ASSESSING MULTILINGUAL COMPETENCE BASING ON HOLISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

According to the census of 2010, Republic of Tatarstan is inhabited by the representatives of 115 ethnic groups. Among them are Tatar (53.2%), Russian (39.7%) and other nationalities like Udmurt, Mordva, Mari, etc. Taking into account the Republic’s linguistic diversity, modern tendencies and language education policy, the national programme «Preserving, studying and developing state languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and other languages in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014-2020» was adopted.

Basing on the above mentioned programme Kazan Federal University has started the project of multilingual education of gifted children. The project is aimed at developing the national identity, enhancing multilingual interactions and preserving the national legacy of people inhabiting Tatarstan. The lessons were structured according to the multilingual approach that the authors considered crucial in terms of the research. The process of distant learning for schoolchildren of 8-9 grades and 10-11 grades in 11 rural schools of Tatarstan is organized via the Internet. The modules studied are: “Advanced learning of Tatar, Russian and English”, “Content-based instruction through English”, “Advanced learning of Tatar art and culture”.

Using multilingual approach, the authors faced the problem of assessing the level of multilingual (Russian-Tatar-English) competence. Existing language tests are monolingual as they assess only one-language competence. One of the aims of the following research was to develop tests suitable for assessing students’ multilingual competence basing on FREPA (Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures) holistic approach. The following approach states that in order to answer the questions given in one language a child can use the language of cognition or any other language that he/she considers appropriate in the following situation. The following pluralistic approach to teaching and learning cultures and languages refers to pedagogical approaches which involve more than one language and culture into teaching, learning and assessing. At the same time the so-called “singular” didactic approaches consider only one culture or a particular language in isolation.

To assess the level of schoolchildren multilingual competence, testing materials for the first module were developed in Tatar, Russian and English. FREPA descriptors were used as the basis for tests development. It is planned to use the following materials to assess the progress of 25 schoolchildren of the 8-9th grades.

Keywords: multilingual competence, multilingual assessment, holistic approach, distant learning, FREPA.

1 INTRODUCTION

In many places around the world, developing and maintaining multilingualism has become a norm at all educational levels. Even where multilingualism is absent from official educational policy, students often arrive at school with a repertoire of multiple languages, and most of them are encouraged to learn additional languages, whether through schooling or through interaction with peers outside of school.

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languages of the Republic of Tatarstan and other languages in the Republic of Tatarstan in 2014-2020» was adopted.

Basing on the above mentioned programme Kazan Federal University has started the project of multilingual education of gifted children by means of Tatar, Russian and English languages. The project is aimed at developing the national identity, enhancing multilingual interactions and preserving the national legacy of people inhabiting Tatarstan, to study situations, where people from different cultural backgrounds interact, to focus on social attributes through different patterns and cultures of different groups of people.

Holistic views and approaches to multilingualism in education are gaining popularity these days. The lessons are structured according to the multilingual holistic approach that the authors consider crucial in terms of the research. The process of distant learning for schoolchildren of 8-9 grades and 10-11 grades in 11 rural schools of Tatarstan is organized via the Internet. The modules studied are: “Advanced learning of Tatar, Russian and English”, “Content-based instruction through English”, “Advanced learning of Tatar art and culture”.

Using multilingual holistic approach, the authors faced the problem of assessing the level of multilingual (Russian-Tatar-English) competence. Existing language tests are monolingual as they assess only one-language competence. One of the aims of the following research was to develop tests suitable for assessing students’ multilingual competence basing on FREPA (Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures). The following approach states that in order to answer the questions given in one language a child can use the language of cognition or any other language that he/she considers appropriate in the following situation. The following pluralistic approach to teaching and learning cultures and languages refers to pedagogical approaches which involve more than one language and culture into teaching, learning and assessing. At the same time the so-called “singular” didactic approaches consider only one culture or a particular language in isolation.

2 METHODOLOGY

Traditionally, in school settings languages are taught separately with different teachers for each language. The idea that the first/native language should be excluded from teaching the second/foreign language is the core idea of language teaching. Cook [1] gives three reasons for excluding the use of the native language from the L2 class:

- second language acquisition should be close to the process of acquiring the first language;
- languages should be kept separately in learner’s mind to minimize interference;
- if the target language is not used all the time, students do not make the most of the second language learning.

The idea of separating languages has long been affecting language teaching. It is used in different teaching approaches and methods, for example, the direct method that avoids translation and uses the target language only or communicative approach.

