Using the Communicative Approach in Online Learning

Andrei G. Narushevich

Taganrog Institute named after A.P. Chekhov (Branch) of Rostov State University of Economics, Taganrog, Russia
anarushevich@yandex.ru

Abstract. Purpose: The goal of this article is to describe the use of communicative approach in teaching to write various types of educational texts in the context of online learning.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The achievements of modern communicative linguistics (description of the structure of the communicative act, communicative strategies and tactics) can be successfully used in teaching the Russian language, in particular, in the creation of educational essays of various genres. Since any text is in a certain way a part of communicative situation of direct or mediated communication, in the process of teaching the creation of a written text, it is necessary to consider the peculiarities and structure of the communicative act of educational communication. When creating a text, individual communicative tactics – specific methods of expanding thoughts – can vary significantly and are determined both by the specifics of the task and by the skills of the author of the text. This article examines the use of the communicative approach in teaching the Russian language using the example of teaching communicative tactics to create descriptive texts.

Findings: Teaching various communicative tactics to create descriptive texts (description of the most important features of an object; description based on the most distinctive feature that determines other qualities; approaching the subject gradually; using the effect of disappointed expectations, etc.) enables students to master the tools for creating educational texts of various types. The study and description of communicative strategies and tactics when generating a text, and, most importantly, their use in the practice of teaching the Russian language online contribute to the speech development of students.

Keywords: Communication · Communicative competence · Communicative strategy · Communicative tactics · Speech

JEL code: I20 · I21 · I23 · I29

1 Introduction

Leading universities in Russia have long realized the need to create their online educational environments used as a repository of educational and reference materials, instruments for their development, storage and use, as well as tools for interactive online communication of all participants of the educational process. The transition to
online education due to the unfavorable epidemiological situation caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 has further stimulated interest in distance learning programs. The Taganrog Institute named after Anton Chekhov is actively expanding and updating its online educational environment as part of the development of a distance and blended learning system. Being focused on collaborative learning technologies, Moodle learning environment was chosen as a platform for building e-courses. This learning system allows organization of training in such a way that students could jointly solve educational problems and exchange knowledge. The presence of extensive communication possibilities is one of Moodle’s greatest strengths.

The development of electronic tools to support the course “Methods of teaching the Russian language” taught at the Taganrog Institute named after Anton Chekhov, raised the question of the implementation of the communicative approach in the course of linguodidactics, in particular, the formation of students’ speech skills. In the works (Littlewood 1981), (Passov 1991), and others, we find the general principles of using the communicative approach in teaching, aimed at the formation of students’ communicative competence. Attention of modern researchers focuses mainly on the features of communication in educational setting, speech behavior of participants in the educational process in the academic discourse in general (Zubkova and Kirillova 2019), as well as in specific disciplines - physics, mathematics, etc. (Sür and Delice 2016), (Sari et al. 2018). However, the question of using the communicative approach in teaching the development of speech skills remains open and deserves greater attention.

2 Materials and Method

In Russian communicative linguistics, the structure of the speech act has been considered in detail by (Klyuev 1998), (Antonova 2007), (Isser 2008), and others, the features of communicative behavior (including culturally determined behavior) by (Prohorov and Sternin 2006), and others. The importance of specific linguistic units in a particular communicative situation has also been studied extensively. Usually, when describing a communicative situation, a situation of direct communication is implied. However, any text is, to a certain extent, a part the communicative situation of direct or mediated communication. Therefore, when teaching the construction of a written text, it is necessary to consider the features and structure of the communicative act.

3 Results

The structure of communication when generating a text in a situation of mediated educational communication can be described using the notions of “communicator” and “recipient”. While creating a text, a student (communicator) finds him or herself in a certain educational communicative situation, which determines the motives for communication. When creating an educational text (for example, writing an essay), the author of the text (communicator) is the bearer of a communicative intention; in our case, this is the need to create a text of a certain type depending on the educational
situation. The communicative goal is the expression of one’s own thoughts in the form of a text of a certain type.

