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The Development of Students' Discourse Skills via Modern Information and Communication Technologies

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of students' discourse skills development via new modern information and communication technologies (ICT). The authors (a) discuss the notion of discourse; (d) define the structure of the discourse competence; (c) develop a nomenclature of discourse skills, which can be developed by the use of modern information and communication technologies; (d) describe a study, which aimed to develop students' discourse skills during a short-term development course.
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Keywords: Modern information and communication technologies; discourse; discourse competence; discourse skills

1. Introduction

1.1. Importance

One of the leading vectors of the Russian Education State Policy is the integration into the European Higher Education Area with the preservation of accumulated potential and traditions of the Russian Higher School. The ratification of the Bologna Declaration provisions in Russia is contributed greatly to the accessibility of higher education, the quality and prestige of a two-level education model, the academic mobility dynamics and academic degrees and qualifications providing in demand on the labour market. Thus, the transition to a competence-based education model has identified a number of requirements that must be met by graduates (bachelors) in their

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professional activities. One of these requirements for the professional staff training is to get a complete language education. The expansion of international contacts and qualitative transformation in the social, economic and political areas in Russia has taken a foreign language as a real need for intercultural communication means. According to this, there is a need to review existing methods, tools and forms of foreign language teaching in high school that would be able to meet the needs of modern information society.

The development of new and innovative information and communication technologies (ICT) in education allows reviewing processes of getting, processing and further use of information. The use of ICT in foreign language teaching as a pedagogical tool allows getting a qualitative education at a lower cost of time and effort of teachers and students (Belz &Thorne, 2006; Robert, 2010; Sysoyev, 2013; Sysoyev & Evstigneev, 2009, 2010, 2011; Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

The vital necessity for free orientation in multilingual global community creates a social order on the training of language school graduates (bachelors), who are capable of dialogic collaboration, expression and communicative goals achievement. Consequently, the role of the discourse skills development is growing, that refers to the ability to build different types of discourse, to use and to interpret them according to the communicative situation. And the wide range of modern information and communication technologies (e-mail, web forum, blogs, wikis, podcasts) provides a possibility to develop students' discourse skills during a short-term development course.

1.2. Definitions

"Discourse" and "discourse competence" are key concepts in this paper. However, scholars have not reached an agreement on the definitions of these terms. In the middle of the twentieth century discourse was defined as a sequence of related sentences or speech acts, and, in this interpretation, the notion of discourse was considered close to the notion of "text". But by the end of the twentieth century the term "discourse" was considered as a complex of communicative phenomenon as a system of knowledge, which, in addition to text, includes some extralinguistic factors necessary for a full understanding of the text: knowledge of the world, attitudes, opinions, goals, etc. Thus, discourse is not viewed solely from the standpoint of syntax and semantics.

There are so many different definitions of discourse in the modern literature in which researchers tried to reflect communicative orientation and structure of the concept. However the analysis of many definitions shows that most linguists define discourse as other than a result of communication, and as a proper verbal behavior, the process of actualization of the author's speech intentions and the interpretation of these intentions by the recipient/recipients in a particular communicative situation, and the result of this process is the text. Therefore it can be argued that every discourse is a text, but not every text can be a discourse.

Since the discourse is seen as a process and is determined from two perspectives - the author's and the recipient's - one should not talk about writing, but discourse-oriented writing, not about speech, but discourse-oriented speaking, not about listening but discourse-oriented listening and not about reading, but discourse-oriented reading.

Thus, from the productive side of communication (the author's position), discourse is understood as the process of encoding information in accordance with lexical, grammatical and syntactical rules, taking into account the stylistic, genre, social, cultural, psychological and emotional factors, with the use of cohesion and coherence in order to achieve a communicative goal - to convey information to the recipient. From the receptive side of communication (the recipient's position), discourse is the process of decoding information in accordance with lexical, grammatical and syntactical rules, taking into account the stylistic, genre, social, cultural, psychological and emotional factors, with the use of cohesion and coherence in order to achieve a communicative goal - to get information from the author (Evstigneeva, 2013).

By discourse competence of students it is necessary to understand a set of specific knowledge and skills that are needed for students to learn foreign languages in order to be able to encode and decode information using a foreign language in accordance with its lexical, grammatical and syntactical rules, taking into account the stylistic, genre, socio-cultural, psychological and emotional factors, with the use of cohesion and coherence in order to achieve communicative goals. According to it, discourse skills of students are defined as the ability to encode and decode information using a foreign language in accordance with its lexical, grammatical and syntactical rules, taking into account the stylistic, genre, social, cultural, psychological and emotional factors, with the use of cohesion and coherence to achieve communicative goals (Evstigneeva, 2013, 2014).

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