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## **Sociocultural, intercultural and translation competence for engineering students**

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### **Abstract**

Targeting at adequate translation while teaching translation to engineers any teacher should remember about social and cultural discrepancies between languages. The difference in mentality should not be reflected in the special target text. Engineering students are supposed not only to be able to find proper equivalents and render the terms appropriately but also to analyse the communicative situation and cultural peculiarities of the source text. Teaching professionally oriented translation depends on many factors including ontological and specialised cultural levels, technological progress and its incorporation into the national, international and global culture, linguistic diachrony and its role in terminological corpus formation as well as science and technology institutional role. Teaching translation at engineering academy has a long and fruitful history, which shows the efficiency of training intercultural and sociocultural competence in teaching translation. It allows to avoid serious drawbacks in translation when a translator confronts the other language culture images and concepts.

**Key words:** engineering, education, translation teaching, sociocultural competence, intercultural communication.

### **Background concepts**

The problem of culture awareness has been discussed by many specialists for centuries in different languages either with the reference to translation or to language learning or teaching as well as with a focus on other Humanities discourses. English Language and Culture Dictionary editorial (1992) hope that learners will “make up the complex fabric of English-speaking life and culture” (p. F7) when they use the dictionary. Ter-Minasova, being the author of the profound research on “Language and Intercultural Communication” quotes about 10 definitions for the word “language” and 6 definitions for the word “communication” (2000, p. 7) as comparable in different languages with almost relative equivalence. When she approaches the word “culture”, she states its polysemantic nature since about 7 different meanings of the word occur in

Russian and all European languages. It is possible to outline the similarity in the meanings of the word when it is interpreted from the anthropological or ethnographic points of view. With reference to the meaning, Table 1 provides four definitions of the word *culture* from different English dictionaries.

No	Definition	Dictionary
1.	<b>Culture</b> — the way of life, especially general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time. <i>Youth / working class / Russian / Roman / mass culture</i> (CIDE).	Cambridge International Dictionary of English. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
2.	<b>Culture.</b> 1) Culture or a culture consists of the ideas, customs, and art that are produced or shared by a particular society (e.g. <i>He was a fervent admirer of Roman and Greek culture... the great cultures of Japan and China</i> ). 2) A culture is a particular society or civilization, especially one considered in relation to its ideas, its art, or its way of life (e.g. <i>the rich history of African civilizations and cultures</i> ) (COBUILD).	Collins COBUILD English Dictionary. Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.
3.	<b>Culture</b> — 1) the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people ( <i>studied Chinese culture</i> ) (COD).	The Concise Oxford Dictionary. Oxford University Press, 1964.
4.	<b>Culture</b> — the customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time ( <i>ancient Greek culture, a tribal culture, pop culture</i> ) (DELIC).	Dictionary of English Language and Culture. Longman Group Ltd., 1993.

Tab. 1: Culture definitions registered by English Dictionaries (Source: Ter-Minasova Svetlana. (2000) Language and Intercultural Communication. Moscow: SLOVO. Print. P.7.)

Regarding the word *culture* as a term one considers it to be equivalent to the sole meaning. The more incongruent interpretations the term possesses the less clear it is. The term *culture* seems to be important for many contemporary researchers. In 2016 a paper on "Iranian EFL Learners' Attitude towards Culture Teaching" was presented at the CLEAR 2016 conference (Samvati, 2016). The author quotes a lot of relevant sources and definitions of the term discussed by other authors: Goodenough's (cited in Wardhaugh, 1986) vision of society's culture "whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves" (p. 210); Kramsch's (1998) definition of *culture* as "a system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting" (p. 10); Brown's (2000) interpretation of *culture* as "a way of life" (p. 176); Richards and Schmidt's (2010) culture perception as "the set of practices, codes and values that mark a particular nation or group: the sum of a nation's or group's most

highly thought of works of literature, art, music, etc." (p. 151), and finally Bayyurt's (2006, p. 235) conclusion on the term while citing Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi who categorize the definition of *culture* as a concept with aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic dimensions. According to Samvati (2016), each of the authors implies the idea of language teaching into their images of the *culture*. However, none of them seems to indicate the time-category for the definition. Living in the era of the vigorously developing technical progress, everyone should understand the importance of the time category for technical or even high-technological culture as a constituent part of our global existence.

