

## Cross- Linguistic and Cultural Analysis in a Foreign Language Targeted at Background Knowledge Sampling

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### Abstract

The paper deals with the role of background knowledge in building the translating/interpreting competence of the students majoring in Linguistics. Methods/analyses: the leading approach used by the authors is observation, collecting and analyzing the data received via the experiment. The authors mark the main problems: lack of attention to background knowledge in teaching methodology of translation in academic major of linguistics. The article is provided by the experiment carried out with the second-year students of the Kazan Federal University. The authors come to the conclusion that background knowledge is crucial for future translators/interpreters and provide recommendations and tools to improve the academic background knowledge acquisition process for the sake of better understanding between communication agents.

**Keywords:** Background knowledge; Linguistics; Linguistic; Cultural approach.



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### 1. Introduction

The problem of implementation of a linguistic and cultural approach in teaching foreign languages and formation of a linguistic and cultural competence is fairly widely covered in the methodological literature. These issues are not sufficiently developed in relation to the teaching of translation. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the role of an interpreter/translator as a mediator of an intercultural communication requires the formation of a linguistic and cultural competence, which is an integral part of a professional competence. It is said that the best way to explore the country is to learn its language. However, it is impossible to study language without exploring the country. Therefore, using of the language – country/ country – language system is an essential part of foreign language learning and the formation of translating/interpreting competence.

As Smirnitsky (1954) supposed, apart from the knowledge of the language, knowledge of the culture, history and way of life of the country are also included into the translation process of a foreign language. Accordingly, in addition to linguistic factors, the translation is also influenced by extralinguistic ones, which belong to bilingual communication, without which oral and written speech is impossible. In the opinion of Shtanov (2011), the linguistic and cultural competence of an interpreter/translator is a set of regional geographic knowledge, as well as knowledge of the national and cultural specifics of the lexical composition of the language, which help to associate the lexical unit with the same information that is understood by the native speakers, as well as the possession of relevant skills, abilities and personal qualities necessary for an interpreter/translator for the effective implementation of interlingual and intercultural mediation.

Other researchers describe linguistic and cultural competence of a translator/interpreter in more details and define it as a system of knowledge about culture embodied in a specific national language, as well as a set of general, special and professional skills aimed at the formation of an all-rounded personality of a translator/interpreter and determining his/her maturity in linguistic and cultural communication activities, understanding of the mentality of peoples and national languages, ability to detect and decode the values and cultural meanings that people put into their creations and actions in the form of symbolic forms, giving them semiotic interpretation as well as an instrumental ability to use it all in practice showing the degree of their spirituality, creative personality, intellectual and emotional wealth, socialization and awareness of culture. Linguistic and cross-cultural analysis allows us to capture background knowledge that could be vitally important for the communication. The concept of background knowledge still does not have a definite interpretation in theoretical studies. There is no a definite scope of background knowledge and sometimes they include almost all knowledge that individual has at the moment of communication. Therefore, we propose to consider several variations of the definition given by linguists (Gafiyatova and Pomortseva, 2016).

In Russian literature, the nature and value of the background knowledge was first discussed by Solovyeva *et al.* (2015) in Language and Culture where the linguists relate background knowledge to general knowledge of all participants of the communicative act. After some time, the definition has been changed, updated, but the essence remained the same. According to the O. Akhmanova, background knowledge is a general fund that allows individuals, speaking one language, understand each other. In other words, it is the common knowledge of the life facts that provides communication. Solovyeva *et al.* (2015) asserts that background knowledge consists of social,

historical, ethnographic, cultural conditions, features and circumstances that form the background, on which the meanings of the words of the national language exist. He subdivides background knowledge on the field of distribution into:

1. Universal knowledge (e.g. knowledge about the sky, sun, wind, death, time, etc.);
2. Regional knowledge (e.g. knowledge about sandstorms, aurora borealis, snow, etc.);
3. Information shared only by the members of a certain nation or ethnic, linguistic community (e.g. children's fairy tales);
4. Information shared only by the members of a locally or socially closed groups, this corresponds to territorial and social dialects (e.g. names of local geographical objects, associations);
5. Information shared by the members of small groups such as: a family, training group, etc. (e.g. school or college nicknames, associations related to the history of this group, etc.).

