

# Network community: means of intercultural communication in teaching foreign languages

Natalya Victorovna Yelashkina<sup>1,\*</sup>, Natalia Gennadievna Sivtseva<sup>1</sup>, and Yulia Stanislavovna Zagraisakaya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Irkutsk National Research Technical University, 83, Lermontov av., 664074, Irkutsk, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Irkutsk State University, 1, Karl Marks av., 664003, Irkutsk, Russia

**Abstract.** The article is an attempt to study the issues relating to the nature, purpose, development, functioning and use of a community in teaching foreign languages in a non-linguistic university by means of telecommunication technologies. To determine specific characteristics of a community, which functions within the context of educational activities while mastering foreign language communication, the authors analyzed the existing scientific research and its interpretation. The result of the analysis is clarification of the strategy of developing a community, as well as of its role and place in the intercultural dialogue. The authors argue that the lack of sufficiently developed skills ensuring the efficiency of students' intercultural interaction in the field of foreign language communication requires the usage of both modern educational tools and up-to-date social, behavioral realities in the methodology of teaching foreign languages. The article describes the specificity of the term "community" and the purpose of developing it. The authors show that, currently, experts in various fields use a community as their main strategy. When teaching foreign languages, the fact that students' foreign language communication in a network community is a necessary condition of the cross-cultural competence development seems extremely significant

## 1 Introduction

Any society being a separate sociocultural structure consists of a multitude of interconnected subsystems. One of the main types of social structures is a social community. Such communities attract people with similar interests, social roles and statuses, functions and tasks. Modern sociologists determine the following causes of creating communities:

- the same and similar living conditions of individuals;
- similarity of the people's needs, their subjective awareness of shared interests;
- existence of communication, common activities, interconnected exchange of the activities results;
- creating their own subculture, namely, the internal rules of relationships, views on the community goals, morality, etc.;
- developing the community organization as well as the system of coordination and self-government;
- social identification of community members, their feeling of belonging to this community.

A social community is a number of individuals acting as a subject of social life and united by the same living conditions, values, interests, norms, social relations and awareness of their social identity [1]. There are several conceptions of creating social communities. One of them was developed by American sociologist George C.

Homans. He believes that individuals interact with each other trying to achieve some benefits; and the more important is the benefit, the more efforts are made by an individual to integrate with other individuals [2]. Studying social behavior within the context of preliminary attitudes (predispositions), a sociologist Gordon Allport argues that a new social subject is developing by means of the predispositions convergence, that is, by the consonance of assessments, values, meanings, stereotypes that are shared by all the members of an emerging community. He principally proved that the basis of any emerging community is both similarity of emotions and rational preferences of people [3].

Another American sociologist Neil Smelser in *Theory of Collective Behavior* (1964-1967) systematizes Allport's theory of convergence. N. Smelser considers the reasons of new communities' emergence to be rather rational than emotional, he writes that it is beneficial for people to join communities to achieve their goals [4].

## 2 Materials and methods

The basic method of the research is the analysis of methodological, pedagogical, sociological literature on the studied issue. The works of the top scientists in the field of communication theory are studied. The given research deals with a relevant term taken from marketing communications and defining the association of people on the basis of their loyalty to a product, brand,

\* Corresponding author: [Nat.Yelashkina@gmail.com](mailto:Nat.Yelashkina@gmail.com)

personality, etc. Thus, the authors describe creating a community as an efficient teaching tool in the development of intercultural competence in a foreign language. The methodological basis of the research is scientific works devoted to the study of educational activities by means of the latest communication and telecommunication technologies.

The development of the community is associated with the development of human technical progress. Up to a certain point schools of thought considered communities that were based on close, closed and strong ties to be the most organized social groups involving definite groups of communities. The classical school of sociology suggested that the industrialized world was weakening the relations of the community. The adherents of this school believed that the villagers lived more jointly because of the close relations, while the townspeople became more and more distant from each other.

