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## CULTURAL CONTEXT IN UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN POLAND

### ABSTRACT

The article presents methodological assumptions for textbooks aimed at Polish-speaking students who study Ukrainian as part of a philological degree course. Particular attention has been paid to the inclusion of cultural context, the aim of which is not only to diversify strictly linguistic tasks, but above all to introduce the student to the world of a different culture.

**KEYWORDS:** language teaching, the Ukrainian language, intercultural communication, cultural context, grammatical-lexical exercises

### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł przedstawia założenia metodologiczne podręczników adresowanych do studentów polskojęzycznych, uczących się języka ukraińskiego na studiach filologicznych. Szczególną uwagę zwrócono na uwzględnienie kontekstu kulturowego, którego celem jest nie tylko urozmaicenie zadań ściśle językowych, ale przede wszystkim wprowadzenie studenta w świat innej kultury.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** glottodydaktyka, język ukraiński, komunikacja interkulturowa, kontekst kulturowy, ćwiczenia gramatyczno-leksykalne

## INTRODUCTION

The cultural background associated with everyday-life-related knowledge, and cultural knowledge, is a very important element in the teaching of the Ukrainian language in a higher educational establishment in Poland. Students eagerly learn the language by becoming acquainted with the culture of the nation, and by noticing the similarities and differences that relate to mentality and language usus.

We will devote the following reflections to the specific issues involved in the selection and use of texts regarding culture (as it is broadly understood) in the teaching of the Ukrainian language, and to the need to make use of a wealth of texts

of various types in order to build up an image of the specific features of the Ukrainian ethno-linguistic area.

The basis for this discussion will be textbooks published in recent years by the staff of the Department of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Warsaw “Kontrastivna gramatika ukraińskoj i ta polskoj mow” (Кононенко В./ Кононенко І. 2010), „Z ukraińskim na ty”, cz. 1 (Delura et al. 2013), “Z ukraińskim na ty”, cz. 2 (Delura et al. 2014) and etc. They are aimed primarily at Polish-speaking students.

## THEORETICAL BASIS

The concept of learning a language through the prism of a nation's culture has been dealt with in many studies, beginning with theoretical considerations raised, amongst others, by W. von Humboldt (2001) – the relationship between language and culture, understanding language as a “specific worldview” (Matecki 2012), E. Sapir (1978) (language as a cultural and social creation, an important perspective on a chosen culture), C. Kramersch (1993, 1998) (intercultural competence at the center of the foreign language teaching process), and in the work of Polish researchers such as A. Wierzbicka (1997, 2007), (language is an image of the culture of a given nation, a culture which we can understand through its key words), M. Dakowska (2007, 2014) (society exists thanks to a communication system determined by culture), F. Grucza (1989) (the ability to compare a foreign culture and one's own while learning a language), K. Mihułka (2012, 2014) (the unity of language and culture in teaching) and W. Miodunka (2009) (considering the culture of the areas where the taught language is spoken and the learners' culture), through to the results of studies by Ukrainian language teaching and ethnolinguistic researchers (e.g. Антонів 2014; Кочан 2012; Жайворонок 2007 et al.). Their theoretical achievements have also found their way into textbooks for learning the Ukrainian language, books which diligently combine linguistic knowledge with knowledge about cultural phenomena.

## TEACHING MATERIAL

Depending on the level of someone's knowledge of a language, we can bring up various aspects of a culture as illustrated in fairy tales, sayings, and literary works addressed to children and adults (on which we base lexical and grammatical exercises in textbooks for intermediate recipients), to more difficult topics requiring deep reflection and skills for critical analysis, including comparative analysis (e.g.

in journalism, popular-science and literary texts – at the advanced level). Such a selection of materials makes it easier for students to feel comfortable in a geographically close, but nevertheless different, language and cultural reality.

