

English Intercultural Tutorial for University Students Majoring in Japanese

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Abstract

This paper is the first attempt to present the implementation results of the language-learning tutorial based on intercultural and communicative approaches in a classical university in Ukraine. The authors present a new tutorial method for teaching English at Departments of the Far East Languages in Classical Universities of Ukraine. This method is aimed to facilitate the acquisition of essential aspects of knowledge about a country as a regional and cultural subject as well as to improve students' English speaking and conversational skills. The experimental research involved 2nd and 3rd year university students majoring in the Japanese and English languages. The authors proposed the original design of the tutorial to be used both for English speaking practice and as a part of the course content. Considering the psycholinguistic peculiarities of Ukrainian students to percept and understand the English and East Asian languages, the tutorial under review stimulates students' cognitive activity during the English learning process and when developing sociocultural competence with regard to the Far East. Compare and Contrast activities in the English language classroom can create a favourable learning environment resulting in students gaining knowledge and acquiring skills necessary for proficient English users. At the same time, they get the opportunity to pick up more information about Japan using the sources about the country available in the English language. The ability to categorise and compare things in terms of their differences and similarities corresponds to the main stages of cognitive development. Compare and contrast as teaching and learning strategies can be applied when teaching monologic and dialogic production, in particular when discussing similarities and differences of cultural, natural, geographical, historical, political and art objects of Ukraine and Japan. In this article, the interdependence between the use of the tutorial method and academic achievements in English speaking competence has been proved, since the students have significantly improved their speaking fluency in English about the Far East.

Keywords: tutorial, intercultural approach, English speaking skills, East Asian languages, compare and contrast, teaching and learning strategies

1. Introduction

Learning the East Asian languages in Ukraine is an important part of the global process of cross-cultural interaction involving representatives of different national educational systems. In most universities of the world, graduates in the BA/MA program in the East Asian languages with a concentration in Japanese are qualified to work within a variety of fields where there is demand for expertise in Asia, including journalism and publishing, international trade, marketing, business, public relations, education, development aid, as well as in government, non-profit and international organisations. However, in Ukraine studying Japanese in such universities as Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and Boris Grinchenko Kyiv University is still considered highly specialized, with the course based on thematic teaching and training modules.

The students of the Institute of Philology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, enjoy the advantages of direct bilateral inter-university agreements to participate in academic exchange programs and learn the languages or conduct research at recognized universities in Japan. As part of the East Asian languages training, the students take the courses on the country studies in both English and Ukrainian. The authors assume that in order to increase

students' general level of specific competencies, the process of their professional training should be organized as a complex system in which learning a language is defined as a part of an in-depth analysis of the East Asian countries, whereas students in their first and second years of study learn English to build sociocultural competence and make them capable of cross-cultural communication. The concept of such university education has been constantly improved and debated in recent years (Kural, 2020).

The development of a methodological framework for teaching and learning English at the Far East languages departments of universities should not ignore the benefits of intercultural and communicative approaches. The indicated approaches are crucial for the development of speaking skills in Philology majors who are supposed to master Japanese at the level sufficient for understanding social and political information, interpreting negotiations, establishing business and scientific contacts with the East Asian countries. This is also due to the fact, that top-ranked world-class universities have long been providing regional studies on the language, culture, national, political and geographical features of a particular country as part of their linguistic training. To be specific, multicultural training is provided in a range of renowned higher educational establishments all around the world, such as the University of California, Columbia University, Stanford University (USA), Leiden University (Netherlands), the University of Rochester (USA), Heidelberg University (Germany), the University of Bologna (Italy), SOAS University of London (UK), where intercultural approach to teaching and learning the East Asian languages is used, encouraging students to learn about the history, culture and geography of this strategically important area. When studying the East Asian languages, English or other European languages are widely used for discussing political, historical and cultural realities of the Far East region. That is why the English language teaching at the Far East Languages departments of Ukrainian universities should be organized in an interdisciplinary manner to involve students to observe and master the elements of cultural interaction. This could be the key to solving the training problems of highly qualified philologists as well as a response to current educational challenges under the conditions of globalization. And what is more, it could also reduce the student outflow to study abroad.

