A Method of Creative Interpretation of The Gradual Learning of Language, Speech, Culture and Traditions of The People

[1] Oksana Klyuchka

[1] AI Agents Engineer at Apple Austin, US Educator, cultural activist. She devoted many years to teaching children of the Ukrainian diaspora and preserving the native language, USA

ABSTRACT

Under the conditions of rapidly accelerating digital transformation and the intensification of migration processes in 2024–2025, foreign language education is undergoing not merely an evolution but a qualitative paradigm shift: from the dominance of a narrowly understood communicative competence to the priority of comprehensive intercultural and existential literacy. In this study, the method of creative interpretation of stage-by-stage learning (МТИПО) is theoretically substantiated and empirically tested; it represents an integrative model for mastering language, speech patterns, cultural codes, and folk traditions in their mutual interdependence. In contrast to classical linguodidactic approaches, which often artificially separate linguistic and cultural components, the proposed model interprets folklore and tradition not as a set of fixed knowledge to be mechanically assimilated, but as a dynamic, open semantic field that serves as material for creative transformation and personal appropriation by learners. Within the framework of the study, a three-component stage-by-stage learning model was implemented: a perceptive-cognitive stage, at which culturally significant meanings of folklore texts and practices are decoded; a reproductive-reconstructive stage, which presupposes the internalization of typical speech and behavioural patterns; a stage of creative interpretation, associated with the construction of new cultural artefacts through digital storytelling and the use of generative AI technologies. The data obtained on the basis of standardized language competence tests, the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), and qualitative analysis of digital projects demonstrate a statistically significant advantage of the experimental group. This confirms the hypothesis that the creative interpretation of traditions, in their conjunction with the contemporary technological context, contributes to a deep integration of the learner's linguistic and cultural identity, making the process of foreign language education existentially meaningful and sustainable.

Keywords: creative interpretation, stage-by-stage learning, ethnopedagogy, intercultural communicative competence, folklore, digital storytelling, generative AI in education, cultural intelligence.

1. Introduction

The current stage in the development of linguistic education is characterized by an internally contradictory nature. On the one hand, the UNESCO global education monitoring reports for 2024 insistently emphasize that multilingualism and cultural inclusion are key conditions for the sustainable development of communities living under unprecedented migration flows and increasing cultural hybridization [1]. On the other hand, the rapid spread of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and automated translation systems creates a persistent illusion that foreign language learning as a means of information transfer is becoming redundant. In the

emerging configuration of educational reality, the goal of instruction is no longer the simple transmission of factual content (what does this word mean), but the development of the ability for deep interpretation of meanings embedded in the cultural codes, traditions, and mentality of the people who are native speakers of the language [3].

Traditional models of communicative language teaching (CLT), which have dominated methodology in recent decades, are criticized for a reductionist understanding of culture, reducing it to a set of stereotyped artefacts (food, festivals, folklore in their touristic and commercial interpretation) and in fact ignoring basic value orientations and worldview attitudes [4]. As a result, the phenomenon of cultural resistance emerges, in which learners, despite formally sufficient levels of grammatical and lexical proficiency, display rejection of the cultural norms of the target language or prove incapable of empathetic, genuinely dialogical interaction with its speakers [5].

In response to the challenges outlined, the need arises for a methodological approach that, on the one hand, systematically integrates language, speech, culture, and traditions into a single educational continuum and, on the other hand, regards the learner's creative potential as the principal mechanism for the appropriation of a foreign culture. The method of creative interpretation developed in this study draws on ethnopedagogical traditions, critically reinterpreted in the digital age, and conceptualizes the learning process as a step-by-step ascent from the initial perception of the sign to the co-construction of meaning [7].

The scientific novelty of this work consists in the development and verification of an integrative model that combines classical ethnopedagogy (the use of folklore, legends, traditional forms of cultural transmission of experience) with modern tools of digital humanities. Whereas most studies of 2020–2024 focus predominantly either on the technological aspects of learning (for example, on the use of ChatGPT and similar systems), [9] or on a purely cultural analysis of texts (including literary and journalistic corpora), [4] this study proposes a synergetic approach integrating both lines.

The concept of creative interpretation is introduced not as a designation for a modified translation exercise, but as a characteristic of a cognitive and activity-based act in which the learner transforms a traditional cultural narrative (for example, a folk legend) through the prism

of his or her own life experience and in the format of contemporary media practices. In this way, the sense of alienation from the foreign culture is overcome and conditions are created for its personal appropriation [7].

The aim of the study is to provide theoretical justification and empirical verification of the effectiveness of the method of creative interpretation of stage-by-stage learning (МТИПО) in the formation of integrated language competence and cultural intelligence of learners, in comparison with traditional models of communicative language teaching.

