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### **Межкультурные аспекты преподавания английского языка носителям других языков (ПАНДЯ) с ориентацией на обучение английскому студентам, изучающих международный бизнес**

### **Cross-cultural issues in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) with focus on teaching English to students of international business**

В статье говорится о том, что развитие межкультурной компетенции является необходимым условием для изучения английского языка носителями других языков. Авторы работы полагают, что в значительной степени из-за стремительного развития технологий, преподаватели иностранных языков должны адаптироваться к условиям действительности, обучаться и использовать на практике новые методы обучения, а также

преодолевать связанные с этим трудности. Преподавание английского языка носителям других языков (ПАНДЯ) в контексте обучения международному бизнесу заставляет преподавателя и студента отходить от традиционных методов и использовать более современные и эффективные методы преподавания и изучения языка.

**Abstract:**

If it is true, as the academic descendants of Edward Sapir as well as other theorists and researchers in the social sciences and cognitive science posit, that "language is culture is identity" then developing cultural competence is a baseline requirement for teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). A teacher of any subject must contend with cultural differences among students and between teacher and students. No nation is so pure that racial, ethnic, tribal and subcultural differences do not exist, and only among the most homogeneous student bodies will those differences not be significant. On the other hand, students interested in mastering a foreign language for any of the most popular reasons, for example, a career as translator or interpreter, a career teaching English in Russia's public schools or universities, foreign travel or qualifying for immigration to a new country, will be well served by integrating knowledge of cross-cultural issues in their study of the linguistic details of the target foreign language. Think of the difficulties a Russian/English interpreter might have in facilitating contract negotiations between a Russian oil producer who does not speak any variant of English and a Texas (US) oil exporter/importer who speaks no Russian. The interpreter will have to understand a number of linguistic peculiarities, including a Texas regional American accent; cultural issues, including the culture of negotiations from the Russian perspective and the American perspective; and concepts of ego and machismo, or some other view of "strength" and "weakness" in negotiating style and substance. Even the order of introducing the principals to one another and whether a firm handshake is necessary are fraught with uncertainty; errors in social/culture aspects could end the negotiations before they start.

Largely because of the rapid pace of technology introductions, e. g., from fax machines to the worldwide web to G5 iPhones in 40 years, it is apparent that we, as teachers of foreign languages, must adapt, innovate and overcome as we update our teaching methods to solve current pedagogical problems. There is now excellent worldwide web access to prepared lesson plans that integrate business, tourism, politics, legal or

economic scenarios with grammar, vocabulary and cultural references. These lesson plans move teacher and student from a traditional grammar/vocabulary method to more modern, and efficient, methods of teaching and learning English for business purposes. This paper, in its limited scope and its nonacademic focus, discusses some of these alternative strategies to use cross-cultural learning to strengthen the basic task of learning the linguistic details of a foreign language.

### **Cross-cultural issues in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) with focus on teaching English to students of international business**

If it is true, as many academics and other theorists and researchers in the social sciences and cognitive science posit, that "language is culture is identity"<sup>1</sup>, then developing cultural competence<sup>2</sup> is a baseline requirement for teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). A teacher of any subject must contend with cultural differences among students and between teacher and students. No nation is so pure that racial, ethnic, tribal and subcultural differences do not exist, and only among the most homogeneous student bodies will those differences not be significant. However, when teaching a language to non-native speakers, cross-cultural issues may become even more pronounced than when teaching other subjects. If the teacher is not a native speaker, he<sup>3</sup> may misunderstand

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<sup>1</sup> Although this is an idea as old as Plato, in the U.S. it became more fully realized with the new field of linguistics. Edward Sapir (1884–1939), American anthropologist, linguist and student of Franz Boaz, is considered to be one of the most important figures in the development of linguistics as a separate field of study. Linguistic theories of cultural relativity vs. cultural determinism have ebbed and flowed since the work of Edward Sapir and his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941), became identified as a theory of language and culture (though not posited by either man), but still, the idea that language and culture are inextricably bound together has driven the social sciences in the U.S., particularly anthropology, psychology and pedagogy, and particularly as applied to TESOL. Current cognitive research seems to bear out the idea that language does shape how we think, how we see the world. A July 23, 2010 *Wall Street Journal* article, "Lost in Translation" by Dr. Lera Boroditsky, discussed these research findings and, in a side bar, gave as one example Russian speakers, who have more words for light and dark blues, being better able to visually discriminate shades of blue.