Texts on cultural studies not only serve to develop linguistic competences in learners, but also they present the Ukrainian national culture – both old and contemporary, culture related to linguistic etiquette, to national behavior patterns, traditions, literature, journalism, music, art and architecture, design and the media, to film and entertainment. The class modules proposed in the textbooks, with their rich and diverse subjects, are helpful in dealing with everyday life situations in Ukraine and they build up a certain image of the country and the nation. The choice of content to fill the cultural space presented in the textbooks was guided by the desire to show what distinguishes Ukrainian culture, what makes it unique, to show that which you won't find in Polish culture, e.g. different religious and festive traditions, Orthodox church architecture, cooking, spiritual and material folk culture, and customs. In addition, for the above reasons texts about the tourist and architectural highlights of Ukraine, the richness of its folk art, painting, folk music and dances, national symbolism, and the different education system, were all included in the textbooks. Cultural texts selected in such a way, closely related to the contemporary situation in the Ukrainian linguistic-geographical area, are the basis for better understanding, and demythologizing, national stereotypes and for the proper interpretation of facts in intercultural communication situations (Romaniuk/Saniewska 2014).

The textbooks discussed also contain Polish texts, which introduce an element of interculturalism, have a cognitive value, and show certain similarities and cultural differences between the two nations. They discuss issues including Polish national dress and symbols, the first recorded Polish sentence, and a traditional story about a wandering old man, Wernyhora, a Ukrainian bard who predicted the fate of Poland, or the Legend of the Three Brothers. Interesting teaching material is to be found in studies devoted to Polish-Ukrainian topics, comparing content concerning our traditions and customs, theater history or contemporary issues, or giving descriptions of well-known cultural figures. They allow us to get an idea of the closeness of both nations, a closeness resulting from ethno-linguistic kinship and historical conditions related to many centuries of mutual contacts, as well as an idea of the differences that make up the mental-cultural specificities. In the textbooks, cultural texts are presented in a thematically close arrangement. A typical example of this approach, consistently implemented in lesson units, where one can find material concerning Ukrainian and Polish politics, historical figures from both countries, artists and scientists, and sportspeople and writers from Ukraine and Poland. Working with teaching material structured in such a way tends to latch onto symmetry and asymmetry in intercultural communication. Properly 'building' it prevents culture shock or mutual misunderstanding and communicative failures when establishing linguistic contact. The presented topics are therefore a platform for various types of tasks that build up this competence. The section containing

reading materials also includes Ukrainian texts and their Polish translations as well as original Polish texts and their Ukrainian translations.

## TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The material contained in the textbooks mentioned served as the basis for the construction of lexical-grammatical, stylistic, spelling and translation tasks (Мацюк/ Митник 2019; Кононенко/ Митник/ Романюк 2019). These included exercises on general and specialist vocabulary relating to the cultures of both languages (filling gaps, selecting synonyms, antonyms, creating collocations and expressions, and students writing their own texts based on images and photos contained in the books) and tests. The textbooks also include translation exercises from Polish into Ukrainian and from Ukrainian into Polish. Admittedly, they were not considered as competence skills in foreign language learning, they are simply a response to needs reported by students interested in acquiring translation skills, so badly needed in the labor market. They are also a great help in quickly eliminating problems of a lexical/grammatical nature, resulting from linguistic relatedness, and they let us see the beauty and richness of both the mother tongue and the foreign language.

### LEVELS A2+ - B

In the textbooks “Z ukraińskim na ty” and “Kontrastivna gramatika...”, an important teaching element is the comparison of linguistic facts regarding both the students’ native and taught language. The Ukrainian and Polish languages, being both Slavonic languages, are closely related and, because of that, there are similarities between them at different levels of the language system – phonetic, lexical and grammatical (Кононенко 2017). There is a whole range of differences between them, e.g. the accent in Ukrainian is mobile while in Polish it usually falls on the penultimate syllable. Polish can thank its protoslavonic heritage for its nasal sounds [ą] and [ę], which have not been preserved in other Slavic languages. In Polish, there is an unusual category of masculine virile – non-virile. In turn, semantically identical sentences in Ukrainian and Polish may have a completely different word order. For Poles learning Ukrainian, a problem is posed by a huge group of thousands of so-called “interlingual homonyms” (false friends), etymologically unrelated words or else with a common origin, whose meanings have diverged as a result of historical processes. There are also problems for learners due to similar sounding lexemes, with convergent semantics, which differ solely in their stress, as well as similar phrases that differ in one word. Cultural texts

create broad possibilities for constructing exercises comparing these and similar phenomena in Ukrainian and Polish.