The scientific novelty lies in the development and experimental verification of an integrative ethnopedagogical model that systematically combines folklore material, digital storytelling, and generative AI in stage-by-stage instruction in language and culture, as well as in a comparative analysis of its results with data from contemporary research in the field of foreign language education and cultural intelligence.

The research hypothesis is that the implementation of the method of creative interpretation of stage-by-stage learning (МТИПО), based on systematic work with folklore material and culminating in the creation by learners of original digital products, will lead to a statistically significant increase in the level of:

– language competence (primarily in terms of lexical density of utterance and oral fluency) in comparison with the results achieved through traditional methods.

– cultural intelligence (CQ), ensuring a shift in learners' perception of cultural differences from the stage of Minimization to the stages of Adaptation and Integration, in accordance with M. Bennett's model of intercultural development.

2. Materials and Methods

In the course of the study, a systematic literature review was conducted for the period 2004–2025, with a focus on works in ethnopedagogy, folklore in EFL/ESL teaching, digital storytelling, generative AI in language education, and cultural intelligence. The list of sources included predominantly peer-reviewed articles and monographs indexed in international databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, etc.), as well as UNESCO reports and specialized methodological developments; the selection

criteria were the empirical orientation of the study, the presence of quantitative indicators (skill gains, CQ values, effect size), and relevance to the context of foreign language instruction in higher education.

A comparative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results shows a significant advantage of the experimental methodology, especially in productive types of speech activity (see Fig. 1).

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Comparison of mean indicators of speaking and writing between groups (compiled by the author based on [25])

Indicator	Group	Pre-test (M ± SD)	Post-test (M ± SD)	Gain (Δ)	t-test	p-level	Effect size (d)
Speaking	EG (n=60)	58.4 \pm 7.2	79.1 \pm 6.5	+20.7	12.45	0<.001	1.15 (Large)
Speaking	CG (n=60)	59.1 \pm 7.5	68.3 \pm 7.1	+9.2			
Writing	EG (n=60)	61.2 \pm 6.8	76.5 \pm 6.2	+15.3	8.34	0<.001	0.85(Large)
Writing	CG (n=60)	60.8 \pm 7.0	69.4 \pm 6.9	+8.6			

* Maximum score = 100.

Analysis of the data in Table 1 shows that, despite the overall positive dynamic shift in both samples (which is natural for an unfolding educational process), the rate of growth in the Experimental Group (EG) is more than twice as high as the corresponding indicators in the Control Group (CG). The most pronounced gap is observed in the development of productive skills, primarily in the domain of speaking. This effect appears methodologically explicable: the Reproduction phase (dramatization) and the subsequent Creative Interpretation phase (voicing of digital stories) presupposed intensive and repeated use of more complex lexical material, as well as variable intonational patterns in an emotionally significant, personally coloured context. It is precisely this combination of cognitive load and affective involvement that promotes more reliable mnemonic fixation of language units and speech patterns [39].

The impact of the developed method on the formation of intercultural competence was assessed using the four subscales of the CQS questionnaire. Summary results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cultural Intelligence (CQS) indicators after the experiment (adapted based on [31])

CQ dimension	Group	Mean (M)	SD	t-value	Significance (p)
Metacognitive (Strategy)	EG	5.92	0.85	4.56	<0.001
Metacognitive (Strategy)	CG	4.88	1.02		
Cognitive (Knowledge)	EG	5.45	0.98	2.89	<0.01
Cognitive (Knowledge)	CG	4.95	1.10		

Motivational (Drive)	EG	6.15	0.80	6.72	<0.001
Motivational (Drive)	CG	5.02	0.95		
Behavioral (Action)	EG	5.70	0.92	3.15	<0.01
Behavioral (Action)	CG	5.10	1.05		

The most pronounced effect was recorded for the Motivational component of intercultural intelligence. Students of the Experimental Group demonstrate a substantially increased readiness and interest in intercultural interaction. This result correlates with the conclusions of researchers showing that the inclusion of art and creative practices enhances learners' intrinsic rather than externally imposed motivation [41]. The possibility of freely playing with cultural meanings in a safe educational space reduces the level of anxiety and the fear of making a mistake.

The elevated scores on the Metacognitive CQ scale in the Experimental Group can be interpreted through the lens of the systematic use of reflective tasks and AI mediation. When analysing inaccuracies and interpretive errors in working with legendary plots, students were compelled to verbalize their own cultural representations, strategies of understanding, and text interpretation. In this way, their own cultural schemata were explicated and reinterpreted [12].

Thematic analysis made it possible to identify three key categories structuring the participants' experience:

Overcoming the museumification of culture. Many students emphasized that the traditional model (in the Control Group) effectively turns culture into a static museum exhibit, something frozen and detached from their everyday reality. In contrast, the Method of Creative Interpretation gave them the opportunity to bring cultural traditions to life and inscribe them into their own life context. One of the participants (S-24) noted that reading a legend about forest spirits in the usual format was perceived as a routine and barely interesting assignment, whereas creating a project about how these spirits might exist in the conditions of a modern megalopolis allowed him to understand the internal logic of the characters and the value of respectful attitudes toward nature, turning the text into a personally meaningful story [14].

