Quasi-professional tasks in the foreign language education

Y Timkina, M Khlybova

Perm State Agro-Technological University named after Academician D.N. Pryanishnikov, Perm, Russia
timkinaj@mail.ru

Abstract. Foreign language education in a non-linguistic multidisciplinary university is a part of specialists’ professional training. A foreign language is considered as a tool for solving professional problems in future work activities. It is possible to train students for solving problems by creating practically-oriented learning conditions. Quasi-professional activities in foreign language include content and activity aspects, that is, based on professionally-oriented materials, involve students in modeling certain practical activities. Quasi-professional tasks are based on the principles of communication, interdisciplinarity and problematicity. The basis of the quasi-professional problem in a foreign language environment is the communicative situation that ensures the interaction of participants in the process of solving the problem. The interdisciplinarity is defined as the integration of various sciences, namely linguistics and specialized professional training of students, as well as ways of mastering and expanding knowledge and skills. Problematicity defined as the presence of a task with unknowns, or contradictions, is necessary for activating the cognitive processes of a person in overcoming difficulties, which contributes to activating cognitive processes and producing foreign language speech. The aim of the presented work is to develop and justify the effectiveness of in-class work, designed to systematically solve gradually sophisticating quasi-professional tasks. The article provides examples of quasi-professional tasks developed for undergraduate students in the “Hunting, maintenance, breeding of wild animals and animals for commercial purposes” training course. The conducted experimental work revealed a number of benefits and disadvantages of this system. It is noted that the apparent disadvantages are an incentive for development of teacher competence.

Introduction

Foreign language education as a part of undergraduate and postgraduate students’ training in higher educational institutions is aimed at preparing specialists to solve professional problems in a foreign language environment. The range of such tasks encompasses business communication, the study of world experience and innovations in the field of professional activity, presentation of their own developments for discussion within professional community and skills enhancement and professional development. Thus, the goal of foreign language education at all levels of training in higher educational institution is foreign language acquisition in the professional sphere [6, 12]. The modern methodology defines the foreign language acquisition by students of non-linguistic institutions as the formation of foreign language communicative competence with the following aspects: readiness and ability to carry out interpersonal foreign language communication [2], use of language means in speech activities, compensation for a limited number of language means, employment of different strategies and tactics of communication, use of knowledge of the national and cultural specificity of a foreign country in order to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers [14], solution of production tasks within cross-cultural environment [9].

Professionally-oriented foreign language teaching in recent decades has firmly strengthened its position in the methodology and practice in non-linguistic universities, focusing on the use of professional knowledge in the form of content of the foreign language teaching. It has now created the
basis for integration of linguistic and professional education. The expansion of the area of “professional orientation” is realized through the inclusion in the educational process not only content that allows students to get acquainted with professional communication linguistic features, but, to a greater extent, the organization of the activity aspect that simulates professional activities in a cross-cultural communication [11, 13].

The integration of linguistic and professional training is based on the interdisciplinarity, the interdependence of disciplines in an integral professional training program and is aimed at developing the “abstract and professional thinking in the process of mastering and applying language material in situations of professional communication” [7, p. 33]. The orientation of the educational process toward the practice, the need to create conditions for mastering the ways of conducting professional communication and performing future labor functions determines the transformation vector of both in-class work and students’ self-study. The in-class contact work should acquire a new status, during its conduct students should receive the necessary minimum knowledge that would allow them to confidently step forward in the self-study process [8]. The effectiveness of in-class work should be enhanced by active forms of education, namely, the systematic implementation of the quasi-professional tasks with gradually increasing sophistication.

Quasi-professional activity is considered as being “educational in form and professional in content” [13], based on authentic materials reflecting the real state of science and industry [15], based on motivation to learn and to obtain professional qualification [5]. The tasks of this type of activity are the situations that simulate the performance of labor functions of a specialist, containing specific problem or difficulty, which implies the search for solutions. Considering foreign language professional activity, it is necessary to outline such characteristics as the presence of a communicative situation for the implementation of various types of communicative activities (speaking (monologue, dialogue, polylogue), reading, listening, writing). The analysis of studies’ results on organizing foreign language courses based on quasi-professional tasks indicates many advantages of this educational process, particularly the “close resemblance to professional activity, high levels of mental activity, creation of specific linguistic and professional environment that ensures the development of logical-communicative operations” [6], large educational value of foreign language as a means of obtaining professional knowledge [15].

