



## Original Research

# What can a foreign language textbook for Engineering majors be like? A case of developing and evaluating its sociocultural content

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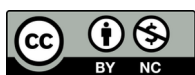
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*The paper addresses the issue of a tertiary foreign language textbook for Engineering majors in the Russian context. The motivation for the research comes from the fact that despite numerous academic publications about the need for developing a modern foreign language textbook for technical universities, the problem still remains unsolved, especially, in relation to the development of the textbook's sociocultural content that would meet the communicative needs in the professional setting. The present study aimed at presenting and validating the framework for the sociocultural representation using the learners' and experts' evaluations. The research questions explored types of sociocultural representation in two piloted English textbooks. Then the authors focused on students' ability to identify the cross-cultural aspect of foreign language communication and sociocultural content in the textbooks. Finally, the research examined the feedback from experts and master students with some cross-cultural communication experience in their workplaces, which helped to evaluate the sociocultural representation in both textbooks. A total of 31 university students participated in the online survey. Data at the qualitative stage of the study were obtained from interviews. The findings show the prevalence of communication-based tasks and materials over knowledge-based ones. Besides, the learners' and experts' positive evaluations confirmed the sufficiency of the sociocultural representation. Being limited by the context of automotive Engineering majors, the study suggests a possible approach for designing sociocultural content of a foreign language textbook for Engineering students.*

KEYWORDS: *foreign language textbook, automotive Engineering majors, sociocultural content, cross-cultural communication*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

To start with, we would like to address the question of choosing the appropriate notion in the context of the present study: *Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) textbook*, *foreign language (FL) textbook*, or *profession-oriented textbook* which are used in the academic discourse. Of all the three, the notion of *FL textbook* seems to be versatile for FL teaching at any education level. For this reason, with regard to the scope of the present paper we would rather employ this one with the meaning of being *profession-oriented*, because dwelling upon backgrounds and possible differences of all these notions is beyond the scope of our study.

Various aspects of designing sociocultural content of a FL textbook have been over decades in the focus of both academics and practitioners. Risager and Chapelle (2012) drew special attention to the key position of textbooks in FL teaching, as they

are the foremost provider of knowledge on the target culture. Chapelle (2010) explores the potential intercultural competence-building content in beginner level French textbooks for developing Canadian college students' intercultural competence and points to some missed opportunities.

Some recent studies concentrate on interpreting cultural values and the ways of its improvement in the university textbook (Xiong & Peng, 2020). Multimodal infusion of moral and cultural values in textbooks for language and other subjects has also become a topic of considerable interest (Liu et al., 2022; Xiong & Hu, 2022). Forman (2014) and Tareva et al. (2017) describe the experience of the implementation of cross-cultural and sociocultural aspects into teaching materials. Cunningsworth (1984) raises the issue of evaluation of FL textbooks' sociocultural component. More specific problems such as realisation of language learning strategies from the sociocultural perspective

*'In the meantime, the development of a tertiary level FL textbook still lags behind the textbook development for secondary school because practical issues of creating profession-oriented teaching materials still face a number of problems, for instance, a contradiction between the need to create such materials and limited educational means, lack of methodological experience and skills for writing learning materials'*

were also explored by Donato and McCormick (1994). Pankratova (2019) points out to the potential of using a regional component in FL textbooks at tertiary level. Selection of cultural content of language textbooks (Risager, 2021), representation of multicultural values in textbooks (Setyono & Widodo, 2019), various aspects of analysis of cultural representation in textbooks (Risager, 2018; Risager & Chapelle, 2012), and issues of balance in representing British and American culture in university EFL textbooks (Laborda & Robles, 2022) are fruitfully discussed.

As for a FL textbook for non-language majors in Russian universities, academic discussions about what it should be like started decades ago, and since then various issues have been touched upon. First and foremost, it is the methodology issues, namely: theoretical approaches to its creation (Bogatryyova, 1998; Igna, 2021; Popova et al., 2020), textbook structure, and principles of content selection (Borisova, 2017; Tsimerman & Almazova, 2017). Safonova (2018) gives some recommendations on the principles and practices of designing tertiary level FL teaching materials based on the European professional education strategy and Russian national educational priorities. In the meantime, the development of a tertiary level FL textbook still lags behind the textbook development for secondary school (Vitlin, 2007) because practical issues of creating profession-oriented teaching materials still face a number of problems, for instance, a contradiction between the need to create such materials and limited educational means (Kirillovykh, 2022), lack of methodological experience and skills for writing learning materials (Kravtsova & Yastrebova, 2019).

Some more important questions include the discussion of the professional aspect in the content of learning materials (Igna, 2019, 2021) and the implementation of the concept of a FL textbook for Engineering (Bazhutina, 2023; Kirillovykh, 2022) and other non-language majors (Bogatryyova, 1998). In the context of training future automotive engineers, the major challenge is that in Russian automobile companies English is used as a medium of communication with foreign partners. In the meantime, English is taught at non-language universities where at a large scale there is no English-speaking environment, and the issue of appropriate textbooks has still not been resolved (Bazhutina, 2021). Additionally, Igna (2021) demonstrates sociocultural limitations in the content of textbooks for technical universities published both in Russia and by foreign publishers pointing out

to the necessity for developing textbooks of a new generation to meet demands for FL competences. Igna (2021) also argues that the sociocultural component of FL textbooks is underestimated, and the regional component of learners' culture is the most vulnerable one. In this regard, we see the need for a more thorough and discerning investigation into the sociocultural content of FL textbooks both quantitatively and qualitatively. Thus, the aim of this article is to take part in the academic discussion about this issue using the example of Engineering majors in the context of Russian higher education by presenting some findings of the authors' research based on analysing, testing and assessing two piloted textbooks: English for Students of Mechanical Engineering (ESME) and English in Automobile Engineering (EAE) for automotive Engineering majors.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Modelling textbook sociocultural content

