

The Intermediary Reflection of Asian Culture through English

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to present the intermediary reflection of different sides of Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese cultures through English on the examples of borrowed culture-loaded words. Using the method of comparative analysis the author describes three Asian cultures through language units. The paper confirms English is actively involved in the development of world community, interacts with other languages, has a significant influence on these languages and undergoes changes itself denoting specific elements of ethnic cultures. Moreover, any foreign word through its meaning reflects the outer world and English, as a lingua franca, helps to get a bright image of a new object without direct acquaintance with it. Results show that linguocultural description of culture-loaded words from Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese cultures through English serves for successful cross-cultural communication of non-native speakers of English. An international communication involves understanding and application knowledge of lingua cultural specifics of both sides of the dialogue participants. The practical value of the study is that research findings can be used in future investigations on the intercultural communication.

KEYWORDS

Intercultural communication; non-native speakers communication; English culture; Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese cultures; culture-loaded words

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Introduction

The relationship between languages and cultures in intercultural communication is evident and undisputable (Halliday, 2016). Language and culture interaction is raising the world scientific interest, and various peculiarities of a nation are revealed by analyzing language phenomena (Heltai, 2016; Ip, 2016; Voss & Aguad, 2016).

The relationship of the cultural sphere of a nation and its language representation is brightly seen when the process of borrowing comes along with language interactions (Kirkpatrick, Subhan & Walkinshaw, 2016). Coming into

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a recipient-language, a borrowed word retains a piece of foreign culture that reflects a different way of world perception (Uryson, 1999). The outer world presented in lexical meaning of a foreign word helps to get some knowledge, a bright image of a new object without direct acquaintance with it (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2013).

Nowadays borrowing is often considered in the spectrum of intercultural communication as the situations of intercultural communication can take place not only among representatives of two languages and cultures (Ustinova, 2013) but also through a lingua franca (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Such communication is called indirect, or intermediary, and it has recently become very common (Proshina, 2012). It's one of the best ways to get in touch with cultures without direct contacts with them (Bolden, 2012).

Being a lingua franca English is used practically by every nation as a link language of intercultural communication and carries information about cultures of different countries through borrowed lexical units denoting specific elements of ethnic cultures (Crystal, 2003).

It is pertinent to point out that non-English speaking countries have the great possibility to learn culture of other ethnicities through English, for example, the great Asian civilization heritage. Z.G. Proshina (2008), a pioneer in studying Asian cultures through English in Russia, observes English is beneficial for all nations.

Other scholars also point out the role of English in international communication (Zav'yalova, 2014; Zhukova et al., 2013; Ivankova, 2011) and intercultural intelligibility (Proshina, 2014).

Characterizing linguistic situation in Vietnam, F.N. Trinh (2002) writes that while the country of Vietnam has gone through *doi moi* (renovation) to being a market economy and establishing diplomatic relations with America, the people of Vietnam have also gone through various stages, rushing and elbowing their way through to learn an international language as a means of relating meaningfully to the wider world. This has created what could be called "English fever". It's hard to imagine how many public and private schools, and how many centers are running English training courses throughout Vietnam.

Some linguists such as A.Ya. Sokolovskiy (2000) and C. Potvin (2005) consider Eastern culture, including Vietnamese, very symbolic. This feature is connected with numbers. For example, 3 is a good number for Chinese. It sounds similar to the character of "birth" and is believed a lucky number: *san ts'ai* – triunity of heavens, earth and man. Number 4 is seemed to be unlucky for Chinese and Japanese because of its pronunciation close to the word "death". That's why some apartments don't have rooms numbered "four". On the contrary, number "four" has great power in Vietnamese culture. It is also reflected in intermediary language picture of the world: *tu duc* denotes four main virtues: prudence, strength, justice and temperance; for women they are: work, demeanor, language, conduct (Huu, 1996). "Seven" appears to be holy number in many cultures.

In the aggregate, this paper deals with linguocultural description of culture-loaded words that enlighten the different sides of Eastern and South-Eastern cultures. It touches upon the intermediary reflection of Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese cultures in English using the example of culture-loaded borrowed words.

