

## PEDAGOGY

*Bezvin I.G.*

### **The Problem of Developing Socio-Cultural Competence of Future University Teachers of English in Reading News Articles on the Internet News Sites Using Project Work**

*Bezvin Iuliia Gennadiievna, English Teacher  
Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A.S. Makarenko, Sumy, Ukraine*

**Abstract.** The article tackles the problem of developing socio-cultural competence of future university teachers of English in reading news articles on the Internet news sites using project work. The article defines the necessary socio-cultural knowledge, skills and abilities which are developed in reading. It enumerates specific difficulties in learning to read the news on the Internet news sites and specifies the list of reading skills, namely to read the news critically and understand the media manipulation.

**Keywords:** *socio-cultural competence, future university teacher of English, news article, Internet news site, critical reading, project work.*

The process of developing socio-cultural competence in foreign languages teaching has been studied by a number of scientists: D. Hymes (1971), M. Canale (1983), R. Lado (1989), N. Brooks (1992), M. Byram (1998), C. Kramsh (1998), Y.M. Vereshchagin, V.G. Kostomarov (1990), V.V. Safonova (1996), N.F. Borysko (1999), O.B. Tarnopolskiy, N.K. Skliarenko (2000), P.V. Sysoyev (2003) and others. The methodologies have been looking for efficient ways to develop socio-linguistic competence in reading, listening, writing and speaking.

One of the widely-used ways to develop socio-cultural competence of a future university teacher of English is teaching in reading. This was developed by Klychnikova (1973), G.V. Rogova (1974), S.K. Folomkina (1985), L.P. Rudakova (1987), F.M. Rabinovich and T.Y. Saha-rova (1991), O.D. Vokueva (1998), N.D. Galskova (2003), O.V. Byriuk (2006). Reading is considered to have a great potential for learning the language and the culture. Authentic texts comprise socio-cultural facts that contribute to understanding the gist of social and cultural aspects. Reading authentic texts, largely, literature has been studied a lot. According to N.V. Kulibina (1978) [1], L.P. Smeliakova (1992) [3] the value of teaching to read literature can't be overestimated, though, it gives the static socio-cultural knowledge and doesn't fill the gap of teaching changes that happen every day in the English-speaking society and culture. Thus, reading literature may not teach all socio-cultural changes at the exact time when they happen. Whereas news articles contain the up-to-date socio-cultural information about today's fast-paced, volatile world. It means that news articles can be treated as learning material for developing socio-cultural competence.

The **aim** of the article is to show that the news articles on the Internet news sites can be the material for developing socio-cultural competence of future university teachers of English. Specifying difficulties in learning to read news in the Internet helps to define the list of the necessary skills, like Internet news sites navigation and reading critically. Project work is viewed as a flexible method to get the necessary skills and thus, to develop socio-cultural competence.

**News articles** are viewed as a perspective and effective material to develop socio-cultural competence. The

background for this is that the level of English of future university teachers of English is rather high to grasp the complicated language, which is used in the authentic news articles. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages the level of reading competence of a future university teacher of English in the beginning of the studies is C1.2 – C2. Though, the difficulty may be in understanding the media terms and the style of the media coverage, which needs to be taught.

The definition of a news article is article reporting news. As well as literature the news article refers to authentic texts. News articles are traditionally printed in the newspapers, journals and magazines. Today there is a tendency for the Internet news sites to outpace paper sources. In general, Internet is becoming a major source of information. Lately, more and more scientists tend to use Information Technologies to teach English: S.V. Titova (2004), N.Y. Yesenina (2007), O.O. Moskalets (2009), T.M. Kamenieva (2009), D.A. Rusnak (2009) and others. Reading materials from the Internet is not an exception.

What are the purposes of teaching socio-cultural changes that happen in the English-speaking countries in reading news on the Internet news sites?

**First**, it serves as a means of bringing up intelligence, which is considered to be one of the most valued characteristics of a person. It adds up to a student's background knowledge and helps a future university teacher of English to be in a habit of learning the socio-cultural information in reading news articles on the Internet news sites. With time it will make a "socio-cultural background" of a university teacher of English, which can be applied in teaching their students.

