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DISTANCE LEARNING: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES

This paper deals with the improvement of students' language skills as well as the development of socio-cultural and communicative competences of engineering students in the distant mode. The ability to communicate with business partners abroad and to negotiate without translation services comes to the forefront of the study of foreign languages. The paper outlines the classroom activities, proposes the ways of overcoming difficulties in teaching engineering students a foreign language distantly. Motivation, true to life situations and personal preferences are the aspects which give the language a communicative character. In everyday life, a person speaks only if he has a need due to certain circumstances of reality. In the classroom, the motive does not arise by itself, and very often the language is caused by the instructions of the teacher. In the era of globalization and scientific and technological progress, more and more people are beginning to study English, knowledge of which is necessary for them to deepen their knowledge in the fields of science and technology, business, education, social life. The role of English as a means of international communication for professionals with higher education is significant. They believe that a good knowledge of a foreign language will contribute to success in their professional activities. Speaking as a type of language activity is primarily based on language as a means of communication. Language provides communication between interlocutors, because it is understood by both the one who provides the information, encoding it in the meanings of words selected for this purpose, and the one who receives this information. Monologue speech has a great compositional complexity in comparison with dialogue one, it requires completeness of thought, strict adherence to grammar rules, clear logic and coherence in the presentation of what a person wants to say. The communicative task for the speaker is to capture the listener's attention, to get his message received, to get a reaction to it, taking into consideration the situation of communication and the personality of the listener. Thus, teaching a foreign language also involves mastering of certain communication techniques.

Key words: *academic situation, spontaneous communication, a foreign language competence, teaching stages.*

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ДИСТАНЦІЙНЕ НАВЧАННЯ: ПРОБЛЕМИ ТА МОЖЛИВОСТІ ДЛЯ ВИКЛАДАЧІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ТЕХНІЧНИХ УНІВЕРСИТЕТАХ

У статті йдеться про вдосконалення мовних навичок студентів, а також розвиток соціокультурних та комунікативних компетенцій студентів інженерних спеціальностей у дистанційному режимі. Уміння спілкуватися з діловими партнерами за кордоном і вести переговори без перекладацької послуги виходить на перший план у вивченні іноземних мов. У роботі окреслено аудиторну діяльність, запропоновано шляхи подолання труднощів у дистанційному навчанні студентів-інженерів іноземній мові. Мотивація, вірність життєвим ситуаціям та особистим уподобанням – це ті аспекти, які надають мові комунікативний характер. У повсякденному житті людина розмовляє лише тоді, коли у неї є потреба, обумовлена певними обставинами дійсності. У класі мотив не виникає сам по собі, і дуже часто мова викликається вказівками вчителя. В епоху глобалізації та науково-технічного прогресу все більше людей починають вивчати англійську мову, знання якої необхідно їм для поглиблення знань у галузях науки і техніки, бізнесу, освіти, соціального життя. Значною є роль англійської мови як засобу міжнародного спілкування для фахівців з вищою освітою. Вони вірять, що гарне знання іноземної мови сприятиме успіху у професійній діяльності. Говоріння як вид мовної діяльності насамперед базується на мові як засобі спілкування. Мова забезпечує спілкування між співрозмовниками, оскільки її розуміє як той, хто подає інформацію, закодуючи її у значеннях підібраних для цього слів, так і той, хто цю інформацію отримує. Монологічне мовлення має велику композиційну складність порівняно з діалогічним, воно вимагає повноти думки, суворого дотримання граматичних правил, чіткої логіки та злагодженості у викладі того, що людина хоче сказати. Комунікативне завдання мовця – привернути увагу слухача, отримати його повідомлення, отримати реакцію на нього, враховуючи ситуацію спілкування та особистість слухача. Отже, навчання іноземній мові також передбачає оволодіння певними прийомами спілкування.

Ключові слова: навчальна ситуація, спонтанне спілкування, ініціативна компетенція, етапи навчання.

