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#### PROBLEMS OF TEACHING PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION TO CHINESE HYDROTECHNICAL ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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### Abstract

In the article the experience in teaching the Russian language to Chinese hydrotechnical engineering students of senior courses under a bachelor's program in order to teach them professional communication at the courses of Russian as a foreign language at Russian State University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy is considered. Programs and manuals addressed to this category of students are analyzed, the principles of creating a new tutorial are developed. In chapter “Problem Statement” special features of the scientific speech referred to profile “Hydrotechnical Engineering”, which includes elements of terms systems of mechanics, geography, hydrology, economics, and other sciences, are described. Also, some information about the experience of working with Chinese students in Shandong Hydrotechnical Institute where students are educated at junior courses, and about specific features of the education system of China is given. Using the methods of observation, analysis of linguistic and methodical literature on teaching scientific speech to foreigners, study of national features of students from the People’s Republic of China, and summarizing the working experience, in particular, approbation of fragments of a new tutorial, the authors revealed a number of tasks of optimizing the educational process, including the task of improving a new manual. Functional communicative approach to education, step-by-step material study with reliance on visual perception, tasks developing communication skills were recognized as the main principles. The necessity to improve a new study manual is determined, and practical working results of the Russian language courses are presented.

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*Keywords:* Chinese students, scientific speech, professional communication



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## 1. Introduction

In the article the authors consider the experience in teaching the scientific speech and professional communication in the Russian language to hydrotechnical engineering students of the third and fourth years of Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, undergoing a bachelor's program in the framework of cooperation with Shandong Hydrotechnical Institute (PRC).

Professional education of foreign students in the Russian language is the important area of Russian higher school. Various forms of international collaboration between universities are practiced (Glebova, 2016). In Moscow State University, the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow Car Road State Technical University, and many other universities there is a vast experience in teaching Russian to foreign students. Programs in which mastery of the scientific speech is isolated as an important aspect were developed (Andriushina, 2000).

An example of the cooperation between the Institute of Land Reclamation, Water Management and Construction at Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy and Shandong Hydrotechnical Institute is bachelor's programs training for engineering students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years in direction “Construction” 08.03.01 of profile “Hydrotechnical engineering”. Joint programs have been implemented since 2003 and are constantly being improved.

During the first two years, hydrotechnical engineering students from Shandong University study Russian in PRC using Russian textbooks and programs (general knowledge). It should be noted that Chinese students study Russian language outside the language environment in large groups (up to 40 people), and Chinese teachers usually conduct scientific speech classes, focusing on developing reading and translation skills, and, to a much lesser extent, on oral communication. Then, students in the third and fourth courses undergo vocational training in Moscow, in Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Agricultural Academy.

Students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years improve their knowledge of the Russian language in Russian language courses under the program “First certification level (B1) (professional module). Engineering profile” in the amount of 150 hours. In addition, in 2019, for the first time, four-year groups were formed for training under the program “Russian as a Foreign Language: First Certification Level (B1 +): Syntax of Scientific Speech in diploma work” (100 hours). Recruitment for these programs ranges from 30 to 40 people annually, groups of 10-12 people are formed.

The specifics of working with this contingent of students requires a new approach, taking into account their national characteristics and the professional orientation of training, improvement of existing programs, and development of new teaching aids.

## 2. Problem Statement

Russian language courses prepare bachelors of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> courses to listen to lectures and read texts in their specialty, communicate with teachers of special disciplines. Students learn to write a diploma in Russian, create a presentation for the diploma, communicate during diploma defense.

Thus, we determined the tasks in teaching the Russian language that students of hydrotechnical engineering face.

The 3rd year students must learn the skills of working with professional vocabulary and master grammatical structures necessary for the professional communication. In addition, they will participate in scientific conferences and write articles, that is, it is necessary to build productive statements both in writing (text of an article, presentation, course paper), and orally (report, course defense).

The 4<sup>th</sup> year students must improve skills obtained in the previous training year, as well as read special non-adapted literature, and navigate in the Russian language environment. They must be able to produce a written (diplomas, diploma presentation) and oral monologue, and have a dialogue in the professional environment (answering questions during diploma defense).

Optimal organization of courses for hydrotechnical engineers from PRC presumes the consideration of, firstly, the specifics of material being taught, secondly, national-cultural, psychological characteristics of students.

### 3. Research Questions

What difficulties can hydrotechnical engineering students face while mastering the specialty? Let's define the range of research problems.

