

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE FORMATION OF THE RUSSIAN TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' BILINGUAL STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the socio-cultural factors that motivate stable bilingual strategies of the technical university students, necessary for their future career and employment in the new economic and social conditions in Russia. Particular attention is paid to such factors as the intensification of the modern technical university's international activities and the formation of a cultural capital. The students' attitudes towards the priority selection of English language are reviewed, considering instrumental and universal interests. The data cited were obtained from the empirical research conducted among the students of 1-4 courses of study at Platov South-Russian State Polytechnic University (NPI) during 2010-2013.

Key Words: bilingual strategy; motivation; socio-cultural factors; interests; cultural capital; language learning

FATTORI SOCIOCULTURALI CHE CONTRIBUISCONO ALLA FORMAZIONE DI STRATEGIE BILINGUI NEGLI STUDENTI DELL'UNIVERSITÀ POLITECNICA RUSSA

SINTESI

L'articolo considera i fattori socioculturali che negli studenti del politecnico motivano lo sviluppo di strategie bilingui stabili, necessarie per le loro future carriere e occupazione nelle nuove condizioni economiche e sociali in cui la Russia si è ritrovata. Si presta particolare attenzione a fattori come l'intensificazione delle attività internazionali offerte presso questa università politecnica moderna e la formazione del capitale culturale. Vengono esaminati gli atteggiamenti degli studenti nei confronti della scelta prioritaria della lingua inglese, in relazione agli interessi utilitaristici e generali. I dati citati sono stati ricavati da una ricerca empirica condotta tra gli studenti dei corsi di studio I-IV all'Università politecnica statale Platov della Russia meridionale (NPI) negli anni 2010-2013.

Parole chiave: strategia bilingue, motivazione, fattori socioculturali, interessi, capitale culturale, apprendimento delle lingue

INTRODUCTION

The most important socializing institution providing primarily vertical social mobility in modern societies is education. Getting an education is not only a preparation for the implementation of a certain type of professional activity in the future, but also the ability to acquire a kind of a social status, while a diploma of higher education becomes a symbol of a social status, thereby emphasizing the symbolic aspect of education itself.

Over the last decade Russian higher education system is in a state of permanent transformations, caused by changes in the functioning and the development of the society.

One of the priorities is to prepare not only high-skilled professionals, but also a new type of personality possessing creativity, mobility, flexibility, ability to work in teams and not only in local economic systems, but also in multicultural business environments.

Therefore, bilingual strategies acquire a special significance for students, by which we mean a system of social and cultural views of an individual on the use of linguistic knowledge throughout his life, orienting him to the active learning (or exclusion) of a foreign language during the professional knowledge acquisition and guiding his behavior for a long period of time (Susimenko, 2003; 2008).

Realizing the importance of the formation of sustainable bilingual strategies of today's university students aimed at cross-cultural communication and formation of a bilingual person and the need for specialists of technical (engineering) profile having good knowledge of a foreign language in conditions of a market economy in Russia and globalization trends, we conducted an empirical study, which main purpose was to determine the type of bilingual strategies that guide students in the process of secondary socialization at a technical university. The goal has been realized in the course of the following tasks: identifying external motivational factors contributing to the formation of sustainable bilingual strategies; defining the role of the intensification of the international activities of the university as a motivator towards sustainable bilingual strategies; typology of students and their division into groups according to their bilingual strategies defined by their subjective interests. The originality of the study is that it suggests an attempt not just to explore a degree of second language acquisition by the technical university students, but identify the role of bilingual education in the development of future life and career, and enhancing graduates' professional mobility. It was found that during the professional socialization of future engineers bilingual preferences have different value and rank high/low in the prolonged professional expectations of the students.

METHODS

To imagine how external motivational factors contribute to the formation of strong bilingual strategies that

students of the technical universities are guided with when learning a foreign language, we conducted a sociological research based on the method of a survey "in which a sample of respondents drawn from a specific population respond to questions either in an interview or on a questionnaire" (Kornblum, 2008).

To realize our survey a questionnaire was developed consisting of 71 questions. Most of the questions (59) dealing with the motives of learning a foreign language, its value in the hierarchy of university disciplines for a student, review of a foreign language as a status category, its impact on the future professional career include choice by the students of one of the suggested answers (but not more than 3), some of the questions (7) concerning the quality and effectiveness of teaching a foreign language at the university, as well as self-assessment of foreign language acquisition involve a five-point scale for rating by the students, the rest of the questions are just informative (sex, age, department, foreign language, the number of years one has been learning a foreign language for). In total, from 2010 to 2013 1507 students filled in a questionnaire. The analysis of the results allowed us to come to certain conclusions.