The link between the author (communicator) and the reader—the teacher (recipient) is a text that has certain qualities. The teacher (recipient) perceives the text, gives it a critical assessment, and makes comments aimed at improving the students’ writing.

We believe that in the Russian language classes it is necessary to teach strategies and tactics for constructing texts of specific types. In this connection, in our view, the concepts of “communicative strategy” and “communicative tactics” require special attention. In the works of numerous scholars, communicative strategy is understood as a complex or a sequence of speech actions. For example, Issers (2008) defines it as “a certain sequence of actions (in this case, speech), organized depending on the intent” (Issers 2008). We find a similar understanding of communicative strategy in the works of Klyuev (1998): it is a set of theoretical moves planned by the speaker in advance and realized during the communicative act aimed at achieving the communicative goal. Antonova (2007) defines communicative strategy as “a scheme of speech actions that lead the author of the message towards achieving a certain goal”.

While communicative strategy in direct communication is a theoretical construction of interaction model, communicative tactics is actual interaction—a system of planned communicative actions, the implementation of which is aimed at realizing the communicative goal. “Speech tactics is a specific speech move (a step, a turn, a stage) in the process of implementing a speech strategy; [it is] a speech action (a speech act or a series of speech acts) comprising a particular stage in the implementation of speech strategy and aimed at solving a particular communicative task of this stage” (Anokhina 2008).

In the case of indirect, mediated communication in the process of working on creating a text, communication strategy is a system of actions that ensure the achievement of the communication goal, a generalized plan of actions typical for constructing a text of a certain type (Narushevich et al. 2020).

Communicative tactics—specific methods of unfolding a thought—can be different and are determined both by the specifics of the task and by the speech skills of the writer. For example, when creating a descriptive text, various communicative tactics can be used:

- listing the most important features of the object;
- a description based on one of the most distinctive features that determine other qualities;
- gradual approximation of the object, the discovery of new features as one gets closer to the object;
- using the effect of disappointed expectations (creating a first impression, and then its destruction), etc.

Let us present the stages of work in line with this approach using the example of creating a text describing a person.

Communication in educational setting: working on the text of an essay describing a person.

Purpose of the description: to create an image of a person allowing to reveal his or her character through the description of their appearance.
Communication strategy: gradual approximation revealing the character based on a certain way of organized description of external features.

The preparatory stage of work on the text in this case involves working on and expanding relevant vocabulary to allow creating a text with certain content; mastery of typical syntactic constructions found in description texts.

Since adjectives play the leading role in descriptions, it is necessary to acquaint students with appropriate vocabulary. For example, while creating a text describing a person’s appearance, the following vocabulary material can be offered.

Choose the words you need to describe a person’s appearance. Complete the examples provided.

Face. Round, narrow, wide, oval, with high cheekbones…

Eyes. Blue, brown …; squinted, slanted, narrow, big …; clear, lively, clean, smart, empty, keen-sighted…

Look. Sly, cheerful, stern, inquisitive, surprised, absent-minded…

Eyebrows. Straight, thin, bushy, light, frowned …

Forehead. High, low, steep, flat…

Smile. Joyful, happy, cheerful, charming, radiating…

Nose. Straight, turned up, button, fleshy, Roman…

Hair. Dark, fair, chestnut, light brown, dark blonde, platinum blonde, red, mousey, ashy, gray; smooth, loose, disheveled…

Posture, build, height. Lean, slender, tall, lanky, fat, thick, short, well built…

Walk. Leisurely, light, swift, heavy, jumping, springy, lazy…

General impression, opinion, assessment. Quite handsome, attractive, interesting, plain, scruffy…(Narushevich and Golubeva 2019).

