

**Joint Conference: 20th PCSF and 12th CSIS-2020**  
**20<sup>th</sup> conference Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future**  
**12<sup>th</sup> conference Communicative Strategies of Information Society**

**MODELLING A LINGUISTIC-CULTURAL IMAGE IN TEACHING  
RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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*Abstract*

The article describes the procedure of modelling an image of a country during linguistic and cultural analysis of an artistic text. The authors evaluate the importance of modelling images in teaching foreign philologists. The materials of the research are poems of a Russian émigré writer V.F. Hodasevich which were devoted to Italy. The relevance of the topic in the aspect of teaching Russian as a foreign language is stipulated by the following factors. Firstly, Russian émigré literature is often included as a special course in educational programs for foreign students. These texts are always interesting for foreign students, mainly because they reflect the realia of students' native linguistic culture. It is necessary to use these texts in the educational process and help students find the specifics of country images in them. These texts increase motivation to learn the Russian language. Secondly, cultural relations between Russia and Italy have been developed since the XV century. The image of Italy can be regarded as traditional for Russian culture; it is characterised as archetypical, and scientists define it as "Italian myth" in Russian linguistic culture. Thirdly, Russian émigré literature creates a specific image of Italy, which, as well as images of other host countries, is included in the image of alien, combined and at the same time opposed with the image of own, contains features of foreign and native space. This shows the importance of understanding the image of Italy for foreign students to get a deep knowledge of Russian linguistic culture.

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**Keywords:** Foreign philologists, linguistic and cultural image of a country, Russian émigré literature, Russian as a foreign language.



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## 1. Introduction

The role of teachers of foreign languages is really essential in our globalized society. They help their students find their way in the modern world where their successful self-realization depends on their skills of intercultural communication. That is why specialists in different spheres study various aspects of foreign language teachers' competences. Nowadays, these scientific works are devoted mainly to information literacy of teachers (Azimov, 2020; Bylieva et al., 2018; Deryabina & Dyakova, 2019; Mitrofanova & Zhrebtsova, 2019; Vyazovskaya et al., 2020 and many others). Nevertheless, other competences also deserve attention in the aspect of their development under the conditions of modern educational environment.

Philology students should primarily develop their literary and linguocultural competencies since it is "a necessary condition for overcoming cultural barriers in oral and written communication and for analyzing authentic sources of information" (Birjukova, 2016, p. 115).

To achieve this goal, they analyze literary texts which are the best training tools for a number of reasons: "firstly, they are authentic; secondly, they simulate and represent real communicative situations through artistic images, thirdly, they have great emotional potential" (Filippova & Sirota, 2015, p. 88). It is the third feature, i.e. emotional potential, that differentiates literary texts from other authentic materials used in the process of teaching foreign languages (Chalikendy, 2015). Developing skills of effective reading literary texts forms students' personal qualities and in such a way brings them up (Koutsompou, 2015; Hişmanoğlu, 2005).

To form a cultural (linguoculturological) competence, philology students should learn to carry out a linguoculturological analysis of the text and develop relevant skills: "Literature enhances and nurtures the cultural knowledge of an individual as the interrelation among language, culture, and literature is prevalent and significant too" (Suliman et al., 2019, p. 38). It is known that cultural linguistics is a science that developed at the boundary between cultural studies and linguistics. Like culture-oriented linguistics and ethnolinguistics, cultural linguistics focuses on the interaction between language and culture. However, cultural linguistics studies cultural semantics of linguistic signs through the analysis of culture texts. Linguistic units and cultural signs include culture-specific vocabulary, connotative words, background vocabulary, phraseological units, aphorisms and onyms. In cultural linguistics they are called nominative units, since they are directly related to their referents in the cultural context. Units of phonetics, morphology and syntax are indirectly related to the culture. In cultural linguistics, these linguistic units are called linguoculturemes (the term was introduced by Vorobyev, 2008). The most significant objects, the image of which is created through linguoculturemes, are called linguocultural universals, and their specific features are called linguocultural details. These units are taken into consideration when researchers carry out a linguoculturological analysis of the text. They are considered as linguistic means of creating a linguocultural image and they are used to model images in the process of reading fiction. Undoubtedly, each literary text can be perceived differently, i.e. the number of interpretations depends on the number of readers. However, at the lessons of Russian (and other foreign languages), the teacher should guide students who analyze a text and help them read between the lines.

