Contribution of Cross-Cultural Projects in Foreign Language Education of University Students (by the Example of Murom Institute)

E A Pankratova

1Murom Institute (branch), Vladimir State University, Russia

Abstract. At present it has become evident that one of the principle goals of teaching a foreign language is to develop communicative competence at the level sufficient enough for a student to be effective in the international environment. The research takes into account the tendency to nationalization (versus internationalization) of foreign language education in the countries outside the Anglo-Saxon world.

The project approach to foreign language teaching involving (1) the shift from knowledge-based orientation to activity-directed learning and (2) the emphasis on the national culture reflected in the local cultural peculiarities of an ancient Russian town – Murom is applied in this research. The research is based on the analysis of the 18-year experience of cross-cultural projects implementation by Professors and students of Murom Institute in cooperation with different inter-national centers. Several types of cross-cultural projects on the basis of the local component have been differentiated in accordance with the initiating organization, the purpose and contents, the place of implementation, the participants, time length. Local cultural competence as an integral part of intercultural competence is outlined. The most effective methods are described.

The paper concludes that the applied approach is of great help to foreign language educators working on small territories with respect to the possibility of organizing equal cross-cultural communication which contributes to national identity preservation.

1. Introduction

Foreign language pedagogy in a global era is a challenging professional activity as it should meet constantly changing requirements for training effective agents (human capital) in the world economic market who are able to operate in the increasingly interconnected world. Language education is aimed at preparing students (future professionals) for communication and interaction in the intercultural environment. The issue of finding effective methods of teaching foreign languages is of great importance.

Cross-cultural project method with the emphasis on the local peculiarities is explored in the paper. The analysis of this method application in educational process in Murom Institute is relevant due to the following factors:

1) globalization (international orientation) which is marked by increased connectivity, dependency and mobility of global economy agents at large. As the result, the aim of foreign language training is to develop learner’s

- “intercultural communicative competence” including the following: “linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence in language, combined with intercultural competences in the discovery, analysis, comparison and critique of cultures” [1], or
- socio-cultural competence including general cultural, cultural studies (interpretation and presentation), linguistic-cultural, socio-linguistic, and social competences [2], or
- “translingual and transcultural competence” including the ability to “operate be-tween languages” [3].

2) neoglobalisation (national orientation) which is marked by the growth of national self-awareness of non-Anglophone countries caused by the spread of global English (after the untested period with dominating Anglo-Saxon values) [4], [5], [6]. Consequently, a new purpose of foreign language education which is connected with the development of learner’s distinct cultural identity has become relevant [5].

The main objective of this research is to identify the contribution of the applied project method in the process of training students for participation in cross-cultural dialogues at both international and national levels taking into consideration local peculiarities of Murom as a typical Russian town. First it is necessary (1) to give theoretical resources review identifying the implicit theory of the 18-year experience of cross-cultural projects implementation and then (2) to specify theoretical aspects driven by this practice. The crucial question that is the main focus of the paper is “What are theoretical and practical foundations for successful development of intercultural competence of foreign language learners who study in small-sized educational institutions located on provincial areas?”

2. Methodology
There is a considerable amount of researches focusing on the modern problems of foreign language teaching. This study is based on the two generally accepted approaches to foreign language teaching. The first is the communicative approach (as opposed to study of language as system) which implies the focus on learning a language for communication and use outside the classroom. The second one is cultural approach (as opposed to teach nothing but language) which emphasizes the importance and the inherent place of culture in foreign language education. Novel definition of language-as-culture [7] impacts the foreign languages teaching in a global age. The shift from the model of a native speaker ideal to the model of a successful bilingual learner has led to a new notion of communicative competence encompassing local and international language use contexts [8]. The process of establishing the learner’s cultural identity in acquiring a foreign language is a new issue which has become relevant due to the process of neoglobalization [5], [9], [10], [11].

3. Results and Discussion
Among the debated issues are the following: the goals of language instruction (in respect to the issues of national identity) and the type of culture to be taught. Addressing the problem of language teacher’s aims Byram contrasts nationalism and internationalism in foreign language education. The author singles out the paradoxical role of foreign language teaching. Being the part of national education (which is expected to serve national economy maintaining national identity) it encourages learners to turn attention to other countries for other understandings of what the meaning of “our” (national) is implied [12].

