

## DEALING WITH 'WEST-EAST' CULTURAL DIVIDE: PROBLEM OF CULTURAL UNAWARENESS IN ESP FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Abstract.** *The paper presents result of a modest-scale research into the problem of learners' cultural unawareness about cultures of the East countries suffering the conflicts of global importance within the context of wider 'West-East' cultural divide in ESP for International Relations. Different aspects of the problem are studied through an attempt to assess students' knowledge of the elementary cultural phenomena of general, political and specific interest. The research was conducted to analyze the problem that came to light in the ESP classroom which was aimed to develop speaking skills as an objective within the major teaching/learning goal of preparing for professional communication.*

**Key words:** *'West-East' cultural divide, intercultural competence, cultural awareness/unawareness, ESP for International Relations, guided info-analysis, guided info-search, ICT for intercultural competence*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 'West-East' or 'East-West' cultural divide is a term used in sociology and human psychology to speak about the difficulties that individuals come across in multi-cultural situations. Neglecting this cultural phenomenon may lead to unpredictable consequences and become an obstacle on the pathway for establishing universal standards in global education in general terms and for educating specialists in the sphere of international relations. Thus, keeping a blind eye to this sensitive issue challenges the ESP pedagogy to deal with the problem and initially determined this English language classroom research.

As far as English has secured its positions as the major language of intercultural communication the problem of the 'West-East' cultural divide should be definitely handled in an ESP language classroom as well and in our understanding can be ameliorated through creating focused cultural *awareness* by means a targeted learners' search and a set of activities, where East countries cultural issues are dealt with within the variety of aspects relevant to studying International Relations (IR).

Here we intended to generalize the concept of an East country culture implying an aggregated cultural image of the country or autonomy within a country, so that the problem investigated from the viewpoint of ESP methodology would be more salient. We do not pretend to present any sort of a profound anthropological or psychological research, but see it as a challenge for contemporary ESP for the International Relations. There is also a need

to note that the sample of learners who participated in the research was presented by randomly selected IR students of Saint Petersburg State University in Russia. Besides, it should be taken into consideration that, on the one hand, Saint Petersburg is widely recognized as a city with residents having some variation of European mentality, but, on the other, it is the second largest city of the country which is itself situated in the West and in the East of the Eurasian continent.

We limited our research to the cultures of the countries and ethnic groups which constitute an object for international relations studies, in particular those that are evocative due to the fact that being geographically eastern countries or communities they, however, provide for the conflicts of global political importance.

The reason for this research was the situation which came to light when the ESP teachers preparing students for professional communication encountered the problem of learners' unpreparedness to discuss the issues of the East being the representatives of the West, i.e. not only predominantly sharing the values which have traditionally been referred to as liberal democratic values, but also having too little general knowledge about these parties to global and local conflicts. The lack of knowledge about the countries and ethnic groups located in southern part of the Eurasian continent in the Middle East, Central and South-Eastern Asia creates the problem of cultural unawareness as a part of more large-scale problem of West-East cultural divide and a multifaceted language pedagogy problem of building intercultural competence.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The research into different aspects of intercultural competence dates back to as early as to 1983 when N. Dinges first used the term "intercultural competence" (Dinges, 1983). It was long before the emergence of MacLuhan's "global village" concept and, viewing this term from today's point, it was also long before the intercultural competence became a widely-recognized educational concept (Gordon et al, 2009; Sahin, Akbasli, 2009, p.545; Halasz, Michel, 2011, p. 293).

Under the influence of the rapid spread of communication technologies intercultural competence has been recognized as one of the key competencies by a great number of scholars and is traditionally viewed as a combination of such components as *cultural awareness*, *cultural identity* and *cultural sensitivity* in students.

However, according to M. Byram's model of intercultural competence the central concept within the structure of this competence is critical cultural awareness. Four other components of it are skills of interpreting, attitudes, skills of discovery and knowledge (In Wallinski, CEFcult project, p.6).

B. S. K. Kim, B. Y. Cartwright et al confirm this view and use the term *multicultural awareness*. The possession of this awareness by an individual signifies understanding and accepting the variances existing between individuals in different countries or variances existing in the same country between individuals with different social backgrounds, especially the variances in attitudes and values. Thus, according to them, multicultural awareness involves two other components cultural identity and cultural sensitivity (Kim, Cartwright, 2003).