The main stage of work, writing the text, is the most important. It is here that students master the strategy and specific communicative tactics of creating a text, actually use them in their writing. The following generalized action plan focused on the general strategy of description can help in creating the text:

1. Choose someone you know well to describe.
2. Think in what order you will describe them.
3. Highlight characteristic and distinctive details in your description.
4. Try to express how you feel towards the person you are describing.
5. Think whether using your text, an artist will be able to draw the person you described, as well as convey your attitude in their drawing?

Another very important question is how the text will be constructed, what specific techniques (tactics) will be used to reveal the topic. One of the most productive communication tactics is the “gradual approach” technique, that is, the transition from a general description of someone’s appearance (height, physique, manner of walking) to specific details (facial expressions, eyes, etc.).

For example:

1. Decide who and for what purpose you will describe. (Share an impression, show the most distinctive features, describe their appearance, etc.)
2. What is the focus of your composition? (Show the main character trait; show what you (dis)like about this person; describe a person who is busy with some work, etc.)
3. Where do I start? Write where and how you met. Then imagine that the person is walking towards you. Describe his build, height, the way he or she is walking.

I always recognize my father by the light, slightly springy gait. And now I see him, tall and thin, rapidly climbing the stairs and opening the door of our house.

4. The person comes up to you and strikes up a conversation. Describe his face.

“Hello! Anybody home?” – this comes from the hallway, and I run toward his joyful voice. “Look what I have here…”, he says and looks at me cheerfully with his green, slightly narrowed eyes. Now his face is well lit, so every feature is clearly visible: beautifully curved black eyebrows, neatly trimmed mustache and beard, a mole on his cheek.

As you are talking, continue to look at the person and notice their manner of speaking, gestures, posture, clothing, etc.

Talking to me, my father gesticulates widely and winks briskly. Mom often laughs at his habit of flourishing his arms, which is why things get swept away to the floor or dishes break. But when he tells a funny story, he has no equal. It is as if we see different people and the expression on their faces, and then together we laugh out loud.

5. Finish your description by expressing your attitude to the person.

I love it when my father is at home, because he is always great fun to be with.

The main goal of the final stage is to revise and improve what has been written. At this stage, typical mistakes are corrected. Students can be asked to read and discuss fragments of successful essays. They can also exchange their texts and discuss their essays.

Let us also give an example of the “disappointed expectations” tactic.

1. First, show the person as seen by those who know him little. What impression does he or she make? What are they like at first glance?

My grandfather Georgy Ivanovich worked all his working life at a large metallurgical plant: he was a foreman, an engineer, then a shop manager. Many people know him as a very serious, reserved and even strict person who is always busy, taciturn and smiles rarely. This is exactly what I remembered about him from my childhood. When we would come to visit him with my parents, I recall the closed door of his study, behind it was the writing table and the stern face of my grandfather bending over a drawing or a document. I remember his gray hair, attentive eyes, pursed lips, and his hand with a pen or pencil running quickly over the papers. At first, I was even afraid of him, especially when I was asked not to make noise and not to interfere with his work.

2. Tell about an event that changed your attitude towards the person. How did you see them in a new light in this event? What new, seemingly imperceptible qualities can be found in the person?

Then one day my grandfather and I were looking through an album with old photographs: the workshops of the plant under construction, the May Day Parade, many faces unfamiliar to me … And then for the first time I saw a long-known person in a new light. I was amazed with how he told lovingly about each person, recalling
names and surnames, and telling stories from his life. His face brightened, his gray eyes became cheerful, then sad, and his hands carefully turned the pages, gently smoothing the bent corners of the photographs…

3. Summarize your observations. Make a conclusion about what the person you are describing is really like. Express your attitude towards this person.

That evening I learned a lot about the life of my family and the history of our city, but the most important discovery was the grandfather himself, who turned out to be a very kind and even cheerful person, forever in love with his work, to which he devoted most of his life.

Students can be offered various types of assignments aimed at creating descriptive text.

Task 1. Imagine that a boy got lost in a shopping center. The security officer asks to describe the boy’s appearance. Write a description of the boy, giving essential and additional details.