The word *culture* comprises the ideas of diverse customs, traditions, habits, beliefs, backgrounds and ways of life which take place at or characterise a certain historical period or certain time. As for the term *intercultural communication* it represents mutual understanding/relationship and verbal/non-verbal interaction between at least two interlocutors, participants of the communicative act. Both of the communicants in the intercultural communication should belong to different national, ethnic, or any other minor cultural groups/subgroups/communities. Intercultural communication starts on the threshold of every university when students from all over the world enter the university. Engineering Academy of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia welcomes the young and enquiring ones and they do not come only from Russian Federation, but also from other countries and continents (Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe). Thus, intercultural communication occurs in its most vivid and natural form.

## **Methodology**

### **Teaching environment**

Socio-cultural approach at the RUDN University Engineering Academy is bound to be discussed as far as the university students belong to different national cultures, as long as the "science culture" is considered to be a part of the common culture, is subject to the students' social incongruence, and is stipulated by the translatology demands. Every RUDN student regardless their special/major discourse interests alongside with the learning of the second, third, etc. languages acquires one more supplementary training course "Translator in the Field of Professional Communication" (Malykh & Stanilovskaya, 2014) accounting for about 1500 hours within four years of university curriculum.

To imagine how vast the diversity of the scientific and engineering realms of the Engineering Academy is one should learn about its 16 Chairs and 4

Departments (RUDN University, 2017). Students major in a variety of research fields from “Seismic Safety of Buildings and Engineering Structures” to “Energy Efficiency and Reliability of Industrial, Civil and Hydraulic Structures”; from “Computational Methods for the Synthesis of Dynamic Systems of Intelligent Control Systems” to “Resource-Saving and Resource-Reproducing Innovative Technology Study and Development of the Earth Interior”; from “Engineering and Physical Nanotechnologies and Nanomaterials” to “Development of Methods and Means of Improving the Efficiency of Machinery and Equipment for Construction and Mining Operations” (as well as in “Design and Geochemistry of Paleovolcanic Systems, the Search for Endogenous Mineralization, Atmogeochemical Prospecting of Oil-fields”; “A Study of Geometrical Parameters and the Establishment of Methods for Calculating the Strength of Non-canonical Shells Referred to Arbitrary Coordinates with Geometrical and Physical Nonlinearity”; “Energy Efficiency and Environmental Friendliness of Vehicles and Systems”).

First two years RUDN students intensively learn foreign (second, third, etc.) language for general purposes (LGP). The students have an opportunity to choose either to start learning German, French, Spanish from the elementary levels (A1/A2) or to develop their skills in English (A1/ A2; B1/B2, according to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, i.e. CEFR). The 3<sup>d</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students develop their skills in the field of theory and practice of translation, rendering and reviewing the texts within their scientific discourse. In the final semester of their fourth year, the students prepare and defend their Bachelor Thesis and their Translation Course paper. In the course paper a student should present the translation of the scientific text bound to their Bachelor major subjects as well as to compile a relevant glossary and perform the translation analysis with the number of syntactic or lexical problems professionally outlined and discussed in the paper.

Should the translation course paper be evaluated it discloses a range of translation teaching problems every teacher is confronted with. The first level of the student’s cultural awareness is revealed by the choice of academic words and engineering terms, which show the engineer-to-be competence in the vocational field. The second level assessment should regard the number of syntactic structures, their correspondence to the source text as well as to the translator’s achievements and abilities to render the gist of the special text. The third level shows the translator’s performance/proficiency in resorting to proper translation transformations that create the target text with the required adequacy, appropriate level of technical standard and documentation formality, i.e. metasemiotic equivalence. Speaking about the levels, we mean the ontological, epistemological and axiological aspects as applied to the target text

as a translation practice product. Thus, the paper can demonstrate personal/individual proficiency and competence allowing the student to implement their linguistic skills in building a translator's career at any international/ global engineering company as soon as they graduate from the university.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Sociocultural, intercultural competence as teaching horizons**

Culture comprises human activity in its most conspicuous forms, personal, collective and expressive. Every social institution can function in presence of language, and in its turn, language supports cultural manifestations in any of the socially dependent forms. The interdependence of the concepts is cemented by the translation process as it is: "Translation, involving the transposition of thoughts expressed in one language by one social group into the appropriate expression of another group, entails a process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and en-coding. As cultures are increasingly brought into greater contact with one another, multicultural considerations are brought to bear to an ever-increasing degree" (Karamanjan, 2002).