The scientific speech functioning in the field of hydrotechnics is characterized by a complex term system (Perfilieva et al., 2019), which involves elements from various branches of science and practice such as:

- hydrotechnics (hydrosite, water storage reservoir, gutter);
- hydrology (river, inflow, floodplain) ;
- ecology (salinization, silting, swamping);
- economics (operation, efficiency, resources);
- mechanics (speed, pressure, mass, power);
- architecture and construction (ground, arc, buttress).

Biological vocabulary is also presented. When constructing hydrotechnical facilities, it is necessary to take into account flora and fauna of introductory objects, and know the correspondent names of animals and plants. To describe the motion of fluid in both hydrotechnical texts and medical ones, a rich synonymic range of verbs is used: to flow, to stream, to outflow, to inflow, to pour, to enter, to get, to divide.

Words formed by stems addition and combined word-derivative ways (hydrosite, fishway, spillway, canal-lift, boat-traffic, and many others) are frequent.

Thus, while studying the scientific speech in the field of hydrotechnical engineering, students encounter both grammar problems (complex syntax and word-formation) and lexical ones (a vast volume of words).

A new manual must meet the following criteria:

- be lexically and grammatically oriented to the specialty “Hydrotechnical Engineering”;
- include non-adapted training texts for both 3rd year and 4th year students;
- prepare students to produce oral and written texts within the professional communication;
- take into account specific tasks that students of different courses can face.

Problems in teaching Chinese students may be conditioned, firstly, by differences in Chinese and Russian language systems. However, as evidenced by courses teachers, Chinese students, as a rule, know

well the case system of the Russian language, and verb conjugation, i.e. they master basic grammar, and can orient in B1 level grammar. The greatest problems arise when students try to produce such kinds of verbal activities as writing and, especially, speaking.

These difficulties are most likely to be caused by special features of the national educational system of Chinese students (Saikina, 2019; Wang, 2016). Some of them were revealed during the anonymous questioning of students of Shandong Hydrotechnical Engineering Institute which were studying the Russian language in this university or in Preparatory Department for foreign students at Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy in Moscow. According to the research data of Saikina and Yakimets (2019), Chinese students have definite difficulties in assimilating the oral communication caused by the national characteristics of the PRC educational system. Mostly, students have low or middle self-esteem; even, the best of them do not estimate their Russian language knowledge as “excellent”. Being afraid of “face loss”, students avoid answering difficult or “uncomfortable” questions. Uncertainty, fear of mistakes make communication in Russian difficult.

Herewith, Chinese students possess such positive qualities as discipline, attention, accuracy, which is important for effective study. Students demonstrate these qualities in the conditions of intense loading (classes from 9.00 to 18.15, or up to 20 hours for 5 days weekly), studying Russian in the evenings after special subjects. Unfortunately, in the conditions of such intensity of the educational process, to do a voluminous homework regularly is problematic, and in the classroom the attention decreases.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In connection with the above mentioned, we suppose the following measures to implement successfully educational aims and tasks while developing courses and building classes:

- step-by-step presenting material from simple to complex; phonetics, grammar, word-formation exercises within the power of students to make them confident in themselves;
- writing and speaking tasks based on schemes, fragments, pictures, cards, key words;
- various visibility means: photos, presentations, fragments from documentaries;
- kind and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, success encouragement, tactful correction of mistakes.

Thus, the research aim is to reveal and summarize special features of the scientific speech functioning in the field of hydrotechnical engineering, as well as analyze the characteristics of development of communication skills in the professional area in Chinese students. On the base of the conclusions made, it is necessary to develop criteria of educational process optimization, in particular, structure material for a new manual intended for this target audience.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Statements developed in scientific works on methods of foreign languages teaching served as a theoretical and methodical basis of the research. Modern methods of Russian as a foreign language, particularly, in the field of the language teaching for special purposes, are oriented to a communicative approach tailored to communicative needs of students in the vocational area. “Currently ... it is more

appropriate to speak about learning speech communication in a teaching and research professionally oriented environment” (Shustikova, 2017, pp. 395-396). The communicative approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language is based on the functional principle of the Russian language description presented in works of Vsevolodova (2017), what was reflected in methodology (Motina, 1988; Perfilieva et al., 2019). The functional communicative approach is implemented also in practice of creating a number of professionally-oriented study guides on Russian as a foreign language (Dubinskaya et al., 2020).

The important methodological principle is to consider Russian as a foreign language course in the paradigm of intercultural communication using person-oriented pedagogical and information technologies, experience of working with a particular contingent of students, taking into account traditional relations “teacher – student”, “supervisor – subordinate”, and the whole world view composed of experience of social interaction in vocational areas in different cultures (Guzikova, 2015; Sadokhin, 2004).