National orientation. Graddol claims that “as English becomes more widely used as a global language, it will become expected that speakers will signal their nationality, and other aspects of their identity, through English” [4:117]. Byram does not deny a foreign language teacher’s aim as serving the national economy and creating a national identity as a must [12].

The idea of better understanding yourself, your cultural roots when meeting a representative of the other culture and looking back at yourself through the “other” filter is reflected in many researches. We find similar ideas in Kramsch’s works. She writes: “… language learners learn who they are through their encounter with the Other. They cannot understand the Other if they don’t understand the historical and subjective experiences that have made them who they are. But they cannot understand these experiences if they do not view them through the eyes of the Other” [13:61]. Kramsch identified the position where learners see themselves both from the inside and from the outside as a “third place” [14].
These ideas are rooted in Bakhtin’s dialogism concept [15]. According to it cultural and personal identity is formed through a dialogue when a person needs to respond to a foreign Other. Dialogue has a wide interpretation: it connects communicators who can see and hear each other in present, as well as readers and distant writes, and also present texts to past texts.

The emphasis on the actual nature and characteristics of a learner led to redefining foreign language pedagogy objectives.

There are some researches [8], [16] focusing on the shift from the utopian model of a native speaker ideal (monolingual/homogenious speaker) to the pedagogic model (reflecting the lingua franca status of a speaker) of a successful bilingual learner “equipped with linguistic competence and knowledge of how the foreign language is used in cross-cultural settings” [16].

Learning environment is compared to “the arena of both transfer and clash of cultures” [5] where the process of establishing a learner’s cultural identity (“to view oneself as belonging to one’s own culture”) and ability to “successfully navigate between cultures” is natural [5]. So language education can achieve the goal of developing cultural identity which is seen as personality self awareness “of the place in a range of cultures and purposeful activity on self - reckoning among members of a certain cultural group” [11:80-81], or “as a bearer of certain cultural marks in the surrounding cultural diversity environment” [9:2-3].

National orientation in the theory and practice of language learning and teaching described by Kramsch is addressed as modernist perspective on culture [13]. According to it speech communities are seen as grounded in the homogeneous nation that share common values and common history. However, many researchers in educational linguistics, as Kramsch observes, have changed the old-fashioned national community by multiple, multidimensional, and dynamic communities which are based on common interests or practices [13].

International orientation. Internationalism in education is suggested by Byram as an alternative to nationalism [12]. The author called it “liberal internationalism” linking it with liberal education given by Halliday [17:192] based upon the belief that independent societies and autonomous individuals can evolve towards common purposes through interaction and co-operation. Foreign language teachers have a significant role in encouraging learners to engage in this process. Byram introduces the concept of intercultural citizenship [12] suggesting to combine the strengths of education for intercultural competence in a foreign language and citizenship education (moral or ethical education, education in political literacy) i.e. the critical comparative analysis of “other” cultures and “ours” as well as focus on action in the world taking place now [12: 59].

International orientation. Internationism in the theory and practice of language learning and teaching stated by Kramsch is discussed as postmodernist perspective on culture [13]. The notion of culture has changed (due to the spread of computer-mediated technologies) and it is no longer considered to be bound to the territory of a nation-state as well as to its history. It is emphasized to take into account the postmodern subjectivities and historicities of living communicators changing subject positions through the top-ics they choose to talk about or to avoid in a globalized world [13:71-72].

And now let’s refer to the experience in international cooperation organized by the Department of Foreign Languages [18]. Murom Institute is located in a small Russian town which history starts in 862. Situated on the border of Vladimir and Nizhny Nov-gorod regions it has become an academic attraction for students living on the nearby territory. It may seem that such small educational institutions lack international con-nections potential due to organizational and financial issues. On the contrary, this research will reverse this stereotype and prove the possibility of effective development of intercultural competence of foreign language learners in real life.

The project approach was selected as it assists to create the activity-directed learning environment joining classroom and out-of-classroom participation of students. It also promotes for integration of international, national and local domains in real situations of communication and interaction by means of the English language as a lingua franca for Murom students and a native (or second) language for
the foreign side. Cross-cultural projects have been implemented for 18 years in Murom Institute. The list of the current projects includes the following:

- Fulbright – Hays GPA in Russia. Murom: Past and Present (2004, 2007, 2008);
- Fulbright: English Teaching Assistant Program (2013-2014, 2015-2016, 2016-2017);
- Fulbright: Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program (2018-2019);
- Criminal Justice (2005, 2007, 2009, 2011);
- Alternative Spring Break. Murom (2013, 2014, 2016, 2017);
- Getting in Touch with Russian Culture (2010, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016 - 2018);
- Native English Speakers in the Classroom (2009-2013, 2017);
- Cross-cultural crossroads: American Home – Murom-Lingua (2007-2018);
- Cross-cultural communication an issue for research (2006-2018).

