

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL STUDIES TASKS BASED ON GERMAN TELEVISION PROGRAMS

Natalia Vladimirovna Bazina  
MGIMO University, Russia  
[nataly-bazin@yandex.ru](mailto:nataly-bazin@yandex.ru)

Anna Mikhailovna Ionova  
MGIMO University, Russia  
[anna.ionova@bk.ru](mailto:anna.ionova@bk.ru)

### ABSTRACT

The development of digital technologies has enriched our lives with multiple resources for entertainment, studies and work. The use of authentic video programs can become a natural and effective teaching material for any level and any category of students including those not specializing in linguistics. Yet, it is evident that the didactic potential of audio and visual materials is not fully utilized by language course developers. The goal of this paper is to propose a set of language learning activities with lingual-cultural focus; the sets designed to supplement TV programs originally transmitted by German television. We performed an analysis of the academic subject "German as a Second Foreign Language" in several universities' curriculums. It was demonstrated that the realization of these programs does not comply with the new "Federal Standards for Tertiary Education" adopted in 2015. As an alternative, we propose a kit of lingual-cultural tasks and drills that contributes largely to the goal of training students to be international journalists in cross-cultural contexts; it is aimed at developing both foreign-language communication skills and other competencies necessary for professional journalists. We substantiate our choice of structural principles for the learning kit and our selection of authentic German-language video materials as the suggested learning assignments rely largely upon the socio-cultural approach to foreign language learning; they entail work on both verbal and visual aspects of the videos, the latter aspect carrying the main part of the respective socio-cultural information. As a result, a number of professional competencies of journalism students are developed and improved through language learning. We believe that the proposed complex of language learning assignments assists students of the German language in developing their skills of audio-visual comprehension in general and mastering essential professional competencies of international journalists, given that the universities/colleges in question are not the ones where foreign languages are learned and studied as major subjects.

**Keywords:** *lingual-cultural learning tasks, socio-cultural approach, problem-based learning tasks, audio-visual comprehension, German as a second foreign language, audio-visual skills, socio-cultural activity*

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of communication technology empowers us today not only to watch various videos and entire movies online but also to view podcasts of museums, news agencies and TV channels. One of the consequences of this fact is the increasing attention foreign language teachers pay to the opportunities provided to us by using authentic video materials in class, including those employed for the purposes of teaching German as a second foreign language. The didactic potential of audio and visual materials, however, is not utilized fully in this field as yet. Thus, sadly underestimated remains the value of videos for a comparative study of students' own and other-language cultural contexts, as well as for developing their professional competencies including those implied by the international journalism curriculum. Consequently, the problem of using authentic video materials in class, for learning a second foreign language (German), seems to be a topical teaching issue in the aspect of developing efficient methods and techniques of working with videos and employing them as part of educational process.

Teaching foreign languages at a non-linguistic college or university (having no major in foreign languages) is aimed at preparing students for a professional career in cross-cultural context. In 2015, new "Federal Standards for Tertiary Education" were adopted (Federal'nyegosudarstvennyestandarty...). First of all, among the professional skills and competencies that are deemed necessary for graduating bachelor students, we should pick out those which can be developed and promoted by means of teaching a second foreign language.

General cultural competencies (GC):

- vocal and written communication skills, in Russian and in a foreign language, for the purposes of inter-personal and cross-cultural interaction (GC-6);
- team-working skills; tolerance towards social, ethnic, religious and cultural differences (GC-7);
- self-organization and self-education skills (GC-8).

General professional competencies (GPC):

- ability to comprehend the essence of professional journalism as a social, creative and information-focused activity; good knowledge of its basic characteristics, understanding of a journalist's social roles and personal qualities necessary for a responsible discharge of his/her professional functions (GPC-3);
- ability to comply, in one's professional work, with the basic Russian and international journalistic ethics codes (GPC-8);
- ability to understand journalism as a multi-aspect activity comprising both preparation of one's own publications/programs and collaboration with other media-production actors, relying on individual work and team work...; (GPC-12);
- ability to adhere to the ethical principles of handling/treating sources of news and information; a good knowledge of data collection, data selection, data check and data processing methods... (GPC-13);
- ability to efficiently employ one's knowledge of foreign languages in pursuing professional tasks (GPC-18);
- ability to understand the specifics of journalistic work in multimedia environment; a good knowledge of methods and techniques of creating/preparing information materials in different semiotic systems (verbal, audio, video, graphics, animation) (GPC-19).

