

19th PCSF 2019

Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future

TEACHING BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES WITHIN INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper deals with the problem of preparing non-linguistic students for business communication in a foreign language in the context of internationalization of higher education. The authors prove the effectiveness of application of the case method in English classes in a professional environment as one of the most innovative and promising ways to organize learning process. This method allows students not only to acquire skills of spontaneous speech in a foreign language with regard to professional interests and needs, but also integrate theoretical knowledge and practical actions as well as form decision-making skills. The article touches upon the implementation of a professionally oriented course on business communication in a foreign language. The content of the course is determined in accordance with the future specialty of the undergraduate and is professionally oriented, thanks to the integration of the foreign language with both majors and social and humanitarian cycle disciplines. The pedagogical experiment was attended by students of two second-year groups of the Institute of Industrial Management, Economics and Trade of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. The first group consisted of students from Russia, while the second - foreign students, namely Chinese citizens. In total, the number of tested was 60 undergraduates. The results of the experiment showed the effectiveness of the course and proved that its introduction into the learning process contributes to the improvement of students' knowledge and skills.

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Keywords: Internationalization, case method, professionally oriented foreign language course.



1. Introduction

Globalization remains the dominant process of the global economy (Knight, 2003). Internationalization of higher education may be treated as a reaction and active participation of higher education institutions in the changes caused by globalization. A recent updated definition of internationalisation of higher education published by the European Parliament clearly points out this mission for internationalisation to be inclusive, fair and equal. It says internationalisation of higher education is “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (Beadle, Humburg, Smith, & Vale, 2016, p. 2). Despite the ambivalent attitude towards internationalization among different people, all in all, its influence on the participants of education and social adaptation processes remains positive (Hudzik, 2015). The progressive internationalization of higher education initiates the upgrade of the foreign-language training process. The mastery of a foreign language by graduates as a tool of business communication or, for graduates majoring in economics-related specialties, as a tool for studying and rational usage of the innovative experience and global achievements in the business sector has become one of the mandatory requirements of employers from successful companies and firms.

When promoting the development of the Bologna Process (Araújo, da Costa, Flisi, & Soto-Calvo, 2015), the European Commission pays particular attention to language studies and language diversity throughout Europe. It actively interacts with national governments in order to achieve the ambitious goal: provide citizens with an opportunity to study at least two foreign languages. This goal is supported by taking the steps included in the Council's Recommendations on the Comprehensive Approach to Teaching and Learning Languages, as well as in the Information Message on Rethinking the Education, and the working document of its personnel "Language Competencies for Employment, Mobility and Growth" (Teichler, 2015). At Russian universities, two foreign languages are taught to students in certain majors. However, such projects for improvement of the language training as are employed in the European Union so far do not exist. At the university, as well, due to the lack of classroom hours, principal attention is paid to the language of business communication only.

One of the methods of solving this problem is implementing a special course on business communication in a foreign (English) language. The contents of the course are determined in accordance with the future specialty of the undergraduate and are professionally oriented, thanks to the integration of the foreign language with both majors (e.g. Finances and Credit, Foreign-Exchange and Credit Relations, Accounting, Statistics) and social and humanitarian cycle disciplines (e. g. Culture Studies, Sociology).

2. Problem Statement

For graduates of higher education institutions, both the modern reality and the labor market are full of risks and uncertainties. Higher education helps citizens to manage, to create a stable environment for career growth and social adaptation (Deschamps & Lee, 2015). At that, the education must possess high quality, be open and innovative. A well-structured and transparent education program provides graduates with tools to become well-informed, valuable and critical citizens as well as high-qualified and flexible professionals. The growing number of baccalaureate programs that unite humanities and STEM (Science,

Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects is of particular interest (Kwiek, 2015). At most Russian higher education institutions, baccalaureate programs have been undervalued from the moment of transition to the two-stage system of higher education, practically, until the present time, the transition period to the third stage – gaining a PhD. Higher education allows people to obtain knowledge, skills and competences that would grant them access to a better paid job and achievement of higher positions in the social pyramid.

The progressive internationalization of higher education initiates the upgrade of the foreign-language training process (Gundsambuu, 2019). The latest updated definition of internationalization of higher education (Marginson, 2017) published by the European Parliament states that internationalization of higher education is a "goal-oriented process of integration of the international, intercultural or global dimension in the goals, functions and services provided by higher education for the purpose of improving the quality of education and research for all students and teachers, and also for making a material contribution in the development of society". At the same time, it is necessary to strive to make the mission of internationalization inclusive, fair and equal in the influence over various types of university activities. The knowledge of a foreign language plays an increasingly important role in making young people more employable and preparing them for work where the communication is done in a foreign language. The knowledge of a foreign language is a factor in the competitive ability; bad language skills of employees cause many companies to lose international contract and do not allow employees to find a job in countries apart from their own. Languages can build bridges between people by granting them access to other cultures and allow us to better understand each other. When training students, a more strategic approach to the multilanguage communication is necessary. The well-known expression that "the lack of foreign language skills is a disease, thankfully, a treatable one" is very true, but, unfortunately, so far not everyone chooses to contact a "doctor" on the matter.

