



DOI: 10.1515/rpp-2016-0006

PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, Senior Lecturer, **OLEKSANDR SHUMSKYI**
Kharkiv National Automobile and Highway University, Ukraine
Address: 25 Petrovskoho St., Kharkiv, 61002, Ukraine
E-mail: oll123@meta.ua

MODERN APPROACHES TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING: WORLD EXPERIENCE

ABSTRACT

The problem of applying communicative approach to foreign language teaching of students in non-language departments of higher education institutions in a number of countries has been analyzed in the paper. The brief overview of main historic milestones in the development of communicative approach has been presented. It has been found out that “communicative era” in foreign language training of students is already over and the year 2000 has ushered in a “postcommunicative era” which is characterized by reconsidering the basic features of communicative approach and trying to review the generally accepted belief in the unquestionable effectiveness of this approach. It has been noted that communicative approach, based on interactive methods of teaching and creating the atmosphere of natural language environment at class, forms the doctrine of language training in the USA, Malaysia, Serbia, Croatia and in most of West European countries. In China and Saudi Arabia communicative approach to foreign language teaching is combined with traditional method in order to develop all kinds of speech activity. It has been substantiated that minimizing grammar component of students’ foreign language training in favour of forming only communicative skills has brought to fluent but grammatically incorrect speech. It has been proved that the effectiveness of foreign language teaching to a considerable degree depends on applying the integrated training system based on traditional didactics and communicative approach.

Key words: foreign language teaching, communicative approach, traditional method, grammar structure, communicative competence, interactive training, natural language environment, foreign language proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The intensification of global integration processes, including the expansion of international cooperation in various spheres of professional activities, is one of the most important elements of modern world view. As a result of these processes it should be noted that the public demand for specialists with an acceptable level of foreign language proficiency is constantly increasing.

It is obvious that applying communicative approach to foreign language teaching of students in non-language departments of higher education institutions, which is widely accepted in many countries, is the most effective way of forming professional foreign language communicative competence of future specialists in a certain field. However, one should not neglect the fact that the above-mentioned approach has not only obvious advantages but also a number of controversial points which will be considered in this paper.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the paper is to analyze the history of communicative approach as well as to generalize the results of theoretical research and world experience of applying communicative approach to foreign language teaching.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

The peculiarities of applying communicative approach to training are considered in the works of P. Bekh, I. Bim, H. Hez, H. Kytaihorodska, O. Leontyev, H. Rohova, I. Zymnia. The problem of forming foreign language communicative competence of students is presented in the studies of T. Astafurova, T. MacArthur, Ye. Passov. The professional constituent of foreign language training is accentuated by A. Andriienko, E. Bibikova, K. Klimenko, S. Kozak. The issues on defining the essence and elaborating the structure of professional foreign language competence are taken up in the works of H. Arkhipova, Yu. Fedorenko, O. Pavlenko, N. Prudnikova and others.

Such methods as analysis, synthesis, comparison, systematization and generalization of theoretical and practical experience of foreign language teaching in various countries form the basis of this research.

RESULTS

Communicative approach to foreign language training stipulates modeling typical communicative situations. According to the interpretation of R. Milrud and I. Maksymova this approach is teaching, organized on the basis of completing communicative tasks (Мильруд, Максимова, 2000).

It is necessary to state that most of researchers (L. Bachman, C. Candlin, J. Richards, T. Rodgers and others) agree that communicative approach should be called “approach”, not “method” because, according to J. Richards, approach is much broader than method. Approach is a complex category, which defines not only the strategy but also the choice of training methods, which realize this strategy and provide the variability of its interpretations (Richards, 2006).

Despite the established opinion that D. Hymes is the founder of communicative theory, J. Richards and T. Rodgers have proved that the origins of communicative approach can be found in the American doctrine of 1930s, according to which training was organized with a glance to the needs of future professional communication (Richards, Rodgers, 2001).

The data of the analysis of pedagogical literature, dedicated to the problems of forming and development of communicative approach to education, let us assert that within the period from 1930s till 1960s the priorities in foreign language teaching were gradually shifting to the communicative approach, which was based on audiolingual and situational training methods, that included applying communicative tasks, connected with a certain context.

Within the following stage (1970s – the end of 1990s) the theoretical issues of foreign language teaching were elaborated and instead of mastering only grammar rules and learning lexical units, communicative competence of students was formed and developed. That period was characterized by disclosing the role and main features of communicative approach as well as the psychological and pedagogical conditions of its application were defined.

