INTERACTION IN UNIVERSITY LECTURES

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Recent researches have shown the existence of a certain tension between the need to present information objectively and the need to persuade a receiver about the validity of the information in a proper manner.

According to Čmejrková [1999] the traditional view on scientific style as a public style addressed to an unknown and distant audience is beginning to change because "a scientific text is set into a certain social context … and it reveals its interactive framework, it is also called participatory framework. This interactive and participatory character of a scientific text is shown in several voices that the text contains – the voice of an author, of a reader or the voices of other scientists etc. [Čmejrková:1999:44]".

The articles and studies in particular technical literature show that we can observe a certain shift towards a more subjective way of giving information even in scientific style and in both, a written form as well as a spoken form of academic discourse. The researches of spoken academic discourse in English language are primarily focused on university lectures.

University lecture is one of the genres of spoken academic discourse. Nowadays there is a growing trend of using new information technologies and electronic devices in communication. This tendency is also present in instructional activities where especially computers and the Internet are used. This can be also seen in teaching foreign languages.

In teaching foreign languages e-learning is often used. We can define e-learning as "a process of applying information technologies in the development, distribution and management of education in an organization [Pejša:2007:2]". E-learning involves teaching languages by the means of computers and the Internet and it is very often used especially in large study groups with many students.

Because e-learning is predominantly used as a distance form of education, it does not take into account personal attendance of a student in a classroom and the whole communication between the student and the teacher takes place by using the Internet, e.g. by sending emails.

In spite of the mentioned facts, a spoken form of giving information in a direct interaction between a teacher and a student (face to face) plays a very important role and still has it significance at every level of education. It is especially true in university settings where the university teachers have many other forms of instruction at a disposal, but the lecture still "remains the central instructional activity [Flowerdew: 1994:1]".

There are many definitions of a lecture in particular specialized literature which define the lecture as a spoken form of giving information. Findra and Tvrdoň [1984] also characterize a lecture as a spoken form of instruction and they mention that its main role is to communicate new facts by which "the lecturer must be an expert in the field

and his knowledge must be based on his/her own research, the study of particular literature or based on his/her life experience [Findra – Tvrdoň:1984:125]".

But even by a classic lecture the traditional teaching methods are being replaced by the newer ones, e.g. by various interactive tools like interactive boards etc. Lectures are more and more influenced by the tendency of egalitarianism and we can find more and more elements of egalitarianism in lectures nowadays [Waggoner:1984]. It means that in the process of learning students perceive the teacher more as a person who gives them advice and helps them than as a mere communicator of knowledge.

On the other hand, also teachers call for greater interactivity during a lecture and they ask students to be more active than it was in the past. We can understand it as an effort to shorten the distance between a teacher and a student and as an effort to avoid using formalisms which also influences the vocabulary used in a lecture. The vocabulary involves especially notional expressions and technical terms but according to Findra and Tvrdoň [1984, s. 125 – 126] the lecturer shows his/her attitude and involvement in the lecture by using more expressive terms and tools for making a contact with the students.

The more interactive character of a lecture influences also the lecturing style that the lecturer chooses to use. In connection with a lecture Dudley-Evans and Johns [1981:134] distinguish three lecture styles: 1. Reading, when by giving a lecture the lecturer reads the lecture; 2. Conversational style when the lecturer uses notes in a relatively informal way and with a certain level of interaction with the students; 3. Rhetorical style when the lecturer uses jokes and many digressions from the topic with a broad scale of intonation.

Even if there is no written evidence of the frequency of using these individual lecturing styles, there seems to be a general opinion by the which the informal conversational style based on using notes is prevailing [Dudley-Evans, 1994].

Benson [1994] agrees with this general agreement by saying that there is a shift towards a more interactive lecturing style which is dominant mainly at the universities in the United States of America, whereas Europe is characterized by using a more traditional way of giving a lecture without any greater interactivity and participation on the part of students. Benson [1994] further mentions that the genre of a lecture is changing towards the more communicative approach when students are invited to participate in the classroom discussion to a greater extend.

The different levels of interaction in lectures may cause some problems for the students who are used to different lecturing styles by the overall comprehension of the lecture and this fact should be taken into account especially in international study programs.

Literature

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Summary

Although using new instructional activities based mainly on computers and the Internet, a lecture still remains the key instructional activity especially in higher education setting. But the traditional view on scientific style is changing. It also influences a lecturing style. The lecture is becoming more interactive than it was in former times and students are invited to take a part in the classroom discussion. There is a trend towards a more communicative approach in giving a lecture.