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INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS IN POSTMODERN WOMEN LITERATURE

The author applied comparative literature analysis and sociocultural interpretation of the texts of the novels "Fear and Trembling" by Amelie Nothomb and "Good News from the Aral Sea" by Irena Karpa to explore intercultural conflicts reflected in postmodern women literature, as one of the forms of mass consciousness and sociocultural discourse embodiment.

Keywords: intercultural conflict, post modern, womanish literature.

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ІНТЕРКУЛЬТУРНІ КОНФЛІКТИ У ПОСТМОДЕРНІЙ ЖІНОЧІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ

Авторка застосувала порівняльний літературний аналіз та соціокультурну інтерпретацію текстів романів Амелі Нотомб «Страх і тремтіння» та Ірени Карпи «Добрі новини з Аральського моря» для дослідження міжкультурних конфліктів, відображених у постмодерній жіночій літературі як одній із форм. масової свідомості та втілення соціокультурного дискурсу.

Ключові слова: інтеркультурний конфлікт, постмодерн, жіноча література.

Personal identity acquires signs of mature positivity when a migrant integrates into the foreign cultural space, he/she is inclined to show empathy to culturally diverse people and the ability to transform own stereotypes. These strategies can help to overcome the framework of a person's cultural identity, so he/she no longer remains a "stranger" in new cultural spaces and can find a new self-esteem in relation to new cultural groups. As a "foreigner" perceives the elements of

another culture, his/her self-esteem shifts from an exclusively cultural to an intercultural state. This intercultural identity is flexible and quite mobile because it is no longer based on belonging to the original or foreign culture. Acquiring such an identity is extremely important for dialogue between different cultures (Bilotserkovets et al., 2020).

The case study took place in the course of trainings, designed to facilitate intercultural communication of female students, who left for abroad in the wake of the martial state, but continued their studies in the university online. 78 females, aged 19-24, representatives of various faculties of Sumy National Agrarian University, voluntarily joined the work in trainings, read the novels, shared their insights and experiences, created a mapping for efficient communication strategies, trained their skills of intercultural communication and interaction. The case study was vectored to answer the following questions:

1. What national and gender stereotypes were described in the novels "Fear and Trembling" by Amelie Nothomb and "Good News from the Aral Sea" by Irena Karpa?

2. Do the stereotypes influence the choice of communication strategies in the intercultural environment?

The comparative analysis of literary texts was aimed to find out contradictions and typological coincidences (analogies) within the literary sources, belonging to different time-frames, languages and cultural traditions. The study of stereotypes, forms of explicit and implicit content, cultural influences, interliterary perception, mediation functions of literary tools involved the application of general scientific methods, such as deduction and induction, and more specific methods of dialectical reflection and systematic analysis. The method of text interpretation enabled the study of the stereotypes as cultural concepts, that have not only linguistic expression, but also ethno-cultural specificity. It is essential, as despite their nature, stereotypes reflect the society to which the author belongs, not only in the images of a particular culture, but also a particular language.

Most participants of trainings admitted that both novels presented a predictable situation, where a foreigner, who was unable to complaint with social and cultural standards being very different from her/his own, played the major part.

The plot of the novel *Fear and Trembling* by Amelie Nothomb is based on the relationship between two main characters, – Belgian Amelie and Japanese Fubuki Mori. The female characters were in opposition of Western and Eastern cultures (European and Japanese), that was reflected in the contrast of customs, social laws and features of individual self-consciousness. Initially the Belgian Amelie was sincerely fascinated by the Japanese culture, traditions and way of life. However, having come to work for the company, the young girl faced a strict system and rules extremely different from the European ones. She found it very hard to get used to the situation. The main character made many mistakes because she wanted to assimilate, to become a “real Japanese” (Nothomb, 2001).