Professional competencies:

- ability to look for and find topical journalistic issues and problems for publication; good knowledge of information gathering/checking/verification/analysis methods (PC-1);
- ability to produce mass media materials within the allocated time frame; mastery of certain journalistic genres, styles and formats using different representational systems (verbal, photography, audio, video, graphics)... (PC-2);
- ability to communicate and collaborate with people coming from various social strata; ability to work with authors/correspondents and handle mail coming to the editorial office (both written and electronic)... (PC-6).

## METHODS

We performed an analysis of university curriculums in the academic subject "German as a Second Foreign Language" (Institute of International Relations, Novgorod State University, Voronezh State University, Tomsk Polytechnic etc.) which revealed that the framework of teaching methods aimed at developing the above listed competencies has not been fully formulated yet, including visual comprehension and listening comprehension skills in the German language.

Besides, thus far the problem of building an organized set of assignments and drills to develop audio-visual comprehension as part of learning German using German TV programs has not been adequately explored.

The kit of lingual-cultural tasks and drills we propose contributes largely to the goal of training students to be international journalists in cross-cultural contexts; it is aimed at developing both foreign-language communication skills and other competencies necessary for professional journalists.

The proposed set of learning assignments was designed to accompany video materials from German television, TV series "Galileo"; the latter has a range of advantages over other programs of German television. Besides, the themes of the series are correlative with those of German language lessons, while its level of complexity corresponds to B1 in the European scale of foreign language learning competencies (Bazina [2013]).

The suggested kit of learning assignments relies largely upon the socio-cultural approach to foreign language learning (Safonova [1992], [1996]) as well as on the principles of problem-based learning (Makhmutov [1975]; Safonova [2001]).

With regard to the specifics of teaching German as a second foreign language at a specialized higher education institution, we singled out the following principles of building a kit of tasks to develop audio-visual comprehension skills relying on German TV materials:

- teaching languages in the context of a dialog of cultures and civilizations (Safonova [1992], [1996]);
- the priority of problem-based assignments and drills (Makhmutov [1977], Safonova [1996]);
- level-by-level communicative development of a student as a participant of cross-cultural interaction (Safonova [2010]);
- bilingual/trilingual education (Safonova [1996]);
- polyculturalism (Safonova [1992], [1996], [2010]);
- motivational training (Shatilov [1989]);
- professional direction of training (Liakhovitskii [1981]).

The key principle underlying the proposed kit of language-learning activities is that of the dominant role of problem-based tasks (Makhmutov [1975], Safonova [1992], [2001]). This choice was justified by the necessity to intensify the process of teaching German as a second foreign language to college/university students, since the amount of time allocated to the study of a second foreign language is very modest (6 classroom hours), while the requirements placed upon graduating students are in compliance with the B2 level of the European scale of foreign language skills. At the heart of the problem-based teaching method lies the intensification of students' cognitive activities understood as the "intellectual exertion placed upon a student due to, by and large, challenging him/her with *problematic issues, problem-based cognitive tasks* and learning assignments that have *research /investigative aspects*» (Makhmutov [1975:16]). Proceeding from this principle, the proposed set of learning activities is founded on tasks that focus on "collection, systematization and interpretation of cultural linguistic data, which helps students to master the strategies of lingual-cultural investigation in a new or unknown cultural context, and in guiding themselves in different cultures and related communicative norms" (Safonova [2001:233]).

### Results and Discussion

The proposed complex of lingual-cultural assignments is aimed at developing the above described competencies and includes the following types of tasks:

- ✓ Development of socio-cultural observation skills:
  - observing the behavior of people participating in TV programs, their appearances, speech characterization: *In dieser Sendung antworten auf die Fragen 3 Personen: eine Frau, ein junger Mann und ein älterer Herr. Alledreisprecheneinanderes Deutsch. Was fällt Ihnen auf? Können Sie die Unterschiede bestimmen? Hören Sie bitte aufmerksam zu, passen Sie auch auf das Äußere dieser Menschen auf!*
  - observing different realia and circumstances appearing in videos and movies, people's behavior and its patterns in day-to-day situations: *In vielen Städten in Deutschland gibt es nun nur Fahrkartenautomaten. Was muss man beachten, wenn man mit der U-Bahn fahren will? Und wann kann man im Bus Tickets kaufen?*
- ✓ Development of skills necessary to handle/treat various information/news sources:

