
Through the Looking Glass: What ESL Teachers Can Find in Russian-Published Reference Books

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The purpose of this article was to research the cultural content of Russian-published English reference literature. Paradoxically, in trying to create the learning materials for the students of English, the authors of these texts focus on the values inherent in their own culture. Ethnocentrism and a high degree of generalizations about local values are reflected in the seemingly dry 1-2-sentence texts used for the study. The goal of the present research is not to give "modern recommendations" to non-English-speaking authors on how to write textbooks for students in their countries; rather, the intention is to help Canadian teachers working with the ESL learners to become more aware of the experiences, expectations, and views their students may bring to the classroom.

Le but de cette recherche était d'étudier le contenu culturel de manuels de référence de langue anglaise publiés en russe. Un paradoxe transparait dans la tentative de la part des auteurs qui voulaient créer du matériel pédagogique pour les étudiants d'anglais car leurs manuels reflètent les valeurs de leur propre culture. En effet, les courts textes composés d'une ou deux phrases apparemment insipides qui ont fait l'objet de cette étude, témoignent d'ethnocentrisme et d'un recours fréquent aux généralisations sur les valeurs locales. Le but de l'article n'est pas de présenter des "recommandations modernes" aux auteurs allophones qui écrivent des manuels pour les étudiants de leur pays, mais plutôt de conscientiser les enseignants canadiens en ALS quant aux expériences, aux attentes et aux points de vue que leurs étudiants apportent avec eux en classe.

I'll tell you all my ideas about Looking-glass House. First, there's the room you can see through the glass—that's just the same as our drawing room, only the things go the other way ... Well, then, the books are something like our books, only the words go the wrong way. (Carroll, 1972, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, chap I).

Introduction

The historic changes that began in the world in the late 1980s and resulted in the fall of the Iron Curtain influenced the profile of ESL students in Canada. A significant number of learners whose mother tongue was Russian ap-

peared in ESL classes. They were either immigrants, wealthy members of the new Russian elite, or beneficiaries of various organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). These students are usually well educated, with some knowledge of English, yet they have never had to function in a multicultural environment before coming to Canada. For this reason some present particular challenges to their teachers. Their expectations of the program, their view of the rationale of cooperating with other learners, and their idea of the appropriateness of some teaching methods or even the teacher's behavior frequently cause classroom conflicts, large and small. Many of the Russian-speaking students have brought with them English reference books published in Russia. They use these books both in class and at home, obviously trusting them as a linguistic lifejacket when the unilingual grammar texts or dictionaries do not provide them with needed explanations. Analysis of the hidden cultural messages in the content of these texts may provide some clues as to the opinions, behavior, and perspectives of Russian students in Canadian ESL classes. The findings may be of interest to any teacher who works with a multicultural class and faces the challenge of creating an environment that is comfortable for students of different backgrounds, including Russian. The starting point of the process is to gain knowledge about a particular culture and how it is represented in texts published around the world. As Powell (1997) states,

the pluralistic focus, which requires us to accommodate for diversity in the education process, from the standpoint of a culture other than one's own, means accepting as valid the culturally different learners' values, their motives, the rewards that are meaningful to them, their locus of control, their linguistic system, their learning style and their cognitive style. (p. 14)

The present research is intended to benefit educators who are looking for ways to create culturally sensitive environments to help their students become better learners and successful members of their communities.

Background of the Study

Having taught English as a foreign language (EFL) in a Russian university for eight years and English as a second language (ESL) in a college in Canada for six years, I have had the opportunity to work with both mono- and multicultural classes using materials published in the Soviet Union, Russia, the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Aside from grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation models, I have struggled to understand the deep messages hidden in the English-language books. It seems to me that behind those simple texts and grammar explanations lies something mysterious, fascinating, and amazingly different—the soul of another nation. This has made me look for and decipher the masked declarations about

culture found in dry language books, seemingly unrelated to cultural issues. Many Russian-published EFL texts appeared to be a battlefield of political doctrines, containing generalizations about morality, values, and lifestyles and uncompromising comparisons of native and other cultures with the inevitable subsequent quest for identity. Interestingly, although Russian-published English reference literature includes descriptions of British or American culture, it is much more focused on the images of Russian culture, as if the authors, looking in the mirror of another language, see themselves. Thus my deeply rooted feeling of being bilingual, bicultural, and essentially “bipersonal” has resulted in a fascinating journey into the vast spaces of ethnography and semantics.