It should be noted that our main concern is to present linguocultural description of borrowed lexical units denoting specific elements of ethnic culture and the novelty of the paper is in finding out the linguocultural particularities of Japan, China and Vietnam that have historical relationships. Although the Chinese did exert a permanent influence on Vietnamese and Japanese political, language and cultural spheres, Japan and Vietnam has always remained different.

Method

The study was conducted at the lexical and stylistic levels. Firstly, we determine basic linguocultural concepts expressed in Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese cultures. Secondly, we use the method of comparative analysis in order to describe three Asian cultures through language units and demonstrate the examples of borrowed culture-loaded words.

Data, Analysis, and Results

The results of linguocultural analysis show that since any foreign word is an object of intercultural and interlinguistic borrowing (Ermolovich, 2001), it contains precious cultural information that is transmitted intermediary through English.

So, the culture of Japan, China, and Vietnam can be viewed not only through such culture-loaded words as *karaoke*, *taekwando*, *sushi*, *kimchi*, *Vietcong*, that are well-known practically to all European world due to the popularity of culture-specific objects or activity or to the spread of Hollywood movies as in the case of the word *Vietcong* (the name Americans and the pro-American Sai Gon government given to the revolutionary forces fighting for reunification in Vietnam), but the great part of English vocabulary is presented by the words that have been borrowed without objects or phenomena they refer to; and beyond doubt they brightly reflect the national specification of the nations they belong to. Some of them have similar features in all three cultures, for example, the Lunar New Year.

In China people celebrate *Chun jie*, Chinese Lunar New Year, the annual Chinese festival, also known as *Spring festival* because it must wake the forces of nature. *Tet* (English Dictionary, 2000) is Lunar New Year Festival celebrated in Vietnam. *Oshogatsu*, Japanese New Year, has been celebrated in Japan since 1873 according to the Gregorian calendar, on January 1 of each year. However, the original celebration of the Japanese New Year is still marked, in Okinawa for instance, on the same day as the contemporary Chinese, Vietnamese New Years.

It is pertinent to point out that there are some Japanese borrowings that include number "seven" thus transmitting this linguocultural component, for example: *Shichi-fuku-jin* (Proshina, 2004) denotes Seven Gods of luck in Japanese folklore. *Shichi-go-san* is a festival celebrated by parents on the fifteenth of November in Japan, to mark the growth of their children as they turn three, five and seven years of age.

We determine national language as a unique form of nation identification. *Quoc ngu* "national language" is an exclusive written form of the national Vietnamese language. That was originally written in Chinese characters, called *chu nom*. (Vodhanel & Segal, 2007).

Overall, national clothes and other accessories has always been the differential characteristic of every nation. Such borrowings as Japanese *kimono* (Proshina, 2004), Vietnamese *ao dai* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2000) and Chinese *cheongsam* (Proshina, 2004) give us a vivid image of the men and women styles in clothes at different periods.

For example, *cheongsam* is the dress that most westerners associate with China. It is a long, close-fitting dress with short sleeves, a slit up one side, a mandarin collar (a round, stand-up collar that is worn close to the neck), and a fastening across the right side of the upper chest. The *cheongsam* first appeared shortly after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, which had ruled China since 1644. China, which had been isolated from the rest of the world during the Qing dynasty, began to modernize fairly quickly, both in its politics and its economy.

Women especially began to have more freedom and wanted to modernize their clothing to allow more freedom of movement and comfort. But they didn't want to just adopt Western dress. The *cheongsam* represented a compromise between Western dress and traditional Chinese clothes. It used traditional Chinese fabrics like silk and included a traditional collar and fastening across the right side. But the form-fitting cut and the lack of binding ties were distinctly Western. The *cheongsam* soon came to represent the politics of a modernizing China.

Ao dai is a Vietnamese woman's long high-necked, close-fitting tunic split along the side to the waist and worn over loose-fitting trousers. For many, the dress has become a symbol for the beauty of Vietnamese women. The *ao dai* began to attract international attention during the American War in Vietnam. At that time, many western writers, journalists and tourists writing in French and English referred affectionately to the *ao dai*. This might be a good summary: "Beautiful, but not for every woman and every occasion", or "elegant", "graceful", "simple but showing off the woman's slender form", "a charming dress with its flaps fluttering attractively in the wind..." Visitors to Vietnam have used all sorts of adjectives to express their admiration for the traditional tunic worn by Vietnamese women (Huu, 2006).