2. Purpose Statement

As Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016) observe, it is impossible to avoid systematic comparison of several languages in the process of foreign language acquisition. They claim that comparing not only language peculiarities but also native speakers' social and cultural life realities positively affects students' strength (resilience and persistence) of cognitive motivation. Tinghe Jin (2020), a recognized expert in the Chinese language teaching and country studies, persistently stresses the benefits of combination of intercultural and communicative approaches to teaching and claims that language knowledge provides for the need of studying culture. She argues on the shift from a narrow understanding of culture towards broader discussions of interculturality. This approach offers a means to enrich the language learning experience and contribute to wider educational goals. At the same time, Corbett (2003), Romanowski and Bandura (2019), experts in the English language teaching, develop the idea to encourage learners to reflect on their own language and culture, as well as that of others. They insist on incorporating the intercultural component into the English language course. Corbett (2003), Romanowski and Bandura (2019) also consider the integration of communicative and intercultural approaches to be one of the preconditions for successful language education. Likewise, supporters of contextual learning of English (Illés, 2020) express a similar opinion. The educational benefits of simultaneous acquisition of several languages with studying the peculiarities of corresponding cultures have been proven in studies on student learning in their country and abroad (Norton & De Costa, 2018; Maharaja, 2018).

The researches in the field of cross-cultural communication Gregersen-Hermans and Lauridsen (2021) distinguish several sublevels of individual cultural competence: cross-cultural, intercultural, transcultural, intracultural. It is noteworthy that these authors consider the increase of the ability to communicate successfully as the main outcome of intercultural competence development. Thus, the theory of foreign language learning is closely related to the target language culture and general learner's communication ability. As noted by Oxford (2010), 'the activities and cultural influences cannot be separated from what is learned' in the course of foreign language learning. It is consistent with the claim that intercultural competence ensures the development of communicative competence (Lustig et al., 2017).

Therefore, teaching and learning English in the context of several languages (Ukrainian, English and Japanese) envisage that students of the Far East Languages departments should apply learning and teaching strategies (TLS), as Oxford (2010), Grenfell and Harris (2017) and Griffiths (2018) define them, which will help compare and contrast the objects of different spheres, knowledge, languages as well as the objects of country studies.

Consequently, the task of the research was to organize a tutorial on teaching English speaking skills with the use of

Compare and Contrast strategy (CCLTS).

3. Theoretical Background

Various approaches to conducting English language tutorials for students majoring in Japanese present several definitions of a tutorial in language teaching methodology. According to the dictionary, in a university or college, a tutorial is a regular meeting between a tutor or professor and one or several students, for discussion of a subject that is being studied (Collins, 2020).

Alternatively, a tutorial is defined as a study method, which covers lectures, seminars, case studies and practical sessions. What is called a ‘tutorial’ at the Far East Languages departments is, for the most part, a training course with a standard structure which covers alphabet, grammar, vocabulary, the writing system and sounds of the language (AIRnet, 2020; Free Japanese lessons, 2020).

Such tutorials are not, in fact, very different from textbooks in regard to the topics covered. To develop English speaking skills, students must be trained in the topic areas, which can be relevant for teaching any language or culture: Food, Numbers, Colors, Family, Animals, Months (L-Lingo, 2020) Time, Days of the Week, Movies or Music, School or Job, Places you’ve been to or lived in, Reasons for interest in the language, Local customs and traditions, Interests and hobbies, Personal philosophy about lifestyle and people (Learn Japanese, 2021)

The Culture section of ‘Learning and Teaching Japanese’ online tutorial (Thoughtco, 2021) only to a certain extent meets students’ needs covering the topics as follows: ‘How to celebrate St. Valentine’s day in Japan’, ‘Japanese animated films’, ‘Japanese New Year’. However, the above-mentioned tutorial is not frequently used in Ukrainian universities.

Recent studies indicate heightened interest in different factors that have restraining influence on the language learning process in different cultural environments. The comparative thinking helps such students to systematize new knowledge, use compare and contrast strategies to overcome interlanguage barriers (Akhter et al., 2016, p. 130-134; Zhou & Lin, 2019).

When it comes to improving students’ speaking skills, teachers should find new resources to stimulate the intercultural dialogue through the language tools. Marzano (2017) offers a flexible model of specific classroom strategies. In his model, the applied TLS foster positive and productive changes in students’ acquiring knowledge and skills in various curriculum disciplines (Marzano, 2017). Thus, he believes that applying the LTS should develop the ability for skillful thinking. Comparative thinking is defined as a type of critical thinking and the most effective way to accomplish learning tasks (Whitten et al., 2020). Zhou and Lin (2019) also drew certain connections between thinking techniques and speaking activities. For instance, using the techniques mentioned, the students could practise describing separate items, making and discussing conclusions, completing speaking tasks, summarizing information, questioning and responding.