Motives of choice and learning a foreign language correlate with motives of getting a higher education, the choice of which is more likely to be related to the sense of duty and certainty, as it is a compulsory subject implying passing relevant credits and examinations, the absence of which makes getting a diploma impossible. However, the number of students who feel "forced" to learn a foreign language is reducing from year to year.

Having determined that the number of students whose bilingual strategies are indifferent is decreasing, it was decided to identify the factors that mostly contribute to the formation of sustainable strategies of bilingual students. The conducted survey analysis has shown that the intensification of the international university activity is the main motive for a sustainable bilingual strategy for 27% of students who aim to participate in student exchange programs (8%), who are eager to participate in international conferences (11%), in international student projects (e.g. business administration game Workshop, held annually by the University of Applied Sciences of Southern Westfalia, Germany, being partner university of Platov South-Russian State Polytechnic University (NPI) (7%), who are planning to defend their master's theses abroad (2%).

The chain "interest-demand-value" has been of a particular interest to the authors. However, we relied on the fact that "interests – are specific social results that benefit a particular individual or a group. Such interests can be perceived and pursued by an individual or a group, as well as be set by the others" (Gardner, 2001). An interest is a conscious motive of activity since an interesting subject becomes a "sphere of objectives" of a student due to some inducement. If interests have led to a specific activity, have become motives for such an

No.	Variants of answers	Total according to the sampling	%	1st course of study	%	4th course of study	%
1	The ability to communicate in an intercultural environment	337	38,1	167	18,9	170	19,2
2	An opportunity to become a bilingual person	70	7,9	52	5,9	18	2
3	The use of new information technologies	229	25,9	110	12,4	119	13,5
4	The ability to understand authentic literature of professional orientation	126	14,2	31	3,5	95	10,7
5	An opportunity to have high academic results in the subject	112	12,7	106	12,0	6	0,7

Table 1: Students' interests in learning English (2013)

activity, one can talk about the motivational process in which a group of motivators or factors that determine human decisions (motivational determinants) is distinguished, including preferences, external social situation, one's own resources (opportunities), internal social situation (the situation in which the individual finds himself at a given time), the condition of the goal achievement, the consequences of one's actions (short-term and long-term ones).

The survey conducted showed that students of technical universities are mostly interested in learning English rather than other foreign languages. The number of such students comprised about 89% of all respondents. There are many reasons for this: historical traditions (the last Russian monarch Nicholas II kept his diaries in English); political and economic expediency, the necessity to develop trade, cultural, technical ties with other countries, willingness to take part in international research and educational projects, conferences, to be accepted into the student exchange programs, to facilitate the use of modern technologies, etc. It should be noted that extrinsic motivation is typical for students who intentionally decide to learn a certain language. Extrinsic motivation is determined by two types of motivation: narrow (instrumental) and universal (a broad, integrated).

It is pleasant to note that, despite the fact that bilingual instrumental strategies still remain dominant, the number of students with bilingual universal strategies increased in comparison with 2010, when their number comprised only 2.1%. That is, there is an increase in the number of students for whom it is important not only to achieve good progress within the academic assessment and use a foreign language in the instrumental context, but also to have an opportunity to become a bilingual person, assuming acquisition of linguacultural, socio-cultural and social competencies in the field of foreign language culture. It should be specified that the survey of the 1st-year-students was conducted in the summer semester as it was useless to poll students in the winter se-

mester when they just started to learn a foreign language at the university. 4th-year-students were surveyed at the beginning of the winter semester, as they had already completed the academic (required) cycle of learning a foreign language at higher school and by their answers we can determine the type of bilingual strategies they pursue.

Young people are quite sensitive to changes in economic situation. The transition to market economy appeared to be a strong extrinsic motivator to acquire the skills enabling students to enhance their social status and the level of income in the future that is directly related to the introduction of the concept of cultural capital by Bourdieu, that may be reached due to family background and its values and by means of education. A. Giddens analyzing his theory underlines that cultural capital is connected with symbolic capital representing "prestige, status and other forms of social honor, which enables those with high status to dominate with lower status". He stresses the possibilities of capital's exchanges leading to the "trade" of cultural capital for economic capital which increases changes to get a well-paid job and "advantage over other applicants". Moreover, according to A. Giddens "those with high social capital may know the right people or move in the right social circles and be able to effectively exchange this social capital for symbolic capital – respect from others and increased social status" (Giddens, 2009).

