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## THEORY AND METHODS OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION

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### Communication Strategies Training Technology in a Foreign Language Class

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**Abstract.** Improving the quality of foreign language teaching is necessary for students to develop appropriate communication strategies in foreign language communication in various social situations. The aim of the study is to form communicative strategies in foreign language communication among university students, using the developed technology of teaching communicative strategies based on linguistic and cultural reflection. This task can be accomplished by applying a special communication strategy training technology, which makes students compare standard cultural norms that are associated with each individual linguistic culture and critically assess them. This cultural reflection enables the development in university students the skills of critical understanding of these linguistic and cultural differences. The article presents a methodology, which determines the effective formation of appropriate communicative strategies for students when teaching a foreign language at a university and the development of their skills of effective communication in intercultural situations. It also describes experimental learning, which aimed to develop university students' communication strategies. The experimental results have convincingly proved the effectiveness of the worked-out technology.

**Keywords:** communication strategies, communication strategies training technology, foreign language education, university students, linguistic and cultural reflection

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## ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОДИКА ОБУЧЕНИЯ И ВОСПИТАНИЯ (ИНОСТРАННЫЕ ЯЗЫКИ)

Научная статья

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### Технология обучения коммуникативным стратегиям на занятиях по иностранному языку

**Аннотация.** Повышение качества обучения иностранному языку необходимо для выработки у студентов соответствующих коммуникативных стратегий в иноязычном общении в различных социальных ситуациях. Целью исследования является формирование коммуникативных стратегий в иноязычном общении у студентов вуза с помощью разработанной технологии обучения коммуникативным стратегиям, основанной на лингвокультурной рефлексии. Лингвокультурная рефлексия подразумевает сравнительное совместное изучение иностранной и родной лингвокультур, сравнение сходных или отличающихся коммуникативных стратегий, которые проявляются в каждой отдельной лингвокультуре как стандартные рефлексивные нормы, и формирование навыков критического осмысления этих лингвокультурных различий. В статье представлены основные поло-

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жения процесса изучения иностранного языка, которые определяют эффективное формирование соответствующих коммуникативных стратегий у студентов при обучении иностранному языку в вузе. В ней также описывается экспериментальное обучение, целью которого было развитие коммуникативных стратегий у студентов университета. Результаты эксперимента убедительно доказали эффективность разработанной технологии.

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникативные стратегии, иностранный язык, обучение иностранным языкам, студенты университета, лингвокультурная рефлексия

## Introduction

Nowadays the aims and goals of methodological science in the field of foreign language education go far beyond the common narrow practical results expressed in the students' acquisition of a certain amount of knowledge and skills of a foreign language. Researchers are increasingly interested in the possibilities of foreign language education in the field of a personality's intercultural development, the formation of genuine subjects of communication who are able to organize equal intercultural interaction, taking into account the values and social norms, underlying the peculiarities of speech behavior of a foreign-speaking interlocutor on the one hand, but without losing their own cultural and civic identity and preserving the value basis of their native culture on the other hand.

Thus, the essence of this research can be presented in working out a specially designed technology, focused on the formation of proper strategies of foreign language communication among students – future foreign language teachers of the English and German languages training profile.

This article is based on the research in the field of linguistics, methodology of teaching foreign languages and intercultural communication by N. D. Galskova, M. N. Levchenko, V. P. Shabanova, N. A. Skitina [1], V. V. Vetrinskaya, T. A. Dmitrenko [2], S. A. Pesina, Y. L. Kiva-Khamzina, N. A. Rubanova [3], G. Rabab'ah [4], O. A. Leontovich [5], W. Cheng [6], V. A. Tunnikova, E. M. Karpova [7], Yu. V. Baryshnikova, T. V. Emec, Yu. L. Vtorushina [8] T. V. Larina [9; 10], M. A. Locher [10], and others. All the above authors agree that in the era of close convergence of languages and cultures, the issues of development of a person's intercultural empathy and communication skills determine the directions and trends of modern research and require further study and generalization.

