

On the Problem of Compiling Study Guides for Teaching Russian As a Language for Specific Purposes to Foreign Students

Nataliia Kondrashova
*Foreign Language Training Center
 Saint Petersburg National Research University of
 Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics (ITMO University)
 St. Petersburg, Russia
 ORCID: 0000-0002-0322-8356*

Abstract—The article is devoted to the problem of devising study guides for teaching Russian to foreign students as a language for specific purposes (LSP). The author cites a number of requirements to an LSP study guide from the perspective of a competency-based approach. Particular attention in the article is given to describing the criteria of selecting specific texts and specific types of exercises for teaching Russian to foreign students as a language for specific purposes.

Keywords—*study guide, professional communicative competence in a foreign language, language for specific purposes, exercise*

I. INTRODUCTION

As is commonly known, the goal of teaching any foreign language, including Russian as a foreign language (RFL), at a technical university is to form professional communicative competences in a non-native language, that is, the student's ability and readiness to participate in academic and professional communications in a foreign language.

It is sometimes quite narrow to familiarize foreign students with the requirements of their professional language forcing the RFL lecturers to write study guides by themselves. For instance, RFL faculty members at Saint Petersburg National Research University of Information Technologies, Mechanics and Optics (ITMO University) have developed Russian language study guides for foreign students studying such subjects as Refrigeration Appliances [1], Food Technologies [2], Economics [3], and Information Technologies [4].

The national foreign language teaching practice sets a whole series of requirements to textbooks that have existed for quite a long time and were devised by such researchers as L. Bim, O.V. Afanasieva, O.A. Radchenko [5], M.V. Yakushev [6], N.I. Gez, S.F. Shatilov, and others [7]. From among such requirements we have picked out the following parameters that are relevant for contemporary professionally-oriented language education.

II. PARAMETERS RELATED TO CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

A. Functional parameters

a) Characteristics of learning goals: the main goal, as was mentioned above, is to form professional communicative competences in a foreign language with the help of a study guide;

b) Characteristics of the learning process components. It is of utmost importance to us to identify the procedural component of the learning process, which is comprised of the following speech activity elements:

- making preparations for an activity;
- performing the activity on a reproductive level (training/drills);
- performing the activity on a receptive level;
- performing the activity on a productive level;

• control;

c) Characteristics of teaching principles. Of utmost importance to us are the following ones:

- the study guide must conform to the requirements of the syllabus;
- the study guide must take account of who it is addressed to (the type of the school, i.e. a technical university) and be oriented towards the personality of the student, a foreign student of a technical university;
- the study guide must ensure conversion of speech activity in a foreign language into activities of other kind.

B. Formal parameters (the outer structure of the study guide)

a) The contents of the study guide must be presented clearly with tasks written in plain language and the study

guide as a whole having a clear structure;

b) Use of the didactic functions of visual illustrative materials.

Thus, a study guide must, on the one hand, conform to the didactic requirements and, on the other, it must reflect the specific features of this or that area of professional communications to which this study guide is dedicated. Besides this, a modern study guide must give an opportunity to implement a competency-based language learning approach, i.e. it must contain material to form all kinds of speech activity skills in their entirety and at the same time reflect the interdisciplinary ties (the ties between the Russian language as a discipline and the vocational disciplines of the student's future profession), thereby improving the general professional competence of technical university graduates and forming meta-disciplinary competences. When teaching any kind of speech activity, one must remember that knowledge and skills are formed in phases and exercises should be graded depending on their speech orientation and difficulty for foreign students.

III. LANGUAGE EXERCISES IN THE STUDY GUIDE

In order to have the procedural aspect of learning implemented, the study guide must contain exercises of different levels such as:

1. Language vocabulary and grammar drills, the purpose of which is to ensure that foreign students have a good command of vocabulary and grammar and Russian language skills, i.e. to form the ability to identify and differentiate between technically specific and general scientific terms and construct sentences in Russian using the grammar patterns common for the sublanguage of a particular profession. Such drills are vocabulary and grammar exercises on the level of words, word combinations and sentences.

2. Receptive text exercises that help to polish up various types of reading (skimming, scanning and intensive reading) and listening and ensure that the student has a good command of semantic processing skills. These are exercises which, for example, require searching the given details, making a plan of the text and selecting the key words for each point of the plan, identifying the given details in the text you hear and so forth.

3. Reproductive and productive language exercises, written and oral. The task of such exercises is to improve discourse skills, i.e. the skills of constructing written and oral text while taking into account the particular genre that is commonly used in this specific area, the conditions and laws of written and oral communication. These exercises may come after reading/listening exercises in just one class and based on just one text. These are such exercises as "Compose a text using the following terms", "Read the text. Find the key words and write them out. Then briefly write what the text is about using the words you have written out", "Based on the text you have read, find arguments in writing / orally to support the statement

(point, etc)", "Compose a text based on information from the table/chart", "Present information from the text you have read in the form of slides or make a brief report". Such exercises also include rephrasing (using various grammar patterns to convey the given sense).

4. Conclusive control exercises that help to assess the level of foreign language skills and knowledge of a foreign student.

All exercises in a study guide, despite of having different levels of complexity, are aimed at accomplishing one main goal, namely, to ensure further success of a foreign student in the chosen discipline and preparing him/her for his future professional activity in the Russian language.

