

Ряд магистрантов принимали активное участие в конкурсах и грантах, в международных, все-российских конференциях, где апробировали результаты своей опытно-экспериментальной работы.

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FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING: METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE

The article deals with the use of the functional approach to language teaching as the foundation for communicative practice. Functionalism is viewed as the following current trends: integrative functionalism, extreme functionalism, and external functionalism. The focus is made on the correlation of external functionalism and communicative paradigm in language teaching.

Key words: functionalism, integrative functionalism, extreme functionalism, and external functionalism, communicative approach, content-based instruction.

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ФУНКЦИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ПОДХОД К ОБУЧЕНИЮ ЯЗЫКАМ:
МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ И ПРАКТИКА

В статье рассматривается проблема использования функционального подхода к обучению иностранным языкам как основы коммуникативных практик. Функционализм представлен тремя основными подходами: интегративный, экстремальный и внешний. Акцент сделан на корреляции внешнего функционализма с коммуникативной парадигмой в обучении иностранным языкам.

Ключевые слова: функционализм, интегративный функционализм, экстремальный функционализм, внешний функционализм, коммуникативный подход, содержательно-ориентированное обучение.

The nature of language is the most controversial question raised both by linguists and language teachers. The issue of what language is and, consequently, how to teach that enormous phenomenon and what exactly should be taught generates lots of divergences. The only common ground among the latter is the fact that critical, thoughtful and efficient teacher cannot perform successfully without certain comprehension about the theory of language that underlies the teaching and learning processes.

In the vast field of linguistics, one of the most fundamental views concerning the nature and essence of language is functional originated in 1920. The works of a linguist Malinowski provided two basic concepts of the functional approach: the context of communicative situation is crucial for understanding language; in communication social and emotive functions are necessarily performed (Yalden, 1987). This approach considers language as an instrument that fulfills a number of essential functions or tasks in the socium, where it is used. The most prominent among them is the communicative function – answering the needs and wishes of the common mutual understanding of individual members of the given language community. The representatives of the Prague linguistic school, in their turn, contributed in application of their functional views in language teaching (Ahmed, 2013).

Newman formulates three positions actualizing functionalism. Firstly, the links between the formal properties of grammar and their semantic and pragmatic functions are strong to avoid in advance any significant methodological or analytical “parceling out” (Newmeyer, 2000, p. 18) of the form. Next position states that to a considerable degree, the formal properties of grammar are driven by the functions that language holds, particularly its function to convey meaning in the course of communication. And last but not the least claim is that integration of the functional explanation with typological investigation allows to explain higher frequency of some grammatical features in some languages of the world than others and to define reasons of appearance of one feature that inevitably implies the emergence of another. (Newmeyer, 2000, p. 18).

According to Bardovi-Harlig the principal argument of functional approach (contrasting to Universal Grammar) is the centrality of meaning and function, where language form always follows language function, and that language development, as well as language acquisition, arises out of communicative need, and its primary purpose is communication, and its existence is regarded impossible without actual speakers of this particular language. (Bardovi-Harlig, 2007). Cooreman and Kilborn (1991) share this idea pointing that language serves communication and form serves function. Moreover, this language world view treats all linguistic levels (e.g., syntax, semantics, phonology, morphology) equally (opposing to Universal Grammar) always working on all the levels of language. As they state, «there is no formal separation of the traditionally recognized subcomponents in language, i.e., morphosyntax, semantics, and pragmatics» (Cooreman and Kilborn 1991, p. 196).

The linguists sharing the functionalist orientation differ in their basic assumptions about language. There can be distinguished three current trends in functionalism: integrative functionalism, extreme functionalism, and external functionalism (including cognitive linguistics) (according to Croft, 1995 as cited in Newmeyer, 2000: 13).

Integrative functionalists do not deny the language systematicity, but they reject the Saussurian claim that it is significant to separate “langue” from “parole” and synchrony from diachrony. Integrative functionalists are typically unwilling to distinguish between the functional role that a linguistic element might perform with respect to other linguistic elements with which it is associated and the external functional motivation for that element. The only established model of integrative functionalism is Paul Hopper’s Emergent Grammar. Emergent Grammar does not accept the idea that “grammar» [is] an object apart from the speaker and separated from the uses that the speaker might make of it”. On the contrary, grammar is “provisional and emergent, not isolatable in principle from general strategies for constructing discourses” (Hopper 1987: 132 as cited in Newmeyer, 2000, p. 13).

Extreme functionalism is represented by work in the “Columbia School” (Garcia, 1979; Diver, 1995) and advocates the belief that all language grammar can be derived from semantic, and discourse factors (Newmeyer, 2000).

