

RLMSEE-2020**The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment****METHODOLOGY OF GROUP WORK OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON DRAFTING A SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE**

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Abstract

The present article describes the experiment conducted at the faculty of humanities in the academic years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). The objective of the experiment was to create a new methodology for the senior students' work group to acquire the writing skills in a second (Russian) language to be able to compose a scientific article. For the classes of Russian as a second language, a composite approach is the best fitting as it efficiently combines practicing the grammar rules, anchoring the synopsis, papers and essays writing skills and learning practical tips on how to apply these skills and overcome the psychological problems when creating an original scientific text and preparing it for publishing. The article lists the main problems that arose in the process of work and the ways of solving them, as well as the technical resources that helped organize this work in the most efficient way. The article also outlines the directions of the future improvement of the methodology.

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1. Introduction

In the last years, Russia is striving to be integrated in the global education system by offering international graduate and postgraduate students its own competitive educational network of national research universities as an alternative to the European educational platform. The federal state standard of the general education includes new requirements to the educational process which reflect the step away from the classic formula “knowledge – skills” to a more practice oriented model aimed at building competences.

Higher education institutions tend to put more emphasis on scientific development, which inevitably leads to a focus shift on the educational process in in teaching foreign languages. In our case, teaching Russian language as a mediator in which all profile classes are taught.

2. Problem Statement

This article will not mention the unique opportunity that RUDN offers to international students, in terms of learning Russian language as a major or as part of other degrees. We will consider students who have already graduated from the preparatory faculty and mastered the language at a B2-C1 level.

According to the federal state standard of teaching Russian as a second language, the traditional goal of teachers who give classes of Russian as a second language to students from 1st to 4th year of bachelor program is to make sure the students will be able to understand and write down the lectures of their profile courses. As well as to select and read relevant texts, compose short essays, and tell what they have read. They also should write papers; participate in discussions and make presentations in Russian. These skills are listed in the federal state educational standard of the Russian as a second language and correspond to the third certified level C1. As we can see at this stage, international students must be able to do the following:

- Select the appropriate information sources, to create a problem raising written text related to social and cultural communication; to explicitly state their point of view and support it with adequate arguments and evaluations;
- to reproduce a written and an audio text; to demonstrate their ability to analyse its content, identify the relevant bits of information and transform it according to the requirements of the written communication (Kirillova et al., 2017).

There is also a schematic program of the second language course for bachelor degree students. This program outlines the requirements to the level of intercultural communication which the students should master. It also sets the goals for the bachelor students who learn a foreign language (Kurkina et al., 2018). But the skill of editing a scientific article is not present in either of the two programs. We see here a gap between the program content and the actual need for bachelor graduate students to master the ability to create academic texts. This adds to these standard program requirements a need for the students to be able to write, arrange and publish an independent research article. This ability is a necessary requirement for the students who plan to continue their education at a master and at a PhD level. Hence, the knowledge and skills linked to the ability of writing an academic text is of utmost importance. Publishing a scientific article is the end goal of the research activity because it establishes the author’s priority in her

research domain (Rozhkova & Salnikova, 2016). Many teachers write about the need to learn the skills of academic text creation (Chujkova, 2018; Sapuh, 2019). Naturally, this work should continue on a master education level (Babakova, 2019) but we believe that the earlier it starts the better it is for the student himself.

The characteristics these texts are rather strict and well formalized in the methodic literature. (Bazanova, 2014; Kashcheeva & Aleksandrova, 2017). We want to stress that scientific writing not only requires to use an adequate tone and style (which dictates the appropriate vocabulary selection, strict text structure, and correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation), but it also requires, according to Smirnova (2017, p. 59), the ability “to transmit the written academic discourse based on professionally oriented academic texts in a foreign language; to think critically and grow one’s own learning and professional competence”.

Some traditional assignments from the first- and second-year program such as writing a synopsis or an annotation are partially preparing the students to edit scientific texts (Dmitrieva, 2019; Ibatova, 2020).