However, systematic actualization of quasi-professional activities during foreign language courses implies solving certain problems, namely, defining tasks, applying task types in accordance with level of education and language knowledge, developing tasks aimed at improving cognitive skills and professional thinking, identifying benefits and disadvantages of the system being developed. The purpose of this work is development and methodological justification of the foreign language course encompassing quasi-professional activities during in-class work . The hypothesis of the study is the statement that systematic implementation of gradually sophisticating quasi-professional tasks will contribute to formation of foreign language communicative competence at a higher level.

1. Materials and Methods

The bases of organization of foreign language quasi-professional activities are provisions of the communicative approach with the presence of a communicative situation and professionally-oriented approach with interdisciplinarity and personal-activity approach. The communicative situation is a prerequisite for formation of receptive and productive speech and communicative skills. The development and consolidation of these skills is realized through the process of performing a speech act. Activation of speaking activities ensures obtaining practical experience by forming the ability and readiness for foreign language communication that constitute the foreign language communicative competence. The speaking skill activity is possible in presence of the interaction of interlocutors by which the developer of the communicative approach E. Passov assumes the interrelationships of communication participants, which have personal character and determine motivation to solve the verbal thinking task [10, p. 46]. Creating conditions for establishing relationships in a group of students during in-class work involves the following steps: identifying the subject of interaction,
providing subjects of communication with the information being discussed and subject-linguistic context, establishing information communication, establishing the form and method of interaction, setting up communicative task [10, p. 56].

Interdisciplinarity of foreign language studies in the future professional activity is considered as the integration of two or more sciences such as linguistics as the language science and the scientific knowledge, which is fundamental for students of certain field of study [7, p. 90]. At the same time, not only the substantive part is in the focus of integration, but also the ways of interaction in professional communication, “the dynamics of students' personal and professional development”, the involvement of future specialists in the “multicultural global world” of professional activity [7, p. 91]. An important factor ensuring interdisciplinarity is the cooperation of foreign language and special discipline teachers, as well as the involvement of employers and professional community in order to develop up-to-date teaching cases, monitoring and evaluating educational process from the point of view of modernity and adequacy of solved quasi-professional tasks, solutions and results to be achieved. Significant for our study is the fact that disciplines related to mastering a foreign language are studied in the first and second courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate courses, while core disciplines are studied at graduate courses, which causes gradual and consistent extension of professional knowledge in linguistic education. The prevalence of a foreign language at the beginning of a course provides preparation for further independent mastery of a foreign language and its use as a tool in acquiring professional competencies. A gradual increase in the amount of professional knowledge in a foreign language corresponds to development of future specialists’ cognitive sphere in the training process, “realizes the transition from basic study with methodological support during the course to an independent creative professional form of activity” during self-study process at graduate courses [16].

Problematicity is considered in this article as the presence of certain tasks or contradictions that need to be solved by activating cognitive processes, such as analysis, comparison, use of deductive and inductive methods, etc. According to the personal-activity approach in vocational training, it is important to involve students in finding information and such ways to solve problems where knowledge accumulates, and their application mechanisms are improved by including a certain mental state of intellectual difficulty stimulating the cognitive processes and speech skills [1].

Quasi-professional tasks in foreign language education are designed to simulate professional interpersonal communication in a foreign language environment based on solving a certain problem that involves the activation of verbal and cognitive skills. The “educational in form, but professional in content” [13] tasks should reflect labor activities of graduates, which allow use of professional standards as guidelines in design. Studying and analyzing labor activities of specialists allow to identify the main areas of communication, determine the subject and object of communication, predict possible problem situations, determine the components of foreign language communicative competence necessary for the formation. The movement towards accepted professional standards determines the maximum likeness to future activities in accordance with the goals of higher education. In addition, it is possible to establish contact with employers for a substantive assessment of the training quasi-professional tasks, solution methods and obtained results.