The analysis of the implemented projects allowed me to classify them into several types:

1) according to the initiating organization: Fulbright Program (Moscow, Russia), The American Home (Vladimir, Russia). The International Center of Legal Research (Saltsburg, Austria), Foreign-side initiated (individual or academic institution), Murom-side initiated (individual or academic institution); 2) according to the purpose and contents of the project: lecturing on Foreign culture to Murom students, teaching practical English and culture to Russian student, improving language skills (English for Murom side, Russian for foreign side), broadening culture awareness (Anglo-Saxon culture for the Murom side, Russian culture for the foreign side); 3) according to the place of project implementation: hosting, visiting; 4) according to the participants of the foreign side: a) academic affiliation: with students participation, with students guided by Professor participation, with Professor (teacher/s), with native speaker’s participation (volunteer outside academic field); b) the Russian language proficiency of the foreign side: with the participants possessing Russian language skills, with the participants possessing no Russian language skills; c) the visit to Russia: with the first visitors, with non-the first visitors; 5) according to the time length: shot-term (1-3 days), middle-term (1-2 weeks), long-term (1-2 years).

Typically, projects include an extensive academic program: participation in the meetings, conferences, discussions, seminars with Russian students and Professors who are interested in the foreign language and foreign culture; attending English classes as native speaking visitors: making audio and video recordings of the teaching materials in for English programs. The cultural program of the Project includes: Murom students’ guided sightseeing in Murom (places associated with the national symbols); taking part in/or organizing traditional performances and celebrations, etc.

New theoretical aspects on the basis of the obtained results have been distinguished.

The practice showed that international and national orientation of the foreign language education should be completed by local orientation. There are several reasons for this assumption. First, though based on unity the incentive for international communication is diversity. Foreign community members tend to learn and practice something different, unusual. The proof of which can serve the reasoning given by many American students concerning their learning choice of the Russian language as a lingua franca: “I wanted to be cool/different/ not like others”. In this way foreign national culture (studied in classrooms) being presented through its local manifestations (experienced in the field) attracts more participants of cross cultural dialogues giving more food for thoughts and discussions. Second, local environment gives opportunity to manifest patriotism more naturally due to natural love to the home land. According to Russian academic tradition the contribution of a foreign language includes bringing up a patriot and a citizen of this country [19:28], [20]. Third, the political tension between the Russian Federation and the Anglo-Saxon world gives rise to using a foreign language as a soft power instrument in international communication and interaction at the local level assisting to overcome barriers of misunderstanding at the international level.

From the perspective I have described so far, it seems necessary to include more elements into the composition of intercultural competence. I propose to include local cultural competence, the development of which contributes much to the learner’s present improvement (inside educational institution by participating in cross-cultural projects) and future evolution (outside educational institution in the
field of work). It seems necessary to outline the composition (the details will be considered in the further research) of the suggested local cultural competence:

1) knowledge:
   - the national culture with common values and common memories reflected in the local cultural peculiarities: a general knowledge of literature, the arts, and history,
   - the local people’s ways of everyday life, their beliefs and values, traditions;

2) skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing using foreign language as the means for local cultural peculiarities presentation through lexis;

3) experience (in the local field):
   - interaction with representatives of other speech communities as grounded in the nation,
   - interaction with representatives of other speech communities defined by academic and/or professional ties based on common interests or practices.
   - an autonomous participating with other autonomous agents in a common task to realize common goals connected with the local area and local community.

The most effective methods applied in the implementation of cross-cultural projects fall into two groups: organizational and axiological.

Host family method proved to be very successful as it involves home stays (with Russian families of both students and Professors). It gives the opportunity to immerse into the authentic local environment experiencing the other way of life: daily routines, home-cooked food, family gatherings, etc.

