

Communicative Reading: Modification of Foreign Language Teaching for Sustainable Development of Education

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses a variant of transformation of language education in Russian universities. To make graduates more competitive on the labour market, it is necessary to follow the principles of competence-based approach and to develop communicative competence, which is the basic in the program of foreign language for non-linguistic students. Communication may become the foundation for the development of all language skills such as reading, writing and listening. Communicative reading is defined as an approach to teaching reading in class with the help of the basic reading strategies: predicting, visualization, making connections, summarization, questioning, inferring, vocabulary expansion and contextualization. A set of exercises has been developed and tested in groups of non-linguistic students. Approbation proved them to be motivational and productive in terms of foreign language communicative competence development. This original approach to teaching reading corresponds to the ideas of education for sustainable development.

Keywords: Higher education, Foreign language teaching, Education for sustainable development, Reading strategies, Reading skills development, Competence-based approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation, sustainable development, integration, intercultural communication and global competition are some of the concepts that describe modern reality. These processes affect various spheres of life including education. Modification of education reveals itself in the introduction of competence-based approach, activity-based teaching, student-centered approaches and other trends that stimulate students' involvement in learning. We agree that "a new competence-based model of higher education is connected with the shift of educational paradigms towards the person-centered and practical components and the increase of developmental and creative nature of education" [1].

Foreign languages (further referred to as FL), particularly English, have been in the core of all educational programs in Russia. However, approaches to FL teaching are constantly changing to meet the necessary requirements. Today a competence-based approach aims at development of the skills that the graduates will need in their professional activities.

When teaching foreign languages, special attention is paid to the development of communicative competence. "Formation of communicative competence is possible with the help of interaction that allows students communicate with other members of learning process in the forms of group discussion and problem solving" [2].

The goal of this research is to reinvent the methodology of teaching such aspect as reading to students of non-linguistic university. To reach the goal we provide an overview of reading strategies, discuss the traditional approach to reading in class, analyze the textbook from the point of view of its reading methodology and describe the original communicative approach to teaching reading.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is conducted according to the traditions of pedagogy. It contains both theoretical background of the problem and its practical solution.

1.1. Research Methods

This research is based on the general scientific methods, such as analysis of the modern approaches to education, development of reading comprehension in particular; description of reading strategies; analysis of the textbook from the point of view of the exercises used to develop reading skills; interpretation of the results obtained. Empirical research methods are pedagogical observation, development of a linguodidactic model of communicative reading, continuous sampling to collect the tasks used in English language textbooks to develop reading skills and comparison of results.

1.2. Research Materials

Communicative approach to FL teaching has dominated in pedagogy for the last several decades. This approach is pragmatic, as it makes communication the goal of learning rather than the language itself. Popularity of communicative approach in FL teaching has resulted in the variety of definitions. It is possible to identify two interpretations of the essence of communicative approach: 1) communicative language teaching is based on the interaction and language units (forms of words) are not taught separately. In other words, analysis of grammatical and lexical structures is not provided, they are mastered as patterns [3]; 2) communicative exercises are in the basis of teaching, but they are combined with explanation of grammar phenomena that are used in communication. Such interpretation may be called form-focused communicative instruction [4,5]; in the Russian pedagogy it is referred to as communicative-cognitive approach [6]. This approach is especially relevant when a foreign language is being learnt outside the language environment and many peculiarities of it (sociocultural and grammar phenomena) are easier to comprehend on the basis of knowledge. This is exactly the case of Russian higher education.

According to the Federal state educational standard of higher education, the communicative competence is the main one and it must be developed in FL programs in all university curricula. It should be borne in mind that the primary goals of FL teaching are development of oral and written communication for interpersonal and intercultural interaction, formation of the ability to work in a team being tolerant to social, ethnic, religious and cultural differences, and stimulation of self-organization and self-education. These are the competences that are included in the English language program for students of the Ural State University of Economics (Departments of Management and Information Technologies). In this research we develop an original approach to teaching non-linguistic students reading comprehension. The set of exercises has been tested in groups of students

majoring in Management and Information Technologies of the Ural State University of Economics (Yekaterinburg, Russia).

On the one hand, “reading is an act of communication between the author of the text and the readers. Comprehension of a text implies identity of conclusions made by the reader (who is the addressee of the information) with the intention of the author (who is the addresser of the message)” [7]. Such communication is not verbalized, it exists in the form of thoughts and ideas. On the other hand, reading may be treated as a combination of cognitive (thinking) and communicative (speaking) activities, when students express their ideas on the text being read. In this case, communication becomes verbal. One of the main principles of communicative approach is that all language skills (reading writing, speaking and listening) should be developed simultaneously and in coordination with each other. So, it is possible to introduce such concepts as communicative reading, communicative writing and communicative listening.

