

*S. Ter-Minasova***Cultural Studies in ELT at the University Level:****A View From Russia.***key words: communication, culture, speech production, background knowledge*

An ever-increasing interest, a real boom in area and cultural studies is a natural result of the previous history of the country where it was bottled up for so many years. The triumph of the communicative approach, the urgent need for speech production skills inevitably has led to the idea that the use of language largely depends on the background knowledge of the world where this language is naturally used as a means of communication.

Our practice of ELT has shown that learning rules of grammar as well as learning vocabulary (which usually implies learning “meanings of words”) is not enough to enable learners to use the language to communicate, to develop active skills, the skills of speech production. That kind of ELT was sufficient when English was taught as a dead language, like Latin or Ancient Greek, with the only purpose of reading classical or scientific literature. Nowadays, with new opportunities in the Russian social life, English is demanded first and foremost as an actual means of communication. Developing communicative skills (the latest ‘fashion’ in the world of EL teachers and learners) is a difficult problem everywhere but it is particularly complicated in Russia where for so many years English Language Teaching was generally oriented on recognition while production was neglected. The reason is obvious: for many decades the country was completely cut off from English-speaking world.

And although both recognition and production skills cannot be developed without the background knowledge of the world of the language under study, it is speech production, the actual use of language that makes the importance and

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inevitability of the sociocultural component so evident. Indeed, it is a great misunderstanding to believe that in order to use language, to produce speech, both written and oral, it is enough to know words as lists of meanings and rules of bringing them together in speech. The problem is that the idea of meaning as a reference to reality invariably leads one out of the world of language into the world of reality. Consequently, bringing words together means bringing objects of reality together. The real worlds may coincide in some physical features but the visions of the world by different peoples representing different speech communities do vary.

Thus, if a lack of cultural background knowledge kills a foreign language, turns it into a dead one, then cultural studies are the magic wand that revives it, returns it to life. That is why, in present-day Russia, where real, live communication skills are in such an incredible and unimaginable demand, cultural studies are becoming more and more popular as an indispensable part of Foreign Languages Teaching.

At the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Moscow State University, this subject (which we call "the world of the language under study") occupies one-third of the time allocated to foreign language studies. British cultural studies, for example (as well as American/Australian, etc.), are presented by parallel courses given by both a British and a Russian lecturer.

The idea behind this is very simple: to give the fullest possible picture of the country, to show it through both British and foreign (Russian) eyes. Indeed foreigners, having come from a different culture, notice things that native speakers often take for granted. In my paper I mean to reveal both the actual content of the course and the new original forms of presenting this content.