Following M. D Barrett and J. Huber understanding the intercultural competence as "a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills" which can help the one

who is harnessed with it to understand and respect people with different cultural affiliations and to be efficient in intercultural communication, we believe that it has great pedagogical value. It is also seen by these scientists as the ability to manage “positive and constructive relationships”, which in its turn implies appropriateness of communication and compliance with cultural norms while achieving the communicative purposes (Barret, Huber, 2014). As far as efficient communication in the English language is the primary goal of teaching English, cultural awareness as the main component of intercultural competence is to become one of the teaching priorities in the English language pedagogy.

The understanding of the necessity to use the EFL classroom to teach intercultural awareness was well-investigated and supported not only by the educators in the West and the RF, but by our counterparts from the East. L.K. Barany, a researcher from Duhok University in Iraq, emphasizes that learning foreign language is not the aim for itself and linguistic competence should serve as a communication tool in intercultural communication, namely “to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.” Furthermore, the author underlines that almost always communication takes place in the context of culture and can be rarely “culture-free” (Barany, 2016, p.159).

The problem is relevant not only for the students of international relations but for the English language education in preparing specialists in any field. While ‘West-East’ *cultural awareness* for the students of International Relations is certainly a part of their professional competence, for other areas of education it can be seen as a part of their general social competence, in which the knowledge of the English language is a necessary component to be wired to the events swirling around.

Nevertheless, as the International Relations Studies is the area where this competence is vital, we maintain that the problem of cultural unawareness within the ‘West-East’ cultural divide is more urgent in ESP for international relations than in any other.

Within the focus of the current research cultural unawareness falls into the authors’ category of knowledge and understanding, where the most important feature is the lack of realizing the fact that the interlocutors may not only express ideas in a unique way, but the very ideas put forward in discussion may be unique (Barret, Huber, 2014, p.19-20).

Sharing most researchers’ view that cultural awareness is based on understanding of own culture and others cultures all over the world (Byram et al., 2002, p. 5), in this paper we would nevertheless consider a narrower issue of critical lack of this knowledge about cultures of the countries situated in the Middle East, Central and South-Eastern Asia so necessary for fostering professional communication skills of the students of International relations.

It is important to note that in our paper we considered cultural phenomena not only from the viewpoint of general understanding of culture at large but also emphasized some political culture aspects. For instance, we considered knowing the capital and the second city of the considered country or autonomous territory and the persons of first and second political importance as knowledge of the focused culture for an IR student.

Thus, the problem of cultural awareness/unawareness and its manifestations within ‘West-East’ cultural divide require a language pedagogy approach grounded on a research, in which the first step would be defining the pool of problems which are encountered by teachers and learners in the ESP classroom and designing methodology of dealing with them.

### 3. THE ASPECTS OF 'WEST-EAST' CULTURAL UNAWARENESS AS A PROBLEM OF ESP LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The problem of West–East Cultural unawareness is multifold and can be observed in all areas of learners' performance in professional communication where they have to consider the cases of terrorism, armed conflicts or human rights abuse in the countries of the Middle East, Central Asia and South East Asia. First of all, while most of the students pay due respect to the significance of such countries as China, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq for contemporary international relations they know almost nothing about their cultures. As far as, generally, a research in global politics is a scattered one (the students might be focused on a particular area of foreign policy or country) there is little chance that there will be a student or two in the English language group of 13-15 learners who would have more than superficial knowledge about them.

Therefore, having little knowledge about the local languages and cultures students experience difficulties while referencing local cultural phenomena in oral speech production.

Although it should be noted that the picture of cultural awareness may vary from year to year respectfully to the political situation in the world and local media focus of reporting global political events, our paper is based on the analysis of the current state of affairs.

The cultural unawareness survey that we conducted among the third year students displayed that they have much more information about European countries than about countries of the East, to say nothing of professionally important ethnic or religious communities.

#### 3.1. The research procedure: lacking facts

To see what sort of correlation can be observed between their cultural awareness regarding Western world countries and countries of the Middle Eastern and Central and South-Asian countries we asked our students to perform a 3 items-quiz with very simple questions and to write: 1) the capitals of 3 Western world/Eastern world countries and the second largest cities; 2) 3 male and three female names; 3) the names of 3 famous writers/painters/composers; 4) the names of 3 well-known politicians; 5) the names of 3 most important holidays; 6) the names of 3 cultural heritage objects in; 7) the names of 3 well-known dances; 8) the names of 3 cultural traditions; 9) 3 names of items traditional cuisine in any of Western world/Eastern world countries.

