

6.3.2 Ways of Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence in the Russian Federation

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The survey, as a written questionnaire, looked at the ways of assessing intercultural communicative competence in the Russian Federation. The questionnaire was administered to modern language teachers and teacher trainers at 33 educational establishments. The aim was to identify guidelines, instruments and tools currently used to assess ICC at secondary and tertiary levels of language instruction. The results reflected a wide range of professional opinions, personal reflections as well as pluricultural and plurilinguistic experiences. It gave a new input in terms of initial education and ongoing training to teachers and teacher trainers at various levels of instruction.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE – October 2004

- **Q1 Do you have any guidelines, tools, instruments or... to assess ICC in your educational institution?**

The majority of respondents (approximately 90%) answer positively, though they see “guidelines”, “tools” and “instruments” differently.

- **Q2. If yes, could you write down which ones?**

Guidelines:

- Assessment mechanisms envisaged by the national educational standard, Common European Framework of References, European Language Portfolio (Russian version)
- Some respondents draw on classical and modern theories in assessing ICC, such as Sapir-Whorf, Vygotsky, Leontiev, M. Byram, Knapp-Pothoff, J. Banks, I. Khaleeva (second language identity).
- Authentic English, German, French teaching materials with the focus on ICC (Cutting Edge, Proficiency Passkey, Inside Out, Nexus, Mission 2, Upstream, Integrated Skills, Focus on Advanced English, Kontakte knupfen (Rainer Ernst Wecke), “Moment mal!” Nouveau sans frontieres, Guide pratique de la communication, etc).
- Local teaching materials (peer-reviewed, approved by local educational authorities or the Ministry of Education)

Instruments and tools:

- ELPs
- Questionnaires (short and extended answers)
- ICC cloze tests (culture-specific concepts, lexis, cultural things, encyclopedic knowledge)
- commentaries on the cultural component of a text for different target audiences (Russian and foreign)
- Group discussions on culture-specific topics (cultural mediation)
- Group discussions where students are supposed to demonstrate argumentative/public speaking skills particular to the culture they study
- Role plays and simulations

- Debates and round-table talks, students' conferences, quizzes, compositions and essays (with the focus on stating one's position on certain aspects of interpersonal and intercultural interaction)
- Tape/video recordings
- Diaries of exchange students
- Term papers, graduation papers, dissertation projects related to ICC
- Department and university final examinations on ICC
- Student research (papers and abstracts) into similarities and differences of national stereotypes, ICC development in bi- and polylingual settings, case study, fact files
- Internet www.5balls.com; Delphi; advanced level 1,2, Tell me more 1,2, www.welt.de, www.goethe.de (for departments of science and engineering)
- Extra-curriculum activities, theme parties dedicated to outstanding personalities, social and cultural events, holidays, etc.

Q3. Which components of ICC are usually assessed in your educational institution? At which levels?

a) connaissances / knowledge

Assessed regularly throughout the entire period of study (1st-5th (final) year at university and Grade 1- 11 at school)

- Formative assessment of cultural elements in classes of conversational practice, writing skills classes, cultural studies, translation and interpretation, literature, ICC, lexicology.

b) les savoir-faire / Knowing-how

- *Regular assessment in formal academic setting is difficult unless the class is taught by a native-speaking teacher (10 % of respondents).*
- From the 2-3d year onwards in ICC classes and classes of conversational practice (simulation of critical situations)
- During study exchange programmes

c) les savoir-être /Being (language awareness, cultural awareness or others)

- *Is this component measurable at all? (12 answers)*
- *The assessment criteria are not clear-cut yet*
- *Subjective assessment through interaction with foreigners or exchange trips*
- Can be assessed through discussions on cultural values, the worldview, ICC training sessions, analysis of critical situations at advanced levels of instruction, discourse analysis
- As a professional skill in training translators and interpreters at advanced levels

Q4. Which examples/critical incidents can you send us to be included in an assessment kit of ICC?

