Developing communication competences of technical university students through extracurricular projects in foreign language studies

Kirill D. Mikhailov

MBA, Senior Lecturer,
Department of Foreign Languages,
Moscow Automobile and Road Construction State Technical University,
125319, 64, Leningradskii ave., Moscow, Russian Federation;
e-mail: mikhailov@madi.ru

Natal'ya G. Karaseva

Senior Lecturer,
Department of Foreign Languages,
Moscow Automobile and Road Construction State Technical University,
125319, 64, Leningradskii ave., Moscow, Russian Federation;
e-mail: natkarasyova@mail.ru

Abstract

In recent years, the overall requirements for university graduates have increased significantly worldwide. Employers will prefer a candidate possessing not just professional skills but also creative potential and a flexible mindset, one who is familiar with modern technologies and devices, a fast learner able to search and analyze information. An important factor in hiring is the graduate's ability to communicate, including communication in a foreign language. The article discusses the role of extracurricular activities in foreign language training in a technical university, traditionally focused on increasing the motivation of students in their language studies. Based on practical experience gained by the Department of Foreign Languages of the Moscow Automobile and Road Construction State Technical University (MADI), it examines the stages of organizing students' project work to create English-language videos on a given topic for participation in international and all-Russian students' competitions. By observing project results and interviewing the teachers and students of the supplementary professional retraining program "Translator in the sphere of professional communication", who were part of the university teams, the authors determined competencies, that are developed through the participation of students in this type of extracurricular activities. The attempt is made to correlate the work at different stages of a video project with the universal competencies defined by the Federal Standard of Higher Education for undergraduate programs in the university studies areas, as well as universal, general and specific professional competencies of a translator in the sphere of professional communication.

Introduction

In recent years, the overall requirements for university graduates have increased significantly worldwide. Employers will prefer a candidate possessing not just professional skills but also creative potential and a flexible mindset, one who is familiar with modern technologies and devices, a fast learner able to search and analyze information. An important factor in hiring is the graduate's ability to communicate, including communication in a foreign language.

The competencies of a university graduate, related to their ability to communicate in a foreign language, are attributed in the Federal Standard of Higher Education either to general cultural or universal competencies. Specifically, the need to possess "the ability to communicate in oral and written form in Russian and foreign languages in order to handle issues of interpersonal and intercultural interaction" is mentioned there as a universal competency.

According to a recent survey, over 80% of MADI students consider a foreign language necessary for their future career and are keen to study primarily English to gain a sufficiently high level of foreign language communication competency [Polyakova, Karelova, 2018]. To meet the needs of students in foreign language studies, Moscow Automobile and Road Construction State Technical University (MADI) has created a diversified system of continuous foreign language training which includes compulsory, elective and additional learning programs [Polyakova, 2015].

An important role in this system belongs to the supplementary professional retraining program called "Translator in the field of professional communication". The program is aimed at building students' professional translation competency to a level sufficient for translating scientific, technical and other special literature from English into Russian [Polyakova, Solntsev, www]. It defines a wide range of universal, general and specific professional competencies of a translator [ibid.] based on the Federal Standard of Higher Education in the field of "Translation and Translation Studies" as related to the specific goals of the program and the learning environment.

The students are largely involved in extracurricular projects, presenting reports at conferences, writing English-language dictations arranged annually by Kazan Federal University, taking part in translation contests and video projects competitions in English.

 Among the main purposes of such events are not only the increased motivation to study a foreign language, but also the development of personal skills, professional culture and communication activity of the students, enhancing their universal, general and professional competencies, which would facilitate the process of adaptation of university graduates in the professional environment. By regularly participating in such events, students not only develop their language skills, but also embrace the concept of successful behavior and self-fulfillment. Among all such educational contests we consider

video project competitions to be one of the most productive ways to unlock the creative potential of students.

Background

The increasing scope and role of students' extracurricular activities, particularly video projects have attracted attention of many researchers worldwide recently. Efforts have been made to use project-based learning framework to determine the enhancement of high school students' general competencies in course of production of digital video projects (Hoe L.S. et al) [Hoe et al., 2019] and create "learning with technology" environment for teacher education students (Hung V.H.K. et al) [Hung et al., 2004]. Qualitative research design has been used to record how digital video making projects impact the student's motivation (I. Savedra, J.G. Brauchi) [Saavedra, www]. Investigations have been carried out to assess the levels of students' satisfaction in course of project completion and determine the relevance of video project for language learning (Ng Choo Ting) [Ng Choo Ting, 2013]. A research has been conducted to study how video project work helps Management students in developing 21st century skills including self-direction, knowledge creation, collaboration, and digital literacy (A. Puspa) [Puspa, 2016].