Previous studies strongly suggest that FL teaching at tertiary level should combine professional content with its language form (Inozemtseva, 2017; Popova et al., 2020; Sorokovykh et al., 2022; Sysoyev & Potapova, 2022; Tsimerman & Almazova, 2017; Yang, 2020). In this regard, to devise appropriate FL courses and learning materials employing both components, communicative needs analysis has always been essential (Basturkmen, 2021; Sysoyev & Potapova, 2022; Tomalin & Tverdokhlebova, 2021; Upton, 2012; Yang & Wang, 2016). Its extreme importance is emphasised in designing a sociocultural aspect (Weninger & Kiss, 2013), and the role of authentic teaching materials in realising this aspect was detailed by researchers (Igna, 2019; Skiada, 2021).

Igna (2021) suggests a number of essential features of the sociocultural component of FL textbooks for technical universities: *'professional and cultural orientation of topics; a variety of authentic materials; emphasis on sociocultural content of texts; sociocultural and lingocultural commentary; value orientations of text materials; exposure to the native language and culture including a regional component; positive presentation of the learners' country and culture; taking into account students' communicative needs, interests, and sociocultural experience; diverse presentation and its equal ratio of the sociocultural information about foreign countries if possible'* (Igna, 2021, p. 122). Bogatryyova (1998) suggested requirements for the sociocultural component of a FL profession-oriented textbook: (a) promoting the development of empathy among students; (b) informative value and relevance; (c) possibility of providing conditions for authentic communication on cross-cultural level; (d) taking into account communicants' native language and culture, communication and sociocultural experience; and (e) taking into account stylistic differentiation of learning materials; (f) linguacultural comparison.

Another relevant issue for discussing sociocultural content of tertiary FL textbooks for technical universities is forms and content of cross-cultural engineering communication. A number of pedagogical studies have sought to establish them. For example, Serova and Maletina (2010) singled out a business meeting,

*'The analysis of the sources in this section has brought us to the conclusion about the crucial role of the sociocultural aspect in designing a FL textbook for Engineering majors. What engineers read, write and talk about at work and what genres of all this discourse and what communication situations are part of cross-cultural communication, should become central when selecting and writing learning materials under consideration'*

a workshop, a training seminar, a presentation of an engineering design/report, an interview, negotiations, and a conference. Polyakova (2010) proposes 'engineering dialogue' as the essential genre of cross-cultural communication in any engineering area and being able to participate in this communication genre as the one of the target oral skills. Later, the ability for an engineering dialogue was included into the notion of integrative ESP competence as part of its communicative language activities.

As for approaches for representing cross-cultural communication in learning materials, Andarab (2019) argues that developing coursebooks helps both native and non-native speakers of English familiarise themselves with different linguistic and cultural norms that they are likely to encounter in communication situations with speakers from different cultural backgrounds. Byram (1997) and Menard-Warwick (2009) insist that learners should be given means for developing responsive action. Murayama (2000) used the terms *aspects of culture* and *levels of cultural understanding* to evaluate cultural content of textbooks. Having analysed Murayama's (2000) findings, Shin et al. (2011) introduced the modified term *levels of cultural presentation* instead of *levels of cultural understanding* and distinguished *knowledge-oriented* and *communication-oriented* materials and tasks to describe levels of cultural presentation. Their approach sounds appropriate for the objectives of the present study; therefore, we followed the analysis pattern of the sociocultural content elaborated by Shin et al. (2011) in the corresponding section.

## 2.2. Critical analysis

Following Byram (1997) and Igna (2021), we distinguish cross-cultural (intercultural) competence and learning materials that possess some sociocultural content to develop this competence. One more Igna's (2021) statement is important for our research and relates to specifying cross-cultural competence as being professional and cross-cultural. Thus, we specify the sociocultural content of a FL tertiary textbook as being *profession-oriented*.

Attempts to explore the sociocultural content in foreign language textbooks have been made by many authors. Shin et al. (2011) conclude that most of the ELT textbooks they examined reflected a knowledge-based level of cultural presentation. Shin et al. (2011) remark that *future textbooks should: (a) focus not only on cultural facts but also on deeper beliefs and values; (b) incorporate a variety of 'Englishes' in teaching materials; (c) en-*

*courage non-native, English-speaking educators to write textbooks; (d) promote both native and target cultures' specific norms* (Shin et al., 2011, p. 265). A thorough analysis of sociocultural content in FL textbooks for technical universities written by Russian scholars was carried out by Igna (2021) who listed their most typical features: '(a) high informative value and relevance of texts; (b) absence or lack of a sociocultural component any sociocultural commentary; (c) lack of texts that address common human problems and values; (d) absence or lack of authentic materials for visualization of educational information; (e) the content of textbooks is mostly out-of-date; (f) authentic materials include texts while authentic audio and video materials are scarce; (g) encyclopaedic character of country-related and sociocultural information; (h) a range of cultural values is not wide; (i) a positive image of Russia' (Igna, 2021, p. 123-124). At the same time, Igna (2021) suggests that some of these features are drawbacks of the textbooks under consideration.