The study guide on the Russian language of the student's major must be divided into topics with due regard for the interdisciplinary ties and must be based on the student's vocabulary in the given professional sphere because teaching LSP is also the practice of applying the knowledge of the subject of the profession in a foreign language communication, this is like penetrating into the way of thinking that prevails in this professional sphere.

IV. RELATED SUGGESTIONS

Teaching language for specific purposes (LSP) is inevitably connected with learning the particular aspects of professional communication and the genre specific of such communication. This is achieved through reading a lot of text on the subject you are studying. We suggest selecting texts for teaching LSP to foreign students on the basis of the following criteria:

A. *Topic*

Text topics must correspond to the content of professional communications in the subject studied by the student.

B. *Authenticity*

For teaching purposes, it is best to pick out texts that are used in the natural environment of real professional communication; therefore, texts must be authentic in terms of their structure, content and presentation. However, at the initial stage it is allowed to shorten large text if this does not lead to a significant change in the lexical-grammatical structure of the text and does not ruin the perceptual unity of the text. We include such texts in our text library as technically authentic, meaning they are as close to the real life texts as possible. The authenticity criterion is dictated by the goal of teaching and that is to prepare a foreign student for real-life academic and professional communication.

C. *Language*

a) LSP texts must contain basic vocabulary and grammar of the language specific for a particular professional area;

b) LSP texts, even the short ones, must be holistic units

rather than separate sentences or fragments.

D. Information

Information in the texts must be meaningful for students, it must be supplemental to the information they get in their major disciplines, that is, it should enlarge the students' professional vocabulary. Texts that are offered for learning a language for specific purposes must reflect a contemporary view on the issues raised. The reading of such texts enables the transition from a foreign language activity to the student's future professional activity, which helps to raise motivation among students.

It is only possible to have all such criteria in place in the case of cooperation between a Russian language expert and the lecturer on the major subject. This is the specific feature of writing LSP study guides.

E. Design

The design of a modern study guide requires that it should be illustrative. The didactic potential of visual material is tremendous. The non-language information in the form of illustrations to the text, diagrams and the like supports the language information thus making it easier for a foreign student to get an insight into the text. On the one hand, exercises with illustrative material activate the mechanism of visual memory and visual thinking in students and, on the other, develop the verbal area of thinking and verbal memory. Besides this, exercises with instructions like "Read the text. Draw a diagram of the devices described in it", "Read / listen to the text and make a classification of the phenomena (mechanisms / technologies, etc)" and "Describe this device by using its diagram" serve a diagnostic function. They help the lecturer to control whether foreign students understand the text correctly and fully and whether they know the terms. A combination of texts and illustrative materials and the nature of learning activities as such (describing the diagram, using the elements of drawing) also facilitates the transition of speech activity into another activity, thereby raising students' motivation, encouraging them to do exercises and, in addition to this, serves as a means of psychological relief during the RFL class.

V. CONCLUSION

An LSP study guide is an important tool for forming the student's professional communicative competences in a non-native language. It simulates the environment of

professional communication in an RFL class. Without a suitable textbook, it is very difficult for an RFL lecturer who is not an expert in the field of professional activity of a student to let the student feel the atmosphere of his/her future profession. All this makes the study of the problem of compiling LSP study guides an extremely urgent problem that requires research.

However, there are two main limitations in this paper that could be addressed in our future research. First, the compiling and testing of a study guide is a long-term process. The results of using a particular study guide can be visible only in the practical implementation of students' knowledge after having studied this guide. Making revisions to the study guide to cure deficiencies and writing a new revised study guide requires even more time. Thus, the study of the problem of compiling textbooks is always a long-term study, and this fact makes it difficult to analyze and present the results. Second, in the case of teaching languages of rare specialties, the study is hampered by a small number of students participating in this study. If a specialty is studied in only a few universities in the country, this problem is complicated by little opportunity to involve colleagues in the discussion of the matter. Therefore, the author of this article invites you to discuss this problem and will be very happy if her work gets feedback.

REFERENCES

- [1] N.A. Kokoshnikova. Russian as a Foreign Language. Refrigeration Appliances: Textbook for Foreign Students / St. Petersburg: ITMO University, 2016. 43 p.
- [2] N.V. Kondrashova, E.A. Kurlova. Russian as a Foreign Language. Food Technologies: Textbook on the Russian language for Foreign Students / St. Petersburg: ITMO University, 2016. 56 p.
- [3] N.L. Samosyuk. Russian as a Foreign Language. Economics and management: Textbook for Foreign Students / St. Petersburg: ITMO University, 2014. 48 p.
- [4] N.V. Kondrashova, N.A. Kokoshnikova, E.V. Merzlyakova, T.F. Sizova. Russian as a Foreign Language. Russian Language in Professional Activity: Information Technologies: Textbook for Foreign Students. – St. Petersburg: ITMO University, 2019. – 170 p.
- [5] I.L. Bim, O.V. Afanasieva, O.A. Radchenko. Regarding Evaluation of a Modern Foreign Language Textbook // Foreign Languages at School. 1999. Issue No. 6. P. 13-17
- [6] M.V. Yakushev. Scientifically Justified Criteria of Analysing and Evaluating a Foreign Language Textbook // Foreign Languages at School. 2000. Issue No. 1. P. 16-23
- [7] N.I. Gez et al. Methods of Teaching a Foreign Language in Secondary School / Moscow: High School, 1982. P. 90