Innovative Tendencies in the Profession Development of Foreign Language Teachers in Russia

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Abstract. The article represents the peculiarities of foreign language teachers’ professional development regarding new educational standards. The authors offer methodological justification for an advanced professional educational program which is based on using communicative situations as the core of mastering professional communicative competence. In the view of the current changes in Russian system of education communicative and situational orientation of teaching seems to be the most appropriate to satisfy the need of highly qualified foreign language school and colleges teachers and optimize the process of their advanced education.

Introduction

The development of modern language education in Russia is determined by a political, economic and socio-cultural process, the globalizing character of which promotes using English as the language of world communication, expanding the role and the functions of this subject in the professional education programs. The intensification of international cooperation, a wide range of opportunities for communication with specialists of other cultures, and the change of the language status, provoked revision of old norms of teacher education and accentuation of new aspects of it. According to the conditions of modern society, along with the skills to solve professional problems, the priority is teachers’ ability to adapt to a multicultural society for exchanging new educational techniques and methods of teaching English by means of multimedia technology. In the course of implementing Russian Federal Educational Standards of New Generation, new global trends of language education, there is a critical need in optimization of the process of training and retraining secondary school and college teachers, allowing them to advance their professional competence all life long, due to the demand for teachers as representatives of an intercultural dialogue and negotiators of intercultural communication.

The problem is that teaching models, used in many colleges and schools, do not take into account the need for modernization of a language training system, failing to prepare students for communication with representatives of other cultures. Teaching a foreign language mainly comes to mastering lexical and grammatical structures of a language and is based on the situations covering school subject area but is not aimed at the development of students’ communicative skills. It is impossible truly master the language without mastering the cultural contexts in which the language occurs, while real-life situations and communication in socio-cultural contexts should be emphasized. Students’ motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics. As the real life situations change from day to day, teachers should keep situations fresh and real. A foreign language teacher allows students to become conscious of their own experience of learning a language, master critical thinking on their own, have their own opinion and give arguments, as the efficiency of learning depends on the motivation and active participation in class. Essentially, reflecting the outgoing changes in the world and language
education in particular, this research attempts to identify communicatively-situational education, which is based on the principals of a communicative approach, as the core part of the additional professional program of advanced education for foreign language teachers.

The targets students of this program are language teachers, who attend the course for professional development in the Academy of Advanced Education. The majority of teachers have a qualification of language teacher and the working experience in teaching language specialized state schools - gymnasiums or lyceums - for more than 8 years. They are mostly representatives of the middle-class, monolingual females who often come from small towns or suburbs with very limited intercultural experiences. The necessity to prepare and raise student scores on annual standardized tests - Unified State Exam makes many of these teachers work under stressful conditions. They are non-native English teachers and usually feel unsafe using the language they have to teach. They are to attend courses every day during 2 weeks and the course was specially designed for this particular group in accord with their needs and expectations.

The experience in working with language teachers indicates that the majority of the teachers are eager to check their level of proficiency in languages with the help of the test which is similar to the Unified State Exam (which their students of 9th and 11th forms are to take every year). Also, teachers have to participate in speaking activities to prove their level of English as well as the level of their professional development as the topic for discussion connected with the system of education and its problem in Russia. So, interpersonal intelligence which involves showing respect to others and knowing how to understand and interact successfully with peers” has to be emphasized [1]. In terms of language learning acquisition the research is carried out with the help of cognitive approach as well as competence one. Moreover, it is based on learner-center and situational approaches due to the tendencies in the field of training and retraining system in Russia.

Body of the Text

Taking into consideration that Russia is in need of specialists who are able to teach a language as a means of intercultural communication more efficiently, developing professional competence in foreign language teachers means constant personal and professional development. To become highly qualified in line with standards of new generation, a teacher needs to advance important communicative skills, to be aware of present-day state laws and regulations in education, Russian Federal Standards, new educational programs, relevant teaching techniques and activities, ways of improving language teaching.