Methodology

The Department of Foreign Languages of Moscow Automobile and Road Construction State Technical University has gained considerable experience in preparation of students' video projects. In addition to filming clips for the university Olympiads, students have made videos on the topics "My transport university" and "Transport in my life" for the 1st and 2nd International English-Language Olympiads for students of transport universities of the CIS countries in 2018 and 2019, as well as a video titled "Language in my career" for the 7th International Inter-University Students Festival in Foreign Languages, which was awarded the 1st prize.

Filming a video is essentially a project work that the students of the program carry out under the guidance of their teachers. Normally the contestants are asked to film a short story on a given topic, lasting only about 5 minutes. Based on the experience, we distinguish eight stages of a video project, that are: informational (1), preparatory (2), operational (3), rehearsal (4), filming (5), analytical (6), corrective (7), presentation (8).

At the first, informational stage, the details of the competition are collected and communicated to students. The main task of the teachers is to attract the students' attention and motivate them to participate.

The second, preparatory phase is critical to the successful implementation of the project. During this stage, interested students are identified and potential team members are selected. To be involved in the project students should possess at least B1 level of English proficiency in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. After a natural dropout of participants, the final composition of the team is confirmed. Then, in line with the abilities and preferences of the students, the roles are determined for team members: screenwriters, cameramen, actors. At this stage, the teacher acts as a consultant assisting the students in project planning. At this point most of the communication is usually still in Russian.

At the third, operational stage, the team use brainstorming to determine the overall concept, the main plot line, collect the necessary information and come up with the script versions. As soon as they

are ready, the team discusses the versions and plans accordingly. The final script is then translated into English. At this stage, the choice of location for the shooting is also finalized, and the roles are assigned among the student actors.

At the fourth, rehearsal stage, students work through the phonetics of their lines, practice pronunciation and intonation and rehearse in the setting in front of the camera. At this stage, the script may be adjusted to fit into the set time limits. Often a new version of the script would require replacing actors.

At the fifth, filming stage, trial shootings are carried out and the full video is filmed.

The sixth, analytical stage involves viewing of the footage and assessing the quality of the oral speech by all team members. The teacher's role is limited to assisting the students in case of any disagreement.

At the seventh, correctional stage, the sound mixing is finalized and the need for any additional material or additional filming is identified.

The eighth and final stage, presentation, involves final inspection, completion of the video file, sending it to the competition committee and follow up.

In the process of project completion, one of the main universal empirical methods of collecting information was used, observation and interviewing. The purpose was to identify at all stages of the project the development of various competencies within the group of contestants.

Interviews were conducted both with the project participants and with the mentoring teachers to evaluate the progress in the development of respective competences and collect opinion of the project and impressions from the project work.

Results and discussion

The work on a video project is instrumental in enhancing various competencies necessary for both oral and written interpersonal communication in a foreign language, as well as competencies important for the organizational, communicative, informational and analytical activities of a translator [Polyakova, Solntsev, www].

At the first, informational stage of the project, the most work is done by the teachers. Information about the competition is collected and disseminated among students. Since the information is normally presented in Russian, the students only apply their communication skills and abilities in mother tongue within the limited framework of interpersonal interaction. Interviews with teachers and students at this stage reveal no difficulties.

The second, preparatory stage takes about 15% of the total workload and mainly involves project planning activities, which creates conditions for the developing general cultural competencies. Based on our observations and the opinion of the project team members, students develop "the ability to work in a team, tolerantly perceiving social, ethnic, confessional and cultural differences", "the ability for self-organization and self-education". At this stage some sensitive issues related to use of information and copywrite law may arise, so "the ability to use general legal knowledge in various fields of activity" becomes relevant.

The third, operational stage, is focused on the selection of the material, its translation, writing and translation of the script. It is decisive for the choice of the content and design of the video, that should clearly distinguish it from other competitors and fully reveal the topic. In order to write an effective and expressive script, students have to go through a bulk of educational literature, research material and information, write several script versions and sometimes even change the plot line more than once. In course of this work, heated intellectual battles take place between the team members, where students

learn to analyze the selected material, to form, justify and defend their point of view.

Material selection and working with scientific and technical information help students to develop "the ability to independently search for professional information in printed and electronic sources, including electronic databases" [ibid.], as well as the ability to work with various sources, information resources and technologies, to search, store, process and analyze information from various sources and databases, present it in the required form, using information, computer and network technologies, master standard methods of typing and editing in Russian and foreign language. This creates conditions for the development of such professional competence of a translator as the ability to apply the methods of thematic data search in reference materials, special literature and computer networks. All three competencies are extremely important for the work of a translator.

