Network Interaction Trends in Higher Linguistic Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the current situation in higher linguistic education and state the socio-historical conditions of network interaction. This study proposes our understanding of the concept of “network interaction in education”, suggests the socio-historical conditions of network interaction development at three levels: the level of society as a whole, the level of education as a field of human activity, the level of direction of training - training of linguists. It highlights major network interaction trends in higher linguistic education: communicative orientation of interaction, globalization and openness, individualization and de-synchronization, variety and variability, polylogue character of interaction. From the outcome of our investigation it is possible to conclude that the higher linguistic education is the most open to the implementation of network interaction. Being aimed at intercultural interaction, involving students and academic staff with a high level of language skills, it gets significant advantages over other Higher education areas in the process of integration into the global educational space.

Keywords: Higher education; network interaction; language training; socio-historical conditions; development trends.

1. Introduction

The modern society is the society of information flows and rapidly upgrading technologies, expanding international relations and overcoming space-time boundaries, the society of people who are able to adapt and interact. The above-mentioned social realities lead to transformations in the system of higher linguistic education, which tends to decentralization. Losing hierarchical characteristics, it is being transformed into an educational network, where network interaction is becoming a development priority. For that reason the paper addresses the issue of network interaction trends in higher linguistic education.

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2. Aims and Methods

The object of the current paper is network interaction in higher linguistic education. It aims at disclosing, on the theoretical and empirical level, the socio-historical conditions of network interaction development in the period of educational paradigm change. The following objectives have been set to achieve this goal: to analyze scientific literary sources and documents regulating education in Russia related to the issue researched in this article. The methodology of this study integrates analysis of documents regulating education in Russia, analysis of scientific literature on the issue of interaction of a learner and educator. The following research methods were applied: a) analysis of documents regulating education in Russia; b) analysis of scientific literature.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Overview of the approaches to the essence of the concept “Network interaction in education”

Having analyzed the development trends of network interaction we have come to conclusion that it is impossible to disclose the socio-historical conditions of any phenomenon without understanding its essence. On the one hand, in order to trace the socio-historical conditions of network interaction development we need to have a clear notion of the researched issue. On the other hand, as Aristotle (2004) argued, “only then can you understand the essence of things, when you know their origin and development” (p. 21). This is the reason why we started this research by investigating the essence of the notion Network interaction.

Interaction is one of the basic philosophical, ontological categories which is generally defined as a universal form of motion and development, the influence of objects on each other – as well as – a universal form of movement, development, which determines the existence of the structural organization of any material system. On the basis of this definition, it seems fair to claim that interaction is a key feature of all social processes, including education.

There exist many scientific approaches to the definition of Interaction in education. According to Wagner (1994) educational interaction is “a reciprocal event that require at least two objects and two actions. Interactions occur when these two objects and events mutually influence each other” (p. 8). Bibler (1991), Bruner (1982) point out the connection between interaction and communication, defining the term under analysis as a main method of communication between the participants of the educational process. Kenny (2002) agrees with this approach and describes the following dimensions that comprise the concept of interaction – communication, collaboration, and active learning.

Consequently, an educational process itself is nothing but a multidimensional and polymorphic interaction of its subjects – a teacher and a student. Support for this idea comes from Shale and Garrison (1990) who state that interaction is “education at its most fundamental form” (p. 2). In our turn, we share the position of Vitvitskaya (2012) that educational interaction is collaboration of students and teachers, aimed at the formation of their competences, acquisition of new knowledge on the basis of a joint action” (p. 79). Thus, the interaction in education is a joint activity of teachers and students as a key feature of the educational process. Obviously, such a joint activity can differ in forms and types, and network interaction is a new form of educational interaction, that has been much discussed in recent scientific literature. Describing this form of educational interaction, scientists use such terms as “online interaction”, “web-based interaction”, “distance interaction”. Russian scholars tend to operate with the term “network interaction” since it was declared in official documents regulating education. These are the Concept of Profile Education (passed in 2002) that describes the model of the network organization in education, and the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" (passed in 2013), that contains the article regulating the issue of network form of educational programs.

The importance and popularity of investigating the issue of network interaction is demonstrated clearly by many scholars all over the world. Analyzing the Russian scientific literature we can enumerate such researchers as Mosicheva, Shestak & Sigov (2008) investigating the issue of network approach to teacher training, Mojaeva (2012) – network structures in education as a factor of virtual academic mobility development, Anisimova, Demkin & Mayer (2005) – networking of universities in the common educational environment. There are as well a number of European and American educators and scientists whose researches are concerned with the idea of network
interaction in modern higher education. They are Moore & Kearsley (1996) – a system view on distance education, Soo & Bonk (1998), King & Doerfert (2000) – interaction in the distance education setting, Billings, Connors & Skiba (2001), Boyle & Wambach (2001) – interaction in Web-based courses.

Rose (1999) pointed out in his article “Deconstructing interactivity in educational computing” in 1999 that “the concept of interaction is a fragmented, inconsistent, and rather messy notion …” (p. 48). Not so much has changed since then. Network interaction, as a relatively new phenomenon, is being studied by lots of scientists but still doesn’t have unambiguous interpretation. Some researchers highlight the social character of network interaction (Beard & Harper (2002)), others point out its functions (Wagner, 1994). Synchronism and asynchronism of network interaction are key points in Smith and Dillon’s definition (1999).

