

*La mediazione
linguistico-culturale*

Voci e istanze dall'accademia

a cura di Maria Chiara Ferro

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THE REGIONAL STUDY POTENTIAL OF POLACK LAND (BELARUS) IN STUDENT INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

Natal'ja Gennad'evna Apanasovič

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the experience of using the regional study potential of Polack Land in teaching Russian as a foreign language at Polack State University (Belarus). The co-study of Russian and Belarusian culture, together with the use of the sociocultural context of the Polack Region is viewed as an opportunity to expand the educational environment and one of the ways to immerse students in real circumstances of everyday language. An overview of the ways to apply regional historical and cultural material in the practice of teaching is given, taking into consideration the state of Russian/Belarus language teaching research.

Keywords: cultural competences; Polack land; regional study; RKI; student intercultural interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE VALUE OF THE WORK

The integration of the Republic of Belarus into the international educational system after the signing of the Bologna Agreement led not only to the process of reformation of higher education with fundamental changes to the curricula and programs, but also made Belarusian higher education more open and accessible to foreign citizens. These changes have influenced the number of foreign students not only in large metropolitan universities, but also in regional ones, including Polack State University (PSU).

The growth of proposals for the export of educational services has stimulated the development of new programs focused on the needs of

foreign students (e.g. economics and engineering programs with the possibility of studying in English both on the undergraduate and graduate levels, postgraduate programs, a pedagogical program for “Russian as a foreign language” for foreign citizens, etc.). These factors have significantly increased the overall influx of students.

On the one hand, the presence of foreign citizens in classrooms has become commonplace; on the other hand, it has led to the need to revise the content and teaching methods, taking into account the increased intercultural interaction of students, and prompted a search for resources to implement a socio-cultural approach in order to enhance intercultural communication. A telling argument for work in this direction was the fact that complete and multidimensional language acquisition and socio-cultural competence formation are not possible without the acquaintance with regional studies and linguoculturology¹, without understanding the connection between language and the non-linguistic reality, gaining experience of intercultural communication².

To the greatest extent, this has affected the teaching of Russian as a foreign language, which is studied at PSU by students of both linguistic and non-linguistic programs. Understanding the fact that “a person as a biosocial and spiritual being is formed in a certain linguocultural space and time”³, has led to the need to take into account features and capabilities of the educational environment in which foreigners are taught, as well as the need for co-study of Russian and Belarusian culture, and enhancement of the regional aspect in language training.

The regional study potential of Polack Land was identified as part of the development of classes in Russian as a foreign language and it was used to create summer school programs with various sightseeing and educational tours. A successful implementation of this approach was the summer school in Belarusian studies for Latvian students, held in the summer of 2017. The use of regional study material was also successfully tested as part of a weekend educational tour “Smart Rest in Polack”, designed for foreign students learning Russian, and offered to groups of Chinese students studying in the capital of Belarus (May 2017, March 2018). At present, an experiment has been launched at PSU to introduce a special course “History and Culture of the Polack Region” into the educational process

¹ On this subject see M.C. Ferro in this volume. On the importance of cultural and historical competences in mediators’ training see also the article by G. Moracci (Editor’s note).

² Ter-Misanova 2000, 31 (translation here and in the whole text is mine).

³ Kolesnikova 2014, 303.

for foreign students, planned with the maximum use of the regional study potential of Polack.

Polack State University is one of the most significant and sought-after universities, serving as a cultural and educational centre in the region, a propagator of modern educational technologies, scientific research, and cultural achievements of the republic and the world. Despite its relatively young half-century history, the university considers itself to be the successor of the older educational traditions of the first higher education institution in the territory of modern Belarus – Polack Jesuit Collegium, established in 1580. Today the University of Polack is a university that is developing in accordance with the European model, providing an opportunity to study and conduct research in engineering and humanities, accumulating the intellectual and cultural potential of the region. Currently, the university consists of eight faculties, providing 45 programs for more than ten thousand undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate students.

Polack State University is located in two cities. Some of the buildings are situated in Novopolack, one of the youngest cities in Belarus, built in 1958 on the banks of the Western Dvina. The city quickly acquired its status of an industrial centre of the region, which it still remains today. At one time, an urgent need for educated and qualified personnel for petrochemical enterprises led to the opening of Novopolack Polytechnic Institute (NPI). That educational establishment attracted highly skilled and progressive specialists for work and research in the field of petrochemistry and oil refining, construction, geodesy, etc., from all over the Soviet Union. In 1993 NPI was transformed into Polack State University.