Working with a text, including one relating to culture, entails employing primarily tasks of an analytical type, for example, writing down words and expressions from the text relating to a specific thematic group. Of particular teaching value are extensive, multi-stage tasks that give the student the possibility of multifaceted work with the text, on the one hand favoring better acquisition of the language material, and on the other helping to broaden their knowledge about the culture of the Ukrainian nation.

The materials included in the textbooks “Z ukraińskim na ty” and “Kontrastivna gramatika...”, have been provided with glossaries of harder words and expressions. The students’ task is also to use additional lexical works, mono- and bilingual (both traditional and electronic versions), including those prepared at the Department of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Warsaw: (Кoнoнeнкo/ Спiвaк 2008) and (Kononenko/ Mytnik/ Wasiak 2010). They are particularly useful when teaching individual thematic blocks and for broadening students.

An effective language teaching system involves the use of various concepts, techniques and teaching methods. When teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language, the use of cultural subject matter and tasks related to it creates great opportunities to include additional illustrative material in the teaching process (Рoмaнiюк/ Сaнeвcькa 2014). For example, classes devoted to the work of the well-known painter, Maria Prymachenko, may be accompanied by a presentation of her paintings prepared by the lecturer or by students (individually or in groups). Working with a text on applied art, such as traditional Ukrainian toys, embroidered towels or folk ceramics, will be more effective if it is enriched with these items and students are able to hold them in their hands, carefully examine them and in such a way learn about and understand art. In turn, when learning about the subject of national cuisine, a great incentive to learn a language is interactive workshops involving the joint preparation and tasting of dishes, e.g. dumplings stuffed with cherries. In this way, a text and the exercises connected to it become a reference point for conversations on various topics, during which the ability to speak is improved, and students have the opportunity to learn about Ukrainian culture using various means and teaching techniques.

An important element in the methodology of language teaching in a Polish-speaking environment is audio and visual material focusing on Ukrainian culture, material whose authors are Ukrainians, i.e. native speakers. Such a material allows students to listen to the pronunciation and melody of the Ukrainian language, it is very useful in the process of encouraging speaking and listening comprehension both relating to the literary language and its different styles, as well as the basic variety of the spoken language – colloquial language. In addition to proprietary audio materials, teachers also use Ukrainian educational websites and popular services that thematically correlate with the teaching units being taught. They complement teaching materials contained in textbooks with interesting online

material. For example, the textbooks include the lyrics of traditional songs, which are a very important element of Ukrainian musical tradition. They are played during classes. Students are eager to learn and sing them, and they can also take part in competitions for the best performance of a Ukrainian song.

In later stages of language education, we propose employing more difficult tasks related to this subject, for example, filling in gaps in the lyrics of songs students listen to or entering the correct forms of words based on proposed forms in accordance with a recording that is heard. Such exercises were also used for work with recordings of literary works read by the authors (e.g. poems by Lina Kostenko). This makes for quite a difficult exercise, requiring a high level of attention, because the author's intonation and way of speaking may be so different from those orthoepic patterns known to students that even those fluent in a language can experience difficulties. Internet resources, online films, or those on DVD, are also used in work with folk tales, literary and historical texts. In turn, lessons devoted to Ukraine's tourist attractions are accompanied by projections of audiovisual materials on tourism and sightseeing. Multimedia technologies are indispensable in language teaching, in the visual and acoustic absorption of linguistic and cultural material.

The use of the above-mentioned techniques for presenting material affects the "turning on" of different types of visual memory, as well as auditory, sensory, aroma-related and taste-related memory. Mnemonics, or effective ways of memorizing and learning quickly, is based on the use in teaching of non-verbal and associative memory (Strelau 2003; Vockell 2006). When carrying out various tasks related to cultural texts, the student consciously and unconsciously remembers the linguistic material. Detailed work on a text tends to lead to, for example, involuntary memorizing of the meanings of certain words, their spelling or the rules of punctuation. The use of a range of memory techniques while working on a single text affects the neurological processes that fix the material in the memory. Because different types of memory are used during language learning, brain regions are activated in both hemispheres, between which neural connections are formed. Creating a network of such connections is responsible for long-term memory, which results not only in the acquisition of new skills, but also in their absorption and consolidation.

