

TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING SYNTHETIC SPEECH ACTIVITIES AS A WAY TO FORM NETWORK COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract

Modern technologies have drastically changed the educational space and environment. Today, the technology, which significantly impacts the learning process and has informational power, is the Internet. Customary ways and situations of communication are transformed into new forms, e.g. instant messengers, in which one can write a message, or send an audio or video file instantly. Thus, the primary task of teaching Russian as a foreign language is the development of complex skills and abilities to be used by a foreigner in various conditions of real modern communication, which in the modern world is directly connected by the Internet telecommunications network.

The network space allows students to immerse into the actual linguistic reality and, therefore, significantly reduces the traditional language barrier of the practical use of the target language, in particular Russian, in this environment. The purpose of learning is the development of students' network communication skills in a non-native language in various communication areas which are increasingly mediated by the network space.

Network communicative competence involves the ability to work with information, the means of its transmission and processing in the World Wide Web. The development of certain skills is promoted by methods, techniques or forms of work that are associated with the processes of retrieving, storing and processing information in a network environment, with the choice of necessary electronic resources and network services, with an understanding of their purpose. Network communicative competence also includes the ability to interact with the subjects of the global network, to organise joint activities in the network educational environment. An important role in this is played by the formulation of tasks, for the solution of which, it is required to compose and publish messages of various types and use means of emotional and graphic expression on the Web as well as the ability to make a self-presentation through network profiles or personal electronic resources.

If in earlier science, a text was the basic unit of language and speech (communication), today media discourse can be considered a unit of modern communication. It is media discourse that becomes a new didactic material in RFL classes. The article presents an analysis of the main research papers on media discourse issues and identifies the linguodidactic media discourse potential for developing network communicative competence.

To date, media discourse is rarely used in the process of learning Russian and, in fact, there is no developed methodology for working with this unique didactic material, because it requires a completely new approach. With this approach, in the process of learning Russian, a student is simultaneously involved in all types of speech activity, that is, an educational route is being formed, which includes exercises related to the development of reading, speaking, listening and writing skills in a network environment. We call this complex work in media discourse “synthetic types of speech activity” which develop skills necessary for students learning Russian today. To determine the effectiveness and reliability of the methodology, we conducted an experimental training course for one year. Two groups of students participated in this experiment. The first (experimental) group was trained using the proposed method for teaching synthetic speech activity and the second (control) group learned Russian according to the traditional method. At the end of the year, a final test was conducted, the purpose of which was to determine the level of students’ network communicative competence. The results of the experimental training course allowed us to draw the following conclusions: (1) the use of synthetic types of speech activity in classes efficiently develops communicative competence, teaching students to work freely in the Russian-language Internet space; (2) the proposed technology helps students to develop skills necessary for real networking in Russian, involves them in real communicative situations and also contributes to the development of the abilities to effectively organise their learning activities and work in the information network space; and (3) this technology makes it possible to develop skills in analysing, transforming and processing information received in the network space.

Keywords: network communicative competence, teaching methods, synthetic speech activities, Russian as a foreign language.

1 INTRODUCTION

Modern requirements for the level of proficiency in a foreign language are associated primarily with the ability to carry out speech communication in real situations, in accordance with the norms of behaviour and speech etiquette adopted in a given community. While learning Russian, foreign students familiarise themselves with the Russian culture and communication environment which is mostly the network environment.

For productive communication, it is required to form network communicative competence, which is aimed at developing a modern person’s ability to communicate in a network space, i.e. an authentic speech situation. A modern man becomes a “network man” involved in the surrounding media space. For successful activity in the new conditions, any person, especially a foreigner learning Russian, needs skills and abilities to retrieve, analyse and process information. The new conditions of communication entail the problem of developing foreign student’s network communicative competence.

In the modern real communicative environment, the phenomena of communication are continuously developed and updated. The primary goal of the methodology for teaching Russian as a foreign language is to take into account these realities in the process of developing student’s communicative competence. The changed communicative sphere requires new forms and methods for working with it. Media discourse becomes the main tool for developing network communicative competence. Any activity, including speech, in the network space is carried out by means of media discourse. That is why the modern methodological base should be expanded due to the emergence of new pedagogical approaches, technological capabilities and means of teaching a foreign language.

To effectively form a network communicative competence using a media discourse, it is necessary to develop a technique based on a set of sequential operations carried out during one lesson: these operations are intended to simultaneously develop the writing, reading, listening and speaking skills in the network. This is exactly the subject of our research.