Identifying similarities and differences in the speaking process activates personal prior knowledge with respect to the subject matter of the discussion (Behm & Rankins-Robertson, 2017) which results in communicative intercultural transaction, as presented by Lustig et al. (2017). It enables students to denote their cultural sensitivity and to improve the intercultural relationships with conversation partners. Thus, TLS, used in the English speaking tutorial for students majoring in East Asian Languages (Fig.1), should be incorporated in intercultural interaction and based on the techniques of achieving communication goals, as interpreted by Liubashenko and Kavytska (2020). Moreover, Compare and Contrast Learning and Teaching Strategy (CCLTS) should promote students’ speaking skills by means of various speaking activities.

This strategy may indeed be effective in case of involving students in intercultural investigation of the East Asian Region. Using comparative techniques forces students to enhance their English speaking activities: to narrate, to describe, to continue the conversation.

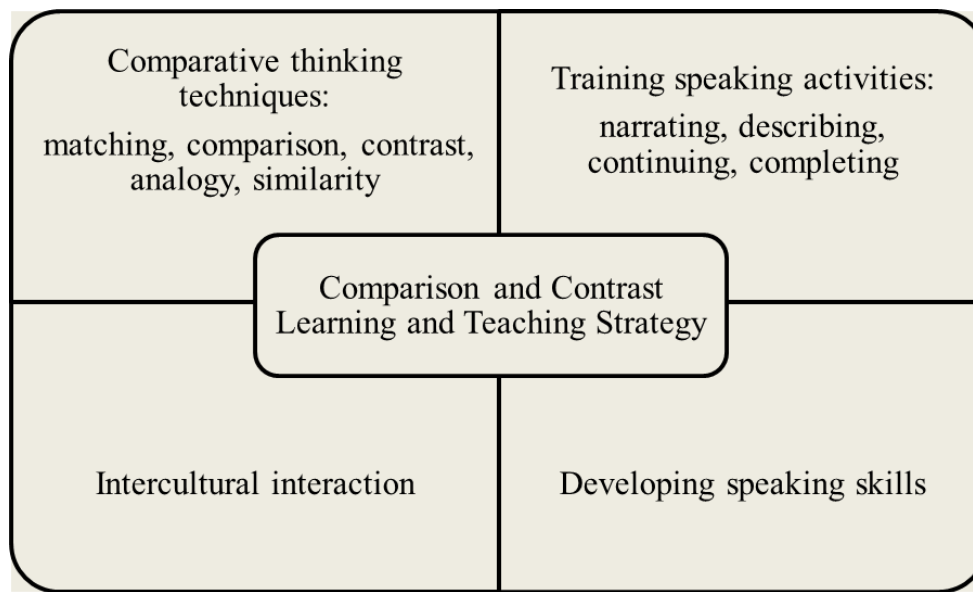


Figure 1. Compare and Contrast Learning and Teaching Strategy in the Englishspeaking Tutorial for Students Majoring in East Asian Languages

4. Paper Tasks

The paper under review fits the general framework of the FL learning in a classical university. It focuses on students' spoken language skills. The main assumption is that CCLTS used in the tutorial has a profound effect on learning spoken English as it could enhance students' motivation potential.

The hypothesis of the study lies in the assumption that a significant enhancement of students' speaking skills could be achieved by using the English language tutorial for Ukrainian students majoring in Japanese, which is designed on the basis of compare and contrast techniques, such as comparison, matching, analogy, contrast, and similarity. Empirical and theoretical research urged us to apply the learning and teaching strategy, which could help students feel confident when speaking in English about common and unique objects of Ukrainian and Japanese broad cultural, mental, and social discourses. This strategy increases the cognitive activity of students and encourages them to learn a language to demonstrate appropriate professional training, education and upbringing. Consequently, the objective of the article is to verify the correlation between the use of the tutorial and enhancing students' English speaking skills.

RQ1 How to design the English tutorial based on intercultural and communicative approaches at the Department of the Far East languages?

