

Reconsidering Intercultural Component of Foreign Language Learning in the Result of Russia-Ukraine War (Ukrainian Perspective)

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Abstract: *According to the generally accepted paradigm culture is considered an indispensable element of language learning process. Analysis of modern didactic materials and textbooks shows that target culture is presented in both explicit and implicit way. Authors insist that shaping students' intercultural awareness cannot be limited to students' exposure to another culture. Real intercultural approach also involves students' ability to present their home country and culture. For this purpose it is essential to determine elements of students' native culture which are to be incorporated in language learning process. Analysis of cultural patterns utilized in language learning proves that it offers a variety of everyday and touristic topics but omits the problems of wars and conflicts which are pertinent to many countries. The full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine has challenged educators in Ukraine to reconsider approaches to cultural representations of home country. Authors claim that current war has significantly transformed the image of Ukraine as well as the global agenda, and showcase this with relevant examples. Due to these facts it has become impossible for students to present their home country through the prism of peaceful relations and omit the problem of war and its implications. For this purpose authors specified war-related topics which are relevant to national curriculum and can be potentially incorporated in the content of foreign language learning. In order to find out educators' attitude towards incorporating war-related problems in national curriculum the authors have questioned over 300 teachers from various parts of Ukraine. The obtained data clearly shows that most educators support the idea of integrating war-related topics as they have a potential to showcase the problem of human values, inter-personal relations and cultural dimensions.*

Keywords: *learning content, intercultural awareness, wars and conflicts, human values and interpersonal relations*

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Introduction

Analysis of modern foreign language (FL) textbooks proves that cultural component is integrated and contextualized in almost every topic. Over the past few decades authors and methodologists have elaborated sophisticated approaches to exposing students to cultural information in both explicit and implicit way. From didactic perspective cultural content of a FL textbook has to be relevant and meaningful to students. In this way it will be able to address students' instrumental motivation, minimize tensions and elicit more positive attitudes to language learning as well as shape their values and attitudes.

As Pershukova states, until recently sociocultural element in most FL textbooks could be described as partly entertaining and serving mainly 'touristic purposes' (Persukova, 2008): so that students could easily integrate in the community whose language is being taught. As far as educational policy of any country requires reconsidering its standards and content of education depending on external challenges, approaches to structuring FL curriculum and textbooks gradually evolved and provided positive learning outcomes (Redko, 2019).

Currently the system of education in Ukraine is facing another challenge. The full-scale Russia's invasion in Ukraine transformed lives of thousands of people around the world. Facts beyond number prove that due to their devastating impact, conflicts and wars have a powerful impact on people, their relations, environments as well as values. Their causes will always be in memory and devastating consequences will be felt by their witnesses. As a result, current Russia-Ukraine war cannot leave school curriculum unchanged. According to Hein and Selden textbooks reflect a national consensus regarding the amount of knowledge, values and perspectives that a society wants to transfer to the future generations. Due to textbooks students are exposed to dominant narratives that present an official story that shapes their attitudes (Hein, & Selden, 2000). War is a topic of great potential through which sensitive aspects like democracy and state-building may be explored in rich detail. Primarily, problematics of war has direct influence on humanities, where cultural matters are analyzed and reflected. Due to the fact that culture is an essential part of FL learning, now it is vital to ask a question whether the current Russia-Ukraine war will be reflected in school FL textbooks and to what extent.

Literature overview: culture in fl textbooks

In contemporary linguistic paradigm language and culture are considered as intertwined entities (Byram & Grundy, 2002). Perhaps the first ones to identify this connection were Sapir and Whorf who empirically proved that language determines the pattern of culture and the way the human mind perceives the world (Sapir, 1961; Whorf, 1956). The importance of these findings was quickly recognized by various social sciences i.e. sociology, anthropology, but not methodology of language teaching. As Allen W. states, in methodology the division line between language and culture was carefully drawn until the 1960s as the primary goal for second language acquisition was access to the great literary masterpieces of civilization (Allen, 1985). Hence, reading in a foreign language was regarded as activity that helped people learn about representatives of another culture. As global mobility started to increase in the early 1960s (UNDP, 2020), it became obvious that travelers and migrants needed not only good command of foreign language, but also higher cultural awareness to properly understand representatives of other nations.

Due to the fact that language was considered a principal carrier of meanings relevant to a particular culture, methodologists insisted that language teaching had to involve familiarizing with a particular culture (Colson, & Geertz, 1975). So, after decades of relative neglect, culture was finally receiving due recognition as a key element of FL education. In 1966 Nostrand suggested that FL teaching had to pursue two educational goals i.e.: 'crosscultural communication and understanding' (Nostrand, 1966). Having recognized the importance of culture in FL learning scholars (such as Brooks, Hall, Nostrand, Seelye and others) made their efforts to elaborate ways for natural integration of culture in the process of language learning and make exposing to culture more natural and accessible to the language learners (Kramersch, 1993).