Even at the time of its foundation, one of the features of education was a close interaction of theoretical and practical components. Today, this trend continues, and the university in this sense has an advantage over many universities of the republic and is focused on “maximum integration of educational, scientific and innovative activities with the needs of the real sector of the economy and social sphere”⁴. Therefore, for many years training in engineering programs has been in demand from foreign citizens who, during their studies, can acquire theoretical knowledge and also gain experience in its practical implementation.

In 2005, the restored buildings of the former Jesuit Collegium, included in the State List of Historical and Cultural Values of the Republic of Belarus as a unique monument of architecture of international importance, received PSU students within their walls. This event symbolically

⁴ Lazouski 2004.

marked the return of higher education to the most ancient city of Belarus and restored the connection of traditions interrupted by life circumstances, while the renovated buildings became one of the gems of the historical part of the city. In the refurbished buildings, the spirit of the times has been preserved while taking into account the requirements of modern life.

As the successor of the oldest educational traditions in Belarus, the university sees as one of its most important tasks the duty to acquaint its students with the historical roots of education in Belarus in order to actualize the need to study in modern life. Thanks to the implementation of their own engineering projects, the development of educational excursion and entertainment programs, and thematic interactive classes, the university staff have managed to create a unique educational environment filled with images of history, interest in scientific research and experiments, and the popularization of knowledge. All this has significantly activated another aspect of university life, museum-excursion activity, and attracted a large number of Belarusian and foreign travelers to the university. This has created a demand for the development of programs and courses in different languages for foreign students.

From the point of view of modern methods of teaching, “languages should be studied inseparably from the world and the culture of peoples who speak them”⁵. In this sense, the use of a sociocultural context (especially in a multicultural environment) is one of the ways to immerse learners into the real circumstances of language functioning, and yet another possibility of getting to know the holistic language picture of the world characteristic of native Russian speakers.

This situation gives reasons for the need to develop different programs and projects based on the usage of the regional study potential of Russian-speaking countries in the process of teaching Russian as a foreign language. Teaching materials of this kind, which have been developed at Polack State University, are unique and not found in any other higher educational establishment in the Republic of Belarus. Taking into account the growth of cross-cultural awareness together with the increase in the number of foreign students, this experience could be interesting and useful in teaching Russian as a foreign language in other educational establishments in Belarus as well as abroad. This fact justifies the relevance and novelty of the study.

This article describes a multidimensional linguo-pedagogical experiment which is a pilot project by its nature and has a complex set of aims

⁵ Ter-Misanova 2011, 94.

as it touches upon a wide range of problems, including socio-cultural, psychological and linguistic aspects.

The aim of the article is the analysis of the experience of Polack State University in the use of the regional study potential of Polack Land in student intercultural interaction while studying Russian as a foreign language. This aim was achieved through the following objectives: to provide a brief theoretical justification for the use of regional study potential in the intercultural component of teaching Russian as a foreign language, to make an overview of programs and projects developed at Polack State University, and to draw a conclusion about the use of the regional study potential of Polack Land in studying Russian as a foreign language.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE ARTICLE. THE RELEVANCE OF THE INTERCULTURAL COMPONENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES IN GENERAL AND RUSSIAN IN PARTICULAR

The theoretical basis of the article consists of the works of S.G. Ter-Minasova (2000, 2011), L.N. Kolesnilkova (2014), V.A. Krivošeev (2011), T.G. Tkač and A.P. Zabrovskii (2018), E.M. Vereščagin and V.G. Kostomarov (1998), A.N. Ščukin (2012), A.I. Lazovskaja (2013), A.A. Čingisova (2006), etc.

The significance of the intercultural component in foreign language education is stimulated by reality itself; globalization and the active interaction of the representatives of different cultures and nationalities. It is clear that:

Modern living conditions show that one of the most vulnerable areas of human relationships in a transformed multicultural society is the ability for intercultural communication, which is usually understood as the process of direct or indirect interaction between people from different cultural environments.⁶

Professional facilitators in this sphere are also found among journalists, translators, and teachers of foreign languages, whose professional activities are related to foreign languages, including Russian⁷.

