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The difficulties in teaching reading in English for academic program "Agro-engineering" and its solutions

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the teaching of reading in English for academic program Agro-engineering of agricultural higher educational institution. Here is given the research of the concept of reading difficulty, as well as ways to identify and overcome the difficulties in reading in English of future engineers of agricultural sector. The difficulties of reading can be partially solved by using: 1) the positive transfer of general reading skills from Yakut and Russian to reading in a foreign language; 2) transpositions of phenomena that have similar features with phenomena in Yakut and Russian languages. It is shown that transfer is one of the natural mental processes of a person, which like any other needs to be developed. To solve the tasks set, the following research methods were used: the study and analysis of Russian literature on the research problem; the analysis of the textbook "English for technical directions"; monitoring the learning process of reading among the students of the first and the second courses; conversations with students and lecturers. The research has allowed to come to the following conclusions: without considering the positive interlingual and intra-linguistic transfer it is impossible to find a correct solution to the problem of teaching reading students in English who has already had these reading skills in Yakut and Russian languages.

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Keywords

Linear way of understanding, positive transfer of general reading skills, linguistic experience, learning, pedagogy.

Introduction to the problem

Teaching students to read is one of the most important tasks of teaching a foreign language, a valuable practical skill that will be needed by the overwhelming majority of university graduates and will be most likely to be used in professional and self-education activities [Baryshnikov, 1999, 10].

At present, the general questions of the psychology of teaching reading are well studied and methodologically sufficiently fully developed. However, “practical results of students in the field of reading leave much to be desired” [Gal'skova, Gez, 2004, 230].

Proceeding from this, the purpose of our article is to consider issues such as the “difficulty of reading”, as well as ways to identify and overcome the difficulties of reading in English for students of 1-2 courses for academic program Agro-engineering of agricultural higher educational institution.

The methodological basis for solving the problem posed was the work of such researchers as N.V. Baryshnikov, N.D. Galskova, N.I. Gez, I.V. Karpov, Z.I. Klychnikova, A.V. Koledinova, A.N. Sokolov, A.D. Klimentenko, A.A. Mirolubov, S.K. Folomkina, A.V. Shchepilova and others.

Some researchers have identified the following as the main reasons for not being sufficiently highly trained in reading in a non-linguistic university: [Kushnir, 1997, 83], “the lack of a differentiated approach to the reading of texts in the specialty, lack of knowledge of the psychological characteristics of a mature reader; using only such types of reading as reading for detail and skimming; poorly developed teaching methods for different types of reading” [Gal'skova, Gez, 2004, 230].

Also, we should not forget that reading is a “complex thought process aimed at extracting information” [Klychnikova, 1973, 6], contained in the text. Mature reading represents the organic unity of the two sides of the reading process – technology and understanding. Accordingly, difficulties in reading, depending on the stage of learning, the level of proficiency of a foreign language can be associated with both the text and these two components of the reading process.

The difficulty of a foreign readable text is a “psycholinguistic phenomenon” [Tomina, 1985, 3], which is matched with such factors as: “1) information richness of the text; 2) the compositional logical structure of the text; 3) semantic categories implemented in the text; 4) language means of expressing semantic information; 5) polygraphist design of the text; 6) the degree of approximation of the reader's vocabulary, grammar and style of speech to the author's vocabulary, grammar and style; 7) experience of the reader; 8) the reader's knowledge of a large context and implication; 9) learning the ability to read (technology, reading techniques); 10) the proper organization of the focus of attention when reading; 11) emotional readiness of the reader, his interest in it, emotional sensitivity and emotional empathy of the reader; 12) age peculiarities of the reader; 13) personality characteristics (character and temperament)” [Klychnikova, 1983, 180].

Researchers have different assessments of the significance of the listed factors in determining text difficulties for students.

The statement of the problem

What difficulties do students of agricultural higher educational institution have while reading English texts in the specialty in the context of trilingualism?

Difficulties experienced by students in the process of reading foreign texts in agricultural higher educational institution can be associated not only with the nature of readable text and language material, but also “with the lack of appropriate reading mechanisms, such as visual perception, speech hearing, comprehension, long-term and operational memory, probabilistic forecasting, linguistic and contextual

conjecture, internal pronunciation” [Koledinova, 1999, 4]. All of these reading mechanisms develop in a complex while reading, regardless of the language being studied and the age of the readers.

The analysis of the practice of teaching students to read in English in agricultural higher educational institution confirms the opinion expressed in the methodology that students “have a linear way of understanding. That is at the analytic-synthetic level of semantic perception, they most often do not recognize lexical units and grammatical structures, but recognize them. It reduces level of understanding. Linear perception of isolated lexical units is one of the main reasons for the lack of understanding of foreign texts” [Baryshnikov, 1999, 30]. Linearity in the perception of the text contradicts the essence of the process of reading, which consists in the search and selection of semantic marks in the text [Sokolov, 1947, 183];

As a result, students have difficulty with the need to simultaneously solve linguistic and semantic tasks. Accordingly, there is a slowdown in skills that allow to “see” the whole text; especially the ability to predict, to understand the main idea of the text, to build a logical sequence of facts set forth in the text, to draw conclusions from the text.

The revealed complex of difficulties can be compensated to some extent if the students, while reading texts in English, realize the possibility of: I) positive transferring general reading skills from native and Russian to reading in a foreign language; II) transpositions of phenomena that have similar features with phenomena in the native and Russian languages [Ivanova, 2009, 17].