Can note that *Kimono* is the most basic term for traditional Japanese dress. The word *kimono* came into use in the late nineteenth century as a way to distinguish native clothing from Western clothing and thereafter became more common in Japan. *Kimono* refers to the principal outer garment of Japanese dress, a long robe with wide sleeves, made of various materials and in many patterns. It is generally unlined in summer, lined in autumn and spring, and padded in winter. Nowadays, Japanese people rarely wear *kimonos* in everyday life, reserving them for such occasions as weddings, funerals, tea ceremonies or other special events, such as summer festivals.

Linguocultural comparative analysis shows that words denoting politics and philosophy of nations are also of interest because they reveal the national self-consciousness. A great number of such words of Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese origin have been borrowed by English.

The emphasis can be made on the denotatively similar notions from Chinese *gaige* (Proshina, 2004), a reconstruction with Chinese specification, and Vietnamese *doi moi* that means reforms, directed to the general process of

renewal in all spheres. As for the words of Japanese origin, it's possible to mention *kokugaku* (Proshina, 2004) or "National Learning".

It refers to an intellectual trend which rejected the study of Chinese and Buddhist texts and favored philological research into the early Japanese classics. The main teachings of *kokugaku* were that Japan and the Japanese people constitute a distinctive national entity marked by spontaneity, natural goodness and innate divinity.

Thus, studying the examples of culture-loaded words we considered the intermediary reflection of Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese cultures through English. Denoting an object of reality by lexical units in the process of international communication we strongly feel cultural diversity and the national ways of real world perception that are controversial to our native culture.

Discussion

By spreading various cultures, English enriches people who get to know more and more about other nations (Proshina, 2004). Similar investigations in the field of word borrowing from different Asian countries have been made by such linguists as S.G. Ter-Minasova (2000) and A.Ya. Sokolovskiy (2000).

Despite the former controversy between Japan, China and Vietnam, they have given a great role to English in their desire to speak one language with the world, and thus, have the possibility to exchange knowledge, ideas, traditions, literature, etc. English is studied as a foreign language in these countries and is widely used for international business, tourism and is seen in media, pop culture, science, advertising, and education.

For example, SoftBank, one of Japan's largest mobile phone companies has introduced an incentive scheme that will pay 1 million yen to staff who score 900 points on the international Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), which has a maximum score of 990 points (Japan firms see importance of speaking in tongues). English teaching has been getting more and more attention in China, especially since Beijing won the bid to hold the 2008 Olympic Games. Apart from English teaching in schools, other forms of English training courses have appeared across China (for example, the Beijing New Oriental School is the best and most famous privately-run English school for tests) (Lin, 2002). That confirms our thesis that people in Asia are enthusiastic about learning English and publications about English learning.

The study of G. Tang (2007) also proves the topicality of such intercultural communication investigations. The researcher presented cross-linguistic comparison of Vietnamese and English across speech-sound, word, and grammatical language levels.

Conclusion

To sum up, linguocultural description of culture-loaded words from Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese cultures through English serves for successful cross-cultural communication of non-native speakers of English. Furthermore, an international communication involves understanding and application knowledge of lingua cultural specifics of both sides of the dialogue participants.

Results show that English is actively involved in the development of world community, interacts with other languages, has a significant influence on these languages and undergoes changes itself denoting specific elements of ethnic cultures. In addition to that, linguocultural description of culture-loaded words from Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese cultures through English serves for successful cross-cultural communication of non-native speakers of English.

In the aggregate, the interaction of Asian languages and English and the role of this interaction for Russian communicators in English may be very important as it is widely used for international business, tourism, and is seen in media, pop culture, science, advertising, and education. Modern functional needs in practical knowledge of foreign language used for communication with non-native speakers of English change the approach to language research and are significant for both theory and practice of language teaching, learning and researching. It is directly applicable to training future interpreters and translators by raising students' linguocultural awareness to work with regional varieties of English, and to teach students to speak on their culture through English as a Lingua Franca, because using English for intercultural communication people reflect the specific linguocultural peculiarities of their own native culture and identify themselves.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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