Nowadays a foreign language professional is required to have not only the knowledge of a foreign language (preferably of several ones), but also the ability to coexist in a multicultural environment, a sense of tolerance, and the ability to communicate successfully with representatives of differ-

⁶ Krivošeev 2011, 279.

⁷ Tkač - Zabrovskij 2018, 561.

ent cultures. This trend is represented in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*⁸, which was written in the late 1990s and has been updated taking into account a sociocultural approach.

The vision of the learner as a social agent in the action-oriented approach takes these concepts further in relation to language education, considering that:

the aim of language education is profoundly modified. It is no longer seen as simply to achieve ‘mastery’ of one or two, or even three languages, each taken in isolation, with the ‘ideal native speaker’ as the ultimate model. Instead, the aim is to develop a linguistic repertory, in which all linguistic abilities exist.⁹

The document repeatedly emphasizes the understanding of close interconnection between all aspects of communicative competence, including the “sociolinguistic” one.

These three aspects of linguistic competence, pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic competence, also known as parameters of description, are always intertwined in any language use; they are not isolated “components” and cannot be separated from each other¹⁰.

Taking into account the sociocultural approach in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2018) language learners are considered among other interpretations as “social agents”, and language as a sociocultural phenomenon. Such an understanding involves the maximum use of all the linguistic resources of the person:

The plurilingual vision associated with the CEFR gives value to cultural and linguistic diversity at the level of the individual. It promotes the need for learners as ‘social agents’ to draw upon all of their linguistic and cultural resources and experiences in order to fully participate in social and educational contexts, achieving mutual understanding, gaining access to knowledge and in turn further developing their linguistic and cultural repertoire.¹¹

Special attention is paid to plurilingual and pluricultural competence, which among other things presupposes the following features:

- the capacity to deal with ‘otherness’ to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration;
- the willingness to act as an intercultural mediator¹².

⁸ Council of Europe 2018.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 157.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 131.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 157.

¹² *Ibidem*, 158.

Relying on modern approaches to foreign language education, language in the learning process can be presented not only as a fact of linguistics, but more broadly as an aspect of culture¹³. In this case, it is viewed as an acculturation tool, as one of the effective ways of understanding the worldview of a foreign culture.

The knowledge acquired in the framework of linguistic and regional approaches opens up a possibility for a much deeper immersion in the real space of language functioning, and strives to comprehend the peculiarities of the worldview and ways of thinking of another people. In this case, “the tasks of language learning as a set of forms of expression merge with the tasks of studying a country”¹⁴.

The dialogue of cultures promotes in the multicultural educational environment a clear understanding of not only what distinguishes different cultures, but also what unites them, and forms such qualities of socio-cultural competence as “cultural tolerance”, “cultural understanding” and “cultural interconnection”¹⁵.

The status of Russian as one of the official languages in the Republic of Belarus, as well as its real prevalence in communication, allows us to consider Belarusians as native speakers of the Russian language. This fact led to the perception of Belarus as a country of the studied language, which is increasingly reflected in Belarusian textbooks on Russian as a foreign language.

It is necessary to pay attention to some difficulties in the representation and scale of the national-cultural component, which is relatively reflected among the linguistic facts of textbooks, and also manifests itself in the real functioning of the Russian language in Belarus. One of the most respected Belarusian methodologists A.I. Lazovskaja notes: “In Belarusian publications on Russian as a foreign language, it may be difficult to distinguish between the space of Russian and Belarusian culture”¹⁶. The current bilingual situation and its impact on the spoken language that foreigners hear in everyday communication (on public transport, in stores, etc.) requires clarification. Russian textbooks, in turn, representing the Russian space, do not reflect the real situation of language functioning which is manifested locally. According to E.M. Vereščagin and V.G. Kostomarov, founders of the linguocultural approach to foreign language studies, the

¹³ See Tkač - Zabrovskij 2018, 561.

¹⁴ Vereščagin - Kostomarov 1990⁴, 7.

¹⁵ Ščukin 2012, 184.

¹⁶ Lazovskaja 2013, 159.