The most complicated stage of the process is to persuade the target culture recipients, to translate, transfer, and convey the message; to make a bridge between the source and target cultures.

Writing is regarded to be the most difficult of the English learning skills especially when it deals with English for Academic Purposes/English for Specific/Scientific Purposes (EAP/ESP). One of the most difficult features of the skill is to distinguish low-level writers from more advanced writers. For a decade from 1991 to 2002 there was conducted a lot of research in the field of performance-based assessment (Becker, 2010). The Engineering Academy students have an opportunity to be certified in one of the Cambridge Assessment Tests/Exams (PET, FCE, CAE, BECs), Goethe Institute Test DaF, French language DELF/DALF test, which makes them globally competitive. Apparently, the tests embrace different skills achievements without focusing on the written skills as the Test of Written English (TWE) does within the TOEFL® framework aimed at evaluating independent or integrated writing tasks. But the tests do not assess the level of student's proficiency in translation and especially in scientific or engineering discourse texts' translation. Though it should be admitted that students when they learn how to translate do not deal with the writing tasks by and large. They are mostly concerned with the levels of adequacy, equivalence and requirements for the proper grammatical and syntactic structures in both

the Source Language (SL) and the Target Language (TL), they work with transformations of the source text (ST) and target text (TT) corresponding the overall stylistic and register requirements. When the students strive for a master's degree with the background in translation they work in the field of EAP/ESP writing and speaking which enhances further their translation competence as well.

Engineering Academy students deal mostly with the scientific and engineering discourses. Considering the difference of scientific and literary texts one should enlist the most culture dependent areas in both. Though the latter are entirely culturally interwoven, permeated with the culture, the former are less stipulated by the cultural intrusions. Definitely, the scientific discourse is logical, precise, reasonable and rational, objective, denotative, standard and truthful to a particular reality, abundant in terminology, specialised items, symbols and formulae. (Al-Hassnawi, 2010) To be absolutely objective, a translator-engineer working in a particular scientific discourse is not absolutely detached, isolated from culture in its either narrower or broader sense, otherwise the translator would be associated with an automaton. But even in the engineering discourse a translator should be prepared for what is dictated by either cultural awareness or social strata belonging. Normative documentation, technical specifications and manufacturer's instructions, patents and contracts, every of the areas causes the translator to compare and contrast the realia of the SL and TL, of the ST and TT.

Professional culture creates another culture spectrum. A translator as a mediator should switch between the languages or even replace his/her knowledge of the national culture with the ST author's mental representation of the text, discourse. The translator should be acquainted with non-native cultural entourage, with the L2 or L3 features of communication, social and professional traditions and their routine, organisational, structural, hierarchical, technical and interior environment of both languages' in professional spheres - at the enterprise, plant, R&D Department or research conference and scientific workshop. Enumerating the translator's duties and liabilities, responsibilities and assignments should not be briefly highlighted or left beyond the subject of sociocultural approach in teaching. Intercultural, sociocultural competences build up a solid foundation, a proper background for a translator-engineer-to-be.

### **Approaches implemented – competence acquired**

Being a part of the Bologna process a RUDN University graduate as well as any other university graduate should be competent in different spheres of life, competitive and qualified as a specialist but he/she should not be limited solely to their professional scope. A specialist should possess a set of mandatory

competences including the translational, sociocultural and intercultural ones. According to Komissarov (2002), the producer/sender of the message and the recipient of the message in the intercultural communicative act are representatives of two different cultures, two different languages on the one hand. On the other hand the translator mediates between these two people/groups, decoding, re-coding and encoding the same information via the means of languages and cultures from one person to another, from one culture representative to another, from one group to another. The translator is a bilingual and bicultural individual of the act. Thus, translation is a phenomenon where diverse cultures confront, various epistemological values are compared, different personalities, unlike mentalities, multifarious literatures, epochs, social, traditional, behavioural backgrounds contrast each other. A university student should be set for the challenging translator's goals. A university teacher should assist in the process. That is why when students's attention is drawn to at least fragments of the world literature specimens students could not be declared as deprived of the humanities education and world cultural heritage. Thus, students learning English-Russian translation read Romantic essays in class which broadens their minds and cultural awareness (Anosova, 2009).