According to Igna (2021), the sociocultural content of textbooks for technical universities published by foreign publishers has a number of features: '(a) high informative value and relevance of original materials; (b) specific profession-oriented topics; (c) scarcity of texts with country-related and sociocultural information and sociocultural commentary; (d) lack of texts that address common human problems and values, their topics are identical; (e) lack of consideration of the recipient's communicative needs, native language, and culture; (f) a positive image of their country; (g) difficulty to assess the correlation of sociocultural information about the country / countries of the language being studied and about other countries; (h) textbooks are developed for a large number of countries, and the specificity of each is impossible to take into account, therefore, a range of cultural values is not wide' (Igna, 2021, p. 124-125). All these textbook features were described on the basis of the criteria elaborated by Igna (2021), which enabled her to conclude that the range of the textbooks being analysed is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standards for Higher Education in Russia for the development of FL communicative competence.

The analysis of the sources in this section has brought us to the conclusion about the crucial role of the sociocultural aspect in designing a FL textbook for Engineering majors. What engineers read, write and talk about at work and what genres of all this discourse and what communication situations are part of cross-cultural communication, should become central when selecting and writing learning materials under consideration. The framework for developing the sociocultural content was determined by the following: (a) the learner's communicative needs and experience; (b) a strong tendency of being profession-oriented; (c) necessity for using authentic culture and country-related texts and other media materials; (d) competence-based approach, i.e. cultural representation should be aimed at forming cross-cultural communication skills that are relevant for a particular professional area. Accordingly, in this study, the authors use the following research questions to organise and guide their exploration.

RQ1: Which type of sociocultural representation dominates in the two textbooks: knowledge-oriented or communication-oriented?

RQ2: Can students identify the cross-cultural aspect of foreign language communication and sociocultural content in the textbooks?

RQ3: Is the sociocultural content sufficient to get ready for cross-cultural communication in a particular engineering area from the learners' and practitioners' perspectives?

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Research methods and objectives

This quantitative and qualitative research adopted a number of combined methods. The use of qualitative methods includes content analysis of textbook units, interviews, and interpretation of the results obtained. The authors also administered an anonymous online survey prepared in Russian to avoid any misunderstandings. The results of the questionnaire were analysed employing methods of descriptive statistics (IBM SPSS Statistics 23). All these methods were aimed at: (a) performing assessment and self-assessment of the representation of the sociocultural aspect of communication in ESME and EAE; (b) eliciting whether these textbooks can present a framework of the sociocultural content appropriate for a FL textbook at tertiary level in the context of automotive Engineering majors in Russian universities; and (c) specifying a list of features of the sociocultural representation in a FL textbook for students of automotive Engineering majors.

#### 3.2. Study context and participants

The research was conducted in the period between 2021 and 2023. The participants were 31 volunteering 1st-4th year undergraduate students and master students from Togliatti State University (TSU). All of them had from 1 to 4 semesters of English courses in which ESME and EAE were used for instruction. All the students were made aware that their responses would be anonymous and would not have any influence on their course grade. Since the survey was anonymous, no consent from them was required. The authors also interviewed six master students who worked as automotive engineers for transnational companies or enterprises with constant international connections according to the degree of intensity of cross-cultural communication. This classification was previously elaborated by Polyakova (2010) and further detailed for automotive companies by Bazhutina and Tsepilova (2021). The participants' verbal consent to present their responses in a generalised form was obtained. All volunteering participants were clearly instructed about the purpose and possible outcomes of the research. Among the participants, there were also two EFL practitioners who were interviewed, and their consent to use their answers, credentials and a brief description of work experience relevant to the research was also obtained. Expert 1 was a master's degree student in automobile engineering at TSU and a holder of the bachelor's degree in linguistics, a content and language

teacher with expertise in cross-cultural engineering communication in the automotive industry. This expert had experience teaching English courses to Engineering students using ESME and EAE during two semesters. Expert 2 was a pre-service teacher with expertise in linguistics and translation and cross-cultural studies. They had experience of teaching English courses to Engineering students using ESME during four semesters.

#### 3.3. Data collection

Data collection took place in four stages.

Stage I. At this stage, a procedure of content analysis (Chapelle, 2010) of ESME and EAE was employed. Its aim was to find out which type of tasks and learning materials according to Shin et al. (2011) prevails in both textbooks.

Stage II. To answer RQ2, an anonymous online survey was conducted among 33 volunteering TSU students of automotive Engineering and aimed to elicit whether they can identify the sociocultural content and its sufficiency in the piloted textbooks. Among the participants were those who had already completed their English courses at Togliatti State University: a few master students and 4th-year students. There were also 11 students whose first major was military training, and they trained to join the army. The questionnaire is composed of three main sections with a total of 13 questions: the participants' general information (3 items), their perceptions and evaluation of the sociocultural aspect of the textbook materials (9 items), and one open-ended question to give any extra comments about the aspect under consideration or just their impressions of the textbook(s) the respondents would like to add (see Appendix for the complete questionnaire). The part about the participants' general information contains 3 close-ended questions. A 5-point Likert scale was used for 9 items, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The questionnaire was provided in an online format and took approximately 5-7 minutes to complete. Two students did not send their responses. A total of 31 valid questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 94%. The reliability of the questionnaire reached Cronbach's alpha .86.

Stage III. At this stage, interviews with six master students were conducted to elicit whether the sociocultural content is sufficient to get ready for cross-cultural communication in a particular engineering area from the learners' perspective. The master students, experienced in cross-cultural communication in spoken and written forms, were asked questions about typical FL communication situations in their workplaces and whether ESME and EAE tasks and materials correlate with real engineering communication in the cross-cultural context. The purpose of this stage was also to find out whether the sociocultural content is sufficient from the two EFL practitioners' perspective who were interviewed to obtain their evaluation of the sociocultural content representation in ESME and EAE. Both experts were teaching English to automotive Engineering students during 2021-2023. Both interviews lasted for about 7-10 minutes and were shorthanded by one of the researchers. These procedures helped us answer RQ3.