Despite numerous research in the sphere of language and culture, K. Risager claims there is still no general consensus about what should be included in the cultural representations (Risager, 2020). This is due to the fact that 'culture' is essentially quite complex and experts have offered a variety of its interpretations and limits. If in the past people thought of culture as what is often called "high culture" i.e.: art, literature, music and the like; gradually understanding of culture evolved and comprised many more aspects including more intangible phenomena like attitudes, relation patterns, values etc. (Killick, & Poveda, 1997). According to Byram, language represents the values and meanings of culture, it refers not only to cultural items but also indicates people's cultural identity (Byram, 1989).

A significant contribution to understanding of culture was suggested by Nostrand's in *Emergent model scheme* that comprised six categories and their detailed descriptions: *Culture, Society, Conflict, Ecology and technology, Individual, Cross-cultural environment* (Nostrand, 1978). The first category "Culture" included value systems, thought patterns, and various art forms; "Society" was defined as a system of interpersonal and intergroup relations and included institutions such as family and different types of organizations; the category of "Conflict" was described as a framework of interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts; "Ecology and technology" included exploitation of natural resources, knowledge of plants and animals, health care, travel etc.; "Individual" was dedicated to intra/interpersonal variations i.e. internal organization and variability of an individual, and their reaction to the generally accepted patterns and institutions – reactions of conformity, revolt, or exploitation. Finally, "Cross-cultural environment" had to do with attitudes towards other cultures.

Such detailed descriptions of culture and its comprising elements were very helpful in understanding culture's essence and scope. Although *Emergent model scheme* was later reconsidered and updated by researchers, its framework is still used as a guiding principle for defining content of cultural component in foreign language curricula.

Within framework of our research two categories of Nostrand's *Emergent model scheme* represent special interest. These are "Cross-cultural environment" and "Conflicts".

The cross-cultural component (in some interpretations "sociocultural", or "intercultural") has undergone significant transformations over the last fifty years and has become an indispensable element of communicative competence in its modern interpretations (Europe, 2002). In practice foreign language acquisition in modern FL textbooks involves modelling true-to-life situations of communication in the target language as well as exposing students to elements of culture where target-language is spoken. Mostly such 'cultural encounters' involve information about popular holidays, cuisine, portraits of people, popular tourist sites, outstanding persons who made significant literary or scientific contributions to their nations, samples of short stories, songs and rhymes etc. As Hinkel states, all these are elements of *surface culture* and static elements to represent a nation (Hinkel, 2001). While such encyclopedic approach sheds some light on the most explicit cultural elements it is not able to provide students with real insight in thorough understanding of those processes, attitudes and values which determine another nation's values and attitudes (Kramsch, 1993). This fact was acknowledged by textbook authors who had reconsidered their

practice. Due to this, most recent FL textbooks possess not only high-quality linguistic material but also elaborated techniques of representing implicit cultural elements in a more interactive and comprehensible way so that students can gain better understanding of such cultural elements as gender roles, beliefs, interests, values etc.

Although foreign languages need to be introduced through the representation of target culture (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002) Pasichnyk insists that limiting students' exposure only to elements of the culture where target language is spoken in essence represents deliberate imposing of its values and attitudes and thus fosters shaping distorted perception of cultural environment (Pasichnyk, 2021). While it is important to have deep understanding of a foreign culture when dealing with foreigners, most real-life communicative exchanges involve answering questions about speaker's close environment, their home country and culture. In this respect researchers claim that any FL should be taught in a method that *learners could conceptualise their own culture using a particular FL* (Alshenqeti, 2020). In this respect FL classes have to create an opportunity for real "inter-cultural encounters" where students can contrast and compare similar aspects of their home and foreign cultures e.g. peculiarities of school life, patterns of family life, daily routines, most popular jobs, attitudes to money etc. While Byram, Gribkova, Starkey suggest teachers should encourage comparative analysis with learners' own culture (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002), Pasichnyk, claims FL textbooks also have to contain an adequate amount of information about learners' home country. In his opinion this amount should not exceed 10% of overall textbook content (Pasichnyk, 2021)

As far as element of home culture strictly depends on the country where the language is taught this intercultural element is possible to implement only in state-approved FL textbooks. To achieve this goal state-approved school FL textbooks don't necessarily have to contain descriptions of all aspects of home country students are already familiar with. On the contrary, the textbook's primary goal is to expose students to explicit and implicit elements of foreign culture but at the same time it has to encourage students to draw this information about their home country from their own experience and background.

