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Brent M. Davis
Suleyman Demirel University
Almaty, KZ

ANALYZING BELIEFS AND VALUES OF AMERICANS THROUGH THEIR WRITING

In this analysis we use a worldview framework advance by Sire, Hofstede (wikipedia), and a schema analysis approach to identifying these from behavior.

Key words: Analysis Assignment, Comparison of Values, Value: Universalism.

В этом анализе были использованы мировоззрения Сира, Хофстед (Википедия), и их анализ методики, и схемы для выявления поведения людей.

Ключевые слова: анализ присваивания, сравнения ценностей, универсализм.

Abstract

British and American Studies (BAS) is course

for 2nd year TFL and 3rd year TRS students at our university. The goal of the course is to give

background information that will help them to better understand cultural references in literature and while translating for British or American speakers. The course is based around tracing worldviews throughout history and showing how these views changed due to external factors, and that parts of these earlier views still influence the behavior of Brits and Americans.

Introduction

Why should translators and language teachers in training study the land and people of their second language? Presumably, doing so will help them to be better professionals. What does their profession require that would benefit from such area studies? Understanding literature is one area that quickly comes to mind. The meaning of a text is dependent on context which in turn is determined by the larger communication situation which ultimately is dependent on the culture and geography of the author.

“Any piece of writing has equally complex links to its immediate surroundings and to ultimate reality (Sire, 2010, 1785).

Thus area studies for language students should focus on those aspects which will provide context for the texts that they may need to teach, criticize or translate. Typically British and American studies focus on geography and/or cultural studies,

Language is a part of culture, therefore it makes sense that students of foreign languages should learn something of the culture of native speakers, particularly in area studies courses. If the language is used purely as a lingua franca, perhaps that might not be the case, but the influence of native-English speakers in the world suggests that understanding them would be helpful.

At the heart of culture is the worldview of a member of a particular culture. We should realize that concretely each individual's behavior and mental processes are unique, but for communication to occur there must be some commonality. When actions are interpreted by the actor and the observer in the same way, to that extent a worldview is shared (or at least understood which is the goal of the BAS course).

Worldviews consist of basic beliefs and core values. Sire (2004, 122) defines it this way:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously,

consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.

These beliefs and values are often revealed in written accounts such as autobiographies, biographies and literary works, through explicit statements in them and through analyzing actions and decisions taken in narrative texts. These texts are presentations of individuals to an audience, and the authors may slant an individual's statements or behavior to evoke a particular reaction to the individual. Thus, these text can not be taken as absolute guides to individual worldviews, but by looking at the text and its situation we can understand something of the worldview of the individual in society.

James W. Sire found that worldview analysis made an excellent framework for studying literature: “It was worldview analysis that made the literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance come alive for me in graduate school at the University of Missouri.” In my course of British and American Studies I have sought to extend this approach to area studies for philology students. Worldview analysis helps us to see the meaning of historical events, current culture, and literary trends.

The Worldview Analysis Assignment

At the beginning of the course, students are introduced to the concept of worldviews and a set of values which have been used in cross-cultural studies. Part of the assignment is to compare values with those in the student's culture so using a standard framework makes this easier. This imposed framework probably introduces some distortion in representing the worldviews in the text, but again with the goal of preparing students for analyzing behavior and literature it seems justified to me. A description of the values is in Appendix I (excerpted from the student handout).

The assignment is to read a biography of autobiography (a few involving authors also include some literary works) of an influential British or American personage. The goal is to identify some core beliefs and values based on 1) explicit statements and 2) an analysis of an event where the individual was faced with a decision. An example of the first is this statement of Benjamin Franklin:

Principles. I never doubted, for instance, the existence of the Deity; that he made the world, and govern'd it by his Providence; that the most

acceptable service of God was the doing good to man; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter.

An example of the second may be found in Appendix II where John Woolman faced a decision about writing a will for a slave-owner, and declined due to his valuing the freedom of every person which falls under the value of universalism (see Appendix I).

The assignment also includes listing basic biographical information such as date of birth, and concludes with the student making a comparison of the worldview of the person in the text with his or her own worldview. A general course evaluation is also added to the assignment. A sample of a student paper is found in Appendix III.

Comparison of Values

Here are comparisons of values in the students' own words:

On Thomas Jefferson: Credit is the one of the notable values that Thomas Jefferson appreciated most of all. Respect, trust and reliability are the components of credit. Jefferson always thought about his people. The opinion of his people was very important. In spite the fact that he was slave owner in the Declaration of Independence he wrote that everyone is equal. Unfortunately the rest of his life he forgot about it and kept silent concerning this theme. Perhaps it happened because of absence of support.

As for us we strongly admire this political person. His values are the example which should be followed. Credit is the most important value for us as well. Without it we can achieve nothing.

Wilberforce: First of all, I had no idea who William Wilberforce was prior to reading this book, nor did I realize how great person he was or how big of a figure he was in British politics. This book and William Wilberforce's life resonate with me deeply. His awakening was evangelical Christianity, mine is Muslim. He endeavored to do as much as possible to better the world. Even we are different in religion, but we have almost the same view about the universe. We both believe that there is only one God in the whole world; we know that trade slavery is one of the absurd action ever took place in our life, yet we cannot deny a fact that there is no longer trade of slaves, still it exists. Besides that, he loves his fellow creatures and wants them to be free and get all comforts of life even it is limited for human being. Thus, we

have a full right to say that he was an abolitionist and a philanthropist. As an example I can represent the following statement (taken from "The life of William Wilberforce") that proves his feelings to a man.

"May every Sabbath be to me, and to those I love, a renewal of these feelings, of which the small tastes we have in, this life should make us look forward to that eternal rest, which awaits the people of God, when the whole will be a never-ending enjoyment of those feelings of love and joy and admiration and gratitude, which are even in the limited degree we here experience them, the truest source of comfort".

Value: Universalism

....When we born, we do not have any values, but values begin to appear as we grow older. I mean everyone becomes conscious what he needs to appreciate and what he finds trivial for him. As for me, parents and relatives are the most important people who I consider my main values. It sounds too simple and obvious to say that parents are people who you value. It can be interesting and surprising to tell you that such abstract thing like friendship can be regarded my personal value. This is true feeling for me. I cannot live without my friends. It is unbearable to stay alone, to spend your free time with your shadow. Even a dog might become closer friend than a man. Because I want to have true friends and dog can be your eternal supporter.

Another thing I eager to rich is my goal. This can also be considered as one of my values. I am aware that my environment and almost everything that surrounds me are illusion. As I mentioned above, this is imperfect world, however mankind is able to progress and perfect himself. This is the main point why we were created. Money, poverty, go clubbing are not the idea I am talking about. By evolving I mean to understand yourself, to find yourself, finally, to develop your spiritual values. We must discover ourselves. These are my values and how I get this mysterious world.

As we can see the students made some comparison and evaluation of the persons they read about. This helps to develop their critical thinking skills, and gives the students an opportunity to develop their own voices. Finally, the students developed skills in working as a group. Again, I will let the students speak as the conclusion of this article:

"We have learned that in our world there are many values and peculiarities that we have to take

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into consideration. We can point out one of his values, unity. Working together on that project we understand the meaning of term “unity”. We worked in team and helped each other, when

somebody couldn't understand something we tried to help and explain incomprehensible things. To be united to be one cohesive team.”

Sources

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