It is noteworthy that communication failure usually occurs not because of language differences, but because of the fact, that interlocutors have different conceptual visions the world. Each national culture has its own system of ideas about subjects, social and behavioral stereotypes and rules of communication. Therefore, human consciousness is ethnically conditioned.

These differences are most clearly manifested in the communicative behavior of people belonging to different linguistic societies. As a matter of fact, interlocutors usually evaluate communication in terms of its acceptability in their native linguistic culture. Consequently, they unconsciously transfer the national and cultural stereotypes inherent in their native culture to the process of communicating with representatives of another linguistic culture and evaluate the success of communication relying on their own cultural expectations. All this can cause serious communication failures and communication errors.

It is worth pointing out that one of the most important categories of speech behavior in any linguistic culture is the category of politeness. The category of politeness only at first glance seems to be universal. In fact, verbal politeness has its own distinct characteristics and specific manifestations in each national culture, so it is deeply nationally colored. This can be explained by the fact that politeness in each culture has a different content and is closely related to the ethical norms and cultural concepts of the representatives of a certain linguistic cultural community.

In addition, one needs to be always aware which communicative actions are appropriate to perform in a particular communication situation. Since it is impossible to anticipate, and, even more so, to constantly bear in mind various situational communicative parameters which may arise under the influence of rapidly changing conditions of the ongoing speech act, the learner's ability to freely and adequately use different communication strategies becomes an essential determinant of communication success.

Hence, the above-described politeness should be considered as a communicative category, which, in its turn, can be interpreted as the most general communicative concept that organizes a person's knowledge about the rules of communication and the norms of its implementation in a real discourse. In the context of our research, verbal politeness is interpreted as a set of communicative techniques used in speech acts to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings arising from cultural differences between the participants in communication. The participants decide which verbal strategies to use depending on the available parameters of the speech situation, i. e. communicative context, the intentions of the interlocutors and the communicative expediency.

We believe that appropriate communication strategies promote harmonious conflict-free communication and maintain an optimal balance between formality and familiarity, which is situationally and culturally variable. The main purpose of appropriate speech behavior is to show the partner a friendly and respectful attitude towards them.

Our experience in training English language teachers in terms of developing their speech skills indicates certain gaps and insufficiency in the solution of the problem of teaching appropriate communication strategies in the methodological aspect and practical application. Different approaches to forming cross-cultural communication skills are presented in the works of Russian and foreign methodologists [1; 2; 3; 4]. These works highlight some aspects of the problem, but do not offer an ultimate definitive solution.

Therefore, teaching methods and techniques for optimal developing students' speech strategies at different levels of studying and in different types of educational institutions are not fully elaborated yet [5; 6; 7]. Thus, the identified problem is awaiting its full and comprehensive solution.

As a result of foreign language training at the university, the student acquires a certain amount of language knowledge and skills, while he experiences difficulties in choosing appropriate communicative strategies for foreign language communication, adequate speech behavior, allowing them to interact with a foreign-speaking interlocutor achieving the level of a genuine dialogue of cultures [8, p.175].

Summing up, we strongly allege that it is necessary to implement into the educational process a specially developed technology, which can activate in learners linguistic and cultural reflection and, eventually, may result in the formation in students the essential features of genuine subjects of communication, capable of conscious choice of optimal ways of speech interaction.

### **Materials and methods**

The material of the research is the set of indispensable components of the real educational process, namely: foreign language speech skills, as well as methods, tools, exercises and tasks, as well as topics used for the formation of foreign language communicative competence. The above-mentioned components are analyzed in line with the problems of the proposed study.

We assume that cross-cultural reflection triggers the mental process of choosing an adequate speech strategy in the communicant's mind, and, so, this accounts for the leading role of mental reflexive processes in speech communication. Hence, there arises an urgent issue: what methods and technologies can contribute to the development of students' correct speech interaction strategies?