RQ2 How effective is the use of CCTLS for developing English speaking competence in students?

RQ3 How does the tutorial affect the development of students' speaking skills with the use of the techniques such as comparison, contrast, matching and analogy?

5. Methodology

The research is based on the experimental data collected during the academic year 2018/2019. The research settings included quantitative, descriptive-data collection and qualitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The authors and their teams recruited 48 students of the 2nd and 3rd year of the BVA program majoring in the Japanese language to conduct the experiment. They were involved in the English tutorial at the Department of the Far East languages, Institute of Philology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. For the comparative experiment, they were equally divided for into the treatment and control groups of 24 people in each beforehand (Bailey, 2008). The participants of the experimental training got acquainted and agreed on the ethical principles for educational research elaborated by Cohen, Lawrence and Keith (2007).

The tutorial sessions were held once a week during the academic year within the course 'Foreign Language for

Professional Purposes'. The tutorial was designed by the authors in compliance with the English Language Training Program of the Department of East Asian languages, in conformity with the syllabus plan, curriculum and methodology of the university course (Szundy & Leung, 2018). It comprises 4 units and 8 speaking topics (Table 1). The study content was planned to let the students take advantage of using a full set of compare and contrast techniques: comparison, matching, analogy, contrast, similarity, as well as to train their spoken English.

The quantitative characteristic of the successful application of the training strategy was defined by the total rating score of the group based on the assessment results for each unit. The assessment was based on the criteria for speaking performance specified in the educational programs for English course level C1 with reference to the CEFR assessment scales (<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/22649-rv-examples-of-speaking-performance.pdf>). The ability to apply the techniques of comparison, matching, analogy, contrast, and similarity was also incorporated into the system of assessment criteria (Allen, 2017). The criteria, which served to mark students' overall speaking abilities, were as follows.

Table 1. The Number of Grade Points a Student Could Earn for Each Unit Ranged from 1 to 12

a) Fluency and Coherence	b) Range and Accuracy	c) Interaction	d) Techniques of Comparison, Matching, Analogy, Contrast, and Similarity
1. Effort or Ease of speaking	1. Range of Vocabulary and Grammar Structures.	1. Ability to initiate, maintain and close conversations on the topics in the the English Language Training Program.	1. Ability to identify critical content for examination
2. Hesitations	Flexible use of the latter	2. Ability to interact with certain degree of ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues.	2. Ability to identify the similarities and differences between critical content concepts
3. Use of connectives and discourse markers	2. Accuracy	3. Ability to interweave contribution into the mutual discourse with natural turntaking.	3. Ability to linguistically and nonlinguistically represent similarities and differences
4. Ability to develop a topic	3. Use of idiomatic vocabulary / collocation / realia		4. Ability to generalize and draw conclusions after the examination of similarities and differences
	4. Paraphrase		

Table 2. Student's Grades for Each Tutorial Unit

Units	Criterion and range of points				Total
	a	b	c	d	
1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	12

The maximum total score the students could get for the tutorial was 48.

The design of the experimental data with the rating score facilitated the preparation of learning outcomes for the quantitative calculation, and made it possible to use a mathematical apparatus to calculate the results and analyze the data. The progress rating of the student participants was based on the progress test scores. The final rating of the students was calculated as a commulative total of the grades recieved during the study in the tutorial. By all criteria, the maximum student rating was defined as 100%.

During the tutorial study, several assumptions were tested. The first one was tested by comparing the students' actual academic achivenments in spoken English on the pre-experimental and the post -experimental stages. Comparing what the actual data demonstrated with what was expected to accomplish, the chi-square test was used. Since four criteria were applied in the two groups, the chi-square analysis was chosen as appropriate.

The second assumption with respect to students' speaking skills in using CCTLTS techniques such as contrast, analogy, comparison etc. was tested mainly with teacher's observation and students' feedback.

