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СТУДЕНЧЕСКИЕ КОНФЕРЕНЦИИ КАК ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНАЯ СРЕДА

Проанализирован потенциал конференционной деятельности как образовательной среды, способствующей развитию коммуникативной компетентности обучаемых, предусматривающей применение новых образовательных технологий, внедрение прогрессивных форм организации образовательного процесса и активных методов обучения, интеграцию образования, науки и инновационной деятельности. Особое внимание уделено культурной специфике и дискурсивным характеристикам общения в рамках студенческих научных конференций, отличающим его от других видов академического общения.

Ключевые слова: конференционная деятельность, образовательная среда, академический дискурс, общение, культурные особенности, коммуникативные стратегии, проект, иностранный язык

Student conferences open a great potential for the implementation of innovative programs that suggest the use of both proven and new educational technologies, the introduction to advanced forms of organization of the educational process and active learning methods, and integration of education, research and innovation on the way to professional competencies formation – all of which being aimed at ensuring the graduates' competitiveness in the labor market.

The conference activities neither consume in-class hours, nor are spelt out in the curriculum, - however, they occupy an important place in the academic practice, being aimed at stimulating students eagerness to learn, triggering their zest for research, enhancing and developing their professional knowledge and skills, developing their ability to carry on professional polemics in accord with the rules of scientific ethics, choose precise and intelligible wording, follow the logic of the presentation, keep to the standards of scientific and professional communication practices in mono- and multicultural environment.

Our study focuses on the interactive nature of conferences on the grounds that it is precisely this factor which contributes to the development of students' communicative competence, including their ability to interact and work together with others, knowledge of psychology and ethics of institutional (academic) communication, the adequate perception of the other person (empathy) as a colleague, a business partner.

Besides, providing the conditions for socializing with their peers at the academic level and giving young people a chance to participate in the academic argument, to assess and demonstrate their abilities as researchers, this activity is gaining popularity with students.

As a practical embodiment of the design methodology of teaching foreign languages, students' conferences at the Humanities Institute within the Polytechnic University have their own specifics, and aim to ream out the use of a foreign language and increase students' motivation to study it. Foreign Languages at students' conferences stand in he capacity both of a subject of research, and of an instrument of the verbal intercourse between all participants (the working language of the conference). Students specializing in Engineering, Programming, Economics and other non-linguistic spheres, search for and refer to foreign information resources in specialized publications. They have to know foreign languages to survey the latest achievements in the relevant spheres, and get ready for their reports, presentations and research articles in various special fields of the Polytechnic. Linguists and Humanities students, complementary to this, pursue special research goals in their professional fields - methods of teaching foreign languages, the theory of speech and language, linguistics and intercultural communication theory, theory and practice of translation, social sciences and culture. The profiles of discussion are highlighted in the conference program (division into domain-specific sections).

The presented reports are assessed according to the following evaluation criteria:

1. relevance and topicality of the object of research;

2. practicability and possibility of application of the project ideas into practice and their scientific value;

3. the presentation quality and the speaker's oratory skills;

4. proven foreign language proficiency;

5. logic, literacy and quality of abstracts.

It is necessary to provide understanding of the reports by the students' audience, and for this purpose offered may be a variety of techniques (consecutive and parallel translation, handouts, etc.).

The presented projects are qualified as team work – carried out by a collaborating team a student (students) and a teacher who acts as a scientific advisor and as a tutor in the process of selection and development of the research subject. Teachers provide personal consultations to the students who applied for the conference participation, proof-read their abstracts and articles, which is professionally interesting, though rather time and effort consuming. (Regretfully, it not included into the academic workload, hence not paid for.)

Since foreign language teaching at the Polytechnic is a component of general professional training of students, we treat a foreign language proficiency as an indispensable component of our graduates' professional competence, focusing at the communicative aspects of their professionally oriented intercourse. Assessed are efficiency of obtaining information from both national and foreign resources, adequacy of the information perception and transmission via various oral and written media, information technologies including, as well as practicing different types of relevant speech acts within the context, familiarizing with the situation of communication and linguacultural features inherent in this type of communication.

Thus, creation of favorable conditions for students' scientific conferences promotes dissemination of ideas, stimulates creativity and insight, develops communication skills, provides for the professional growth, highlighting the so-called motivation-in-training concept.

Communication within the framework of the conference activities has certain discursive characteristics that distinguish it from other kinds of academic communication. Conferences create a peculiar communicative situation, within which the intentions of the participants of the event are manifested: for a limited time period and in presence of reputable audience they are supposed to explain and prove their position, answer the questions and discuss the debatable points. Welcome are presentations and the consequent discussion in English as a working language of the conference, as well as other languages accepted if they are shared by the audience.