### 3.4. Data analysis and validity of the research

The data from the questionnaire was analysed using the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 23. In addition to the essential descriptive analysis, the Pearson correlation test was used to determine any significant relationships between various variables. The value for significant correlations for this research was set at 0.05.

The validity of the present research can be proved by the following facts.

1. Duration of the experiment. It was conducted during a period of over 2 years.
2. Ninety-four percent responsiveness in the online survey.
3. Sample representativeness. Study participants represented different academic groups, academic years, and courses of study.
4. Researchers' involvement. The authors used the technique proposed by Yang (2020). At the stage of designing both textbooks and teaching, they worked as insiders, but were physically absent while the students were completing the survey.
5. Interviews with master students were held by one of the co-authors of the article who is not a co-author of the piloted textbooks.
6. Sufficient qualification of the experts interviewed within the research.
7. Homogeneity of measuring instruments. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions formulated in a similar way and had a limited number of identical response options.

In the following sections, we present the major results and discuss the most significant findings.

## 4. STUDY RESULTS

### 4.1. Content analysis

#### 4.1.1. Analysis criteria

At Stage I, the sociocultural content in each unit was classified into knowledge-oriented and communication-oriented ones (Shin et al., 2011). All the materials and tasks based upon them were analysed according to the following criteria: (1) presence of information related to the engineering occupation in the automotive industry and devised for getting acquainted with various social and cultural aspects; e.g., facts about English and non-English speaking countries, job functions in the automobile industry, automotive engineering notions and terminology, career prospects, engineering education in Europe and India, achievements of Russian and European Formula Student teams, local car brands designed by an English car designer and their Russian team of engineers, etc.; (2) communicative activities aimed at developing the cross-cultural component of learners' integrative ESP competence that was previously described (Bazhutina & Tsepilova, 2022, 2024); e.g., role-plays, presentations, small talk, making up dialogues and reports, describing technical possesses, reading and translating specialist literature, writing business letters, etc.

According to these criteria, the amount of knowledge-oriented and communication-oriented tasks and materials was identified (Table 1).

Below a number of detailed examples of both types of ESME and EAE materials and tasks are presented. These lengthy lists are given to sufficiently illustrate various facets of the sociocultural content.

Table 1

*Knowledge-oriented and communication-oriented tasks and materials based on sociocultural content*

TOTAL NUMBER OF MATERIALS AND TASKS	KNOWLEDGE-ORIENTED MATERIALS AND TASKS BASED ON SOCIOCULTURAL CONTENT	COMMUNICATION-ORIENTED MATERIALS AND TASKS BASED ON SOCIOCULTURAL
ESME 248	43 (17%)	50 (20%)
EAE 209	49 (23%)	76 (36%)

#### 4.1.2. Examples of knowledge-oriented tasks and materials in ESME

Unit 1. WE ARE STUDENTS OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

1.12. (a) Here is Alex's weekly timetable. Some of the information is missing. Before you listen, try to answer these questions about the timetable. What time do classes start each day? When does Alex finish? How long is a class? How many classes does he have each week? What room is Maths in? What do students do on Tuesdays and Thursdays? (b) Listen to Recording 1.2 and answer the questions. What is Alex's major? Which stage of the course is Alex at? What subject did he like at school? (c) Listen to Recording 1.3 and fill in gaps 1-8.

Unit 3. FASTER AND BIGGER?

3.21. Watch Video 3.1 with a song about LADA Niva. Does the singer enjoy driving Niva? Why does he like his car? Read the lyrics and find the words which describe (a) weather in Saskatchewan; (b) how a car works, (c) LADA Niva design. *Notes for the teacher. Before watching the video draw your students' attention to some social and historical realia that are mentioned in the song. Eg., KGB, Garbor and some stereotypes about Russian people.*

Unit 6. WHAT'S IT LIKE INSIDE?

6.1. (a) Watch Video 6.1 about the car interior (from 3:15 up to 6:15). (b) Translate the terms for parts of the car interior into Russian from the video. (c) Split into teams to label all parts

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of the dashboard. Divide the terms into some portions for each team. Use your English list of words and this source (see a list of interior terms).

#### **4.1.3. Examples of communication-oriented tasks and materials in ESME**

Unit 7. AVTOVAZ: PEOPLE AND CARS

7.21. (a) Watch Video 7.7 with Steve Mattin's presentation of the design of LADA models he made in 2019 at Togliatti State University. (b) Steve Mattin says that it takes four years to build a new car: from its concept to production. Write down the names of LADA concepts and produced cars under the right date. (c) Work in pairs and ask your groupmate questions about these concepts.

7.27. Make up questions to ask Steve Mattin about his work for AVTOVAZ. Role-play your own interview with the designer. Student A: ask Steve Mattin (a) how long he has been in the automobile industry; (b) when he started working for AVTOVAZ; (c) how long he worked on the X concept; (d) when his team of designers introduced Vesta; (e) when they refreshed Granta. Student B: use the information from 7.17 and 7.28 to answer Student A's questions. Example: How long have you been ...? When did you start working for AVTOVAZ?

7.28. You work for a big car manufacturing company in Russia in the logistics department. You have received the email below from a French manufacturer of car components. (a) Complete the email with words from the box. (b) Now write a reply to the email. Use the phrases in your email (followed by a list of clichés). Student A: choose one option and write a business letter of complaint about the wrong quantity of the batches of (a) stalks, (b) accessories, (c) sockets, (d) armrests and headrests, (e) fuel gauges, (f) tachometers, (g) electric central locking switches. Student B: write your reply to this complaint.