6. Results and Discussion

In our view, the expected results should indicate that using Compare and Contrast learning and teaching strategy (CCLTS) in the tutorial improves students' English speaking competence (Tab 3)

Table 3. Tutorial Syllabus for Using CCLTS

Unit	Speaking topics	References	Speaking competence with applying CCLTSE techniques
1. Authentic cultural traditions. Food & Drink	Repast ceremony	https://www.justonecookbook.com/home-made-miso-soup/	Describing differences through contrasting
	Japanese miso soup and Ukrainian borsch	https://ukrainian-recipes.com/ukrainian-borsch.html	
	Repast ceremony	https://livejapan.com/en/article-a0001056/	Describing similarities
	Japanese matcha and Ukrainian uzvar	https://ukrainian-recipes.com/uzvar-dried-fruit-compote-popular-ukrainian-christmas-drink.html	
2. Symbols in folklore	Traditional symbols Japanese sakura and Ukrainian kalyna	https://festival.si.edu/blog/2014/significance-of-sakura-cherry-blossom-traditions-in-japan/ https://www.ukrainiandanceworld.com/single-post/2014/11/21/the-symbolism-of-kalyna-in-ukrainian-culture	Narrating applying matching and analogy techniques
	The hidden language of embroidery	http://japancraft.co.uk/wordpress/hidden-language-japanese-embroidery/	Narrating applying matching and analogy techniques
	The symbolism of Japanese and Ukrainian embroidery	https://theculturetrip.com/europe/ukraine/articles/the-meaning-behind-traditional-patterns-in-ukrainian-embroidery/	
3. Poetry and Philosophy	Traditional forms of poetry	https://poets.org/glossary/haiku	Describing differences and similarities through contrasting and comparing
	Japanese <i>Haiku</i> (俳句) and Ukrainian <i>Duma</i>	https://authenticukraine.com.ua/en/blog/dumi-ak-osoblivij-zanr-folkoru	
	National mindset		Describing differences and similarities through contrasting and comparing
	Japanese <i>Ikigai</i> (生き甲斐) and Ukrainian <i>Cordocentrism</i>	https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-ikigai https://pvntsh.nung.edu.ua/index.php/id ea/article/view/761	
4. Myths and Legends	Places of mystery	https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/article/aokigahara-jukai-suicide-forest	Narrating applying compare, contrast and similarity techniques
	Japanese Aokigahara (樹海) and Ukrainian Lysa Hora (Bald mount)	https://shows.acast.com/unsolved-mysteries-of-the-world/episodes/the-bald-mountain-lysa-hora-ukraine	
	National heroes	https://www.bokksu.com/blogs/news/samura-history-traditions-legends	Narrating applying compare, contrast and similarity techniques
	Japanese samurai and Ukrainian kharacterniks	https://uapost.us/en/blog/kharacterniks-the-eternal-guardians-of-the-cossack-kin/	

The results of the study were expected to prove that an effective tutorial implementation contributes to boosting English speaking skills if the teacher and students use the CCLTS with training techniques. The quantitative result of the successful developing of the English speaking competence was determined according to the criteria for each unit in the whole group (Tab.4)

Table 4. Final Results of Students' English Speaking Competence

Range of points by a,b,c,d criteria	Frequency out of 24 in treatment group	Frequency out of 24 in control group
48-25	20	9
24 - 0	4	15
Theoretical maximum	24	24

$$\chi_{01}^2 = \frac{(20 \cdot 15 - 4 \cdot 9 - \frac{48}{2})^2}{24 \cdot 24 \cdot 29 \cdot 19} \cdot 48 = 8,61$$

The chi-squared analysis indicated that the results showed by the students of the treatment and control groups are different. To know how they differ, the percentage change of the actual total group rating score at the same academic period was used (Tab.5)

Table 5. Total Group Rating Score

Control group		Treatment group	
Pre-experimental stage, D_0	Post-experimental stage, D_1	Pre-experimental stage, D_0	Post-experimental stage, D_1
336	352	312	388

Knowledge and skills demonstrated through completion of the tutorial were assumed in the factual total group rating score (D_f). It has been compared with the maximum possible group rating score (D_m). The percentage increase $D = D_1 - D_0$:

$$D_0 = \frac{D_{f0}}{D_m} \cdot 100\%; D_1 = \frac{D_{f1}}{D_m} \cdot 100\%$$

After applying the chi-square analysis, the report of percentage change became possible. In that way we could compare the percentage change between the groups (Tab.6). The percentage change in the control group was defined as follows:

$$D_0 = \frac{336}{576} \cdot 100\%; D_1 = \frac{352}{576} \cdot 100\%; \Delta D = 61,1 - 58,3$$