As for foreign language acquisition, students of technical universities in modern education environment have opportunities to gain rather high level of proficiency in foreign languages attending different courses which are available at universities. Most of them consider foreign language acquisition as a substantial contribution to their cultural capital, which can help them in professional careers in the near future which can be seen in our empirical data. The information shown in Figure 1 was obtained as a result of questioning the students (graduates of 2013) in the period immediately be-

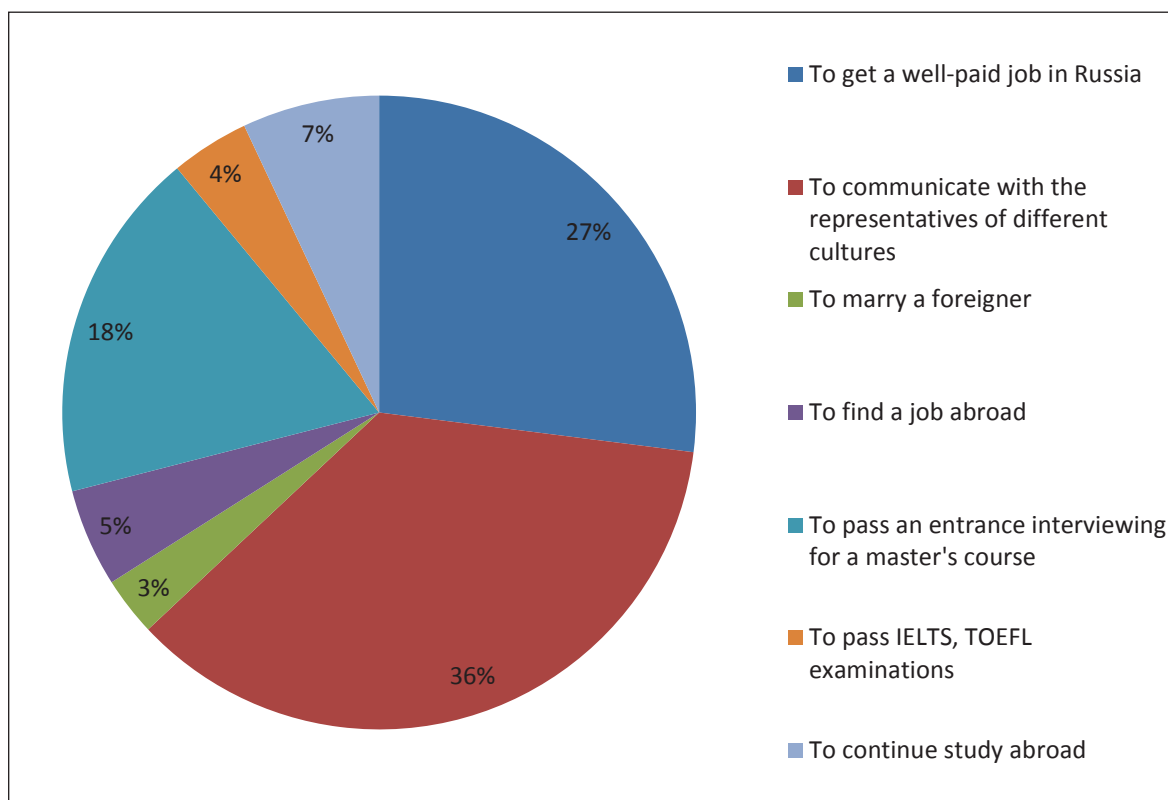


Fig. 1: Intentions of students to use a foreign language after the graduation from the University (final-year undergraduates taking bachelor's course)

fore defending their graduation theses. Those were just the students who indicated “the ability to communicate in an intercultural environment” and “an opportunity to become a bilingual person” as important goals of mastering a foreign language, their total number amounted up to 188 people.

The above data obtained from the fore-mentioned questioning of the 4th-year- students show that they associate bilingual education with an access to social benefits, with an occupational mobility, as in this way they are becoming aware of themselves as part of a particular social community that has an advantage in achieving good things of life (Susimenko, 2006). The desire to be identified with such a community socializes their interests and is an important motivator for learning foreign languages, primarily English (Moore, 2009).