It is known that it is hard to perceive and interpret linguistic units with a national-cultural component due to their background and connotative specifics, which students are unlikely to come across

in traditional dictionaries. To carry out a linguoculturological analysis, students can consult linguistic and cultural dictionaries, for example, (Kapitsa, 2000; Stepanov, 2001). However, even lexicographic sources may not contain the information students need to model a specific linguocultural image. Therefore, literary works foreign students have to analyze include various types of commentaries:

1. pragmatic commentaries which explain the meanings of Russian words and constructions foreign students might not know because they have a poor vocabulary;
2. projective commentaries which are used to compensate for a lack of background knowledge;
3. projective commentaries which explain the context and provide students with the information about the roles of specific subjects or phenomena in the life of the linguocultural community and in different areas

Reading a literary text in a foreign language is reasonably compared with being in a foreign, first of all, in a foreign cultural universe (Gashi-Berisha, 2018). That is why the teacher should help the students to orientate in this universe using different kinds of commentaries.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Linguistic and cultural analysis of an artistic text is one of the key skills of a foreign language teacher. This skill shows the level of literary and cultural competence of a future specialist. The article characterises the process of modelling a linguistic and cultural image during the analysis of an artistic text.

## **3. Research Questions**

The authors strive to answer the following research questions:

- Why is it important to teach foreign philologists how to carry out a linguistic and cultural analysis of an artistic text?
- What role does modelling a linguistic and cultural image of a country play in the process of text analysis?
- What language units should the readers pay attention to in order to model an adequate linguistic and cultural image?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to characterise the phases of linguistic and cultural analysis of an artistic text and the process of modelling an image of a country as a result of text analysis. The process of modelling an image of a country is shown on the example of the image of Italy in V.F. Khodasevich's poem «Net nichego prekrasnej i privol'nej...»/" There is nothing else as fine and free...".

## **5. Research Methods**

The main research methods are modelling, descriptive and method of linguistic and cultural analysis of an artistic text.

## 6. Findings

As a rule, when reading a literary text, students are involved in image modelling. Artistic texts could become material for modelling different types of images: people, places, objects. We decided to show the procedure of image modelling in the example of the image of a country in the poem of the Russian émigré poets V. F. Khodasevich.

Images of countries, both the USSR (Russia) and host countries, in Russian émigré literature reflect the linguocultural universalia “us - them” (Frik, 2020).

In émigré literature the image of a foreign country is an interesting to analyze for different groups of students as it is perceived differently:

- Russian students perceive it as another culture which shares some similarities with their own culture;
- foreigners can perceive it as their own culture seen through the eyes of the immigrants;
- foreigners can perceive it as something alien when it is seen through the eyes of the immigrants and through the eyes of the author.

The specific features of images of the host countries depend on a number of factors: 1) when Russian citizens emigrated from the USSR (whether they belong to the first, second and third waves of emigration); 2) the degree of the linguistic and cultural proximity of Russian and host country cultures; 3) cultural relations between Russia / USSR and the host country. Therefore, the texts, which contain projective commentaries explaining the context and which are given to learners before they start to carry out an analysis, should provide students with the information about Russian émigré literature on the whole (in case students have never read about it before), and the role of the particular author in it. The image of Italy presented in V. F. Khodasevich's poems should be regarded in the context of images of host countries in Russian émigré literature and peculiarities of Russian emigration in Italy (Buluchevskaya, 2016; Ljubin, 2018). Of course, we should also point out the role of Italian myth in Russian culture, compare V.F. Khodasevich's Italy with traditional Italy, presented in Russian literature of the Golden and Silver Age (Panfilova, 2015).

To model a linguocultural image of the country, foreign students have to analyze literary texts which contain a lot of linguistic and cultural details. This is characteristic for V.F. Khodasevich's poem «Net nichego prekrasnej i privol'nej...» ("There is nothing else as fine and free...", written in 1925-1926).