Widespread research methods have been vastly employed in the study in question, namely: theoretical methods (analysis, interpretation, and generalization) and empirical methods (scientific survey and testing).

We have suggested that the effectiveness of the process of forming adequate speech strategies as a result of linguistic and cultural reflection, provoked by special methodological techniques, is determined by the following conceptual provisions:

– students should be offered a specially organized cultural and comparative research activities, during whose implementation they could observe and identify the values of another culture and determine how they influence the speech strategies of native speakers. This enables them to discern and differentiate what is common and what is different in the linguistic cultures they study and continuously compare, thus expanding their own linguistic, cultural picture and worldview [8].

– a specially elaborated communication strategies training technology should be introduced in order to design various ways of speech interaction between interlocutors and form in students the ability to understand cultural differences. More so, the proposed technology aims to promote the students' awareness of differences in speech behavior and provide for their meaningful choice of speech strategies appropriate to the conditions of a particular speech act.

It is precisely the linguistic and cultural reasoning that forces the student to reflect on the compared cultural values and objectively assess their significance. It also helps the learners to resist alien values and ways of communication that contradict their native culture and enables them not to succumb to manipulation and verbal aggression. The planned result of the application of the suggested technology is the developed ability of the student to justify and choose the optimal speech strategy, with the help of which it is possible to most accurately realize the speech intention, convey the meaning, while maintaining their cultural and civic identity.

In this paper, we would like to present a communication strategy (CS) training technology, elaborated in the course of the research. The CS training technology, which provides for the formation of students' skills of conscious choice and skillful application of the most effective speech strategies includes the following

stages: introductory-guiding, correlative-introspective, verbal-productive and regulative- assessing.

The specificity of the content of the introductory-guiding stage is determined by the imperative need to inform students about the indispensable components of the communicative situation in focus, namely: what social characteristics of the interlocutors are, what kinds of roles they play, what goals and motives they pursue, and how their life experience is reflected in the communicative act [9; 10]. For a more detailed virtual immersion in the situation, students are offered original video and audio materials, which may prove helpful in illustrating the acceptable application of certain speech strategies and the specifics of their proper implementation in the native speakers' speech behavior.

For example, when teaching students how to make requests, the teacher first may ask questions like "Can you think of any peculiarities characterizing the Russian style of communication? What do you know about the British and American styles of communication?". Then the students study the information compiled by us relating to how English people make requests. They learn about the factors which determine the word choice, appropriate phrases and frequent grammar patterns, and communicative strategies used when asking somebody for something or asking somebody to do something for you. The information provided is to be further used by the students when doing the exercises. Here is an extract from the information provided for the students:

[...] *Some communicative strategies you can use when making a request are the following:*

– *distancing by tense shifting to the Future or the Past: Will you help me with my homework? I wondered if you could help me with my homework.*

– *shifting to Continuous: I'm hoping you can give me a hand with packing. I was wondering if you had a bag to spare.*

– *distancing by modals: Could / would you lend me your scanner?*

– *hinting by negation: I don't suppose you could help me with my project?*

– *exaggeration: I hate to be a nuisance but could I ask you something? [...]*

The organization of rational and value-based speech interaction, forming a communicative environment of mutual trust and responsibility in an institutional context, takes place at the correlative-introspective stage. The intensive reflexive practice within the framework of the traditional value systems and the set of generally accepted communication strategies regulations of the co-studied linguistic cultures forces students to critically reflect on the conventional ways of speech interaction accepted in another culture [11, p. 14]. At the correlative-introspective stage, we tried to activate students' previous knowledge, to arouse interest in the topic, as well as to formulate learning goals. The introspective analysis involves working with samples of modern discourse aimed at conscious perception and analysis of implemented ways of speech interaction by the students, using various research techniques such as labeling, tabulating and record keeping.