As a matter of fact, Nostrand's description of "*Conflict*" category was very concise and was mainly interpreted in terms of interpersonal relations. Although Nostrand lived in a post-war epoch, in his *Emerging Model* he actually ignored the fact that conflicts often arise between countries, nations or ethnic groups. They are an indispensable feature of all human societies, and

potentially an aspect of all social relationships (Avruch, 1998). Such conflicts have a very huge impact on interpersonal relations, define how nations rally against their foes and seek support among other nations. Also conflicts make participants reconsider their own values and attitudes. As Batton states only through in-depth exposure can a person learn the concepts, skills, and values underlying conflict, and grasp the basic concepts of human rights, humanitarian norms, and responsible citizenship (Batton, 2015). These facts prove that conflicts as well as the ways in which they impact communities may be well-incorporated in the content of FL learning, although the scope of their representation is still to be researched and verified.

Examples of Russia-Ukraine war impact on information field

Facts prove that Russia-Ukraine war has brought about numerous changes in the way common facts are perceived. Primarily, the place and role of two countries became subject of substantial reconsideration. Numerous facts prove the increased interest to Ukraine. Soon after the war broke out Timothy Snyder brought out a series of lectures “*The Making of Modern Ukraine*”, which had millions of views on *YouTube*. With this resource interested foreigners started to gradually rediscover Ukraine, its history, people and their mentality.

The war has prompted scientists to reconsider the image of Russia as well. In January 2023 BBC released a film ‘*The Invention of Russia. A Tale of Two Ivans*’ where the history of Russia dates back to 1340s when it was a subordinate of Golden Horde. This may be deemed as in Western perception of Russia which is no longer associated with Kyiv Rus as it used to be.

Actions to restore historical truths were very obvious in cultural sphere when museums all over the world disentitled artists from Russian status and classified them as Ukrainians: this happened to Kazimir Malevich in *Stedelijk Museum* in Amsterdam; also *Metropolitan Museum* changed information about Arkhip Kuindzhi, Illia Repin and Ivan Aivazovskiy (Harris, 2023).

Not only institutions are involved in restoring the truth about Ukrainian heritage. Individual citizens also lead their own battles for historical accuracy. One of them is Antonina Malei, who currently resides in London and published results of her observation at *texty.org.ua*. She was stunned by the facts that even well-educated people in Europe have a very distorted image of Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, Antonina Malei went even further: she analyzed texts of encyclopedias and books for children and teenagers available in libraries and book stores and discovered that Modern Russia is wrongly associated with what is an actual and indispensable part of

Ukraine's history. Similar examples were found in children's books in other European countries.

According to Kuzio, to great extent such misconceptions continue to exist due to the fact that Western historiography of Russia for a long time relied on Russian imperial framework that neglects Ukrainian national identity by promoting an all-Russian perspectives and identifies the medieval state of Kyiv Rus (the majority of which lay in Ukrainian territory) as Russia's historical heritage and takes an imperialist view on modern Ukraine (Kuzio, 2000). In this imperial framework, also followed by Western historians, Ukraine has very occasional representation.

According to Ms. Malei, the problem is that after people get the wrong ideas and concepts in a young age, they are difficult to eradicate later. In collaboration with *Texty* editorial board Ms. Malei sent enquiry-letters to Publishing Houses responsible for misleading information. Most important is the fact that the case of Antonina Malei proves that books and other media whose main goal is to bear and proliferate knowledge are an essential tool in shaping peoples' awareness and understanding about every aspect of human lives. In this respect school textbooks have to be under a special scrutiny as very often they are responsible for delivering sensitive content to a very sensitive category of people – children, whose awareness is being shaped.

The importance of books and their content is that they have long been the guardians of knowledge and a primary tool in proliferating ideas and memory of a given society. Due to the fact that some books carry 'inconvenient truths', after the invasion in February 2022 Russia has destroyed or removed thousands of works from the shelves of libraries and schools. This irreparable loss of documentary heritage is part of the even greater loss of cultural and artistic heritage in Ukraine (Fernández Aparicio, 2022).

Impact of wars and conflicts on content of FL textbooks

Analysis of relevant publications and textbooks shows that wars, conflicts, their causes and consequences have always been a domain of history lessons with numerous researchers inclined to consider wars and their impacts through the prism of history textbooks. This may be due to the fact that history textbooks play a key role in shaping the next generation's understanding of both past events and the concept of 'friend' and 'foe'... and also help in molding of national identities (Roldan Vera, & Fuchs, 2018). Representation of wars and conflicts in history textbooks often depends not only on didactic but rather ideological goals pursued by the authors - the

coverage of the same events, their importance may vary in textbooks for different countries or even parts of the same country (Goldstein, 2020).

Nevertheless, we set a goal to analyze war and conflict-related representations in FL textbooks. Our analysis helped discover several examples where wars and conflicts had impact on FL curriculum and textbooks.