<sup>2</sup> The authors use the term "cultural competence" not in its organizational or systemic sense, but to mean the cross-cultural awareness, knowledge, attitude and skills needed by an individual to teach effectively, regardless of the student's gender, race, age or national origin. The term can also be used with reference to teaching content, where the goal is to develop the cultural competence of the students.

<sup>3</sup> The use of the masculine pronoun here is itself a cultural issue, exhibiting a raging controversy in the U.S. that developed during the women's movement of the 1960-s and 1970-s. Since the

cultural references in the language being taught and the texts being used. If he is a native speaker, he may not understand the cultural motivations of his students. Whether a native speaker or not, the teacher must contend with cultural differences among his students and between his students and himself. This essay attempts, in its limited scope and nonacademic focus, to explicate some of the complexities of TESOL and to offer strategies for improving students' English and their skills in applying English in the business setting.

English teachers in the United States think that teaching English to native speaking students is difficult enough, but that the task is compounded greatly when teaching it as a second language, which teachers in a nation of immigrants are required to do.<sup>4</sup> Of course, even native-speaking teachers teaching to native-speaking students are often challenged by cultural differences, for example, a teacher from the New England region of the country might have a very difficult time teaching children of the region known as the "Deep South".<sup>5</sup> Both teacher and students may have English in common, but not by much. Although listening to English being spoken, a New England teacher could be at a total loss trying to understand a conversation by children in Georgia or Alabama. However, accents and dialects are just the first hurdles; the very different world views of the New England teacher and the southern student shape their language usage, even if spoken or written in ostensibly the same language. Likewise, there are many children "born and bred" in the U.S., whose parents are fifth-, sixth- or more-generation Americans, who

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genderless third-person pronoun "it" is not appropriate when speaking about people, the masculine "he" has long been understood to include the feminine. However, the women's movement disapproved of such use on the grounds that it continued to invalidate women. Several options were floated, e. g., "he/she", "he or she" or "(s)he", but were never accepted in American Letters. Another option is to endlessly repeat the noun. Many people use the even more unacceptable third person plural "they" or "their" when meaning the third person singular. In this paper, the authors have chosen to alternate the use of "he" and "she" rather than to rely on clumsy writing or the violation of the basic grammar rule that the pronoun and noun must agree in person.

<sup>4</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_United_States) declares that 337 languages are spoken in the U.S., of which 176 are indigenous to the area; 52 languages formerly spoken in the country's territory are now extinct..

<sup>5</sup> The Deep South is conventionally considered to include South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi, the antebellum "King Cotton states". They are part of the broader south, which includes Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, North Carolina and Virginia. The two broad descriptions of a southern accent are "the southern twang" and "the southern drawl". The twang tends to come from the mountainous regions, while the drawl is identified with the deep south. New Englanders, from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont or Massachusetts, tend to have a more nasal, forward, wide and flat sound. These accent descriptions are, of necessity, generalizations.

do not learn American English as their primary, or home, language. Louisiana Creole or Cajun French may be the home language of children in southern Louisiana and their culture is likely quite alien to the New England teacher. Gullah, spoken in the Sea Islands and the coastal areas of North and South Carolina and Georgia, is a creole language composed of English grammar and a vocabulary that borrows heavily from various West-African tribal languages.<sup>6</sup>

Another good illustration of inherent cross-cultural complications in teaching is that faced by teachers of American Indians.<sup>7</sup> It is imperative that an Anglo (non-Hispanic white) teacher teaching Navajo students, for example, recognize that her students have an entirely different world and spiritual view than that of the dominant American culture, even if they do speak English. Much has been written about "Indian time", the disregard for linear, or clock, time so valued by most Americans. The teacher who values clock time, who values her students "being on time" may be frustrated with her Navajo students. The Navajo religion and, therefore, its culture, stress balance and beauty as core values and guiding principles of life, concepts that are not easily understood by the dominant culture. In the realm of etiquette, Navajos never point with their index finger; instead, they point with their lips. An Anglo seeing that for the first time may be utterly confused.<sup>8</sup> A Navajo thinks it impolite to make prolonged eye contact with a teacher, while Anglo teachers expect their students to look at them so they know if the students are paying attention and comprehending what is being taught. Cultural sensitivity and the ability to develop cross-cultural capability are vital to the success of an Anglo teacher teaching in Indian Country.