Since students' conference activity is defined as academic communication (as an international conference it implies communication in foreign languages), it is a milieu for the formation of the communicative competence, which is a component of discursive competence. It would be reasonable to consider this kind of academic discourse as internationally understandable and professionally focused dialogue, and approach it on the standpoint of the communicative, social, pragmatic, linguistic, cultural, cognitive-semantic analysis.

This approach to discourse interpretation is dominant for the reason that in text-producing linguacultural societies the nature of verbal communication requires not only understanding what is being said, but also how it is said and what is being done in the process of discursive interaction in the context of a dialogue of cultures.

The pragmatic value of utterances that make up the discourse may represent a variety of speech acts, depending on the context of the situation. The study of discourse in this key makes it possible to include both pragmatic and social factors into its content: types of the social context, situational roles, status and power relations, frames of reference socially important for communicants.

In addition to the socially constructed factors, important is the degree of speech influence upon the recipient, as well as how adequately the chosen language means accomplish the communication ends and obtain the results of verbal interaction. Consequently, in the framework of this approach, the interaction of the communicants, their level of knowledge and skills, intentions and incentives, as well as the actual occasion of the communication, encounter with all its linguistic and extra-linguistic characteristics are the components of the discourse analysis.

Discourse as a communicative phenomenon occupies an intermediate position between speech as activity (verbal communication) and specific verbalized entity (the text, recorded in the course of communication). Discourse as the communicative process is opposed to a text that is actualized in the conference activities through an abstract, a report, thesis of the report, presentation materials, annotations, conference proceedings notes, program, etc.

We see a conference as an inquiry-based educational technology, covering discussion of projects, innovations, designs, ideas, plans, with a view to their development or implementation. On the other hand, within the academe framework, a project is a joint creative activity of a teacher and students, aimed at solving complex professional problems and resulting in a socially significant product - all of which implies the realization of cognitive and professional preferences of students.

Priority is given to the special professional content of projects. At the same time, the professional communication includes the areas that reflect the general knowledge and skills relevant to a particular profession.

We believe that the conference activities in academic discourse support the general assertions:

1) discourse is dynamic by nature;

2) discourse is realized only in communicative situations;

3) the leading role is played by communicants, not by means of communication;

4) discourse is inextricably linked to pre-communication and post-communication stages of intercourse;

5) the result of the discursive processes is generation of a text.

At the same time, conceptualisation of "academic discourse" from the standpoint of linguistic-cum-cultural approach includes the differences in communicative behavior, verbal rules, preferences, ways of speaking accepted in a particular social, cultural or linguistic community, which is made up by the whole body of participants - students, scientists, teachers. The content of discourse in a conference communication involves presuppositions and background knowledge, which can neutralize the possible cross-cultural communication barriers.

In the context of the conference, the academic discourse becomes a professional focus and, as an object of cognitive semantic research, provides basic, typical and potential information associated with a particular concept and enclosed into certain frames. This is reflected in the content of the projects submitted by conference participants, and is subjected to discussion with the audience.

There are three generally accepted dimensions of discourse: 1) linguistic (the language proper); 2) epistemological (thinking and information transmission); 3) interactive (situation-dependent verbal communication), - all of which come out in the conference milieu, which should be taken into account in the course of pre-report consultations .

From the lingvocultural angle of vision it is relevant to define what culture the subjects of the discourse belong to and correspondingly how the cultural standards and values influence the instantation of all the discourse components.

Observable are two vectors of analysis: from cultural phenomena to their linguistic manifestation, and from actual wording and structuring to the corresponding cultural basis.

Following H.P.Grice's maxima of cooperation, we emphasize the important feature of academic speech aimed at creating the cooperative effect – accuracy, or rather exactness, of terms and precision of structural models. In other words, it will

be impossible to cooperate at the academic level of communication if the parties do not reach the consensus about the codes of professional communication, be they individual formulae or symbols or terms or verbal systems.

Being informatively condensed and void of certain stylistic ornamentations, academic discourse follows different patterns in low-context and high-context cultures. The peculiarities of the Russian linguistic culture include inferences, implicated information (implicatures), multiple deviations from the subject of discussion, abundance of allusions and backoffs – all of which combined to result in comprehensive description, or in-depth argument presentation. English, on the contrary, is perceived as linear, consecutive, enjoying optimal verbal expression of all propositions. (We follow here the data supplied by R.Kaplan [1]) As soon as cultures interact, the effect on the verbal form of communication becomes obvious.

