

Students' Conference in Foreign Languages as a Constituent Component of Education in Ecology

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Abstract

We analyze targets and ways of organization of annual students' conferences in foreign language for students in ecology obtaining a diploma in interpreting. Collecting data prompted by the teacher and oral presentation using humour and intensifiers of attitude expression aim to improve and inspire science education in ecology. Educational background of the training activity in order to compose a report on the chosen theme includes a special individual coaching. The final task of this work is seen in the frame of a general educational guidance: students are beginning to understand that a person of culture today is the one who knows how to interpret the information, and, thanks to the hidden layers of a text. Students acquire techniques of reading for specific information, skills of processing current data, methods of presenting information to find pragmatics of the author and common points of reference when discussing an innovative research. The stages of realization are followed by the stage emphasizing the successful completion of tasks. Such outcome as an affecting experience provides functional oral L2 performance development and cultural assumptions within the field of science. Implementation of student scientific conferences is an extracurricular form of educational work giving positive dynamics of social adaptation of students; it increases the cohesion of the student group forming a sense of individual and collective efficacy.

1. Introduction

Thematic student conference in foreign languages is a way of formation of public speaking skills, on the one hand, and one of the ways to form environmental conscience of a future specialist, on the other hand. Socio-cultural context of mastering the ecological professions changed for the better, the present expert community working for protecting Earth is multilingual, the RUDN University students come for more than 100 countries [1], so it creates conditions to an international context of the forum.

The present paper analyses more than ten years' experience of L2 teachers organizing students' environmental conferences in foreign language. We will consider more closely the recent experience: a) The Annual XVII Conference [2] of the Ecological Faculty in April 2015 included 79 short articles of young researchers and their research advisors in English, Spanish, German, French; the great part of them were presented in oral form; b) The International Youth Scientific Conference in November 2016 united 297 publishers (among which 49 post-graduates, 61 master's degree students and 117 undergraduates of 20 countries) plus 50 undergraduate authors of essays not included to the two-volume Proceedings [3].

The formation of students' skills of application of acquired knowledge and skills of speaking in new situations with the use of ICT has been studied in previous works of the team [4; 5; 6; 7].

Methodologists do not pay attention enough to this kind of pedagogical work in higher school, thinking, perhaps, that the participation at a Student Conference is akin to a seminar report [8], but the analysis of the types and methods of teacher activity shows being consistently different at each stage of this work, where using modern tools and searching a state-of-art form of presentation of information are extremely important.

Preparation stage of a student's public performance is studied much more as overcoming individual psychological difficulties [cf.9].

2. Methods and material

The report at the student conferences is limited to 7 minutes; it is based on different sources of information; the speaker must give a critical assessment of facts, events; substantiate their opinion on the seen, read, heard; express attitude; draw conclusions. The Conference occupies the entire day (the Conference of November 2015 took two days).

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The preparation of a report takes about a month. Students are reporting by e-mail to the teacher about their discoveries, findings, ask for references. As a rule, students report to the results of their own research ("Man-made small ponds for birds in times of drought", "Stray dogs in Moscow" or "Biological indicator of fresh water reservoirs in the Moscow Region").

Rare are the cases when students have had internships in foreign companies, and have got written documentation, such as "Joint Franco-Russian proposals on waste management in Moscow and Moscow region". If the research activity is just in the beginning, the student can make a literature review. The primary search as a rapid computer-helped orientation in the theme is completed when the results of materials in native language (Russian, in the case) are compared and supported by foreign sources. One of the main ideas is to teach the students to go in the web sites of different countries: as for French, for example, for "Acid rains around Lubertsy town" it must be compared not only with the situation of industrial zones of France, but also with other French-speaking countries with a series of articles and collections of audio and video material on the chosen topic.

From 2008, the conference is held in a new format: we gathered all studied languages (English, Spanish, French, German). This gave new momentum at the preparatory stage: it took to make a PowerPoint presentation. Teacher exercises control function: the grammatical and stylistic correctness foreign language text, the use of equivalent environmental terms when translating the data from Russian, good proper names. To be inspired, students can get acquainted with the materials of the previous conference at the RUDN Study Portal [10].

Students obtaining a diploma in interpreting are fluent in the studied foreign language, so the teacher meets them only once, in the middle of the work, to discuss the strategic direction of the material presentation and conclusions. They may present the report without the fully written text.

Every student has to listen his/her own report (part by part, sentence after sentence) having put it in any of computer pronunciation system (the Google translate, for example) in order to be sure of word stresses and right oral form of each word.

Less confident students are prescribed to write the full text of the speech.