**Second**, being knowledgeable about the news contributes to successful communication with the foreigners. It gives so-called "safe" topics for conversations. It's not acceptable in some countries to talk about religion, private matters, income level, and illnesses. So, talks about news provide a safe background for lively and interesting "small talks", encouraging communication with the foreigners. The subject of "small talks" has been studied by O.B. Tarnopolskiy and N.K. Skliarenko [4]. They mention the "neutral" topic for discussions as weather, sports,

social and cultural events. Such events are highlighted on the Internet news sites.

**Third**, the news articles introduce the new words which mean the new phenomena, notions that appear in the culture. The news may be the first source where the breaking news information can appear.

Socio-cultural competence of a future university teacher of English comprises three components: **socio-cultural knowledge, socio-cultural skills and socio-cultural abilities** [2]. Let's see how they are developed in reading up-to-date news articles. *Socio-cultural knowledge* is developed by getting knowledge about the country and the culture, namely historic, cultural, socio-cultural, ethnic, semiotic backgrounds and so-called "safe" topics for communication. *Socio-cultural skills* presuppose applying the socio-cultural knowledge. They are developed by learning to understand the news articles and making their analysis, including the "hidden" media interpretations; learning to apply the socio-cultural knowledge in communication with foreigners and with their students in their future career. And in the long run, they will learn to get mutual understanding with the people they communicate with. Reading news articles contributes to building up *socio-cultural abilities*, which are the ability to understand the strong relations between the language and the culture, socio-linguistic and socio-cultural tolerance, ability to compare the native culture with the foreign one, using reflection, deep thinking, ability to be sympathetic, tolerant and open-minded.

Teaching to read news is not new when it comes to reading news in newspapers. But it has some specific features when it has to do with reading news in the Internet news sites. These specific features cause the list of difficulties which we have to teach to overcome.

The first difficulty is **learning about exceeding number of resources**. There are many news sites which place the world news in the Internet. To have a good idea of the websites, it's essential to know about news sites aggregators, which are systems that gather news feeds from many sources and make them available through a single set of screens. The study of news sites aggregators shows that most of them are American by origin. For example, Alexa Internet, NetTop20, eBizMBA.

The second difficulty is **learning to navigate the news sites**. Teaching to read news articles in the Internet requires learning sections of news. The study of the news sites sections shows that the most used are: World, Technology, Sports, Business, Entertainment, Politics, Health, Science, Environment and Education. It's also essential to learn navigation terms of the news sites. For example, nouns: archive, blog post, the post most, related stories, grid, quick links, shortcut; verbs: follow, find out more, search news, see related coverage, quick read.

The third difficulty is **learning about exceeding number of articles**. The main skill to be developed is to separate relevant news articles from irrelevant ones. So that to have a good command of socio-cultural materials from the news article, a future university teacher of English needs to have clear understanding which articles have socio-cultural potential to be applied in communication with foreigners and in a professional work of a university teacher. To differentiate on a number of topics, they may apply the knowledge from the "Methodology" course,

which gives the list of topics for all year students according to university curriculum.

The fourth difficulty is **learning about exceeding information and media manipulation**. There is an idea that media manipulation currently shapes everything you read, hear and watch online. In order to get objective socio-cultural information it's necessary to learn to see exaggeration, distortion, fabrication and simplification in the articles.

In terms of **vocabulary**, a future university teacher of English has to learn the following:

- words and expressions that belong to professional media vocabulary;
- words and expressions employed in discussions of the functioning of mass communication;
- ideologically loaded vocabulary – "buzz words" typical of speech of adherents of different ideologies;
- professional media vocabulary employed to discuss major political issues.

In terms of the **content**, a future university teacher of English has to be taught **to read critically**:

- to study various socio-political topics and mass communication;
- to distinguish objective and subjective elements in the news articles;
- to identify biased language in the news articles;
- to interpret graphic data;
- to understand variety of interpretations available in a number of related news articles.