Procedure

The present research is on “the borders,” as it is rooted in different, though connected, fields of knowledge: ethnography and linguistics (sociolinguistics and semantics in particular). This study is based on one- to two-sentence texts, usually intended to illustrate grammar phenomena or the usage of specific vocabulary in Russian-published reference literature. These short texts employ a high level of generalization, thus giving “perfect” examples of the “common truth” adopted as a norm in a particular society. The genuine character of these cultural generalizations is in the fact that the authors of the reference books are preoccupied with mainly linguistic explanations; therefore, they use the sentences that best illustrate their point and pay little if any attention to the cultural messages issuing from their examples. Although many of the sentences are characterized by overt ethnocentrism and traditional conformity, it is precisely these characteristics that make their analysis engaging.

Nine Russian-published English reference books published in 1983, 1990, 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997 and all intended for intermediate and advanced levels were included in the research (see Appendix). The books hold an abundance of sentences that can be found in any didactic text around the world; however, these sentences do not serve as the material for my study. Rather, I concentrated on the statements that stood out because they would be difficult to imagine in Canadian school textbooks. The sentences that I singled out contain cultural messages contrary to those accepted as politically correct in Canadian society. The ideas expressed in these sentences are almost never vocalized in the classroom environment, let alone published in educational sources. I grouped the selected sentences into content areas: ethical concepts, ideological and political postulates, economic and geopolitical issues, and gender differences and sexism. I also separated the examples talking about *us* (i.e., related to Russian culture) from those talking about *them* (i.e., English-speaking cultures). I did not change the analyzed

sentences even if they were erroneous in their grammar, style, morphology, or spelling.

Because the selected texts were available to me through my students (who were using them out of personal choice), they are not a representative set of all reference literature published in the Soviet Union and Russia. Also, there may be some imprecision in terms of what is observed and how it is interpreted. However, no research of any culture is absolute or comprehensive.

Results and Discussion

The Russian Perspective

The Russian culture has always been known for its polysemantics. "The mysterious Russian soul," as seen from the Western viewpoint, has symbolized the pattern of thinking and behavior principally different from both European and Asian standards. The specificity of the Russian model has been determined by the ambivalent place Russia occupies in the world physically and spiritually. The idea of dualism permeates Russian geography, history, and psyche. This is what Pitcher (1964) called

two strains in popular Russian behavior. One strain, derived largely from Christianity and the idea of submitting to the will of God, was "collective" and "submissive"; the other, derived from the peasants' free and mobile life and from the conflicting elements within the peasant population, was "independent" and "self-assertive." (p. 184)

Collectivism is inherent in Russian culture, springing from both the communal spirit of Russian Orthodoxy ("we suffer together") and the distinctive organization of the agricultural commune *mir*. *Mir* was a prototype of the primitive communist structure where leveling through common taxation, regulated distribution of land, and collective help to the underprivileged peasants had always impeded the participants' individualism. Generally, the old Russian tradition presupposed that "individual rights were sacrificed to state imperatives" (Paramonov, 1996, p. 17).

Sentences from Russian grammar books such as "You should not despise people less fortunate than you" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 111) or "The young man helped his friends in trouble and in this way showed to everybody what was the right thing to do" (Bonk, Kotii, & Loukianova, 1994b, p. 68) demonstrate that collectivism, when projected onto the system of moral values, gives rise to the dictate of group ties, reciprocity, and equality over the individual. In the second example, the "young man" finds it important not only to help a member of the group, but also to have his action morally validated by the rest. In "The honor of our country is very dear to us" (Kachalova & Izrailevich, 1995, p. 42), another form of collective identifica-

tion, this time with the nation at large, finds its reflection in the concept of Russian patriotism.