Most of the named, worldwide shared, accepted, and established functionalist theories appear to represent external functionalism: some examples are Role and Reference Grammar; the Competition Model; Functional Grammar; and Systemic (Functional) Grammar (Newmeyer, 2000).

Like functionalism, in general, external functionalism, rejects the idea of characterizing the formal relationships of grammatical elements independently of any characterization of the semantic and pragmatic properties of those elements.

This functionalist approach is compatible with cognitive linguistics (this maintains that a grammar is a semiotic system) accepting following claims: language is a means of communication; its primary unit is functional one, and principal function is to convey meaning; language is social behaviour; shared sociocultural norms are of vital importance.

Halliday, one of the most prominent representatives of the external functionalism, notices that language cannot be disassociated and disconnected from meaning. His systemic-functional linguistics considers communicative function and semantics as the basis of human language and communicative activity (Halliday, 1985 as cited in Xia, 2013). Halliday’s account of meaning and context of the situation still is the driving force in contemporary linguistics.

Linguistics provides the most systematic study of language. It would be unacceptable for language teaching theory to disregard what linguistics investigated about language. A language teaching theory in its turn also conveys answers to questions about the nature of language. These questions relate language teaching theory directly to theoretical linguistics. The task of language teaching or learning prompts the teacher almost invariably and very often the learner, to think about the nature of language. The view of language in a language teaching theory means exactly what we teach and the way we teach it (Stern, 1983, p. 182).

The functionalist linguistic theory has undoubtedly greatly influenced language teaching theories. A great deal of research has been done in the application of the functional approach, namely, external functionalism to second language instruction. This theory has made it clear that communication is the most characteristic and primary function of language. Communication is regarded as the language use appropriately during communicative interactions in a variety of real-world situations that in their turn can be utilized for teaching grammar, the four language skills, and discourse analysis

Content-based instruction is viewed as a potential source for the application of the external functional approach to second language teaching, because it yields the contexts that facilitate the interaction between the learner's background knowledge and the target linguistic items (Ahmed, 2013).

Brinton, Snow and Wesche (2003) define it as "(...) the integration of particular content with language teaching aims (...)" or "the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language skills". Leaver and Stryker (1989) state that CBI is an approach in which "language proficiency is achieved by shifting the focus of the course from the learning of language per se to the learning of subject matter". Short (1993) claims that in CBI content topics, instead of grammar rules or vocabulary lists, should be used by language teachers.

Krahnke suggests the following definition: "It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught" (Krahnke, 1987, p. 65).

According to Krashen (1984), second language acquisition takes place when the learner receives comprehensible input, but not when the learner is memorizing vocabulary or fulfilling grammar exercises. That means that the methods providing students with more comprehensible input will be more effective and successful. He says that "comprehensible subject-matter teaching is language teaching" since learners acquire language when they understand messages in that language. In content-based teaching, the focus is on the subject matter and not on the form or, as Krashen says, on "what is being said rather than how" (Krashen, 1984, p. 62 as cited in Snow, 2001).

Swain (1985) suggests that learners have to be "pushed toward the delivery of a message that is ... conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately" (Swain 1985, p. 249). Content-based instruction provided it as students learn to perform in language both appropriate in terms of content and language.

Richards and Rodgers (2004) suggest a number of assumptions about the nature of language for Content-Based Instruction: "language is text and discourse-based; language use draws on integrated skills; language is deliberate" (Richards and Rodgers, 2004, p. 208–209).

There are a number of descriptions of activity types in CBI describing how to teach a language while implementing it into practice. Stoller (1997) provides a list of activities classified according to their instructional focus. The classification categories she proposes are: language skills improvement; vocabulary building; discourse organization; communicative interaction; study skills; synthesis of content materials and grammar (as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2004, p. 212–213).

The cognitive side of this approach touches students' roles at the CBI classroom. It assumes an active part by learners in several dimensions. Learners are expected to be active interpreters of input, willing to stand uncertainty along the path of learning, willing to explore alternative learning strategies, and being eager to seek multiple interpretations of oral and written texts.

Stryker and Leaver (1993) suggest the following essential skills for any CBI instructor: "varying the format of classroom instruction; using group work and team-building techniques; organizing jigsaw reading arrangements; defining the background knowledge and language skills required for student success; helping

students to develop coping strategies; using process approaches to writing; using appropriate error correction techniques; developing and maintaining high levels of student esteem” (Stryker and Leaver, 1993, p. 295 as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2004, p. 212–213).

Content-based instruction grows rapidly. CBI may be widespread in both second/foreign language teaching. Content-based models can be found in both the foreign and second language settings. They can be implemented to teach foreign languages at the elementary school level or applied to secondary and postsecondary settings. Models of content-based instruction differ in realization due to such factors as educational setting, program objectives, and target population. All share, however, a common point of departure – the integration of language teaching aims with subject matter instruction (Snow, 2001).

