

LINGVODIDACTICS

EXPERIMENTAL DETECTION OF THE EFFICIENCY OF LINGUOCULTURAL COMMENTARY AS MEANS TO ELIMINATE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC LACUNAS OF A RUSSIAN-SPEAKING RECIPIENT OF THE ENGLISH LITERARY TEXT

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The article presents the results of the experiment conducted by its author writer on the above-stated subject. In the article the author demonstratively reveals the shortcomings of the existing theories on compiling linguocultural commentary and supposes how to improve the situation.

In order to verify the efficiency of the existing scientific criteria on compiling linguocultural commentary, we modified and put into practice the model of an experimental psycholinguistic analysis of the English literary text containing the precedent phenomena, presented to linguocultural commenting. We have changed the original experimental model designed by N.F. Kovalyova¹ for the analysis of the texts of commentary in order to understand how effectively linguocultural commentary of precedent phenomena promotes the realization of complete communication of the writer and the reader and the elimination of the reader's cultural and linguistic lacunas.

The experimental base of the research is represented by 18 pieces of the original English literary text (Galsworthy John. *The Forsyte Saga. The Man of Property.* - Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974. - 384 p.)². The text fragments selected for the experiment are supplied with 21 units of linguocultural commentary which has been compounded by N.K. Matveyeva in 1974. Alongside with the already existing commented units to the selected fragments of the text, some precedent units, which (to our own subjective sensations) could possibly require linguocultural commentary, were also included in the task. Thus, the selected 30 units reflect all the potentially arising types of lacunas for the Russian-speaking recipient of the English literary text.

The main goal of the experiment was to detect the precedent units already commented by the author of the linguocultural commentary, which do not really require commenting at all.

The meanings of such units are already familiar to the respondents. The experiment was also meant to reveal the precedent units, which required commenting but did not receive it. The research problems also implemented the observation of the distinctions in the thesauruses of the recipients of different levels of language proficiency. These changes were expressed in the quantity of absolute lacunas detected for the respondents ('brand new knowledge') and in the existence of partial lacunas ('what it is possible to guess').

Initially 256 second-, fourth- and fifth-year students of the institute of foreign languages (studying English as major) were enrolled in the experiment. However, while estimating the veracity of the conducted investigation, the problem of cultural literacy of the respondents has arisen. "Cultural literacy" (the term was introduced by E. Hirsh³) includes the information on history, science, art, literature etc. indispensable for the representative of a given culture for the adequate interlocution within its framework. These items of information are, as a rule, rather superficial and approximately correspond to what they call "banal erudition" in Russian, the level of which among the students (as the participants of the experiment) was approximately identical. Thus, there appeared the necessity to expand the circle of the respondents to include the representatives of various professions and social groups of different levels of language competence aged 16-43.

The respondents (418 persons) received the fragments of the English literary text and the

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commentary to it; they were asked to arrange the italicized commented units into three graphs: "I know", "I could guess", "Commentary indispensable". The respondents were also asked to fill the fourth graph ("I expected commentary") with the words or expressions from the text, which, in the opinion of a respondent, required commentary but did not get it (that is, lacunas derived by the ignorance of the precedent texts involved in a fragment). The time for task completion was unlimited.

During the experiment the units were divided into four graphs as follows:

I know	I could guess	Commentary indispensable	I expected commentary
6 units	8 units	7 units	9 units
29 %	38 %	33 %	43 %

All the lexical units in graph one ("I know") are frequent and can be found in English-(French-) Russian, Russian-English (-French) and English explanatory dictionaries:

Ah, well she had had no time to go deeply into the matter just then, with that prunella silk on her hands; but she was "very *intriguïe* - very!"

Intriguïe (фр.) - заинтригована.

(Galsworthy John. The Forsyte Saga. The Man of Property. (Commentary by N.K.Matveyeva.))

In the second graph ("I could guess") there are those words and expressions, the meanings of which are easy to restore, if one possesses the knowledge on grammar and phonetics, aerial studies etc.:

'Look at Master and at Missis now, *the dawgs!* Ease with security - ah! that's the ticket!'

The dawgs (pejorative) = the dogs.

((Galsworthy John. The Forsyte Saga. The Man of Property. (Commentary by N.K.Matveyeva.))