However, collectivism has not been the only formative element of Russian culture. As Pitcher (1964) stresses, "within the peasant commune ... the dualism was accentuated: collectivism was infested by the need to live closer together, while the independent strain found a satisfactory outlet in the conspiracy against the outside world" (p. 184). Fighting the outside world has played an important role in shaping the Russian soul. Not only the necessity of combating the unfriendly environment with its vast spaces and cold climate, but also the urge to challenge the Mongol yoke and later the burden of serfdom has turned Russians into a people who do not trust the government, but nevertheless submit to its inevitability and arbitrariness. On a personal level, Russian self-assertiveness would manifest in "indirect resistance to the authority" (Pitcher, 1964, p. 186), which may take a form of

a refusal to take authority seriously or to respect it, of evading as much of the social responsibility, and breaking as many of the rules and conventions as one can reasonably get away with; or trying to beat the system by applying to the modern situation the techniques of evasion and self-interest developed by the Russian peasant over the centuries. (p. 186)

At a state level, the Russians' self-assertion has risen to "an enduring expansionist instinct" (Blackwill, 1995, p. 3). Russia, with its huge, sparsely populated territory, "sought security through the systematic domination of adjacent lands, and often nations bordering those lands as well ... It became commonplace in Russian strategic thought to imbed the well-being of Russia in concepts of external insecurity and imperial behavior" (p. 3). Thus on a nationwide scale, the duality of the Russian mind manifests in the self-identification of every person with the whole body of the Russian people (a commune equal to the country). On the other hand, Russians realize their self-assertiveness through challenging "the outside authority" of the rest of the world. Because the costs of pursuing any form of violence are now prohibitive, the Russian dare takes the form of megalomaniac competition with other countries.

It may be assumed that the invariably cheerful and assertive way in which the reference texts published in Soviet times describe Russia is the natural outcome of the propaganda. Thus a book published in 1983 contains the following sentences: "Our plants provided with the most modern equipment have raised their output" (Novitskaia & Kouchin, 1983, p. 228), "Our machine-building plants have provided our hydroelectric stations with gigantic hydroturbines" (p. 228), "The astrophysical observatory in Armenia has been provided with excellent Soviet-made instruments" (p. 228), "Numerous engineering problems have been and are further being solved"

(p. 157), "Exports are now running at a monthly average of twice last year's level" (p. 228), and "The Soviet locomotives run many years without any overhauling" (p. 286). However, Russian books published after the demise of the Communist state also contain numerous sentences presenting Russia as a focus of everything that is physically big, spiritually great, and developmentally outstanding: "The Russian troops displayed such courage which amazed the whole world" (Kachalova & Izrailevich, 1995, p. 43), "Moscow has the best underground in the world" (p. 36), "Moscow's theaters are the best in the world" (p. 22), "Our country is very rich in coal and oil" (p. 45), "The Soviet cosmonauts have established records in conquering outer space" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 156), and "The Lenin Library in Moscow is one of the famous libraries of the world" (Petrova, 1996, p. 68). The intensity with which Russian greatness is presented in school textbooks irrespective of their published date may lead to the conclusion that the idea of Russia's grandeur is not an invention of the propaganda machine of past days, but is a construct deeply inherent in Russian ethnicity.

Although Russia's global challenge to its potential adversaries may be perceived as rather sinister, its image as that of a peacemaker is repeatedly emphasized in texts published both before and after the fall of the Soviet Union: "The Soviet Union was, is, and will always remain the bulwark of peace" (Novitskaia & Kouchin, 1983, p. 156), "The Soviet Union has demonstrated that its words are never at variance with its deeds, which was often a case with Western countries" (p. 287), "The idea of struggle for peace that passes through the book is near and dear to all of us" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 144), "The peoples of the world are fighting for peace. We are fighting for the lasting peace for all the peoples of the world" (Bonk et al., 1994a, p. 57), and "We want to live at peace with other people" (1994b, p. 482). Interestingly, the reference to Soviet policies is found in a text published in 1995: "The firm peaceful policy of the Soviet Union makes up peace in the world" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 118).

Although some of the analyzed sentences echo traditional Soviet rhetoric, there are signs of new attitudes and practices. For example, a statement, "I don't think you can go into the church in shorts" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 300), showing some piety toward religion, would have been unimaginable in a textbook some 15 years earlier. New realities in the form of borrowings from the West also signify a new era. A Russian grammar book (titled *Practical Course of the English Language: The American Variety*, Shakh-Nazarova, 1996) offers the following sentences: "At a quarter to seven we have breakfast. We often have bacon and eggs, toast and jam and tea or coffee" (p. 115) and "Peter and I always have lunch in the cafeteria. We usually have salad, roast beef or steak, French fries and a cup of tea or coffee for lunch" (p. 115). These two sentences present a brilliant example of total cultural confusion typical of the Russian textbooks of today. Why is a classic English breakfast (bacon

and eggs, toast, jam) described in a book on American English as a typical Russian meal? Why do some Russian people have lunch in a cafeteria? As someone who grew up in the Russian culture, I can testify that Russians do not have lunch because they eat a full dinner, with soup and the meat dish for the main course in the middle of the day. Moreover, the Russian language does not even have an indigenous word corresponding to lunch. The inclusion of these phenomena, which are foreign to Russian culture, in school textbooks may be considered a manifestation of the old mechanism of identification with an influential group through simple imitation.