One of the standard forms of academic discourse is essay writing. We have compared the results of essay writing technique investigation provided by M.Clyne (Anglo-speaking cultures) [2] and G.A.Yelizarova (Russian-speaking cultures) [3]. In compliance with Grice, the touchstone here is pertinence (i.e. keeping up to the point) which a quality essay is characterized by. Neither repetitions, nor deviations are recommended. All this is compatible with Clyne's linearity principle. Linguistically it is reflected in the following characteristics: texts are propositionally symmetrical, i.e. individual propositions are logically and sequentially interconnected, as much as they are relevant to the generalizing proposition; the English-language discourse disposes of the organizing markers, referring to the text structuring, the argumentation, all of which makes the text predictable; the terms are supplied with definitions and this is done in advance; all examples, references and statistics are reliable and are introduced into the discourse consecutively. [4]

Compared to the above mentioned, the English-language essays by Russian students are characterized by propositional asymmetry of the texts, with some propositions being separated from the general proposition, as much as disconnected between themselves, abundant in deviations, dilatations, completions; text parts being installed within each other, permeated with speculations on irrelevant subjects; casual character of narration, with the plan missing; lack of definitions of terms, the meaning of the latter are taken as going without saying; references are often missing.

The explanation of the differences is of the cultural nature. Of prior concern is content and form juxtaposition. Form is a priority in low-context Anglo-lingual culture, with all relevant discourse elements verbalized and unequivocal, connections between them being unambiguous. In anglolingual cultures formal aspects dominate the discourse structuring and evaluation.

In contrast to that, Russian lingua-culture is high-context, with all the consequences. Contents orientation results in asserting that information is priority, little attention paid to the reliability of the information source. This is closely connected with the distribution of responsibility between the addresser and the addressee for the text comprehension and avoidance of disruptions in discourse.

Anglo-lingual cultures are inclined to hold the addresser responsible for any possible failure, committing the addresser to produce addressee-friendly texts, while in Russian lingua-culture the addressee is recognized responsible for misunderstanding, and it is the addressee's fault or lack of intelligence/competence if the information is missed.

Individualism *vs* Collectivism parameters find numerous manifestations in academic discourse, one of such being I *vs* we attribution to investigation descriptions. From the analysis of students' research works it is evident that "I" dominates the academic discourse in Anglo-lingual cultures, while Russian lingua-culture prefers "we"-reference, which is based upon the relations of the research-work author with the epistemological aspect, as well as upon the values of responsibility and independence in different cultures. In this respect it is also possible to refer to the indication of commitment, complicacy, indifference, modesty, self-evaluation, arrogance, etc.

All this is demonstrated both by written texts, and by oral discourse, being often a barrier to adequate communication. To reach the positive result of the cross-cultural communication process, the interlocutors should overcome certain obstacles on the basis of cultural literacy and reach the level of cultural tolerance and flexibility at which the communication companion is treated as a partner instead of an alien. Another resource to more efficient communication is understanding of cross-cultural contributions to the context-dependent discourse dynamics and adaptation to change on the way to reach the cooperative effect.

Academic discourse can be interpreted depending on the criteria underlying the consideration of the concept. For example, the processes of interaction are the basis for the definition of this type of discourse in terms of the communicative approach; structural and stylistic approach is based on the principles of conversation; following the structural and semantic approach the selection criterion is the smallest unit of discourse or the explicated full fledged meaning of the text in the recipient's mind, ie, super-phrasal unity; in accord with the structural and syntactic approach, discourse is meant as a fragment of a text, ie a formation belonging to the level higher than a sentence: super-phrasal unity, complex syntactic whole, a chain of replies in a dialogue; socio-pragmatic approach treats discourse as speech immersed in the social reality; structural and stylistic approach considers non-textual discourse as the organization of speaking, characterized by fuzzy division into parts, the rule of associative links, spontaneity and high contextual dependence; socio-pragmatic approach defines discourse as a text immersed into life in the form of communication situation (N.D. Arutyunova); or as socially or ideologically restricted type of utterances (P.A Serio.); or as a metalanguage that expresses the special mentality disposing of special texts (Y.S. Stepanov); the advocates of the functional approach (D.Schiffrin) believe that the study of discourse is caused by the functions of language and functional features of speech; lingvostylistic approach involves the allocation of registers of communication based on the analysis of discourse, the distinction between speech in the oral and the written varieties by their genres (J.Frow, N.Coupland,K.Bhatia);

linguacultural approach establishes the specifics of discourse within a particular ethnocultural society, defines a set of formulas of speech etiquette and communication (V.I.Karasik); cognitive semantic approach, which appeared relatively recently, considers discourse in terms of the implementation of the communicative and cognitive structures expressed by frame models and containing social and cultural information (M.L..Makarov)

Conference activities disclose the academic discourse in terms of the specific communicative situation structuring, relating this phenomenon to the participants of the speech act, with their communicative intentions and the degree of impact on each other. On this basis, it is possible to treat a conference as a form of social interaction, which emerges within the framework of a special set of communication goals, standards, strategies and tools that should be investigated and mastered in order to mould professional communication skills in the course of training and in the subsequent professional activities.

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