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## The Content of Spiritual and Religious Component of the Communicative Competence

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### Abstract

In this paper we analyzed the role of religion in the models of the communicative competence. We examined the meaning of the concept “spirituality” and found out that its content depends on the point of view: religious or secular. In the secular interpretation, spirituality is related to the exalted emotional condition and considered to be an aspiration to absolute truth. From the religious point of view, spirituality is determined by the individual’s personal relations with God. We summarized the ideas that lay behind the discussion of new subject on the Basics of religion and secular ethics in public schools. These ideas define the role of spiritual and religious component in educational process and its potential for personal development.

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### 1. Introduction

Communicative competence and its components are an object of numerous studies in language teaching methodology and educational sciences. Many of the studies focus on sociocultural competence. Some of these studies concern the religious and spiritual component of this competence.

This factor becomes very important. Higher education in Russia adopts new standards which present new requirements to the results of education and define new objectives and tasks for researchers, methodologists and lecturers. The new federal state educational standards of higher professional education 035700 Linguistics

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(Bachelor's degree) was adopted the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2010. The standards fixed legislatively and introduced the competency approach into teaching practices. Now the standards aim to evaluate not student's knowledge and skills but competences.

Our primary object of study is the body of competences concerning spirituality and religion. Requirements of previously mentioned educational standards (Federal standards, 2010) included the cultural competence stated as: *"The student comprehends the system of the universal values and takes into consideration value orientations of the different social, national, religious and professional communities and groupings in Russian society"* (Federal standards, 2010); *... follows the principles of the cultural relativism and the code of ethics which suppose rejecting of ethnocentrism and respect for the foreign culture peculiarities and for the values of the foreign societies"* (Federal standards, 2010). Professional competences of a graduate include the following one: *"a graduate has a notion about ethics and moral standards of behavior established in foreign society, about models for social situations and typical interaction scenarios"* (Federal standards, 2010).

Participation of the Russian Federation in the Bologna Process is another reason for our research. The Russian system of language education is guided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages elaborated by the Council of Europe (Cadre européen commun de référence, 2010). Chapter 5 details the learner's competences required to reach communicative goals successfully in various social situations. The authors of the CEFR define sociocultural knowledge as awareness of the society and culture of the community or communities in which this language is spoken (Cadre européen commun de référence, 5.1.1.2, p.102). The authors of CEFR think that this competence merits special attention because it lies outside the learner's previous experience and may be distorted by stereotypes. They propose determining the features distinctively characteristic of the local society and its culture in relation to different factors and areas. Our points of interests are: interpersonal relations (relations among political and religious groupings), values, beliefs and attitudes in relation to religion, and ritual behavior (religious observances and rites).

Formation and development of the competency approach in language teaching methods methodology of teaching foreign languages were preceded by a number of studies carried out since 1970. As it was noted by N. Galskova *the concept of communicative competence is a result of an attempt to draw a border-line between cognitive (academic) skills and basic interpersonal communicative skills* (Gal'skova, 2008). This led to the shift from the knowledge-based approach to the competency approach. In time, the concept of communicative competence got further development in the various models of competence.

## **2. Research Design**

### *2.1. Goal and Objectives of Research*

Our aim was to justify the necessity to consider the spiritual and religious elements as specific component of the sociocultural competence, as well as to define the content of this component. We planned to realize the following steps while conducting our study: a) Analyzing and comparing the models of the communicative competence and the role of religion in these; b) Examining the meaning of the concept "spirituality"; c) Summarizing the ideas that lay behind the discussion of new subject on Basics of religion and secular ethics in public schools; d) Examining students' motivation and interests in order to find out elements necessary to include in spiritual and religious component of the sociocultural competence.

### *2.2. Methods*

In order to identify the content of spiritual and religious component we examined and compared the models of communicative competence, we analyzed definitions of spirituality and found out that the concept is defined in a variety of ways. We analysed reports presented in scientific conferences and formulated principles and statements justifying the importance of this concept. We designed a questionnaire on the basis of these data. The experimental group was represented by the 3-4 year students of the faculty of foreign languages of the National research Tomsk State University. The survey allowed defining more precisely the content of the spiritual and religious component.

### 2.3. *The role of religion in the models of the communicative competence*

We examined some models of communicative competence including the results obtained by other scientists. We focused on the spiritual and religious component, the position and role of religion in these models. Spiritual and religious component is a part of sociocultural competence. The sociocultural competence is considered to be a part of communicative competence. M. Byram introduced the term "intercultural competence" to define the concept close to the one referred to as communicative competence.

The model of the scientist Jan A. van Ek (1988) is presented in the thesis of L. Litvinova (2000). Jan A. van Ek distinguishes between the following components in the structure of communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, sociocultural and social competence. The scientist thinks that acquisition of sociocultural competence is related to the local culture studies. That is why he considers this competence as a set of information about history, religion, economics, etc. He interprets sociocultural competence as the knowledge about the sociocultural context and the knowledge of how this context influences the choice of linguistic forms. Spiritual component is represented as a set of knowledge about religion studied within the framework of the local country studies. However, he did not determine it as a separate component in the structure of the sociocultural competence.

