Linguistic and Regional Aspects of Proper Names in Teaching a Foreign Language

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the role of proper names in second language acquisition in their culture-through-language aspect. Proper names being an important element of language and culture play an important role in the process of mastering a foreign language, i.e. contain information about the national and cultural features of a particular ethnic group. Knowledge of the national-cultural component of proper names helps to recognize the characteristic features of a particular nation, this or that type of linguistic personality, and prevent communicative interference. The proper name has a completely unique additional advantage in terms of enriching the intellectual potential and emotional sphere of students, namely, the possibility of developing individuality in the dialogue of cultures.

1. Introduction

The modern world is becoming more open and accessible for cognition which is greatly facilitated by the knowledge of a foreign language. However, in the process of intercultural communication very often there are factors that reduce the quality of communication. As noted by I.A. Feshkina, similar problems arise due to differences in mentality, behavior, perception and assessment of the real and imaginary reality of representatives of various socio-ethnic communities [1].

The factors causing communication failure are called communicative interference. The effect of interference can lead to serious communication failures, for example, to distort information or to misunderstand it. Successful mastery of a foreign language is impossible without the ability to recognize and prevent communicative interference. One of the ways to overcome communicative hindrances is to study a foreign language along with the penetration into the culture of the people who speak it.

The problem of mastering culture in the process of mastering a foreign language has repeatedly been raised in linguodidactics and found its embodiment in the theory of linguistic and regional studies. Researchers who consider the problems of teaching a foreign language in close connection with its culture, speak of the need to study words with a national-cultural component, which include, first of all, units reflecting the cultural specifics of a foreign language: background and non-equivalent and connotative vocabulary [2]. Most scholars who support the idea of the need to learn a foreign language in close connection with culture attribute proper names, anthroponyms and toponyms to vocabulary with a national-cultural component [3, 4]. Knowledge of proper names in a foreign language environment has wide practical application. It is necessary to understand media reports, advertising texts and reading fiction both in situations of verbal, business and interpersonal [5].

However, for all the importance of proper names in the process of mastering a foreign language, in linguodidactic literature there is still no uniform classification of proper names in terms of the presence of a national-cultural component in them.

The study of anthroponyms for understanding culture is no less important than the study of toponyms, however, it seems that the study of the relationship between culture and language should
be started precisely with anthroponyms since anthropocentrism of the linguistic picture of the world is more clearly demonstrated by their example, the center of the cortex is a person.

Taking into account all of the above, the purpose of this article is to develop a classification of anthroponyms of the English language based on the criteria for the presence of a national-cultural component, and methods for presenting anthroponyms as didactic material when teaching a foreign language.

2. Methods

For achievement of a goal of research, we use the linguocultural approach to the study of the role proper names play in the language. The modern approach to the study of the language, and in particular of its vocabulary, involves the analysis of lexical units as elements of a linguistic space in the conditions of a culturological space, which gives a new dimension to the study of language.

In the process of describing the functioning of proper nouns there was an interpretation of their non-systematic lexical meanings actualized in speech on the basis of concrete realizations and contextual situations.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Language and culture: interconnection and interrelation

The problems of the interaction of language and culture in the process of teaching a foreign language which worried researchers for more than a century developed in Russian linguistics in the 1980s as an independent discipline—linguistic studies. The founders of linguistic and regional studies E.M. Vereshchagin and V.G. Kostomarov developed the theoretical foundations of the problem of teaching culture and history of the people through the prism of the studied foreign language [6]. Currently, the main provisions of linguistic and regional studies which were refined and expanded in the 1990s distinguish 2 aspects of problems. One aspect is connected with the study of the national-cultural semantics of linguistic units in order to understand them in their entirety of content, nuances and connotations, to the extent as close as possible to their perception by native speakers of this language and this culture [7]. The second aspect is related to the problems of linguodidactics, the main task of which is the selection of didactic material to familiarize students with the elements of culture in the process of teaching a foreign language [8, 9].

