Teaching French for Specific Purposes

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Abstract: Since 2009 a new didactic concept of teaching foreign language named "French for university purposes" is being developed. This article describes the stages of its development and methods of teaching French to foreign students using approaches based on the analysis of their academic goals and professional needs. To develop this new concept efficiently, teachers should be actively involved in theoretical and practical research in this field by taking advantage of the expertise contained in the "English for Academic Purposes" that has been in development for the last 20 years

Keywords: French For University Purposes, English For Academic Purposes, Students` Needs, Competences

Introduction

The issue of teaching a foreign language to non-linguistic experts, scientists, and technicians is not new(Whyte, 2019). Without losing relevance, this issue has been debated since the middle of the twentieth century, and while the problem statement and training goals have evolved over time, the essence of the problem has remained constant, because effective methodological and organisational approaches to specialist training have yet to be proposed(Urgal, 2019).

Methodology

French for non-specialists

The issue of language training for a broad range of experts occurred for the first time in the postwar period, when strong international economic cooperation began. The words "language of science and technology" and "language of speciality" emerged in French methodology at the time, however were eventually replaced by the term "language for non-specialists", implying that it was about individuals for whom the language was not a specialisation(Christison & Murray, 2021).

These terms were contrasted with the language of everyday communication, the mastery of which had traditionally been the goal of teaching. In the 60s of the XX century, two different trends could be observed. In the educational environment, the demand changed: a different audience appeared - adults, who, unlike children and teenagers, wanted to master French for professional activities (Gouhengaim, et.al., 1964). At the same time, the institutional environment realised that science and technology are important and integral components of the general cultural space(Horwitz, 2020).

However, it was only at the lexical and grammatical level that it was proposed to solve the problems arising from the development of these trends(Crosthwaite, 2019). By that time, a dictionary of common vocabulary necessary for everyday communication, based on frequency and thematic criteria, had already been created. It included 3000 lexical units and basic grammatical constructions. This dictionary became the main course in French for foreigners for several decades (Gouhengaim, et.al., 1964).

At the end of 1960, a dictionary of general scientific vocabulary was created on the basis of the same criteria. Since this dictionary was designed to teach foreign students, scientists and technicians to find information of professional interest to them, it was created solely with written communication situations in mind(Kormos & Smith, 2023). The dictionary, which was compiled by analysing written texts related to various sciences, was intended to be a link between a dictionary of everyday communication and a specialised dictionary (Gouhengaim, et.al., 1964). However, it turned out that 64 per cent of the lexical units included in the edition belonged to the frequent dictionary of common vocabulary and were used not only in scientific publications, however also in everyday communication, without being specific to any particular field of research. In addition to the selection of vocabulary, the compilers of the Dictionary of Common Scientific Vocabulary paid considerable attention to the selection of morphological and syntactic constructions most characteristic of written scientific and technical speech(Derouet et al., 2024). Such a dictionary, according to its creators, should allow students to use those lexico-semantic constructions without which communication in the professional sphere is impossible even if they have knowledge of highly specialised vocabulary (Lehmann, 1993). The subject of the dictionary was limited to individual phrases considered out of context, although in the introduction it was noted that the purpose of teaching a speciality language is to enable students to communicate in the professional sphere and to realise the required communicative intentions(Jury et al., 2021).

The ineffectiveness of this approach was due, on the one hand, to the significantly impoverished linguistic content of the developed course and, on the other hand, to the inattention to the specific learning objectives of the students, since the course creators did not take into account the communicative tasks that the students had to solve in the

professional sphere (Phal, 1971). These tasks were significantly beyond the scope of the course, which was limited by the very methodology of compiling a dictionary of general scientific vocabulary, which was based on only one communicative competence, namely receptivity in situations of written communication(Faez et al., 2021).

French for non-specialists: a functional approach

In the 70s of the XX century, a new approach called "functional" was developed to solve the problem of training specialists in French-speaking professional communication, which had not yet been solved. The impetus for its development was the dramatically changed after the 1973 oil crisis. The international situation, against the background of which, for the first time, a decline in the influence of the French language in the former French colonies was noted, due to a significant reduction in funding for French language teaching, especially in the Maghreb countries(Onishchuk et al., 2020).

In France, the Directorate for Cultural and technical co-operation also drastically reduced the budget for educational projects, which led to the prioritisation of areas that had never before attracted the attention of specialists in the teaching of French as a foreign language. In 1970, the target audience was broadened and at the same time defined much more precisely: instead of the vague definition of "non-specialists working in scientific and technical fields", there were "lawyers, medical professionals, tourism and hospitality professionals, agricultural specialists" and so on(Uvsløkk & Vold, 2024).

