

**STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS
OF RUSSIAN LANGUAGE LISTENING TRAINING
IN THE CHINESE AUDIENCE**

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Strategic dimensions are a fundamental requirement on modern linguistic education as well as computer-assisted listening training that has different aspects related to the acquisition of new competences. Strategic competence in language learning is not always considered as a separate component of the communicative competence as it involves several sub-levels in accordance with the needs of target audience. The development of the Chinese university students' initial strategic competence due to the previous communicative experience, when learning a new language in a computer-assisted foreign language classroom, has been investigated in the article.

Key words: computer-assisted listening training, discursive strategies, initial competence.

Давер М.В. Стратегічні аспекти навчання аудіювання російських текстів у китайській аудиторії. Урахування стратегічних аспектів є обов'язковою вимогою сучасної лінгводидактики, як і комп'ютерне навчання аудіювання, що має низку параметрів, які сприяють опануванню нових компетенцій. Стратегічна компетенція у навчанні мов не завжди розглядається як самостійний складник комунікативної компетенції, оскільки вона поділяється на кілька окремих рівнів і підкомпетенцій відповідно до потреб контингенту, що навчається. У статті розглянуто розвиток вихідної стратегічної компетенції китайських студентів-філологів, що сформовано під час довузівської мовної підготовки, навчання аудіювання із використанням комп'ютера.

Ключові слова: дискурсивні стратегії, вихідна компетенція, комп'ютеризоване навчання аудіювання.

Давер М.В. Стратегические аспекты обучения аудированию русских текстов в китайской аудитории. Учет стратегических аспектов является обязательным требованием современной лингводидактики, так же как и компьютерное обучение аудированию, имеющее множество параметров, способствующих освоению новых компетенций. Стратегическая компетенция в изучении языков не всегда рассматривается как самостоятельный компонент коммуникативной компетенции, поскольку она подразделяется на несколько отдельных уровней и подкомпетенций в соответствии с потребностями обучаемого контингента. В нашей статье рассматривается развитие исходной стратегической компетенции китайских учащихся-филологов, сформировавшейся в процессе довузовской подготовки, в ходе компьютеризованного обучения русскому аудированию.

Ключевые слова: дискурсивные стратегии, исходная компетенция, компьютеризованное обучение аудированию.

Communicative competence has many components that should be acquired and developed in the course of language learning. There are not only linguistic competence, but also sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and other competences.

Each adult language learner has a certain initial level of the strategic competence due to the previous communicative experience that should be developed and improved in the course of learning a new language.

Strategic competence generally can be considered as an ability to overcome difficulties in some area of human activity. As one of the

components of communicative competence it is defined by Canale and Swain as 'the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence' [2: 30]. So communicative compensation strategies and learning strategies can overlap and should be considered as 2 components of this ability to solve problems that arise not only in foreign language communication but also in foreign language learning. Learner's contexts and background experiences in learning and interpersonal communication enrich their initial strategic competence [3]. Due to this previous communicative and learning experience every student has some initial level of strategic competence that should be improved and developed when learning a new language.

Strategic dimensions have a particular importance in a learner-centered approach which implies the development of the competences according to the needs of the learners. That's why desired strategic competence in learner-centered language learning can be subdivided into several levels in accordance with the needs of target pupils [4].

The highest level of strategic competence is designed for the students of language schools, future teachers, guides and translators, especially those who are going to continue their education and work in the country of target language. Professional development for teachers must adopt a more sophisticated approach that better addresses the skills in strategic theory, foreign language culture and pedagogy that teaching requires. They should acquire not only compensation and learning strategies but also sociolinguistic and discourse strategic components of communicative competence.

Sociolinguistic competence can be considered as a component of the strategic competence. This is an ability to use strategies to respond appropriately to the communicative situation, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating. The students of the high level should know how to express in a new language some specific attitude (courtesy, authority, friendliness, respect) when they need to and how to know what attitude another person is expressing.

Discourse competence is an ability to interpret the larger context and to construct longer stretches of language so that the parts make up a coherent whole, to create conversations, speeches, e-mail messages, newspaper articles.

So the both competences are based on the student's strategic potential of interpersonal and professional communication but also need a special development and improvement while studying a foreign language.

Our small-scale study of university and guide's courses learners strategic competence development and improvement with a special focus on listen-training, was conducted in China in 2008 – 2009, using teaching experience, to explore the professional and personal issues associated with the student's motivation to acquire adequate strategic competence. The study was carried out in a pedagogic university of Harbin (Ho-shi-ta) and on the Russian language courses for guides and interpreters of a tourist office of Harbin who tend to deal not only with Russian tourists coming to visit China but also with representatives of many Russian tourists offices while organizing and conducting tours of Chinese tourists in Russia.