The percentage change in the treatment group was defined as follows:

$$D_0 = \frac{312}{576} \cdot 100\%; D_1 = \frac{380}{576} \cdot 100\%; \Delta D = 66 - 54,2$$

Table 6. Percentage Increase of Total Group Rating Score

	D_{f0}	$D_0, \%$	D_{f1}	$D_1, \%$	$D, \%$
Control group	336	58,3	352	61,1	2,8
Treatment group	312	54,2	380	66	11,8

We rounded the percentage value to one tenth. In the control group the average increase by 4 criteria indicators was 2.8%, while in the experimental group it made up 11.8%. An increase approaching or exceeding 10% is considered likely to be significant (Curran-Everett & Williams, 2015). Thus, it can be argued that such changes occur due to the

effectiveness of changing factors.

After the implementation of the tutorial in the English teaching - learning process, we augmented the analysis of students' speaking skill progress in the treatment group with the students' feed-back. The observed results were subsequently compared with the criteria of officially accepted assessment scale for speaking production (CEFR, Structured overview of all CEFR scales: <https://rm.coe.int/168045b15e>.) The main findings have demonstrated that 17-24 students displayed the rise in the number of points for their speaking skills (Tab 7).

Table 7. Observation of English Speaking Skills after CCTLS Applying (Frequency out of 24 in the treatment group)

Acquired speaking skills	Post-experimental stage
Can compare objects by making a comparison with a narrow set of language tools	21
Can match the important differences in Japanese and Ukrainian culture	19
Can find correctly articulated words and phrases to make an analogy and clarify similarities	19
Can use polite conversational forms in case of detection of any difference or dissimilarity	22
Can focus on the contrast features of different cultural realities	20
Can make use of expressive means in their speech	17
Can convey degrees of emotion and highlight the significance of Ukrainian and Japanese phenomena.	18
Can hold a conversation with groupmate by imagining them to be native Japanese speakers	20
Can extend conversational topics and expand the range of objects of comparison	18
Can itemize similarities and differences using intonation correctly	24
Can converse flexibly making use of emotional tools	17

In the post-experimental feedback all students of the treatment group praised the tutorial session they had. They noted a special benefit of a massive list of local-related words and rhetorical figures, using persuasive strategies and other linguistic devices to express ideas and emotions as well as to elevate language and make it more engaging and impressive. According to these data, it can be argued that the students treat the results of their tutorial study as a part of the academic success, which includes attainment of learning outcomes, acquisition of skills and competence, satisfaction (York et al., 2015).

As can be seen, the research results confirm that offering the original design of the English tutorial both as a speaking workshop and as a part of the course content for learning East Asian region influenced the academic achievements of Ukrainian students in developing English speaking skills.

7. Conclusions with Implications for Further Research

The research has proved to have a reliable positive effect on the developing of English speaking skills in students majoring in East Asian languages in Ukrainian universities through the engagement of wide professional interests and natural curiosity of students. It provides argumentation that changes should be introduced into a tutorial design from the standpoint of intercultural and communicative approaches.

The proposed scheme of designing a tutorial for developing speaking skills in Ukrainian students is primarily aimed at: 1) expanding of general professional knowledge of the East Asian region; 2) developing English speaking competence; 3) usage of language devices for critical thinking techniques such as matching, drawing analogies, spotting similarities, searching for contrast, finding differences. This is achieved through the constructing Compare and contrast strategy, which was focused on cultural transaction between the languages the students learn. While participating in the tutorial, the students directed their attention not only to linguistic but also to national and cultural differences and similarities in order to comprehend the material on a deeper level. According to this global task, the assessment of intercultural competence should also be considered when designing the English tutorial for students majoring in foreign languages. Moreover, certain theoretical models for obtaining deep cultural knowledge have already been elaborated (Fantini, 2009; Dearthoff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Bennett, 2015).

The areas of further research include the specification of the descriptors and indicators for the levels of speaking competence aimed at intercultural transaction.

The research perspective is clearly visible in Ukrainian students' perceptions of the East Asian key concepts of

cultures, events and ideas, which goes hand in hand with the development of English speaking skills. The proposed tutorial can provide both teachers and students with a good opportunity to include a number of multilingual and comparative materials into a university course. The tutorial collaboration and applying speaking activities with critical thinking techniques enrich students with new communicative experience. It deepens their knowledge about the East Asia region through the English language and Ukrainian identity.

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