It should be noted that possible diversity in levels of tasks’ complexity varies with the level of students’ foreign language skills and stage of professional training. The spectrum of tasks presented in the methodological literature includes different level types of tasks, such as situation - problem, evaluation, illustration, exercise [13], or according to the level of problematics depending on the unknown component, problem-presenterative, linguistic-cognitive, communicative-active and professional-communicative tasks [1]. Designing quasi-professional tasks of varying complexity, from simple to complex, allows one to consider the stages of formation students’ foreign language communicative competence. The structure of the quasi-professional task adapted by O.L. Felde and O.N. Ignat includes the objective’s formulating, context establishing for a specific situation, tasks leading to result, and assessment criteria [4]. Performing these step-by-step actions facilitates process of creating quasi-professional tasks and contributes to students’ ability to solve tasks, and as a result, to achieving an educational result.
Preparation for solving problems during in-class work is carried out in the self-study of students which acquires a new status. Most of the time in the development of disciplines concerned with mastering a foreign language is spent on self-education process. This is the work that includes forming of foreign language competence in terms of mastering new language units (phonetics, morphology, etc.), performing speech exercises, mastering new grammatical structures, and terminological system of professional activity. In self-education process is possible to choose text, audio or video materials that meet individual needs and interests, in such a way that they stimulate and maintain motivation and develop independent learning skills [15].

Let us point out the main features of organization of educational process based on the quasi-professional activity: in-class work is based on solving gradually sophisticating quasi-professional tasks with the simple-to-complex principle; quasi-professional tasks contain linguistic or professional problem; quasi-professional task is connected with communicative act; self-education process takes over the majority of traditional methods of in-class work in regard to new language material introduction, communicative skills based on authentic materials development and application.

2. Results and Discussion
On the basis of theoretical principles of quasi-professional activity there was developed the course in English for undergraduate students of “Hunting, maintenance, breeding of wild and game animals” training course of the “Zootechnology” speciality of the Perm Agro-Technological University. The discipline includes 108 hours (3 learning credits), of which 42 hours is in-class work. The basis of the course are the quasi-professional tasks developed on the professional standard “Hunting” (2016) and the federal state educational standard “Zootechnology” (2016). 20 tasks for in-class work of three types – illustration, problem, assessment were developed. Let us demonstrate several sample tasks.

Example 1. The quasi-professional task-illustration.
Objective: making commentary on what hunting is, the importance of hunting in the modern world, traditions of hunting in Russia and abroad, difference between hunting and poaching, the main lines of hunting’s activity.
Subject content: the place of hunting in the modern world, the importance of hunting based on the historical development of society, history of hunting in Russia and in other countries, hunting traditions in different countries, the main components of hunting.
Communicative activity types: speaking (polylogue), listening, reading for gist, reading for specific information, and reading for detailed comprehension.
Implementation: searching for information, mastering new necessary vocabulary, drawing up a mental map of a particular part of the report (for example, hunting traditions in a particular country) or making a whole report during self-study process, justification of hunting’s importance in the modern world, expression of agreement or disagreement between speakers.

Example 2. The quasi-professional task-problem.
Objective: determining the sustainability of natural resources’ management, the measures taken for organization of environmental management and hunting.
Subject content: sustainable management of natural resources and hunting use, the concept, signs of rationality, irrational nature resources management, the examples, generally accepted principles, ways of improvement, examples of the world community.
Communicative activity types: reading, writing, speaking (presentation).
Implementation: small texts with a description of use of natural resources are offered to students in small groups, where it is necessary to assess the situation, determine the rational or irrational use of resources. On the basis of these texts, the principles of rational use should be drawn up (in writing).
Expected results: the creation of natural national parks with rich flora and fauna, protected landscapes by human activity, nature conservation combined with the organization of leisure activities and mass tourism, natural resources are used in a way that does not damage nature.