In China, the geographical scale of the country and the speed and extent of contemporary socio-economic evolution, allied to long-established and distinctive cultures of learning, make the interface of new technologies in intercultural learning objectives particularly interesting and significant especially in higher education. That's why contemporary linguistic education in China tends to implement more student-centered, activity-based, integrative curriculum and teaching approaches to promote language learning. Nonetheless our research results show that despite all the advantages of new technologies the textbooks remain here the predominant authority. Findings suggest recognition by teachers and students of the potential of the strategic competence, and of the validity of strategic goals for foreign language classes, although there are some divergences between the views of teachers and students. But the survey proved that university students' strategic competence is still insufficient and needs special development to acquire new communication and learning strategies.

It is acknowledged that learners and teachers are the key elements in Chinese educational technology of foreign language teaching and learning. But somehow high authority of a teacher in Chinese education is the reason of the insufficient use of original language learning strategies in foreign language audience, especially the initiative ones. Sometimes students are even discouraged from asking questions. The entire educational system in China doesn't encourage students for speaking out, asking questions, or talking about the presented material. Consequently, as a direct result of the school educational system, Chinese students have

a great deal of trouble engaging in creative and intuitive conversation. Their learning strategies are usually adaptive and reactive. The communication strategies are more active and productive. That's why computer-based learning has many advantages and is very popular with young students:

- Students easily learn to find information on their own.
- They gain confidence in themselves.
- Learners are involved in authentic learning tasks.
- They have enough time and necessary feedback [8].

They work in an atmosphere with low levels of stress and anxiety. Our investigation focused on cultivating not only the students' oral abilities in Russian conversation, but also had strategic learning objectives that were carried out in a computer-assisted audio-visual course based on Russian movies and during the lessons of newspapers and Internet lexicon. The language classrooms were equipped with audio-visual equipment and modern computers with internet connection for the incorporation of networked technologies and the contributions of the Internet and networked communications to enhance the use of communicative strategies.

Listening training was an important component of both courses. Text's perception was directed not only to the use of communicative strategies of discourse, but also of universal, sociolinguistic and learning strategies and those of compensation. In the absence of adequate strategies in student's repertoire teachers tried to contribute to the development of learner's strategic competence.

For the development of compensation strategies, in particular, language guess, special job was done on the pre-text stage of work. Working with the compensation strategies was built by organizing dialogical communication where a strategic problem was lack of understanding of some important lexical items and grammatical forms that are needed to achieve the communicative purpose (and a further understanding of the text). Students engaged in a dialogue trying to interpret the description of events and situations where the central elements must be compensated – they were unknown – trying to guess the missing elements of the context, or to apply other methods to achieve the communicative purpose. Students were in the situation of shortage of language means that they had the right to overcome by resorting to any available strategies. In our case, they successfully achieved communicative goals so that we could

determine whether students achieved understanding using compensation strategies: interpreting gestures and facial expressions, or by using a dictionary to find the right word, or using the word of the native language or intermediate language, or asking the teacher or someone other for help, or by using a successful language guess that was estimated above the other strategies. If the result was successful, the strategy appeared not only as an active part of the repertoire of the student who applied it, but also became a model of successful communication solution for other students.

In the interpretation of foreign language texts, in addition to verbal compensation strategies we inevitably applied non-verbal ones. The non-verbal strategic component, which is widely used by native speakers, is very important. Facial expressions and gestures, movements, pictures, that accompany the presentation of the text contribute to a better understanding of the students. We must emphasize that computer-assisted language learning has many advantages because there are many authentic materials from Russian newspapers and magazine articles and also materials prepared specially for learners, such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary exercises and tests. Apart from retrieving information from the Internet, learners can also create their own materials, such as projects, and share them with partner classes, and other benefits which are often described in detail in special articles [7; 8]. But despite the advantages just mentioned, in our strategic work we encountered a number of disadvantages or obstacles we had to consider, the most important of which was the problem of the use of non-verbal strategies. Along with the undoubted advantages, the lack of non-verbal strategies while working without a visual range becomes a disadvantage. Also, it should be noted, on the one hand, that non-verbal strategies of Russian speakers are not always clearly and correctly perceived by Chinese students, on the other hand, that the natural acquaintance with such strategies during the course of listening is certainly useful and necessary for students of the highest level for further communication in the target language. It is also obvious that the absence of non-verbal support complicates the perception of audiotexts imposed without adequate records in the video.

Great attention was paid to discursive strategies of perception, that include the identification of the context in general, as well as the related context of knowledge about the world, which leads to activation of the

corresponding script [1], because their result contributes to the implementation of expectations of what is perceived, i.e. on the organization and content of the perceived text. A major role in identification of context belongs to a pre-text work, when the learner carries out a general prediction, as well as hypotheses regarding the meaning of the text's communicative intent. Then as the result of a strategic action he has the test of the hypothesis. If the hypothesis is not confirmed, there is a return to the stage in the general forecasting produced in an alternative strategic plan, which allows to better explain the received key support and revise the hypothesis [1: 2; 6; 7].