Along with mentioning gastronomic novelties not known in Russia before, the description of traditional items, namely, alcoholic beverages, also finds its place on the pages of one reference book: "Bottoms up! I'd like to drink to your health!" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 176), "Have some whisky/Scotch. Whiskey and soda? No, straight (on the rocks)" (p. 25), "Can I have a bottle of vodka?" (p. 27), "I'd like a bottle of champagne" (p. 299), "Three tins of beer, please!" (p. 76), "Let's drop into the bar" (p. 10), "Pour yourself some cognac/brandy" (p. 104), "I want a stronger drink" (p. 106), and "I think he was drunk last night" (p. 217). Used as a means for establishing social connections and a home remedy for almost any disease imaginable including even radiation sickness (Baker, 2001), liquor in Russia is more than a drink. Historically, alcohol has been a shaping element of Russian culture. As Baker explains, "It has unravelled the strategies of generals and thwarted the will of czars. It has sent Russian men to early graves. But ... it also links a society stretched across two continents; it serves that part of the Russian soul that cherishes hospitality, camaraderie, and trust" (p. A4). On the one hand, the fact that the author includes alcohol-related phrases in his book as absolutely indispensable for Russians traveling abroad emphasizes the importance of alcohol in the Russian value system. On the other hand, the automatic transfer of one's own values to the foreign environment reflects the author's assumption that what is important at home will be equally important everywhere.

The description of Russian cultural constructs as presented in Russian-published texts reveals their complex and contradictory nature, combining such seemingly incompatible traits as egalitarianism and almost feudal social divisiveness, credulity and suspiciousness of everything alien or merely different, a keen interest in the outer world, and above all sheer confidence of being the greatest, the smartest, the most daring, the most patriotic, and, simply speaking, the best. The analysis of the sentences studied here also points to the cultural chaos in which the authors of Russian reference literature find themselves at present: new concepts that arrived in Russia with the fall of the Iron Curtain mix with the traditional Russian and Soviet patterns and ideas to form an unusual and sometimes inexplicable concoction.

Gender Roles

A sense of identity, and particularly gender identity, is one of the most important elements of personhood. Needless to say, gender intersects with ethnicity and culture. The advocates of the "good old approach" to defining male and female roles in society (including some of the Russian students in my classes) often suggest that the differences between men and women are programmed by nature itself, and not to notice them means to violate the natural laws. Indeed, even in the relatively emancipated society of North America, sex role clichés are pronounced. Boys and men are seen as "aggressive, independent, strong, logical, direct, adventurous, self-confident, ambitious, and not particularly emotional. Girls and women are passive, weak, illogical, indirect, gentle, and very emotional" (Cushner, McClelland, & Saford, 1992, p. 198).

In Russian culture, which is much more patriarchal than North American culture, gender stereotypes are so deeply rooted that they are not even perceived as such by most men and women; rather, they are seen as normal and natural. The first thing that strikes the eye of someone researching the Russian-published reference literature is the fact that females' appearance is mentioned much more frequently than that of males. A Russian text (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995) advises us of the following: "You shouldn't be put down by her loud dress. The woman has a heart of gold" (p. 135). In this statement, a woman's supposedly inadequate dress and her moral character are perceived as two equally important constructs. The same book asks: "What color of dress would you advise a girl to wear to set off her fair complexion?" (p. 157). Our counterquestion would be, "Why should she?" Another Russian text (Dubrovin, 1997) also focuses on the descriptions of females' appearance: "She has brown nice eyes" (p. 41), "What a pretty nice little girl!" (p. 52), and "Ann was a lovely and slim girl" (p. 52). Can she be imagined lovely but not slim? Characteristically, I could not find a single example related to the appearance of a male, handsome or not.