Thus, the goal of linguistic and regional studies as a science is, on the one hand, to provide non-native speakers with background knowledge to the extent that native speakers of that language possess, and, on the other hand, to select didactic material that reflects the national characteristics of the country of the language being studied and extends the background of students’ knowledge in the right direction.

One of the central problems of linguistics is the connection of a proper name with culture and reality. Within the framework of this complex problem, an important place is occupied by the question of semantics and functioning in speech of proper names. The difficulties of its solution are largely due to the fact that for a long time there was a point of view according to which extralinguistic factors were excluded from the study of the meaning of the word in general and the proper name in particular. Only recently, in connection with the intensive study of the meaningful side of linguistic signs and their functioning in speech, did the researchers realize the need to expand the scope of linguistic semantics [10]. This in turn led to the possibility of considering anthroponyms in aspects of linguistic and regional studies, i.e. to consider them as cultural units and as a means by which the culture of an ethnos speaking this language is comprehended.

3.2 Proper names and national and cultural component

Studies of the peculiarities of using proper names in the structure of a society suggest that units of this type being cultural dominants and functioning as a national-cultural component help to identify characteristic features of a nation, a particular type of linguistic personality [11].
Speaking of the name as a national and social sign, one should keep in mind the presence of fields in onomastics—a certain sphere of correlation of the name. In speech, this boundary is determined using extra-linguistic knowledge which is necessary for the correct use and understanding of names. The extralinguistic aspect of the meaning of a name includes special conditions for the existence of a name in society, cultural and historical associations, and the degree of fame of the object and its name.

In speech, as a rule, the main attention is paid to non-linguistic associations of names, of which the main attention belongs to social factors, which are inextricably linked with the historical, national and cultural characteristics of the country. In this regard, phraseological units with proper names take on special meaning. Phraseology of any language is a valuable linguistic heritage which reflects the vision of the world, national culture, customs and beliefs, fantasy and history of the people speaking it.

Phraseological units with proper nouns are closely related to human experience, culture and history, mythology and religion. Due to the expression of proper names, in these phraseological units, two types of idioms can be distinguished—intralingual and supra-linguistic, the latter of which is created due to cultural, historical, social, folklore, religious influences of a person. It is knowledge of supra-language idiom that helps non-native speakers to overcome communicative interferences and failures.

3.3 Proper Names as a problem of linguodidactics

National-cultural vocabulary is divided into several groups. The first group is background vocabulary, i.e. vocabulary that carries information of a national-cultural nature and needs commentary, since the concepts expressed by words coincide [12]. Acquaintance with background vocabulary helps students develop background knowledge. A number of English anthroponyms are national-cultural units that contribute to the expansion of students' background knowledge, introducing them to the history and realities of English-speaking countries.

Background knowledge is detailed by G.D. Tomakhin based on their prevalence: a) universal knowledge; b) regional information; c) information available only to members of a particular nation; d) information that is available only to members of a locally or socially closed group; e) information available to members of the micro-collective (family, study group, etc.) [13].

It seems that English anthroponyms can also be classified on this basis. So, the first group will include mythonyms, anthroponyms, which include proper names taken from biblical legends and ancient (Greco-Roman) myths [10]: Lot’s wife, Achilles heel. The second and third group will be represented by anthroponyms associated with the names of prominent personalities in the history of English-speaking countries: monarchs, scholars, people who have become famous for good or bad deeds: Jack The Ripper, A Florence Nightingale, Honest/old Abe (Abraham Lincoln).

The fourth group consists of anthroponyms of a locally or socially closed group. These are anthroponyms that function in slang or professional jargon: Big John – the police, a police officer, John(ny) Law—a law officer, Sam—federal agents; federal narcotics agents, Peter Jay—a nickname for a police officer, Jane Joe—used especially by the police to refer to a woman whose name is not known.

In the fourth group, one can include, for example, abbreviated, colloquial forms of anthroponyms: Jim, Pam.

Acquaintance of students with the anthroponyms of this group not only expands human buildings but also helps to expand background knowledge about the culture, history and traditions of English-speaking countries.

