

The Strategy of a Teacher of Russian as a Foreign Language in Integrated Content and Language Teaching at University

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Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning, Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language, Professionally-Oriented Learning, Language for Professional Purposes.

Abstract: This article deals with the problem of organizing the process of integrated content and language learning in the conditions of a modern Russian university. The purpose of the research is to describe the experience of intensification and optimization of the learning process in the language of the specialty with foreign students based on the strategy of combining popular scientific texts with scientific-educational and scientific texts proper. To confirm the hypothesis that a popular scientific text, due to its linguistic and semantic accessibility, should facilitate the process of studying academic scientific texts and maintain students' interest in the chosen specialty throughout the entire period of study at the university, the authors tested experimental training with foreign students of junior and senior courses receiving the specialty "Foreign Regional Studies: The Russian Federation" at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. The results of the experiment and the survey of foreign students at the end of the academic semester showed the need to include popular science texts in the corpus of educational materials intended for use in the language classes of the specialty. In addition, the paper defines the goals that form the strategy of a teacher teaching students Russian (or more broadly, another foreign language) as a means of communication in the professional sphere.

1 INTRODUCTION

The main vectors of the development of the modern world are the processes of globalization and digitalization, which are inextricably linked and interdependent and are a natural result of scientific and technological progress. (Chumakov, 2021). The development of global communications contributes to the rapid dissemination of scientific information around the world. Modern scientific knowledge has become an imperative of our time. In this regard, mastering the language of science is a need not only for narrow specialists in any field of science or technology, but also for the whole society as a whole, which finds itself in conditions of technogenic existence. The changed priorities of modern society have become a guideline for the formation of new educational goals and objectives at all levels of the modern education system around the world.

Currently, the system of higher professional education faces the task of training highly qualified specialists of a new generation who possess not only subject knowledge in their specialty, but also are able to communicate professionally in a foreign language

in a foreign language environment.

In the context of professionalization of language education, higher school teachers face a number of issues that require rethinking the accumulated experience and searching for new organizational and methodological solutions in teaching foreign languages.

This article discusses the problem of organizing the process of content and language integrated learning in the conditions of a modern Russian university on the example of Russian as a foreign language. The purpose of this research is to describe the experience of intensification and optimization of the learning process in the language of the specialty based on the strategy of combining popular science texts with scientific-educational and scientific texts proper.

The object of the research is the texts of the popular scientific sub-style of speech used in teaching Russian as a foreign language to students studying in the specialty "Foreign Regional studies: The Russian Federation".

The subject of the research is the strategy of using popular science, educational-scientific and scientific

texts proper in Russian language classes for special purposes in junior and senior courses.

When teaching foreign students the language of the specialty, the unit of study traditionally acts as an educational-scientific (and scientific text proper in senior courses), which is a linguistic model for studying the lexical and grammatical features of the language of the scientific style of speech, as well as the logical and compositional structure of the scientific text as such. The methodological difficulty of a teacher of Russian as a foreign language (or any other foreign language) consists primarily in the selection of texts for teaching, which should be suitable not only for teaching the language itself, but also for forming a fragment of the scientific picture of the world associated with the chosen specialty of students.

The long-term practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language in Russian universities indicates that foreign students of junior and senior courses (to a greater or lesser extent) in the learning process experience significant difficulties in understanding and comprehending scientific-educational and scientific texts proper in their specialty. Oral and written forms of control of knowledge, skills and abilities of foreign students show that the understanding of the read text is superficial, which is manifested in the lack of depth and completeness of perception of the content of the text, as well as the idea of its structural and semantic organization. Solving these problems is the primary task of a teacher engaged in teaching the language of the specialty.

The teaching of Russian as a foreign language (RFL), which began to be implemented in Soviet universities in the early 50s of the 20th century and then continued in the Russian higher education system, has always been professionally oriented, since the Russian language is for foreign students receiving higher education in Russia, primarily a means and tool for mastering professional knowledge in an academic environment (Mitrofanova, 1976; Motina, 1988; Popova, 2021). Teaching the language of the specialty in the conditions of a Russian university is based on the principle of interdisciplinary coordination, which includes close interaction between the teacher of the RFL and teachers of special disciplines. English as a foreign language training programs also include the development of communication skills for special purposes (ESP) (Hans, 2015; Hortas; Ellis, 2015). However, in the practice of teaching English as a second language (ESL), English for Academic purposes (EAP) has also been singled out recently

(Wette). This division has arisen due to the fact that teaching English for special purposes is focused mainly on those who have relevant professional knowledge, skills and abilities and are learning the language for further activities in the specialty (Nhlanhla Mpfu, 2021).

In 1994, D. Marsh introduced the term "content and language integrated learning" (CLIL) to denote the educational process in which disciplines or their individual sections are taught to students in a foreign language (Marsh, 2010). Students simultaneously study a foreign language and receive professional education in it. With such an organization of training, students find themselves in a bilingual educational environment, that is, they master their future specialty simultaneously in their native and foreign languages.

