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MEDIATIVE COMPETENCE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

The paper presents some steps of scientific text mediation at the English language class with the students whose major is chemical technology. The authors describe hybrid forms of text mediation when the written scientific text is followed by audiovisual representation which ends in a group discussion on a certain topic. The practical results of the text mediation are given within the framework of the theoretical information about mediation in general.

Keywords: mediation, mediative competence, scientific text mediation, cross-disciplinary approach, methodological support

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МЕДИАТИВНАЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ В ТЕХНИЧЕСКОМ ВУЗЕ

В статье представлены несколько этапов реализации медиации научно-технического текста на практических занятиях по учебной дисциплине «Иностранный язык» с обучающимися, которые изучают химическую технологию в качестве основного предмета. Авторы описали реализацию гибридных форм медиации текста, начиная с работы с письменным научным текстом, затем переходя к аудиовизуальной форме представления информации и заканчивая групповой дискуссией на заданную тему. Практические результаты исследования представлены в контексте описания теоретических основ понятия медиация в общем.

Ключевые слова: медиация, медиативная компетенция, медиация научного текста, междисциплинарный подход

Today in the world full of information available at different sources students may experience difficulties in identifying the relevance of information to the topic under study. The teacher/instructor can play a role of a *mediator* between the information (in a form of oral or written text) and the students dealing with it. Several stages of scientific text mediation with the students studying chemical technologies are presented in the given article.

Mediation has become a new trend in many spheres. The word “*mediation*” is seen in the following collocations used in publications: cultural mediation, intercultural mediation, family, bank, law mediation, and others. These days the term mediation has been mentioned in the pedagogical materials (in Russia and abroad) but in a slightly different interpretation that it was used before.

In general context mediation means “any activity that reduces the “gap” between people or between people and new concepts through language” [9: 13]. The purpose of mediation is to facilitate access to meaning and promote effective communication.

In different periods the mediation practice in a foreign language teaching was seen differently. In its traditional meaning mediation was equivalent to the translation. Then, in the 60s, 70s, 80s of the twentieth century, with the advent of audiolingual and audiovisual methods, mediation was excluded from linguistic education. In the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century, due to the communicative approach, mediation was allowed into the teaching practice but still played a secondary role [2: 39].

Since 2001, mediation has been “rehabilitated” as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages has placed it on par with other communicative competencies: listening, reading, writing, and speaking [7]. So, the *mediative competence* was defined.

Particular emphasis was placed on this competence in the Supplementary Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [8], the content of which has been adapted to the modern context. Its main difference from the 2001 document is that it proposes a transition from a competence-based approach centered on such communicative competencies as understanding of oral and written texts, writing, speaking (monologue, dialogue) to an approach centered on communication methods (reception, production, interaction, mediation), including communicative competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic).

In the Supplementary Volume, the concept of mediation is expanded to 19 scales and is represented by descriptors at 10 levels. According to its main ideas, in mediation a student acts as a social agent who creates tools for conveying the meaning within the same language (monolingual mediation) or by means of several languages (interlingual mediation) [8: 90].

In Russian didactic literature, there have been a number of papers dealing with different aspects of mediation in a foreign language teaching with the emphasis on the methodological support. These papers are focused on the content of the term mediation as an integral component of foreign language communicative competence, its strategies and assessment criteria [2; 3]; on linguistic mediation as a special form of speaking activity, the formation of mediation competence in teaching foreign languages at secondary school institutions [1]; and on the role of language mediation in teaching translation [6].

There are also three main spheres of mediation: text mediation (involves passing on to the other person the content of the text to which they do not have access due to some difficulties of linguistic, cultural or technical characteristics); concept mediation (cooperation in a group aiming, for example, to provide access to the knowledge necessary to solve the problem); communication mediation (creating a favorable atmosphere for the communication of the interlocutors where the student performs the mediator's role) [8: 91].

Below we will discuss in detail the *technical text mediation* which is represented by the following skills: information transfer, interpretation of data given in the form of graphs and diagrams, processing of the text orally or in writing, translation, creating notes, and discussion of literary texts [8: 92].