The boy looks six or seven years old. He has brown eyes and fair hair. He is in the first grade at school. He attends art school, draws well, plays sports. He afraid of tickling and loves chocolate and ice cream. Speaks with a slight lisp. Wearing jeans and a red T-shirt.

Task 2. Describe these people in a specific situation.

1) Nikita, as usual, was not listening to the teacher’s explanations. And now he was unexpectedly summoned to the board. Describe him at this moment. What is he thinking about? What does it feel? Come up with a title for this description.

2) Masha and her grandfather came to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Describe the expression on the girl’s face as she is standing in silence near the Eternal Flame. Try to convey her state of mind. What is she thinking about? How can this description be titled?

Task 3. Write an essay describing the appearance of someone you know in different situations. 1) The person is delighted, upset, angry; 2) The person is passionate about what they are doing. Do not forget to tell what caused your character’s state of mind.

Task 4. Write a short essay on the topic: “The most beautiful man.” Try to explain what their beauty lies in. (Narushevič and Golubeva 2019).

4 Conclusion

The formation of the communicative competence of students, which includes the mastery of all types of speech activity, including their ability to create written texts of certain styles and genres, can be grounded on the study of various communication strategies and tactics. Using communicative approach allows students to master the tools for creating educational texts of various types. The description of communication strategies and tactics when generating a text, and most importantly, their use in the practice of online teaching of the Russian language will contribute to the speech development of students.
Acknowledgments. This article was prepared with financial support of the Russian Fund for Fundamental Research. Grant of the RFFR 19-013-00101 «Formation of communicative universal study skills in the study of the Russian language in general secondary school».

References

Passov, E.I.: Communicative Method of Teaching Foreign Language Speaking. Prosveshchenie, Moscow (1991)
Zubkova, Y.V., Kirillova, I.K.: Structural characteristics of discourse communication. SHS Web Conf. 69, 00147 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20196900147
Sari, N., Tantra, D., Santos D.: Task-based language teaching and text types in teaching writing using communicative approach. SHS Web Conf. 42, 00064 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184200064
Anokhina, V.S.: Strategies and tactics of communicative behavior in a small social group (family) Vestnik Stavropol’skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. № 56, pp. 64–71 (2008)
Antonova, Yu.A.: Communication Strategies and Tactics in Contemporary Newspaper Discourse (Responses to a Terrorist Attack): avtoreferat dis… kand. filolog. nauk. Ekaterinburg. 23 p (2007)
Asmolov, A.G., Burmenskaya, G.V., Volodarskaya, I.A., et al.: Formation of universal learning actions in basic school: from action to thought. System of Tasks: A Guide for Teachers/Ed. A. G, 159 p. Asmolova. Prosveshchenyi, Moscow (2010)
Issers, O.S.: Communicative Strategies and Tactics of Russian Speech, 288 p. URSS-LKI, Moscow. (2008)
Klyuev, E.V.: Speech Communication: Communication Strategies. Communicative Tactics. The Success of Speech Interaction: Textbook. Manual for Universities and Institutions, 224 p. PRIOR, Moscow (1998)
Narushevich, A.G., Alexandrova, O.M., Dobrotina, I.N.: Russian Language. We Are Writing an Essay, 110 p. Prosveshchenie, Moscow (2020)
Narushevich, A.G., Golubeva, I.V.: Russian Language. 7th Grade. Getting Ready for the Main State Exam. Tests, Creative Works, Projects, 57 p. Prosveshchenie, Moscow (2019)
Prokorov, E.Yu., Sternin, I.A.: Russian Communicative Behavior, 193 p. Flinta, Moscow (2006)
Kozlova, V.V., Kondakov, A.M. (eds.): Fundamental Core of the Content of General Education. Russian Academy of Sciences, Russian Academy of Education, 79 p. Prosveshchenie, Moscow (2011)