The starting point in the development of the new approach was the main problem unsolved at the previous stage, namely the attempt to define the content of training based on the specific requirements of students, thus maximizing their implementation (Lehmann, 1993). According to the authors of this approach, the motivation of students in its application was to become a consequence of their professional interest not only in the results, however also in the learning itself, since now its content was functionally linked directly to the field of their activity.

The teaching models developed under this approach varied, although they were still based on lexical minimums selected for specific professional fields, such as medicine or agriculture. Unlike audiovisual methods, which were the only methods used at the time in French language courses in everyday communication situations, the teaching models considered were still oriented towards written communication(de Lira e Silva, 2024).

The first models were linear in nature: students' needs were analysed in an active way, and the results were used to select significant communicative situations, which made it possible to determine the content of the training (Lehmann, 1993). Thus, before the course development began, the lexical minimum, grammatical structures and speech acts necessary for the realisation of the communicative situations identified in the course of the analysis were specified. However, it soon became obvious that the needs of the students

identified at the beginning of the course did not allow for a precise and definitive definition of the objectives and content of the course. Another disadvantage of the proposed methodology was the complete rejection of the general educational character of training due to the short timeframe and narrow specialisation(Adawiyah, 2023).

The refined model is no longer linear, i.e. sequential. Although the organisation of training including the same stages, the nature of interaction between them has changed: the possibility of feedback has been taken into account. The objectives and content of training, outlined in the course design, were implemented consistently in the process of training, then in this model there is a possibility to correct them. The course itself determined the sequence of intermediate tasks at each stage. The new approach was criticised for its overly detailed analysis of student requirements, since, due to the collective nature of learning, the needs of each student identified in the analysis could not be taken into account at the stage of planning learning objectives for the group (Cuq and Gruca, 2006). If the needs of the students could not influence the content of the teaching, the criteria that would make it possible to define it could be, according to the critics, the learning problems that the students will face in the learning process(Vito, 2019):

-Emotional-psychological problems caused by a feeling of insecurity in learners who are starting to learn a foreign language and do not know whether they will be able to cope with this task

-Language problems that need to be solved in order to fulfill learning tasks.

-Sociocultural problems related to the use of authentic language materials in the learning process (Cuq and Gruca, 2006).

From the analysis of these new needs the organisation of the learning process had to begin. Opponents of the approach argued that since the very nature of communication does not allow for systematisation, it was necessary to develop models in which the content of learning would not be predetermined: it could be determined by the learners themselves in the learning process. Taking these criticisms into account, the researchers realised the need to develop a new communication methodology.

French for non-specialists: an instrumental approach

However, there was a compromise model between the one that defined the content of the training in advance and the one that considered it pointless. In this model, the necessary preliminary organisation of the content, arising from the real requirements, did not interfere with the implementation of the communicative approach in the learning process(Hyland, 2019).

An attempt to create such a compromise model was made in Latin America within the framework of the approach called "instrumental", which was aimed at teaching the reading of scientific and technical literature. The creators of this approach assumed that the

task of teaching all aspects of a language to students who do not have enough class time is unrealistic. Therefore, instead of limiting, and therefore impoverishing, the language material due to the time limits of the course, it is more logical to limit the content of the course from the very beginning, choosing as a learning objective the acquisition of a certain communicative competence, such as reading.

In order not to repeat the mistakes of the authors of the linear model, it was planned that only the content of the teaching material could be determined in advance, however not the content of teaching. The linguistic material was selected in such a way that it reflected as fully as possible the various genres characteristic of the special field of activity in which the students were interested. This linguistic material was not to be arranged in a certain sequence before the beginning of the training - it happened in the course of the training. We could only speak of a preliminary discourse and textual analysis of the language material, the aim of which was to develop a reading strategy that would allow the students to understand each text in the most effective way. The serious disadvantage of this model, as practice has shown, was the loss of students' interest in learning, which was explained by the fact that they had no real goals for learning a specialty language. In fact, the goals were of a purely academic nature. In the absence of the possibility to create real motivation in students (which was an organisational problem requiring a political or economic solution), according to the critics of this approach, it was necessary to abandon the narrow professional specialization of teaching, expanding its cultural content and thus stimulating students' interest.