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<sup>6</sup> The cultural difficulties of teaching Gullah children (also called "Geechees" within the Gullah community) were detailed in the autobiographical novel, *The Water is Wide*, by Pat Conroy (Random House Publishing Group, 2002 Reprinted Edition).

<sup>7</sup> Again, another cultural issue is what to call Aboriginal Americans. The term considered acceptable by the mainstream culture is "Native American"; however, at least in New Mexico, most Aboriginal Americans call themselves Indians or identify themselves by tribal name such as Navajo, Mescalero Apache, Zuni or Laguna. Some, particularly youths, have begun using the term "First Peoples" or "Aboriginal American" (which are not names that have taken hold in the country). Individual tribes are resurrecting their ancestral names, which are usually some variant of "the people" in the native language. Some modern Navajos, for example, prefer to be identified as "Diné."

<sup>8</sup> The Dyaks of Sarawak (Borneo portion of Malaysia) also point with their lips. Misunderstanding this culturally based gesture may cause a great deal of angst on the part of both natives and non-natives.

The United States is a geographically large and culturally and linguistically diverse country. The same is true of Russia. It is likely that Russian teachers can point out many of the same kinds of examples of cross-cultural confusion as noted for American teachers. While these illustrations demonstrate the difficulty of teaching when all participants speak essentially the same language, the same or even greater cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity are required in TESOL, whether the teacher is a native speaker or not. In some sense, the non-native teacher has the added burden of having to learn a culture well enough to teach its language while maintaining her authority as teacher<sup>9</sup>.

Some commentators think that a further complication for students trying to learn English as a second language is the question of which English is being taught to them, e.g., American, British, Indian or Australian.<sup>10</sup> Are they being taught the English that will serve them in their chosen profession or for a given social milieu? Like the examples of New Englanders vs. Southerners or White vs. Navajos, speakers from the various English-speaking countries often have similar trouble understanding each other. It is not simply a matter of accent, spelling or pronunciation, but one of vocabulary that describes widely divergent cultural norms. Idiomatically and metaphorically, the English spoken in various countries differs from each other. Ironically, there is a movement to develop "international English", but it has not happened, arguably because no agreement has been made as to "whose words for what" should be used. Many authorities seem to think that American English dominates in international business, but, on the practical side, the person who has learned any country's English can probably quickly learn different pronunciations and spellings. A useful familiarity with idioms and cultural references will likely take longer, but, as noted, that is the case for many English speakers as well.

English for specific purposes (ESP) has been popular for many years as a kind of shorthand language acquisition, particularly business English. ESP dovetails nicely into content and language integrated learning (CLIL),

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<sup>9</sup> One side note about cross-cultural differences is the pitfalls of trying to use humor in teaching or when trying to teach another culture's humor, particularly for the non-native speaker. In the United States, humor is considered a favorable attribute in a teacher and a significant teaching tool; however, it can become a disaster in second-language teaching if cultural competence is lacking.

<sup>10</sup> South African, Indian and Canadian are also recognized as linguistically differentiated variants of English. In addition, each region has linguistically differentiated regional pronunciations and word usages, exacerbating the cultural norms. A case could be made that Russian English is also a linguistically differentiated variant.

which is the current trend in language education. CLIL, even more than ESP, has significant application in international business course work. With its lexical emphasis, CLIL may make language acquisition and retention easier for international business students at the same time they learn business-related subjects such as human resource management, accounting, marketing and advertising, negotiation skills or country-specific business law.

Of course, cross-cultural differences manifest in CLIL just as they do in TESOL. In the U.S., the use of sports analogies or metaphors by instructors can cause a great deal of confusion for international business students. Americans, particularly on university campuses, love typical American sports such as football, baseball and basketball, and professors would naturally think to connect with their students through the use of sports-related metaphors. For example, a CLIL instructor in business practices might urge his students to "keep your eye on the ball", "come out swinging" or execute a "full court press". He might tell them that "we're down to the wire" or caution them against "dropping the ball" near the end of the semester. He might explain a business scenario as "an end run" or as an attempt to "move the goal posts". For someone who knows nothing about American sports, these metaphors can be completely incomprehensible.

