

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Forming the Second Language Business Communication Competence

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Abstract

The model of business language teaching should be based on an interdisciplinary approach. It requires the integration of specifically language, professional, scientific and cultural skills and knowledge. When teaching business English in Russian universities the great attention is paid to creating the practically useful range of knowledge and skills that can be implemented in business communication, including written and oral forms of communication. The following tasks are used when teaching the academic and business writing: preparing a set of documents for job searching, creating self-presentation materials, professional portfolios, grant application letters, etc. When teaching communication English the role playing is regularly used in order to help to model the real situations of business communication. Students are offered such a task as discussing the real situations of business communication failures, especially in the intercultural environment. The great attention is paid to teaching the e-communication in English. When teaching business English it is necessary to use tasks that model the real situations of business communication. The interdisciplinary approach helps to create the second language business communication competence more efficiently.

Introduction

The second language (mostly English) business communication competence is undoubtedly important for every person who works in the modern world. Communication skills, both written and oral, are the main factors contributing to job success and career progression [1]. Today, with the explosion of international business, English has become a lingua franca for business people from different countries, therefore it is necessary to develop the English-based intercultural business communication competence.

When teaching business English in Russian universities, especially for Master degree courses, the great attention is paid to creating the practically useful range of knowledge and skills that can be implemented in business communication. Such skills and knowledge form the second language business communication competence. It is an integrative characteristic of a person that ensures the ability to communicate effectively in the intercultural business environment [6]. This is a complicated multi-level structure including some narrower, more specific competences.

It seems quite obvious that development of the second language business communication competence should be based on an interdisciplinary approach. According to Laster and Russ (2010) most business communication teachers in the USA employ this approach [3]. In Russia this approach is also widely used [6]. The interdisciplinary approach combines linguistic, professional, communicative, psychological and cultural aspects of Master of Science education and helps to distribute the contents of the Business English curriculum among classes and homework.

In the process of teaching Business English educators will solve the main tasks of developing all the specific competences included into the second language business communication competence. The model of the second language business communication competence comprises such aspects as linguistic, communicative, professional, cultural ones, and each of them includes some specific competences. This model is realized in St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University's curriculums and tutorials for Master courses. The educators of the university have developed a set of textbooks and other didactic materials to teach the undergraduates the second language business communication competence on the basis of an interdisciplinary approach.

The goal of the article is to share the experience of Business Communication educators from Russia in using an interdisciplinary approach to forming the second language business communication competence.

Written and e-communication skills development

Well-developed skills of written business communication are necessary for a successful career in the modern world. According to Condruz-Băcescu (2010), 'no business is feasible without



communication, especially written' [1]. In different countries all over the world the English writing competence is considered to be a significant criterion in the recruitment process in international and domestic companies [4].

The importance of teaching written business communication is widely recognized. The research conducted by Wardrope (2002) indicated that most educators who provided the business communication courses perceived writing skills to be more important than other communication skills, such as speaking, technology-mediated communication, interpersonal communication, team/group communication, listening, and cultural literacy skills [7]. Nguyen & Miller (2012) argue that the most important genres of English business writing are e-mail messages, business letters, and reports [4]. But there are, certainly, other types of documents used in the intercultural business communication. It is taken for granted that all the business written communication should be clear, accurate and well-designed [1]. Thus it should be taught properly. In St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University the following activities are used when teaching the academic and business writing: preparing a set of documents for job searching (CV, application letter, cover letter), creating self-presentation materials, professional portfolios, grant application letters, writing reports and articles.

One of the elements of the business communication competence is skills of creating the second language multi-code texts in the major field of an undergraduate's study. Such texts include flyers, advertisements, unusual presentation of CVs, with some visual elements in addition to the usual textual information. The visual elements can be as follows: photos, pictures, graphics, video, etc. All the elements of a business multi-code text must be in harmony with each other and provide a solution to a common pragmatic problem. At the same time such a text should be a finished product with certain aesthetic properties. The visual elements of a business multi-code text should serve the overall goal of the document, attract potential client or employer, create a desired mood, evoke certain emotions, strengthen and emphasize the meaning of the text information.

In the present-day world visual communication is an integral part of every business communication, it is necessary to develop the second language skills of the use of visual information to create multi-code texts. The following learning activities aimed at developing the skills of creating a multi-code English-language text can be suggested:

1. Creating a CV in the form of a collage containing photographs and drawings with a small volume (compared to the traditional form of summary) of text information.
2. Making a report on an undergraduate's industrial practice or internship in the form of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation in English, including pictures, graphics, drawings, tables, and videos.
3. Creating a flyer to promote any product (service), or a company logo, using photographs, drawings, and text slogans in English.