Professions are also described in an explicit and unambiguous manner: *she* is at most a teacher, whereas *he*, being well educated, hard-working, and goal-oriented, occupies all kinds of high positions: "My brother is a chief of the expedition" (Kachalova & Izrailevich, 1995, p. 44), "We'll discuss the matter with Comrade Petrov [a male's last name], dean of our faculty" (p. 44), "He has been appointed captain of the S.S. 'Minsk'" (p. 44), and "The boy's ambition was to become a cosmonaut and travel to distant planets when he grew up" (Bonk et al., 1994b, p. 119), whereas "She teaches geography at school" (Kachalova & Izrailevich, p. 42), and "The young woman you see in the classroom is our English teacher" (Petrova, 1996, p. 96).

The following sentences, which illustrate the use of the present indefinite tense, go together in one exercise: "1. Rose dusts the furniture regularly. 2. James is fond of playing baseball. 3. Martin's hobby is skating. 4. Andrew

devotes a great deal of time to reading. 5. Ann cooks dinner every day" (Arbekova, 1990, p. 105). As we see, even if males do not engage in intellectual activities, they still work on their personal development rather than do household chores. Generally, the topic of women's obsession with cooking and cleaning overwhelms the textbooks: "My wife is fond of making pancakes" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 17), "She cooked delicious soup" (p. 19), "She's busy doing the housework" (p. 290), "She is a thrifty housewife" (p. 302), and "She's busy tidying up her flat" (p. 78). However, there is some expression of sympathy with overworked females: "I wonder how Kate manages to follow world events with a family of four on her hands" (Bonk et al., 1994b, p. 324). Again, nowhere in the books studied here could I find a single mention of a male busy with housework.

As distinct from the "weaker" sex, men are always presented as doing something significant for the community at large. So what is *he* busy with while *she* is satisfying her urge for cooking? "He paints in oils" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 117), "He has his own style in painting" (p. 117), "He created an unsurpassed masterpiece" (p. 229), "He's collecting material for his book" (p. 117), "He is engaged in politics" (p. 77), and "He studies mathematics/medicine. He studies hard" (p. 78). A sentence "It is unwise to subjugate a child too much because he should gain knowledge in making decisions himself" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 98) unambiguously states the sex of the child who is supposed to learn the art of decision-making.

Men are seen as responsible and resolute, whereas women are faint-hearted, sentimental, dependent, and whining: "He fired a rifle. He shoots well" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 258), "He is trying to achieve his aim by all possible means" (p. 253), "He turned out to be a very conscientious worker" (p. 59), "He is not only a great scientist but also a wonderful person" (p. 269), and "He is a man of great dignity" (p. 63). On the other hand, "What a noble woman she is; she works all the time to help others" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 13), "She took great care of us" (p. 175), "She felt fear for her safety" (p. 258), "She dedicated herself to the family" (p. 190), and "She's an unusually tactful/sympathetic person" (p. 299).

Men are in charge not only in their communities, but also in their families: "He's now the head of our family" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 41). Women are often shown as loving but irrational caregivers: "My wife indulges our children too much and I often fall out with her over bringing them up" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 56). The father appears a strict but wise judge of his "mini-universe"; it is the father's judgment that counts: "I hope you're not up to any mischief your father would disapprove of" (p. 7).

Russian textbooks often describe men and women as facing irreconcilable contradictions. Thus "Men say that women like them to make up to them, and women claim the opposite" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995, p. 118), and "Men often claim that their children take after them in good points and after their

wives in bad ones" (p. 176). Some Russian texts express disappointment with *her* inappropriate conduct: "She used to be a sweet helpless creature. To become a career woman is the last thing I could have expected of her" (p. 180). Being weak and charming is seen as normal for a female "creature," whereas her becoming "a career woman" is presented as surprising and undesirable behavior.