However, even the students who successfully mastered these types of assignments might experience difficulties in composing an original article. We believe that there are two reasons for that. First, the foreign students are caught in the routine of analysing existing scientific texts, which they do a lot in the course of learning the Russian language and then of preparing for their major subject classes. This focus on ready-to-use texts is not specific to learning Russian as a second language; it rather characteristic of learning any foreign language (Raskhodova et al., 2020).

Second, there is a certain psychological barrier to creation of original texts, which is hard to overcome even for the native speakers.

3. Research Questions

- How to motivate advanced international students to improve continuously the quality of their mastering of Russian language.
- How to stimulate the creativity of the international students who learn Russian as a second language.

4. Purpose of the Study

To overcome the above-mentioned difficulties, this article proposes a new methodology for teaching Russian as a second language at an advanced level. It is important to highlight that this methodology is applicable to advanced levels only, no earlier than the 3rd or 4th year of the bachelor’s program. It can be called “science-oriented creative group work” as opposed to the conventional “practice of the scientific speak”. The main purpose of the experiment was to prove the possibility for each student in the group to compose a publishable scientific paper, as well as to find ways to integrate this type of activity into the conventional advanced level grammar-learning program.

5. Research Methods

While preparing for the experiment we analysed the relevant teaching and methodological literature. We applied the experimental, problem research, contextual and situational **methods**. We have also reflected over the experience of teaching the Russian as a second language at the chair of the Russian language and cross-cultural communication of the RUDN.

For several years already, Russian language and cross-cultural communication chair of the faculty of humanities of RUDN University has been holding the conference “The Slavonic script days” conceived and organized by Dr. Bakhtikireeva. As part of this event, students must prepare presentations and compose articles over the following subjects:

- The current state of national languages and cultures in Russia and the world;
- the key languages in the modern world and prospects of indigenous languages of Russia and of the rest of the world: culture and subculture;
- the youth subcultures. The language of subcultures;
- the problems of the cross-cultural communication in the modern world;
- the cross-cultural communication and its artistic dimension;
- reflections on the literary Russian language and its current state.

This conference has been selected as a platform for the experiment during the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years because its topics can be understood by students of different specializations within the same language group. The conference also has standard requirements for arrangement of scientific papers.

In our experiment, the students were encouraged to prepare papers based on the presentations done in the course of the conference. A subsequent publication of these papers served as motivation for the students. It is worth mentioning that reduced motivation is a rather big problem in the last years of the learning course: the students have already mastered the spoken Russian at a level sufficient for their day-to-day communication as well as for listening to the lectures and performing their routine tasks, and they so no need to improve their language skills further. However, in our case this problem was easy to overcome simply by explaining the students the importance and complexity of the scientific style.

For a proper comparison, we selected 3 groups of students of the same year.

The students of the groups A, B, and C were asked to write a paper for the conference.

The students of the Group C have only received information about the requirements for the paper and the deadline for its submission.

In the Group B, the teacher worked individually extra hours with the three students who were interested to participate.

In the Group A, all the students have taken part of this work which as they were told that its results would be counted as a final course assignment.

6. Findings

The students from the Group C did not submit a single paper. Although initially they were interested in an opportunity to get their work published, but the lack of teacher’s support demotivated

them and they never started working. The Group B had two papers submitted. The individual approach tried in the Group B is definitely an advantage; however, there are also serious drawbacks to it: 1) the irregular character of the teacher's advice; 2) the students would download the entire paragraphs from the Internet expecting the teacher to correct and arrange them properly; 3) the students often included obscure or meaningless sentences and paragraphs so that the teacher would have been forced to ask "what did you mean by that?". As the answer might never come, the teacher would need to rephrase the sentence on her own. As a result, the students would not form the critically important skill of editing the text and would not be able to fill the gap between the erroneous original text and the final one edited by the teacher. They learned the skill but never really mastered it, and there is a risk that they would repeat the errors in their future work.

In the Group A, six students wrote and published their papers.

