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PREPARATION FOR INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE EXAMS AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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This article is devoted to the problem of the development of the intercultural competence in foreign language classes. It highlights the advantages of employing the types of tasks and assignments used in preparation for international language exams (primarily, in

English) for attaining such a purpose. The focus has been made on the Cambridge exams: FCE (First Certificate in English) and CAE (Certificate in Advanced English). Such a choice has been conditioned by their prestige and the practical experience of the authors of this article. The conclusion has been made that preparation for international language exams contributes to the development of not only linguistic skills, but also of such important aptitudes as openness for effective communication with representatives of other cultures, tolerance to social and cultural differences as well as the abilities of showing empathy and critical thinking.

Key words: intercultural competence; international language exams; Common European Framework of Reference; competence-based approach.

ПОДГОТОВКА К МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫМ ЯЗЫКОВЫМ ЭКЗАМЕНАМ КАК СРЕДСТВО РАЗВИТИЯ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ

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Настоящая статья посвящена проблеме развития межкультурной компетенции студентов на занятиях по иностранному языку. В ней представлены преимущества использования обучающих и контрольных типов заданий, которые применяются в рамках подготовки к международным экзаменам (в первую очередь, по английскому языку). Главным образом, речь идёт о кембриджских экзаменах FCE (First Certificate in English) и CAE (Certificate in Advanced English). Такой выбор был обусловлен их престижем и непосредственным практическим опытом авторов данной статьи. Сформулирован вывод о том, что подготовка к международным языковым экзаменам способствует развитию не только языковых умений, но и таких важных качеств личности, как готовность к эффективной коммуникации с представителями иных культур, толерантность в отношении социальных и культурных различий, способность к эмпатии и критическому мышлению.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная компетенция; международные языковые экзамены; общеевропейские компетенции владения иностранным языком; компетентностный подход.

The globalization of international relations necessitates effective intercultural communication, which implies intensive personal and professional intercourse in foreign languages. The success of such communication largely hinges on the ability of the interlocutors to overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers. This, in turn, requires a sufficient level of their intercultural competence apart from a good command of foreign languages.

There exist various approaches to the understanding of what intercultural competence is. G. V. Elizarova states that intercultural competence is an integrative quality, an ability of an individual to carry out interpersonal and professional communication in order to attain a positive result [7, p. 310]. A. P. Sadokhin, a recognized expert in this field, generally considers such an approach to be the most common one in the practice of intercultural communication. He lists such important benchmarks of a developed intercultural competence as openness to learning foreign cultures; the perception of psychological, social and other intercultural differences; psychological readiness to cooperate with representatives of another culture; the ability to overcome social, ethnic and cultural stereotypes; the possession of a set of communicative tools and their correct choice depending on the context of speaking; the observance of etiquette norms in the communication process [8, p. 133].

In this regard it has to be said that quite a number of specialists in the field of foreign language teaching: E. Low, S. Chong, M. Ellis, T. V. Zhavner, S. V. Nesterova, L. M. Popkova, A. S. Iakovleva, Y. L. Semenova, G. V. Sorokovykh have come to the conclusion about the advantages of implementing oral and written types of tasks practiced in international language exams for the development of the integrative communicative competence [see 2; 3; 5; 6; 9; 10]; hence, the development of the intercultural competence as it is believed to be a derivative of its socio-cultural and linguistic aspects [7, p. 310]. In fact, the types of tasks offered at international language exams like CAE (Certificate in Advanced English) have been developed on the basis of the competence-based approach and are linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [see 1].

In accordance with it, there was developed a scale outlining 6 levels of foreign language proficiency distinguished from A1 to C2 (or from a beginner to a proficient user). International language exams measure the level of competence in 4 main types of activities: reading, writing, listening and speaking. This scale enables educational institutions and employers to establish the required level of the language proficiency for their potential students and employees. The scores for the exam can be considered as a reliable confirmation of the tested linguistic abilities as well as the level of development of the related competencies.

For the confirmation of proficiency in English, the most popular language exams in the European framework are FCE (First Certificate in English), IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and CAE (Certificate in Advanced English). L. M. Popkova and A. S. Iakovleva state that preparation for such tests presupposes a complex development of all the facets of the integrative communicative competence: i. e., the linguistic, sociolinguistic, discursive, strategic, social and sociocultural [6, p. 162]. They also

believe that borrowing European experience in compiling tests and assignments while preparing students for international language exams will help to strengthen the competitive position of the Russian educational system at the international level [6, p. 166].