“social nature of the language is an objective opportunity for any foreigner to join the reality new for them”¹⁷. Current trends in foreign language studies, including Russian ones, are focused on practical language skills, so there is a need for clarification of information in relation to real life conditions of the host country. This situation stresses the importance of regional geographic information not only in Russia, but also requires background knowledge of Belarusian realities. This opportunity can be realized within the framework of the regional studies aspect in the study of Russian as a foreign language, taking into account the use of intercultural communication.

3. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF EXPERIENCE

There is a certain peculiarity of studying at PSU, which means that foreign students study in mixed groups in which the majority of students are of Belarusian origin. In this case, a foreigner, especially at the very beginning of training, feels like a real stranger in an alien environment. Of course, in such situations, the human factor, that is the degree of readiness and openness to new contacts, plays the most important role, but, as a rule, both parties have to overcome the barrier of alienation, to establish contacts, to show intercultural skills. If a student studies in a group staffed only by representatives of his country, then his interaction with the new environment is in most cases limited to shopping and the service sector.

To a lesser extent, foreigners are in contact with local students during their stay in a hostel, where they have an opportunity to move into rooms with representatives of their own country and there, as far as possible, to maintain their usual lifestyle and housekeeping. All this makes the process of getting used to new conditions less painful, but it significantly delays adaptation and makes it difficult to be included in a foreign-language sociocultural space. In this case, foreign and Belarusian students exist as if in parallel worlds, and the situation gets worse because of low communication skills among young people, and this may not allow them to interact to the full degree during the entire period of study. In this environment, foreigners have an opportunity to speak their native language, and communication in Russian is limited to the framework of educational and everyday communication.

¹⁷ Vereščagin - Kostomarov 1990⁴, 9.

Such circumstances have a negative effect on the development of communication skills, especially in real communication situations. The development of language norms, vocabulary extension and acquisition of syntactic constructions are significantly limited, taking place predominantly in class which is an artificial environment for conversational, everyday communication. E.Ju. Prochorov writes that students lack real knowledge, as “it is the knowledge about culture that provides communication in Russian in each case, which are both the basis of the content of communication, and the determining elements of its speech design”¹⁸. There occurs only a superficial language immersion thus not giving an opportunity to perceive it as an important component of culture, reflection of values, mentality, peculiarities of the view of the world as well as time and space belonging to the representatives of the studied language¹⁹.

In this regard, a number of creative and educational activities, corresponding to the goals of the formation of socio-cultural competence and experience of interethnic interaction, are carried out for the implementation of the dialogue of cultures at university. I would especially like to dwell on the strengthening of regional study potential, which combines various activities and classes on Belarusian culture including, among other aspects, minimal knowledge of the Belarusian language.

An introduction to the phonetic system and some aspects of Belarusian linguistics and syntax activates knowledge of the Russian language among foreign students through the comparison of closely related languages, and makes it possible to analyze and differentiate some language phenomena in an easy and relaxed manner (for example, features of phonetics, interlanguage homonymy, and non-equivalent vocabulary and so on). Such classes create a desire for discovery among foreign students, discovery of a “different linguistic and cultural personality”, whereas the Russian language in relation to the new Belarusian one acquires its status of an “acquaintance”, becoming more intimate and understandable.

Introductory classes on Belarusian culture, as a rule, are held in the form of master classes, i.e. they involve active participation in the development of cultural acts through learning authentic medieval folk songs, folk dances of the early 20th century and folk games, and mastering the basic skills of traditional crafts. Foreign citizens, along with Belarusian students, are actively involved in national Belarusian rituals and national holidays

¹⁸ Prochorov 1990, 79.

¹⁹ See Furmanova 1994, 74.

(e.g. such rites as *Gukanne vjasny* or “Welcoming of spring”, *Kaljady* or “Christmas celebrations”, etc.).

Our experience is an attempt to solve the problem and cannot claim to be inclusive either due to its short duration or due to the insufficient number of participants. Nevertheless, we would like to note some interesting observations. Thus, the art of *vycinanka* (papercutting, a type of folk art) turned out to be much appreciated by Chinese students. The process of cutting out a paper pattern for decorating a postcard with a Belarusian decoration was understandable and entertaining for them. This task did not cause difficulties for either Latvian or Russian students. But Turkmen students (both girls and boys) found it difficult and incomprehensible, despite the fact that they were interested in the task and then signed ready-made postcards with enthusiasm.