Formulation of the problem. Language is a means of communication. Teaching a foreign language competence comprises several components, including teaching to speak. Conditions for the origin and stimulation of the language use are very important for teaching a foreign language today. Motivation, true to life situations and personal preferences are the aspects which give the language a communicative character. In everyday life, a person speaks only if he has a need due to certain circumstances of reality. In

the classroom, the motive does not arise by itself, and very often the language is caused by the instructions of the teacher. In the era of globalization and scientific and technological progress, more and more people are beginning to study English, knowledge of which is necessary for them to deepen their knowledge in the fields of science and technology, business, education, social life. The role of English as a means of international communication for professionals with higher education is significant. They believe that a

good knowledge of a foreign language will contribute to success in their professional activities. The ability to communicate with business partners abroad, to negotiate independently, without an interpreter, becomes urgent when learning a foreign language. Regarding this, teaching a foreign language involves the formation of communicative competence – the ability to communicate in a foreign language, necessary for intercultural cooperation. Thus, one of the main tasks of a high school teacher is to form such students' communicative skills as understanding and using foreign language expressions in accordance with the specific communicative situation, language tasks and communicative intentions (Bukhbinder, 1980: 140).

An analysis of studies. Application of advanced methods and approaches to teaching/learning in order to improve the quality of education has always worried scientists and teachers. The global pandemic has made radical changes in the educational process at institutes and universities. Using only traditional methods does not allow to effectively carry out the educational process, as the main task of foreign language teachers is to create a comfortable environment in the classroom, which will promote communicative and mental activities, covering the professional interests of engineering students (Chmel, 2018: 50).

The transition to distance learning has forced the teaching staff of universities, including foreign language teachers, to master new technologies in order not to lose the achievements of full-time study and continue to improve the level of foreign language proficiency of engineering students distantly. The priority in language teaching is the formation of foreign language communicative competence, but the use of new tools and means has become necessary to achieve this goal. Mastering of Google services appeared to be a real challenge for foreign language teachers. To meet the demand of the time teaching of many subjects were switched to video conferencing. Zoom or Google Meet became widely used. Many teachers have started creating Google Classrooms to provide students with the necessary teaching/learning materials, tests, to evaluate homework, and ensure feedback. Another challenge for both students and teachers of foreign languages was to gain perfect skills of Zoom platform use, because students need to be taught all kinds of language activities, especially speaking.

Presentation of the main research material.

There are three main reasons why a teacher should involve students in the speaking process in class. The first reason is that the task of speaking is for them a “rehearsal”, an opportunity to practice live conversational situations in class. Secondly, while performing these tasks, students try to use all or some

of the language tools they have learned. Here, both teachers and students can see progress in learning a foreign language. But along with progress, there are language difficulties that students face when speaking. Finally, the more students have the opportunity to activate the various language elements they have learned while studying, the more likely they learn to use these elements automatically, which means that they can easily apply these elements without thinking or choosing words and phrases learned at the lesson in true to life situations (Bukhbinder, 1980: 380).

Speaking as a type of language activity is primarily based on language as a means of communication. Language provides communication between interlocutors, because it is understood by both the one who provides the information, encoding it in the meanings of words selected for this purpose, and the one who receives this information (Vолоkita, 2011: 58). The simplest kind of oral speech is a dialogue. Spoken language is characterized by catchwords, phrases and individual words the interlocutors exchange, questions, additions, explanations, the use of hints, understandable only to the interlocutors, various auxiliary words and exclamations. In dialogues communicative roles change alternatively, resulting in a gradual understanding; it becomes possible to coordinate the actions and behavior of people who communicate, otherwise it would be impossible to achieve results in mutual understanding. If we give the task to prepare a dialogue and divide students into pairs, we must explain them that it is not a simple mechanical division, they become partners and interlocutors. It is extremely important not to reduce the attention to this type of language activity when working with students remotely. Zoom platform allows the teacher to divide the group into session halls, where students can acquire and improve the necessary skills not worse than in the classroom, as the teacher can form pairs independently, considering the level of students' language proficiency.