The most distant example was found in Miroljubov monograph and is connected with World War II. According to Miroljubov, in 1941 after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Ministerial instructions in USSR recommended that educators familiarize students who begin to learn foreign languages in Year 5 with military lexica. Also the recommendations specified particular military topics for students in Year 7 and older. Moreover, different foreign languages pursued different goals: as far as German was the language of invaders students in German language classes were primarily exposed to situations of interrogating the enemy, whereas French and English textbooks implied more conversations with Allies (Miroljubov, 2002).

Yael Teff-Seker analyzed the matter of peace and conflict in modern Israeli state-approved textbooks. According to his observations, the textbooks used to teach Arabic to the Jewish sector contain many stories and dialogues that include or revolve around all Israeli Arab-speakers and present their point of view and everyday life to the students. All opinions are presented respectfully, objectively and without prejudice or judgement. In terms of conflict peace agreements with Arab states are mentioned favourably, though peace negotiations and events that have to do with the Palestinian Authority are described briefly and factually, and textbooks refrain from expressing any opinion other than a general support for peace in the Middle East. (Teff-Seker, 2020)

Further research confirms that most FL textbooks have only occasional mentions of wars and conflicts even if they have had a significant impact on the nation or relations between ethnic groups. Some examples were identified in *Insight Pre-Intermediate* where wars and conflicts are mentioned sparsely and only in context of other topics. For example, the textbook states that '*coltan is used to pay for war in Congo*' (Wildman & Beddall, 2013: 124). Another mention of war is in the context of comparing living conditions nowadays and in the 1940s when people had to build personal shelters to protect from air-raids (Wildman & Beddall, 2013: 42-43). In *Solutions Intermediate* students are provided with information about Remembrance Day, which only describes the tradition of commemorating those who died for their country in World Wars and other conflicts and the story of Poppy symbol (Falla & Davies, 2012: 16). In English language

textbook *Access* for German school, information about a conflict between Lakota Indians and first settlers in the US is outlined in the topic that describes life in South Dakota. However, in this case the author raises a more sensitive topic of whether Mount Rushmore with faces of four presidents carved on it can be regarded as a symbol of national glory, taking into consideration that these presidents had contributed to relocation of Lakota from their own lands (Harger & Niemitz-Rossant, 2016: 82, 89). In *Mission 2* World War I is mentioned through the prism of football that ‘*makes history*’ (Evans & Dooley, 1998: 40).

These are just a few mentions which we were able to identify in FL textbooks. Meanwhile we also identified that the only social conflict which seems to have been properly illustrated in school FL textbooks (especially those for teaching English) is the problem of slavery and how people were able to overcome it.

From our findings we may draw the following conclusion: although conflicts are sometimes mentioned in FL school textbooks they are used as a background or relevant supplementary material rather than a separate problem for discussion. Besides, there are very few recommendations or methodological guidelines for how to represent the problem of wars and conflicts in school FL textbooks. Although Batton outlines sample ways of practising conflict-analysis and conflict resolution skills in academic contexts, these are not intended for FL classes (Batton, 2015). Another example is an educational non-profit organization, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives* (ALBA), whose work is inspired by the American volunteers of the *Abraham Lincoln Brigade* who fought fascism in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Using an abundance of available documents and authentic resources generated by war (i.e. songs, poems, plays, novels, films and essays, as well as posters, photography, art, and film) *the ALBA* offers to use them in the language classroom in order to develop common core state standards in reading, writing, speaking & listening as well as develop students’ critical thinking. After reading fragments of Antonio Buero Vallejo’s *El tragaluz*, one of their lesson plans exposes students to the following questions: *Is vengeance inevitable? How does one find the peace to reconcile with immense pain? How do we keep the past from paralyzing or poisoning us?* (https://alba-valb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/SPA_LP5_Vengar_la_muerte.pdf) Although this is not a part of a regular curriculum or a standard FL textbook and we have no information about students’ or teachers’ feedback, ALBA provides a good example that the problem of war can be used to shape students’ awareness and their values.

We assume that such low representation of war-related problems in FL textbooks is due to two reasons: primarily, as mentioned above, wars, conflicts and ways of their interpretation are the subject of history lessons, whereas FL has been traditionally aimed at shaping neutral perception of another culture i.e.: cuisine, sports, sights, relations between people on every-day level etc. Students are exposed to all these through texts, illustrations, short educational videos with further practice in typical communicative situations. On the other hand, in conflict interpretations many issues remain unresolved – still for many of them there’s no generally accepted moral interpretative framework. To great extent, these facts explain why authors avoid them in their works.

Research objective

The objective of our research is to reconsider approaches to representing cultural information about students’ home country with regard to changes that were brought about by Russia’s full-scale invasion in Ukraine. The goal is to survey educators in order to define topics and aspects which have to be integrated in the content of FL textbooks for school in Ukraine.