2 ON THE ISSUE OF NETWORK COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The main goal of modern education at all levels is to form the student’s competent personality; therefore, the

primary task for students is to acquire an integrated system of universal knowledge, skills and abilities as well as experience of independent activity and personal responsibility in the course of educational practice (The Concept of Modernization of Russian Education ..., 2002), and the concept of “competence” is introduced into the assessment of the result of education.

The concept of competence encompasses “not only the abilities required for carrying out professional activities, but also the behaviour, the ability to analyse facts, make decisions, transfer information and other skills necessary for professional activities” (The Quality of Vocational Training. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Brussels, 2000).

In other words, competence refers to those aspects of a person’s knowledge and abilities (potential) that are required to achieve certain results in a specific situation of activity and are actualised in it. Consequently, in the field of education, at all its levels, competences will be formed on the basis of the integration of students’ knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience in independent educational activities. In Russian and foreign pedagogical literature there are different interpretations of the concept of proficiency and a different composition of competencies that determine personal proficiency in different areas of activity (L.P. Alekseeva, J. Delors, I.A. Zimnyaya, N.V. Kuzmina, A.K. Markova, J. Raven, L.M. Mitina, R. White, N.S. Shablygina).

Initially, the concept of “competence” appeared in the works of N. Chomsky who delimited two factors of language proficiency:

1. The speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language.
2. The actual use of language in concrete situations (Chomsky, 1965).

In addition, N. Chomsky emphasizes that “Only under the idealization ... is performance a direct reflection of competence. In actual fact, it obviously could not directly reflect competence.” (Chomsky, 1965).

Shortly after Chomsky proposed and defined the concept of competence, supporters of a communicative view in applied linguistics (for example, Savignon, 1972) expressed their disapproval of the concept of idealized linguistic competence as a theoretical justification for the methodology of learning and teaching languages.

Then came an alternative interpretation of competence. Namely, D.H. Hymes (1972) introduced a sociolinguistic element into the purely linguistic view of N. Chomsky. Hymes defined communicative competence not only as grammatical knowledge of a language but also as the ability to use grammatical proficiency in various communicative situations.

Further, the study of communicative competence was continued by H. Widdowson (1983) who made a distinction between competences and abilities. In this regard, he defined communicative competence in terms of knowledge of linguistic and sociolinguistic agreements.

Widdowson understood “ability” (which he called “procedural or communicative ability”) as the ability to use knowledge as a means of creating grammatical meaning in a language (Widdowson, 1983). According to this author, “ability” is not a component of competence. It does not become “competence” but remains “an active force for continuing communication”. Having defined communicative competence in this way, Widdowson was the first to speak in his scientific reflections on the relationship between competence and performance and pay more attention to the actual use of a language.

Another interpretation of communicative competence belongs to the American scientists M. Canale и M. Swain (1980). Their idea is that communicative competence is a synthesis of the basic system of knowledge and language skills necessary for communication. In turn, knowledge is a conscious or unconscious category. According to these scientists, there are three types of knowledge:

1. Knowledge of basic grammatical rules.
2. Knowledge of contextual use of grammatical structures.
3. Knowledge of the right combination of statements with the principles of discourse.

In addition, their concept of “skill” refers to how a person can use knowledge in real communication. According to M. Canale (1983), the skill requires a further distinction between the main ability and its manifestation in real communication, that is, in its performance (M. Canale, 1983).

In the methodology, there are numerous studies and practices of the development of language competences: pragmatic and communicative. But as we saw, in the concept of M. Canale and M. Swain

there is a kind of knowledge that can provide productive communication only if it is known how to combine personal intention with grammatical knowledge and, most importantly, how to make this statement within a certain type of discourse.

Today, network discourse is the most popular and requested. Therefore, the modern education system should prepare students who are able to navigate information flows and ready to communicate in the network, perceiving information and using it for their own purposes. The new conditions of communication entail the problem of developing foreign student's network communicative competence. It is worth paying attention to the insufficient development of methodological models and technologies for using network texts, taking into account the characteristics of such network texts and their functioning on the Internet. The interest of researchers in the development of network communicative competence is quite high.

This problem is highlighted in the works of A. V. Fyodorov, N. V. Chicherina, I. A. Fateeva, V.V. Protopopova, A.V. Sharikov, T.I. Myasnikova, K. A. Avetisova, I. A. Tsaturova, D. A. Mezentseva, T.A. Olkhovskaya, B. Herzig, G. Tulodziecki, H. Moser, J. Erpenbeck and others. A review of the literature on this issue allows us to conclude that network competence is understood as a combination of all knowledge and skills that ensure effective, creative work with respect to the texts of media discourse. Based on the above, we understand network communicative competence as a set of interactive skills of productive and receptive types of speech activities that provide communication in the network space.