How to ensure the transfer of already formed reading skills from the native, Russian to reading in a foreign language?

The students' reading skills in their native Russian can be transferred to reading in a foreign language if: 1) the formation of an appropriate attitude of students to English reading (from the very beginning of teaching reading, orientation to understanding the meaning of the text and extracting semantic information); 2) the implication of special teaching methods of reading used in their native language by the teacher in reading foreign texts; 3) a specific sequence of mastering various types of reading in English. It is considered advisable to start learning with skim reading, as a type of reading that facilitates the transfer of relevant techniques of mature reading from the native language. Learning reading is proposed to be introduced when students have already acquired certain skills in skim reading; 4) the use of easy-to-linguistic texts as the conditions of reading are close to the conditions of reading in native language [Klimentenko, 1981, 290-291; Folomkina, 2005, 49-52].

Observing the proposed conditions for transfer, we consider it reasonable to make changes to the third and fourth conditions, i.e. to start learning to read English texts with scanning. As the primary understanding of general meaning of a foreign text as a whole is a necessary step that creates the basis for more detailed work with the text. Reading for specific information can promote understanding of the text which can be reached by search of obvious and latent supports. Reading for detail gives “more accurate understanding due to grammatical and lexical analysis”. Repetitive holistic perception of the text (skim reading/synthetic reading) gives “a complete and adequate understanding thanks to the preceding analysis” [Karpov, 1950, 24].

We share the point of view of researchers that the success of the transfer of methods of activity depends on how correctly the similarity of tasks, conditions and types of approaches for its solution is assessed. It must be borne in mind when learning foreign reading.

What could be the linguistic source of transposition while reading?

So “there must be an appropriate layer, element, model for the implementation of transposition in the linguistic experience of a student” [Shchepilova, 2003, 268]. According to E. Kellerman, the transfer can be facilitated by a comparative analysis, which creates the necessary prerequisites for its

implementation. However, as A.V. Shchepilova noticed here the level of formation of grammatical structure plays a role: “the deeper the structure is located in the linguistic consciousness, the more significant is the influence of the native language. At the surface level of the formulation of thought, the transfer can be carried out from both the native and Russian languages into a foreign one. One of the most important conditions for the implementation and direction of transfer is the degree of universality of the structure in contacting languages. The universality of the phenomenon in terms of transposition is more important than the similarity of the phenomenon with its analogue in the native language” [ibid., 269]. “When linguistic phenomena in languages are based on the same rule, and this rule belongs to the category of language universals, it requires the least effort to master it in a new language.” Accordingly, common features in the studied languages facilitate learning. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the formal similarity of phenomena, which are nevertheless different functionally or semantically, creates a long-term interference [ibid.].

Under the conditions of subordinate Yakut-Russian bilingualism while reading internal transposition factors can be universal grammatical word order rules in a sentence: 1) setting the subject at the beginning of a sentence in three contacting languages; 2) in Russian and foreign languages object as a verb-driven member of the sentence stands after the verb; 3) in Yakut language the conjugation of a verb is distinguished by a variety of tense forms, as in English, which leads to the presence of universal concepts (Continuous tenses, Present Perfect, Past Perfect, Past Perfect Continuous). Identical morphological rules also facilitate transposition in reading. For instance, adjectives are inconsistent with nouns in native and foreign languages (neither in gender, nor in case, nor in number), they do not accept inflective endings and etc. Transfer is one of the natural mental processes of a person “that like any other, needs to be developed” [ibid., 271]. Without considering the positive interlanguage and intralingual transfer it is impossible to find a correct solution to the problem of teaching reading in English to students who already possess this skill in Yakut and Russian.

The results of the study

Thus, the data of the assessment of students revealed a low level of development of reading skills in English for students of 1-2 courses, but at the same time reading skills in native and Russian languages formed at a sufficiently high level were found. Based on this, we concluded that the formation of certain reading skills in native and Russian can serve as a support for the transfer of these skills when learning to read in English. To accomplish this positive transfer, we have developed a learning technology that allows students to implement it independently. The task of this technology is also to mitigate the difficulties experienced by students when it is necessary to solve simultaneously linguistic, sociocultural and semantic problems in the process of reading texts in English.

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Трудности при обучении чтению на английском языке по направлению «Агроинженерия» и способы их преодоления

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Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена вопросам обучения чтению на английском языке по направлению «Агроинженерия» в агровузе. В статье рассмотрено понятие «трудность чтения», а также пути выявления и преодоления трудностей чтения на английском языке будущих инженеров в сфере сельского хозяйства, которые могут быть частично решены за счет использования: I) положительного переноса общих умений чтения с родного и русского в чтение на иностранном языке; II) транспозиции явлений, которые имеют сходные черты с явлениями на родном и русском языках. Показано, что перенос – один из естественных ментальных процессов человека, который, как и любой другой, нуждается в развитии. Для решения поставленных задач использовались следующие методы исследования: изучение и анализ отечественной литературы по проблеме исследования; анализ действующего учебного пособия «Английский язык для технических направлений»; наблюдение за процессом обучения чтению студентов 1-2 курсов агровуза; беседы со студентами и преподавателями. Проведенное исследование позволило нам сделать следующие выводы: без

учета положительного межъязыкового и внутриязыкового переноса невозможно найти корректное решение проблемы обучения иноязычному чтению студентов, уже владеющих этим умением на якутском и русском языках.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Линейный путь понимания, положительный перенос общих умений чтения, лингвистический опыт, обучение, педагогика.

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