*Below are the examples of tasks offered at this stage.*

*Task 1. Read the opinion of Inge Lauren, a stylist from London, on the differences in the way the Russians and the English speak [12, p. 11]. Answer the questions after the text.*

*I am amazed by the way people speak here. The English are probably the most ceremonious and delicate nation in the world, while the Russians are probably the least. An English woman who wants to open the window would say "Don't you think it's a bit stuffy in here?" An American would be more straight – she'd go "Would you mind opening the window?" Well, in Russia, people usually put it as "Open the window". (The text is abridged.)*

*Now, answer the questions:*

*1 What does Inge Lauren say about the English people and the Russian people judging by the way they speak?*

*2 What examples does she give to illustrate her point?*

*3 Comment on the three requests ("Don't you think it's a bit stuffy in here?", "Would you mind opening the window?", and "Open the window"). What makes each of them polite or impolite for Inge Lauren? What communicative strategies does each request follow?*

Long-term training of students in the practice of choosing appropriate speech strategies still continues at the verbal-productive stage. Students gain vast experience of communicating properly in situations of familiarity, request, apologies, refusal, farewells, and sustaining a conversation, business meeting, exchange visit, considering them the most common communicative situations.

At the same time throughout the instructional training, we pointed out the cultural differences of the corresponding situations and demonstrated the peculiarities of the functioning of these communicative acts in the English-speaking environment. Moreover, we have designed a set of communicative activities and techniques in order to instruct students how to communicate with a friend or an unknown person; how to deal

with representatives from different social strata; how to choose optimal ways to keep up conversation; how to show interest in talking to the other person or politely put an end to the talk. This way, students are taught to choose and use the appropriate communication strategies in situations of intercultural discourse.

Some examples of the tasks at this stage include the following:

*Task 2. Make the following requests/orders more polite by using different communicative strategies.*

*Help me.*

*Can you give me more details?*

*Will you buy some milk for me? ...*

*Task 3. Using different communicative strategies, ask one of your fellow-students to do these things:*

*1) open the window because it's rather stuffy in the classroom; 2) lend you their phone to make an urgent call. ...*

Then comes a regulative-assessing stage. At this stage students summarize the results of their analytical language activities, revise and comprehend the communication experience gained, and critically evaluate the results of mastering the trained speech strategies.

Another issue to tackle is the choice of an effective means to use in order to develop the communication strategies required in classes of a foreign language. We hopefully believe it is possible to use authentic texts of different types based on intercultural items. Also, there can be used films/film scripts or short stories in which the reader can observe not only a clash of cultural values belonging to different societies, but also examples of distinct communicative behavior typical of the cultures concerned.

As the students listen to or read a text, they are supposed, along with doing a reproductive task, to solve a communicative task. This kind of tasks is effective in motivating learning activities in students. Examples of these tasks include identifying a socio-cultural problem, exploring national values, and others. We consider choosing an appropriate communication strategy an especially important task as the students have to reflect on the linguistic material and cultural background in the communicative situation in question. Some examples of the tasks are given below.

*Task 4. Make up short conversations in the following situations. Ask people to do things for you in varying degrees of politeness.*

*1) You are revising for an examination. Your roommate is listening to loud music, which annoys you a lot. What will you say to your roommate?*

*2) Your English friend and you are at the airport in London. You need your friend's help with checking in and flight information. Ask them for help with varying degrees of politeness.*

*Task 5. Reflect on the following question.*

*1 Can you explain how the cultural values and peculiarities influence the communicative behavior of the English people (particularly when they make requests)? You may speak about individualism, privacy, low power distance and others.*

In our research, we apply techniques to develop communicative empathy on the basis of authentic materials such as films and written or audio texts on intercultural topics. These techniques powerfully enhance linguistic and cultural reflection and encourage students to look for an opinion (or solution to the problem) that all participants of the intercultural communicative situation could agree with. While sorting out the problem situation, the learners move on to the position of a cultural mediator, they have to understand the thoughts, feelings and emotions of their communication partners, show their intercultural sensitivity on the basis of comparing the values of their cultures and considering their cultural differences. This makes it possible for students to choose and use the communicative strategies appropriate for the given context.