Disagreements concerning the essence of community developed together with the development of society and lay in determining structural composition of a community and places of their distribution. In the 1970s F. Khan, G. Filman, T. Gitlin come to the conclusion that simple (directive) collective communications are still quite popular, but the diverse use of networks of cheap and efficient information transfer allows for communication with a higher level of liberation and longer distances. This view led to the emergence of a new kind of communities that did not depend on territorial distance and provided an opportunity to move away from the previous approaches and sociological interpretations of the concept of community. In the 1990s communities were studied by such researchers as P. Levin, D. Macwell, B. Wellman, and W. Galston. They defined a community rather as a network of social relationships than as a kind of local connections [5].

B. Latour and K. Knorr-Cetina allowed significantly varying the approach interpretation in their actor-network theory. They wrote about the “ontological turn” in the views on what society was made of. In their opinion, given the current communication environment one should abandon the idea of creating a community on the basis of “collective production” as the principle of “object-centricity” is becoming more important [6]. Currently, the communication links that form the community are located in the area of residential premises and offices. People almost completely substituted communication in public places for interaction via computer networks. Nowadays, individuals can easily join a large number of diverse communities using social networks [7].

People feel they are strong enough at the moment when they belong to a community; they suffer when they are deprived of it, and despite of the place where people live and communicate they always create communities. People identify themselves according to their community: tribe, family, work, clubs, school, churches. People are born in the community, and they will be lucky if their life ends in the community as well. Obviously, one of the people’s goals is to belong to some society, community, group, etc. If there is no self-

assignment to a particular social group, then it cannot be regarded as a community. This is the reason why businessmen began to take into account the phenomenon of the people’s social community and to determine the prospects of developing communities.

A community (sometimes referred to as a “client community”) being a marketing communication term defines a union of people on the basis of their loyalty to a particular product or brand. Among the conceptions explaining consumers’ behavior the community conception focuses on communication between consumers. The notion of “client community” can be defined as a set of common values, norms, rituals and traditions associated with the consumption of goods that is stable for members of the given group. One of the types of customer communities is an Internet-community.

The term "community" was first used by Albert Muniz Jr. and Thomas C. O'Guinn in 1995 at the annual conference of the Association for Consumer Research in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In 2001, in their article *Brand Community* published in *Consumer Research (SSCI)*, they described a community as a specialized, geographically independent union based on a structured set of social relationships among brand fans [8, 9].

The community exists to serve rather people involved in business than the business itself. People often forget that consumers are actually ordinary people with their own characteristics, needs, interests and responsibilities. Brands that have their own communities increase loyalty not through trading, but through the fact that they satisfy people’s needs. However, in contrast to common ideas of marketers, people have these needs not just to raise their status or try to somehow identify themselves by purchasing goods.

There is a variety of reasons why people decide to join a community – one person wants to find emotional support and encouragement, another one – to explore new ways to take up a more noble and kind occupation or to develop the own interests and skills. As a rule, a person joins a community in order to build new relationships. Thus, a community communicator function is creating a community. He/she is responsible for creating, developing, managing a phenomenon, product or object of art and for communicating with the community, so he/she is a bearer of the idea and ideology of the company he/she cooperates with. A community communicator is responsible for developing (or identifying) loyal people, communicating with them and involving them in communication [9].

### 3 Results and discussion

A foreign language teacher can act as a communicator.

The scientists believe that a community **communicator** must have the following skills and characteristics:

1. *Open and energetic character.* A community **communicator** helps students to work together or to interact in order to implement plans that are important for them. The function of a community leader is to allow

people to be the best in the community they want to belong to. The job of a community communicator is to provide conditions for open communication between community members, to help them to achieve their own goals and the goals of the whole community.

2. *Trust*. A person can be liberated only with the help of trust. A community is a kind of social economy; its participants accumulate their social capital via their contributions and donations. It is quite natural that trust is necessary in the society where social capital is prior. If people in the community do not trust the community **communicator**, the specialist will be treated with caution and it will be difficult for him/her to accumulate social capital.