Learning traditional dances of the 1930s-1950s took place in a free and relaxed atmosphere: foreign students studied fairly simple movements, from the point of view of Belarusians, with great diligence. After a several-minute introduction they proceeded to practice. Latvian students got used to them without any difficulties and enjoyed dancing, but it was difficult for Turkmen and Chinese students to master the specific nature of the stomp, despite the fact that everyone quickly remembered the movement pattern itself. Both Chinese and Turkmen participants tried to perform the movements as prompted by the knowledge of their national dances or moves.

Belarusian students and university graduates take an active part in demonstrating examples of folk culture, conducting master classes. For many of them, such hobbies almost turn into professional artistic activity (for example, the university choir of authentic singing, *Vargan*), thus allowing them not only to master the facts of their culture, but also to manifest themselves as active conductors and popularizers of folk art.

Such kinds of interaction between teachers, native speakers and foreigners can be useful for building a nationally-oriented paradigm for teaching Russian as a foreign language²⁰, when the learning process is planned taking into account the ethno-psychological characteristics of representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities, and the national and cultural factors of the partners²¹.

The museum and educational potential of the university itself is used in working with foreign students to its full extent.

²⁰ Čingisova, 101.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 102.

If visiting travelers from different countries are offered excursions in foreign languages, then foreign students studying at PSU get acquainted with the history of education in Polack Land in Russian. Such excursion classes are offered taking into account the communicative skills of the participants and perform, among other things, the function of language training, in which situations of active listening and spontaneous speaking are created at the moment of real communication.

For example, a conversation with a “talking head” when visiting the reconstruction of Gabriel Gruber’s project “The Mechanical Head” not only tells the story of one of the most famous European scientists, but also actualizes the knowledge of speech etiquette, and the unusual situation causes a desire for communication even among the most restrained and shy students.

Viewing the “Musical clock with an academic procession” gives students an opportunity to get acquainted with the outstanding founders of educational traditions in Polack Land: Rev. Euphrosyne of Polack, who became famous not only for her holiness, but also went down in history as the only female educator of her time (XII century) in the territories of the Eastern Orthodox Slavs; Francis Skorina, Eastern Slavic pioneer printer, who first translated the Bible into the Old Belarusian language (the jubilee dates associated with this event began to be celebrated under the auspices of UNESCO in 2017); Peter Skarga, first rector of Polack Jesuit Collegium and Vilna Academy, an outstanding scholar, leader of the Counter-Reformation, a theologian and polemicist. During the musical accompaniment of the procession, students are introduced to the anthem of the University of Polack, as well as the world famous anthem of students, *Gaudeamus*. Walking through the open art gallery and the university buildings, students can recognize world renowned painting masterpieces and compare modern views of Polack with the historical ones shown in the photographs of the past.

The development and conduct of such excursion-educational programs in foreign languages involves not only the staff, but also Belarusian students. This gives them an opportunity to participate in communication with foreign citizens, leads to an understanding of the need to master foreign languages in modern life, and teaches intercultural interaction.

PSU bears the name of the most ancient city in the territory of Belarus – the so-called cultural capital of the republic, and city-museum. A relatively small urban area makes it possible to move from one point of interest to another quickly, often on foot. It also makes outdoor study of historical events and facts possible, walking directly through the city, when

all the surrounding buildings, monuments, street names, etc. become historical artifacts.

As it was mentioned earlier, the university buildings are located in the very centre of the historical part of the city, so the study of Belarusian history for foreign citizens, as well as for some Belarusian students, is carried out in the form of interactive excursions. It is enough to go out of the university gate and climb the castle hill to get acquainted with the origins of the Belarusian statehood. One can see the monument, reflecting the milestones of the Belarusian statehood, and visit one of the oldest Christian architectural monuments – St. Sofia Cathedral. There you can appreciate the baroque style of the church, and listen to the world masterpieces of organ music. On the castle hill you can enjoy the beauty of the Belarusian nature on the bank of the Western Dvina. There is also a tributary of the Western Dvina, the Polota River, standing on the bank of which one can find out about the chronicle version of the origin of the city name according to the Tale of Bygone Years.

Polack is rich not only in places that provide an opportunity for multidimensional immersion in the Belarusian historical and cultural context, but which also represent Eastern Slavic culture, the Christian sphere, Scandinavian-Baltic-Slavic ties, etc.