This classification of background knowledge, according to the degree of their prevalence is restrictive and can be significantly expanded. The definition provided by [Solovyeva et al. \(2015\)](#) where background knowledge is virtually all the knowledge available to the communicants in communication appears the most justified ([Tomakhin, 1980](#)).

## 2. Materials and Methods

Our speech is largely based on a system of hints. We are supposed to capture the external form of a hint in order to understand what the individual is talking about and then refer to our background knowledge system to link this hint with the available information. For example, Madison Avenue is a street in New York City that considered to be a symbol of American advertisement or Downing Street 10 is an official British Prime Minister's residence in London. Without knowledge of definite facts of a country, an interpreter/translator would not be able to translate the text in a correct and adequate way. For instance, it would be impossible to translate the following sentence into Russian accurately not having the idea what is the Spanish term *la guardia civil* means. *Fue la guardia civil que salvó la vida a un montañero que sufrió un accidente en Sierra Nevada*. There is not a concept of *La Guardia civil* (a civil army operating outside of the city) in Russia, therefore, it does not exist in Russian ([Mukhametshina et al., 2017](#)).

Not knowing the Russian name of the Leonardo da Vinci's mural painting *La última cena*, translator will face the challenge translating it. If one translates *La última cena* word by word, it will look like the last supper that is not correct since this work is called «*Taynaya vecherya*» in Russian. Translating into Spanish, it should be taken into account that there is a special notion for the Spanish princesses - *infanta* - while the Spanish word *princesa* will not be right as it means princess of other kingdoms (Great Britain, Monaco, and Denmark etc). For example, « on Tuesday the princess accompanied by her father, the King of Spain, Philip VI visited the stadium Santiago Bernabé first» –*La infanta Sofía asistió este miércoles por primera vez al estadio Santiago Bernabéu acompañada de su padre, el rey Felipe VI*. Let us provide example in the English language: Michael Martin, the Labour MP of working-class Glaswegian stock who is speaker of the House of Commons, and Boris Johnson, the Old Etonian, Conservative mayor of London, have little in common... An interpreter/translator is supposed to have an idea what Eton is, the reputation it has and why is this phrase used to characterize the mayor of London ([Mukanbetkaliyev et al., 2018](#)).

The Prime Minister spoke a few words from a window in Number 10. Every Englishman knows that the concept Downing Street 10 refers to an official Prime Minister's residence in London while not every Russian is aware of it. [Dijk \(2003\)](#) and many other linguists are convinced that the main reasons of an incorrect translation are the absence of background knowledge, unawareness of political life in the country/social and political facts, insufficient knowledge of a current situation in the world and etc. Budding translators and students usually make mistakes not because they do not understand a grammatical structure or lexical meaning of the word but because they have a lack of extralinguistic knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a technique for teaching social political text translation applying background knowledge. We have conducted an experiment that approves our hypothesis background knowledge plays a significant role in the teaching methodology of the social political translation ([Antúnez and Ganga, 2016](#); [Miestamo, 2017](#)).

### 2.1. Participants

The total number of participants in the experiment was 61 and represented by second-year students of Kazan Federal University, Russia. The students' major is Linguistics specializing in Translation and Interpretation Studies. All of the respondents study Spanish as a first foreign language and English as their second foreign one. The age range of the students was from 19 to 21 years old. The participants varied greatly in terms of the length of their Spanish learning experience ([Jafari et al., 2018](#)).