These questions were designed to be simple and 'front mind answers' were expected. The results appeared to be very indicative of displaying 'West-East' cultural awareness/unawareness (See Fig. 1).

As it can be concluded from the bar chart less than a half out of 50 respondents provided answers to the questions concerning elementary cultural knowledge of the countries of the Eastern world. As one would expect they mostly coped with the Question 4 that requested to write the names of well-known politicians as far as this is the area of their professional competence. The lowest showings of cultural awareness, as we see, are for cultural traditions, holidays and male and female names of people living in the countries important for our research. The most disappointing was the gap in the knowledge of the capital cities in these countries and the majority of students fail to answer this part of the first question. Only 12 interviewees managed to provide the names of both the capital and second large city.

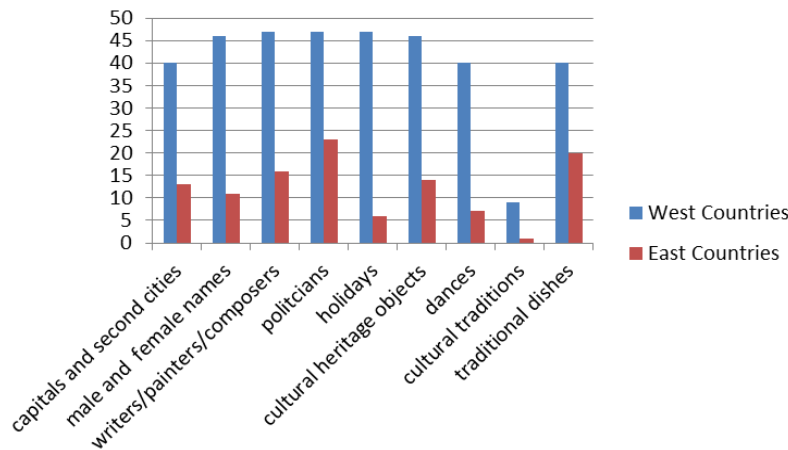


Fig. 1. Comparing ‘West-East’ cultural awareness/unawareness

Undoubtedly, there are historic, economic and social reasons underlying this ignorance. Most of them can be to a great extent ascribed to religious divergence and the authoritarian influence of orthodox religious leaders both on the part of Islam and Christianity.

But more relevant to modern generation, among whom religion is rarely seen as an obstacle towards intercultural communication, is the lack of cultural knowledge which in our view is explained not only by commonly recognized limited amount of English speaking population in the Arab world and among China’s citizens, but also by insufficient amount of those who study Arabic or Chinese among the residents of Western countries.

Within the framework of this research we could have verified only the second part of the statement. We decided to substantiate our opinion and extended the questionnaire with a request to indicate the second language the students are studying. Here only 4 respondents out of the said number of 50 appeared to be studying the languages of the East countries, with 3 studying Chinese and only one person studying Arabic. Nevertheless, being asked what other languages they would like to study 36 of them claimed that they would like to study these languages (with 20 respondents preferring Chinese and 16 – Arabic). The findings proportionally confirmed our thesis showing few cases of studying these languages, but at the same time displayed high level of motivation for doing this.

The second questionnaire consisted of two parts: one checking the simplest political culture realities and another checking cultural awareness through Hofstede’s “cultural onion” approach. Considering a limited number of countries of their professional interest and grounding on their media education the students were asked to confirm their knowledge of the facts in question by simple putting a plus or a minus into the relevant box.

The answer analysis displayed that while most of the participants were able to retrieve the names of the capital cities and the heads of the state of Turkey, India, China and Tibetan autonomous region, which they viewed as a part of China, they failed to do this for Pakistan and Kurd’s autonomy in Iraq. The latter two were important for a classroom discussion on Jammu and Kashmiri dispute between India and Pakistan and the problem of Kurdish statehood respectively. (See Fig.2)