Today a relatively small city has eleven museums of different kinds, some of which are unique and are not represented anywhere else in Belarus, like the Museum of the Belarusian Book Printing and the Library-Museum of Simeon of Polack. As a rule, students go to these two museums after a brief acquaintance with the Belarusian language, having received a preliminary idea about the features of ancient books and the peculiarities of their creation. On the way to these museums, there is an opportunity not only to see a monument to one of the letters of the Belarusian alphabet (the letter Ў, the so-called “short”), but also to practice reading Belarusian words, searching for Russian equivalents, and developing linguistic ingenuity.

At the Museum of the Belarusian Book Printing, students learn about the history of the book from ancient times to modern editions. The exhibition fully represents the history of the Russian book and the Russian word, as well as the work of the outstanding figure of the XVII century Simeon of Polack, whose work illustrates the development of the Russian and Belarusian poetic and dramatic tradition.

At the Museum of Traditional Manual Weaving of Poozerye, students have an opportunity not only to see the exhibition, but also to take part in various master classes in folk crafts and attend performances of the tra-

ditional *batleyka* theatre (Belarusian folk puppet theater). At the Museum of Knighthood, excursion programs are supplemented with entertainment which makes it possible to join in the European traditions of knightly culture.

A visit to the Savior and St. Euphrosyne Convent gives a complete and diverse picture of the development of Orthodoxy in the Eastern Slavic lands and the development of ancient architecture.

A large number of historical and cultural attractions in a compact city centre allow teachers to conduct Russian language classes in the open air, focusing on a wide range of activities: e.g. vocabulary learning, conducting classes in the form of quests, interactive excursions, developing speaking skills in real situations. Providing fascinating insight into the history and culture of the Belarusian people and Polack Land in particular does not limit students just to local studies, but allows them to step into an authentic language environment, and enhances analytical skills in their search for similarities and differences between their culture and the Russian national picture of the world. All this has a positive effect on language learning, gives students an opportunity to easily navigate in a foreign language on different levels of interaction, makes adaptation less painful and problematic, and makes it easier and more efficient to interact with Belarusian and foreign students. It can be argued that the introduction of the principle of intercultural communication in the process of language learning contributes “to the identification of human universals based on the comparison of their own and foreign cultures”²².

4. CONCLUSION

Multidimensional language proficiency and formation of sociocultural competence are not possible without knowledge of country studies and linguocultural studies, without understanding of the connection between linguistic and extra-linguistic reality, getting experience in intercultural communication.

Thus, we can conclude that the examples given in this article clearly demonstrate the wide possibilities of the use of regional material for educational purposes, including solving problems of intercultural communication.

²² Skoblikova 2016, 400.

It is necessary to stress the fact that the linguo-pedagogical experiment under description is multi-dimensional. Thus it covers an extremely wide range of problems: starting from the issues of socio-psychological adaptation of foreign students in a foreign language environment, the development of intercultural communication skills, their introduction to the sociocultural context and features of language communication in Belarus; ending in a deeper interest and a more careful study of the language, the development of language guessing, the differentiation of linguistic units under the conditions of bilingualism and active training of spontaneous speech in real relaxed communication.

The set of measures presented in the article is a pilot project, and at this stage we can only talk about the formation of experimental individual groups of students where the material is tested. At present, the undertaken experiment is a first step to solving the problem, including the identification of a thematic spectrum for further research, as well as the beginning of the development of various linguistic and methodological materials taking into account the sociocultural component of this area. It is necessary to emphasize the authorship of this project, which is primarily associated with the specific nature of the regional studies material, its uniqueness which is revealed not only in the cultural and geographical region of Polack Land, but is unique for the whole Belarus. Accordingly, before that time it had no equivalents either in Belarus or abroad, and is being developed on such a broad research field for the first time.

Focus on the formation of sociocultural competence allows us to use the presented facts of language, culture, science and history in the methodology of teaching foreign languages, including Russian as a foreign language. The interactive form of classes as well as a wide range of historical and cultural issues contribute to vocabulary extension, formation of speech etiquette, and the ability to describe the emotional sphere, as well as forming necessary communicative skills, and allowing a deeper immersion into the language environment. Students gain positive experience of intercultural interaction, and learn to understand and respect foreign culture.

This practice could therefore be developed in the framework of the nationally-oriented methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language and may become the basis for research and application of this methodology in Belarus.

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