The participants have filled the third graph with the precedent units the meanings of which they did not know and could not guess about them without resorting to linguocultural commentary. It is in this very graph where we can find the phenomena, the ignorance of the linguocultural meanings of which is a lacuna for the recipient:

Looking back on the Victorian era, whose ripeness, decline, and "fall-off" is in some sort

pictured in "The Forsyte Saga", we see now that we have but *jumped out of a frying-pan into a fire.*

((Galsworthy John. The Forsyte Saga. The Man of Property. (Commentary by N.K.Matveyeva.))

Judging by the general quantitative results of the conducted experiment, we came to the following conclusions:

67 % of precedent phenomena of the English literary text presented to linguocultural commentary (from the stuff of the experiment) can be omitted, as they are not relevant for the decoding of the sense. The target reader, to which the given book is written, does not need any commentary on these units, because they are notorious to him or it is possible to guess their meanings from context. These words and expressions are available in the thesaurus of the target reader and, therefore, require no commentary.

33 % of precedent units invoke actual difficulties in the comprehension of the English literary text. Their meanings can not be deduced from context, they demand an excess of limits of the basic contents of the text, that is commentary. The absence of these precedent phenomena in the thesaurus of a Russian-speaking reader is a source of linguistic and cultural lacunas; it is necessary to eliminate them in order to achieve complete comprehension of the English literary text.

43 % of lexical units of the text required further explanation but did not receive any. These precedent phenomena are also absent in the cognitive base of the recipient and represent linguistic and cultural lacunas for him. These lacunas originate from the ignorance of the linguocultural contents of the precedent texts, which circulate within the framework of the given literary text by means of referring to certain lexical units (precedent phenomena). The filling of this type of lacunas is also necessary in order to provide for the successful communication of the writer and the recipient.

The analysis of the concrete linguistic units selected for the experimental research has allowed us to make the following conclusions and suppositions:

During the recognition of the elements of a foreign culture, the reader of the English literary text originally rests on the background knowl-

edge, already available for him in the field of his mother tongue and native culture. The volume of this knowledge for all the respondents taking part in the experiment was different because, first of all, of distinctions in age (19-42 years) and also professional and social status. Next, the recipient refers to the basic course of English and other foreign languages, to the fundamentals of the English aerial studies and linguistics obtained at school or during the first two years of high school. The resort to the mother tongue and native culture, and also to the fundamentals of English explains the practically identical (for all the respondents) quantity of units in the second graph ("I could guess"), which is 38 %. The recipient correlates precedent units of the English literary text with mythologemes, measurement standards and stereotypes, characteristic of his native culture and then - of the culture of the English-speaking countries, thus restoring the semantics of the given precedent units and filling (or discovering) lacunas of his own linguocultural background knowledge. So, the following units appeared to be notorious or most easily yielding to recognition (and, thus, not requiring any linguocultural commentary):

◆ "the Victorian era", "intriguée", "azaleas" - owing to the consonance with their corresponding units in Russian and from the analysis of the context;

◆ "Bath", "Yarmouth" - these units are familiar to each student of a pedagogical university from the course of the English language under the editorial of V.D. Arakin (Year 1); it is curious, that Harrowgate, being not less popular within the English, is not mentioned in the manual, and appeared unfamiliar to 100 % of the respondents;

◆ "in toto" - is an essential expression in the active vocabulary of the students of Latin (Year 1).

All the above-mentioned units were put into the first or the second graph by both the graduates and the freshmen. However, during further training in high school (due to the introduction of courses of individual, home reading, second foreign language, and also acquaintance to semantics of morphemes, acquisition of skills like "Guessing Meaning from Context" etc.) the thesauruses of the students undergo quantitative and qualitative changes: in time some new linguistic units linger in their thesauruses; the

meanings of other units yield to guessing more easily due to the constant extension of the background knowledge:

◆ "Bois de Boulogne" - a borrowing from French, known only to the 4- and 5-year students, who study French as the second foreign language;

◆ "the Common Law Bar" - is included in the topic "Court and Justice" (the course of the English language under the editorial of V.D. Arakin (Year 4);

◆ "was cement", "the dawgs" - a nonce word and a stylistically marked word - both become comprehensible for those, who studied English lexicology and stylistics (Year 4 and 5).

As for the elder respondents of non-linguistic professional fitting, the increase of the volume of their linguocultural background knowledge is predetermined merely by accumulation of common experience and acquaintance to the English linguoculture through books, films, art masterpieces etc. This fact could partially give reason to the fall in decoding of the units "the Common Law Bar", "was cement" and "the dawgs".