This study assesses the options of implementing the contents and processes of a special course on business communication in a foreign (English) languages for undergraduates majoring in Economics at the Institute of Humanities of the St. Petersburg Polytechnical University. The work that examined the status quo as of 2009 was devoted to solving a similar task. In the past 10 years, certain changes have taken place both in the European and the Russian educational spaces.

The European study devoted to examining the influence of Erasmus Student Exchange Program has demonstrated that graduates with an international experience of training and communication manage the work at the labor market much better. The European Commission has developed the Skills Panorama, by means of which EU governments (Vahshtajn, Meshkova, & Zhelezov, 2005), employer associations and labor unions make their contributions to the forecasts of skill demands in different sectors of the economy, including the demand for foreign language proficiency. Another key project is ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations), which classifies the European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations. It provides clear information (in 24 languages) on the skills, abilities and qualifications needed for various occupations in the European Union. In 2011-2013, the Commission was coordinating the business platform that made a contribution in the Network for Promotion of Language Strategies for Competitiveness and Employability (CELAN). Its objective was to disclose the language needs of companies and employees of the European Union and to provide tools to satisfy them. The results

of the two latest comprehensive reports on languages and employment opportunities: studying the foreign language proficiency level (Beadle, Humburg, Smith, & Vale, 2016) and employment opportunities (Araújo et al., 2015) as well as employment languages and opportunities (both since 2015) have demonstrated that there is a direct connection between language skills and likelihood of employment.

At Russian universities, there are no similar projects for enhancing the language training, even though teaching two foreign languages is practiced for students in certain majors (e. g. foreign regional studies, global economy, some others). This could be explained by the insufficiently frequent contacts with foreign citizens in both the business and day-to-day environment (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). Also, the foreign language training needs to be started as early as possible. At the university, too, principal attention is paid to the language of business communication.

Where the selection of the foreign language is concerned from the successful employment standpoint (this largely applies to the second foreign language since English has long since become the leading language of scientific and business communication), it is necessary to bear in mind the programs of strategic development of one's region and state ones in general (Fink, 2013). Here, there is a misconception about the role of China in the sphere of economy, implementation of innovations, R&D efforts of the leading Chinese universities. China is persistently promoting its strategic initiative "One Belt, One Way", and Russia is not against taking part in it. At the same time, our country is lobbying its projects for Eurasian cooperation. In such projects as SCO and BRIX, Russian and Chinese are basic languages. Without a doubt, Chinese needs to be actively studied in territories that border China (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018).

The successful mastery of a foreign language largely depends on the use of modern teaching techniques. The work (Araújo et al., 2015) lists the conditions, implementing which would allow carrying out the effective teaching of a foreign language for business purposes to future Bachelor's degree holders. They comprise:

- a special course based on the modular competency approach, aimed at the development of the foreign-language professional communication competence of a student;
- the special course is modular by nature, which allows mixing and matching the modules depending on the demands of the labor market and occupations in the region;
- the subjects included in the course are determined in accordance with the future specialty of the graduate; the course contents are integrated and professionally oriented by nature, while its processes are implemented in the context of the educational and informative communication activities, using the teaching techniques aimed at the interactive training in business communication.

Modern researchers allocate several factors which are closely connected with internationalization processes. They influenced reconsideration of the purposes, tasks and the content of training in business communication in English (Teichler, 2015), such as social and political, economic, sociocultural, social and public.

Social and political factor. In relation to the system of higher education state policy is aimed at improvement of quality of training of future experts for different branches of the national economy. It is also necessary to mention the development of the international relations between Russian and foreign higher

education institutions which leads to establishment and maintenance of close contacts in the field of teaching, student's exchanges, the sphere of professional development, the field of scientific research.

The economic factor is an essential factor influencing updating the content of training business communication in a foreign language nowadays. Therefore, the demand for experts with knowledge of a foreign language for professional focused and business communication considerably increases.

The sociocultural factor involves strengthening the cross-cultural aspect of foreign-language communication. Teaching English in a cross-cultural context allows to compare the image and lifestyle of the foreign and the own countries, develops behavioural and speech culture, abilities to observe business image according to rules of national etiquette and international business ethics in business and commercial activity.

The social and public factor influences improvements of quality of training of students to life and activity in polycultural society in which approach education, science, culture, economy, production.

In the context of the revealed factors, new trends in training in foreign languages are accurately designated.

1. First, gradual integration of disciplines is observed, the content of training extends and updated.
2. Secondly, the refusal of passive assimilation of a training material and increase in interest in independent research and design activity is observed.
3. Thirdly, the range of special courses and author's programs taking into account the professional directed needs of students extends.

3. Research Questions

The following research question was addressed in this study:

- Study the peculiarities of the process of preparing students of non-linguistic specialties for business communication in a foreign language in the context of the internationalization of higher education.