7.32. Role-play a follow-up telephone conversation. Student A makes a call from a Russian company. The task is to apologise for the wrong delivery in person. Swap your roles.

#### **4.1.4. Examples of knowledge-oriented tasks and materials in EAE**

Unit 2. FORMULA STUDENT: COMBUSTION, ELECTRIC, DRIVERLESS

Introduction. Do you know what Formula Student is? Watch these videos from Formula Student competitions in Video 2.1 and Video 2.2. Who participates in this project? Is it only a sports event?

2.6. (a) To learn more about Formula Student competitions read the text below. (b) Say if the statements are true or false. Correct the false ones. (c) Find in the text some engineering and soft skills. Can you add any more? (d) Fill in the gaps in the sentences from the text.

2.7. Engineering skills and soft skills are tested in Formula Student events. (a) Write these events into the checkered flag, which is used to show each Formula Student driver that the session has been completed, and the driver must leave the track at the first opportunity. (b) Match Formula Student events and their definitions. (c) Check your answers watching Video 2.3.

2.17. Watch Video 2.4 about Black Scorpion G2, a racing car built by Togliatti Racing Team in 2019. What technical features of Black Scorpion G2 are presented in the video? What type of engine is used in this car? Make up a list of technical features and provide Russian terms for them.

2.18. Read the story of success of Togliatti Racing Team and make up a list of achievements of this team or your university team.

#### **4.1.5. Examples of communication-oriented tasks and materials in EAE**

Unit 2. FORMULA STUDENT: COMBUSTION, ELECTRIC, DRIVERLESS

2.19. (a) Watch a review of Togliatti State University racing cars 'From Sprint to Black Scorpion' in Video 2.5. (b) Answer the questions. Which car is the fastest? the lightest? Which one has the shortest acceleration time? How long does it normally take to build a Formula Student racing car? (c) Discussion. Why do you think Formula Student competitions have strict rules? Speak about your university team. If you know the latest news of Togliatti Racing Team or your university team, share them with your class.

2.27. Role-play. Student A: You are on the Formula Student campsite. You need to find out something according to your role card. Keep asking groupmates (Students B) your question until you find out what you need.

Unit 6. CAR SUSPENSIONS

6.20. Pat Clarke, a Formula Student judge from Australia, did a lecture at TSU. Watch a fragment from this lecture in Video 6.2 and answer the questions. What terms for suspension geometry are mentioned? What advice does Pat Clarke give to make 'tyres happy'?

6.22. (a) Imagine yourself at the Formula Student Autumn School which was held in November 2020 at Togliatti State University. Pat Clarke answers students' questions about the sus-

pension design. Prepare your questions taking into account business etiquette of cross-cultural engineering communication. (b) Consider these questions. You may ask Pat Clarke your own similar questions and 'get' his answers while watching Video 6.3. Introduce yourself, ask your questions and make some comments during silent fragments.

**4.1.6. Content analysis takeaways**

The results of the content analysis show that the majority of sociocultural materials and tasks in ESME and EAE is communication-oriented, and the selected examples provide some glimpses of their content. All the communication-oriented tasks are based on authentic materials used in the automotive industry (technical documents, business letters) or on video footage of situations cross-cultural communication or borrowed from real situations and verified by master students. In the meantime, the

shares of knowledge-oriented and communication-oriented tasks and materials are not equal in both textbooks. The percentage of communication-oriented materials and tasks in EAE is bigger than in ESME by 16%. This is due to the fact that EAE is used for teaching 3rd and 4th year students and even master students who normally have a broader outlook on their future profession or may have some working experience unlike 1st and 2nd year students. Thus, a larger share of sociocultural materials and tasks appeals to the learners' professional knowledge and experience and simulates possible communication situations in the cross-cultural context. It should be noted that simulating such communication situations is characteristic of all the communication-oriented tasks in ESME and EAE.

The findings of this stage enabled us to create a framework which reflects the design of the sociocultural content in ESME and EAE (Figure 1).

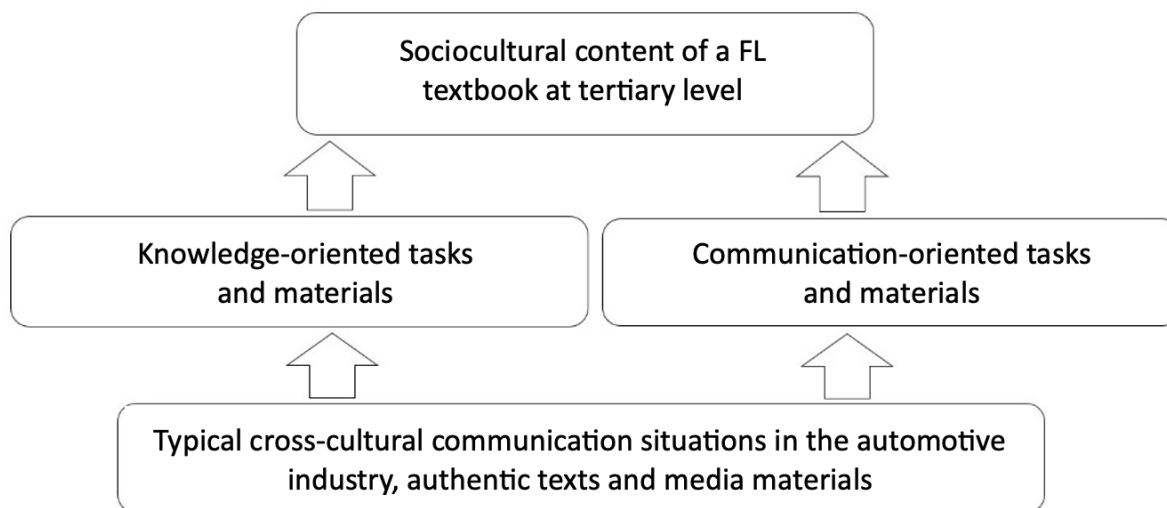


Figure 1. Framework for representing sociocultural content of a FL textbook for automotive Engineering majors

**4.2. Online survey**

At Stage II, we analysed 31 valid questionnaires that were received from TSU students of automotive Engineering majors after their English courses. The results of the students' evalua-

tion of the sociocultural content are summarised in Table 2 and are discussed in detail below. (Agreement percentage was calculated by adding up points 1 and 2 in the Likert scale of the questionnaire.)

