Such types of research work have educational, developmental and practical impact on the process of study. This should help to increase interest in scientific research, deepen language knowledge, and to consciously integrate various branches of scientific knowledge and the personal socio-cultural experience of a student.

**Stages of research**

At the first stage of the research, the students were to analyze the basics of the terminological nomination within the framework of the language theory and sociolinguistics.

At the second stage, students were given tasks to analyze certain empiric material. The students studying to be sportsmen were involved in the linguistic research but by the material adherent to their branch of sport – professional terminology of their kind of sport.

At the same time, ‘teaching’ becomes ‘learning’: not just giving knowledge, but facilitate forming the ways of action that would allow the student to progress both in analytical skills and creative thinking. The creative methods of developing learning traditionally include reference-based (abstract writing), problem-based, experimental, naturalistic and descriptive, research. Our work rests on the group of methods men-
tioned last. A student-researcher (or a group of them) is set a problematic task: the problem is formulated for further research conducted by the students themselves. This type of the teaching methods is sometimes called design and search (project) work in the Russian education science.

The above methods can and should be used in teaching foreign languages. The material for teaching a foreign language is mainly in the form of texts. For students of non-linguistic areas and specialties, texts (of various kinds – educational, thematic, dialogical, audiovisual) should contain professionally significant (in our case, sports-oriented) information. There are different ways to deal with this information in order to make it valuable for learners. The given article is a description of the student research project aimed at studying the basics of linguistic nomination in the professionally significant for a student field – a sport terminology. The project was implemented taking into account the following recommended stages: to formulate the topic of research, to set tasks and objectives, to make choice of the research methods, to do the research work concerning the project, to analyze the findings and make general conclusion as for the results, to conclusions, presentation of the result (presentation at the conference).

Here below is the progress of the students’ activities within the framework of the research project.

The topic of the student research project is “Terminological nomination in the professional sublanguage of figure skating in Russian and English in comparison”. Along with the above, the ‘working’ draft version of the topic was formulated, that is more vividly expressing the essence of study: dramatic metaphorical images are the source of origin for the terminological names of the elements and skills in the language of figure skating in Russian and English; the differences between these processes in the two languages. Thus the research issue meets the following important requirements. First, the issue is attractive since researchers acquire the opportunity to improve their level of English adding to their competence knowledge of professional terminology of sport: they study the world-building paradigm of the professional sublanguage of their sport. Second, the issue is relevant in terms of the present-time situation in the sport terminology of
figure skating: it reveals the terms which remain untouched in the course of time, those that are being replaced by English borrowings or phonetic loan-words. It seems interesting to find out in which sport area the terms borrowed from the English language appear more often, i.e. in professional sport or in coaching. Then, it should be noted that the research project has all the terms necessary for its implementation: a large vocabulary base in English and Russian, access to information via the Internet and possibility to trace the life-cycle of the terms in different types and forms (texts, audio sources). Finally, the research issue is laid down in the way that is concrete and implies the ability to formulate specific tasks based on it. Those tasks will make up the plan for the research and suggest the first steps that the researcher needs to take. The following questions and tasks were formulated: how the creation of figure skating terms in Russian and in English is carried out, how these processes differ in the two languages; where the intersection points of the two term systems will be.

The students had to develop a bilingual glossary of metaphorical terms naming the elements of figure skating for which judges award points to athletes at competitions. Further, it was necessary to compare the metaphorical models underlying the identified terms: *metaphorical transfer occurs on the basis of visual, functional similarity of the sports elements, skills and the objects of the surrounding environment* (V.N. Telia [12], L.A. Lipilina [9], P. Howarth [13], J. Nattinger [16]). Then, on the basis of quantitative analysis, the students drew conclusions about the trends of the nomination in the compared parts of the glossary, i.e., Russian and English.

For comparison of the terms in the two languages, researchers designed a kind of *conversion tables* considering the following structure:

- the English term and its dictionary counterpart in the Russian language in the study;
- a literal translation of the English terms into Russian (a literal translation is helpful with a translation equivalent - it gives an understanding of the inner semantic form of the phrase);
- commentaries on the term’s origin and its derivation – both in Russian and English;
- images underlying the metaphor that leads to a new interpretation of a free combination of words (peculiar mechanism of metaphorization in both the languages to make evident the differences between them).

The following is an example of the analytical work of a student doing research on this project. In the process the researcher acquires knowledge about the conceptual language pictures (concept maps) in the two languages by the material of the sport terminology of figure skating.