Considering the above, achieving a sufficient level of professional competence of a foreign language teacher, developing his ability to use a foreign language in socio-cultural communicative situations, and developing the personality of a teacher in the intercultural context are considered foreground tasks of modernizing of the language education system and creating an additional professional program of advanced education. The given program is aimed not only at fulfilling the society demand but also at creating a new model of a foreign language teacher. It implies understanding the key ideas and principles of the Russian Federal State Educational Standards, the goals of a foreign language teacher, mastering educational performance in compliance with the modern state order.

An essential part of professional competence of a foreign language teacher is foreign language communicative competence which is more approximate to real everyday situations of the intercultural dialogue, and includes the following consecutive components [2, 3]:

- **Linguistic component** refers to lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills which provide a meaningful communication in everyday and professional situations.
- **Socio-cultural component** is concerned with the communication between representatives of different cultures based on the awareness of social norms and traditions of the country.
- **Discourse component** implies understanding how utterances form a meaningful whole and include the skills to structure the information in abstracting, annotations, thesis, reports, biographies, letters, etc.
• **Strategic component** relates to the skills to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning in a given context, using lexical and grammatical structures relevant to basic official and unofficial communicative situations.

• **Pragmatic component** means a functional use of a language, development of skills to correlate style and registers of communication in a situational context.

Development of communicative competence in foreign language teachers promotes also development of **methodological competence**, referring to skills to study a foreign language consciously, constructively and purposefully [4]. Therefore, communicative competence of a foreign language teacher is both a complex of linguistic, discourse, socio-cultural and pragmatic knowledge and skills, providing proper communication in the context of intercultural situations, and professionally significant communicative skills, enabling a teacher to teach a foreign language as a means of intercultural communication more efficiently.

The integrate development of the components of communicative competence promotes achieving the following goals:

- to develop the skills of written and oral communication with account of socio-cultural differences of the multicultural world;
- to form a willingness to solve any problem both from the academic and professional point of view. Solving a problem is connected with its verbal shaping, defining its main point, finding all possible ways of solving problems. Solving a problem is based on knowledge, skills from different subject areas according to a communicative situation;
- to develop the intention to study during the whole life, refreshing the gained knowledge and improving communicative skills adapting to the existing changes, in case of need to get additional education. This quality provides person’s mobility in the society and can become his guarantee of success and social protection. The received language education prepares a person for such changes and satisfaction of the need of further communicative skills development.

In this connection we claim that language teaching based on communicative situations acquires special importance as it promotes developing and advancing professional communicative skills of a teacher as a specialist. Development of foreign language communicative competence is based on consecutive study of a complex of communicative situations and their external features (the social status of a person, his role as a party of communication, the nature and the object of communication, and the chronotopos of the situation, the value index) correlating with personal, social and educational-professional domains, which are a linguadidactic basis of practical language learning:

- **the personal domain**, in which a person is regarded as an individual, accentuates home life with family and friends, and engages in individual practices such as reading for pleasure, keeping a personal diary, pursuing a special interest or hobby, etc.;
- **the social domain**, in which a person is regarded as a member of the public, or of some organisation, and is engaged in transactions of various kinds for a variety of purposes;
- **the professional domain**, in which a person is regarded as a specialist (a teacher) and is engaged in his or her job or profession;
- **the educational domain**, in which a person is regarded as a student or a pupil and is engaged in organised learning, within an educational institution.

It should be noted that for foreign language teachers, the professional and educational domains coincide.

Situational features determine the type of the situation used in class. In line with the additional professional program of advanced education three main classifications of situations are of special interest for foreign language teachers. According to E. Passov, there are the following types of situations [5]:

- **Social situations** are aimed at defining professional characteristics of a person in compliance with his social status.
- **Role-playing situations** define the specific character of teachers’ work and suggest playing such roles as a student-a teacher, a student - a student and so on.
- **Cooperative situations** suggest participating in different types of activities such as conferences, contests, symposia.
- **The situations of professional improvement** include the elements of self-education and professional training.
- **The situations of moral interaction** are used as a means of showing mental and ethical aspects of interpersonal relations as not abstract entities but human beings, endowed with personal character, taking part in communication.