Designing a course based on similar tasks focuses the developers on a more thorough selection of lexical base for students’ active vocabulary, functional grammatical structures based on statistical
methods of corpus linguistics that meet the criteria of frequency, universality, breadth and utility. Particular attention is paid to phrases which help to organize communication and support the conversation.

Such an educational process forces a change in the teacher’s role. The teacher performs the functions of a moderator and manages communication: puts tasks in context, asks questions, directs the conversation in the desired direction, sets the tone for communication and other things, but does not evaluate or make comments, corrections in the process of communication. The students’ self-study process may consist of two parts: firstly, repetition of the problem being solved in the form of an essay, outline, mental map, etc. and secondly the preparation for the next task.

From the students’ standpoint involvement in solving quasi-professional tasks allows them to realize their own preferences and interests, choosing the appropriate issues and means, creative abilities, and developing skills of academic communication. Freedom to choose the option of preparing for the task, use of authentic materials supports the motivation of learning and mastering a foreign language for professional purposes. The assessment of students’ foreign language communicative competence is carried out on the basis of subcompetencies.

Analysis of the above characteristics of the educational process suggests that this organization of the process is quite effective. It forms relationship between teacher and students and is focused on developing future specialist’s personality, professionally-motivated mastering a foreign language, using limited time for in-class work within the course framework for the revitalization of productive speech skills (speaking), the orientation of students’ self-study process on meeting professional interests and needs.

3. Conclusion
The organization experience of quasi-professional tasks exhibits benefits and disadvantages of this system. Benefits include orientation of the educational process towards students’ future professional activities, mastering a foreign language in practical activities by using it as a tool for the formation of professional competence, tightening up relations between teacher and students. The discussion and overcoming of emerging difficulties and problems contributes to immersion in educational activities, develops cognitive area of future specialists, supports motivation training, activates students' self-study, and, as a consequence, increases the level of foreign language knowledge. The main disadvantage is high labor-intensive development of tasks for teacher, which includes mastering new interdisciplinary content for the foreign language teacher himself, formulating tasks, developing teaching materials and methodological support for students' self-study, developing evaluation criteria and playing the role of moderator requires communication management skills that requires considerable preparation. Obviously, such organization of training stimulates teacher to enhance his own skills as well as communication skills and creates the prerequisites for a thorough study of the area of students’ activity.

The presented system differs from traditional one by a deeper immersion into the area of future professional activity with the help of a foreign language on the basis of systematic solution of quasi-professional tasks during in-class work. Orientation of self-study on personal needs and interests’ satisfying during preparing for solution quasi-professional tasks allows one to center the educational process on the development of future specialists' personality.

References
[1] Aitov V 2006 Izvestia: Herzen University Journal of Humanities & Science 17 127
[2] Bezukladnikov K E, Kruze B A 2015 Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 200 393
[3] Chilingaryan K, Gorbatenko R 2015 Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 214 559
[4] Felde O L, Igna O N 2017 TSPU Bulletin 10 (187) 155
[5] Gitman E K, Danilov A N, Stolbova I D 2017 News of higher educational institutions. Technology of textile industry 2 321
[6] Khomiakova N P, Dubynina N V, Osetrova M G 2015 Philology at MGIMO 1 132
[7] Krupchenko A K, Kuznetsov A N 2015 *Basics of professional linguodidactics* (Moscow: The Academy of Professional Development and Re-Training of Educators) p 232
[8] Leushin I, Leushina I 2017 *Higher Education in Russia* 6 51
[9] Leushina I 2018 *Language and Culture* 42 198
[10] Passov E 1989 *Basics of communicative methods of foreign language communication teaching* (Moscow: Russian language) p 276
[11] Pozdniakova S 2018 *SHS Web of Conferences* 50 01141
[12] Serova T S, Krylov E G 2015 *Language and Culture* 3 106
[13] Shliamova A A 2014 *European Social Science* 7-3 204
[14] Sysoev P V 2014 *Language and Culture* 4 184
[15] Vaičiūnienė V, Užpalienė D 2010 *Studies about Languages* 17 94
[16] Verbitskiy A A 2018 *Moscow State Linguistic University Bulletin* 796 126