2.1 Means of Developing Network Communicative Competence

Today, the main communicative means in the network space is media discourse. Media discourse has emerged as a new form of expression for cinema, printed media, radio, television, and politics. At the beginning of the 20th century, these areas were looking for other forms than the old information transfer formats. Since the 90s of the 20th century, the term "media discourse" has been actively used in the works of foreign researchers (T. Van Dijk, Martin Montgomery, Alan Bell, Robert Fowler), who review and analyse linguistic features, linguistic and media technologies, principles of creation, functional and stylistic specifics of such texts.

It is media discourse that becomes the main tool for developing network communicative competence. Following Ye. Kozhemyakin, we define media discourse as "thematically focused, socio-culturally conditioned verbal and cogitative activity in the network space" (Kozhemyakin, 2010). Also, in the scientific literature there is another, sometimes synonymous, term – media text. In English-language works one can also find terms such as Web's text, digital text (Handa, S., 2014, Harmer, J., 2007).

In our study, following T.G. Dobrosklonskaya, we stick to the opinion that the relation of media discourse to a media text is the same as the relation of the general to the particular (Dobrosklonskaya, 2008). Media text is a unit that differentiates information flows. Therefore, we consider a media text as part of media discourse. Any activity, including communication, in the network space is carried out by means of media text.

Of course, the basis of the concept of "media text" is the concept of "text" defined by I.R. Galperin: "Text is a piece of speech production represented in a written form that correlates to some literary norms; it is characterized by completeness, wholeness and coherence and consists of specific text units joined by various logical, lexical, grammatical and stylistic means under one title; it has a definite communicative aim as a carefully thought-out impact on the reader ..." (Galperin, 1981).

In the sphere of mass media communication, the concept of "text" expands its boundaries. A text is no longer seen as a sequence of words only, printed or written on paper. It includes various media components: primarily sound and visual images. As Ya. N. Zasursky defines it, "a media text is a new communication product," highlighting its features such as inclusion, on the one hand, in different media structures (verbal, visual, sound, and multimedia plans) and, on the other hand, in different media circumstances (magazine, radio, Internet, etc.) (Zasursky, 2005). Thus, a media text is a combination of verbal and media components, a multifaceted textual formation possessing completeness and purposefulness, in which all elements constitute a single whole: structural, semantic and functional.

Network media texts have great linguodidactic potential. They are the core of the modern media space and are available at any time to each user. They are especially valuable for methodologists of RFL. After all, students learning Russian as a foreign language, who use texts of a modern format, will be able to gain more knowledge on the subject than students who work with printed texts. To obtain the required online information, one should make a competent inquiry in the network and then correctly process the information received. By including new information in their own text, students form a network product, and through simultaneous communication, the network contributes to the students' independent creative activity.

3 TECHNOLOGY FOR TEACHING SYNTHETIC TYPES OF SPEECH ACTIVITY

3.1 Genesis of Teaching Synthetic Types of Speech Activity.

If the traditional text changed its structure, form and transmission channel, and the media text has become the main type of discourse that is now used throughout the world and as a common communication medium, it is more reasonable to speak not just about four types of speech activity (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), which are involved in working with the text, but on synthetic forms, which are based on the text origin, that is, the didactic material for classes. In view of the modern requirements for the RFL teaching methodology, which are aimed at developing foreign students' communication skills in the authentic environment of the Internet space, the notion of "synthetic types of speech activity" should be highlighted, implying the development of listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills on the material of network media discourse. They can be considered synthetic only if the material for lessons is network discourse.

For high-quality communication, mutual penetration of approaches to learning all four types of speech activity is necessary, i.e. synthetism (from Greek σύνθεσις – connection, binding, folding). In the RFL teaching methodology, the system of exercises and training techniques for each type of speech activity has been thoroughly studied and developed. But in view of the modern requirements for foreign students' communicative competencies, we assume that the traditional system of rather isolated development of each type of speech activity cannot qualitatively generate the skills and abilities that are needed for a foreign communicator in the world where all information is concluded in media texts and transmitted through the Internet.

For an effective process of teaching Russian as a foreign language, it is necessary not only to use new technologies in the educational process but also to offer new methods for working with a variety of modern texts, which make it possible to teach students to present information in a new way during network communication. The development of new forms of the educational process is facilitated by the use of synthetic types of speech activity in the RFL teaching methodology. The emergence of this new methodology is caused by the imperatives of our time, because each new method can change the educational process itself, make it flexible, interesting, and adapt it to the goals and objectives of any discipline.