We have developed a special kind of aid for students with only a basic level of the studied foreign language. When the structure of the report is quite clear, the glossary of equivalent terms is done, the ideas are in order, the teacher of foreign language He looks at the written text, and speaks aloud, adding necessary lexical units proper to the oral scientific presentation: the introductory words and sentences, rhetorical questions, emotional epithets, expressive words, estimates of different types (objective: technical, quantitative; subjective: ethical, aesthetic, social, etc.) This free speech is recorded in any kind of recorder: smartphone, iPhone.

The advantage is in a spontaneous statement on their material. This record is to be auditioned repeatedly.

What takes the student from such a comment?

First of all, the modus elements corresponding to the laws of listening which is expressed by intensifiers of attitude expression: units to establish contact, to attract attention to a point, ways of expressing emotions, transitions from one topic to another, everything that allows to keep the interest of the audience. The student is to compose his oral presentation choosing the means he likes. He is allowed to have a look in the text during the presentation. In this case the multimedia presentation is to be shown by a classmate.

3. Results and discussion

The proposed method of professionally focused training is, above all, a kind of education of the future specialists in the Earth Sciences. The purpose of this activity is to create a special attitude to the chosen issue so that the work acquires some personal meaning and emotions.

The main idea is to achieve the environmental awareness and sensitize the young generation of environmentalists to the moral side of the research that is aimed at the greening of training. Working together we form the students' foreign-language speaking skills, such as:

- 1) searching for information on a given issue in Russian and foreign languages;
- 2) data analysis, critical comparison of the found data, assess the robustness of the sources;
- 3) selection of materials that are needed to accomplish the pragmatic task: to impress the audience, engage them in it emotionally;
- 4) structuring, taking into account features of oral speech perception;
- 5) compression of the data of the research;
- 6) preparation of the presentation in a foreign language with multimedia support;
- 7) participation in the communicative situation of discussion within the professional fields of activity.

The final task of this work is seen in the frame of a general educational guidance: students are beginning to understand that a person of culture today is the one who knows how to interpret the information, and, thanks to the hidden layers of a text.

The effectiveness of the preparatory phase of the conference is based on the interdisciplinary integration, variability of presentation material, the use of modern ICT technologies. The preparatory stage is the stage of motivation and goal-setting. It takes some time (at least a week) to give a mature conception of a reports after discussing with the research advisor (for a student of the 4th year or a master's student) or after a discussion during a lesson of foreign language or a teacher's comment or a text/video translation. Sometimes students formulate their own themes. Note that the attitude of the teacher at this stage requires special tact.

Many students estimate materials to each other, discuss them and offer attractive ways of presentation. We identify the lack of ability to independent critical thinking, students are too much confident in all written data. That's why the teachers make the future participants work at sites in many languages, comparing, for example, material from the Wikipedia, other encyclopedia using the given keywords in English, French, Italian and German. Students acquire techniques of reading for specific information, skills of processing current data, methods of presenting information to find pragmatics of the author and common points of reference when discussing an innovative research.

This work does not involve knowledge of all these languages, we teach young specialists not to be afraid of a new language, to find international terms, to use machine translation, to guess using linguistic clues. As a result, students are aware of the international significance of the chosen topic, can see it through different eyes.

Trying to choose the best option of the presentation of the material (the principle of "Surprise the listener!") the creative side of Me of the student is being developed.

Student Conference is a situation of a convention: teachers and students play a communication in foreign languages. But our experience shows that interesting theme become afterword a subject of discussion in groups (for this purpose 10 minutes have been specifically set aside at the lessons just after a conference).

The stages of realization are followed by the stage emphasizing the successful completion of tasks. Evaluation of results, congratulations with an experience of success (and for some of the participants, a bad sensation of a failure, alas) is the final step of the work for teachers of the department: they have to identify problems to be solved.

But there is another stage of the project, called the aftertaste. The faculty does not forget the conference at once. Students discuss it in their forums and blogs. They feel more to be a big team protecting the planet, they now know interesting people of others years, meet them, become closer. TV studio of the RUDN University makes films and interviews students (in Russian). The discussion after the conference has shown that they are thinking now about the creation of a global information space.

4. Conclusion

Organization of student's scientific conferences on environmental issues in foreign languages is a special activity of the department of foreign language.

Participation in the conference in foreign language solves a range of educational and developmental problems, provides a significant increase in the level of language skills by increasing the level of intrinsic motivation. Gathering facts and preparation of the report is a complex of individualized communication methods of work, managed by teachers and aimed at developing the ability to work with multilingual authentic sources.

The well-prepared report is visually very agreeable for the audience: they see a person enjoying the process, outwardly expressed in a confident smile, a cheerful tone, gestures. Of course, it requires long and painstaking work, and the task of the teacher is to inspire, to give hope, to encourage.

If the experience is successful, it encourages other students to make the same effort next time.

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