So, we have developed the interactive teaching techniques which are meant for developing the following communication skills: to take into account the characteristics of the interlocutor (i.e. their social status and their relations – friends or strangers); to keep the conversation (to listen to and to hear the partner); to finish the act of communication with the proper expression of satisfaction and politeness); to consider such factors of the situation as personal background, interests, views, status); to foresee the possible impact of what and how they say (speech politeness).

These techniques enable the students to master new speech strategies used by native speakers, hone their linguistic and cultural observation skills and develop their skills of solving communicative problems in new situations of intercultural interaction.

## Results

We found it important to put to test the training technology we developed while teaching English to fourth-year students at Nosov Magnitogorsk State Technical University. The students were training to become teachers of English at school. All in all, there were forty-two students involved. They were divided into four groups – three experimental groups (EG-1, EG-2 and EG-3) and one reference group (RG). We carried out the experiment to assess the effectiveness of the tasks created within the framework of our technology. The teacher of the reference group applied the traditional techniques without any particular focus on the communication strategies.

First of all, the level of proficiency in speech strategies was measured in all the groups involved in trial training. As it turned out, the level of proficiency in foreign language speech strategies among all the respondents was disappointingly low. They found difficulty in initiating and maintaining the conversation, formulating a polite request and refusal, expressing satisfaction with the act of communication, completing conversation. The main problems were the lack and scarcity of language means, the inability to adapt their speech behavior to a changing speech situation, and the unwillingness to use speech strategies typical of English speakers.

The students from EG-1, EG-2 and EG-3 were supposed to acquire the necessary amount of information concerning common English communication strategies. They studied the materials provided relating to how to greet people and say good-bye, ask for something, apologize, and appeal for help. The students were instructed on how the British people behave in different communicative situations. They were to make use of the acquired knowledge when performing the developed communicative tasks, making up dialogues or interviews, doing problem-solving assignments, participating in simulations and role-plays. That experience helped them to learn how to take into account the socio-cultural features of the speech act and adequately use the appropriate communication strategy.

Meanwhile, the learners from the reference group continued to learn the English language on the basis of traditional teaching methods without specially designed tasks aimed at developing adequate speech strategies in standard communicative situations. As a matter of fact, they mainly relied on their intuition and the so-called “sense of language” when choosing language tools and speech strategies appropriate to a given communicative situation.

On completing the experiment, we calculated the results of the experiment by finding out the value of the absolute growth indicator for the average indicator. As predicted, it was the largest in the experimental groups (0.33 in EG-3, 0.27 in EG-1 and 0.28 in EG-2). It is 0.33 more than in the RG.

As a result, we have received indisputable proof that without specially organized language training in speech communication strategies, the students of the reference group were unable to independently determine the most appropriate speech strategies and effectively use them in a creative speech act of their own.

Whereas the students of the three experimental groups, on the contrary, demonstrated stable ability to expertly highlight and recognize cultural specifics of intercultural communication and showed a confident command of speech strategies in various conditions of speech interaction, as well as communicative empathy, due respect for another culture, meanwhile staying within the boundaries of their own cultural and civic identity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we have every confidence in stating that the interactive communication activities we created can be effectively used to develop the cultural and linguistic reflection in the students. The students learn to adequately perceive and critically assess the values both of the native and foreign cultures, which helps them to choose the correct communication strategy and raise awareness of their own cultural and civic identity.

Thus, the practice of the prolonged classroom use of the suggested communication training technology has convincingly confirmed its necessity and usefulness in the effective formation in students the essential features of genuine subjects of intercultural communication, capable of conscious assessment and justified choice of optimal ways of speech interaction, truly resistant to cultural manipulation and verbal aggression.

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