Table 2  
Descriptive results of evaluating the sociocultural content of ESME and EAE

ITEM	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.9
Mean	3.61	3.87	3.97	4.00	4.19	3.90	3.84	4.19	4.10
SD	0.882	0.806	0.752	0.775	0.833	0.870	0.934	0.601	0.831
Agree	48.4%	64.5%	71%	83.9%	80.6%	71%	74.2%	90.3%	83.9%

*The results of the content analysis show that the majority of sociocultural materials and tasks in ESME and EAE is communication-oriented, and the selected examples provide some glimpses of their content. All the communication-oriented tasks are based on authentic materials used in the automotive industry (technical documents, business letters) or on video footage of situations cross-cultural communication or borrowed from real situations and verified by master students. In the meantime, the shares of knowledge-oriented and communication-oriented tasks and materials are not equal in both textbooks'*

The results revealed that the students showed low agreement (48.4%) with the statement that the textbook(s) contain(s) tasks giving an idea of the vocational training of students in other countries (item 2.1). A greater degree of agreement (64.5%) relates to the statement that the textbook(s) contain(s) tasks enabling learners 'to practise' communicating with students and future colleagues at work (item 2.2). The major reason for this result may be the fact that the task giving an idea of the vocational training of students in other countries is offered only in one unit of ESME, and there is much more exposure to getting ready for possible cross-cultural communication in the workplace in most units of both textbooks.

For items related to the presence of tasks for giving an idea of how to act in cross-cultural communication situations (item 2.3), to the presence of sociocultural information about automobile engineering, military issues (item 2.4), information about local professional culture and its history (item 2.5), information about other countries and their automotive productions (item 2.6), related to sufficiency of tasks for acquiring cross-cultural in the professional context (items 2.7 and 2.8) and considering learners' native language (items 2.9), the agreement reached between 71% and 90.3%. Such high agreement could be explained by the fact that all the respondents had previously only courses of general English and were aware of the content changes of their English courses during the testing of ESME and EAE. One more evident reason for the 71%–90.3% agreement is that all the participants assessed their achievements during the testing period with the help of self-assessment grids supplied with clear skills objectives.

Nevertheless, some negative and mostly neutral answers for items 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6 and 2.7 were received from all the respondents planning to join the army (N=10) and from those who had not decided yet upon their future career (N=3). This result may suggest that some respondents hesitate to identify the type of information or may lack knowledge about target discourse communities which was observed by Ananyeva (2014). Although career preference (item 1.3) did not appear among variables of our exploration, a big share of neutral survey answers ranges from 20% to 35%, which is relevant for describing the research findings.

It can be assumed that the respondents whose first major was military training are not motivated to giving detailed feedback about the sociocultural context of their second major (automotive engineering) due to the lack of interest in it. We believe that their expectations from the sociocultural component of the textbooks were different from those who had only an automotive major. Thus, this group of respondents would have been more likely to specify their opinions if the sociocultural content of the textbooks had been designed to address their future needs.

Interestingly, those who had some working experience in the industry, experience in participating in the international engineering project Formula Student or considered a job in the automotive industry in the future had higher agreement with items 2.1, 2.2, 2.3., 2.6 and 2.7 than those who had two majors and planned to join the army. This may be because the former group were much more interested in the automotive engineering and had real experience of cross-cultural communication.

Of all the respondents, eight left their comments expressing their complete satisfaction with the textbooks which helped them to master vocational English. Three respondents expressed a wish for more speaking and listening practice related to automotive engineering. Hence, one of the positive findings is that the survey shows the learners' awareness of the cross-cultural aspect of FL communication and the sociocultural content representation in the textbooks' tasks and materials.

#### 4.3. Significant differences by variables

In order to answer the second research question of the study, the researchers also performed a correlational analysis of students' awareness of sociocultural content of both textbooks and acquiring skills for cross-cultural communication. When comparing the students' replies according to various variables, we discovered some significant variances, for instance, a positive correlation between the learners' ability to identify country-related and professional information (item 2.6) and their agreement with the sufficient representation of professional context for acquiring basic skills for communicating with people from other cultures on job-related topics (item 2.8). There is also a positive correlation between the availability of tasks and materials giving an idea of how to act in cross-cultural communication situations (item 2.3) and the respondents' agreement with the sufficient representation of cross-cultural communication situations for acquiring basic skills for communicating with people from other cultures (item 2.7). We also discovered that those learners who agreed with the sufficient representation of professional context for acquiring basic skills for communicating with people from other cultures on job-related topics (item 2.8) also exhibited agreement taking into account their native language (item 2.9). Following Igna's (2021) list of essential sociocultural features of a tertiary FL textbook for technical universities, we distinguish professional and cultural orientation of topics which was reflected in items 2.7 and 2.8. Tables 3-5 reflect these positive correlations.