Due to the fact that the Russian language in the conditions of teaching in a Russian university is not only a tool of cognition (language of learning) and a means of communication (language for learning), but also a subject of study (language through learning), that is, corresponds to the triad of integrated foreign language teaching (Coyle, 2010), the term "content and language integrated learning" (CLIL) corresponds to the goals and objectives of the RFL in the Russian higher education system. It is worth noting that in the Soviet-Russian linguo-methodological literature devoted to the problems of teaching Russian as a foreign language for foreign specialists mainly uses such terms as "Specialty language", "Language for special purposes", "Professionally-oriented teaching of Russian as a foreign language", "Scientific style of speech" (Kutuzova, 2008; Almazova, 2017).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The authors of the article hypothesize that the intensification and optimization of subject-language integrated learning in the language classes of the specialty is carried out by introducing into the corpus of educational materials not only scientific-educational and scientific texts proper, which are traditionally the basis of teaching, but also popular scientific texts. Popular science texts, due to the fact that they contain features of scientific and journalistic styles of speech, are used as "transitional" to the development of professionally oriented texts related to the profile of students' education and having pronounced features of the scientific style of speech. If scientific-educational and scientific texts proper are to a greater extent the basis for the formation of language competence, then popular science texts, in

addition to this function, are designed to support foreign students' interest in the chosen specialty, as well as to perform developmental and educational functions.

The following provisions served as a justification for the above hypothesis.

Popular science texts have both signs that bring them closer to the scientific texts proper, and specific signs that distinguish them from the latter. These two types of texts are united by a common communicative goal – the communication of scientific information. However, the scientific texts proper are aimed at qualified specialists, and popular science texts are addressed to the general public who do not have special knowledge in this field. It is this feature that makes these texts interesting and understandable for students who are starting to receive their future specialty.

In comparison with the scientific texts proper written in strict scientific language and meeting scientific standards, popular science texts are a linguistically simplified version of the scientific text. This circumstance makes texts of this type the optimal unit of instruction in the language classes of the specialty. Firstly, students receive interesting scientific information in an understandable form, which undoubtedly increases their educational motivation not only for classes in the language of the specialty, but also for specialized subjects. Information about scientific facts, phenomena, achievements in popular science texts is reported with elements of entertainment and imagery. In such texts there are no scientific generalizations and classifications, on the contrary, they contain concrete examples (facts, events, phenomena, processes), figurative comparisons, metaphors, analogies are used. The new and difficult is explained through comparison with objects and phenomena that are understandable and familiar to an ordinary (specially unprepared) person. In addition, the use of digital data and special terms in popular scientific texts is minimal, which also makes the text easy to understand in terms of content and language. Secondly, such texts perform the function of "transitional" and prepare students (especially junior courses) who do not have a sufficient stock of scientific and linguistic knowledge to perceive linguistically complex scientific texts proper, the share of which increases in the language classes of the specialty in senior courses. On the basis of popular science texts, it is much easier to master the general scientific vocabulary, which abounds in popular science texts, and which forms the basis of scientific speech. Syntactic constructions are also more

simplified here, which in the future (at senior courses) facilitates the study of complex syntactic constructions in academic scientific texts. Thirdly, reading popular science texts expands the scientific horizons of students, increases their general level of culture and awareness in the field of knowledge studied.

All of the above factors served as the basis for the introduction of popular science texts into the corpus of educational materials on a par with scientific-educational and scientific texts proper intended for study in the classroom in the language of the specialty, in our case, Russian as a foreign language.

In order to confirm this hypothesis, an experimental training of foreign students of 1-4 courses receiving the specialty "Foreign Regional studies: The Russian Federation" at the Higher School of International Relations of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University was conducted during one semester in classes on Russian as a foreign language.

For experimental training, we, together with teachers in specialized disciplines, selected popular science texts that met the following requirements.

1. Availability. Popular science texts should be understandable not only in terms of language, but also in terms of content. In this situation, it is necessary to take into account the level of language and general training of a specific group of students in this subject (field of knowledge), which would allow them to successfully master new material. The texts available in terms of language and content contribute to the creation and maintenance of motivation among students while reading texts.
2. Subject matter. The subject matter of the texts should be determined primarily by the curriculum provided by the training profile. At the same time, various problems can be discussed within the same topic.
3. Cognitive value of texts. Texts should contain scientific information that would arouse interest and satisfy the cognitive needs of students. It is desirable that popular science texts be used in addition to those topics that are studied in specialized disciplines and contain new information for students.
4. Visualization of texts. For a better understanding of what has been read, it is necessary to choose texts that have illustrations or other means of visualizing the content.
5. The ratio of the main and secondary information in the text (Akhmerova, 2015). Texts should be

suitable for training various types of reading (studying, introductory, viewing, searching) (Folomkina, 2005), written tasks, as well as speaking tasks.

6. Authenticity. The degree of authenticity of texts is determined by the level of language training of students (Akhmerova, 2015). So, for junior students, texts adapted to a greater extent will be offered for reading, and for senior students - texts with elements of adaptation or original texts.