The previously mentioned academic textbook "Kontrastivna gramatika...", is a multi-faceted, universal methodological work, consistently following the principle that there should be a close relationship between theory and practice. The subject of the theoretical section is a description of the shared and different properties of Ukrainian and Polish. The practical part consists of tasks relating primarily to a comparison of various issues in the Ukrainian and Polish languages, tasks which are extremely helpful when teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language in a Polish environment.

The textbook draws greatly from the folk tradition of both nations (songs, fairy tales, riddles, proverbs). Practical experience shows that students particularly enjoy working with jokes and anecdotes with didactic and humorous themes. The an-

ecdotes usually have a dialogue structure that allows one to play roles and act out scenes, and in addition they are easy to remember. They are accompanied by tasks involving, for instance, identifying polite forms of address used in a text and putting them to use in students' own texts or statements.

The textbook contains tasks aimed at improving linguistic competence in the fields of phonetics, vocabulary, phraseology, morphology and syntax. Ukrainian linguistic and cultural phenomena in the texts are consistently compared with Polish phenomena. In the chapter on vocabulary, there are exercises comparing groups of Ukrainian and Polish synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, and paronyms. At the same time, many of the tasks include multiple stages. For example, from some children's poems included, one must note down the diminutive words, divide them according to part of speech, and then translate them into Polish. Some of the exercises are aimed not only at putting theory into practice, but also at encouraging learners to formulate their own generalizations on the basis of the exercises.

The textbook series "Z ukraińskim na ty" is addressed to people with a knowledge of Ukrainian at the pre-intermediate level of A2+. The material presented in the textbooks allows the student to acquire and improve their language skills, allowing them to talk freely in various everyday situations and to acquaint themselves with the culture of Ukrainian language territories.

Lesson units in both textbooks have been divided into blocks. Each block begins with a literary text. These are stories and fairy tales, known primarily to Ukrainian readers, as well as Ukrainian translations of world literature. Word stress is marked in the texts, which is especially helpful for students who speak Polish, and there are glossaries under the texts. Work with a text involves 8–10 tasks of various types. A variety of exercises created with reference to the main texts in the book make the student come back to the cultural material every time with fresh eyes, working with it on many different levels. This tends to cause an intensification of the learning process. And it leads to, not a mechanical, but a verbal/logical appropriation of linguistic units and cultural facts. Visual and auditory memory are then activated, thanks to which the student not only consciously, but also involuntarily, commits to memory both spelling and the lexical/grammatical connections between textual elements.

The next part of the block contains tasks based on various texts. The set of exercises offered covers a broad spectrum of language issues concerning phonetics, lexis, word formation, morphology, syntax, stylistics of the Ukrainian language, as well as spelling issues. The cultural materials are mostly written in a journalistic style. They include texts about New Year and Christmas celebrations in Lviv, Ukrainian dances, and national dishes. Interestingly, they are not only about old traditions, but also about contemporary trends in the development of culture in its broadest sense. These are materials about, amongst other things, artists such as Nina Matviyenko and Evgenia Gapchinska, today's fashion, or Lviv's restaurants. At the same time, as in the textbook "Kontrastivna gramatika...", this textbook series also includes many texts on folk themes – folk songs, fairy tales, riddles and poems – tongue twisters. Also included are materials relating to the culture of other nations,

concerning national cuisine, religions, and holiday customs, which lead to issues of intercultural dialogue. The texts in the second block are accompanied by various types of exercises. We offer multi-aspect forms of work with lexical units, e.g. analyzing and translating words with figurative meanings that occur in the presented material.

The textbook contains an array of multi-element tasks, as is illustrated by a component that uses the lyrics of the song “Under the cherry tree”. The exercise is based on creating the correct forms of verbs and on verbally describing the emotional state of the characters in the work. The text becomes a spur to extend language skills. One must not only write out words belonging to a given lexical/semantic group from the text, but also expand the group and make sentences with the words or compose a new text, e.g. a dialogue.