Let us take a closer look at the work in the Group A and outline the problems the group faced and the solutions it managed to find.

The group had a goal to achieve; the deadline was set for getting the paper finished. The teacher then split the assignment into a series of concrete micro tasks, each one of them having a deadline on its own, usually the following Russian language class. This is an excellent way to organize the work of the to-be authors.

One example of such micro tasks could be for a student to familiarize herself with the topics covered by the conference and select a topic of interest. One of the most common mistakes is that international students fail to see the difference between the topics announced for the section discussions at a conference and a subject of a scientific paper. Anticipating the potential confusion, the teacher proactively explains the difference and demonstrates how papers on various subjects can potentially fit the same discussion topic. The next assignment would be then to formulate the subject of the student's own paper. It is required to prepare not just a single subject but to propose 3 options; then, during the discussion in class, the student would choose the most suitable option out of the three.

It is specific to the work in the Group A that the results of these micro assignments are reviewed and discussed by all the students of the group. In other words, each student does not only work on her own paper but also observe and potentially discuss and amend their teammates' progress. To provide an example, the selection of the article's title always triggers a lot of interest and a lively discussion among all students.

It turned out that the students find it particularly challenging to define the problem of the article. This concept was entirely unfamiliar to all students. It was solved by delivering another dedicated explanatory session including examples of correct and incorrect work.

The rest of the assignments were: 1) to compose the plan of the article. The class discussion outlined that the plan must be logical, well-structured and comprehensive. 2) To select appropriate materials for each point of the plan. The discussion run around the content; the match between materials and points of the plans; adjustments and amendments. 3) To build conclusions on each point of the plan.

Correct citation and its arrangement according to the publisher's requirements turned out to be another challenge. The teacher had to deliver a dedicated presentation about this matter. Another separate discussion point was how to formulate the conclusions and create a proper bibliography.

Advantages of this type of group work

- The group prepared six articles for publishing; in fact, each and every student actively participated in editing each one of the six, which allowed all students develop strong copywriting and editing skills.
- The students were not just interested in the end outcome but were highly engaged throughout the step-by-step micro assignments process. Each text was a result of a thorough and elaborate editing process (quoting a student: “I didn’t know how to express myself, now I see how it should have been done”) instead of reading and analysing an external text as the conventional system assumes.
- A very positive atmosphere of collaboration and co-creation, which helped a lot overcoming the above-mentioned psychologic barrier and the lack of self-confidence. There was also a spirit of healthy competition (“I can do it, too... Maybe I can do it even better!”) This was not a deliberate purpose of the exercise but rather an unexpected positive side effect.
- The improvement of the grammar skills is also an advantage of this approach because the teacher was able to take into account the most frequent stylistic, grammar and lexical mistakes committed by the student while completing their assignments. This context for rehearsal of lexical and grammar topics helps to overcome the usual resistance to the repetitiveness: the students can see for themselves the mistakes they make and also notice each other’s mistakes. This makes them feel the need for repetition and rehearsal, which multiplies the positive effect of the exercises. We also believe that in the context of such a group work the topic itself dictates the most useful words and expressions, and filters out the less frequently used ones, which allows concentrating on the former and skip the latter.

To list the most common mistakes made by international students while copywriting a scientific text (Figure 1):

- breaking the logical flow
- **Так как в Китае главой дома обычно является мама, люди всегда считают женщин более внимательными к бытовым мелочам (must be: В Китае главой дома обычно является мать, так как люди всегда считают женщин более внимательными к бытовым мелочам), 5%;*
- lack of the correct link between parts of the proposition
- **В нашей стране не очень много информации о событиях, которые происходят в Китае. Но только много информации о США и странах Евросоюза (must be: однако много информации о...), 10%;*
- repetitiveness, 3%;
- failure to properly integrate a direct quotation into the text
- **Русские люди очень тоскуют по Родине, когда приходится надолго уезжать за границу. Это пословица: «В гостях хорошо, а дома лучше» (must be: Эта мысль может быть проиллюстрирована пословицей...), 7%;*
- using expressions inappropriate in a scientific text, as well as slang and popular language