Cummins also supported the idea of language separation in terms of Canadian immersion programmes. He considered that “it is pedagogically more sound to use languages separately on an instructional unit than to use them concurrently” [2]. Cummins [2] gives the following reasons to justify the idea of using one language in bilingual settings: students are less bored and more motivated; they have to make more cognitive effort to understand the context, the use of minority language will counteract the influence of the dominant culture; there is no need for the teacher to translate but at the same time more effort is required from the teacher to be understood by the students. Within bilingual context, there are also other reasons for language separation such as the fear of code-switching or interference and the desire to protect the minority language and culture.

In traditional approaches languages are evaluated separately and students’ knowledge of other languages is not taken into account. The use and the influence of other languages are not welcomed.

In 1991 Cook introduced the term multilingualism that is contrasted to the traditional view of separating languages at school. The term multicompetence used by Cook is employed to study the process of second language acquisition within holistic approach. From this view point, L2 user is a whole person and not an incomplete speaker of the L2. Cook [3] defines multicompetence as “the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind or the same community”. He [3] also stated that holistic
In recent years there has been a considerable shift in theory and practice of language teaching from separating languages in the process of teaching and considering them as fixed codes to viewing languages as socially and politically constructed ideological artifacts [4]. The following ideas influenced the development of the following trends in language teaching practice such as translanguaging [5], polilingualism [6], translingual practices [7] etc. However, multilingualism has broader connotation than any of the abovementioned notions.

These ideas are aimed at blurring the boundaries between different languages. Cenoz and Gorter [8] highlight that it is vital to consider the whole linguistic repertoire of multilinguals within educational context so that to activate all their linguistic resources and make them more efficient learners and language users than in traditional approaches.

The advantages of multilingual approach when teaching students with diverse linguistic background are discussed by Cummins [9-10]. He thinks that “using multilingual approach can provide students with different resources, such as activation of the cognate relationships between languages” (Cummins, 2007) [9].

Holistic views and approaches to multilingualism in education are gaining popularity these days but their implementation is not yet widespread. The trend to teach through a multilingual lens is being discussed in scientific literature but it does not easily reach its implementation through language educational policies. The example of this is Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which endorses a multilingual focus.

CEFR, published by the European Council in 1996, promotes intercultural and plurilingual competences that should be developed within European educational context. The following framework gives basic description of the abovementioned competences highlighting the main vectors of their development. The holistic approach was further applied in Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures (FREPA). FREPA is a structured framework for assessing multilinguals nowadays. That is a multifunctional tool for creating teaching and testing materials and for assessing students’ progress in content and language acquisition. According to the authors of FREPA, competences and approaches in CEFR were presented in “additive way and separated from one another” [11]. As a result, students were not encouraged enough to show reflection and promote language learning competence. One of the objectives of FREPA, published in 2007 by the European Center of Modern Languages (Austria), is to fill this gap using “pluralistic approaches”. FREPA is based on four pluralistic approaches that are both language-oriented and intercultural:

- awakening to languages (introducing students to linguistic diversity);
- intercomprehension between related languages (using the knowledge of a related language to learn a new one);
- intercultural approach (relying on phenomena from one or more cultural areas as the basis for understanding others);
- integrated didactic approach to different languages studied (helping learners to establish links between a number of languages, which are taught within school curriculum). [12]

According to FREPA, competence is an interaction of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (or internal resources) [13]. The resources, both internal and external (dictionaries, mediators, etc.), contribute to the formation and activation of plurilingual and intercultural competences. From the other hand, competences constitute complex tasks and specific situations: elements of varying complexity, socially relevant tasks, integration into a context. [14] To master these complex phenomena a student should take advantage of all the external and internal resources and activate abilities to select required resources. The approaches are reflected in “Knowledge”, “Skills” and “Attitudes” areas in the form of descriptors and subdescriptors. For example, “Skills” area is presented by the following descriptors and subdescriptors: S5: Can use knowledge and skills already mastered in one language in activities of comprehension or production in another language: subdescriptor S 5.6: Can identify one’s own reading strategies in the first language (L1) and apply them to the second language (L2).

The example of “Knowledge” area: K3: Verbal and non-verbal communication: subdescriptor 3.4.1: Knows that one can resort to linguistic similarities (e.g. genealogical links, loans, universals) to facilitate communication.
The example of “Attitudes” area: A2: Sensitivity to the existence of other languages, cultures or persons or to the existence of linguistic, cultural or human diversity: subdescriptor 2.2: Sensitivity to linguistic or cultural differences.

![FREPA components](image.png)

**Figure 1. FREPA components. © Michel Candelier / European Centre for Modern Languages**

### 3 RESULTS

We’ve made an attempt to develop tests using FREPA descriptors. The example of the test tasks aimed at assessing subdescriptor S 5.6: *Can identify one’s own reading strategies in the first language (L1) and apply them to the second language (L2)* is presented below.