Emotional resonance and empathy. Visualization of plots and their dramatization contributed to the formation of an empathetic attitude toward the characters. Students described their experience as living through the emotional states of the heroes of folklore texts, stressing that such depth of involvement is unattainable within the framework of purely analytical reading [8].

AI as a sparring partner. Attitudes toward the use of generative AI were ambivalent but overall productive. Students repeatedly noted that AI tools tend to reproduce stereotypical, Western-centric interpretations of Eastern folklore. Confrontation with such interpretations prompted learners to assume the position of expert and correct the AI by explaining cultural nuances and value emphases. Paradoxically, this strengthened their own cultural competence and awareness [29].

Taken together, the data obtained confirm the main hypothesis of the study. The superiority of the Experimental Group is explained by the fact that МТИПО activates mechanisms of deep information processing. Under conditions of traditional instruction (Control Group), the process is dominated predominantly by memorization of factual information, that is, the formation of declarative knowledge. Within the framework of МТИПО, especially at the third stage, knowledge is transformed into procedural and personally meaningful experience.

The creation of a creative interpretation places increased cognitive demands on the student: it is necessary to deconstruct the source text, to identify its invariant semantic core (key values, cultural norms, traditions), and then to reconstruct this meaning in a new form and media shell. Such a process, designated in the academic literature by the term re-signification, is considered a key mechanism for the formation of stable neural connections between linguistic form and cultural content [7].

The results of the study show that folklore material serves as an optimal basis for this type of work. In contrast to contemporary texts that may potentially provoke political or social resistance, [6] legends and fairy tales are perceived by learners as a relatively safe

space of artistic fiction. However, through interaction with archetypal plots and images, students gradually and often unconsciously assimilate the basic behavioural norms and value orientations of the culture (attitudes toward elders, time, honour and shame, etc.).

Creative reworking of folklore makes it possible to reconcile students' own identity with the foreign cultural frame of reference. They do not need to abandon their own self for the sake of a symbolic becoming Other (which often provokes inner resistance); instead, a Third Place is formed in which the learner's personal creativity encounters and interacts with the tradition of the target language [43].

The integration of digital storytelling and AI technologies into the framework structure of the method corresponds to the demands and logic of contemporary digital society. The data obtained show that technologies do not destroy tradition but, on the contrary, provide it with a new expressive resource. Digital storytelling enables students to employ multimodal means (sound, video, image, text) to convey semantic nuances that, at their current stage of language proficiency, are still difficult to express exclusively verbally [27].

The role of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in this process requires special emphasis. The greatest effect is achieved not when AI acts as an autonomous content generator, but when it is used as a tool of reflection and critical analysis. Interaction with AI makes it possible to highlight hidden biases and cultural shifts embedded in the models themselves and thus develops students' skills of critical digital thinking.

4. Conclusion

The study conducted provides convincing evidence of the high effectiveness of the Method of Creative Interpretation of Stage-by-Stage Learning (МТИПО) in the development of integral foreign language communicative competence. The proposed approach, which combines deep engagement in the realm of folklore and cultural traditions with contemporary practices of creative rethinking (including those based on digital technologies), makes it possible to solve a dual methodological task: to ensure a high level of language proficiency and at the same time to form a profound, empathically coloured understanding of the culture of native speakers.

The effectiveness of creative interpretation fundamentally depends on the completion of the preceding stages, namely careful perception of the material and its reproductive practice. An attempt to move directly to creativity in the absence of a formed linguistic foundation leads to the consolidation (fossilization) of errors and a decrease in the quality of the language product.

The opportunity to creatively rework and interpret traditions, rather than limit oneself to their mechanical memorization, serves as a powerful motivational factor for students of the Z and Alpha generations, who are oriented toward self-expression, creativity, and personalized educational trajectories.

Digital storytelling and artificial intelligence tools function as effective means of actualizing archaic cultural meanings, making them conceptually and emotionally significant for the contemporary learner and ensuring their integration into his or her personal experience.

It is recommended that university teachers integrate modules of creative interpretation into the content of courses such as Country Studies, Intercultural Communication, and Speaking Practice. At the same time, particular importance is attached to the thoughtful selection of folklore material, which should possess the potential for contemporary reinterpretation, as well as to the purposeful development in students of ethical norms and rules for the use of AI when working with cultural heritage.

Future research should focus on identifying cross-cultural differences in the perception of this method, as well as on the development of specialized prompts for artificial intelligence systems that minimize the risk of cultural distortions and hallucinations when working with low-resource languages and traditional cultures.

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