Monologue speech has a great compositional complexity in comparison with dialogue one, it requires completeness of thought, strict adherence to grammar rules, clear logic and coherence in the presentation of what a person wants to say. The communicative task for the speaker is to capture the listener's attention, to get his message received, to get a reaction to it, taking into consideration the situation of communication and the personality of the listener. Thus, teaching a foreign language also involves mastering of certain communication techniques.

When selecting or developing teaching tasks to form students' communicative skills, the language teachers should bear in mind that both the content

and task procedure are to correspond to the real communicative actions. One of the most effective tasks successfully implemented in English classes at Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Igor Sikorsky according to the curriculum for 3-6 courses of engineering specialties is the preparation of essays on professionally-oriented topics, creation of PowerPoint presentations, their demonstration and discussion in class. Zoom video conferencing mode allows the teacher to “share” the screen, and the student to demonstrate his presentation, accompanied by a report with the camera on to show fluency in monologue speech on the topic.

Further discussion takes place using the “raised hand” function by the students of the group to coordinate the discussion. The successful holding of the annual All-Ukrainian Student Scientific and Practical Conference ‘Significant Achievements in Science and Technology’ for 1-2 year students at Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute on-line also confirmed the possibility and necessity of Zoom services application in teaching engineering students distantly.

Speaking has always been considered one of the most popular language activities. For many students, this is a basic skill. Sometimes it is extremely easy to involve students in communication at the lesson.

A friendly atmosphere, good interpersonal relationships, sufficient level of English motivate and facilitate students to participate in the discussion willingly, especially if the teacher offers them exciting topics and effective tasks. However, in practice, the level of language training may be different, or the tasks are not interesting and up to date. Speaking skills, like any other skills, are not formed by themselves; for their formation it is necessary to use special exercises and tasks, which are ultimately designed to form and hone the ability to navigate in natural situations of communication (Zimnyaya, 1991: 13). They are an important component of the course of study (training).

It should be noted that it is more difficult to select or develop effective speaking tasks than those for listening, reading or writing. First, it is necessary to find out what “effective speaking task” means. The characteristic features of successful tasks for conversation: students speak a lot. Moreover, all students should have equal participation. Each student gets the opportunity to take part in the discussion. High motivation of students is essential (Kazantsev, 2012: 20). They want to talk because the topic of conversation is interesting, and they are eager to express their ideas. The level of language training is appropriate for conversation.

We would like to present some tasks aimed at developing and improving oral skills. These exercises are of great

interest to students. 1. The task of clarifying the necessary information (information gap activities) includes the process of information exchange. Initially, participants have only part of the general information, and then as a result of language interaction, each receives a more complete amount of information. Students work in pairs. For example, the topic of “employment” is discussed.

Both students receive job application cards, each of which contains different information. Video conferencing mode allows the teacher to display these tasks on the screen. Asking each other questions, the students fill out their cards. This material forces students to ask a large number of questions in order to complete their task. Such exercises encourage communication and specific vocabulary on the topic is developed (Passov, 1989: 201). 2. The task of ranking activities involves the distribution of information received in accordance with certain criteria. For example, students are offered a list of adjectives that describe a person’s character traits. In groups, they have to choose three most important (in their opinion) adjectives that characterize a friend, girlfriend, teacher and arrange them in order of importance. Ranking of information is accompanied by discussion and subsequent exchange of viewpoints. The students are to express disagreements, give arguments and present opinions. 3. Guessing activities are related to the identification of a person, object or process with the help of general questions that require answers “yes” or “no”. For example, students work in small groups (Ryazantseva, 2016: 531). The student is given a card with the name of a famous person. The rest of the group members need to know the supposed identity.