Another motive that promotes the formation of sustainable bilingual strategies is the need for access to quality education that is directly related to the demand for knowledge on the part of society. However, this demand depends on the subjective interests of students, which can be differentiated into three main groups. The first group consists of the students whose second language acquisition serves as a major terminal value. The second group comprises of those students whose second

language acquisition serves as a tool or a possible start-up to further attempts to contact with foreign employers, firms, joint ventures, etc. The third group can be referred to indifferent students who have no certainty of goals and direct orientation, typical of the first two groups.

For the first two groups of students the motivation to learn a foreign language is caused by an individual need to expand one's internal capacities, on the one hand, since different languages make it possible to look at the world through a wide lens, overcoming stereotypes of the stagnant consciousness. On the other hand, the motivation is caused by the socio-cultural situation in the society: it is impossible to talk about a high-quality professional in the modern world who does not speak at least one foreign language, since having good computer skills and speaking English have become necessary qualities of specialists that are in demand in the labor market.

It is also necessary to emphasize that for the first group of students, globalization processes affecting their personal disposition and status characteristics are a significant motivator. In the transition to an information society, a catalyst for which are the processes of globalization, language identity and language competence become one of the governing conditions of social

success. Social identity of a former Soviet student was under the influence of imposing a Newspeak (the Soviet version of the Russian language) and no real motivation for learning foreign languages, which were only used by a small group of Soviet specialists (diplomats, interpreters, representatives of creative professions). In the new socio-economic conditions in Russia, on the one hand, there was a “depressurization” of the Russian language, and, on the other hand, there was a real “boom” in learning foreign languages (especially English). Enhancing motivation for the formation of sustainable bilingual strategies is largely due to the concept of globalization, including the focus on the diversification of education and increase in the competitiveness of a specialist due to the skills beyond the purely professional activities. Students of the first two groups are sensitive to these trends, and include foreign language competence in their professional portfolio, thus demonstrating the focus on a sustainable bilingual strategy.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The process of economic globalization cannot but affect the increasing role of English language in Russian society that correlates with its worldwide spread for over the past 50 years. According to D. Crystal, Russia is in an Expanding Circle of nations where learning English language becomes a priority, emphasizing that modern professionals require qualities like a good knowledge of English language, intelligence, creativity, ability to work with people, stress resistance, persistence in achieving their goals (Crystal, 2003). This opinion coincides with the opinion of the most practicing foreign language teachers who believe that in Russia a foreign language is finally considered as the “non-linguistic university graduates’ tool of professional work in the new economic conditions” (Lesokhina, 1999).

The bilingualism mastering in the context of globalization processes is no less important, which helps to overcome communicative and cultural contradictions for the humanity survival, requiring an existence of a “new humanism”, based on cultural competence and social tolerance of human behavior principles. “Regarding this, we cannot ignore the possibility of bilingual education to act as a method of a modern specialist’s socialization that is able to feel himself adequately in terms of international cooperation and interaction” (Litvinenko, Levchegova, 2006).

Demand for students possessing linguistic and intercultural competence in a foreign language that is actually the key characteristics of a bilingual, is also caused by the expansion of international activities of modern Russian universities undertaking significant efforts to provide students with every opportunity to learn foreign languages. For example, since the mid-90s of the 20th century, many technical Russian universities have introduced a program to obtain an additional education

“Interpreter in the field of professional communication”, that has enabled students to receive the corresponding diploma. However, the demand for foreign language specialists depends not only on the university administrations’ efforts, but primarily on the students’ motivation to master foreign languages.

According to general ideas, “a motive - is not any impulse (understanding as a state) arisen in a human body, but the inner conscious motivation reflecting a person’s willingness to act” (Ilyin, 2000). Motivation in education can influence the way of students’ learning and their attitude to different subjects. According to Ormrod it can have several effects (Ormrod, 2003):

- direct behavior towards particular goals;
- lead to increased effort and energy;
- increase initiation of, and persistence in, activities;
- enhance cognitive processing;
- determine what consequences are reinforcing;
- lead to improved performance.

Thus, as a motive of educational activity all factors that contribute to the manifestation of educational activity are implied, they are needs, interests, attitudes, sense of duty, etc. Hence, the bilingual motivation – is students’ attitude to a foreign language and to the culture of its native-speakers, as well as students’ focus on the acquisition of another language, recognizing the value of being a bilingual. On the basis of the Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the need for mastering bilingualism should be attributed to the necessity for respect and self-actualization that leads to “self-confidence, confidence in one’s value, strength, abilities and adequacy, feeling of one’s significance and necessity in the world” (Maslow, 2006).