It is obvious, one cannot learn trust. A specialist is either trusted or not. However, if a community **communicator** is always honest, behaves confidently and his/her actions are transparent, he/she will be trusted at last. Besides, a community communicator should be emotionally close to every member of the community.

3. *Listening skills*. A community **communicator** can use one of the efficient techniques of earning the trust of the community members as well as of increasing self-confidence; it involves proper understanding of goals. The specialist should be aware that some community members will disappoint him/her. Some members will be too hasty in their actions or in expressing their opinions on any subject, while the others will be too shy to take something up. On the contrary, some members can encourage the community **communicator** by their sense of responsibility, their ability to respond to the situation adequately, their desire to help the community.

When a community builder demonstrates trust and desire to listen, community's trust to him/her will grow. If there are positive relationships between the community leader and the community, its members feel inclusive, more important and involved.

4. *Skills of managing the own ego*. Right inspiration can cause long-term positive effects, wrong decisions and approaches can cause long-term depression. Psychologists believe that many people who take the lead have excessive ego. People know who the community leader is, they trust his/her words, believe his/her opinion. The development of the Internet and online communities makes boosting the ego of an individual easier. Google search, social networks, news feed, notifications, tracking statistics can easily show the number of people loving a person.

6. *Do not try to be someone else*. The personality of a leader is the most valuable asset. Individuality is the basis of the audience's trust, and this trust is the main component while developing a successful community leader. If he/she tries to be someone else, he/she will lose the most important feature. The community **communicator** should determine own characteristics in order to benefit from the positive ones and to correct the negative ones while always remaining true to himself/herself. When a specialist follows this approach for managing his/her community, he/she would never worry about trust, honesty, or respect: community members know that the words pronounced by him/her reflect his/her own ideas.

M.V. Plotnikov and other researchers also add code, context, and noise to these components [10]. Communication channels are the means by which information can be transmitted. These channels are divided into: informational (article, information board); analytical (social research, interview); communicative (master class, discussion) and organizational (briefing, conference).

A person obtains the basic part of the information about the world through the language channel; therefore, people live rather in the world of concepts created for intellectual, spiritual and social needs than in the world of things and objects. A huge share of information is perceived by people through the word, and the success of a person in a society depends on how well he/she masters the language, it depends not on understanding the culture of speech, but on the ability to uncover the language secrets. Cross-cultural communication has its own laws that influence the interaction of communicators a lot.

Thus, the following conclusion can be derived: the problem of simultaneous studying the language and culture attracts the attention of researchers from different points of view (culture elements can be researched both within the context of the goal of education and its content) at all stages of the methodological science development.

This article is the first attempt to present the idea of teaching a foreign language via a new media community.

As for the principles of teaching, the authors believe that teaching foreign languages by using the community strategy complies with the teaching principles stated in the methodology and can efficiently develop cross-cultural competence:

1. speech orientation of the process – the goal of education is communication;
2. orientation both on the content of communication and on the formal component – form of expression;
3. functionality principle in the selection and organization of material;
4. contextuality in the selection of material: the material should be selected depending on the educational situation and trained in situations that are typical for using certain language forms;
5. authentic materials usage;
6. use of real communicative tasks that contribute to the development of communication skills.

The means of cross-cultural communication is a foreign language, efficient usage of which leads to mutual understanding in any multicultural and multilingual space.

## 4 Discussion

Communication is a process of circular interaction which includes an information sender, its recipient and a message itself. Individuals, small or large groups of individuals and even whole cultures can be involved in cross-cultural communication. A person's awareness of being a participant of cross-cultural communication is a positive prerequisite for communicators allowing them

to communicate efficiently. The community allows students to communicate a lot. Interlocutors communicating with representatives of a foreign culture should take into account the communicative means choice, as it makes their interaction easier. While communicating at the cross-cultural level, the social motive has a significant impact on the characteristics of cross-cultural communication. The case is communication in the community.