This type of exercises motivates and programs language interaction. 4. Role play tasks encourage students to perform various social and psychological roles, promote the development of communication process (Starodubtseva, 2013: 45). 5. Group discussion tasks include discussing a range of issues on a specific topic (for example, “Environmental Security”), exchanging statements that complete and clarify the information. Participants express their agreement or disagreement on the issues discussed. Great attention is paid to the abilities of students: listen carefully and understand the interlocutor, join the discussion, ask questions, switch to the new aspect of the problem discussed, evaluate the remarks of interlocutors. 6. Project work tasks () are “independently planned and implemented by students works in which communication is closely connected with intellectual and emotional context of other activities” (Akhmad, 2018:5).

As an example of project-based activities creation of a radio program on the topic “News” could be suggested.

Students appoint an editor who is responsible for coordination and preparation of “stories”, “interviews” for the news release. 7. Prepared monologues develop the skills of monologue speech on a given or freely chosen topic. For example, the student is asked to prepare an oral report on the ecological state of his city, the cultural traditions of the region, etc. Developing of such exercises it should be remembered that they must provide not only action but also interaction of students. To perform all these types of tasks, students and teachers can effectively use screen sharing function to demonstrate prepared photos, diagrams, charts, etc. for a more interesting presentation of their messages. However, there is always a problem of “silent student” who has great difficulty in performing tasks in a foreign language and resists to any opportunity to develop his communication skills in the classroom (Mikhnenko, 2018: 33).

Having analyzed domestic and foreign methodological literature, we can distinguish such motivation issues as inhibition / uncertainty (inhibition / lack of confidence) as the main difficulties. Unlike reading, writing, or listening tasks, speaking tasks require immediate response. There is usually a pause (delay) before the student can say something in a foreign language. This pause may be due to some factors: anxiety about saying something wrong, fear of losing face in front of the group, shame of attracting attention or fear of making mistakes. Students are ashamed to speak a foreign language, to be criticized by the teacher and ridiculed by groupmates. You can constantly hear complaints from students that they do not know what to say on the topic in their native language. They have no interest (motive) to express their thoughts, to share their ideas. Students do not have enough language and speech tools to solve the problem.

To remove the factor of inhibition / uncertainty, Zoom allows the teacher to divide students into small groups considering their level. This increases the students’ oral production and interaction time and reduces the inhibition of a student who does not want to speak in front of the whole class. It would be a good idea to repeat the words before the discussion.

It is also worth doing a series of exercises on different language structures (grammar, lexical, phonetic), which the student will need in their discussion.

Recognizing the fact that students may be afraid of making mistakes, we recommend convincing students that for you, as a teacher, correct speech and correcting mistakes are NOT a priority. To express oneself in a discussion despite language skills is an invaluable experience of speaking, and mistakes are inevitable. Careful selection of topics and tasks, brainstorming and exchange of ideas can to raise students’ interest.

Conclusions. Revision of vocabulary and expressions on the topic, giving definitions to the terms, matching of synonyms or antonyms, filling in the necessary preposition and making own sentences with collocations can facilitate students to get ready for the discussion and diminish the difficulties which may arise. It should be remembered that “speech activity cannot be taught; it can only be learned” (Saienko, 2020: 38). Students will feel much more confident in a foreign language if their ability to speak is constantly maintained in class. This type of communication activity should be an integral part of each lesson (Starodubtseva, 2013: 45).

Also, communication on social networks greatly helps to master and improve basic language skills, including speaking. According to recent research, students and teachers of foreign languages consider social networks a useful tool for learning new material and a tool that helps to develop foreign language communication and master the technical terminology of the specialty (Saienko, 2020: 38).

Thus, the success of speaking a foreign language depends on several factors: whether the tasks for speaking are properly selected and organized, whether they create an internal need for communication; whether they provide useful practices for the development of oral skills; whether the strategies of dialogue and monologue speech are taught; the extent to which each student gets the opportunity to speak in practice; how comfortable he feels in the classroom.

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