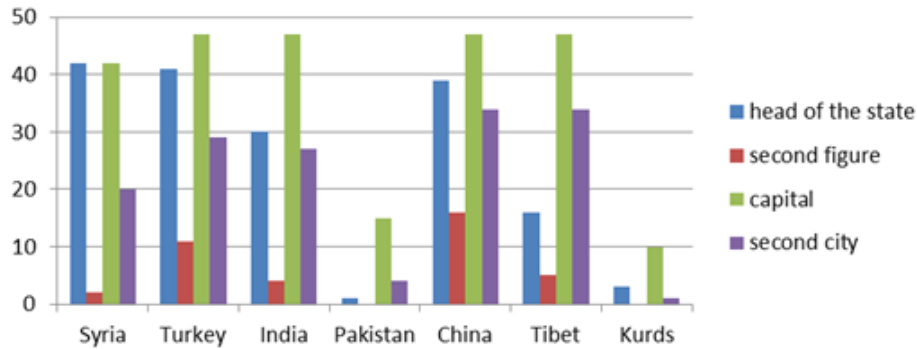


Fig. 2. The country of the conflict specific cultural awareness (1)

The third set of questions was based on Hofstede's theory of culture (Hofstede's Onion). To maintain experimental integrity while designing our questionnaire we did not include Hofstede's concept of symbols as low-frequency information which is hard to restore in a front mind answer. The graph below demonstrates that in spite of the fact that only a bit more than 50% of participants confirmed their familiarity with cultural phenomena of the countries we were interested in it is noticeable that Turkey, India and China are among those cultures whose cultural manifestations are known to the students. As well as in the bar chart of Figure 2, it is observable that they view China and Tibet Autonomous Region as one culture and demonstrate considerable shortage of information about such country as Pakistan and such ethnic group as the Kurds whose culture was considered within the context of Kurd's autonomy in Iraq.

Figure 3 is also indicative for understanding that media education appeared to be of no help when assessing cultural awareness in the case of Syria which has been occupying leading position in the news programs all around the world and the fact that for soft-core ESP branches in the contemporary information-rich society where media rule the minds there is a need to revise approaches to using mass media in the classroom.

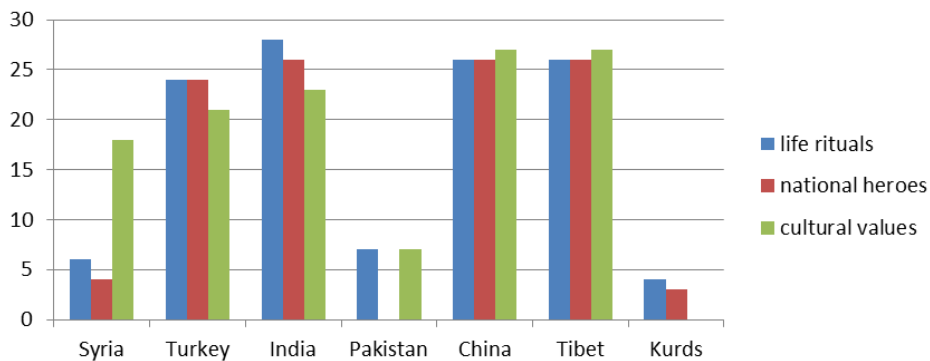


Fig. 3. The country of the conflict specific cultural awareness (2)

The analysis of these three blocks of data confirmed the presence of cultural unawareness at several levels; 1) general cultural unawareness within ‘West-East’ cultural divide; 2) political culture unawareness for countries of the existing conflicts; 3) cultural unawareness within Hofstede’s approach. It revealed that there are cultures of the East countries with which students are more or less familiar (Turkey, India, China, Tibet as a part of China) and cultures that are almost completely not known to the learners’ audience (Syria, Pakistan, Kurds culture).

For an ESP class it means that when given a Foreign Affairs article covering an issue of their professional competence (Terrorism, Global Conflicts, Regional Conflicts or Human Rights) they would by all means encounter the problem of not knowing the key figures and places, local policies and preceding situations to which the authors of this article refer to and appear to get beyond the discourse

The data gained by questioning show that to be fully engaged into discussing aspects of global conflicts with the East world geography IR students need a language pedagogy of augmenting cultural reality which would allow them to pro-actively gain and use culture-specific information for practicing to gain oral professional communication skills.

### 3.2. The research procedure: articulating cultural concepts

Another ESP methodology case of cultural unawareness within the ‘West-East’ cultural divide is phonological and it becomes obvious when the discourse involves cultural concepts mentioning people and places. Students always falter when they have to articulate an Arabic – or Chinese-origin proper name in discourse, be it oral reading or speaking. To investigate the issue, we prepared an oral reading test. The test consisted of 15 lexical units and the task was to read aloud the proper names of politicians and geographic names of the countries from the case studies prepared for classroom discussions. Mostly these were the names of notable political media persons but not the heads of states and the names of places also were meaningful for a particular discussion. (See Fig. 4).