The script writing process also promotes the development of other competencies relevant for the translator's activities: "the ability to engage in intercultural interaction in writing in order to ensure cooperation in handling professional issues, tolerantly perceiving social, ethnic, confessional, cultural and other differences", and also "the ability to produce logical, reasonable and clear oral and written speech in Russian, including that on professional topics, to publicly present own or commonly known research findings, conduct discussions" [ibid.]. In addition, the process of writing and translating a script requires the ability of a translator "to apply knowledge in the field of geography, history, political, economic, social and cultural life of the country of the target language, as well as the knowledge of the role of the country of the target language in the regional and global politics", as well as "the ability to adequately apply the rules for composing texts in working languages to achieve their coherence, consistency, integrity based on compositional speech forms" [ibid.]. At the same time, the translation of the script tests the student's ability to "apply translation transformations to achieve the required level of equivalence and representativeness when performing oral and written translation of a written text" [ibid.].

At the fourth (rehearsal) and the fifth (filming) stages, that take about 20% and 25% of the project time respectively, the students rehearse and perform their roles, which can be described as preparation and actualization of oral utterance based on the existing level of foreign language communicative competence, which tests the readiness of graduates to communicate in oral and written forms in a foreign language for purposes of interpersonal and intercultural interaction. This stage involves application and development of all components of the foreign language communicative competence, including speech, language, socio-cultural, compensatory, educational and cognitive ones.

The sixth, analytical stage of the project work involves deep analysis of written and oral text, both its content and linguistic form. Here students apply such translation competencies as "the ability to carry out linguistic analysis of the text/ discourse based on the systemic knowledge of the current stage and the history of the development of the target language", "the ability to adequately apply the rules for composing texts in working languages to achieve their coherence, consistency and integrity, based on compositional speech forms", as well as "the ability to engage at all levels of communication: official, unofficial or neutral" [ibid.].

The seventh, correctional stage requires students to use correct lexical units, professional terminology, grammar structures corresponding to a certain level of oral communication on the basis of their foreign language communicative competence. Such translation competencies come into play here, as "the ability to carry out post-translation self-editing and edit checks of the translated text" and "the ability to assess the quality and nature of the information, to distinguish the most significant facts and concepts, to provide individual assessment and interpretation" [ibid.]. The success at this stage largely depends on the ability of students to work in a team and tolerate social, ethnic, confessional and

cultural differences.

At the eighth, final stage, the completed and verified video is sent to the competition committee. The need to submit a video for the competition at a given deadline, in a certain form, filling in the relevant paperwork requires students to demonstrate a certain level of responsibility, as well as skills and abilities in self-organization.

Conclusion

Extracurricular activities in foreign language studies not only help to increase the motivation of students of technical universities to master a foreign language, but also creates conditions for the development of a wide range of competencies required by the Federal Standards. The project work that the students of the supplementary professional retraining program are engaged in during preparation and filming videos in English contributes to the development of general cultural, general and specific professional competencies of the translator, as well as to self-fulfillment and self-education of students. It also expands the audience's understanding of the countries of the target language, develops their cognitive, creative independence and unlocks the intellectual potential. As confirmed through the project work experience, the greatest potential for the development of communicative competencies in a foreign language is provided at the operational, rehearsal, filming and analytical stages of the project work.

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Развитие коммуникативных компетенций студентов технического вуза с помощью внеаудиторных проектов по изучению иностранных языков

Михайлов Кирилл Дживанович

Магистр MBA, старший преподаватель,
кафедра «Иностранные языки»,
Московский автомобильно-дорожный
государственный технический университет,
125319, Российская Федерация, Москва, Ленинградский пр., 64;
e-mail: mikhaylov.kirill@gmail.com

Карасева Наталья Геннадиевна

Старший преподаватель,
кафедра «Иностранные языки»,
Московский автомобильно-дорожный
государственный технический университет,
125319, Российская Федерация, Москва, Ленинградский пр., 64;
e-mail: natkarasyova@mail.ru

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается роль внеаудиторной деятельности в обучении иностранному языку в техническом вузе, традиционно ориентированной на повышение мотивации студентов в изучении языка. На основе практического опыта, накопленного кафедрой иностранных языков Московского автомобильно-дорожного государственного технического университета, рассмотрены этапы организации проектной работы студентов по созданию англоязычных видеороликов на заданную тему для участия в международных и Всероссийские студенческие соревнования. Наблюдая за результатами проекта и опрашивая преподавателей и студентов программы дополнительной профессиональной переподготовки «Переводчик в сфере профессиональной коммуникации», входящих в состав университетских команд, авторы определили компетенции, формируемые при участии студентов в данном виде внеклассной деятельности. Сделана попытка соотнести работу на разных этапах видеопроекта с универсальными компетенциями, определенными ФГОС ВО для программ бакалавриата по направлениям вузовской подготовки, а также универсальными, общими и специфическими профессиональными компетенциями переводчика в сфера профессионального общения.

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