

RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF A NATIVE SPEAKER

For language teaching, the exchange of experience both at the regional and international levels is a prerequisite for the development of this professional and academic field. The concept of a native speaker is one of the key concepts of linguodidactic discourse. The preferred foreign language teaching strategy by the professional community depends on what meanings and values are contained in this concept. The term 'native speaker' is considered formed, established and unproblematic for intercultural communication, although the definitional analysis of Russian and English dictionary entries has revealed that there is a difference in the understanding of these terms. The article discusses the English and Russian concepts behind the term and describes the modern structure, content and features of the functioning of these concepts in discourse in a comparative aspect. The analysis shows that the English-language and Russian-language concepts have more differences than similarities, which is reflected in the role of a native speaker in teaching foreign languages.

Keywords: native speaker, concept, linguodidactics, academic discourse, English language teaching, international language.

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ПЕРЕОСМЫСЛЕНИЕ КОНЦЕПТА «НОСИТЕЛЬ ЯЗЫКА»

Для преподавания языков обмен опытом как на региональном, так и на международном уровне является необходимым условием для развития данной профессиональной и научной сферы. Концепт «носитель языка» является одним из системообразующих концептов лингводидактического дискурса. От того, какие смыслы и ценности содержатся в данном концепте, зависит предпочитаемая профессиональным сообществом стратегия обучения иностранному языку. Термин «носитель языка» считается сформированным, установленным и непроблемным для межкультурного общения, хотя дефиниционный анализ русскоязычных и англоязычных словарных статей раскрыл, что существует разница в понимании этих терминов. В статье рассматриваются англоязычный и русскоязычный концепты, стоящие за термином, и описывается современная структура, содержание и особенности функционирования данных концептов в дискурсе в сопоставительном аспекте. Проведенный анализ показывает, что англоязычный и русскоязычный концепты имеют больше различий, чем сходств, что отражается на роли носителя языка в преподавании иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: носитель языка, концепт, лингводидактика, научный дискурс, преподавание английского языка, международный язык.

Introduction

The content and structure of the concepts we operate with is formed under the influence of everyday environment. As everyone seems to understand us in daily communication, we tend to believe that we share the same concepts. If misunderstanding occurs, at the interpersonal level we can identify differences in our perception of the world and clear up confusion in the course of a conversation, however, at the level of mass communication, especially intercultural, we cannot firmly establish the content of all concepts.

The illusion of mutual understanding is especially insidious in professional and academic discourses. Since all key concepts are usually terms, fixed in dictionaries, professionals and scholars do not think that a concept can develop new shades of meanings in foreign language discourse under the influence of any local factors. Unfortunately, dictionaries reflect pronounced changes but not the dynamics that led to them. As a result, communities that speak different languages may be completely unaware of the fact that they are already discussing different things, because on the external level they use the same words.

While any professional or academic community may undergo this effect, it is the humanities discourses that are most at risk. Scholars involved in these fields of knowledge normally operate with ideas and abstract concepts. Even if the object of study exists in the material world, it is usually not universal and culturally specific.

One such discourse is the discourse on teaching English or ELT discourse. Any discourse related to education is constantly subject to socio-cultural and political influence, but the unprecedented spread of the English language makes the ELT discourse unique. Back in the 70s of the twentieth century, this discourse was not independent, it was part of the general linguodidactic discourse. Then the worldwide study of English led to the creation of a separate industry, which attracted a large number of specialists. As a rule, any large professional or academic group generates its own discourse. Thus, today the ELT discourse is separated from the discourse about teaching other languages in the English language.

One of the core concepts of the ELT discourse is *native speaker*. In language teaching, achieving a native-like level of communicative competence is traditionally the goal, and native speaker acts as a resource for shaping the content of learning. It is logical only if identifying a native speaker is not problematic. In the case of English, which is the official language of communication in about 70 countries and is spoken by half the world, the issue of a native speaker is debatable. Thus, the purpose of

the article is to identify all the meanings enclosed in the concept of *native speaker* in the modern English-speaking ELT discourse and to compare it with the concept of the same name in modern Russian-speaking linguo-didactic academic discourse.