So, the authors used the following methods:

- 1) analysis of scientific methodical literature;
- 2) study of available pedagogical experience on this problem;
- 3) study of authentic texts on the profile “Hydrotechnical Engineering” in order to assess their specifics (vocabulary, word-formative models, syntax);
- 4) pedagogical experiment in the conditions of university education;
- 5) study of educational characteristics in Chinese universities.

The following research goals were isolated: 1) analyzing available study guides on Russian as a foreign language for students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> years on the profile “Hydrotechnical Engineering”; 2) developing ways of forming communicative skills in the professional area of hydrotechnical engineering; 3) presenting the experience of teaching students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> years taught under a bachelor’s programs in the direction “Construction” 08.03.01 on the profile “Hydrotechnical Construction”.

## 6. Findings

As it was mentioned above, there are a number of guides on communication training in the educational field in which a modern functional communicative approach is applied, but these guides are intended for a different target audience (Aroseva, 2019). In 2007, in Moscow State University of Environmental Engineering (now Institute of Land Reclamation, Water Management and Construction named after A.N. Kostyakov at Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy) a study guide “We study a specialty in Russian” by Mamay et al. (2007) for students of the profile “Hydrotechnical Engineering” was published. This study guide is addressed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year foreign students from PRC. It consists of 19 units, each is based on a special text related to this or that section of the course “Introduction to Hydrotechnicals”. Tasks preceding reading have three levels – vocabulary, grammar, and speech. It is remarkable that tasks of “speech level”, according to the words of the authors of the guide, involve “strategies of understanding necessary for students’ adequate “entry” into the content system of the text being studied. Such strategies are “orienting” questions, plans (in the form of names and questions), as well as annotated retelling”. The system of after-text tasks includes such kinds of exercises as a question-answer conversation, restoring the text on footings, producing (retelling) the text

without footings, participation in a dialogue-interrogation on the topic being studied, composing written plans based on the text, as well as annotated retellings (Mamay et al., 2007).

In 2014, Publishing House of the Moscow State University of Civil Engineering issued a study guide “We study the professional speech of builders and architects” by O.V. Frolova for foreign students of the profile “Construction of Buildings and Structures” (Frolova, 2014).

The analysis of these guides devoted to the scientific speech style showed that the authors selected only adapted texts, answers to questions, grammar repetition. As we can see, available manuals cannot cover completely the professional communication needs of students.

### **6.1. Practical part (about the manual)**

The study manual “The Russian language for special purposes. We read and create independently texts in the specialty. Help to the future hydrotechnical engineer” was developed by teachers of Department of Russian as a Foreign Language and General Education of RGAU-MSHA (Russian State Agrarian University – Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy). The publication of the manual is due to the need for methodological support of the additional education program “Russian as a Foreign Language. The first certification level (B1+). Syntax of scientific speech in diploma.” This educational program and the manual are addressed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> year students (hydrotechnical engineering specialty).

The tutorial consists of two parts, each includes several chapters. Part I is devoted to generalization of the material already known to students: vocabulary, word-formation, grammar, and syntax of the scientific speech. This part is oriented to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students and serves to form communicative skills. Part II contains diploma guidelines, and introduces students to vocabulary and syntax constructions which are used when writing a diploma. The second section of the manual is intended for the 4<sup>th</sup> year students. Each chapter presents the table of syntax constructions, examples of word-formative models, special terminology, text with before-text and after-text exercises, schemes, pictures, photos. Linguistic material of the manual is selected, taking into account Russian realities, texts are adapted and authentic.

The manual must provide generalization of the knowledge obtained, and contribute to solving communicative problems in the area of the written scientific speech within the program declared. Types of exercises developing communicative skills are widely used, namely: responsive (question-answer) (in before-text and after-text tasks it is required to formulate a question or answer a question), situational (e.g., you received a diploma problem, ask questions to your scientific supervisor), reproductive (text retelling), discussion (e.g., take part in the discussion: What power plants have the future, hydropower plants or nuclear power ones?), composing (oral report on a suggested topic, e.g.: Tell about the largest hydropower plant in China), games.

The material of this tutorial is tested and added annually, beginning from 2015-2016. It is planned to publish the manual in the fourth quarter of 2020.

### **6.2. Examples of tasks**

Let us consider how the criteria developed above can be applied. We present a fragment of a lesson from the first section of the manual intended for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. Lessons of this section are oriented

to grammatical constructions of the scientific speech with the definite semantics (functional semantic constructions).

Thus, in the fifth lesson the ways to express classifications are considered.

In the first part of the lesson, the table of corresponding grammatical constructions grouped in functional semantic units is presented.

Task 1. View table 01. How to talk about an objects classification?