Result and Discussion

French for Specific Purposes

The criticism of the functional approach to teaching French as a specialty language led to the fact that in the 80s of the XX century one could observe a decline both in the sphere of theoretical developments in this field and in the market of educational services. However, as the target audience continued to exist, in the 1990s interest in this issue arose again - already at the stage when the communicative approach was actively developed in the methodology of foreign language teaching. This new stage in the methodology of teaching French was called "French for special purposes".

In contrast to the previous model, now the analysis of students' goals and needs was carried out not only to identify the knowledge that will be needed in the future in situations of professional communication, however also to describe the skills and behaviours that are professionally required in situations of foreign language communication, and then to include them in the teaching content. The practical outcome of active methodological work

in this area during this period was the emergence of special training courses (tourism, hotel management, medicine, economics, law) organised according to the level principle (Cuq and Gruca, 2006).

Until the 90s, the courses developed for training specialists of a certain sphere of activity were designed for a sufficiently high level of knowledge of French. It was assumed that students had already reached, if not the B2 level (according to the Council of Europe classification), then at least the B2 level

French for University Purposes

"French for University Purposes" in the methodology of teaching French as a foreign language started to be developed in 2009. It was the result and deepening of the approach developed at the previous stage. As a result of the Bologna Process, which aims to create a common European educational space, by 2011 France ranked fourth in the world in terms of the number of students whose native language is not French (15 per cent of the total number of students studying in French universities) (Bouclet, 2011).

On the other hand, outside of France, many countries have faculties teaching in French (167 faculties, 11,000 students). Thus, among those who study French as a foreign language for professional purposes, it is possible and at the same time methodologically sound to identify a narrower target audience, which is defined at the first stage of the organisation of training in the framework of the course "French for special purposes" - at the stage of analysis of the goals and needs of students (Bouclet, 2011).

The overall aim of these students is to improve their knowledge of French and to develop competences that will enable them to obtain a degree from a French university in the future. This is not an easy task, given that French universities have specialities where only 40 per cent of native-speaking students obtain a degree. Obviously, this threshold is even lower for non-francophone students.

While the learning objectives of the new approach can be more clearly defined than in the previous approach, the limitations that existed before remain. It is still a question of learning in the shortest possible time, since this stage is only intermediate in obtaining professionally significant education; the target audience is characterised by different levels of linguistic, sociocultural and sociolinguistic competences, formed within the framework of each student's culture; traditional study groups are forced to unite students of different specialities: future lawyers, economists, philologists, engineers.

Thus, the only way to methodologically improve the previous approach is to narrow and clarify the needs of students, which leads to an increase in the effectiveness of the new approach compared to the previous one. The main factor is the greater motivation of students, who now instead of the vague goal of acquiring professionally significant

knowledge, have a very specific goal - to obtain a prestigious diploma of higher education (Bouclet, 2011).

Discussion.

Studies conducted by French methodologists have made it possible to determine what competences should be formed as a result of training in order to help non-francophone students adapt to the university environment. It is important to note at once that we are talking about both academic and organisational adaptation. Thus, in addition to the traditional "French for special purposes" competences, linguistic and specialised competences related to the future profession, such non-traditional for foreign language teaching competences as methodological and institutional competences are highlighted. The methodological component refers, first of all, to the competences that allow the use of language knowledge and skills for academic and university purposes. In the student's native culture and in the French culture, university courses are organised epistemologically differently. They may differ in their thematic, structural, methodological organisation, system of presentation, argumentation, references (Bouclet, 2011). Therefore, in the field of writing, students (before they find themselves in a university environment) need to learn how to:

- take notes during a lecture
- methodologically correctly prepare and design various types of written work for intermediate and final control.
-methodologically correctly prepare and draw up a thesis.
In the area of speaking, important for university purposes are:
-comprehension of the lecture
-participation in a colloquium
-Speaking in front of a highly professional audience.

Interestingly, surveys of foreign students studying at French universities show that the main difficulty for them is not oral comprehension, which is known to be the most difficult skill to develop, however skills related to the preparation of written work.

On the one hand, writing is the main, and often the only, form of student knowledge control in French universities, and the methodology of writing these papers is nationally specific. The institutional component is heavily reliant on sociocultural and sociolinguistic competency in the university setting. The student must comprehend the overall structure of the French university and be able to engage with administrators, instructors, and students in the university setting. Each of these levels of engagement has its own set of national and cultural characteristics, with which the student should be aware before beginning.

Conclusion

At present, the theoretical development of the new concept and its use in practice in the organisation of teaching is being carried out only by the teachers of those French universities that accept foreign students. The ultimate goal of developing the new concept is to increase students' understanding of French and build skills that will allow them to get a degree from a French university in the future.

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