As for motivation connected with acquiring foreign language it is the main element which determines success in learning another language in the classroom setting (Gardner, 2001). As a rule two kinds of motivation are considered as the most significant: intrinsic motivation, which implies that students are personally interested in learning foreign language because they think it is important, or they get some satisfaction from it either moral or instrumental. Extrinsic motivation is associated with external factors such as praise, recognition, or a system of rewards (D rnyei, 2005). Not only social contexts and cultural environments but also socio-economic factors play an important part in influencing foreign language learning outcomes (Kormos, Kiddle, 2013; Muñoz, 2008; Ardasheva, Tong & Tretter, 2012). The division in motivational variables is highlighted between rural students and language learners from provincial and metropolitan areas (Lamb, 2012). Among the factors influencing the levels of motivation in learning foreign languages, teacher’s qualification and resourcing as well as class sizes are also stated (Hu, Gao, 2014).

Formation of bilingual strategies in higher education plays a certain role in the development of social and

cultural identity of future professionals, as an independent dimension of social stratification, the symbol of the position occupied in the status hierarchy, a mark of the appropriate lifestyle. Considering bilingual strategies in this perspective, we relied on the works of Henry Tajfel and John Turner. According to J. Turner, the cognitive system of an individual includes two major subsystems: the personal and social identities. The first one relates to self-determination in terms of physical, intellectual and moral traits of character. The latter one is made up of individual identities and is determined by personal affiliation to different social categories (Turner, 1982).

Analyzing identity as a tool of social orientation of the individual, in the course of which not only Self-image is shaped, but also the image of the group the individual affiliates himself to, H. Tajfel defines the group as a set of individuals who perceive themselves as members of the same social category, share emotional consequences of self-determination and achieve some degree of consistency in the evaluation of the group and their membership in it. (Tajfel, 1979). Identity as a reflexive mechanism of social knowledge is manifested on three levels: the subconscious (W. James, Z. Freud), conscious (E. Erickson, G.H. Mead, Y. Habermas, P. Berger, T. Luckmann) and the level of self-awareness (Charles Cooley, J. Hoffmann, T. Hopf, M. L. Schneider et al.). In this paper, attention is focused on a conscious level and the level of consciousness that allows us to consider identity as a “tool of social orientation” and a result of “the process of socialization on the basis of selection and formation of the life model”.

Currently, all institutions of higher education, including Russian ones, are keen on admission and graduation of the students with the knowledge of foreign languages, especially those possessing not only linguistic, but also linguistic-cultural, socio-cultural and social competences, the presence of which determines the individual's degree of bilingualism. One of the external factors that contribute to active strategies of bilingual students in a technical university is the intensification of the international activities of a particular university that has become one of the most important requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, especially after Russia signed the Bologna declaration (Susimenko, Shcherbakova, 2002).

It should be noted that in the last decade, the universities' international activity, including technical universities, has become a characteristic feature not only for universities, which are located in major cities of Russia, but also for institutions of higher education, which location is associated with a concept of a provincial town. Meanwhile, the “provincial” location does not mean “provincial” educational activities undertaken by the university. For example, the very first technical University in the south of Russia, founded in 1907 at the request of the Don Cossacks (Platov South-Russian State Polytechnic University (NPI)) for more than 100 years

has been successfully training engineers of different specializations, and actively expanding international activity on main directions: scientific and technical cooperation within the framework of partnership relations with foreign universities and research centers; education services provided to the citizens of foreign countries; exchange education of students, postgraduates, young scientists with the support of various funds; arrangement of student practical training abroad, student group exchange during the holidays; professional development of lecturers at foreign universities; participation of the faculty in the international conferences and workshops, organization of conferences with the international participation, relations with foreigners – former students, who graduated from the university.

CONCLUSIONS

External socio-economic and socio-cultural factors shape the intrinsic motivation and bilingual strategies of technical university students in the process of secondary socialization. Despite the fact that secondary socialization processes do not involve a high degree of identification, as an engineering education can be obtained in the course of a very rational, emotionally neutral education, receiving a language education usually involves a high degree of identification with experts in this field (interpreters, diplomats, secretaries) which means achieving at least a coordinative level of bilingualism, when two language systems remain independent. However, quite apparent are the abilities not only to operate with language code, but also to select the channel through which the code is implemented, to take into account situational variables that modify this choice, as well as socio-linguistic rules, which allow a coherent speech and maintain or establish social relations (Bell, 1976.) In this case, the teacher's role as a personality increases, i.e. socializing staff takes role of significant others in relation to the socialized individual.