Another recognized model is proposed by the scientist M. Byram. He considered the intercultural competence as consisting of such components as: knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, and skills of discovery and interaction (Byram, 1997).

The model of the communicative competence of the scientist I. Bim is presented in the thesis of N.M. Belyakova (Belyakova, 2008). I. Bim distinguishes between such components as: linguistic, thematic, sociocultural and compensatory competences. Sociocultural competence, in her opinion, must include sociolinguistic, thematic, generic and local cultural competences.

V. Safonova proposes the following components of sociocultural competence: local language and cultural, sociolinguistic and cultural competences (Safonova, 1998). According to V. Safonova, sociocultural competence helps learner to comprehend various cultures and civilizations and norms of communication related to them. Sociocultural competence also helps to interpret adequately cultural phenomena and facts (including communicative acts) and to use these guidelines to choose communicative strategies for personal and professional purposes in different types of intercultural communication (Safonova, 1993).

We analyzed how spiritual component is presented in the structure of the communicative competence by comparing the model of V. Safonova to that of M. Byram.

V. Safonova distinguishes between knowledge, abilities, habits and skills. Her model comprises the following knowledge components: 1) information about native speakers of the target-language and sources of information about the definite ethnos, nationality, culture, society, region and civilization type; 2) information about sociolinguistic and local language and culture aspects of vocabulary; 3) information about sociocultural aspects of target-language communicative behavior (Safonova, 1993). These components of knowledge implicitly include religious and moral values, religious traditions and ceremonies, background knowledge about religious motifs in works of art. V. Safonova includes these components into the content of the syllabus on country study called "Great Britain: society and culture in the context of Europe" (Safonova, 1993). For example, part 3.6 of the designed syllabus includes such subjects as: "Religious life in the modern British society", "Socio-Economic and religious conflicts, successes and failures in their settlement". Part 4.5 comprises such subjects as "Philosophical, religious and artistic worldview and its representation in the British mentality at different periods of history of West European civilization", "Influence of British culture on the philosophical, religious and artistic worldview of other countries and peoples". Part 5.3 includes "European and national cultural background of traditions, rites, conventions, values (as it is commonly interpreted), stereotypes of behavior typical of various communities and observation in the intercultural communication".

The model of M. Byram also includes knowledge about cultural peculiarities but is focused not on the cultural background of language units but on understanding interpersonal interaction in the society and of intercultural communication (Byram, 1997). This model seems to attach more importance to understanding the mentality of another person, of the inner life of interlocutor.

It could be assumed that both models include religious and spiritual components. The difference is that the model

by V. Safonova is focused on the country-specific knowledge and on the language units influenced by sociocultural factors (lacuna, equivalence issues, etc) and the model by M. Byram is focused on worldview of target-language including values, rites and tradition.

In both models of communicative competence linguists did not define religion as a separate aspect or component. Knowledge about religion is just a part of the knowledge about the country where this language is spoken. We think that it is important and necessary to specify spiritual and religious component in the communicative competence, or more exactly in sociocultural competence. This sphere of life is subtle and needs a specific approach, both in terms of content and expression. Religious background knowledge is necessary to understand literature, art and history. In addition, according to educational standards, a graduate with bachelor's degree has to comprehend religion, religious values and rites.

#### *2.4. Difficulty in defining the concept of "spirituality"*

While studying the representation of spiritual and religious component in models of communicative competence we did not give a definition of this term. We analyzed all the elements, areas and factors related to religion in general. For the further research it is important to examine different definitions of spirituality and to specify the content of spiritual and religious component.

The spirituality is commonly interpreted as a life guided by high moral standards, as an aspiration towards ideals, as high feelings, thoughts and actions. In the sociology the spirituality is considered to be a consolidating basis of the society represented in the moral values and traditions. They are concentrated in the religious doctrines and practices, as well as in the art.

However, the concept of "spirituality" has no clear and precise definition. Moreover, some modern philosophers think that in spite of frequent use of this term, its content remains debatable. According to Y. Abramov and E. Kornev this term is "not operational" (Abramov & Kornev, 2007).

That is why they think that it is necessary to define the cultural and anthropological context of the term "spirituality". They propose to use it to describe the inner world of a person. In their opinion, spirituality is a process of understanding one's life purposes and of obtaining sense.

Another particularity of definition of the term of "spirituality" consists of the fact that its content depends on the point of view: religious or secular.

Thus, N. Kotriakhov argues that the term "spirituality" can be used in two senses: religious and secular. In the religious interpretation this term is related to the soul, which is considered to be the Divine source of a person. In the secular interpretation spirituality is related to the exalted emotional condition which is especially evident in the creativity" (Kotriakhov, 2010).