The great attention is also paid to teaching the e-communication in English. Business communication through Internet, Skype, e-mail, social networks requires not only IT skills, but also the knowledge of business communication etiquette.

The use of electronic means of business communication for self-study and completing both traditional and creative tasks in English has now become a mandatory requirement, as in the modern world a specialist in any field of knowledge and business cannot do without regular access to the Internet resources. The content of individual work with the use of information technology in teaching business foreign languages includes various tasks associated primarily with the search for information online. For making reports, presentations, multi-code texts and documents in English an undergraduate should possess skills of use of specialized Web sites that publish articles on business issues he or she is interested in, forums and social networks of professionals where one can find discussions of topical issues of the modern economy and business. Participation in such discussions, as well as communicating in social networks is one of the most effective means of developing the second language business communication competence. It is important to encourage undergraduates to take part in independent communication with native speakers, to find means of presenting their point of view, to find ways of persuasion in written form.

Oral business communication skills development

Oral business communication in English is the essence of the present-day business and management, so a proper education should be provided in this field. The great attention should be paid to teaching the business communication etiquette both in face-to-face conversation and telephone communication. It is anything but a secret that the telephone conversation rules differ from culture to culture, and there are certain communicative differences in phone calls and face-to-face meetings [2]. So, when teaching business English it is necessary to use such tasks that model the real situations of telephone conversations and face-to-face communication.



When teaching oral English business communication the role playing is regularly used. The role games help to model the real situations of business communication, e.g. job interviews, negotiations, visiting business partners abroad, taking part in conferences and forums.

This method of training refers to a group of active methods of learning, it helps to activate and improve students' speaking skills in the most natural way, and it is especially important in the absence of a natural language environment. Role-playing puts students in a situation which includes certain limitations and motivations that are close to ones existing in the real world. Playing games removes psychological barriers and the fear of speaking a foreign language, forms the ability to express one's own thoughts, and, therefore, it helps to solve a great number of practical problems of the foreign language education.

When developing the second language business communicative competence it is necessary to use role-playing games based on the interdisciplinary content, using situations encountered in the real business communication and possible in undergraduates' future careers. These games should involve both narrowly professional knowledge and communicative skills of persuasion and argumentation. The experience of teaching undergraduates who study in various fields has shown that the most effective are such role-playing games like "Job Interview", "Grant Proposal", "Innovative Project Statement", "Loan Getting", "Tough Boss Persuading". Playing these games undergraduates should employ methods of logical reasoning, means of emotional and psychological influence on the other participants of communication, whose mission is to try to counteract this influence, provide the arguments of the denial to the request for an extra holiday, salary increase, a loan granting, a grant awarding, the proposed innovative project financing, etc. The most successful is a participant who has achieved their business goal, managed to convince the other participants to agree or to take some action in their favor. The 2012 survey of the St. Petersburg State Polytechnical University's undergraduates showed that 83% of respondents appreciated the benefit of playing games in studying a second language [6].

According to Saatci (2008), teachers of intercultural business communication often use the problem-based learning, that places students in problem-solving situations [5]. Undergraduates are presented with complex real-life problems that provide a context for developing communicative skills. Undergraduates are also discussing the real situations of business communication failures, especially in the intercultural environment. It helps students to understand the reasons of communication problems and avoid them in their future life. For example the following communicative failure is presented for students' consideration:

You have a French business partner. At lunch you were discussing your business activities and projects when suddenly you used sign «okay» to say that you had coped with some difficult negotiations perfectly. But your French business partner understood your sign wrong. She decided that you had failed your negotiations. Why do you think this misunderstanding occurred? Try to explain to the partner this misunderstanding.

The systematic discussion of such communicative failures in the second language classroom can prevent misunderstanding caused by ignorance of the realities of foreign language or cultural differences in mentalities of the interacting parties.

Development and improvement of the business communication competence includes the solution of such problems as mastering the basics of public speaking and presentation skills, developing successful personal communication strategies and tactics aimed at the professional form of communication and cross-cultural settings. Undergraduates make reports and presentations about business problems, achievements, innovations etc. Training of a monologue speech in combination with the group discussions of case studies of intercultural communication failures and successes, ways to deal with a conflict contributes to the formation and development of intercultural communicative competence as the most important part of the second language business communication competence.

Conclusions

The experience of Russian educators in employing the interdisciplinary approach in teaching a business second language shows that oral and written skills of the second language business communication should be developed simultaneously. The learning activities presented to undergraduates should be various and based on the real business situations in the intercultural environment. The interdisciplinary approach can be successfully used in the process of learning the basics of intercultural business communication. It helps to create the second language business communication competence more efficiently.



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