- *Чтобы найти ответ, я перерыл огромную кучу книг (must be: В поисках ответа я прочитал много книг); *Он меня продинамил (must be: не оправдал моих надежд), 18,5%;
- mistakes linked to an inappropriate case use or incorrect selection of a preposition after a verb are rather common
- *В древности только муж имел право предложить развод, но ему нужно послушать советы из родителей (надо must be: советы родителей); Мне очень хотелось побывать в Москву (must be: в Москве); Мы задержались с публикацией за неделю (must be: Мы перенесли срок публикации на неделю), 3,5%;
- international students have problems with coordination of grammatical aspects of the verbs in a long sentence:

*Есть люди, которые любят распространить слухи, но эти слухи не обязательно на 100% ложны (must be: распространять); Роман показался мне скучным поэтому я читала его только на половину (must be: Роман показался мне скучным, поэтому я дочитала его только до половины.), 13,5%;

- the mistakes linked to an incorrect participial use are less common.

*Об этом ученом мы прочитали в одной книге, знающему 5 языков (must be: Об этом ученом, знающем 5 языков, мы прочитали в одной книге); Он использовал результаты эксперимента ученого, который описал в своей статье. (must be: Он использовал результаты эксперимента ученого, которые ученый описал в своей статье), 8%;

- the misspelling is practically non-existent. This should be the result of learning the “integral image” of the words.

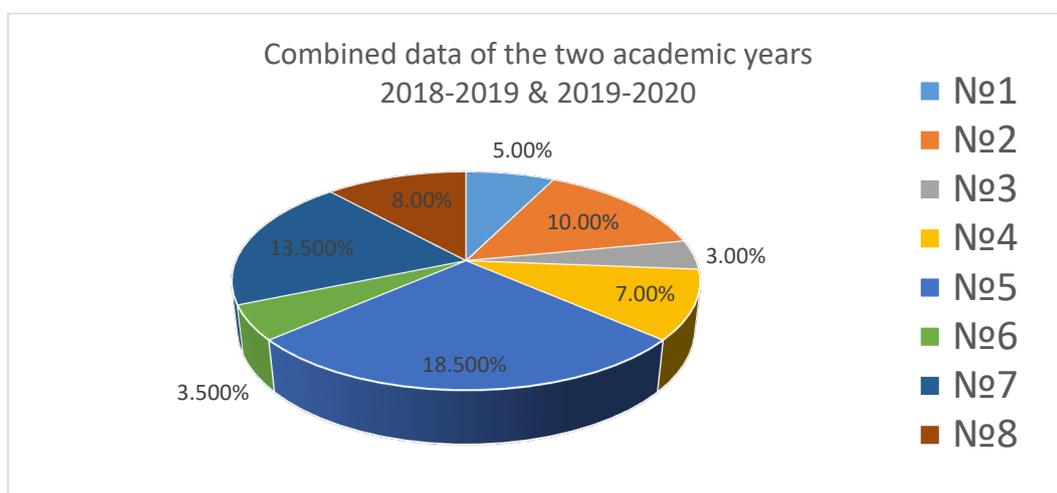


Figure 1. Combined data of the 2 academic years 2018-2019&2019-2020

The dictionary of methodological terms provides the following definition of the group work: it is “a teaching method where the fulfilment of the proposed communication tasks serves the general purpose and requires a cooperation, task split among participants, working communication of the students about the learning topic and includes shared responsibility and mutual control” (Azimov & Shchukin, 1999, p. 107).

The different types of group work are well described in the school methodology of teaching (brain storming, case studies, learning games, Bell-Lancaster system, workshop method, project method etc.).

Lobashov is right when he establishes that “not all teaching methods can be used for training future professionals without being adjusted and tailored to a consistent teaching program” (Lobashov, 2007, p. 32).