Communicative reading is the process of work with a text in class aimed at information acquisition and its interpretation, analysis and discussion orally and in writing. Communicative reading in class can be divided into three stages: before-reading, while-reading and after-reading, each having its own exercises. Such a division is rather typical for reading classes and it helps to make a lesson more structured. Each stage contains exercises that present reading strategies. “Communicative reading strategies are an instructional technique that treats reading as an integrated language process, rather than a series of skills to be mastered. The strategies facilitate the integration of processes involved in constructing meaning from written language” [8].

Reading strategies that are often discussed in scientific literature include: predicting (ideas on the content of the text before reading it), making connections (combination of the information from the text and personal experiences), visualizing (use of pictures, graphs, schemes, etc. before or after reading to affect the emotional sphere and to help better comprehension and memorization), inferring (reading between the lines), questioning (asking and answering questions about the text), and summarizing (eliciting main ideas of the text) [9]. In this research three more strategies have been added: vocabulary expansion (isolation of new words and collocations from the text and their memorization), contextualization (use of new vocabulary in the meaningful context) and reading for specific information (scanning of the text to find the necessary details). These strategies allow for more student interaction, which increases student interest and improves their understanding of the text [10]. The importance of reading strategies has been discussed by many researchers [11-13] and it is believed that

Table 1. Reading exercises from the textbook for the first-year students

Stage	Task	Reading strategy
Before-reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predict which of the following the text might be about. 	Predicting
While-reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scan the text and tell what job Jo-Ann Saunders does. Scan the text and say how many people are mentioned in the text. Who are they? Scan the text and find the following... 	Reading for specific information
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The text is divided into six paragraphs. Read the text and think of an appropriate heading to each paragraph. 	Making connections
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the text again. Find expressions with the verb <i>to take</i>. Read the text again and find verbs and expressions to say that you like something. 	Vocabulary expansion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the Education timeline and use the correct form of the verbs in brackets. 	Grammar skills building
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the descriptions of people and number the pictures. 	Vizualizing
After-reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the text and answer the following questions Read the text. Answer the questions choosing a, b, c or d. Read the text again and decide if these sentences are true or false. Correct false sentences. 	Questioning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the text and make a project: Ideal School 	Making connections

“without a solid foundation of reading strategies the students will struggle throughout their academic and adult life” [14].

In the next paragraphs we analyzed reading assignments in the English language textbook and present our ideas on how to implement communicative reading in university FL classes. The tasks from the English language textbook that is used in the Ural State University of Economics are shown in Table 1. They are correlated with the reading strategy. It is obvious that some reading strategies are underrepresented.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to work out a method of communicative classroom reading we analyzed reading exercises that are included in the textbook of English used in the Ural State University of Economics for the first year students (E.N. Makarova, I.V. Pervukhina English. Part 1). The textbook has ten units (About myself, Everyday life, Making arrangements, Appearance and Character, etc.). Each unit contains various exercises to develop all language skills. As far as reading is concerned, the textbook presents a number of exercises, however, they seem to be rather standard and similar in all units. There are numerous examples of reading for specific information strategy, it is present in almost all units, while predicting, visualizing and making connection are found only once each. Besides, such strategies as summarization and inferring are not used at all.

We suggest ideas to make reading more communicative. Two sets of exercises are provided, the first group is called “typical exercises” which means they are often used in FL textbooks, the second group is referred to as “alternative exercises” which means that they are less frequent in textbooks, but they have high potential for creativity development and promotion of motivation.

1) Before-reading exercises include prediction of the content and the use of background knowledge of students. Traditionally this stage is focused on vocabulary practice (collocations and grammatical structures from the text). Communicative tasks include exchange of opinions on the topic, answering questions, introducing hypothesis, etc.

Typical exercises:

- ✓ Work in pairs and exchange information on the topic presented in the title of the text (Making connections strategy);
- ✓ Do the quiz – a general knowledge quiz connected with the content of the text (Making connections strategy);
- ✓ Look at the picture and predict – students give their ideas on the text based on the pictures (Vizualization and Predicting strategies);
- ✓ Read the first paragraph and find out the main idea of the text (Summarizing strategy);

These exercises motivate students to talk and express their opinion; they are often used in the FL textbooks published by Oxford and Cambridge Publishing houses (such as New Headway, New Cutting Edge, Inside Out and others).

Alternative exercises:

- Internet Inquiry. Students are asked to search for additional information in the net and then exchange the facts in group (it is advisable to give a list of resources to make the search faster). It combines Questioning strategy and Making connections strategy;
- Picture this! Students are given the title of the text they are going to read and are asked to draw a picture to illustrate the possible content of the text. They also write five associations with it. The task is based on the ideas of multimodal learning that activates all senses

– visual, auditory and kinesthetic. It combines Visualization and Predicting strategies;

- Brainstorming. We suggest choosing a catching title of a text and predict the content. All the ideas are written on the whiteboard and after reading students get back to them and discuss. Predicting strategy dominates here.