At the university level in the U.S., at least a modicum of course work in cultural competency is generally part of any international business curriculum, whether TESOL, ESP or CLIL. The nuances of culture and etiquette are particularly important in the business world where millions of dollars (or other currency) can be lost on bad impressions or the cultural insensitivity of employees. There are numerous books in English as well as other languages that attempt to assist students prepare for professional life in the international arena. Books written for an American audience include *Managing Across Cultures: Seven Keys to Doing Business With a Global Mindset*, by Charlene Solomon and Michael S. Schell; *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett and James Trefil; *Multicultural Manners: Essential Rules of Etiquette for the 21st Century* by Norine Dresser; and *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands* by Terri Morrison.

A CLIL student taking an international business degree needs a more highly developed lexis than a non-native-English-speaking business person speaking English as a lingua franca to another non-native-English-speaking

business person.<sup>11</sup> In like manner, the student at Ural Federal University who hopes to serve as an English-Russian translator/interpreter or who hopes to succeed in international business, perhaps by being hired by an American or British multinational corporation, will need to understand English at a fairly high level, including an understanding of business idioms and metaphors. A look at international business publications, for example *The Economist* or *The Financial Times*, will show the extent to which American and British culturally based idioms and metaphors are pervasive in the business world.<sup>12,13</sup>

As a practical application of cultural competence in the business world, consider the difficulties a Russian/English interpreter might have in facilitating contract negotiations between a Russian oil producer who does not speak any variant of English and a Texas (U.S.) oil exporter/importer who speaks no Russian. To be effective, the interpreter must understand a number of linguistic peculiarities, including a Texas regional American accent; relevant cultural issues, including the culture of negotiations from the Russian perspective and the American perspective; and concepts of ego and machismo or some other view of "strength" and "weakness" in negotiating strategy. A simple matter such as knowing the proper order of introductions of the principals to one another and whether a firm handshake is necessary can be fraught with uncertainty; interpreter errors in the myriad social/cultural aspects inherent in the languages of the parties could end negotiations before they start. A culturally unaware principal or referent/perevodchik brings a critical imbalance to the negotiating table. On one side might be two or three native language English speakers with ten years each of experience negotiating contracts. On the other side might be less experienced Russian negotiators

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<sup>11</sup> It has been generally estimated that 2 000 words of English vocabulary and mastery of the declarative and interrogatory sentences are sufficient to conduct non-technical conversations in English anywhere in the world.

<sup>12</sup> Examples from *The Economist* October 6, 2012 include: "...painted Mr Romney as a corporate parasite who sucked big profits out of businesses even as workers were sacked and balance-sheets buckled."; "he promises to cow countries that have crossed America. . ."; "projects bear fruit"; "a financial Wimbledon"; "bespoke banking advice"; "Americans do not often turf out sitting presidents. . ."; "weathered the world recession"; and "a new round of QE would be against the run of play".

<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a story in *The Financial Times* of September 21, 2011, pg. 7, "Marked by a miracle", by Ralph Atkins, used the following business idioms: "rubble of the second world war", "stick to the rules", "industrial powerhouse", "experience informs", "mere crisis", "crisis engulfing ... escalates", "press hard", "worst miscreant", "pay a high price for breaking the rules", "financial meltdown" and "boost growth", among others.



communicating their needs and wishes through an interpreter they are relying on to interpret correctly. However, without knowledge grounded in cultural competence, the interpretation can fail; vital nuance can be lost. Can the interpreter adequately convey bullying or evasive language, does she understand the connotational and denotational importance of word choice in both languages? To paraphrase a popular expression in the U.S., "interpreting is not for sissies!"<sup>14</sup>

So how does the TESOL instructor navigate through the cultural minefield? First by being culturally competent himself. To be successful, the TESOL instructor must be aware of his own cultural prejudices and have a good understanding of the values of the cultures being represented in the language course. The instructor's cultural competence will go a far way in providing his students with the tools necessary to speak, write, read and listen in English. The TESOL, ESP or CLIL course curriculum must be culturally appropriate and relevant as well as academically rigorous. The use of authentic materials is already a language-teaching strategy, but choosing authentic materials that highlight cultural differences or similarities within the context of business or other content area offers two lessons for the price of one. The introduction of content-specific vocabulary can be used to underpin the values and culturally appropriate behaviors of the identified culture and buttress specific language lessons. Even if the instructor does not know everything (and who among us does, even native speakers?), being sufficiently self-aware, meaning having the awareness, knowledge, skills and attitude of cultural competence, is the second most important threshold requirement for TESOL. Obviously, the first requirement is adequate knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary.