\* \* \*

There is nothing else as fine and free  
as to break up for good with a beloved her  
and leave the railroad station all alone.  
And then in front of you entirely new  
the palaces of Venice would reappear.  
You linger on the stairs and then go to  
take a gondola. As you approach Rialto  
you breathe in freely smells of fish,  
rancid butter and the stale vegetables

and recall without regret that her train  
has probably already passed Mestre.  
Then walk into a banco lotto shop  
and bet on seven, fourteen and forty,  
walk down to Merceria and dine  
with a bottle of Valpolicella. At nine  
you change and show up at the Piazza  
and, listening to the magic overture  
from the Tannhauser, think: "By now  
she must have passed Pontebba." How easy!  
Your heart is refreshed, and slightly bitter.

Translated from Russian by Andrey Gritsman (<http://www.hodasevich.su/poems/there-is-nothing-else-as-fine-and-free.html>)

The image of Italy arising in V.F. Khodasevich's poems is archetypal for Russian literature on the whole and Russian émigré literature in particular. It is known that "in Russia the image of Italy <...> was mainly created by Russian poets of the "Golden Age" who were chasing an unattainable dream and who had aspirations for the cherished country, the birthplace of high art, the "motherland for inspiration", attracting a lyrical hero" (Zhivotovskaya, 2016, p. 113). When Russia was going through the difficult times, it was Italy that remained a symbol of an eternal and sustainable culture and spiritual values. Italy had that image despite the political changes in the early 1920s.

In their poems Russian emigrants often touch upon the image of Italy and some of its cities. These toponyms turn into culture-specific proper names (Zhivotovskaya, 2016), since they are related not to the names of geographical objects, but to the cultural signs. The culture-specific proper names commonly used by the representatives of the linguistic culture of the Russian diaspora included the names of such cities as Rome, Florence, Venice (Titarenko, 2009).

An onomasticon also plays an important role: "The names of Italian poets, writers, artists, sculptors and architects who belonged to different epochs coexist in the same cultural space of Italy; they become perpetual and supertemporal in literary metareality" (Krjukova, 2007, pp. 40-41). It is generally believed that Italian literature followed the traditions of ancient literature (Shkolnikova, 2015).

V. Khodasevich constantly turned to the image of Italy (in his poems « Večer»/ "Evening", «Uspokoenie»/ "Consolation" and in his works that he wrote before and after emigration). Vladislav Khodasevich shows the contrast between the trivia of everyday life and the traditional romantic image of Italy, the "deceptive image of beauty" (from the poem «Brenta, ryzhaja rechonka» / "Brenta, the red-headed river"). Thus, in his late works V. Khodasevich turned poetry into prose. He mainly turns to the images of the sea, celestial bodies, mountains and the image of the beloved. The poet focuses on biblical and mythological motifs and emphasizes the harmony of man, nature and architecture (Sukhoeva, 2017). Time and space expand; there is a sense of falling out of time into eternity.

The above-mentioned information should be presented during pre-reading activities in order to form the base for image modelling.

During while-reading activities, students pay attention to specific language units of different levels which are important for image modelling and developing communicative competence.

The poem is known by its first line « Net nichego prekrasnej i privol'nej...»/ “There is nothing else as fine and free...”, and special attention should be paid to these grammatical forms. Students should analyze the structure “there is nothing + comparative degree” (they should say if the adjectives are used in their positive, comparative or superlative forms). Learners should have some practice and use comparative structures in some sentences like « *Net nichego priyatnee / luchshe / huzhe / interesnee/ dorozhe* »/ “There is nothing nicer / better / worse / more interesting / sweeter than”. Students can also practice some adjectives to describe people « *Net nikogo blizhe / talantlivee / rodnee / dostojnee / dobree / bogache* »/ “No one is closer / more talented / dearer / more worthy / kinder / richer than”.

Another phrase to be worked at is *Na serdce kak? / I feel + adjective*. The teacher comments that this phrase is used to denote feelings. Students can describe their feelings in different situations using the construction.

The author says: « *Na serdce i svezho, i gor'kovato* » / *I feel both refreshed and bitter*. The students should say if the author feels happy, sorrow or both happy and sorrow at the same time? Why is he happy? Why is he sorrowful?