- Browse the Web. Find a room to rent in London on the website sparerroom.co.uk. Students work in pairs, each pair is given a card with the criteria for the search, such as price, location, period, neighbors, etc. (Making connections strategy).

Such exercises allow for the development of creativity and they affect both cognitive sphere and emotional sphere.

2) While-reading stage includes the tasks that combine reading and some other activity.

Typical exercises:

- ✓ Fill in the gaps with one of the words from the text (Vocabulary expansion strategy);
- ✓ Give a heading to each paragraph (Summarizing strategy);
- ✓ Agree or disagree with the statement (Making connections strategy).

Alternative exercises:

- Interrupted reading. Students work in pairs, they read the text and ask each other questions at any time. This exercise imitates the real life, when we may be interrupted at any moment and we need to answer or do what is needed. Questioning strategy.

- Think aloud. While reading any student may express their opinion on the text at any time. They say it aloud and other students are encouraged to respond (agree or disagree). Inferring and Making connections strategies.

- Adjective-ities. Students find all adjectives in the text while reading (actually it may any other part of speech or word form) and make their own sentences, a connected story or rhymes with the new adjectives. Vocabulary expansion and Contextualizing strategies.

- Puzzle reading. It is a team activity. The text is cut into several parts (according to the number of students in a team). The team also receives a list of questions that they need to answer. Each student gets one piece of the text, i.e. only part of information can be elicited from it. Students are not allowed to show their pieces of text to the other team members. Making connections, Inferring and Questioning strategies.

3) After-reading stage contains tasks to discuss, analyze and interpret the information from the text. Its goal is to promote communication, the tasks may be done orally (speaking) or in writing. The majority of exercises on this stage are purely communicative.

Typical exercises:

- ✓ Answer the questions (Questioning strategy);

- ✓ Express your point of view (Making connections, Inferring strategies);

- ✓ Make a dialogue (Summarizing, Questioning strategies);

- ✓ Make a project and present it in class (Visualizing, Inferring, Making connections strategies).

Alternative exercises:

- Business card book. Students write the answer to the question or express their view on the text on a small piece of paper (the size of a business card). Such a limited space stimulates to write precisely to the point, give a short and clear answer. Inferring, Summarizing strategies;

- P.S. This exercise is especially suitable when reading a piece of a novel or a story. Students are supposed to describe their variants of the plot development and the end of the story. It is also possible to ask students write their response (or message) to the text author, ask questions that arouse while reading in class or give the characters advice. Inferring, Making connections strategies.

- Interrogation. It is a communicative exercise when one of the students gets the role of the text character and answers the questions from the group on the basis of the information from the text. The answers should be detailed, it is advisable to stimulate students use new vocabulary from the text. Summarizing, Questioning, Inferring strategies.

All these exercises have been used in teaching non-linguistic students English. The basis for the exercises were text from the textbook mentioned above, in other words the content of the lessons corresponds to the program approved by the university. After approbation we received the following responses from the students: reading became more meaningful; reading between the lines helped to promote analytical skills; speaking tasks helped to expand active vocabulary; from a boring task reading turned into an adventure. So, it is obvious that communicative reading techniques are more stimulating and they are a good tool to develop the necessary competences.

4. CONCLUSIONS

FL teaching at university takes place in groups of students with different learning styles (some of them are visual and prefer to work with pictures, schemes and printed texts, the others are auditory learners and like to listen, some students are kinesthetic, they need to feel what they learn and some students are discrete which means they need to find logic in all activities), preferences (some students are individualistic, the others like teamwork), ways of thinking (logical, abstract or creative) and levels of the foreign language. Textbooks

are focused on the average student, they often take into account only the level of the language (beginner, intermediate, upper-intermediate, etc.). It means that the teacher is responsible for the adaptation of the textbook material for the students in order to make the learning motivating, useful and productive for all of them. Didactic teaching aids, such as different forms of exercises, visual and audio aids, elements of multimodal approach to teaching help to develop the necessary competences in students, thus making them competitive on the labor market. Communicative reading is a method to teach a foreign language that arouses students' interest to the subject and makes learning student-centered. The list of exercises we describe in this paper may be continued, other reading strategies might be added. We attempted to describe the general idea of communicative reading and to explain that it is important and possible to make FL classes in university more communicative with any textbook used as the basis. Note that the research does not attempt to criticize the textbook, it emphasizes the idea of adaptation of learning aids to the needs of particular students.

So, higher education today should foster personal development of every student and turn from a general and unified mode to a more flexible and up-to-date model.

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