**Task 1**

In the table below you will find 9 parts of texts written in 3 languages (3 parts of text in each language). Try to recognize these languages and to put the parts in the right order. Answer with the grid!

**Table 1. Grid for the answers.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the language</th>
<th>Put the text in the right order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Texts in three languages.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name of the language</th>
<th>Put the text in the right order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>In 2019, the participants of the Kazan Marathon will run along a new route. The marathon will be held in the capital of Tatarstan on May 4-5.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Йөгерүлəргə старт Үзəк стадион янында бирел incarcer. Марафон трассасы бер айланешка узачан кем шаңарның төн истәлекле үрөнәр — Иккел Татар бистәсе, Казан Кремле, Кремль яр буе, күл санлы спорт объектлары - Баскет-холл, &quot;Татнефть-Аrena&quot;, &quot;Казан Аrena&quot;, Су спорт төрлөрена сараланың башкалар уз эчене алачан. Марафонда катнашуышлар Кремль кем Киров дәмбәләрдә, &quot;Миллениум&quot; күпере буйлап узачанлар. Талап - барлык 42,2 км дөяымына ин аз биеклектәр 100 мөтәрәк артмаска тиеш, дип хәбер ителә ТР Спорт мөөнәләрләр сәййетендә.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Напомним, это будет пятый по счету Казанский марафон. Подать заявку на участие в забеге может любой желающий. Участники могут выбрать одну из 4 дистанций. Забег на 3 км запланирован на 4 мая. Основные старты – на 10 км, 21,1 км и 42,2 км – состоятся 5 мая. Также традиционно в рамках Казанского марафона пройдет детский забег на 600 м.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Исегезгə төшерəбез, бу исəбе буенча бишенче Казан марафоны булачак. Йөгерештə катнашу өчен телəнгə наркем гарйа бира ала. Катнашучылар 4 дистанциянең берсен с айлый алалар. 3 км га йөгерү 4 майга планлаштырылган. Төп стартлар - 10 км, 21,1 км һəм 42,2 км - 5 майда узачак. 

Шулай ук Казан Марафоны кысаларында 600 метргə балалар узышы узачак.

The start will be given at the Central Stadium. The marathon route will be in one circle and will include the main attractions of the city: the Staro-Tatarskaya Sloboda, the Kazan Kremlin, the Kremlin Embankment, numerous sports facilities such as Basket Hall, “Tatneft Arena”, “Kazan Arena”, the Palace of Water Sports, etc. The participants of the marathon will run along the Kremlevskaya and Kirovskaya dams, the Millennium Bridge, according to the website of the Ministry of Sports of the RT.

В 2019 году участники Казанского марафона, который пройдет в столице Татарстана 4-5 мая, пробегут по новому маршруту.

This will be the fifth Kazan Marathon. Anyone can apply for the race. Participants can choose one of 4 distances. The 3 km race is scheduled for May 4. The main starts (10 km, 21.1 km, and 42.2 km) will take place on May 5. Traditionally, a children's run of 600 meters will be held within the framework of the Kazan Marathon.

Старт забегам будет дан у Центрального стадиона. Трасса марафона пройдет в один круг и охватит главные достопримечательности города – Старо-Татарскую слободу, Казанский кремль, Кремлевскую набережную, многочисленные спортивные объекты – Баскет-холл, «Татнефть-Арену», «Казань Арену», Дворец водных видов спорта и т.д. Участники марафона пробегут по Кремлевской и Кировской дамбам, мосту «Миллениум». Основным критерием будет являться минимальный набор высоты до 100 м на протяжении всех 42,2 км, сообщается на сайте Министерства спорта РТ.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Although the holistic perspectives on multilingualism are becoming widespread at the theoretical level, there have appeared some problems concerning their practical implementation especially in terms of assessment. Assessment is complex as it is usually made by external organizations that follow the tradition of language separation. Nowadays there are three main trends in assessing multilingual competences: a multilingual approach towards comprehension in assessment (the importance of using a mother tongue for assessment as multilingual speakers may have problems when they are assessed through the dominant language that they can be weak at) [15], a multilingualism approach towards multilingual scoring (students are assessed differently according to their linguistic background and not as deficient users of their second language) [16] and translanguaging approach in assessment (the possibility to go across languages in language testing, tests should match actual language practices; multilinguals use resources from their whole linguistic repertoire) [17]. We are planning to develop testing materials basing on holistic approach as it is vital to focus on multilingualism paying attention to assessment and taking into account the whole linguistic repertoire of students.

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REFERENCES