According to the types of communication, L. Pasechnaya distinguishes the following types of communicative situations [6]:
- **The situations of social communication** serve as a background for reports and speeches.
- **The situations of personal communication** motivate to exchange opinions, to share impressions and information with each other.
- **Content-based situations** encourage planning cooperative work, to coordinate actions while carrying them out, and to discuss the results.

Vaisburd M. gives the classification of communicative situations according to speech forms and distinguishes the situations of *monologue, dialogue, and polylogue* forms of communication, which are differentiated by the placing of communicants and the connection (relations) between them [7].

The role of predicting a future communicative situation and forecasting future results seems to be significant, in that, without articulating future expectations it does not seem possible to conclude whether teaching/learning is successful. A comparative analysis of the results anticipated and actual, assessment of efficiency of teaching in general, the designed communicative situations in particular, and assessment of the achieved level of communicative competence will allow a teacher to trace a course of improvement.

Having analyzed the relevant levels of foreign communicative competence we can assume that it forms the basis of teachers’ professional competence on the whole and ensures obtaining the following professional skills and knowledge:
- setting up aims and goals to structure and arrange students’ work at relevant lesson stage;
- using appropriate methods and techniques to create working atmosphere in class;
- arranging students to work independently, search for necessary information and use different sources for this purpose, encourage their critical thinking;
- specifying the criteria on the basis of which students’ knowledge and skills are assessed;
- using methods and techniques to form students’ self-assessment of their study results.

The level of development of the mentioned professional skills and foreign communicative competence after finishing the program varies from satisfactory to optimum. It can be explained by such factors as the entry level of foreign communicative competence, working experience, psychological portrait and personal motivation of a teacher.

**Conclusion**

Finally, we can conclude that the problem of retraining teachers is still essential and not sufficiently researched. According to G. Yule, for most people, the experience with their second language is fundamentally different from their native language experience and it is “hardly conductive to acquisition” [8]. They usually encounter the second language during their teenage or adult years, in a few hours each week of school time. For the teachers the main approaches to the teaching English at the time they were students were the grammar-translation and audiolingual ones. The first offered vocabulary lists and sets of grammar rules to define the target language and memorize as much as possible. Obviously, “written language was more emphasized than spoken” [8]. The main difference of the audiolingual approach was that the emphasis was on the spoken language and practice which involved hours spent in a language laboratory drilling aspects of the language (Stern, 2003).

Despite a great deal of training and teaching experience, “non-native speaker teachers may be viewed as insufficient language teachers because they often lack native speaker’s linguistic
competence in the target language and culture” [9]. However, from our own professional experience and observation, we can assume that non-native speaker teachers possess some crucial “advantages over native speakers including a deeper understanding of learners' first languages and an ability to explain second language features in ways that students can understand”. So, it is essential for non-native teachers to constantly strive to reach high levels of communicative proficiency in a foreign language. The fact mentioned by S. Wallace should be taken into consideration as teachers may be at “different stages of development or improvement and have different needs and aspirations, of which a common programme of competences might meet only the most basic” [10]. Additionally, teachers of languages need special assistance with the challenging task of developing and administering proficiency tests (for example, unified state exam, which their students take while leaving the school) that teachers as well as administration of the educational department can effectively measure students’ progress. It is critical for language teachers to be aware of the Unified State Exam and have practice of preparation for the exam.

Taking into account all mentioned above, communicative-situational language education seems to be more appropriate to satisfy teachers’ need in real-life communication from the intercultural perspective of view. To build up an up-to-date model of advanced education we have to analyze the material which is useful for foreign language teachers from the professional point of view; to define the domains, in which they participate, to work out a system of communicative situations according to the levels of professional competence. The given program is designed with the aim to improve foreign language acquisition in teachers’ training and retraining institutions and satisfy colleges and schools’ need of teachers as participants of intercultural communication.

References