

Reconciling Form and Content: Acquisition of Cross-Cultural Discourse Structures by Learners of English

ELENA SCHMITT
JUDITH E. HAMMER

Southern Connecticut State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the ability of advanced Russian learners of English as a foreign language (FL) to compose authentic essays in the target language (TL) reflecting morphosyntactic, discursive, and cross-cultural expectations. Thirty-four students at Russian universities were asked to utilize their TL, English, to write compositions focusing on topics about everyday life. These compositions received high scores on measures of grammar, content, and vocabulary; but lacked in the areas of discourse organization, audience awareness, and transcultural literacy. Therefore, the goal of this research was to examine learners' translingual and transcultural competence (MLA, 2007) by contrasting their grammatical and lexical accuracy with their cross-cultural and discursive proficiency manifested in their compositions through organization of discourse, audience awareness, and interrogations of the native and target cultures. To attain this goal, the researchers developed a Comprehensive Assessment of Translingual and Transcultural Awareness (CATT) Model that includes traditionally evaluated categories (morphosyntactic and lexical usage and content) as well as features of transcultural analysis (the mention and reflection on cultural products, practices, and perspectives).

Keywords: Assessment, culture, discourse, foreign language, teaching, writing

This essay analyzes the ability of advanced Russian learners of English as a foreign language (FL) to compose authentic essays in the target language (TL) reflecting morphosyntactic, discursive, and cross-cultural expectations. 34 students at Russian universities were asked to utilize