The problem of integrating cultural components in foreign language teaching has attracted the attention of scientists for a long time. The authors present reasoning of the culture integration specificity in the process of teaching a foreign language.

The idea that students should be able to participate in cross-cultural communication has become widespread. It was mentioned above that students studying a foreign culture and communicating with foreign language speakers should be very careful while choosing linguistic means for expressing their thoughts. The situation becomes even more complicated if both interlocutors are not informed about their belonging to different cultures. Communication problems can be solved by the community communicator. The functions of such an intermediary can be performed by a person or more often by telecommunications.

The main characteristic of such training is the use of telecommunications as a dynamically developing means of teaching; their usage fundamentally changes the system of forms and methods of teaching. Consequently, the use of network community in teaching a foreign language is an efficient tool in teaching students.

If education on the Internet is understood in this way, it does not contradict other forms of the educational process organization and easily integrates in them. Written communication via telecommunications involves the process of information **transfer**, and it is associated with a foreign language written activity, namely, with the technical aspect of writing. Thus, the skill of writing letters is of great importance when communicating on the Internet. With the help of this skill a communicator can quickly remove misunderstandings because he/she knows how to send a request.

Writing in such a context is very specific as there is no need to follow any formal format in this communication. Thus, when mastering foreign language communication via telecommunications, it is important that students have writing skills.

Information is perceived through the visual channel during the telecommunications use and communication on the Internet. Foreign language communication is subject to perception and proper processing by means of reading skills.

If communication is considered to be abundant exchange of information in a foreign language, the most appropriate form of information transfer is writing and reading text messages.

In other words, written communication via telecommunications is performed. The detail analysis of the specificity of its bilateral nature allows concluding that one aspect marks the process of **perception and processing** of information. For example, communicating

on the Internet orally, a communicator can quickly and easily learn social and cultural information if he/she needs to do it.

Thus, the level of communication skills development concerning reading and writing in a foreign language is an obligatory component of easy and real education of students. Students always have an opportunity to interact with other communication partners in the community.

The abundance of cross-cultural communication is closely related to the possibility of communicating with diverse communication partners in a foreign language. The Internet facilities also allow for constant and quite dynamic communication between students as well as with native speakers via telecommunications. These linguo-didactic characteristics of telecommunications allow students to make cross-cultural communicative contact and learn a foreign language interacting in real situations.

This idea is developed by I.I. Khaleeva. In her opinion, cross-cultural communication is “a set of specific processes of interaction between people belonging to different cultures and languages” [11,12].

In other words, the participants of cross-cultural communication try to take into account other traditions and customs using their own cultural and linguistic experience, their national and cultural traditions and customs, while recognizing the fact of their “foreignness”.

## 5 Conclusion.

Thus, students' usage of social networks and instant messengers, building their own foreign language community, their constant management and active participation in online communities will help to improve the level of language competence, to develop skills necessary for professional communication, to take into account national peculiarities of different cultures. The article is the first attempt to present a new technology of developing the cross-cultural competence using a community. Thus, the use of marketing strategies can be implemented in educational-cognitive activities and contribute to the achievement of the goals of learning and teaching foreign languages at the university. Nowadays, the network community is used not only for entertainment and communication, but also for the development of business communications which underlines the relevance of cross-cultural communication in a foreign language.

A community is a function that combines technologies and teaching tools. Building a community is based on the human need to belong to a community at the instinctive level. This function is used for successful communication in a foreign language. Creating a community does not happen instantly. Therefore, a teacher should pay attention to characteristics and levels of competences development. At the same time maintaining the activity of community members (students) while teaching foreign languages cannot be ignored after the appearance of a social group. Using a

community in education requires focused, strategic efforts to develop cross-cultural competence.

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