Getting deeper into teaching critical reading, one should mention the list of skills for critical reading, suggested by D. Milan [6]. According to D. Milan "critical reading" does not mean "critical" in the sense of tearing down or fault-finding; rather it means using careful evaluation, sound judgment, and the reasoning powers of the reader. It's necessary to learn to evaluate the evidence which supports the argument. In brief, it needs to be logically arranged, and it should be relevant to the main idea. The evidence should appeal to a person's intelligence and reason, not only to emotions.

Here is the list of skills which we consider to be relevant for learning to understand the socio-cultural information in the news articles:

- to uncover the arguments;
- to find unstated assumptions;
- to evaluate evidence;
- to see if the socio-cultural information in the news article balanced or not;
- to understand inductive and deductive reasoning;
- to see different appeals in arguments: appeal to emotion, authority, fear, patriotism, sympathy, tradition;
- to find logical fallacies in the news articles.

All the difficulties above define **the learning objectives** that a future university teacher of English has to achieve in learning to read the news article with socio-cultural potential:

- learn to work with news sites and separate relevant socio-cultural news articles from irrelevant ones;
- learn to find the articles with socio-cultural information;
- learn to read and critically evaluate news articles/ make critical analysis of them;
- understand implied information and deep frames that underlie the surface structure of news articles;
- critically evaluate and respond to idea and attitude, which is expressed in the news article;
- learn to compare the related articles in different news sites.

Having defined the learning objectives and the material for developing socio-cultural competence, it is required to choose the method which will help to implement all mentioned above. There should be a complex method, which will cover the extended activities and skills on learning about the Internet news sites, learning navigation, getting skills in finding the news articles, separating relevant from irrelevant and making analysis. **Project work** is viewed as a method to fulfill them all. That is largely due to the flexibility that a project work has. It can be applied to any topic, any time frames, any age and any level.

Project work dates back to XX-th century when there was a need to encourage the students' cognitive activities and to apply the skills in real life situations. The founders are considered to be S. Haines, T. Hutchinson, D. Fried-Booth, R. Ribe, N. Vidal. According to S. Haines the most favorable period for project work is a so-called "Transfer Stage". That's when the students have rather well-developed skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking and the students "feel free" to apply them in all stages of project work [5].

Due to the fact that a project has a number of stages, and each stage may have different purposes, the stages of the project for developing socio-cultural competence in reading the news articles can be as follows:

- Stage 1. Choosing the topic that everyone in the group is in favor of.
- Stage 2. Searching for the socio-cultural information on the Internet news sites.
- Stage 3. Background reading research.
- Stage 4. Separating relevant news articles from irrelevant ones.
- Stage 5. Analytical reading.
- Stage 6. Comparing news articles from different Internet news sites.
- Stage 7. Possessing the information.
- Stage 8. Making end product.
- Stage 9. Presenting end product.

Thus, using Project Work is a method which will help to use news articles as a material to teach reading for to develop socio-cultural competence of a future university teacher of English which means developing their critical thinking and learning media manipulation.

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**Безвин Ю.Г. Проблема формирования социокультурной компетентности будущего преподавателя английского языка в обучении чтению новостей, размещенных на сайтах новостей в Интернете с использование проектной работы**  
**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается проблема формирования социокультурной компетентности будущего преподавателя английского языка в обучении чтению новостей, которые размещены на сайтах новостей в Интернете с использованием метода проектов. Определены необходимые социокультурные знания, навыки, умения и способности, которые развиваются в процессе чтения новостей. Перечислены характерные трудности, которые возникают в процессе чтения новостей на сайтах и определен список навыков и умений в чтении, в частности умения критического чтения и понимания манипуляции, которая применяется в средствах массовой информации.

**Ключевые слова:** социокультурная компетентность, будущий преподаватель английского языка, статья-новость, интернет-сайт новостей, критического чтение, проектная работа.