*Wael Nader al-Halqi, Mohammad Jihad al-Laham, Haider al-Abad, Li Keqiang, Mamnoon Hussain, Zhang Dejiang, Yu Zhengsheng, Nawaz Sharif, Anwar Zaheer Jamali, Qangba Püncog, Padma Choling, The Jabal an Nusayriyah, Sulaymaniyah, Buhayrat ath-Tharthar, the Dasht-e Kavir*

Fig. 4 Proper name reading test

During the test students could not hear each other and the findings were obtained through observation of students’ behavior. The results of the test allowed to make some important conclusions: 1) dealing with proper names as a particular linguistic problem the testees made fewer mistakes than in the case when they were a part of their utterance in the course of discussion; 2) some high-performers refused to read the names trying to avoid making a mistake; 3) some students switched on language inferencing and resort to their cognitive resources to establish consistent patterns of reading.

### 3.3. Findings

As the matter of fact, the research only confirmed the extreme relevance of the problem of ‘West-East’ cultural unawareness that the ESP teachers encounter on a regular basis: the students either have very few facts to verbalize or even when having

this knowledge or given a printed text as a prompt they do not know how to articulate the names of cultural phenomena in the English language transliteration.

When the material for professional English classroom case-studies are such conflicts as the ones between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir; Kurds problem that involves four eastern countries - Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq, or the problem of Tibetan autonomous region the ESP language pedagogy becomes impotent if relies only on classical PPP (present, practice, produce model).

In the second part of our research we systematized the methodology we used to overcome the investigated aspects of the problem of cultural unawareness with proper consideration of not only traditional ELT pedagogy approaches, but bearing in mind psychological characteristics of contemporary learners as digital natives.

#### 4. DEALING WITH IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL UNAWARENESS IN ESP INSTRUCTION

The specific of the field of IR research and first of all fluidity of events and attitudes confirms that the language to study is predominantly located in numerous information updates press releases, news reports and analytical articles or TV/digital TV analytical programs.

However, to deal with the problem of cultural unawareness as a part of the 'West-East' cultural divide within the context of intercultural communication we need some special procedures and techniques. Here we mean that the mere availability of resources on the web and virtually existing opportunity to discuss the problem with the learners' counterparts without proper methodology do not provide for creating cultural awareness.

Therefore, from the viewpoint of ESP goal to develop oral professional communication skills the problem falls into the task to ensure acquiring a minimal but sufficient amount of culture specific information in the limited time frames.

Our approach to the problem was based on the ICT use theory for higher education (Allen, Kern, Mattison, 2002) and the research on the topic of integrating ICT technologies in the process of fostering intercultural competence (Espinar, Rodrigez, Parra, 2011; Aba, 2014; Lee, Markley, 2015). Since the necessity to build intercultural competence aroused with the omnipotent spread of information-communication technologies, the latter are to be actively employed to alleviate the problem of cultural unawareness as a major component of intercultural communication.

The most fundamental research on the topic is presented in the paper "ICT for Intercultural Competence Development" by Á. M. L. Espinar, A. R. R Rodríguez and M. E. G. Parra, 2011. Not only do we share their position on the advantages of the Internet resources for improving motivation, promoting self-learning and the opportunity to incorporate productive and receptive skills, but also confirm the necessity of careful selecting these materials to correspond to the teaching/learning aims (Espinar, Rodrigez, Parra, 2011, p.120). But while these researchers are mostly concerned with the general importance of fostering intercultural competence for the society of the XXI century, we would like to present particular ICT pedagogy aimed at dealing with a specific IR ESP problem of cultural unawareness in the context of 'West-East' cultural divide and the knowledge needed for IR studies.



#### **4.1. The main pedagogical aims as the context**

For achieving major teaching/learning aim to get ready for oral professional communication, students of international relations were analyzing HardTalk program videos where the above-mentioned conflicts were discussed by a politician from an East culture and one of BBC correspondents. The methodological concept lying beneath was to make students benefit from the programs in several aspects: 1) professionally – to learn about the attitudes to a global political problem in European Community and inside the country; 2) linguistically – to enrich ESP vocabulary and 3) interculturality – to observe International and British English contrasted in real professional communication.