With respect to increasing competitiveness, T. V. Zhavner describes the current approach of the Siberian Federal University in relation to foreign language teaching and testing since 2016. Within the framework of the Russian academic excellence program, bachelor students of engineering specialties have been studying English for preparing for the FCE Cambridge certificate which corresponds to the B2 level in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It has to be added, though, that such preparation was organized for those students who demonstrated the best results after the entrance language tests at the university [3, p. 42].

S. V. Nesterova and Y. L. Semenova stress that focusing on the standards of international language exams in the process of language learning at university is a prerequisite for increasing academic and working mobility [see 5; 9]. The requirements of European universities to the language command of their potential exchange programs participants vary. However, an international certificate like TestDAF (Deutsch als Fremdsprache) for the German language or CAE for English are generally well-recognized both by educational institutions and companies. Y. L. Semenova says that CAE certificate has weight for such companies as Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Sony, Nokia and Bosch [9, p. 30]. In such a way preparation for international exams forms motivation for further education, enables students to reveal their potential and increases their competitiveness in the common European educational space.

From the personal experience of taking part in the CAE some other advantages in terms of competence development can be added. Apart from the knowledge of the language, international tests also check a number of essential skills and abilities expected from an educated member of society. Among the most important ones is the understanding of a wide cultural context.

At the lower levels, students generally have to know and analyze only everyday situations, for example, consuming goods and services, communicating with friends and relatives or knowing some basic aspects about the culture from which the language originates (like common etiquette norms). However, in order to effectively prepare and successfully pass international language exams of a higher level, like CAE or CPE (Certificate of Proficiency in English), it is essential to demonstrate more advanced vocabulary and grammar for communicating sophisticated thoughts and emotions, as well as an in-depth cultural knowledge.

The subtests on the receptive types of speech activity, *Reading and Use of English* and *Listening*, are oriented at a holistic comprehension of the situa-

tion, which presupposes background knowledge of technology, history, law, politics and other areas. Regarding the subtests on the productive kinds of speech activity, namely, *Speaking* and *Writing*, it has to be said that they require not only a vivid worldview, but also an ability of expressing an opinion on complex issues in a well-structured and comprehensible way.

One of the tasks of the subtest *Speaking* is connected with participating in a dialogue. Two candidates are expected to discuss an issue and come to a conclusion, which engages analytical and communicative skills aside from the linguistic ones. In subtest *Writing* the first task is always preparing an essay in which the test-takers are expected to reveal their ability of critical thinking. Apart from fluent grammar and vocabulary use, the vital criteria involve organization, clarity and coherence. It is worthy of note that in the second task of this subtest the topic and the style of the texts can be chosen by candidates.

Undoubtedly, doing these types of tasks may help students to develop cultural tolerance towards different nationalities, peoples and their ways of life. In the modern globalized world, building cultural tolerance is in demand. The related abilities to effectively communicate and express one's opinion, show empathy, analyze and critically assess the context of speaking lay the foundations of the students' future success in the XXI century. Notably, the mentioned qualities are in concordance with the list of universal competencies offered by A.V. Makarov, a recognized national expert in the field of educational standards [4, pp. 108 – 110].

Summing up, it has to be said that approximation of university tests and assignments to the types of tasks practiced in international language exams allows to solve a number of other important objectives like boosting motivation for language learning, liquidating knowledge gaps, bringing diversity to the methods of teaching, promoting personal development in terms of competence growth and contributing to the competitiveness among the educational establishments. The successful participation in international language exams as a logical consequence of preparation might promote further development of the intercultural competence as long as obtaining an internationally recognized language certificate may provide increased opportunities for taking part in academic and professional exchange programs.

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К ВОПРОСУ О РЕКОНФИГУРАЦИИ СОВРЕМЕННОГО РЕКЛАМНОГО ДИСКУРСА (НА МАТЕРИАЛАХ ФРАНЦУЗСКОЙ ЛИНГВОСЕМИОТИЧЕСКОЙ ШКОЛЫ)

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В статье рассматриваются отдельные вопросы трансформации рекламного дискурса, анализируемые в рамках исследований французской лингвосемиотической школы. Отмечается отказ от традиционных рекламных практик и смещение рекламной коммуникации в сторону Интернет-технологий (баннеры, всплывающие уведомления). Описываются новые формы рекламной коммуникации, обусловленные диверсификацией носителей информации. Устанавливаются специфические черты реконфигурации рекламного дискурса: интерактивность, перенос акцента с продукции как таковой на продвижение марок, различные форма рекламной мимикрии, «размывание» посредством метадискурсивных практик и обращения к игровому регистру, «ужесточение» как следствие обращения к стратегиям шоковой рекламы.