Literature review

Many English-speaking and Russian-speaking authors have addressed the issue of a native speaker. A. Davies, J. Jenkins, V. Cook, p. Medgyes, L. Smith consider the role and importance of a native speaker in terms of teaching English as a non-native language. These authors criticize *native speaker* as a reference point in teaching English. B. Kachru and Z. G. Proshina address this term from the standpoint of sociolinguistics and the World Englishes paradigm.

V. Cook and p. Medgyes question the privileged status of a native speaker as a teacher. Unlike a non-native teacher, an untrained native speaker has not experienced difficulties in mastering a non-native language, has not developed their own language learning strategies, cannot compare English with the student's native language, and cannot understand the student's psychological state. In their opinion, only a native speaker with a special education and a high level of acquisition of the student's native language can be as effective as a non-native teacher [Cook 1999, 2015; Medgyes 1992, 2000].

J. Jenkins and L. Smith suggest new linguodidactical models that are alternative to English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), which consider a native speaker as a learning model and a target interlocutor. They both start from the fact that English today functions as an international language or lingua franca. L. Smith promotes teaching intercultural communication for both native and non-native speakers, focusing on the features of the varieties of the English language that are most used in a particular region, while J. Jenkins is more radical and considers a native speaker as an unnecessary element [Smith 1976, 1981]. According to her, when non-native speakers communicate with each other, the accuracy is not mandatory and it is necessary to study only what can lead to communicative failure [Jenkins, 1996, 2004, 2006, 2012].

A. Davies attempts to give a complex answer to the question "Who is a native speaker?" in his book. Nowadays as the number of bilingual and multilingual users of English is growing, 'nativespeakerness' seems to be more of a spectrum than a specific phenomenon. He covers psycholinguistic, linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects and concludes that there are

two kinds of judgements: of identity and of language and the boundaries between first and second language speakers are rather blurred [Davies 2002].

The World Englishes paradigm deals with the pluricentricity of the English language. Proponents of this paradigm believe that there cannot be cultural dominance of one variety over others [Kachru 1983, 2009]. Since there is no single English language, a more accurate term is a native speaker of one of the varieties of English. Changes in the concept, in turn, are reflected in their ideas about the goals and approaches to learning English [Proshina 2005, 2020].

Although many researchers have addressed the issue of the term 'native speaker', no one has analyzed its functioning in the ELT discourse in dynamics and has not carried out cross-cultural comparisons of the perception of this concept.

Methods and material

The material of the study is presented by academic articles and scientific papers in the field of methods of teaching English as a non-native language. To collect materials, we used the method of continuous sampling for the keyword 'native speaker' using the search engine Google Scholar, Google Books and electronic libraries E-library and Cyberleninka. In total, 188 academic papers with the key term are analyzed: 108 in English and 80 in Russian.

For a comprehensive consideration of the concept, a number of methods is applied: definitional analysis, axiomatic analysis, contextual analysis, fractal modeling method and comparative method. Definitional analysis allows revealing the content side of the term, which is the "name" of the concept under study. Referring to lexicographic sources allows us to analyze at the initial stage the degree of correspondence between the English and Russian terms that are considered to be full equivalents. Axiomatic analysis reveals the value foundations on which the content of the concept and the rules for its functioning in discourse are built. Contextual analysis is used as a tool for identifying value relationships between the key concepts of discourse. Although academic discourse tends to be emotionally sterile, such markers as modal verbs, parenthesis, generalizations, appeals to well-known facts, evaluative and expressive vocabulary make it possible to describe the value base of the discourse on a certain synchronic cut. Also, when considering the discourse in dynamics, axiomatic analysis allows us to see the change in the value base. The fractal modeling method is used to visualize the structure and content of the concepts on

a certain synchronic cut. The comparative method is used to compare the features of the structure, content and functioning of the Russian and English concepts in the ELT discourse.