Interesting are the clusters of sentences that reveal the double standard in the interpretations of identical behavior in women and men. For instance, "She was crying with pain/grief. He could scarcely hold back the tears" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 176), or "He was on his best behavior. Her behaviors were very strange" (p. 178). This is how the meaning of the word *feature* is illustrated by the two consecutive sentences: "She has fine features. That's an important feature of his political program" (p. 296). In this example, *feature* as applied to *her* is a mere physical characteristic, whereas applied to *him* it refers to his social activities. Another "pearl" comprises four sentences: "He's a person of great ability. She's completely lost the ability to control herself. He is a very capable boy. He's capable of working day and night" (p. 251). *His* ability is associated with competence and power; *she* lacks both. Even the description of how men and women change their facial expressions is not the same: "He turned red with excitement. She blushed with embarrassment when they started praising her" (p. 106). These examples reflect a widespread phenomenon: societal opinion attaches different value to identical acts of behavior for men and women. As Cushner et al. (1992) point out, in English an aggressive man is perceived as a "go-getter," whereas an aggressive woman is a "bitch." In Russian, a career-minded woman is referred to as "a *muzhik* [an equivalent of both English *peasant* and *man*] in a skirt." Both in English and Russian a woman capable of changing her behavior to accommodate others' needs is seen as "caring," whereas a man doing the same thing is a "wimp."

How can the gender inequality that is portrayed so graphically in the Russian texts be explained? Why do the books published in post-Soviet "democratic" times sound not less, but rather more sexist than those published in the 1980s? Russian women's lives have never been easy. "During socialist rule more than 90% of women were in paid employment, which was the largest percentage in the world" (Zdravomyslova, 1996, p. 33). The high level of Soviet women's involvement in the workforce was due to chronic labor shortages caused by destructive wars and purges as well as low productivity and relative technological backwardness in all spheres of the economy. In the Soviet Union, women were in fact "workhorses": on the one hand they had to be "productive members of society" by participating extensively in paid labor; on the other hand, they were under strong pressure to be attractive to men, marry in their late teens to early 20s, have children, and do the lion's share of household chores under conditions of continual shortages.

After the start of the drastic economic reforms, many women found themselves out of paid work; Russian unemployment acquired "a woman's face" (Sperling, 1999, p. 146). In 1994, about when many of the researched textbooks were published, "68 percent of the registered unemployed were women. Also, women found themselves disproportionately unemployed among the educated strata, making up 78.2 percent of the unemployed with a higher education in 1993" (p. 150). Then Labor Minister G. Melikian said, "There is no point in creating jobs for women, when there aren't enough jobs for men" (p. 74). It would not be an overstatement to say that Russian democratization and economic liberalization has been at the expense of the vulnerable in society: elderly people, disabled people, children, and women. Gender-selective unemployment is but one link in the chain of systemic injustice against Russian women. Virtually nonpunishable sexual harassment at work (Sperling, 1999), exploitation of female nudity in the media (Vinogradova, 1999), rape and domestic violence considered "a family affair" and therefore neglected by the police (Attwood, 1997), and a horrific spread of diseases have become commonplace. For example, the number of registered tuberculosis cases among women rose from virtually zero in 1990 to 25,800 in 1994, and registered syphilis cases from 8,700 in 1985 to 79,600 in 1994 (*Zhenschiny Rossii*, 1995). Women's economic dependence on men has given birth to new social phenomena. Some women are not allowed to work by their nouveau riche husbands "because of prestige considerations" (Zdravomyslova, 1996, p. 42). Others are actively pursuing marriage to foreigners through numerous Russian brides' Web sites and agencies just to get out of the country. Yet others are looking for *sponsorship* (sponsors, a newly coined term), the new rich able and willing to provide for kept women. The slogans "Beauty not brains," "Girls should be girls," "The better half of the humanity," "Guardians of the family hearth" (Kay, 1997) are voiced not only by the government and men, but also by many women; however, it is difficult to assess to what extent this "enthusiasm" has been imposed on them by the overwhelming circumstances. Today Western-type feminism is as alien to most Russians of both sexes as it was 20 years ago. With sexist attitudes seen as innate, gender inequality remains a powerful component of Russian culture. Russian-published English reference books reflect and reinforce the realities of the society and the time. As Renner (1997) notes, "it is a known fact that one of the tools used to maintain and support oppression is school textbooks" (p. 1).

Images of the United States

Images of English-speaking countries occupy a modest place among cultural images presented by Russian-published reference books. It is noteworthy that a great deal of attention is given to reflections of the US. In the books that I studied, Great Britain seems to arouse much less interest, and countries like

Canada, New Zealand, and Australia are not mentioned at all. Obviously, in many foreign language teachers' and students' eyes, North American culture appears to be solely that of the US. I remember that while living in Russia, I was always puzzled by the presence of Canada on the map of North America because, with little information available at the time, Canada seemed to be nothing more but the 51st state of the United States of America.