A significant didactic potential of media discourse and multimedia allows them to be used as an effective and relevant learning tool for creating the most realistic learning environment. Such educational environments can store any amount of information necessary for the educational process, presenting it in multimodal mode (text, graphic, audio, animation, and video information), implement graphic modelling of processes and phenomena, use psychologically based connections, including associative thinking, video and audio. The use of the modern communicative space in teaching Russian makes it possible to develop the ability to receive new information in the target language not only through independent study, but also during interaction with other people, to search, collect and select the necessary information to solve problems during the lesson.

In this context, the teaching goal is to develop the communicative network behaviour of students in a non-native language in various areas of modern communication, which are increasingly mediated by the network space. The relevance, mobility and modernity of information and ways of its presentation in the Internet space motivate students to collect new facts related to the target language, expand linguocultural information about the target language country and search for new network resources containing such information.

In addition, the genuine development of communicative competence is possible only in the process of real speech practice, when there are no inhibitory factors, e.g. confusion or fear of saying something wrong, etc. These factors are eliminated in the course of working with synthetic types of speech activity, since, for the younger generation, traditional forms of activity reduce these negative factors and opens up the possibility of solving educational problems in a group during communication and discussion. We assume that, when working within the technology of teaching synthetic types of speech activity, the teacher will find it easier to create an authentic communication environment for students.

3.2 Specifics of the Technology for Teaching Synthetic Types of Speech Activity

The technology of learning synthetic types of speech activity is designed for foreign students with the following proficiency levels: TORFL-1 (B1), TORFL-2 (B2), TORFL-3 (professional knowledge, C1), TORFL-4 (C2). Some texts of network discourse can be used in classes with students having Basic Level (TBL / A2).

Due to the fact that the method for working with network discourse is "dictated" by the specifics of discourse itself, we have identified four main types of media texts: texts from a news feed (as well as social network

texts), media projects, culturally significant video clips, and media texts (interviews).

These types of media text make it possible to organise the methodology of teaching synthetic types of speech activity in the framework of one lesson in Russian as a foreign language.

To work in accordance with this approach, a number of conditions are required: each student should have a personal laptop, tablet, internet connection, registration on sites with certain platforms (Vkontakte, Facebook, Instagram), links to the main news sites, and YouTube Russia video channel.

As an example, we will present the technology of working with synthetic types of speech activity on the material of a video clip on YouTube Russia. In the Internet environment, especially on the YouTube video channel, animated cartoon series about Russia have recently become popular, with financial support from the Russian Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communication, the Russian Geographical Society and the regional administration (e.g. "Multi-Russia – St. Petersburg"). Short animated films that last some 2–3 minutes present every Russian city. These cartoons tell about the foundation of a particular city, historical events significant for this city, its places of interest, etc. All information is presented by a good-natured bear as the main symbol of Russia. The bear as a guide shows all the beauty and breadth of both the Russian land and the Russian soul.

Below is a fragment of a lesson on the method of teaching synthetic types of speech activity based on the video material:

I. Psychological preparation

1) Making conversation. The teacher asks leading questions. Since the video is about the city of St. Petersburg, the students answer whether they have been to this city, what they know about it, etc. This conversation is meant to prepare the students for the lesson.

2) Listening to a thematic musical fragment (the song "City on the Neva"). The teacher switches on an audio fragment of one of the most popular Russian songs about St. Petersburg. Within this mini-project, the textual activity in the target language consists in independently formulating a search query in Russian, introducing it into the search line, viewing the list of the results obtained and selecting the desired site, identifying the desired text fragment on the site. After listening to the audio fragment, the teacher asks questions: Have you heard this song before? What are all the names of this city that you heard? What river is it situated on? What cultural features does the songwriter sing about? How do you understand the expression "white nights"? (interpretation of a phraseological unit) Let us open the Internet page and see how many songs about St. Petersburg exist in Russian song culture.

II. Work with the video fragment "Multi-Russia. St. Petersburg".

The task to the video: Open the Youtube video channel. Type in the header "Multi-Russia. St. Petersburg". Describe what you saw.

Next, the students choose the city of St. Petersburg and are given the task to carefully listen to the text of the video.

The conversation:

1. Where is the highest cathedral in Russia? 2. Who founded the city? 3. When was St. Petersburg renamed as Leningrad? 4. For how many centuries has St. Petersburg existed? 5. Repeat the phrase that the Bear-guide says at the end? What does it mean?