Results

The analysis of the definitions of the term 'native speaker' in Russian and English shows that some difference in the content and functioning of the concept has already been manifested and recorded in dictionaries. The English term is more controversial and problematic, which is reflected even quantitatively: English-language dictionary entries are more voluminous. Qualitative analysis of definitions shows that the English and Russian terms share a common semantic core. Both terms note that a native speaker is someone who has been fluent in the language since childhood, has a high level of language competence and a high level of development of speech skills. However, The English term lists controversial points such as the inconsistency of the criteria for identifying a native speaker, the role and place of a native speaker in teaching English as a non-native language, the status of bilinguals and multilinguals. The Russian term focuses on the need for a deep understanding of sociocultural norms and the identification of a person as a representative of a certain sociocultural community.

A contextual analysis of the use of the term shows that in the 70s and 80s the Russian-speaking and English-speaking academic communities had almost the same understanding of the role of a native speaker in teaching foreign languages and had a common value base. There was a consensus that a native speaker is a reliable source of information about language norms and the goal of language learning is to achieve native-like competence and to be able to communicate fluently with a native speaker. The logical consequence was the idea of a native speaker as a learning model and an ideal teacher.

At the present stage massive changes have taken place in the structure and content of the English language concept in the English-speaking ELT discourse. *Native speaker* is gradually losing its value, and *non-native speaker* becomes a more significant concept. A combination of several factors triggered this process. Firstly, it is the spread of the English language. The number of non-native speakers greatly outnumbers the number of native speakers, taking into account all varieties. Secondly, the change in the functioning of the language in the world. English is the language of international communication and the number of contacts in it as a lingua franca is constantly growing. Thirdly, in many non-English-speaking countries it is English that is a compulsory subject in various educational

institutions, which led to a sharp increase in the number of non-native speaker teachers. Thus, *non-native speaker* becomes, if not a central, then an equal concept, having positive characteristics, while *native speaker* contains criticism and negativity and becomes a symbol of imperialism, neocolonialism and discrimination.

Although the English concept has significantly changed its structure and content, *native speaker* in the Russian-speaking linguodidactic discourse has not undergone any special changes. An educated native speaker of precisely British, less often American English is still an indisputable learning model. A teacher who is a native speaker of these language varieties is considered a great value, regardless of their qualifications. Changes have occurred only in the connection *native speaker — target interlocutor*. In modern Russian-language linguodidactic discourse, the ultimate goal is not only communication with native speakers, but communication with the whole world which is recorded in official documentation. Most teachers, educators and researchers acknowledge the fact that English is the language of international communication and that most of the communication takes place between non-native speakers, and the number of bilinguals is constantly growing. Intercultural communication has become an important aspect in the teaching of foreign languages (Figure).

Discussion

In the English-speaking ELT discourse identifying a native speaker of English (or Englishes) and their role in teaching is highly debatable issue. This has resulted in the search for new linguodidactic models that meet modern realities. Traditionally, English in English-speaking countries has been taught under the model of English as a second language (ESL), and in non-English-speaking countries it has been taught under the model of English as a foreign language (EFL). In both cases, the teaching was focused on mastering the norms of a particular variant of English, without taking into account the identity, creativity and needs of the student. A number of scholars have suggested several alternative models: international English (IE) [Quirk 1981], English as a lingua franca (ELF) [Jenkins 2006, 2012], English as an international language (EIL) [Smith 1981], the translingual learning model [Garcia, Rubdy, Alsagoff 2014; Zamel 1997]. Despite significant differences, all these models take into account the new functioning of the English language as a language of intercultural communication, its pluricentricity and the diversity of the English language. However, none of the suggested models has become a full-fledged replacement for traditional approaches yet.