We also offer exercises that develop creative thinking, consisting, for example, in creating endings for various stories, constructing stories that continue a given thought, or seeking solutions to a highlighted problem. On the part of the teacher it is not important to evaluate the content of what is said, but to create an atmosphere conducive to openness and students freely expressing their own views on people and situations, and to freeing the imagination.

#### LEVELS C1 – C2

Textbooks for advanced levels (e.g. Romaniuk/ Saniewska 2017) offer, among other topics, ones related to raising children, different personality types and their perception in society, personal development, striving for professional and financial success, as well as modern problems such as how people with disabilities cope in the labor market and society, living in poverty, ethics in medicine, organ transplantation, the environment, armed conflicts and security, historical events and other issues.

The work that accompanies the materials contained in the book is interesting, and at the same time demanding, especially at advanced levels, where there are texts about difficult, often controversial issues, e.g. the role of women in modern society, life choices, old age, death, abortion, warfare, etc. As authors, we are aware of what the researcher quoted earlier, K. Miłułka, correctly writes, that: “The reaction of the communicators to the mentioned misunderstandings can be extremely different – starting with a smile or surprise, and ending in indignation and irritation. Sometimes encountering the standards prevailing in a different/foreign culture may even result in culture shock” (Miłułka 2012).

The selection of topics related to contemporary life not only allows us to deepen students’ language skills, but also to familiarize them with the changes taking place in the Ukrainian language, i.e. the appearance of loan words and newly-created words. Tasks in the textbook concerning various levels of grammar and vocabulary, focus primarily on: working with a text and involve filling in gaps, including entire sections of text, individual sentences or words; creating a text from scattered

fragments; using the correct grammatical forms; selecting synonyms and antonyms; deleting incorrectly used words – archaic and colloquial ones, Polonisms, Russianisms, and linguistic units deemed “surzhyk” (this term refers to linguistic forms arising from the mixing of Ukrainian and Russian; they are incorrect grammatically, orthoepically and regarding spelling). In particular, the last few types of tasks are aimed at helping a student who speaks the language at an advanced level, but who still requires further improvement, to produce grammatically and stylistically correct speech.

At the syntax level, the tasks focus on transforming simple and compound sentences, building compound sentences of different types, correctly using conjunctions, and transforming direct speech into reported speech. The textbooks also contain tasks that check students’ knowledge of spelling and punctuation rules (especially the more difficult forms of verb conjugation, numerals, and adjectival and adverbial participles).

Tasks linked to the ability to construct written utterances involve creating sentences using new or difficult words, transforming sentences, and writing: summaries and longer argumentative statements, essays about a topic that has been covered, wishes, invitations, explanations, CVs, and cover letters. In turn, oral utterances include explaining complex concepts and phrases, acting out scenarios and situational dialogues, conducting interviews, discussing various issues raised (in pairs or groups, with or without a moderator), as well as preparing notes of conversations and summing up the views of others.

One form of discussion that involves all the students in a group is “brainstorming”. This method consists in gathering as many solutions as possible to a problem in a short time (e.g. 1–2 minutes). Another form is to discuss a subject suggested by the teacher, leading to the group coming up with a common position on the issue. Some tasks can be performed during classes, and some alone, at home.

Cultural differences are an interesting aspect of language learning and pique the interest not only of beginners (Kostro-Olechowska 2014), they also inspire extremely interesting discussions among those students who have already mastered the language at an advanced level. Therefore, the development of intercultural competence served as the basis for two further publications.