So, for the term haircutter, the reasoning may look like this. The equivalent translation is заклон. The literal translation is машина для стрижки волос. The term is used to denote rotation in a tilt with the grip of the free leg with one or two hands, while it seems that the blade of the skate is in a position that allows you to cut the hair of the skater. The Russian equivalent is not metaphorical by its inner form, while in English the metaphorization is obvious. It should be noted that in English the term is formed by adding the stems, which can be viewed as a verbal complex.

The next good example is the term spread eagle. The Russian equivalent translation is кораблик. The literal translation is растянутый орел (that is, with wings and legs spread apart). The term is used to refer to an element of figure skating when a skater slides on two skates placed in a line with their heels to each other (the skill is performed on the outer or inner edges of the skates). In this case the metaphorical transfer based on the similarity of the visual image of an eagle spread and of a figure skater in the process of performing the element is evident. However, the Russian term кораблик is more aesthetically pleasing than растянутый (распростертый орел). The student notes down the case of absolute discrepancy of the conceptual structure in the two languages.

Such a simple technique, provided that a significant part of the glossary of figure skating terms is analyzed, allows the researchers to obtain valid quantitative results which would describe the cases of matching up and discrepancy of the concept maps of the English and Russian languages in their comparison.
Results and practical implications

The research implications were discussed at the meetings of the students’ scientific club and at the 72nd Scientific and Practical Conference of Students of the Smolensk State University of Sports in April 2023.

This synchronistic study of the metaphorical models allows researchers to get an insight into the conceptual structures (concept maps) of the English and Russian languages in the field of sport and terminological nomination, improve their knowledge as for the similarities and differences of both the languages. The investigation demonstrated that Russian terms and metaphorical word-compounds underlying the verbal complexes stay unique for this traditional Russian sport as compared with the English terms which have been widely borrowed into the Russian language for the last decades. As it was demonstrated, this may be seen in the professional (sports) communication and in the sphere of the conceptual structure of the language. The coincidence of the images underlying the terminological nomination in both languages, the substitution of Russian terms with English loan-words are observed at the level of names of elements named after the famous figure skaters. Such word-loans are widely used by the referees at the competitions in figure-skating for quick assessing of difficulty (to facilitate communication among international participants of those events) that can be explained by the mediating role of English in international sport.

Results

The results of pedagogical observation, which has been carried out in parallel with the students’ project research, imply the following. The intense use of English in professional sport activities fosters the students command of English, but arouses questions as for the terminology unification: it is not clear enough whether to completely abandon the actual Russian-language terms, replacing them with the English equivalents, or try to avoid using English-language terms (which, however, are convenient in the practical work of sports referees), replacing those with the Russian equivalents. Unconsciously students assimilate alien sociolinguistic models of the foreign language (recall the notorious ‘Skolkovo language’) and employ them whenever
they have a chance to, becoming irrelevant from the socio-cultural point of view. We strongly believe that when a student takes part in the professionally significant (and therefore quite understandable) research in the field of language, language policy, socio-cultural stereotypes, it contributes to the formation of the student’s understanding of why this happens, why unique models of the language are replaced by the foreign ones and whether it is always necessary. Thus, the educational and developmental component of language teaching will be implemented through a meaningful rational approach to mastering a language, when the latter is not allowed to indirectly interfere with the student’s own concept map.

In the course of study, the selected methodological constructs showed their expediency; systemic, cultural, linguistic and cognitive approaches proved to be effective in the students’ project research. The research has as its core the positive attitude of students towards scientific research corresponding to their professional area of interests, even if this area is not related to learning a foreign language. Moreover, language learning contributes to the formation of socio-cultural stereotypes and the upbringing of national identity in children, which does not interfere with pure practical knowledge of foreign language concept models.

Then, the students of non-linguistic professions (here – studying to be athletes, coaches) have an advantage over students-linguists as the former are able to look at the language material from a different point of view. Those studying at the institutions of higher education to be sportsmen are thus combining two competencies: professional sport knowledge and the skills to employ chosen methods of research. The first competence is actualized in the deep understanding of the sports terminology in the foreign language from the inside. Students-linguists would study the sport terminology as a purely linguistic phenomenon and are not able to estimate their work as from the point of their translation equivalence, they need experts to consult with. The other competence resides in the ability to conduct research, in the very idea of higher education – not only to provide specific knowledge, but also to teach thinking, analyzing, conducting scientific research, to cultivate in a professional a desire to constantly upgrade their competences. In other words, the process of
higher education should develop information literacy in a student which is a characteristic feature of a sheer professional [10]. The research is prospective and attractive both to the student and his supervisor. In addition to purely practical improvement of the knowledge and understanding of the foreign language (English) and the corresponding sport terms, and a deeper perception of language structural models, the student has the ability to increase knowledge and skills in socio- and ethnolinguistics. Consequently, learners grow to be educated specialists, professionals, and members of their nation and cultural society.

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