**Table 1.** Classification of objects

From	Major	to minor
verb	Questions	example
to be	(What /Nom. case plur.) are (What?)	<i>Dams are lake and channel</i>
to distinguish	Distinguish (what? What? / Acc. c. plur.)	<i>They distinguish lake and channel dams</i>
to be distinguished	Are distinguished (What? What? / Nom.c.)	<i>Lake and channel dams are distinguished</i>
to be divided into	What (Nom.c.) is divided into (What? What? / Acc.c.)	<i>Dams are divided into lake and channel</i>
<i>From</i>	<i>minor</i>	<i>to less</i>
to be subdivided	What? (Nom.c.) is subdivided into (What? What? / Acc.c.)	<i>Soil dams are divided into earthen and stone</i>
<i>From</i>	<i>minor</i>	<i>to major</i>
to be referred to	(What? Nom.c.) is referred to/ belong to (What? / Dat.c.)	<i>Stone dams are referred to soil dams</i>
to belong to	What? (Nom.c.) is referred to / belong to (What? / Dat.c.)	<i>Stone dams belong to soil dams</i>
<i>Sign</i>	<i>of classification</i>	
to distinguish	By what/ by what sign? (Dat.c.) they distinguish (What? What? / Acc.c. plur.)	<i>By the height they distinguish between low, medium, high and ultrahigh dams</i>
to be distinguished	By what /by what sign? / are distinguished (What? What? / Acc.c. plur.)	<i>Low, medium, high and ultrahigh dams are distinguished by the height.</i>
to be divided into	By what /by what sign? / What? (Nom.c.) is divided into what? /Acc.c. plur.)	<i>By the height dams are divided into low, medium, high and ultrahigh dams</i>
to be subdivided into	By what /by what sign? / (Dat.c.) What? (Nom.c.) are subdivided into/ what? / Acc.c. plur.)	<i>By the height dams are subdivided into low, medium, high and ultrahigh dams</i>

Table 01 is an important component of the lesson. Grammar, presented in it, is partly familiar to students as they have already met it in the course B1 (1 of certificate level). Familiarity with this table helps to structure the material being studied.

The important component of the lesson is working with word-formative means.

Task 2. Form adjectives from nouns:

a) With suffix -н- (-n-). Model: насос – насосный (nasos – nasosnyy)

Железобетон (zhelezobeton), контрфорс (kontrfors), габион (gabion), опора (opora), турбина (turbina), камень (kamen') et al.

Notice the alternation к/ч (k/ch): арка – арочный (arka – arochnyy)

Река (reka).

b) With suffix **-ов/-ев-** (-ов/-ев-). Model: грунт – грунтовый (grunt – gruntovyy)

Грунт (grunt), берег (bereg), русло (ruslo), ткань (tkan’).

c) With suffix **-онн-** (-онн-). Model: деривация – деривационный (derivatsiya – derivatsionnyy)

Гравитация (gravitatsiya).

Students are required to recall meanings of source words, determine what categories these belong to (material, construction, water object).

Exercises of such type not only introduce the word-formative models, but help to remove phonetic and lexical problems.

Then exercises which contain examples to the table’s points and allow checking understanding of these constructions are offered.

Task 3. Using the table and the words from task 2, tell:

A) What dams are there?

B) What dams are distinguished?

C) What are dams divided into?

Then the text about dams classification taken from the training site “Baza znaniy” CoWATER (“Knowledge Basis”), supplied with pictures and schemes, is presented. The text is not adapted, but abridged. The given table allows structuring the text. Answering the questions about the text’s contents, students return to the table. Students are required to transform the text’s phrases using synonyms: text transformation skill is important when abstracting scientific texts.

The following is the task to study photos of several dams different in material, construction and power, characterize them, and define the position of these dams in the classification by different signs (by material, location, construction, etc.). Also, students may retell parts of the text based on pictures or key words.

The lesson may be supplemented by fragments of documentaries about the construction of large dams. For example, in the film about the construction of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station, one can observe the process of dam construction in bulk and with the help of a directed explosion. When viewing movie excerpts without sound, students should comment accordingly. Students are also encouraged to find information on dams in their area on the Internet and to talk about them. As a result of watching the film and the conversation “Why dams are needed”, students come to the conclusion that dams, in addition to the main function, perform city-forming, aesthetic and other functions.

Thus, the material proposed in the lesson ranges from simple to complex and prepares the basis for communicative tasks.

As for tasks from the second part of the manual, intended for students of the 4th year, we can cite the final test as an example, the purpose of which is to test the formed skills before writing a diploma.