### 2.2. Instruments

The respondents were given a Spanish text [Rebello \(2018\)](#), *de viaje oficial en España* published by [www.euronews.com](http://www.euronews.com) 16<sup>th</sup> April 2018. They were to translate it into Russian without using any searching systems. Once a translation was done, we provided them with a list of proper, geographical names, abbreviations and some facts that were mentioned in the text (Rey Felipe VI, Palacio Real, MAEC, Zarzuela, Manuela Carmena and etc.). Then, the students were supposed to translate the text again taking into account the information they had been given. We examined the two versions of translation.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The results of the experiment suggest that:

1. Students are not aware that Spain has a king (Felipe VI) and a president (Mariano Rajoy) as well.
2. They do not know what MAEC means.
3. The names [Rebelo \(2018\)](#), Manuela Carmena are not familiar to them.
4. Grammatical mistakes were made.
5. General ideas in some paragraphs were expressed incorrectly due to misunderstanding of some words and phrases.

The first translation shows us that students do not have enough background knowledge to translate social political texts. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a technique for teaching translation applying background knowledge. We made different types of tasks targeted at skills development of lexical units' recognition, word selection and their use in practice. There are several exercise examples below: Task 1. Find words with the meanings of the British and Spanish facts of social political life. Find the information about them in a linguistic cultural dictionary. How can you translate them into Russian?

1. Mariano Rajoy, candidato del Partido Popular.
2. Quería comentarle algo que dijo recientemente el presidente del Consejo Europeo?
3. What are we going to tell the victims if Black Monday happens again?

**Task-2.** Complete the table with the words below. How can you translate them into Russian? Do you know their Russian equivalents?

Organisations	Public Authority	Ocassions	Geographical names

Federal Reserve System, Fort Knox, Treasury, Great Depression, Succex, Brexit, David Cameron, Estado Islámico, Casa Blanca, Gobierno de Madrid, viejo continente, comunidad autónoma, La Tomatina, Mariano Rajoy. Task 3. Find the information of the following facts of life. How can you translate them into Russian? Do you know their Russian equivalents? House of Commons, House of Lords, working house, prefect, Social Security, National Insurance, Medicare, Medicaid, la guardia civil, generalitat, Infanta, siesta, puesto de la ONCE, la Guardia Civil, corrida de toros, comunidad autónoma, Junta, Infanta, Generalitat. Task 4. What life facts are applied in the sentences below? Fue la guardia civil que salvó la vida a un montañero que sufrió un accidente en Sierra Nevada. Incorporación inmediata con contrato laboral indefinido en el Régimen General de la Seguridad Social, con un salario inicial muy atractivo ([Solovyeva et al., 2015](#)).

Task 5. Find words that would have a different interpretation in Russia, Britain and Spain. La infanta Sofía asistió este miércoles por primera vez al estadio Santiago Bernabéu acompañada de su padre, el rey Felipe VI. One year we totaled up and found we had earned enough to have to pay an income tax. Task 6. Does the interpretation of the following concepts coincide in the US and in the UK? Central bank, budget, privatization, banks. Task 7. What interpretation do the following concepts have in Russia? Can we be sure that they have the same meanings in Spain and the UK? Why? Nalogi, privatizatsiya, vybory, inauguratsiya, prezidentstvo, profsoyuz. Task 8. What associations do the British have about the following words?

Enterprise, the EU, Brussels, boarding school, Brexit, education. According to the teachers' practice, students are supposed to be offered to watch the latest news and read the current social and political events reviews. Thus, offering such tasks to students, we improve their translation skills. In addition, they gain cross-cultural background knowledge via these exercises.

### 4. Conclusion

By aligning the list of competencies that are required in a particular field of translation, the education system will be optimized for mass production of specialists, meeting the requirements of the labor market. Thus, a carefully worked out list of translation competences should involve a comprehensive approach to various spheres of life in modern society. The study of competences is challenged by the need to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. On this basis, it is the translation training that allows bypassing the cultural barriers in communication. Academic major of Linguistics in terms of its universal cross-discipline approach is the benchmark of humanities knowledge of the society in general. We believe that if we talk about the courses to encourage students' self-development and building the necessary background knowledge pack, it is advisable to lay more emphasis on such disciplines as Country Study, Culture Study, Cross-cultural Communication and alike.

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