The latter provided the students understanding of the difference between British and International language standards and important for dealing with cultural unawareness understanding of accent that they might expect from the speakers of the English language from India, Tibet or Syria, in the situation of possible professional communication.

#### **4.2. Two approaches to dealing with the problem of cultural unawareness**

As it was shown in the course of ascertaining experiment of the research there is a yawning information gap in the general knowledge about the East countries compared to the West ones. Grounding on the findings of the first part we suggested two main approaches in dealing with the problem of West-East cultural divide in IR ESP: 1) a guided analysis of teacher’s pre-selected materials (*guided info-analysis*) and 2) a guided learners’ search for the relevant information (*guided info-search*).

First of all, bearing in mind that oral professional communication was the major goal of IR ESP course it was necessary to define theoretical grounds for discussion and prepare the texts of extracts from relevant articles of public and supranational international law.

The next important objective of augmenting IR relevant cultural reality was to expose students to origins of the conflicts and regional political maps, so that they could see the territories of the parties to the conflicts and neighboring states that might be indirectly involved in the conflict.

As far as most of the countries involved into the conflict are sovereign states or at least represent autonomies within these states we suggested that the students need informative visuals displaying the political system and administrative division of the states or territories in question, relying on such visuals’ feature as the ability to present the information briefly and substantively.

Thus, three major prerequisites of guided info-analysis of the culture specific aspects of professional themes such as Terrorism, Global and Local conflicts or Human Rights appeared to be: 1) extracts from relevant international law norms, 2) maps, and 3) visualization of political and administrative systems of the countries involved into the professionally-important conflict.

This information was presented in the handouts form or in e-form on the screen for 5-minute question-answer activities and processed by means of sets of specifying questions, e.g. What international norms stipulate as legal practice in such situations? What territories/administrative issues/human rights are challenged? What institutions might be involved into the conflict.

But viewing the group of learners as digital natives, i.e. those who were raised within technologically rich environment, we resort to the use of *hybrid applications* or *mashups* as more relevant, more dynamic and motivating, if those were available.

Hybrid applications possess a number of features that help facilitate the process of learning such as: 1) the exposure to good rich in professional vocabulary language; 2) presenting information briefly and substantively; and 3) appealing way of presenting information. Their designers often combine multiplication with moving maps showing the way the territory acquired its borders, photo images and episodes from documentaries and feature films. For instance, we found some valuable educational resources to brief the students on the origins and aspects of the conflicts between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir; Kurds' problem that involves four East countries Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq or the problem of Tibetan exile.

There are *formal mashups* of quite academic presentation as, for example, The Economist videographics service "Videographic: India, Pakistan and Kashmir"<sup>1</sup> and rather *informal*, but rich in relevant vocabulary and motivating. The examples for the latter group are a Munich-based Kurzgesagt (In a Nutshell), a YouTube channel producing animated educational videos: "Iraq explained: ISIS, Syria and War"<sup>2</sup> and TestTube News - education and documentary internet and app channel network under Discovery Digital Networks, launched in 2012.

Especially feasible for instruction appeared to be brief stories delivered by Executive Video Producer Tara Long whose videos we employed for preparing to a discussion on local conflicts India vs Pakistan; "Who are the Kurds?" "Why isn't Tibet free?" and for a discussion on human rights.<sup>3</sup>

If Kurzgesagt education videos employ animation and the information is delivered in a cartoon format with moving schemes, diagrams and images of key political figures, Tara Long's Test Tube News videos contain maps, retrospective documentaries and video episodes of current affairs and perfect teaching for briefing and exposure to all problematic areas of relevant culture specific language: names places, historical events.

It is evident that the time frame of a lesson puts forward a problem of material selection that is why some of the cultural information was distributed in the learning management system or more informally, which is a part of contemporary practice, on the page of a limited access group in the social network VKontakte. The latter currently has become more and more popular learning management practice not only in Russia (Rodriguez, Sabino, Zhou, 2011). For example, when speaking about Peshmerga as a military force of Kurd's autonomy in Iraq the learners were provided the video clip of Kurdish singer Hozan Ali "Peshmerga Song 2014"<sup>4</sup> or were recommended to watch the documentary Tibet's Stolen Child<sup>5</sup> which is about 57 minutes long and does not fit the lesson but lets the learners better understand the origins of the Tibet exile problem and encounter professional academic view on the problem of English-speaking experts.