A. Howatt called that period “communicative revolution” (Howatt, Widdowson, 2004). Nevertheless, this point of view is debatable. In this context the term “revolution” (from the Latin *revolutio* – “overturn”) needs to be specified. The term “revolution” means total liquidation of something old and introduction of something new, which is more advanced. Therefore, in view of the fact that the origins of communicative approach can be traced back within the period from 1930s till 1960s, according to K. Johnson the stage of the so-called “communicative revolution” is the continuation or the subsequent developmental stage of existing language teaching traditions.

There is no doubt that the so-called “communicative era” resulted in the dominance of communicative approach to foreign language training of students in many countries.



Nevertheless, the period since the year 2000 can be characterized as “postcommunicative era” (A. Acar) that is the stage of revising the main ideas of communicative approach. In the latest studies the scientists have made attempts to reconsider the generally accepted belief in unquestionable effectiveness of communicative approach to foreign language teaching. So, such researchers as S. Bax, A. Holiday, D. Hunter, J. Richards, C. Samimy have brought up an issue, which is very important for all the countries, where foreign languages are taught on the basis of communicative approach. The issue is as follows: whether it is reasonable to apply the afore-mentioned approach equally in all countries, without regard to the peculiarities of mentality, culture and language proficiency of students that is to export this approach to all countries and duplicate it without any changes. C. Samimy emphasizes that the model of communicative competence that exists in the modern world has been worked out mostly by American scientists that is by native speakers in order to develop communicative skills of native speakers. This model is based on the language norms and also on the specific sociocultural features and educational standards which are typical of the United States. All these aspects sometimes cause difficulties to teachers in other countries while introducing this approach to teaching English as a foreign language (Samimy, Kobayashi, 2004).

At present in the world academic community one can often hear critical comments on the fact that effective forming the foreign language communicative competence of students depends on applying only communicative approach to training. Scientists from many countries agree that initially the D. Hymes’ theory of forming communicative competence was no more than criticism of N. Chomsky’s linguistic theory and not the attempt of creating new doctrine in language teaching.

In particular, A. Acar does not agree with D. Hymes’ criticism that there is no need to know grammar rules of a language, if they are not used in practical speech activity (Acar, Memedova, Rzayev, Sekerci, 2005). Researchers emphasize that competence approach should be based on N. Chomsky’s linguistic competence which is primary to the communicative competence because “communicative approach to a language starts with the language theory as the language of communication” (Basta, 2011). In this case mastering the theoretical fundamentals of a foreign language presupposes that students understand its grammar structure, which is the basis of developing the skills of grammatically correct speech. Only after this it is relevant to speak about implementing key principles of communicative approach at class, which are as follows: problemat�icity, situationality, professional orientability.

Almost fifty years of broad application of competence approach in the world have proved that forming only communicative competence without regard to the crucial role of grammar knowledge results in fluent but grammatically incorrect speech. “Applying communicative approach to foreign language teaching mainly narrows to the only component – communication, which interferes with mastering a language in all its wealth and diversity” (Stern, 1983). A number of modern researchers from Great Britain (J. Aitchison, R. Carter, M. McCarthy, N. Schmitt), the USA (P. Nation, H. Stern), Turkey (A. Acar, O. Sekerci), Serbia (J. Basta, E. Shafran), Canada (G. Chen, W. Starosta) agree that “only practical studying of a foreign language within the scope of functional communication does not favour the full-fledged mastering of a language” (Chen, Starosta, 2008). In particular, A. Mohammed (Saudi Arabia) emphasizes that despite the fact that the essence of communication is to achieve communicative goals, one should not underestimate the importance of grammar analysis, as “it is not appropriate to separate the



transfer of the expression content from the language structure and it is incorrect to consider, that the main purpose of foreign language training must be developing only communicative skills” (Mohammed, 2011).

Studying the peculiarities of foreign language teaching in various countries has shown that in China, the USA, Japan, Malaysia, Serbia, Croatia as well as in most of West European countries the doctrine of language training is built on the principles of communicative and competence approach.

At some universities in the USA, e.g. at University of San Diego, there are special departments of communication aimed at forming communicative competence of future specialists as a guarantee of their social adaptation and successful professional activities.