Table 3  
Correlation between items 2.6 and 2.8

SUFFICIENT REPRESENTATION OF PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT FOR ACQUIRING BASIC SKILLS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE FROM OTHER CULTURES ON JOB-RELATED TOPICS		
	Pearson Correlation	0.42
Learners' ability to identify country-related and professional information	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00*
	N	31

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4  
Correlation between items 2.3 and 2.7

SUFFICIENT REPRESENTATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION SITUATIONS FOR ACQUIRING BASIC SKILLS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE FROM OTHER CULTURES		
	Pearson Correlation	0.37
Availability of tasks and materials giving an idea of how to act in cross-cultural communication situations	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00
	N	31

Table 5  
Correlation between items 2.8 and 2.9

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT LEARNERS' NATIVE LANGUAGE		
	Pearson Correlation	0.43
Availability of tasks and materials providing sufficient representation of the professional context for acquiring basic skills for communicating with people from other cultures on job-related topics	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00
	N	31

#### 4.4. Evaluation of the sociocultural component of the textbooks

Findings at Stage III helped us answer RQ3. During the interviews with the master students of automotive engineering, we were focused on several questions.

1. Are there any international contacts in your organisation?
2. If yes, have you been involved in cross-cultural communication situations?
3. Were there any difficulties in communicating with representatives of a different culture?

4. Do the exercises and assignments of the textbooks somehow correlate with what happens in cross-cultural engineering communication in your company?

5. Did these textbooks help you to acquire basic cross-cultural communication skills?

All the interviewed master students were involved in various forms of cross-cultural communication at work and thus were able to identify typical situations of cross-cultural communication including small talk, business meetings, negotiations, reporting project outcomes, everyday communication of engineers on job-related topics, writing business letters of various genres.

*'Having answered the research questions, the current findings can be summarised in the following way. 1. Prevalence of communication-oriented materials and tasks over knowledge-oriented ones was supported by the survey results and interview responses. 2. Sociocultural content is multi-faceted so both textbooks attempt at specifying it in accordance with the students' future vocational field and FL communicative needs in the industry. 3. Students are quite aware of cross-cultural communication situations and are able to identify sociocultural content in both textbooks. 4. Those respondents who have some working experience are able to give the adequate feedback about the compliance of the textbook tasks and materials with real cross-cultural communication situations. The results of the survey among student participants as well as the interviews with master students present positive evaluations of both piloted textbooks'*

Their foreign colleagues came mostly from France, Poland, Iran, China, and very seldom or never from the UK and the USA. They did not mention any culture-specific difficulties, and most of them reported that the textbooks provided them with basic skills to participate effectively in cross-cultural communication situations.

Finally, two EFL practitioners were asked the following questions.

1. In your opinion, is the sociocultural content sufficient or episodic in each of the textbooks?
2. Does each textbook unit contain enough authentic learning materials with sociocultural information to provide learners with some sociocultural knowledge?
3. Are the tasks adequate for modelling and simulating situations of cross-cultural communication?
4. Are learners exposed enough to the regional context of cross-cultural communication?
5. Is there a technology of mastering cross-cultural competence: sequence of tasks, exercises, topical relevance of materials, their variety and relevance for students' development of professional and cultural outlook?
6. Is there any account of the native language, culture and needs of the recipient?
7. Should there be more information with advice on cross-cultural interaction?

The answers are presented below in the generalised mode.

*Expert 1.* Their opinion is that the sociocultural content is sufficiently represented in all units, especially the regional aspect in unit 7 with its text, listening and video materials that appeal to the learners' interests. According to this expert, there is integration with the subject content of engineering disciplines. ESME provides simulation of cross-cultural communication situations with a clear professional context, and thus the formation of

cross-cultural competence is consistent. There is a strong appeal to the Russian language and comparison of native and foreign cultures. Besides, the sociocultural content is sufficiently represented in sequences of diverse exercises and tasks based on authentic media materials, their topical relevance to the students' major is obvious, and they promote the development of professional and cultural outlook. At the same time, this informant proposed some recommendations on teaching cross-cultural interaction, namely providing commentary/advice on cross-cultural interaction in simulating tasks.

*Expert 2.* They noted true-to-life content reflecting professional communication in tasks for productive speech that take into account students' communicative needs since the tasks imitate real situations of professional communication well enough. Language material is thoroughly practised in various types of tasks to develop communicative skills, i.e. there is a system of sociocultural representation and training language material. This interviewee also noted continuity of levels, appropriate modelling of situations that simulate cross-cultural communication, sufficient representation of the regional component, and authenticity of materials.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted in the context of FL teaching to students of automotive engineering at tertiary level and had a focus on the representation of the sociocultural content in FL textbooks for automotive Engineering students. It is worthwhile mentioning that its outcomes supplement those that were previously obtained by one of the authors and related to the assessment of the overall content and design of the same textbooks by means of student surveys and experts' reviews (Bazhutina & Tsepilova, 2024). Having answered the research questions, the current findings can be summarised in the following way.

1. Prevalence of communication-oriented materials and tasks over knowledge-oriented ones was supported by the survey results and interview responses.
2. Sociocultural content is multi-faceted so both textbooks attempt at specifying it in accordance with the students' future vocational field and FL communicative needs in the industry.
3. Students are quite aware of cross-cultural communication situations and are able to identify sociocultural content in both textbooks.
4. Those respondents who have some working experience are able to give the adequate feedback about the compliance of the textbook tasks and materials with real cross-cultural communication situations.

The results of the survey among student participants as well as the interviews with master students present positive evaluations of both piloted textbooks. This fact allowed us to conclude that a FL textbook at tertiary level should be profession-oriented to meet FL communicative needs and equip learners with basic skills for cross-cultural communication in the professional context, too.