As a way to create a communicative context for the general prediction, we used different types of communicative pre-text work such as conversation on the topic, a student-centered introductory micro text-story on behalf of the teacher, anticipating the events of the main text, the introduction of strategic lexical compensation in an audio microdialogue with thematic vocabulary. Anticipating questions and tasks of the teacher stimulated the overall prognosis, as well as hypotheses regarding the standing of the text and of the communicative intentions of the author. As a result of the strategic activities of students there were a confirmation of the hypothesis when communicative strategies of the students became appropriate to the lesson's objectives. Activation of general forecasting occurred also through the use of "speaking" title of the text – for example, the very name of the text "Polyglot" already introduced students to the topic – as well as the presentation of a preliminary plan of the text, even if it was presented in the wrong order. Sometimes life experience allowed students to build it up in the correct order, even before reading the contents of the text: for example, in the biographical texts.

So providing an understanding of a complex text with hearing at the initial stage of training may be stimulated by a number of tasks for the development of language guess and other compensation strategies:

- preliminary introduced topic posts (mentioned in the introductory conversation or thematic rhyme to ensure entry to this topic);
- speaking title of the text when the students make predictions about its content, explicit – in the course of group work or implicit, on their own;
- introduction of a number of new words, during strategic compensatory work on pre-text stage, and then we let the students predict the content of the future text according to the studied words and the theme of the

opening stages. (students try to pre-arrange them in a logical manner, in accordance with their guesses);

- presentation of a microtext (or microdialogue), similar in content to the main text but with a different interpretation of events with the opposite position on the basic idea. It is the so-called “reverse idea” to know the goals and interests of the students. Later, it allows students to use the strategy of comparison, to select one of the points of view or to form their original interpretation of the text and join the discussion;
- instead of using a microtext the teacher can simply ask the students to express their views on the issue, to compare it with the one that is expressed in the text, or to express their own opinion.

Audiotexts perception was preceded and accompanied by the application of a number of more traditional jobs to ensure understanding. Jobs and microtexts offered students the choice to apply the preferred strategy, with decreasing levels of complexity in case of difficulties. So, if students could not make a plan on their own, then the rehearing was ready to offer the restoration plan in the correct order or plan to anticipate converted in accordance with the intended logic of events prior to the first listening text. It should be emphasized that teacher’s presentation of the text that was not accompanied by visuals, had to be carried out using non-verbal strategies – facial expressions, gestures, intonation structures, even sometimes exaggerated. This was necessary not only to focus on the key points of the text, but, as noted above, to familiarize students with the communicative behavior of native speakers.

Listening to the text was accompanied by concurrent tasks on the choice of students, according to their preferences and strategies.

For example:

- Selective fixation of information (can be on preliminary issues);
- Drawing up or reconfiguration plan proposed by the teacher;
- Filling the gaps of logic;
- Discover information that is not logically related to the main text;
- Drawing up the circuit action characters of the text;
- Citation – detection of the author of some particular phrase;
- Discovery and interpretation of the main ideas of the text [2].

It should be noted that sometimes analytical and interpretive work assignments for audiotexts were offered by the students themselves.

When teaching listening, given the large number of students in the

groups, we have also carried out some quick tests of understanding through traditional oral tasks using models “because” or “therefore.” These assignments were also important to learn the adequacy of the interpretation of events taking place in the text.

Sometimes students used for the interpretation of a new type of discourse patterns of the native language. This strategy is not always successful, even if languages are similar. Experience has shown that Chinese students often had problems not only in understanding, but in the interpretation of the text. Sometimes the reason of difficulties was not the lack of discursive strategies or poor knowledge of the language, but the defects of the intercultural competence of students, especially when it comes to assessing the motives and actions of the characters. In such cases, the text needed a preliminary socio-cultural commentary. The interpretation of the text was less familiar to the students also from strategic point of view, and had to include the following tasks:

- identify the type of the text;
- compare the text with the last text, tell the difference between these texts (in this case we did not specify the parameters – students have to offer all the options from the linguistic and stylistic to the ideological perspective, using a maximum of strategies);
- tell, what interpretation of the text do you like, or express your opinion on the issue;
- complete the text, offer your version of events;
- tell, what is your evaluation of this text. Was it interesting for you? Why did you like it or did not like? [3]

Our review of studies of technologically-mediated strategic listening training suggests a set of principles and educational design features to promote the building of learner’s strategic competence and to draw some conclusions. For the development of initiative strategies in Chinese audience the teacher needs to create an atmosphere that is completely safe, i.e., free of criticism and relaxed, that is possible thanks to computer. Some practical issues related to the lack of strategic competence in the classroom, that can be used to improve the situation to implementing language strategies training in classroom work in small groups [6] with mutual teaching with the leadership of highly motivated students where every initiative speaking will be stimulated with complementary marks. So if properly organized, strategic work, after a few sessions, improves

strategic competence and activates compensation and discursive strategies of the students who begin themselves to offer, select and apply them in accordance with their preferences.

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