The textbook “Ukraina–Polska. Dialog kultur” (Antoniw/ Romaniuk/ Synczak 2014) has taken into consideration a desire voiced by W. Miodunka (2009) for the inclusion of a range of sociocultural knowledge which responds to the needs of the members of a certain group of learners – in our case – Slavs. Each text therefore presents both sides of the coin, as it were, of chosen aspects such as: well-known figures in the socio-cultural life of Ukraine and Poland, for example the profiles of politicians (Y. Tymoshenko, Z. Brzeziński), historical figures (Saint Olga of Kyiv, Casimir IV Jagiellon), the culture of Kievan Rus, prominent historians (B. Osadchuk, J. Giedroyc), literary figures (Lesya Ukrainka, J. Iwaszkiewicz), musicians (the bands “Okean Elzy” and “Kult”), theatrical figures and organizations (S. Krushelnitska, Teatr 6. Piętro), film directors (S. Parajanov, A. Wajda, A. Hol-

land), artists (M. Prymachenko, J. Nowosielski), fashion designers, media personalities, or academics. The intention of the authors was to offer a textbook for learning the Ukrainian language, one which would include thematically-varied texts, introducing the student to the cultural and linguistic life of Ukraine and which would help them get to know its specificities in comparison with life in Poland. The textbook thus contains authentic texts, most often left in a journalistic or popular-science style, which serve as the basis for language tasks. Each module also contains a text in Polish concerning the issues raised. Audio recordings allow the student to listen to the 'living' language, and develop listening comprehension.

The book contains a variety of grammar, vocabulary, spelling and translation exercises adapted to the needs of the Polish-speaking learner. They include tasks that require creativity, such as writing an application for co-financing a scientific project or a love letter, and solving problems based on certain information given. The selection of texts on offer serves to enrich general and specialist vocabulary, including professional terminology related to the topics covered, and is a starting point for various language tasks, such as: searching for, supplementing, and organizing information on the basis of a text; choosing the right answers; determining the meaning of expressions and phraseologisms from the context; and creating word combinations. An important addition is translation exercises, including creating translation glossaries for the presented texts. Crossword puzzles and language games introduce an incentive to learn the language through play.

Another textbook that uses knowledge of culture in language teaching is "Ukraïns'koû pro kul'turu" (Jakubowska-Krawczyk/ Romaniuk/ Saniewska 2018), in which individual lessons and tasks are based on texts about the visual arts, design, contemporary music and literature. A range of texts present links between culture and everyday life, both private and public – hence there are topics that address issues involving various emotions, including those that accompany: the feeling of love, life choices, making decisions, and competing with others. We didn't fail to pay attention to difficult issues such as the functioning of the media, the reasons for and results of emigration, or the place and role of women in the modern world. Language tasks focus on the consolidation of knowledge and skills acquired in earlier stages of language learning, and are based on the texts presented in the textbook, and take into account different language issues – from morphology, syntax, and stylistics to orthography. They are characterized above all by the increased level of difficulty, and the need to use additional scientific/teaching help, amongst other things Ukrainian spelling rules and various dictionaries, including specialist ones. The textbook contains a variety of language materials: journalistic and literary texts, texts which are also unusual stylistically, because their authors overuse colloquial words, words of foreign origin, archaisms, or Russianisms. Language learners, having achieved language competences at the level of C2, will be able to eliminate not only grammatical errors, but also stylistic ones, and rewrite incorrectly constructed text.

## CONCLUSIONS

The textbooks are the result of a hunt for optimal models to use in the teaching of Ukrainian in a Polish-speaking environment, and a search for how to make these models more effective and improve them. They include various cultural texts, both easily-accessible and niche ones, which the students show great interest in.

Properly selected and systematized material with cultural and real-life content successfully performs not only its basic language teaching function of developing language skills to multiply lexical resources and use them in written and oral praxis, but it also allows a picture of the nation's culture to be created in the learner's consciousness, and it allows students to perceive its native characteristics as well as the relationships between language, mentality and the culture of Poles and Ukrainians. Cultural texts of various types are an impulse to learn more about the language of, and everyday life in, Ukraine, and they are very successful in molding oral and written language skills. We can also add that they are also an elegant, well-received and extremely effective tool in the language teaching, and having linguistic and intercultural competence is a sine qua non for respecting diversity, good communication and developing one's own personal system for perceiving the world.

The output of those researching and teaching Ukrainian as a foreign language in Poland is relatively small in terms of both methodological and theoretical works, as well as teaching materials. We hope that the linguistic/cultural issues outlined in the article, and present in the Ukrainian textbooks prepared at the Ukrainian Department of the University of Warsaw, will serve as a foundation for future, more in-depth studies and teaching works that take into account knowledge about culture.

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