Overview of fl textbooks market in Ukraine and school fl curriculum

In Ukraine, learning a FL is considered of high priority and is not limited only to schools as many adults also enroll in various language courses. That’s why the market of FL didactic literature in Ukraine is very buoyant and highly competitive. Besides state-authorized textbooks prepared by Ukrainian authors, schools have the right to use authentic literature as supplementary resources. To be eligible for school the content of such textbooks books has to comply with state-imposed standards and school curriculum. Nevertheless, foreign publishers oblige to these instructions and in cooperation with Ukrainian authors adapt their content to the needs of Ukrainian schools (Publishing House “*Linguist*” and “*Metodika-Publishing*”). As a result, for every school year teachers have numerous variations of textbooks for every FL to choose from. Such variety of didactic materials provides educators with different approaches and tools and ultimately has favorable effect on language acquisition process.

FL curriculum in Ukraine has undergone significant transformations in the last two decades in order to comply with global trends. Its modern version is based on the concept of ‘big ideas’ (Erickson, 2002). This approach was implemented relatively recently and is aimed at creating a

framework for a seamless learning process in order to shape skills that students need to think conceptually and to solve problems in today's complex, changing world. The key 'big ideas' (also known as 'concepts') are the same across all subject areas and include the following macro-spheres:

- Ecological safety and sustainable development;
- Civic responsibility;
- Health and safety;
- Entrepreneurial and financial awareness.

To some extent these 'concepts' correlate with the Nosrtrand's vision of culture and its comprising elements in *Emergent model scheme*. They pivot around the most vital issues our society has to resolve in order to achieve personal development, raise students' awareness and create preconditions for further sustainable development of the country. Within framework of these 'concepts', the students are exposed to the following macro-themes during FL classes:

- I, my Family and Friends.
- Sports and Leisure.
- Food.
- Nature, and weather.
- Arts.
- Science. Nature and Environment.
- Travelling.
- School Community and School Life.
- Work and Employment.
- Ukraine and the World.

Through each of these macro-themes and problems related to them students develop their competences in a FL as well as learn to resolve typical everyday problems, shape attitudes and values. As said before, teachers are not limited in their choice of didactic materials (textbooks, additional resources), until they provide for the achievement of defined educational outcomes.

Research method

Regardless of teaching methods, one of the objectives of FL education is to enable students to represent themselves, their close relatives and environment either orally or in written form. For people whose country was invaded and who had to flee their homes, part with relatives and spend time in shelters during air-raid alerts such representations are nearly

impossible without using new lexis i.e. ‘*curfews*’, ‘*air-raid shelter*’, ‘*shelling*’, ‘*debris*’, ‘*wounds*’, ‘*destruction*’, ‘*refugees*’, ‘*first aid*’, ‘*relocation*’, ‘*troops*’ etc. But mastering a language is not about expanding vocabulary. To make the process of FL acquisition more logical and structured thematic approach is exploited. In this respect, we have thoroughly analyzed the FL curriculum and how each of them contributes to shaping students’ awareness and values (which are represented by ‘big ideas’).

We suppose that for Ukrainian students representing home country in situations of intercultural encounters requires incorporating transformations caused by war in the content of didactic materials. In our choice of such information, we relied on events which had significant impact on life in the country and which potentially correlate and fit with the topics outlined by the FL curriculum.

Altogether, we have formulated 15 topics. In order to avoid possible ambiguity or misinterpretation each topic is supplemented by a brief description:

1. ***Personal story***: the war has had a different impact on peoples’ lives. After encountering horrific events in their home towns a lot of people had to flee war zones and move to safer places within Ukraine or abroad.
2. ***Life abroad***: being forced to relocate many Ukrainians reached their destinations in other countries where they were not only exposed to new culture, attitudes and values but also had to change some of their daily habits.
3. ***Volunteering***: trying to support Ukrainian Armed Forces and aid people who lost their homes and had to relocate many citizens and foreigners were involved in volunteering activity. What they do, how they manage to make the change, who are these people.
4. ***The world of jobs***: despite the fact that all jobs are equally important, the war prompted us to reconsider established views. Such professions as military officers, fire fighters, doctors, power grid repairman, journalists etc. had little attention in textbooks, nevertheless they performed a significant role in the wartime and their
5. ***Impact of war on ecology***: devastated fields and forests, neglected canals, and depleted rivers, threat of nuclear pollution and other consequences of war will be a challenge for the country and people for the years to come.
6. ***Animals***: rescuing themselves, most people never forgot about their pets; despite this some pet owners and farmers were forced to leave