In the first task of this test students demonstrate the ability to match general scientific terms from the left column with examples of their interpretation from the right column of table 02 (students must connect cells by line):

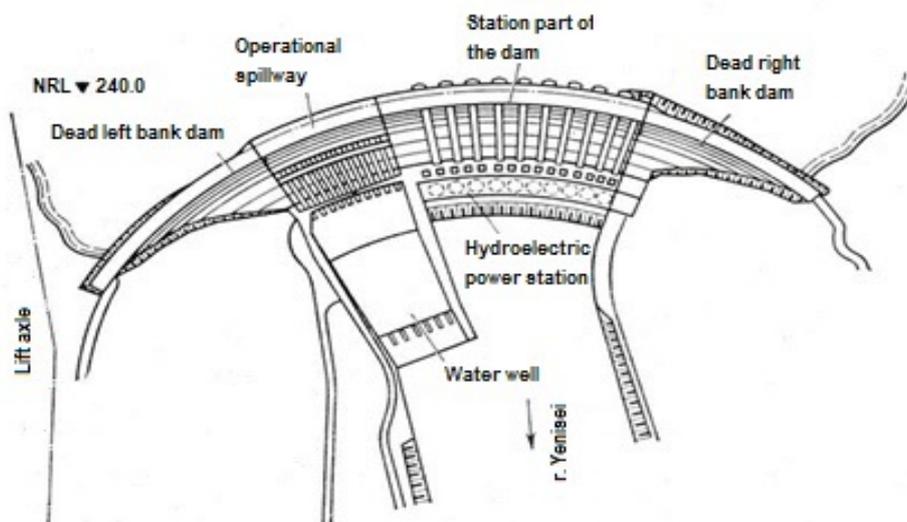
**Table 2.** General scientific terms and examples of their interpretation

Definition	“If the level of the Cheboksary reservoir is raised by 5 meters, then we will get a number of advantages”, - V. Danilov-Danilyan.
Term	<i>Reservoirs</i> are divided into two types: lake; river (channel).
Quotation	Reservoir - an artificial (man-made) basin, formed, as a rule, in the river valley by water-retaining structures for the accumulation and storage of water for the purpose of its use in the national economy.
Classification	Water-power plant
Source	<i>Avakyan A. B. et al. Reservoirs. – M.: Mysl, 1987. – 325 p.</i>

Students can demonstrate abilities to transform direct quotations and compress the text in order to present it in the form of a slide for their presentation. In addition, they get familiar with a correct order of parts of a diploma, demonstrate the understanding of word-formative structure of the professional lexis. In the end of the test students prepare description of the dam using the given picture, what is the most complex moment in this work, since it requires mastering scientific style constructions in the professional area, as well as the ability of the future hydrotechnical engineers to communicate professionally during a diploma defense.

Task example:

Consider Figure 01 and describe the dam according to the scheme (the scheme in the test is attached):



**Figure 1.** Dam scheme

One of the intermediate results of combination of accumulated experience of working with students and methodical developments in this field was the successful participation of Chinese students in annual conferences in the Russian language. For example, in 2018, the 71<sup>st</sup> International Student Scientific and Practical Conference dedicated to the 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of A.V. Chayanov was attended by the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> year students from China, which prepared reports related to hydrotechnical engineering. Reports were both descriptive (“The most impressive world dams” by Yu Naychan, “The use of pumped storage power plants

for energy conservation of nuclear and thermal power plants” by Van Shunsi) and problematic (“The environmental impact of hydrotechnical construction facilities” by Man Linhuey).

In 2019, at the sectional meeting “The Russian language as the Means of Professional Communication” of the 72<sup>nd</sup> International Student Scientific and Practical Conference dedicated to the 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary of A.G. Doyarenko students’ reports related to hydrotechnical engineering problems also sounded (“Ways to fight with flooding” by Shi Yuychen).

However, the main result of our educational work with the materials from the manual is the successful mastery of communication skills in the defense of diplomas in the specialized faculty. According to statistics, all 100% of students successfully pass the stage of defense of final qualification work and receive a diploma.

## 7. Conclusion

So, after studying the experience of working with students studying hydrotechnical engineering, it becomes obvious that students have needs for specialized manuals in their specialty. At the same time, during the analysis of the educational literature, we found that there are not enough manuals aimed at the Chinese audience that meet the requirements and needs of this category of students. In particular, neither the methods of working with the scientific style, nor the quality of texts and tasks satisfy the needs of students in the development of professional communication skills. When developing the manual “Russian language for special purposes. We read and independently create texts in the specialty. Help to the future hydrotechnical engineer”, we made an attempt to improve the introduction of material, taking into account communicative tasks in the professional area. The creation of this manual is a necessary step in the formation of professional intercultural communication.

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