It is important to note that all of the above requirements for popular science texts intended for use in the educational process in the language of the specialty should solve the problems of education, development and upbringing of the personality of students.

The introduction of popular science texts into the educational process was carried out in the following percentage ratio in relation to the educational-scientific and scientific texts proper provided for by the semester curriculum: in the first year - 30%, in the second year - 20%, in the third year - 10%, in the fourth year - 5%.

The work with popular science texts was aimed at achieving training, developmental and educational goals. For the realization of training goals, tasks were used to form skills and abilities in various types of speech activity (reading, speaking, listening, writing), as well as tasks related to the study of structural-semantic and lexical-grammatical features of these texts. In addition, tasks were used to transform popular scientific texts into educational-scientific (or scientific proper), taking into account the lexical, morphological and syntactic features of each sub-style.

Developmental goals were achieved as a result of completing tasks aimed at developing the skills to analyze, compare, summarize information related to the content plan and the plan of expression of popular science texts. This also included tasks for the creation of mental maps as an effective form of representation of the structural and semantic organization of the text.

The realization of educational goals is associated with increasing the level of scientific culture of students, their awareness in the studied field of knowledge, expanding the scientific picture of the world as a whole. To achieve these goals, communicative tasks were used (critical discussion of what was read, identification of known and new information, determination of the value of research for society and humanity, etc.).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the experimental training we have obtained the following results:

- 1) experimental groups of foreign students in junior and senior courses who studied the language of the specialty both on the basis of scientific-educational and scientific texts, and on the basis of popular scientific texts, showed greater interest and speech activity in the classroom, as a result of which they made significant progress in learning Russian than the control groups, in particular which used only traditional texts of scientific-educational and proper scientific style of speech when teaching the language of the specialty;
- 2) students of senior courses, during the experimental training, were able to successfully train various forms of debatable speech communication in the language of the specialty on the basis of the accumulated knowledge base in specialized disciplines and on the material of popular science texts. The language tools necessary for conducting a discussion in the educational and professional sphere, after working out in classes with a Russian teacher, were further improved by students in classes on the profile of training with subject teachers. Success in learning the language of the specialty has increased the motivation and academic performance of students in classes in specialized disciplines.
- 3) the texts of popular science orientation in the language classes of the specialty in combination with scientific-educational and scientific texts proper allowed the teacher to more successfully achieve not only training, but also developmental and educational goals.
- 4) a survey of foreign students of junior and senior courses at the end of the academic semester showed that 95% of students who took part in experimental training noted the need to include popular science texts in the curricula for their use in the language classes of the specialty.

Our research has allowed us to obtain results that allow teachers of Russian as a foreign language (as well as teachers of other foreign languages) to develop their own strategy for the foreign language training of future specialists in higher professional education. As the results of our research show, the factors influencing the effectiveness of language classes in the specialty include not only correctly selected and processed texts of various sub-styles of scientific speech, their quantity, quality, but also the

competent methodology of the teacher's work with them. In addition, it is important to note that "the activity of students in the foreign language environment of the university depends on the activity of the teacher" (Smelkova, 2021). Here we mean the active interaction of teachers in the language of the specialty with teachers in specialized disciplines, without whose help it is impossible to create a corpus of professionally-oriented educational texts that are optimal in terms of language and compliance with the subject content of specialized disciplines. It is also a prerequisite for a language teacher to possess certain knowledge in the field of the specialty studied by students. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the presence of interdisciplinary connections and the creation of a single language space will provide students with a comfortable educational environment for obtaining a specialty in a foreign language. We believe that the results we have obtained will complement a number of scientific studies devoted to the professionalization of the content of foreign language training of students in higher educational institutions.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the conducted research, the following conclusions can be drawn that determine the strategy of a teacher of Russian as a foreign language (or any other foreign language) in the language classes of the specialty:

1. In professionally oriented teaching of Russian as a foreign language, it is advisable to use popular science texts in the classroom that correspond to a certain learning profile. Such texts provide a gradual transition to the study of scientific and educational and scientific texts proper, in which the lexical and grammatical features of the scientific style of speech are fully represented. In addition, the use of popular science texts significantly increases the motivation of students to study, and also gives an opportunity to a language teacher who does not have deep knowledge of specialized disciplines to teach students various forms of debatable speech communication in a foreign language, which can be further improved in classes with subject teachers and acquire an even greater professional form. At the same time, in junior courses, such texts should occupy a dominant role and tend to decrease in senior courses.

2. By applying texts of popular science genre in the language of the specialty, teachers of Russian as a foreign language (or any other foreign language) achieve training, developmental and educational

goals. At the same time, training goals include tasks for the formation and improvement of skills and abilities in various types of speech activity based on popular science texts (reading, speaking, listening, writing), as well as familiarity with their structural, semantic and linguistic features. Developing goals are realized as a result of completing tasks aimed at the ability to think logically, analyze, compare, generalize, draw conclusions based on popular science texts corresponding to the profile of students' education. Educational goals are achieved by increasing the level of scientific culture of students and their awareness in the studied field of knowledge.

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