- their animals behind; some animals became part of the Army and helped in military operations.
7. **Safety rules:** during the war people got used to permanent air-raid alerts and had to elaborate new safety measures for homes and public places; even after the war life in numerous towns and cities will be dangerous due to explosives left behind by troops, because of mines farmers will always risk their lives working in the fields and no trip to a forest may be considered safe anymore.
 8. **Role of a famous person:** it is a common fact that teens have their role model among representatives of pop culture or sport. Many of them rolled up their sleeves and dived in the whirl of events to help the country.
 9. **Life of my city/town/village:** during the war, life in towns and villages changed dramatically: while some towns were losing their inhabitants, others were accepting them by thousands. In big cities like Kyiv and Kharkiv, Underground became a home to any city dwellers.
 10. **Education in wartime:** both students and educators were forced to get used to new conditions and develop new learning styles.
 11. **Foreigners' attitude to Ukraine:** due to war Ukraine has been the headliner in many countries for so long that other nations have formed their understanding of Ukraine
 12. **Treating victims of war:** because of the war, there are already a lot of traumatized people suffering from injuries, loss of relatives and friends, relocation or adapting to new living conditions. These numbers will increase.
 13. **Technology of war.** The war has impacted technological sphere in many ways: from missiles, drones, and satellites in the skies to new challenges in the sphere of power generation. Besides, it is a common fact that war has always contributed to technological development in civilian sphere.
 14. **Art and culture.** It is hard to predict how war impacts the work of Ukrainian artists, writers, composers and film makers, but it is evident that we will have more new names and more war-related problems highlighted by all types of artists. Moreover, art can be sometimes used as a form of therapy for the victims of war.
 15. **Food and national cuisine.** The war has proved that Ukraine is a large agricultural country whose crops are exported and consumed globally. The war has impacted not only the life of farmers and food makers but also posed a threat to food security in global dimension.

Besides, relocation of people across the country brought about new changes to national cuisine and eating habits.

It is obvious that we omit any mentions of Russia which actually triggered the conflict and committed numerous atrocities. This is due to the fact that FL is about communication and establishing meaningful relations on the basis of intercultural awareness. In our research, our topics represent accumulation of such facts that contribute to raising this awareness.

Within framework of our research we surveyed 317 FL teachers at training seminars in the period of 2022-2023. The educators were asked to choose no more than ten topics which they consider as the most relevant cultural markers caused by this war and which are worth integrating in the cultural component of FL learning. We deliberately limited the number of options for educators to see which topics are considered of greater importance.

Results & discussion

In this part, we present our findings regarding educator's attitudes towards incorporating war-related problems in content of foreign language learning (See Table 1).

Table 1. Survey results

Topic	Number of positive responses
1. Personal story	317
2. Life abroad	317
3. Volunteering	302
4. The world of jobs	248
5. Impact of war on ecology	184
6. Animals	117
7. Safety rules	21
8. Role of a famous person	308
9. Life of my city/town/village	293
10. Education in wartime	211
11. Foreigners' attitude to Ukraine	308
12. Treating victims of war	31
13. Technology of War	7
14. Art and culture	129
15. Food and national cuisine	82

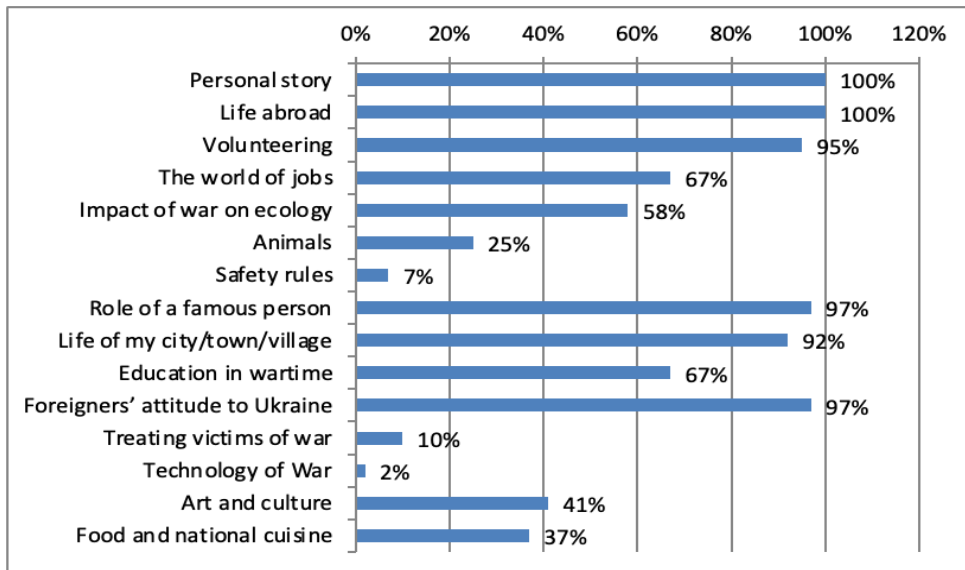


Figure 1. Share of educators' responses per category

The survey showed that not all the educators chose all ten topics. Around 30% of those surveyed chose only 5-7 as the most relevant.