- extracting information from a video/movie: *ImzweitenPunkt der Sendunggehtes um das Mitnehmen der Fahrräder in die öffentlichenVerkehrsmittel. MarkierenSie in der Tabelle, in welchenStädten die Fahrräder in den BUSSEN erlaubt bzw. verboten sind!*
  - extracting data from suggested visual representations and imagery: *UntensehenSie 2 Abbildungen der FahrkartenausÖsterreich (Wien) und aus der Schweiz (Bern). SehenSiesichsie an und besprechenSiemitIhremKollegen/IhrerKolleginfolgendeFragen.*
    - *Gibtes in diesenLänderTarifzonen?*
    - *Welche Tickets kann man kaufen? Wiekann man sparen? WelcheVorteilehaben Kinder, Senioren, Studenten? Welche Tickets sindfürTouristen am günstigsten?*
    - *Müssen die Tickets entwertetwerden?*  
*HieristeinBild von einemFahrkartenautomaten. BetrachtenSieesaufmerksam und sagenSie, was manwissensoll, um ein Ticket zukaufen?*
  - searching the Internet:*StellenSieichvor, siehabeneineReisevor und wollennachMünchen, Salzburg und Zürich fahren. FindenSieheraus, welche Tickets Sie in diesenStädtenkaufenkönnen und füllenSiefolgendeTabelleaus! Diese Links helfenIhrendabei!*
  - ✓ Development of students' creative potential:
    - producing presentations;
    - designing rules similar to those described in a video/movie – for tourists and students coming to Russia from German-speaking countries, with due regard to socio-cultural diversity both in Russia and in the countries of the studied language.  
*ErarbeitenSieRegeln, wie man sichimVerkehrbehagensoll bzw. darf. ArbeitenSie in zweiGruppen. Die ersteGruppeformuliert die Regelnfür die Ausländer, die nachMoskaukommen. Die zweiteGruppearbeitetRegelnfür die RussischenBürger, die nach Deutschland bzw. Österreichoder in die Schweizfahrenwerden.*
- ÜberlegenSiesichfolgendePunkte:*
1. *Was kosteteineFahrtim Land? WelcheMöglichkeitengibtes, um Geld zuspahren?*
  2. *Wokauf man ein Ticket?*
  3. *Was muss man wissen, um das Fahrzielzuerreichen?*
  4. *Was isthöflich und was istabsolut verboten imVerkehr?*
  5. *GibtesregionaleUnterschiedeimVerkehrssystem?*
- Producing videos, articles, graphic images on the same subject as that of the movie.

## CONCLUSIONS

Table 1 shows which professional competencies of journalism students are developed and improved thanks to the proposed set of learning activities.

Table 1

### Assignment types matching standard competencies

Competencies	Types of assignments
General cultural (GC-6, GC-7, GC-8)	Assignments aimed at: developing socio-cultural observation skills; obtaining knowledge of German day-to-day life; comparing socio-cultural phenomena in German-speaking countries and in Russia/other lands; observing different realia and circumstances appearing in videos and movies, people's behavior and its patterns in day-to-day situations.
General professional competencies (GPC-3, GPC-8, GPC-12, GPC-13, GPC-18, GPC-19)	Unaided web search using suggested HTTPs or keywords; extracting information from suggested visual representations and imagery.
Professional competencies (PC-1, PC-2, PC-6)	Producing presentations, videos, articles on the subject of suggested videos/movies, with regard to socio-cultural specifics of Russia and the countries of the studied language; writing rules similar to those described in a suggested video/movie – for tourists and students coming to Russia from German-speaking countries, with due regard to socio-cultural diversity both in Russia and in the countries of the studied

language.
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Unlike traditional language-learning assignments normally done after viewing a video delivered in a foreign language, the proposed set of lingual-cultural tasks and activities entails work on both verbal and visual aspects of the videos, the latter aspect carrying the main part of the respective socio-cultural information. In addition to this, the proposed set of assignments is aimed at developing professional competencies in students of international journalism, which allows us to make a faster and earlier transition to a more professional style of teaching German as a second foreign language. The socio-cultural references contained in videos make up for the lack of these in available study guides and work-books; they contribute to students' personal enrichment and broaden their outlook, while the problem-based nature of the learning activities helps them think more actively and guide themselves in unfamiliar cultural environments.

## DECLARATIONS

### *List of abbreviations*

GC – general cultural competencies

GPC – general professional competencies

PC – professional competencies

### *Authors' contributions*

N. V. Bazina carried out the review and analysis of the Federal State Educational Standards for Tertiary Education and available curriculums and courses of “German as a second foreign language”. Proceeding from this, she developed a set of theoretical principles which are to define and substantiate the idea of using authentic video-materials for learning German as a second foreign language. On the basis of this theory, we worked out a complex of language-learning activities and problem-based tasks/assignments with a lingual-cultural focus aimed at working with authentic audio-visual materials in the German language.

A. M. Ionova directly partook in the development and practical assessment of the problem-based tasks/assignments with a lingual-cultural focus aimed at working with authentic video materials in German. In the process of this, she made several comments and suggestions which were later taken into account in the working out of the final version of the tasks/assignments.

### *Competing interests*

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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