T. Shaposhnikova also examines the term "spirituality" from two points of view: religious and philosophical. Philosophically, spirituality is interpreted as "aspiration to absolute truth" (Shaposhnikova, 2011). In the opinion of the scientist, this aspiration along with the personal experience engender such abilities as: rationality, power of speech, will, conscience, freedom, intuition, high esthetic feelings, creative activity, self-discovery, self-determination, ability to love and to serve. It also presupposes ability to establish and develop free, reasonable and responsible relationship with other people, to take the responsibility for one's actions, for other people and for all living beings. From the religious point of view, the spirituality is determined by the personal relations with God.

The definition of "spirituality" given in the pedagogical dictionary is also important for our research. The spirituality is "the highest level of development and self-regulation of a mature person characterized by human activity regulated by the supreme values. Spirituality is not the element of psychological structure of personality but the style of life of a mature person. This concept is related to the moral education (Novikov, 2013).

Thus, we could conclude that the development of spirituality can be influenced. Moreover, it is important to highlight that spiritual development is related to personal development. This is a crucial objective for the period covering the university studies (in Russia typical age of students is 17–25). This factor is necessary for the personal development of students. That is why it is not enough to take into account religion and religious practices in the target-language country, but also it is necessary to cover the issues that are of interest to students.

#### *2.5. Results and discussion*

### 2.5.1. Subjects

Teaching the Basics of religion and secular ethics in public schools to Russian pupils of 4-5 forms has begun only since the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2012. The introduction of this subject into the school curriculum was preceded by numerous discussions concerning this subject, possibility or impossibility, of the prospects of teaching it in the public school.

### 2.5.2. Survey

We designed a questionnaire consisting of questions about the spiritual and religious component of the sociocultural competence and about the need to include this component in the foreign language courses' syllabi at university. We distributed 22 copies of the questionnaire to the students of the faculty of foreign languages at national Research Tomsk State University. There were no blank questionnaire forms. Only one student answered that it is not necessary to study spiritual and religious component. The students that participated in the survey chose the following elements of spiritual and religious component of the sociocultural competence as important: 1) moral content of religion (11 responses); 2) religious values (10 responses); 3) proverbs and sayings (9 responses); 4) key notions of religion (9). The less important elements are biblical words and phrases (1 response) and religious ideas in art (2). We suppose that these elements are "unpopular" because they are unknown.

When asked to choose the reasons for studying spiritual and religious component, students chose the following statements: 1) it helps to understand history, international politics, historical destinies of countries (12 responses), 2) it encourages respect for traditions (11), 3) it helps to overcome religious illiteracy (10), 4) it encourages thinking about the purpose of life, about their personal spiritual development (7); 5) it contributes to the harmonic development of the student (5); 6) it stimulates self-improvement (4). Only 2 students questioned think that religion gives stable social guidelines.

We could note that the spiritual and religious content is important not only for cognitive but also for spiritual development and it has a great educational potential.

### 2.5.3. Findings

On the basis of the analysis we defined the following principles and consolidated our ideas about teaching the religious component.

1. The harmonious development of personality is possible only on the basis of complex of cognitive and spiritual development.
2. Introduction of spiritual and religious component into educational process encourages spiritual autonomous development of students, their creativity, self-development, self-improvement. It is due to the fact that religion has a reach experience in finding answers to the question about the purpose of life (Glushchenko, 2011).
3. Competence in the sphere of religion has a potential to encourage the respect towards traditions and customs of one's own country. The process of becoming adult is realized in the context of the cultural and ethic traditions (Krolovetskaya, 2011).
4. People turn to religion for infallible social guidelines. Political regimes are considered to be temporary and unstable, religions have eternal stable principles (Balakhanov & Apanasenko, 2011).
5. It is necessary to overcome the religious illiteracy.
6. Religious instruction is related to the issue of preservation of historical heritage and of the social integrity.
7. Understanding the religious doctrines and differences between religions enables comprehending historical events, politics, historical destinies of countries.

## 3. Conclusion

Spiritual and religious component is very specific and important area which needs a particular approach. In our

opinion, spiritual and religious component in communicative competence include:

- proverbs and sayings
- religious and moral values;
- key concepts of religions

As for biblical words and religious ideas in art, it is necessary to find the way of presenting and teaching them because these are not in the sphere of students' interests and are unknown for them.

The further research will be focused on selecting educational materials covering spiritual and moral component and designing activities and exercises which respond to the students' interest and contribute to acquisition of the sociocultural competence. Some principles and ideas of teaching the religious disciplines are suggested on the basis of harmony achievement in a person's development and the realization of his creative potential. The necessity of overcoming the religious illiteracy based on understanding the religious doctrines and differences between religions enables comprehending historical events, politics, historical destinies is justified.

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