III. Reading the text of the video fragment.

The task: To read the text, you need it to appear on the screen. Turn on subtitles to the video. To do this, you must perform the following actions: in the lower right corner: "settings" → subtitles → select Russian subtitles. Press "play", watch the video and read the text.

The conversation:

1. What is the name of the highest cathedral in Russia? (The teacher should make a relevant comment, because the text of the video contains the abbreviated colloquial name of the Peter and Paul Cathedral in St. Petersburg "Petropavlovka". Work with word-building elements).

2. What is the height of the Peter and Paul Cathedral?

3. Which three historical events were significant for St. Petersburg?

4. What synonym did the name of the city acquire during the Second World War, namely during the Siege of Leningrad? (if necessary, the teacher shows slides with these answers).
5. How do you understand the word "persistence"? Why did it become synonymous with the name of the city of Leningrad during the blockade? What do you know about the blockade of Leningrad: dates, major events, etc.? (linguistic and linguoculturological work).
6. Can St. Petersburg be considered the largest northern city?
7. How is St. Petersburg called? (The second capital of Russia). Explain why this expression appeared.

IV. Speaking based on the video material.

Oral answer-reasoning on thematic questions asked by the teacher:

What does the expression "transparent white nights" mean? Have you been to St. Petersburg? Have you seen the white nights? How long do they last? Can St. Petersburg be considered the second capital of Russia, indeed? What does the phrase "opened a window to Europe" mean, and how is it connected with the foundation of the city on the Neva? (linguoculturological work with the phrase).

IV. Continuing work with the song "City on the Neva".

The students work with the song, a fragment of which they listened to at the beginning of the lesson. Before them is the text of the song with omitted grammatical forms of words. The students are supposed to fill in the blanks using the correct grammatical forms of the words. Also, after the work has been completed, the teacher finds out if the students liked the song, what its main meaning was, and what new information the students retrieved.

V. Writing based on the video material

The task: Write a message-story to your friend in Vkontakte or Facebook.

1. Tell your friend what you have learned about St. Petersburg, when it was founded, how old it is, by whom it was founded, on which river this city stands, how many names it had, etc.
2. Write whether you would like to go to St. Petersburg. Why?
3. What sights would you like to see there?
4. Share with your friend your impressions of this city.
5. Send your friend the song you listened to in class. Comment on it (you may choose any other song).

To determine the effectiveness and reliability of the methodology, we conducted experimental training for one year. Two groups of students participated in this experiment. In the first (experimental) group, training was conducted using the method of teaching synthetic speech activity, and in the second (control) group, Russian was taught on the basis of the traditional method. At the end of the year, a final test was conducted, the purpose of which was to determine the level of students' network communicative competence. The control included tasks for four types of activity. The tasks were designed to identify the general level of communicative competence and the level of students' ability to realise this competence in a network environment. The results of the experimental training course suggest that the use of synthetic types of speech activity in teaching makes it possible to develop communicative competence and teach students to work freely in the Russian-language Internet space. In addition, the developed method improves cognitive skills and develops the creative potential of foreign students to a greater degree for obtaining and integrating linguistic and cultural information.

Thus, we believe that any video fragment that contains culturally significant information can be the basis for making up a lesson on learning synthetic types of speech activity. Video is a vivid example of the synthesis of the main speech activities: listening and reading. In class, the teacher should also activate writing and speaking. Thus, in similar classes, the skills in listening and reading as well as the competencies necessary for written and oral communication are acquired and developed. The advantage of using video as a special text lies in its informative plot, colourful illustrativeness and dynamism – all this is necessary for a high level of language proficiency. These multi-texts also immerse students in an authentic environment, contributing to their mastering the fast conversational speech tempo, which is inherent in Russian people.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The proposed technology helps students to acquire and assimilate knowledge about the target language, to

develop their cognitive skills and networking models. In addition, it develops self-educational skills through the solution of practical tasks or problems that require the integration of all the skills and abilities previously formed. The technology involves working with a real practical situation, and also contributes to the development of the ability to work in the modern information space.

As we can see, the development of methods that enable teachers to include students in various types of speech activity, thus teaching them various forms of speech communication in Russian, is determined by the new conditions of the educational space. Modern teachers need to own new forms of communication in order to use them as a tool in their classes. A lesson, based on the technology of synthetic training in the types of speech activity, makes it possible to implement new forms of work with media discourse, thereby fully developing all the skills necessary for the formation of network communicative competence.

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