As it is illustrated in the table, the responses are distributed unevenly. The obtained data clearly show that “*Personal story*”, “*Life abroad*”, “*Volunteering*”, “*Foreigners' attitude*”, and “*Life of my city/town*” are among the leaders of educators' preferences. This may be due to their poignancy and strong association with personal experiences and intercultural dimension. Living in the country which is being invaded, having relatives who serve in the military and helping those who suffered, people are inclined to choose topics that are relevant to their own experiences. Besides, media create information field which emphasizes importance of the chosen topics.

Topics “*The world of jobs*”, “*Impact of war on ecology*” and “*Education in wartime*” got on average 60-70% of positive responses, which also proves educators' interest in their incorporating in the content of FL learning. Overall, we assume that choice of these topics to some extent was predetermined by school curriculum and patterns of teaching practices – educators extrapolated their classroom experiences and topics they teach to those outlined in the questionnaire. Accordingly, the more familiar topic was, the more opportunities educators see for supplementing it with new didactic materials.

Although topics “*Animals*”, “*Art and culture*”, “*Food and national cuisine*” are also a part of FL curriculum, they got 25-40% of responses, which is well below average.

The most underrated topics are “*Technology of war*”, and “*Treating victims of war*” and “*Safety rules*” with less than 10 % of positive responses. Unlike many other topics listed in the questionnaire, these three obviously had the lowest association with intercultural aspects. Besides, as some educators stated these ‘*should be taught in other subject areas*’.

We consider that topics that obtained over 70% of positive responses have high potential to be incorporated in the content of FL learning, while others might require further discussion and cultural analysis.

Our research was not limited purely to counting responses from the questionnaire. Instead, in order to get a broader picture and better understanding of educators’ attitudes, we asked some of them in person to express their own opinion about which other aspects related to war should (or shouldn’t) be included in the content of FL learning. In order to comply with ethical requirements, prior to this survey stage, every respondent was informed about its objective. Participants gave their informed consent to take part in the study. The answers were provided voluntarily, and survey was completely anonymous, i.e. respondents didn’t have to provide any personal data. Although we were able to question only 7% of respondents, their responses were quite illustrious and potentially might encourage further discussion. Some of them are represented in this section (educators’ responses are provided in authors’ translation):

- *Traditionally the system of education has been aimed at transferring a particular set of facts to be memorized by students. Due to the change of educational paradigm and curriculum, modern education emphasizes the importance of shaping students’ awareness and values, one of them being ‘civil responsibility’. The context of war brings the problem of responsibility to a completely new level and it should become a compulsory topic for considering in upper secondary and high school when students are ready for such discussion.*

- *The war and its threats changed the priorities of people in choice of place of their residence. Homes with thick walls, basement shelters are becoming a priority for many citizens. For all institutions like schools, kindergartens and colleges it is a legal requirement to have a properly equipped shelter. This information should also be included in topics related to homes or describing school premises.*

- *It is true that the war has greatly impacted all aspects of life in Ukraine. And the problem of home country representations needs to be discussed and implemented in school practice. Although many of the topics in the questionnaire are equally important for showing the true image of Ukraine, in the future we will have to reconsider their content in*

order to concentrate more on post-war life in Ukraine and its integration in the community of democratic states.

- Due to war, it is likely that military cooperation between countries will develop. Besides, military component will become an indispensable aspect of many professions, even those that seemed to have very little connection to military sphere. In this respect, we have to keep in mind that Ukraine's high school (lyceum) is being transformed to provide more professionally oriented training (i.e. preparing students for particular future trade). Consequently, the need for specially tailored courses to meet the requirements of pre-professional training is on the rise. For classes that major in FL these may be special courses that expose students to military terminology to prepare them for interpreting work in military sphere. Special culture studies courses, which are usually popular with FL teachers, may also cover a wide range of aspects related to Ukraine during and after the war. The questionnaire may serve as a guideline for tailoring content of such courses.

- It is unlikely that these topics will be integrated in textbooks soon. Nevertheless, educators can develop their own didactic materials and encourage students to share their experiences and attitudes about these and similar problems in their communicative activities.

- Although the war greatly impacted our society, the process of FL learning cannot be transformed into total exposure of students to war and its implications. These problems are more relevant to history classes. Only a fraction of war-related facts or episodes may be presented in FL textbooks. Nevertheless, it is obvious that students who witnessed this war will often mention personal experiences in situations of communicative activity.