A professional community as well as socially homogenous one, e.g. a status group, could be accepted as representatives of one culture in a narrow sense of the term. In contrast with the ontogeny culture a specialised, vocational, professional or academic culture is characterised by a wider educational background, social difference, labour specialisation, and systemic and structural institutionalisation or organisation. Specialised culture as well as specialised education encourages an individual to get incorporated into the specialised community, professional clubs, vocational groups.

Science and technology development brought the society to the 'science culture' as an indispensable part of the common, mainstream culture. A bilingual translator is supposed to be at least 'bicultural'. Both in Russian professionally oriented texts and in any other language texts of the kind there is a corporate culture influence, normative documentation, and formality standards framework which dictate distinct features of the texts. Moreover, the science and technology institutions are regulated by certain laws, norms, rules, guidelines, regulations and instructions, as source texts which in their turn should be noticed by the translator and rendered in the most suitable or apt form into the TT. These cultural discrepancies are not the subject of the several classes on translation. From the very beginning the translator in the professional communication is bound to pay a duly focused attention to the culture and social or professional institutions' peculiarities. The institutions play a conservative role in formatting

the requirements to the language usage; the engineering students should understand both the importance of the cultural dissimilarities and the way to bridge the linguistic gap.

### **Conclusion**

The sociocultural inconsistencies in translation cause the greatest embarrassment in the target audience perception. A translator could be a specialist in the field of translation but if the specialist is unaccustomed to the images of the other culture corresponding to the ones in his/her own culture, then, the translation will definitely lack the equivalence. At present stimulated by the globalisation processes opposing approaches are expanding. One tends to derive the social and cultural similarities from the ST close to those in the TT (Dridze, 2000). Another approach once supported by Bakhtin\* (2012) deals with looking for contrasts between cultures and this approach is more productive for translation because it encourages or even enforces the comprehension of new perspectives, acquisition of the new knowledge. Thus, while teaching translation to students, while preparing them to grasp the professionally oriented texts, the discrepancies between the sender's 'world image' and recipient's 'world image' should be emphasised. This will assist in overcoming language barriers, in searching for distinct equivalence, which in its turn is leading to the adequate semantic-stylistic translation. This will enable students to master sociocultural, intercultural and translation competence to their best advantage.

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**Appendix 1**

\*Bakhtin's idea of the dual linguistic vision of the world is supported by N. J. Marr's quotation from Willamowitz-Moellendorf's book on Plato. The Bakhtin's quotation is drawn here as it appears in Russian: «Н.Я.Март в одной из своих работ касаясь вопроса о скрещивании языков как основном факторе становления внутреннего развития языков, приводит следующую цитату из Вилламовица Мёллендорфа (из его книги о Платоне): "Лишь знание языка с иным мышлением приводит к надлежащему пониманию своего языка..." (Март, 1933; Willamowitz-Moellendorf, 1920) Не буду продолжать его цитаты. Дело в ней идет прежде всего о чисто познавательном лингвистическом понимании своего языка, понимании, осуществляемом только в свете другого, чужого языка: но это положение не в меньшей степени распространяется и на литературно-творческое понимание языка в процессе художественной практики.

Более того, в процессе литературного творчества взаимоосвещение с чужим языком освещает и объективирует именно миросозерцательную сторону своего и чужого языка, его внутреннюю форму, присущую ему ценностно-акцентную систему. Для литературно-творящего сознания в поле, освещенном чужим языком, выступает, конечно, не фонетическая система своего языка, не его морфологические особенности, не его абстрактный лексикон, — но именно то, что делает язык конкретным и не переводимым до конца мировоззрением. именно стиль языка как целого.

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Для литературно-творящего двуязычного сознания (а таким и было сознание литературного римлянина) язык в его целом- свой-родной и свой-чужой — является конкретным стилем, а не отвлеченной лингвистической системой. Восприятие всего языка снизу доверху как стиля — несколько холодное и «овнешняющее» восприятие — было чрезвычайно характерно для литературного римлянина. Он и писал, и говорил, стилизуя, не без некоторой холодной отчужденности от своего языка. Потому предметная и экспрессивная прямота латинского литературного слова всегда несколько условна (как бывает условной всякая стилизация). Элемент стилизаторства присущ всем большим прямым жанрам римской литературы, есть он и в таком великом творении римлян, как «Энеида».» (Bakhtin, 2012)