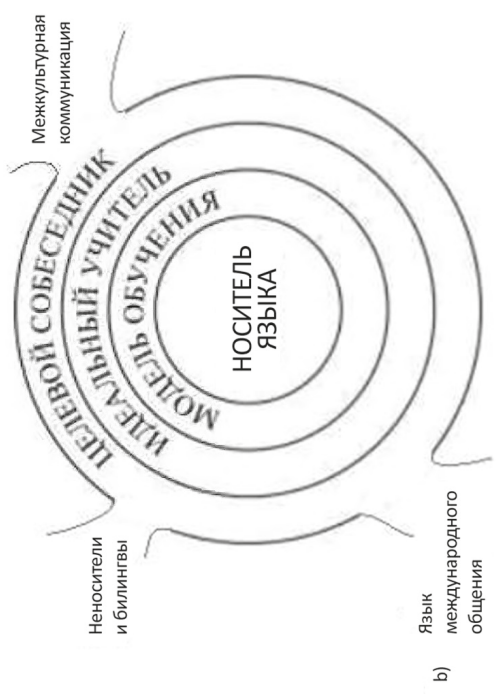
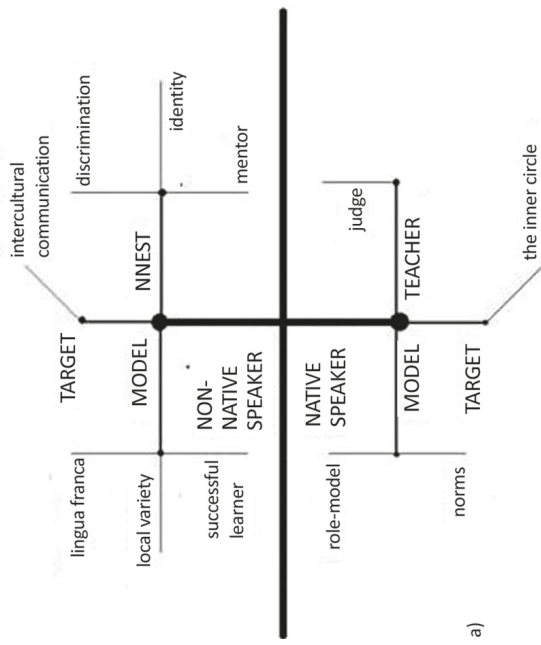


Fig. a) The modern structure and content of the concept native speaker in the English-language academic linguodidactic discourse;
 b) The modern structure and content of the concept native speaker in the Russian-language academic linguodidactic discourse

Note: Носитель языка — native speaker, модель обучения — learning model, идеальный учитель — ideal teacher, целевой собеседник — target interlocuter, язык международного общения — language of international communication, носители и билингвы — non-native speakers and bilinguals, межкультурная коммуникация — intercultural communication.

The Russian-speaking linguodidactic discourse continues to support the model of English as a foreign language with all its characteristics, although the new status of the English language in the world is recognized. It is worth noting that in the last decade, separate articles began to appear predicting the need to change the linguodidactic model, but at the moment even an outline of a specific strategy for a new language education in Russia has not been proposed [Proshina 2012; Lovtsevich, Ryan 2016]. Any suggestions about changing the linguodidactic model stumble upon two fundamental problems: dependence on language norms and a strong connection between the target language and the national culture of the taught language. The analysis shows that the Russian-speaking professional and academic community is currently not ready to give up relying on the norms of British English, as this is the strongest value connection in the *native speaker* concept. However, changes in the development of students' sociocultural competence are possible, since the connection between *native speaker* and *target interlocutor* is weakening. Thus, a hybrid linguodidactic model can be formed that combines the teaching of the language itself, as in EFL, and the teaching of culture, as in EIL.

Conclusion

The term 'native speaker' seems unproblematic in direct translation, but comparing the content, structure and functioning of concepts in English and Russian linguodidactic academic discourses, we see significant differences that lead to changes in language education. The English-language concept has a dual structure: *native speaker* is closely related to the term 'non-native speaker'. Earlier achieving native-like competence used to be the goal of learning, now a non-native English speaker who has reached a high level of communicative competence is offered as a role model. The idea of *target interlocutor* has changed, as the number of contacts in English between non-native speakers exceeded the number of contacts between native speakers and non-native speakers. The role of the teacher in the classroom has also changed, scholars write about the benefits of learning with non-native English speakers, as they are aware of the difficulties of learning a non-native language and can act as an achievable model.

The Russian-language concept remains more solid. It has a clear centripetal structure and firm links between *native speaker* and other key concepts, like *learning model* and *ideal teacher*. However, the Russian linguodidactic discourse reflects the changes that have taken place in the functioning of the English language in the world and considers not only native English speakers as target interlocutors.

The concept of the native speaker of the target language is an important factor in determining the linguodidactic model of teaching, however, the degree of its influence on the discourse still needs to be more deeply investigated and assessed, as well as the relationship of this concept with other key concepts of linguodidactic discourse, which are not mentioned in the article.

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