We have noticed a number of important **treats unique to the group work in the international audience:**

- the experiment has revealed the importance of the role of the teacher in the group work. Instead of just being an observer of a chaotic discussion as it happens at school, the university teacher is actively steering the discussion process. Her task is to thoroughly follow and guide the discussion making sure that every student has an opportunity to speak up but at the same time ensuring that after having heard all opinions the students would naturally pick the most promising and productive solution without moving too far away from a thought line planned by the teacher.
- the experiment made obvious that the teacher may not impose her point of view no matter how controversial the students' ideas might appear, if the student presented enough evidence to support her point of view. Otherwise, the student might lose the motivation to continue working on the subject.
- The idea of splitting the group into smaller sub-groups and allocating them time for an independent assessment failed. It seems that it does not work in an international audience.
- The routine goal of the school group work, that of building personal relationships within the group, is completely irrelevant in an adult student group, especially at an advanced level.

This type of work is particularly challenging to the teacher who must fully master the methodology of teaching the Russian as a second language; must have a deep knowledge of the subjects selected by the students; and must be able to trigger the students to reveal their point of view, which means that the teacher must have at least a general idea about what her student's future paper will look like. The teacher must also demonstrate how to conduct a discussion and moderate it if necessary.

There are also **drawbacks** to this approach. Although it is entertaining, this methodology requires a lot more of a teacher's preparation work than a conventional lesson flow. The teacher must be familiar with the theoretical aspect of the academic copywriting (Bazylev, 2014). The lesson itself requires a much higher level of teacher's personal involvement as well as a quick reaction to any developments of the discussion and deep knowledge of all the textbooks in case there is a need to illustrate a student's mistake and recommend a corrective exercise. It was also challenging to present a student's work to the rest of the group. Oral presentations turned out to be inefficient. Instead, a student would write the assignment down, take a picture and post it to a WhatsApp group. However, this still would not allow making the correction process transparent. The attempt was made to print out the assignment so that every student in the group would have a copy of it and could potentially write down the amendments. However, the teacher still needed to copy the text to the blackboard so that the group could reflect on it. Then it was decided to work in TEAMS. This way the students got the access to the teacher's screen view, where they could see the completed assignments open as WORD documents with all changes and amendments tracked in the review mode. This was the best solution. Not only was it saving the print costs but also accelerating the learning process and making it more transparent. This is why the next academic year (2018-2019) based

on the experience and using computers, we had managed to increase the Group A to 11 students all of whom successfully published their papers, which can be found in the following publications: «*Languages and cultures of the peoples of the world. The Study of Sign Linguistic and Non-linguistic Communication: a collection of articles and essays of the Interuniversity conference of Young Researchers dedicated to the Day of Slavic Writing*», (Sinyachkin, 2018), «*Languages and cultures of the peoples of the world. Intercultural Communication: a collection of articles of the round table of young researchers dedicated to the Day of Slavic Writing*» (Sinyachkin, 2020).

7. Conclusion

A number of performance indicators proves that the experiment overall was a success: the students have published their papers; the level of their grades for the language class improved; the students received positive feedback for the papers from their tutors who evaluate very highly the students' scientific text composition skills. This type of work can be considered as a transition from the analysis of the scientific texts to the independent creation of scientific articles. It is a well-balanced mix of a problem research, contextual and situational methods. It is important that this methodology is fully applicable to distance learning because the main part of the work is done on PCs.

It is worth mentioning that we discovered a very useful software "Videotext" created by initiative of Professor Vekshin from the Moscow Polygraphy Institute. As he puts it: "the modern digital technologies have put a foundation to a change in perception of the printed text thanks to the possibility of animation modification and real time transformation of the graphic symbols" (Vekshin & Khomyakova, 2015, p. 24). After having familiarized ourselves with this software, we came up with an idea of creating a tutorial, which would illustrate the workflow for creating a scientific text to the international audience and would serve as a learning platform for teaching international students scientific text copywriting skills. The tutorial should include examples of the most common difficulties and mistakes and demonstrate the ways of solving them.

The tutorial will be enriched by exercise, which will allow anchoring the grammatical materials learned during the class.

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