*'The sociocultural content of ESME and EAE reveals the attempt to find the balance between tasks and learning materials about culture and the ones based on real 'slices of life' in a cross-cultural engineering environment taking into account 2-4 hours of foreign language instruction a week during normally 2-3 academic years in most Russian technical universities. Therefore, the suggested framework for sociocultural representation supported by the obtained outcomes may enable foreign language practitioners to devise a sociocultural component of learning materials and textbooks for students of Engineering majors'*

The findings complement and specify Igna's (2021) list of essential features of the sociocultural representation criteria for the FL textbook for technical universities. At the same time, the devised framework for sociocultural representation demonstrates the tendency for being communication-oriented rather than knowledge-oriented. Furthermore, this framework provides a comprehensive answer to the question: what should sociocultural content be like in FL textbooks for Engineering students? Additionally, to achieve all the objectives of the research we managed to formulate specific features of the sociocultural representation in a FL textbook for automotive Engineering majors. They are as follows: (a) selecting materials and designing communication situations in the job-related context; (b) designing knowledge-oriented and communication-oriented tasks with the latter preferably prevailing over the former ones; (c) simulating cross-cultural communication situations as close as possible to real ones.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Yang (2020), Yang and Wang (2016) who had a similar purpose and methods while evaluating ESP and CLIL textbooks from the learners' perspective, and this feedback proved to be valid and useful for the textbook writers. Besides, the findings are similar to those of Chappelle (2010) in terms of discovering the potential of the developed textbook content for building cross-cultural competence. Furthermore, our study accords with *'the dual strategy design for EIL curriculum development that includes both a localising and a globalising perspective'* proposed by Shin et al. (2011, p. 254). The obtained outcomes also support Ananyeva (2014) who claims that many university students lack knowledge about target discourse communities and forming this awareness is one of the main objectives of both content and language teachers.

The elaborated framework for the representation of sociocultural content accords with Sorokovykh et al.'s (2022) findings which suggest effective tasks for developing cross-cultural competence in the context of implementing CLIL-based materials at technical universities. The implementation of this framework in the design of the sociocultural content was positively estimated by both experts.

One of the issues that emerges from these findings is motivation. Although the learners' motivation for mastering cross-cultural competence was beyond the scope of our investigation, questionnaire responses from those students who were supposed to join the army as officers showed that the sociocultural content of both textbooks did not meet properly their motives for their future military careers. Therefore, their responses emphasised the necessity to meet FL communicative needs in a particular vocational area. From this perspective, it might be interesting to explore the correlation between the motivation for acquiring skills for the future job and the motivation for acquiring cross-cultural communication skills in a foreign language.

The findings of the research have brought us to the conclusion that sociocultural content of a FL textbook at tertiary level should not just 'tell about' the learner's future profession, vocational field, English and non-English cultures, but rather 'place' them in the cross-cultural communication context closely simulating real on-the-job communication.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The sociocultural content of ESME and EAE reveals the attempt to find the balance between tasks and learning materials *about* culture and the ones *based on* real 'slices of life' in a cross-cultural engineering environment taking into account 2-4 hours of FL instruction a week during normally 2-3 academic years in most Russian technical universities. Therefore, the suggested framework for sociocultural representation supported by the obtained outcomes may enable FL practitioners to devise a sociocultural component of learning materials and textbooks for students of Engineering majors.

However, this exploration has several limitations that should be considered. First, it was carried out within the scope of only automotive majors, therefore, the initiated research should be helpful to address other Engineering majors. Second, the sociocultural content of the textbooks was not specified according to language skills acquisition. Thus, additional research would provide an insight into this matter.

From the present study, the following questions might arise: what is 'sufficient' sociocultural content of a tertiary FL textbook? How should such textbooks be designed to support the development of learners' cross-cultural competence in the Russian context? Keeping these issues in mind, the authors feel that more studies should be carried out in order to be able to discuss the matter any further.

## APPENDIX

**Questionnaire: Identifying and evaluating the sociocultural content of two textbooks (English for Students of Mechanical Engineering and English in Automobile Engineering)**

- 1.1. You are a bachelor student / a degree student / a master student.
- 1.2. You have used the textbook(s) for 1-2 semesters / 3 semesters / 4 semesters.

1.3. Your job preference after graduation. I plan to seek a job in the automotive industry / I have not decided yet / I already work in the automotive industry / I am planning to join the army as an officer / I already work but not in the automotive industry / I am not planning to work in the automotive industry.

2.1. The textbook(s) contain(s) tasks giving an idea of the vocational training of students in other countries.

2.2. The textbook(s) contain(s) tasks enabling learners 'to practise' communicating with students and future colleagues at work.

2.3. The textbook(s) contain(s) tasks for giving an idea of how to act in cross-cultural communication situations.

2.4. The textbook(s) contain(s) sociocultural information about automobile engineering, military issues.

2.5. The textbook(s) contain(s) information about local professional culture and its history.

2.6. The textbook(s) contain(s) information about other countries and their automotive productions.

2.7. Overall, cross-cultural communication (in texts, multimedia materials, in wordings of tasks) is sufficiently represented for acquiring basic skills for communicating with people from other cultures.

2.8. Overall, the professional context (in texts, multimedia materials, in the wordings of tasks, especially in the content of projects) is sufficiently represented for acquiring basic skills for communicating with people from other cultures on job-related topics.

2.9. The textbook(s) take(s) into learners' native language (e.g., Russian-English translation, comparing Russian and English terms).

3. Please write down any comments or suggestions for the current textbook(s).

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