The participants noted that the inability to acknowledge the two cultural worlds was an indirect reason for the conflict between Amelie and her boss Fubuki Mori. This revealed the author’s concept of national stereotype – Fubuki disrespected Amelie because she was a foreigner, not perceiving her apart from her own chauvinistic prejudices. And Amelie assessed both Fubuki’s life and the whole of the Japanese society, based on the European worldview. The psychological conflict representing the whole confrontation of different worlds, their opposition, “moves” the plot of the novel: it was because of Fubuki’s negative attitude towards her subordinate, that Amelie, the secretary, becomes a “toilet cleaner” and was subjected to humiliations. Amelie evoked both sympathy and respect by the readers, because even as she descended the career ladder, she retained her national dignity and inner strength (Nothomb, 2001).

Irena Karpa’s novel *Good News from the Aral Sea* is dedicated to *Filles de l’est* (French) – girls from the East. This phrase is used in France to refer to all women from Eastern Europe – Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak, Czech, etc.. It is rather pejorative and derogatory: when the French say “Girls from the East”, they mean either elite escort service girls, or a house cleaners or brides via the Internet (Karpa, 2019).

Like the Nothomb’s heroine, at first, they were greatly impressed by the culture of the country where they found themselves, but gradually they realized that the glossy facade of bright life hid the contempt for immigrants: “The French, who suddenly fell ill with Ukrainophilia after the Maidan,... rarely refused to eat or drink for

free and often considered a rich friend with an awkward accent to be a “mon client russe” (French, My Russian client) – never mind whether he or she was Croat, Georgian or Ukrainian” (Karpa, 2019, p. 81). They permanently felt separated from the French society remaining only foreigners from an unreliable country. Ukrainian immigrants realized that they “... would never be like them [the French], even if ... found a French job and paid taxes properly” (Karpa, 2019, p. 433).

Nevertheless, after experiencing a series of trials and disappointments, depression and confusion, the main characters of the book achieved national self-identification and self-esteem, though keeping some hint of self-irony. The training’s participants revealed that Irena Karpa’s heroines attempted to understand culturally diverse people, see their grounds and reasons, find analogies with their own culture. The author used the technique of allusion, comparing the most famous Ukrainian dish, Borsch, and Madeleine cake from Marcel Proust’s works, as triggers that evoke nostalgia, childhood memories, national self-awareness (Smith, 2016): “Borsch. Ukrainian Madeleine cake” (Karpa, 2019, p. 378).

Comparative analysis of texts of the novels “Fear and Trembling” by Amelie Nothomb and “Good News from the Aral Sea” by Irena Karpa, carried out in the course of intercultural trainings, was focused on the sociocultural discourse that reflects the mass consciousness of other countries, attitudes and stereotypes of the nations. The participants admitted that all societies still have prejudices against foreign migrants and regard them being inferior to themselves, no matter their educational or economic level. However, being aware of the traditions and customs of another culture, a person can facilitate his/her adaptation to a new linguistic or cultural environment. She/he will be free from misconceptions about the rules of conduct in an unfamiliar society, will not try to transfer own stereotypical standards of perception to the environment.

Interpretation of the novel “Fear and Trembling” by Amelie Nothomb has revealed that it describes protagonists’ inability to overcome ethnic and gender stereotypes. Stereotypical perception of culturally or ethnically diverse people had imposed assimilation, opposition or subversion as communication strategies by interlocutors that doomed their intercultural contacts to failure.

Nevertheless, the novel “Good News from the Aral Sea” by Irena Karpa showed heroines who were inclined to overpower their national and gender stereotypes through the need to develop such an identity, which goes beyond the boundaries of ordinary cultural identification and is characterized by a high degree of interculturality. Empathy, integration and transformation of stereotypical patterns of one culture to the foreign one facilitate intercultural communication and interaction of people in a foreign environment.

The comparative analysis of both novels under review has revealed that national and gender stereotypes are inherent in any culture, they are originated from this culture, and then influence the minds of people, hindering or helping to build intercultural contacts and communication. When representatives of different cultures initiate communication, it is quite likely that certain problems will arise, associated with contradiction in these cultures, among them: difficulties in understanding, misunderstanding, the creation of certain prejudices, and gradually – demarcation, resentment or mental or social isolation. In this sense, stereotypes influence migrants’ choice of communication and adaptation strategies in the foreign cultural space (Lavlinskiy, 2016).

References:

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