All of the above-mentioned actions are realized in the context of different communication methods — reception, production, interaction, mediation — applying to communicative strategies.

The mediation strategies presented in the Supplementary Volume are divided into two groups: strategies aimed at *explaining new meaning* and strategies aimed at *making the text easier for comprehension*. The first group includes: activation of the students' knowledge on the topic (using leading questions, comparisons, examples); language adaptation (the use of synonyms, paraphrase); critical analysis of the constituent elements

of the content. The strategies used to simplify the text include the following activities: using repetition and redundancy, for example, by paraphrasing in different ways, modifying style to explain things more explicitly, giving examples, and striking the main facts [8: 117].

A survey was conducted among the first and second year undergraduate and specialist degrees students whose majors are “Chemistry”, “Chemical Technology”, “Biotechnology” to find out what difficulties they had with comprehending the scientific texts in English.

The respondents were asked questions that aim at finding out (1) how well they can understand a scientific text in English when they read it for the first time, (2) how difficult it was to translate the terms into their native (Russian) language, (3) whether they used other methods of understanding the content besides translation, and (4) how they assessed the degree of their comprehension of the scientific text in English.

According to the survey results, the understanding of the terms used in the scientific text was the main obstacle they face (75%), while for the majority of the respondents, comprehending the general content of the scientific text does not cause any difficulties (78%). Translation was named the main way of comprehending the content (86%).

The text “Man-made Elements” was taken from the study material [5: 172] when organizing trial training. The main point of our trial training was the argument that the students do not understand the meaning of the terms, denoting the creation of the man-made elements, the apparatus used, and the elements themselves.

At the pre-reading stage, the students were given additional information to help them understand the main terms from the text. To achieve this goal, the students’ attention was drawn to that part of the Periodic Table, where artificially created chemical elements are presented. The instructor asked the leading questions about what they know about these elements; whether they studied any information on this topic before (at school, at the University); if they knew, for example, why artificially created elements bear such names.

The next stage of the text mediation involved the transfer of information and the translation of the text under study. In the process of consecutive translation and search reading, the students extracted detailed information about the process described in the article: the elements that were artificially

created, the way they were produced, and the goal of their creation. In the process of co-working with the text at this stage, the students and the instructor singled out the keywords they were going to work with to get the full comprehension of the text. The students were asked, for example, to give the definition of the word, guess the word by its definition, or paraphrase the sentence using the key words.

Then, the students were given the task to draw up a table based on the information from the text. The table contained the following headings to be filled in: the name and the number of the man-made element, its creator/s, the scientific method the described man-man element was created.

Since the factual data presented in the text was not quite enough for a complete understanding of the topic, the instructor suggested getting additional information from the video on this topic: “Pop Quiz Man Made Elements” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJTXhMoWqR8>]. According to C. Viaggio, multimedia or hybrid forms of information presentation can be used in mediation [10: 2000], which we observe in our case. The written text was complemented by an audiovisual text, which strengthens the mediation process, opening up new channels for the flow of information.

Within the final stage of the text mediation all the participants of the teaching process combined the information received from the written text and from the video material. Then, the students had a discussion in English on the topic under study. The information obtained from both sources and the use of key vocabulary were obligatory for conducting a discussion. The students were invited to go further and express their own point of view, for instance, on the subject of the scientific value of creating artificial elements and, further prospects in this research area.

Using the method of participatory observation, we found out that going through all the stages of the text mediation allows students to extract the necessary information to the maximum to understand the problem raised in the text. In this case, we can write about mediation of communication during which a favorable information field was created for conducting a discussion on the topic under study. A cross-disciplinary approach obviously enlarged the students’ knowledge about man-made elements.

The foregoing allows us to conclude that mediation in foreign languages teaching is both a goal and a means. It does not only include trans-

lation, but also the transfer of information, data processing and interpretation, paraphrasing, and other activities. It also comprises a variety of interconnected speech-thinking activities, that contribute to the development of students' cognitive abilities. Tasks aimed at the formation of mediation competence are already part of modern education in the field of foreign languages teaching.

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