Awareness of oneself as a future highly skilled professional, who speaks fluent foreign language, the student generates an image of a social world, a part of which is the conception of himself as a constituent of this world, i.e. he forms his social identity (Harish, 2014).

We do not consider bilingual strategies in isolation from other social processes, they are an integral component of professional orientation. Identifying himself with the social group of bilinguals, a man seeks to explain the causes and consequences of his group solidarity, to answer the questions “Why is it my group?” and “What does that mean?” Besides, the state of social identity can be of various degrees of awareness. The more diverse and wider an individual gets into his role, the more he/she is aware of belonging to it and identifies himself with this role.

Thus, the process of students' socialization at the university is mainly caused by internal motivations and

needs, as well as objective life conditions both of students and the university. The behavior line of each student is formed in accordance with his own ideas about his future and the objective circumstances of the real life, aimed at an active or passive integration into a new socioeconomic situation. In modern Russian society social stratification is being developed in which a social position reflects an ability to adapt to these changes. The language training, its level, all together constituting the essence of bilingual strategies of modern students, can be referred to strategies aimed at acquisition of the cultural capital that promotes self-adapting to the market economy conditions, at building a successful career and at integration into global international activities.

The conclusions seem to be of interest in order to improve the efficiency of higher technical education in Russia, as it gives an idea of the part that bilingualism plays as a social-and-communicative component of professional socialization of students of technical universities, which are located out of the "capital cities" of the country (Moscow, St. Peterburg, Novosibirsk). The pro-

posed typology of bilingual student strategies is the basis for introducing changes in the curricula and programs. The administration of the universities face the issues of organizing additional foreign language classes (courses) for students who demonstrate a desire to form sustainable bilingual strategies and improving material and technical base of foreign languages departments. Language teachers also have to develop motivation for mastering a foreign language among students pursuing the "indifferent" strategy, using non-traditional methods of teaching and extracurricular activities. This study may also be of interest to the educators and researchers from the countries that are engaged into the "Expanding Circle" of the spread of English, for the focus of technical universities on training professionals in the field of technology and engineering can leave on the periphery of the educational process the task of formation of bilingual and bi-cultural personalities, which is very essential for a mutually beneficial and non-confrontational coexistence and cooperation between different nations in all spheres of human activity in the modern globalized world.

DRUŽBENO-KULTURNI DEJAVNIKI, KI PRISPEVAJO K OBLIKOVANJU DVOJEZIČNIH STRATEGIJ PRI ŠTUDENTIH RUSKE TEHNIŠKE FAKULTETE

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POVZETEK

Zunanji družbeno-ekonomski in družbeno-kulturni dejavniki sooblikujejo notranjo motivacijo in dvojezične strategije študentov tehniške fakultete v procesu sekundarne socializacije. Čeprav procesi sekundarne socializacije ne zahtevajo visoke stopnje identifikacije, saj je inženirsko izobrazbo moč pridobiti v teku zelo racionalnega in čustveno nevtralnega šolanja, gre pri učenju jezika navadno za močno poistovetenje s strokovnjaki s tega področja (tolmači, diplomati, sekretarji), kar pomeni, da študenti dosežejo vsaj koordinacijsko raven dvojezičnosti, kadar oba jezikovna sistema ostajata ločena. Zavest o samem sebi kot o bodočem visokokvalificiranem poklicnem strokovnjaku, ki tekoče govori tuji jezik, v študentu porodi podobo družbenega sveta, katerega del je predstava o samem sebi kot o sestavnem delu tega sveta – v študentu se tako oblikuje družbeno identiteta. Proces socializacije študentov na fakulteti se povečini sproži pod vplivom notranjih motivacij in potreb, pa tudi objektivnih življenjskih pogojev tako študentov kot fakultete. V sodobni ruski družbi prihaja do družbenega razslojevanja, pri katerem družbeni položaj odseva sposobnost prilagaja-

nja takšnim spremembam. Jezikovno usposabljanje in njegovo raven, ki skupaj predstavljata bistvo dvojezičnih strategij sodobnih študentov, lahko imenujemo strategije za pridobitev kulturnega kapitala, ki omogoča samoprilagajanje razmeram tržne ekonomije, za ustvarjanje uspešne kariere in vključevanje v globalne mednarodne aktivnosti.

Ključne besede: dvojezična strategija, motivacija, družbeno-kulturni dejavniki, interesi, kulturni kapital, učenje jezika

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