Values-centered method was used in local presentation of the Russian values to members of other cultures thus allowing students to feel their inherited culture being developed by the previous generations. National values were represented through local specifics of Murom which is in a contrast to the chronological method of cultural and historical heritage presentation of small towns. Among the nationally-local values are the following: the value of citizenship (“supremacy of spiritual power over physical for the sake of Sacred Russia”) by the example of Ilya Muromets; the family value (“family, love and fidelity”) by the example of the family of the prince Pyotr and the princess Fevronia; the value of labor and creativity (freedom of spirit) by the example of the TV inventor V. K. Zvorykin, the archeologist A. S. Uvarov, the folklore group Muroma; the value of a human life (collective interests higher than personal interests) by the example of the righteous Juliana of Lazarevo [21], [22].

4. Conclusion
At the present development stage of the Russian educational system basic national values are declared as the main element of the fundamental core of educational contents. Cross-cultural projects make a great contribution into foreign language education of university students as the emphasis is put on the national culture which is reflected in the local cultural peculiarities of an ancient Russian town – Murom. The conducted analysis of projects implementation by Murom Institute resulted in justification of the theoretical foundation concerning preparation of students for successful international communication and interaction. Participating in such projects students get intercultural communicative experience, based on the gained knowledge and acquired skills for exploring the national culture through local manifestation thus strengthening their cultural identity. The example of Murom Institute can be considered as an effective model of beyond classroom teaching which demonstrates to foreign language educators working on small territories in small-sized educational institutions the possibility of organizing equal cross-cultural communication contributing to both international dialogue establishing and national identity preservation in the changing global world.

5. References
[1] Byram M 1997 Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
[2] Safonova V V 2014 Socio-cultural approach: basic social-educational and methodological statements Foreign Languages at school 11 2-13
[3] 2007 MLA AdHoc Committee on Foreign Languages Foreign Language and Higher Education: New structures for a changed world
[4] Graddol D 2006 English Next, British Council, UK
[5] Millrood R P 2016 Cultural identity as a problem of foreign language pedagogy Language and Culture 2(8) 101–107
[6] Hashimoto K 2000 “Internationalisation” is “Japanisation”: Japan’s foreign language education and national identity Journal of Intercultural Studies 21(1) 39-51
[7] Kramsch C 2014 The Challenge of Globalization for the Teaching of Foreign Languages and Cultures Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 11 (2) 249-254
[8] Alptekin C 2002 Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT ELT Journal 56(1) 57–63
[9] Millrood R P 2016 Cultural Self-identity of Personality in the Educational Course of English Foreign Languages at school 7 2-8
[10] Sysoyev P V 2004 Cultural Self-identity of students in language policultural education environment Foreign Languages at school 4 14-20
[11] Sysoyev P V 2013 Conception of Foreign Language Policultural Education
[12] Byram M 2013 Foreign language teaching and intercultural citizenship Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research 1(1) 57-62
[13] Kramsch C 2013 Culture in foreign language teaching Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research 1(1) 57-78
[14] Kramsch C 2009 Third culture and language education. In V. Cook & L. Wei (Eds.) Contemporary applied linguistics London: Continuum 233-254
[15] Holquist M 1990 Dialogism Bakhtin and his world London: Routledge
[16] Andreon G and Galantomos I 2009 The Native Speaker Ideal in Foreign Language Teaching Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 6 (2) 200-208
[17] Halliday F 1988 Three concepts of internationalism International Affair 64 (3) 187-198
[18] http://www.mivlgu.ru/fpst/foreign-languages/mezhkulturnye-proekty
[19] Ter-Minasova S G 2015 FLT in Contemporary Russia: Think about Foreign Languages at school 11 21-29
[20] Biboletova M Z, Ladyzhenskaya N V 2015 Educational Potential of the subject “Foreign Languages” Foreign Languages at school 3 2-10
[21] Pankratova E A 2017 Application of Local Component in Designing a Foreign Language Textbook (by the Example of Murom – an Ancient Russian Town) In: 4th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences And Arts Conference Proceedings Book 3, vol IV pp 27-34 SGEM (Albena, Bulgaria)
[22] Pankratova E A 2017 Modeling of cultural domain in the regional component of a foreign language textbook (by the example of cultural and historical heritage of the city of Murom) Philosophical Sciences Issues of Theory and Practice 12 (78) part 3 198-201

Acknowledgments
This research is funded by the Russian Fundation for Basic Research “Central Russia: Past, Present, Future” 2017 – Vladimirskaya oblast (application number 17-16-33002-ОГН).