The models of CBI are diverse in terms of their design and implementation. Some models have proved to be successful at the elementary school level whereas some have demonstrated their effectiveness at secondary or post-secondary levels. Its models emphasize the content but in some models more emphasis is put on language (language-driven approach and the content driven approach). What is more important, some models also can be implemented not only second language environments but also in foreign language situations (Duenas, 2004).

A number of models in the context of Content-Based Instruction have been designed for the university level and empirical studies showed their success both in second and foreign language settings.

One of the most popular models of CBI, theme-based language instruction, which is also called theme-based or content-infused language instruction, the course is taught by a language instructor and “is structured around topics or themes, with the topics forming the backbone of the course curriculum” (Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 2003, p. 14).

Amiri and Fatemi (2014) in their research “The Impact of Content-based Instruction on Students’ Achievement in ESP Courses and Their Language Learning Orientation” investigated the implement CBI in medical science courses at university level concerning the students’ course achievement and language learning orientation. They proved that if adopted carefully and well-planned, CBI can provide the students with comprehensible learning tasks and activities stimulating both problem solving and critical thinking, resulting in more achievement in linguistic and content areas, as well as higher language learning orientations (Amiri and Fatemi, 2014).

Sheltered content instruction is also a well-developed model of CBI which is implemented by a content expert who is a native speaker of the target language: “content courses taught in the second language to a segregated group of learners by a content area expert, such as a university professor who is a native speaker of the target language” (Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 2003, p. 15).

The purpose of the study by Tsai (2010), namely “The Impact of Content-Based Language Instruction on EFL Students’ Reading Performance”, was to investigate the effect of CBI on EFL students’ reading development through the design and implementation of a content-based literature curriculum. According to the research results, students’ general and academic English reading comprehension were improved via CBI. As found from the interview results, this enhancement was achieved by the use of content-based instruction strategies, which include the explicit instruction of reading comprehension skills; teacher’s comprehensible inputs; a variety of activities used in a meaningful context. Such results show that explicit reading strategy instruction via the content area, comprehensible inputs, and activities done in a meaningful context contributes to the development of English reading comprehension. CBI has been regarded as an effective approach to improving students’ language skills and develop critical thinking as well (Tsai, 2010).

Applying the model of adjunct language instruction, students enroll in two linked courses, a content course and a language course both of which include the same content in common and complement each other by coordinated classroom activities and extra-classroom ones (Richard and Rodgers, 2001: 216).

The effectiveness of implementation of this particular model was proved by the study “Content-based ESL instruction: Long-term effects and outcomes” (Song, 2006). Content-based language instruction shows long-term benefits that influence students’ academic performance. A content-linked curriculum based

on learning communities and supported by counseling and tutoring services is a model of instruction that can satisfy the linguistic and academic needs of ESL and EFL students as it supports and facilitates cross-curricular academic achievement in language and major courses effectively over time (Song, 2006).

Less popular but still successful CBI model is the team-teach method (actually a variation on the adjunct approach). The work is divided between the subject teacher and the language teacher, acting as consultants at class time and helping students with problem solving. The model was presented in the paper "Interdisciplinary team teaching as a model for teacher development" and showed the progression from the pairing of team teachers to the realization of «effective» partnership (Stewart, 2005).

Students gain from an effective partnership because the team teachers offer the students two perspectives on the main issues and concepts in the course. In such a type of interaction, this input is often multiplied by the collaboration: the students benefit from the synergy of a successful partnership. The individual teachers also grow through effective partnership. That means that this type of co-work leads to growth of teacher's professional competency (Stewart, 2005).

The last model in the CBI range is a skills-based one which is interested in a particular academic skill area (e. g., academic writing) that is linked to the study of specific subject matter in academic disciplines. This denotes that students write about the topics they are covering in a university course or that the language course "simulates the educational process" (e.g. mini-lectures, readings, and discussion on a topic resulting in writing assignments) (Shih, 1986, p. 617–618).

In content-based instruction, writing as a process is connected with the study of the particular academic subject and is a means of promoting comprehension to this content. It is already proved that such instruction develops general cognitive and writing skills for academic writing tasks more effectively than does traditional teaching (Shih, 1986).

For all the above mentioned reasons, considering language and its primary unit to be of functional nature, and regarding its major function as means of communication, mode of social behaviour, one of the most successful theories of teaching a foreign language for university students can be the content-based instruction. This approach logically combines and satisfies students' professional interests and needs both in regard with content knowledge and functional language for effective communication in the targeted social area.

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