The second group of national-cultural vocabulary is made up of equivalent foreign language units that do not have equivalent correspondences in the students’ native language [12]. To the equivalent vocabulary words-realities are included which S.I. Vlakhov and S.P. Florin defined as a special category of means of expression, including words and phrases that name objects characteristic of life, life, culture and history of one people and foreign to another [14].

Anthroponyms denoting inanimate objects (weapons, dishes, musical instruments, etc.) relate to realities—objects of material reality. To date, in the specialized literature there is no comprehensive
classification of anthroponyms-realias since they denote a huge number of objects. Nevertheless, it seems possible to distinguish the following semantic groups:

1) the name of the utensils: Long Eliza—a blue and white Chinese vase which depicts tall female figures; A lazy Susan—a revolving round table tray for seasonings and sauces, usually set on a table in a Chinese restaurant (allows everyone sitting at a large table);

2) types of weapons: Joe Manton—a hunting rifle (named after Joe Manton, a famous gunsmith); Big Bertha—a large-caliber German cannon during the First World War (named after the wife of the largest arms manufacturer Krupp von Bohlen);

3) names of accessories and items of clothing: Dorothy bag—Dorothy's handbag (in the form of a bag pulled together with a ribbon), a ladies handbag-pouch; Jesus boots/shoes—male sandals;

4) the name of the money: Benjamin/Benji—a one hundred dollar bill (bearing a picture of Benjamin Franklin), Suzy—a US one-dollar coin bearing a likeness of Susan B. Anthony);

5) the names of dishes, drinks and food: Sally Lunn—sweet bun.

Anthroponyms introduce students to the history and regional characteristics of native speakers of the studied language.

The last group of vocabulary with a national-cultural component includes connotative vocabulary defined as words that have equivalent language meanings in a comparable language, but differ in associations or emotional-stylistic shades of objective meaning [12]. The connotative vocabulary is perhaps the most difficult formation to study, but it seems to be the most important for successful communication in a foreign language. Anthroponyms related to connotative vocabulary are actively used in describing human characteristics. So, anthroponyms can indicate

1) character traits: Dorian Gray—narcissistic egoist; Peter Pan—an infantile man, a whiner; Tom Jones is an attractive rake; John Blunt is a rude, harsh, dumb, boring person; Tom fool—fool, clown,

2) profession or occupation: Thomas/Tom/Tommy Atkins—British soldier, Jack Tar—a sailor.

Despite the importance of anthroponyms in the process of mastering a foreign language, it is better to get acquainted with them at the middle and advanced stages of teaching a foreign language when the students have already generated a sufficient amount of general cultural background knowledge. Acquaintance with anthroponyms can be done in two ways. You can enter anthroponyms when introducing students to a particular topic. For example, within the framework of the family theme students can be introduced to connotative anthroponyms that characterize people. Another approach is related to the compilation of a linguistic and regional passport [3]. This approach involves introducing students to the most general information about the name, including the full name, all its abbreviations accepted in the language, as well as compiling a linguistic and regional passport of the name, which includes all phraseological units with the given name and their meaning. To expand the background knowledge of students in a linguistic and regional passport, you can enter the names of outstanding and famous people of modern English-speaking society and those who have already become part of history.

4. Summary

In modern conditions, teaching a foreign language is considered in the educational process not only as an instrument of communication and cognition, but also as a way by which a student penetrates the cultural field and mentality of a particular nation. Knowing someone else’s culture and mentality is valuable in two ways. On the one hand, it is associated with the enrichment of the picture of the world, the formation of a dialogical attitude to the phenomena of a different way of life, a different way of consciousness, a different hierarchy of values. On the other hand, one who knows a foreign culture comprehends his own better and deeper, more aware of himself as its bearer.

Anthroponym-phraseological unit being an important element of language and culture plays an important role in the process of mastering a foreign language. Extralinguistic knowledge in the structure of anthroponyms determines their national-cultural specificity, which should be taken into account in the process of mastering a foreign language. English anthroponyms introduce students to the facts of history, to the realities of a different culture, help to recognize the communicative
intentions of the speaker and prevent communicative interference. Being a necessary component of language, they are inextricably linked with the knowledge of the human person.

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