4. Purpose of the study

To achieve the goal the authors had to solve the following tasks:

- Identify the features of the process of preparing students of non-linguistic specialties for business communication in a foreign language in the context of the internationalization of higher education.
- Determine the level of efficiency in the use of innovative interactive methods, in particular the case method, in teaching business communication in English.

5. Research Methods

The following theoretical methods were used as research methods: analysis of scientific literature, analysis of pedagogical documentation; empirical: observation, testing; experimental: ascertaining and shaping experiments.

6. Findings

As a result of the internationalization processes, the requirements imposed by the state and the labor market on the level of training of university graduates in the field of business communication in a foreign language increase (Chernova, Akhobadze, Malova, & Saltan, 2017). It is believed that one of the solutions to improve the quality of preparation for business communication in English of students of non-language specialties is the introduction of innovative methods of work in higher education systems.

Modern methods of teaching foreign languages are a flexible and expanding information and educational environment (Chernova et al., 2017), in which, along with the traditional approach to teaching, there is an increasing interest in pedagogical innovations, new technologies and methods. One of the innovative and promising ways of organizing education is the case study method. The urgency of applying the case-study method in higher professional education is due to two trends:

- orientation of higher education towards the formation of professional competence, including on the basis of knowledge of at least one foreign language. Special attention is paid to the ability for continuous learning and self-improvement.
- increasing requirements for the quality of specialist training, who must also have the ability to obtain information from various sources, including in a foreign language, to be able to lead a discussion, both in native and non-native.

The application of the case method in English classes in a professional environment (business English, English for managers, English for economists) allows solving a number of important tasks, such as:

- 1) increasing the motivation of learning a foreign language with regard to professional interests and needs;
- 2) stimulation of communication in a foreign language;
- 3) integration of theoretical knowledge and practical actions;
- 4) the formation of the ability to make independent decisions;
- 5) mastering the skills of spontaneous speech.

Based on the study of the theoretical positions of the problem, analysis of the current practice of teaching foreign students to business communication, experimental work was developed and carried out. Experimental work was carried out on the basis of the Institute of Industrial Management, Economics and Trade of Peter the Great SPBPU in the natural conditions of the educational process. The study involved 60 foreign students (from China), 60 Russian students, as well as 6 foreign language teachers.

The first stage - the ascertaining experiment - aimed at identifying the initial level of development of business communication skills - is implemented using a testing method. The material for testing was developed on the basis of the basic CMD, used in accordance with the approved program of the discipline "Foreign language: Professionally-oriented course."

The evaluation criteria were taken levels of the following skills:

- ability to analyze standard business cooperation situations;
- the ability to adequately perceive communication partners of other cultures, to show tolerance towards them when solving professional tasks;
- the ability to solve conflict situations;

- the ability to use adequate professional discourse strategies.

Table 01 below demonstrates the distribution of students by levels according to the results of testing.

Table 01. The initial level of formation of business communication skills

Levels	Students from Russia	Students from China
High level	0%	0%
Intermediate level	46,7%	3,3%
Low level	53,3%	96,7%

The main link of the formative experiment was the author's model of technology, aimed at developing business communication skills in the course of teaching a foreign language in the context of the internationalization of higher education (De Corte, 2014). It was introduced in the second half of the 2018-2019 school year. During the testing of the developed technology, by observing the course of the educational process, some of its features were revealed, manifested in groups of both Chinese and Russian students, namely, the causes of interpersonal friction within the training groups, which had to be considered when designing the educational process:

- lack of time (with their own needs always seem more reasonable);
- a different level of proficiency in the language, which does not give an opportunity to quickly solve the set collective task
- opposing aspirations during the performance of training tasks;
- lack of clarity in the distribution of functions in the collective decision of an educational task (which can cause different ideas about the functions performed by a person);
- indistinct management, the duality of interpretation of the requirements of the teacher.

At the end of the formative experiment, a control slice was carried out (Table 02).

Table 02. Control out of the levels of business communication skills

Levels	Students from Russia	Students from China
High level	0%	0%
Intermediate level	66,7%	16,7%
Low level	33,3%	83,3%

The results of this control slice allow us to conclude about the positive dynamics, and, therefore, about the effectiveness of the technology used.

7. Conclusion

Internationalizations of higher education positively influences the professional and social adaptation of graduates. It helps to create a steady training environment and promotes career development. Successful mastering a foreign language substantially depends on the use of modern technologies of training. In this study, the authors analyze the possibilities of implementing the substantive and procedural content of a professionally-oriented foreign language course in undergraduate students of economic specialties at the Institute of Industrial Management, Economics and Trade (IPMiET) SPbPU, namely the features of the process of preparing students of non-language specialties for business communication in a foreign language conditions of internationalization of higher education. The authors study the potential of the case study

method for realizing this goal. The data obtained as a result of the experiment reflect positive changes in the level of formation of business communication skills, namely, the transition of 20% and 13.4% of Russian and Chinese students, respectively, from a low level to an intermediate, which testifies to the effectiveness of the applied technology using this method.

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