In Russian-published textbooks, the images of America are the source of great controversy: they range from horrible to admirable, with many intermediate variations. To some authors the US seems, first of all, the land of affluence, impressive achievements in the field of technology, and world-renowned landmarks: "The Rockefellers are a family of great wealth" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1996, p. 354); "The tallest buildings here are small in comparison with those of New York" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 252).

Often, however, Russian texts, although published in post-Soviet times, reveal a strong feeling of rivalry described with the help of ideologically related vocabulary. The authors widely exploit the topic of racism in the US: "Poverty is awful in Harlem" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1996, p. 354), "The housing in Harlem is in dreadful state" (p. 352), "Most of buildings in Harlem look dreadful" (p. 352), "As a result of racial discrimination millions of blacks are unemployed in the USA" (p. 354), and "Negroes in America are often arrested only because they fight for their rights" (Bonk et al., 1994, p. 32). The lives of African-Americans are described as invariably hard and unjust. Interesting is the use of the word *Negroes* instead of the now common *African-Americans*; Russian authors appear to be unaware of its pejorative meaning. Apart from the racial problems, Russian textbooks, although published during and after Perestroika, are also concerned with other imperfections of American life: "With agricultural surpluses in the USA rapidly increasing and exports declining, the agricultural situation in that country is becoming extremely tense" (Kachalova & Izrailevich, 1995, p. 299), and "The election pledges were not fulfilled. The American voter is accustomed to it" (Arbekova, 1990, p. 123). A fact like "The American Socialist Party betrayed the interests of the working people" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1996, p. 330) is also found worthy of the students' attention. Russian texts always stress the fact that some people in the US are politically progressive. For example, "Dreiser, the famous American writer, joined the Communist Party at the age of 74" (Bonk et al., 1994b, p. 490), or "Very early London realized that the American social order was unjust" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1996, p. 331). Jack London, although not as popular with his fellow Americans, is considered "one of the greatest" in Russia. He is seen as the exposé of the social sores of capitalism, so Russian texts are scattered with such utterances as "In 'Martin Eden' London described the awful living conditions of American workers" or "In three of his books London made an attempt to describe the class struggle in the USA" (p. 330).

Interesting is this pair of sentences imbued with some nostalgia for times gone by: "Admission to high public school is automatic in the USA. Admission to secondary school is open to everyone in the Soviet Union" (Shakh-Nazarova, 1996, p. 388). The variation in the choice of words is minimal, but the impression the sentences produce is quite different. "Automatic admission" is felt to be mechanistic and antihuman, whereas "open to everyone" seems to be democratic and fair.

Numerous value-laden words (*Negroes, class struggle, social order, dreadful, unjust, awful, poverty, racial discrimination*) are used in descriptions of the US. The reason for this ideologically biased approach is not easy to determine. Now that the overwhelming majority of Russians have no political illusions, and real America with its good and bad sides is quite often visited by many, phrases accusing the US of all conceivable sins sound at least old-fashioned. Can their presence in textbooks be explained by the authors' lack of desire to be more modern? Or is it some other kind of frustration masked by the habitual accusations of the regular opponent? The absence of sentences describing the everyday life of common people in the US speaks for the fact that the authors of Russian-published textbooks are probably not well acquainted with real—not smeared by obsolete ideological stereotypes—American culture. The difficulty Russian authors experience about American culture may be partly explained by the several "catastrophe[s] that befell the Russian hyperethnos" (Feher, 1996, p. 59). The dissolution of the Russian Empire, the October Revolution, the Civil War, Stalin's terror, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the ensuing political and economic chaos are but some of the events that made it difficult for the Russians to create a definite reference point or a clear "what-is-good/what-is-bad" criterion in relation to other cultures. Therefore, clinging to outdated stereotypes may be one of the techniques for dealing with the "beloved enemy"—the US. No matter what the reason, such an antiquated approach to the reference books' content is hardly of help to the users of these texts.