The second approach, which we referred to as *a guided learners' info-search*, is more learner-centered as it relies on more learners' responsibility and involves tapping potential of their cognitive resources. Within this approach the learners were to fill the gaps in their own cultural unawareness lacunae: linguistically and conceptually.

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<sup>1</sup> Videographic: India, Pakistan and Kashmir, The Economist: URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rmUiLwy7ki>

<sup>2</sup> Iraq Explained -- ISIS, Syria and War, Kurzgesagt: URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQPIREDW-Ro>

<sup>3</sup> Tara Long – TestTube Video: Why India and Pakistan Hate Each Other: URL: <https://youtu.be/yReaR1p-PV0>;  
Who are the Kurds: URL: [https://youtu.be/Uv5-q\\_9fpro](https://youtu.be/Uv5-q_9fpro).

Why Isn't Tibet Free?: URL: <https://youtu.be/KdfoCD2qfWw>. (Accessed 23, December 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Peshmerga Song 2014, -a video clip: URL: <https://youtu.be/mGvbx2q1yf0>

<sup>5</sup> Tibet's Stolen Child – a documentary: URL: <https://youtu.be/34XYIt9dYA> (Accessed 23, December 2016)

An example, for this can be a micro-research for Shia and Sunny difference in a flipped classroom mode when the students prepare to discuss the global conflict in Syria and ISIS. The students might be familiar with the topic in their native language but they lack English language equivalents for cultural concepts and working autonomously they subconsciously spotted the language for lacunas. By the same token, to discuss the problem of Tibetan Exile they need to know the basics of Tibetan Buddhism, the functions of Dalai Lama and Penchant Lama in Buddhist hierarchy or the idea of reincarnation of Dalai Lama into the next Dalai Lama’s body.

To augment the cultural reality to overcome West- East cultural divide, we embarked on traditional practice of assigning to an individual learner or a group of learners to conduct a micro-research into a particular area of cultural unawareness. Students were provided with sets of questions allowing them to spot and fill IR relevant cultural lacunae.

For example:

*Prepare to speak in class on one of the topics below. Be brief and substantive. Your talk should not be more than 1 minute long:*

- 1) *Who are the Kurds? What is the main problem of the nation?*
- 2) *What is Peshmerga? What does the word mean? When and why was it founded, what are their aims? What role did Peshmerga play in Iraqi wars?*
- 3) *What is the gist of Iraqi- Kurds conflict?*
- 4) *Do you agree with the statement that ISIS is not an organization but the state of terrorists? Why? Give your grounds.*

The students were allowed to use Wikipedia as the first step to their micro-research, but recommended to use wiki-info as an initial step. Wikipedia’s functional was also used to deal with narrower pronunciation issues of linguistic competence. For instance, a small phonological entry explaining how to voice a proper name was used not only for understanding, but as a micro-tool of a small repetition drill by simple multiple clicking a small loudspeaker icon in the end of the phonological entry.

Closer to real practice, it should be admitted that the lesson often contained a merge of both approaches where *guided info-analysis* was often applied as a back-up plan. So, methodologically, a merge of both approaches was used.

The findings of the classroom observation conducted in the end of the course showed that ICT technologies employed within two approaches we suggested for dealing with the problem of cultural unawareness as a part of bigger problem of the ‘West-East’ cultural divide were helpful for learners (98% of respondents), but at the same time the learners sporadically mentioned the idea of including at least one East country language into the IR studies curriculum (2 respondents out 28) and suggested that better learning could have been achieved with the expertise of English-speaking representatives from the countries considered for the IR ESP case studies.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research demonstrated that the problem of ‘West-East’ cultural divide and lack of cultural awareness regarding East countries among IR students of a university in the RF is a serious problem for ESP in this area of studies.

The majority of the students lack professionally-relevant knowledge about the cultures of the countries situated in the Middle East, Central and South Asia. Furthermore, the issues that

are familiar to them in the professional academic discourse in their native language (Russian in the considered case) are more than often discussed at vaguest terms as there is not enough either linguistic or conceptual knowledge to enable them to put forward proposals on how to deal with this particular area of concern: be it terrorism, global or local territorial conflict or the human rights abuse issue.

To deal with this problem within the rigid time frames of ESP syllabus there are two main approaches: a guided info-analysis of teacher's pre-selected materials and a guided learners' info-search. Both should involve active use of Web 2.0. resources and a mixture of both might often be the case in the English language classroom.

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