To practice word formation, learners should say which words share the same root with the adjective « *privol'nej* »/ “more relieving”. Students identify the initial form of the word and then change the adjective into its feminine and neuter forms. After that they should make it plural and say which nouns, adjectives and adverbs share the same root with this word. Finally, students figure out the meaning of the word “relieving” and the phrase «*Net nichego privol'nej*»/ “There is nothing more relieving”. The teacher concludes that this is a colloquial word and gives examples of words that naturally collocate with this adjective (*privol'nye luga, polja* / vast meadows, fields; *privol'naja zhizn'* / carefree life). Then students should read the poem and find a synonym for « *privol'no* » («*svobodnyj* »/ “free”). The air of freedom is one of the key characteristics of the image of Italy – it is a place where a person could feel free.

In word-building aspect we should also look at the words with suffixes -onk-, -ovat-: *lavchonka* “hole-in-the-wall”, *gor'kovato* “bitterish”.

The suffix -onk- is a suffix of subjective evaluation, it makes the word sound neglectful. Students can compare the word *lavka* ‘a small shop’ with words with the same root, but two suffixes with diminutive and neglectful meaning). Then the students can make similar forms of the words *book, boat, river* and compare their meanings. The teacher asks why V.F. Hodasevich uses the form with a neglectful suffix in his poem. What attitude does this form show?

The suffix -ovat- (similar to English suffix -ish) has a meaning of incompleteness, thinness, shows the tincture of the main colour. Students form adjectives from *blue, yellow, black, green*. The students decide why does the author describe his feelings with a word with the suffix -ovat. Is he sure in what he is feeling?

Considering lexis, we should bring into view several groups of lexemes.

1) bookish words, such as *vozljublennaja, predstat', pomedlit'* / *beloved, emerge / linger*. Students have to find neutral synonyms to the words and say why the author used bookish, not neutral words.

2) onyms of different types: (Venetian, Venice, Rialto, Mestre, Merceria, Piazza, Tannhauser, Pontebba);

3) realia: palaces, Valpolicella, gondola

These words need projective commentaries providing background information, for example, Valpolicella – popular Italian wine; gondola - a long, black, narrow boat, best known for its use on the canals of Venice; Tannhauser – an opera in three acts, music and text by Richard Wagner (who was born in Leipzig, but died in Venice).

Toponyms perform a specific function in the text: they characterise not only space, but also time. Being aware that Mestre is 9 kilometres away from Venice historical centre (where the author starts his lonely trip), we understand that he remembers his beloved for the first time after half an hour and does not feel sorry. When his beloved is passing Pontebba 203 kilometres away from Venice, we can understand (considering the train speed in the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup> century) that after about six hours the author starts regretting.

Some words do not contain national and cultural information, but should be elicited because they construct the image of Italy. These are words oil, fish, vegetables in describing Italian smells. These smells can be pleasant, but the author points out that oil is rank, and vegetables are stale.

On the post-reading stage, students finish modelling the image of Italy getting together all the details revealed on the pre- and while-reading stages. Italy is a contradictory image, it is both poetic and trivial (words of bookish and low style, magnificent visual (palaces), acoustical (opera), but displeasing olfactory features. It undoubtedly has national specifics in its cultural (architecture, music) and everyday aspect (markets, fish, oil, wine). The image is emotional, it is full of freedom, but this freedom is bitter, because it is based on separation. This was kind of freedom that Russian émigré writers got after leaving their country.

## 7. Conclusion

To sum it up, linguistic and cultural analysis aimed at developing foreign philologists' linguocultural competence comprises the process of image modelling. The process begins before the text analysis, when students make up for missing background knowledge to adequately perceive linguistic and cultural aspects of the text. Analyzing the text, students should pay special attention to linguocultural details and to the use of different linguistic units verbalizing these details. After analyzing the text and making conclusions, students model a linguocultural image which is related to the context of the culture and its national and temporal specifics and which is based on language units of different levels.

## Acknowledgments

The publication has been prepared with the support of the «RUDN University Program 5-100».

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