Following are several strategies and techniques that might prove useful when teaching the importance and practical utility of cultural competence in second language acquisition, with an emphasis on international business.

- Require students to maintain diaries or correspond regularly with a native speaker. Electronic (email) correspondence is the only practical solution for correspondence given course limitations, but students must understand that they cannot use email shorthand, but must write in full grammatical English.

- Include scripted scenarios as production activities for intermediate

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase is actually "old age is not for sissies", but it fits in this context as well.

through advanced levels of language learning. Scenarios need to be detailed and may be available in textual and workbook material from academic bookstores or on the Web. The goal is to set the parameters of the scenario, e.g., purchasing cheese at a local supermarket, that involve some cultural issues (Can the buyer touch or sniff the cheese? How should the buyer inquire about quality, e. g., production and handling sanitation? Will a wrapper be provided?); some relevant idioms ("cheese food", "cheese with eyes", "blue mold cheese", "good for Welsh rabbit"); and some grammatical variations such as how to form an interrogative as distinguished from a declarative statement. Consult resources such as the *Dictionary of American Regional Usage* [Dr. Joan Houston Hall, editor; Belknap Press of Harvard University Press] or the equivalent from other English-speaking countries for ideas on teacher-made assignments and scenarios.

- Introduce vocabulary in both receptive and productive modes. Receptive mode increases recognition vocabulary; productive mode requires the use of the vocabulary in an open-ended scenario.

- Use task-based learning that incorporates cultural values. For example, set up two negotiating teams with a judge's panel and a set-up and question-resolution person or panel. Have one team make an offer for a quantity of tools or crude oil or food, with delivery, quantity, price and payment terms. The second team would then counter this initial offer and negotiations would proceed until a comprehensive contract agreement were achieved. Conduct all negotiations in English. The set-up person would work with each participant to establish a character and style.

- Take advantage of new language technology. Pronunciation guides are highly technical with (among other ideas presented) a visual icon that scores how well a word or sentence is pronounced. The results are presented as a arrow hitting the center or missing the center depending on how accurately the student pronounces the words. This might be an exceptional exercise as preparation for interpreting the words of that Texas oil man discussed earlier.

- Provide students with experience in synchronous translation, which is one of the most technically demanding skills of the bilingual. Begin with a written copy of the speech to be translated, allow adequate time to prepare the translation, then deliver the synchronous speech to classmates. Graduate from there to obtaining the written copy just before the translation exercise is slated to begin. Finally, have students "go live" without benefit of any preparation.

- An idea quite dear to the authors would be to set up a translation and proofing clinic to review and improve student work as well as academic and professional work from others within the University environment.<sup>15</sup> An interpreter/translator's efforts are often judged by native language individuals. A written translation that lacks polish is often considered evidence that the source (host-language) document is equally unpolished and demonstrates sloppy thinking. An original work may lack the grammatical and lexical refinement necessary to pass muster from an English-speaking audience. Through critiques and proofing, students and other participants receive specific, targeted instruction while having their work improved. Initially, the clinic should be led by experienced native-language editors and writers, but could gradually be transitioned<sup>16</sup> to Russian academic English experts.

- Related to the above strategy, teach the crafts of English-language proofing and editing. This strategy will likely be most meaningful to advanced students.

- To the extent that professions requiring English as a second language frequently demand leadership skills, target some teaching exercises that develop skills and experience in the "be, know, do" theory of leadership as taught by the U.S. Army.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This idea could be structured as a revenue source, by accepting assignments from outside businesses and individuals.

<sup>16</sup> This example of a noun-into-verb is yet another language controversy. Most grammarians hate this trend of turning nouns into verbs. It is part of that abuse of language called Pretentious English, which uses word forms that are largely cognitively empty, e.g., "I have been tasked with. . ." is a pretentious way of saying "I have been asked to. . ." Many grammarians lay this at the feet of government bureaucrats and other professionals who somehow believe that obfuscation makes them appear knowledgeable. The pet peeve of one of the authors is the use of the word "utilize" to mean "use", a use that is almost never correct.

<sup>17</sup> See *Be Know Do: Leadership the Army Way: Adapted from the Official Army Leadership Manual* by Frances Hesselbein, published by Jossey-Bass/Leader to Leader Institute (2004).