- Integration of the problems outlined in the questionnaire in the content of FL learning makes sense as it will help overcome a 'touristic' approach to language learning where students concentrate on neutral aspects of everyday life. Students will have an opportunity to speak about their home country and life in it during and after the war. But the problem is that these topics and problems may be implemented only in national state-approved FL textbooks while authentic textbooks from international publishers will remain unchanged. Taking into consideration that many schools opt for foreign editions, we will have a weird situation when different students get different cultural perspectives at FL classes. So this aspect requires further discussion in order to achieve a positive resolution of this dilemma.

These comments do not require our immediate answers, although they may serve as a precondition for further research. Besides, most educators showed their candid interest in the problem of integrating cultural representation of a country that undergoes a military invasion in the content of FL classes.

Within framework of our research we have to make the following remarks. Our research does not intend to transform the process of FL

learning into describing what happened on the territory of Ukraine during the war. The didactic goal of FL learning remains unchanged: shaping communicative competence and raising intercultural awareness. Our presupposition remains as stated before: cultural representations (foreign culture – student’s native culture) should be balanced 10:90 with dominant position belonging to the culture of peoples whose language is being taught. Information about students’ native country is to be incorporated into macro topics subtly and in a relevant way. In situations of communicative activity where students have to represent elements of their native culture they are not limited in choice or amount of material and can draw it from own experience, other school subjects or sources.

In practice all the outlined 15 topics are not to be considered as separate entities. On the contrary, many of them can overlap in many ways covering a wide scope of relevant and interconnected issues. For example, the story of professor Shandor who left his University Chair to become a soldier and read lectures to his students from a trench between battles and subsequently was appointed an ambassador in Hungary in 2023. A similar example is the story of a film director Oleh Sentsov, who also stopped his career and joined the Army. Many more examples may be drawn from life of average people who encountered with the war in their homes e.g. a farmer whose family had to flee Ukraine to settle in Germany while the farmer himself had to stay in Ukraine to take care of his livestock and had to sweep mines on the fields to grow new crops.

The problem of war and its consequences is a very sensitive issue and requires establishing the most appropriate age for students to be exposed to it. Although this aspect has to be experimentally established by psychologists, educators who took part in the survey assume that the starting point to introduce war-related topics is Year 7 when students begin to learn relevant topics in history lessons and their cognitive capabilities allow them to analyze and critically consume information.

Conclusion

Modern methodology of language learning heavily relies on the concept of cultural and intercultural representations. For this reason researchers offer numerous interpretations of culture and define which of its aspects are to be included in the content of FL learning. In recent decades cross-cultural approach, where students learn not only about the culture of the country whose language is being taught, but also compare it with similar aspect of their own culture, has gained significant popularity.

To properly implement cross-cultural approach in didactic materials for FL learning, it is essential to define which elements a culture comprises. In our research we relied on one of the earliest cultural frameworks suggested by Nostrand i.e. *Emergent model scheme* that defined ‘conflicts’ as one of culture’s comprising elements.

From researcher’s perspective it was curious to discover that, despite the fact that conflicts and wars remain an indispensable part of every nation’s history or ethnic relations, the concepts of culture and intercultural relations in FL learning are mainly viewed through the prism of the world where permanent peace has been established. Analysis of academic literature and publications proves that war and its impacts are the subject of history textbooks, but not of FL teaching. Obviously, this helps create positive attitude to language learning, prepare students to interaction in neutral cross-cultural environment and contributes to shaping values and attitudes which a typical for the democratic and civilized world.

Nevertheless, for some countries wars and conflicts become a part of their history or even present and near future. Wars and conflicts, even if they are settled, have a significant impact on people’s relations, their values and attitudes towards their own culture. In our research, we challenged the common practice of omitting war-related problems in the content of FL learning. The position of our research is to look at the possibilities to rear values and attitudes through the prism of world where conflict is not an exception but a fact of nation’s life. Within framework of our research, we surveyed over 300 educators in Ukraine by asking which aspects related to current Russia-Ukraine war should be incorporated in the content of FL learning.

The obtained results show that topics that emphasize personal experience had a high response rate. These were: “*Personal story*”, “*Life abroad*”, “*Volunteering*”, “*Role of a famous person*”, “*Foreigners’ attitude to Ukrainians*”, and “*Life of my city/town*”. We assume that these topics can illustrate key cultural transformations that happened to national awareness and levels of civil responsibility of Ukrainians. They may potentially become a part of national FL curriculum and subsequently be represented in didactic materials (FL textbooks).

Besides quantitative analysis, interviewing educators also helped provide some qualitative insight in the problem of representing war-related problems in school FL textbooks. The responses prove that the problem has different levels of approval: from absolutely positive to more moderate or even abstentions (skeptical). Such lack of unanimity indicates that the problem is new to FL teachers and requires further discussion.

Together with all the involved in the research, we consider that the research problem poses a challenge for methodology and didactics of FL learning. Thus, we do not consider the survey results as ultimate and undisputed, but rather indicative and that may require further analysis on educators' forums and in publications.

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