Here we present the definition of network interaction which compiles the interaction descriptions of Moor (1996), Thurmond (2003) and Vitvitskaya (2012) and reflects our understanding of this complex notion. Thus, network interaction in education is a joint educational communicatively-oriented activity of students and teachers, provided by the presence of a common language of communication, implemented in the web on the basis of information technologies, and intended to enhance the competences of its participants.

3.2. Socio-historical conditions of network interaction in higher linguistic education

We suggest to overview the socio-historical conditions of network interaction in higher linguistic education at three following levels:

1. Socio-historical conditions arising at the level of society as a whole, due to the change of the type of social structure.
2. Socio-historical conditions arising at the level of education as a field of human activity due to growing process of globalization in higher education.
3. Socio-historical conditions that arise at the direction of training, namely, higher linguistic education, due to the emergence and further spread of a new type of communication – virtual (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Three levels of socio-historical conditions of network interaction in higher linguistic education
Let’s describe these socio-historical conditions of network interaction in higher linguistic education at each of above mentioned levels.

In order to disclose the socio-historical conditions of network interaction at the first level – the level of society as a whole, we analyzed the latest scientific works of modern philosophers. Speculating on the issue of changes in the modern world, researchers claim that these years we are experiencing the changes of the type of society, changes of the forms of social structure from industrial to network. We realized that the studies devoted to the problem of modern society, include such terms describing a new type of social structure as post-Industrial society (Touraine (1971), Galbraith (1972), Toffler (1980), Bell & Inozemtsev (2007)), Information society" (Porat & Rubin (1978), Stounier (1983), Masuda (1983), Katz (1988), Rakitov (1991), Abdeev (1994)), Knowledge society (Drucker (1993), Sakayya (1999), Shtehr (2001)). However, the term "network society" seems relevant in our research. The founder of this term is an American sociologist Manuel Castells, who first used it in scientific discourse in the late twentieth century. Castells (2006) understands the network society, or society of networks as a dynamic open system allowing innovation without losing balance (p 143). According to the scientist, global network structures acquire a major role in the life of modern people, displacing older forms of personal dependence and interest.

Thus, the main socio-historical conditions of network interaction in higher linguistic education at the level of society are:
- changing of the ways of information use – the development of technology, the accumulation of knowledge and the achievement of higher levels of information processing;
- individualization of labor, the appearance of new types of employment such as working part-time, temporary work, self-employment;
- transformation of “space and time” definition, caused by the spread of information and communication technologies. In the modern world such new concepts as “timeless time” and “space of flows” have appeared. Timeless time means that on the one hand, time is compressed, and on the other hand – the time is broken: the past, present and future are not the sequence any more. Space of flows can be understood as multiplicity of social practices without regard to geographic attachment.

The network society as a new reality, that has changed our daily life and transformed our consciousness, necessitates fundamental changes in all spheres of human activity, one of which is education. Socio-historical conditions of network interaction at the level of education as a field of human activity are:
- decentralization of higher education: losing the features of hierarchy, linearity, system of vertical relationships, it is becoming a learning network;
- growing need for constant restructuring, modernization and adaptation of organizational structures to the needs of the world market;
- becoming a new reality of the high school practice – academic mobility of faculty members as well as students.

As is clear from the idea of the above described most important conditions of the networking development, they are inherent to all areas of education. However, higher linguistic education is characterized by specific conditions connected with training peculiarities of future linguists. The main competence that should be acquired by the future linguists in the educational process is professional communicative competence, because main professional activity of a linguist is communication. Consequently, these are the peculiarities of professional communication that determine the socio-historical conditions of network interaction in higher linguistic education at the present stage, which include:
- emergence and growth of processes of mass virtual communication, organized primarily around an integrated system of electronic means of communication, including the Internet;
- distribution of human-machine interaction, where technology can take an independent place, as well as become an intermediary in the chain of human-technology-human;
- transformation of the text in the form of changing, diversified electronic hypertext, in consequence of which the symbolic space, formatted and structured as a hypertext, is forming a culture of "real virtuality". In this regard, Cooper (1995) writes: "Hypertext as a new textual paradigm can be considered as a way of communication in a society oriented to multiple, simultaneous streams of information that can not be accepted and internalized by a person" (p. 3).
3.3. Major network interaction trends

Major network interaction trends in higher linguistic education:
- communicative orientation of interaction – network interaction goal is communication on the basis of one common language; communication becomes a means and a result of network interaction;
- globalization and openness – network interaction is global, space-time, age limits are practically absent, access to information and educational resources is mostly free;
- individualization and de-synchronization – the ability to choose individual study program, attend courses of different educational institutions, that is build individual professional development trajectory;
- the variety and variability – educational methods and forms can vary depending on the individual preferences of students;
- polylogue character of interaction – the educational process has a polylogue nature, that is becoming a key for mutual development; the model of student-teacher relationships is transformed into the partnership-model.

4. Conclusions

It is evident that this study has shown that modern higher education has stepped forward to the era of transition to the new paradigm. In spite of the fact that traditional European pedagogy continues to dominate modern higher education classrooms, the new learner-centered paradigm is on its way to gain the succeeding popularity. The existence of real strong socio-historical conditions implies that network interaction is becoming a new prevailing form of contact between a teacher and a student. For that reason this new pedagogic phenomenon needs to be further scientifically explored and methodically developed.

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