It is relevant to mention that foreign language training is mainly based on the principle of collectivity of studying, which is one of the most important principles of communicative approach. This means that group work is organized on the basis of cooperation. In this case the teacher becomes not only retransmitter of knowledge but also adviser and organizer of training, guide to methods of teaching, developer of educational materials. In this case the teacher possesses equal rights as a subject of educational communicative activities.

The above-mentioned information accounts for the fact that the educational programs of such faculties in communication presuppose differentiated approach to teaching when every student’s individual features are taken into account.

In this context it is appropriate to make the following example: it is obvious that not all students feel equally comfortable in group discussions, therefore in order to uncover their creative potential, work in pairs should be used. It is also possible to give students an individual project, the results of which will be then presented and discussed. Due to such variability in selecting tasks all students can actively participate in group work at class. As a result, the effectiveness of mastering educational materials enhances.

However, it should be noted that despite the indisputable advantages of communicative approach to foreign language teaching, the representatives of world pedagogical community still do not have a unanimous opinion about the most effective way of learning active vocabulary, which is the basis of the functional application of a foreign language. American teachers suggest using ranks of word frequency. They recommend to practice new vocabulary in real-life communication and to review it from time to time.

According to the results of students’ knowledge monitoring, Dutch teachers have noted that mastering a foreign language on the basis of communicative approach is much more effective than with the help of traditional teaching methods. In order to develop the skills of fluent speech they widely apply such interactive forms of training as:

- role plays and business games;
- interviews;
- reporting;
- problem solving;
- discussing socially important issues;
- debates;
- press conferences;
- making multimedia presentations and various projects;
- communication with native speakers within the scope of video conferences.

In view of the fact that achieving communicative goals is the ultimate result of the communicative act, it is reasonable to create the atmosphere of natural language



environment in class, because in this case students will acquire the skills of autonomous analyzing language units and understand the sense of language messages. For example, when the teacher sees that students are making speech mistakes, (which are often closely connected with the peculiarities of thinking in native language), he or she plays the role of a foreigner, who either “cannot understand” grammatically incorrect speech, or, in case of an inadequately formulated questions, gives inadequate answers which makes students to use grammatically and stylistically correct speech patterns. The above-mentioned method allows realizing the principle of implicit learning grammar rules that is not by conscious learning language formulae, but in natural way, in the course of communication.

However, the research has shown that in certain countries, e.g. Greece and the Check Republic, teachers adhere to conservative views on the contents of foreign language training, as they believe that forming grammar competence should dominate.

Chinese, Malaysian and Serbian scientists consider that unlike the previous structural and situational method, the whole potential of communicative approach has not been exhausted yet. They are convinced that nowadays there is no approach to foreign language teaching which could be more effective than the communicative one, because this approach has a broad and, to some extent, eclectic theoretical background which gives any teacher an opportunity to interpret it depending on the concrete conditions and level of students’ foreign language proficiency.

And with that, Chinese teachers also take into account the tendencies to revising the uniqueness and universality of the above-mentioned approach. They note that along with focusing on the communicative component that is forming listening and speaking skills, it is necessary to pay more attention to grammar and writing. A lot of scientists from Japan and Saudi Arabia also hold a similar opinion. At Japanese universities together with the communicative approach to teaching foreign languages, teachers apply traditional method in order to develop the skills in reading and writing.

British scientists, such as C. Henner-Stanchina, H. Holec, P. Riley, are of the interim views on this problem. They consider that language educational environment is the most effective prerequisite of successful foreign language teaching, in which it is possible to combine both traditional method and communicative approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, in spite of the fact that due to pragmatic demands of civilization the main goal of modern language training is still forming communicative skills, learning a foreign language only at the level of functional literacy brings to mastering a primitive “survival language” (Пасков, 2008). It is relevant to emphasize that applying communicative approach at class does not mean total reformatting the content of foreign language teaching. In this case we should speak only about using new, more effective methods aimed at developing foreign language communicative skills of students.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that up to now the representatives of world pedagogical community have not fully agreed yet, either it is reasonable to apply or to ignore traditional methods of foreign language teaching in favour of the only communicative approach, we believe that the most effective results of training can be attained provided applying a complex system which should include both the elements of traditional methods and of innovative approaches in teaching.

Within the further research we are planning to study the perspectives of teaching a foreign language with the help of information technologies.



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