Thus, the thesauruses and the volume of linguocultural background knowledge of the recipients belonging to miscellaneous levels of language proficiency have essential distinctions. In time (under the condition of constant acquisition of new knowledge and perfecting of skills) lacunas undergo qualitative and quantitative changes: some of them become completely eliminated (and the linguistic units expressing such concepts, become a part of the thesaurus), others become partial lacunas (the recipient gets enough information about these concepts to guess their meanings without any additional explanation). This fact explains the gap between the quantity of units in the first and the fourth graphs for the respondents in the age of 19-27 (0 %-14 % in the first graph, 53 %-62 % in the fourth respectively) and the elder respondents aged 30-42 (29 %-33 % and 9 %-14 % respectively).

Our special attention was attracted by the expression 'He was not an Irishman?', which at the time of compiling the commentary to the book (1974) was strictly specific for the Englishmen (judging by the contents of the commentary). For the past 30 years some certain traits of the Irish character became popular enough with the globe's community, which is

testified by the presence of this unit in the first and the second graphs for 78 % of the respondents. This fact has allowed us to suspect that lacunas can be filled regardless of the efforts of a recipient, that is, at the expense of the process of constant obsolescence and updating of the linguocultural knowledge.

The following basic groups of precedent phenomena of the English literary text have appeared to require no commentary:

- a) units that become well-known with the course of time ('He was not an Irishman?');
- b) linguistic units, the comprehension of which depends on the volume of linguocultural background knowledge at a certain definite period of time ("Bois de Boulogne", "the Common Law Bar", "the dawgs", "was cement");
- c) precedent units, the meanings of which can be deduced from context ("the Victorian era", "intrigуйе", "azaleas");
- d) toponyms ("Bois de Boulogne", "Bath", "Yarmouth");
- e) borrowings ("intrigуйе", "in toto");
- f) allusions to realia ("the Victorian era");
- g) poly-semantic words in their occasional meaning ("was cement");
- h) nationalities ('He was not an Irishman?');
- i) stylistically marked units ("the dawgs" - brutal, 'I dunno what to make of 'im' - colloq.);
- j) terms ("the Common Law Bar", "azaleas").

Thus, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the following precedent units least require linguocultural commentary: easily restored illiterasisms; international borrowings and terms; low frequency lexicon, the meaning of which is easily deduced from context. To this group we also refer units, the meanings of which become available for the recipient with the course of time or due to thesaurus expansion.

At the same time, the basic groups of precedent phenomena missing in the thesaurus of the recipient of the English literary text and requiring linguocultural commentary include:

- a) toponyms ("Harrogate");
- b) terms ("opoponax");
- c) quotations ("Let the dead Past bury its dead");
- d) allusions to the characters of the English literary texts ("a Quilpish look");

e) phraseological units ("French grey", "an Irish bull");

f) abbreviations ("Q.C.");

g) stylistically marked units ("pooty" - slang).

Taking into account the precedent lexical units from the fourth graph (expected to be explained), we also refer to units requiring linguocultural commentary the following:

a) titles of subjects and realia missing in the mother tongue of the recipient ("the Taxing Master", "pomatum", "prunella silk");

b) proper names: personal names, titles of institutions and establishments, titles of literary works, geographic names etc. ("The Forsyte Saga", "Goupenor Gallery", "Soames", "Bosinney", "Chankery", "Walmisley's");

c) graphic and phonographic dialectisms and lexical units ("an 'alf-tame leopard");

d) colloquial and slang expressions ("to jump out of a frying-pan into a fire"; "clock-sure"; "to cost somebody a pretty penny in dress"; 'he was half-cracked');

e) low frequency words and expressions, allusions and quotations, terms, abbreviations and reductions, phraseological units and set phrases ("sardonic jests", "to bestow a touch", "an eddy in the traffic", "anent", "to make somebody ten and one");

f) lexical units used in transferred or occasional meaning ("a "fall-off", "Bustard", "Water-buck", "the stomach of a horse");

g) individual stylistic expressive means of the author ('I'm very well in myself').

Thus, it is possible to suppose that the following linguistic lacunas are most widespread and least subjected to temporary changes: low frequency units with the meanings non-deducible from context; individual stylistic expressive means of the author; nonce words; very specific terms; para-phrasings and abbreviations.

1. *Kovaleva N.F.* Linguocultural Commentary as Linguistic Hypertext: Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philology. Orenburg, 2003.

2. *Galsworthy John.* The Forsyte Saga. The Man of Property. M., 1974. (Commentary by N.K. Matveyeva.)

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