- A lot of confusion stems from the difference in the way Russian and English native-speakers see the categories of modality, time and place, possession, personality, action/process/state, active/passive voice, negative/positive thinking, heart/mind/soul;

different intonation patterns. This can lead to misuse and overuse of modal verbs in the speech of Russian speakers of English (who for that reason may sound abrupt and authoritative), overuse intensifiers, such as “very”, negative forms (“not to pay attention” instead of “disregard, ignore”) etc. Overall, Russian speakers of English tend to be more emotional and direct.

- “Small talk”. Social behaviour in an English-speaking country is, perhaps, the most difficult thing for a Russian to get used to. The most important rule of social behaviour is “Be articulate”. This means that in a social setting, you should not sulk, be a wallflower, or act like a smart Alec. If you have nothing to say, talk anyway. Don’t shy away from talking about your plans and intentions openly.
- Humour and jokes
- Difference in attitude to queuing, cheating in exams, complaining about service, minor everyday problems reflected in linguistic form
- (To a Russian) Don’t you like to join us? – Not really. – O’K. Don’t go if you don’t feel like it. (Russians usually misinterpret the phrase as being a little rude. English native speakers don’t usually insist too much because they respect other people’s choice)
- Different dress codes (From a British student in Moscow: Why are Russian students wearing shoes on high heels here?)
- A German teacher is invited by his Russian colleagues to celebrate a Russian national holiday. The party is scheduled to take place in the department office. The German turns the invitation down because he has extra classes arranged for the same time. Is it the real reason for refusal?
- A lot of difficulties arise from filling out questionnaires and application forms. (ex., the concept of nationality. In a police station while filling in some papers (mode de acquisition de la nationalite: par naturalisation, par filiation, etc...))
- Should a Russian person paying a social visit to his American colleague accept an invitation to see the house at the end of the party when everyone is pretty tired already and the hostess has indicated she hasn’t had time to tidy up? The answer is definitely yes: your hosts expect you to look into every room and nook (including the kitchen, bathroom, patio/deck, etc.), which is an all-time must on the entertainment agenda. And they certainly expect to hear your compliments about the house and the drive to it, the lawn, the dog, etc. only to say “Thank you” in return.
- Would you expect a Russian and an American to behave the same way in the following situation? A middle-class American is entertaining his colleagues at his place. As he tries to clear up more space under the trees, a huge branch collapses right on his head. It’s serious enough for him to have to go to the near-by hospital. He still has time to call off the picnic. That’s exactly what he doesn’t do. And when guests arrive at the agreed time they don’t pay much attention to the baseball cap on the host’s head and never learn about what happened earlier that day. Do you think a Russian person would do the same?
- Can breakfast “speak louder than words”? What does it mean
 - 1) if your American hostess gives you a “big” hot breakfast, which probably took her an hour to make,
 - 2) if she thought about taking the orange juice out of the fridge the night before,
 - 3) if she makes leaf tea in a teapot inherited from her Dutch grandmother and
 - 4) if the whole breakfast reminds you of a Christmas brunch served in the middle of the summer?

- Sit on a table. You'll marry before you're able to (American) - Don't sit on a table. It's impolite (Russian)
- The Russian hosts arrange a cultural programme for their American counterparts visiting Russia. The Americans agree to most of the programme because they are afraid to offend their hosts and look fastidious. The programme is interesting but crowded, and the hosts feel obliged to follow it through. So they keep gently "pushing" their American guests, who, in their turn feel uncomfortable because they are forced to stick to the programme and don't feel free.
 - Translator's false friends (words that sound similar in English/German and Russian but have different meanings)
 - While it is generally true that the British are reserved, most respond to casual impersonal conversation especially in an informal setting like a park or a railway station. There is a difference between reserved and aloof. Do not persist if the person does not wish to talk or throws out vibes telling you so.
 - An invitation to tea. In the United States it means a cup of coffee, probably a refill, and a biscuit. In Russia it might be a big meal (sandwiches, pies, cakes, jam, etc),