Images of Great Britain

In Russian-published textbooks of English, reflections of Great Britain are much more rare than those of the USA; however, its representations are also often stereotypical. Thus the British are seen as tireless consumers of tea and traditional English breakfasts: "We'll have a real English breakfast today: eggs and bacon, toast with marmalade, and tea" (Dubrovin, 1997, p. 73). Englishmen are also shown as admirers of dogs and national sports: "The English like playing cricket" (p. 9), and "Dogs are Britain's national obsession" (Arbekova, 1990, p. 83). Aside from reviving virtually "textbook" stereotypes about the British, Russian authors also engage in old-fashioned political games. Such statements as "England has an unfavorable balance of trade. The value of her imports is much greater than the value of her exports"

(Kachalova & Izrailevich, 1995, p. 23), and "He says that he read in yesterday's newspaper that in England prices of foodstuffs were rising again" (p. 188) both present British economy as facing grave problems.

As in the case of the descriptions of the US, the sentences about Great Britain used as examples in Russian-published reference books fail to present the real image of the British people. The expressed opinions about British life, irrespective of the time of the texts' publication, are shaped by the stereotypes inherent in the authors' own culture. Totally ignored is the fact that the Great Britain of today is a multicultural and multiethnic society where lifestyles and values are far removed from the 19th-century image presented in the Russian textbooks; consequently, Russian authors do not distinguish between English and British identities. The diversity of social developments that took place in Britain after World War II, including the radical shift in class and gender relationships, the rise of new attitudes toward family, materialism, and religion, and the irreversible transformation of the role that Britain now plays in the international arena (Marwick, 1996) are all neglected by the writers of Russian-published reference books of English examined in this study. Instead, the authors remain under the spell of two traditions: obsolete anti-capitalist rhetoric and "the lingering miasma of Victorianism" (p. 395).

Implications

The purpose for this study was far from giving "modern recommendations" to non-English speaking authors on how to write textbooks for students in their countries; it is intended for Canadian teachers to help them understand their students.

The number of newcomers to Canada in the year 2001 is projected to reach 250,000, "the highest total since the aftermath of the Hungarian revolution in 1956" (Vienneau, 2001, p. A6). Most of these people will come to adult ESL classes, and many will rely a great deal on the textbooks brought from their native countries. For a teacher working in a multicultural setting, knowing where his or her students come from, what their cultural backgrounds are, and what values are traditionally important for them is of primary importance. Sometimes students' reactions to particular situations in and out of class, their response to certain forms of classwork and unfamiliar formats of teachers', and other students' behaviors determine the success of student-teacher and student-student interaction. Learners from various cultures may have different expectations of the topics to be studied. Newcomers to Canada may perceive teaching-learning styles engaged in by other people in the classroom as well as others' opinions, evaluations, and approaches to be agreeable or outrageous. Misunderstandings and cultural clashes on the one hand, and lucky coincidences on the other, can eventually enhance or impede the students' overall progress. As Knapp (1995) states, "In classrooms

where teachers actively or proactively engineer constructive responses to student differences, students may have a better chance of success in both basic and higher-order skills" (p. 14).

I hope that my study and its findings will be of interest to those Canadian educators who may experience difficulties while teaching various subjects, including ESL, in the multicultural setting. ESL teachers are often the first pedagogues whom students from many countries face shortly after their arrival in a new country. Willingly or unwillingly, the students see their teachers as representatives of a culture that may seem not only unusual, but also alien or even hostile. Many of the Russian students come to ESL classes frustrated: some by an unsuccessful job search, others by difficulties they encounter in having their qualifications recognized in Canada, yet others by the separation from their families or cultural and language conflicts with their children. In class, the students may express their frustration by disrupting the activities suggested by the teacher, confronting other learners, ridiculing the "stupid" content of the studied material, or openly disapproving of their teacher's manners, behavior, or even dress. Consequently, on a personal level, the teachers may develop animosity toward such students. These feelings are unproductive and can be avoided if educators are prepared to understand the nature of the problem students' negativism.

Although discussing teachers' awareness of students' cultural differences and democracy in the classroom is not new, it is always relevant. Real understanding of cultural differences and appropriate and timely handling of the problems they bring can be fostered among teachers only by the consistent spread of the ideas of cultural relativism, no matter how out of place, funny, or even shocking some of the values and views inherent in non-North American cultures may seem in the Canadian context. If teachers follow the principles of cultural mediation in their instruction, they will help their students to succeed in the classroom and in society at large.

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Appendix

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