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Discussion Method in developing discourse competence of students: the case of teaching Ukrainian in secondary schools

Keywords: discussion method, discourse competence, spoken Ukrainian.

Introduction

According to the advanced tendencies of language education in Europe, the update of language teaching methods should serve the communicative needs of the pupils. We strongly believe that one of such methods is educational discussion, described and applied for the monitoring of communicative competence development process at the lessons of Ukrainian in secondary schools. Being placed within the scope of methods of teaching, it has not received systemic investigation yet, as well as has not been presented for debate in scientific literature. Drawing teacher's attention to discussion as a teaching method is always caused by the necessity to intensively develop the communicative competence of the pupils, which, in its turn, can be assessed by means of defining the quality of discussion procedures and the outcomes of language communication. At the same time, discussion in the study process preserves the majority of the features of an academic (scientific) dialogue, since it relates to the topics which can be considered as the tools of active participation of pupils in the process of cognition. Thus, discussion as a teaching method, according to M. Klarin, can be defined as the method of developing communicative and dialogic culture of cognition¹.

¹ M.V. Klarin, *Dyskusiya v navchanni: zhyva i virtual'na*, „Shkil'ni tekhnolohy” 2015, №1, p. 59–77.

Discussion method is a tool for applying teaching strategies, which have been in regular use since early 2000s. The development of communicative competence of the schoolchildren in the course of teaching the Ukrainian language, especially in teaching dialogue speech, is meant to provide the pupils with the sense of realizing the differences between a text and a non-text, supplying them with the intuitive feeling of continuous and integrated speech pattern. Discussion could be “an effective macro communicative act that is aimed at attaining a specified goal or outcome through communication”².

Literature review

In the western papers, there could be rarely found some inference between a discussion and a debate³. By means of a discussion (or debate), students improve their skills of making hypotheses, supporting conclusions with evidence. They can develop their rhetoric skills of persuasion in a dialogue. According to O. Brenifier, the development of communicative competence in debates becomes «a permanent laboratory»⁴. Using debates, the teacher is always „on the lookout” to verify the effectiveness of its technical means and to theorize his/her experiences, mistakes and achievements.

Educational discussion for developing students’ communicative competence has been claimed to be a popular method of class management. Though, its role in the development of discourse skills of the students has been diminished significantly, probably due to more “comfortable” conditions of developing text comprehension and text production skills in written speech, as compared to oral interaction. There circulates an opinion that spoken discourse is much more difficult to train, test and correct. At the same time, a vast number of researchers have recently identified discourse competence as a component of communicative competence (L.F. Bachman, M. Canale, J.A. Ekvan, D. Hymes, S. Moirand, Y. Simard, M. Swain). In particular, M. Canale added discourse competence, as a component to his communicative competence model, referring to the knowledge of the text and a skill that combines linguistic elements to achieve a unified textual wholeness⁵.

² O Liubashenko, & O Yashenkova, *Extending the Scope of the English Exit Exam: A Study from a Ukrainian Classical University in Revisiting the Assessment of Second Language Abilities: From Theory to Practice*, Kyiv 2017, p. 415–435.

³ A. Pardo, *Using Debates in the Classroom: A Pedagogical Strategy for the Development of the Argumentative Competence in the Teaching of English As a Foreign Language*, U. Externado de Colombia 2012; T. Brown, & J. Bown, *Teaching Advanced Language Skills through Global Debate: Theory and Practice*, Washington 2014.

⁴ O. Brenifier, *Enseñar mediante el debate*. Ed. Edere, México 2005, p. 28.

⁵ M. Canale, *From Communicative Competence to Communicative Language Pedagogy*, In: *Language and Communication*, ed. J. C. Richard, & R. W. Schmidt, London 1983, p. 2–14.

The authors do not limit discourse skills only to the sphere of written speech. K. Siedov, for example, emphasizes on the need to develop discourse mastery of children in the process of lifelong language acquisition⁶. This leads to a conclusion that discourse competence relates to knowledge of textual conventions in oral and written discourse⁷. The constituent elements of this competence are cohesion and coherence in speech⁸. The researchers in the field of development of discourse skills are mainly focused on the discourse analysis of Ukrainian literature, thus paying little attention to oral text production⁹. O. Liubashenko sees discourse competence within the tradition of text-centeredness approach¹⁰ and interprets it not only as an act of text production, but also as knowledge of a variety of discourse types, rules of their formation, the skills to interpret the text according to the specificity of a communicative situation and produce them in a dialogue, the skills to adapt the text to the peculiarities of comprehension pattern of communication participants. However, in all interpretations, the development of discourse competence in language learning is based on training in various types of discourse types applying the rules of its production in written interaction.

Objective and tasks

Observation of teachers' experience has enabled us to summarize that discussion as a teaching method in teaching the Ukrainian language lacks systematic implementation, and is often viewed as a form of classroom management. However, we have an assumption that discussion method in teaching oral speech can be applied in a number of grades of comprehensive secondary school as a method of development of discourse competence. In our research, we set the goal to develop schoolchildren's discourse competence in spoken Ukrainian by means of experimental strategy. Research tasks included: experimental verification of the efficiency of the learning and teaching strategy, being applied for the development and improvement of schoolchildren's skills to lead oral dialogue by means of questions and answers, as well as evaluation of the influence of the mentioned above method on the development of discourse competence of schoolchildren in the course of communication on a given topic.

⁶ K.F. Sedov, *Discourse and personality: the evolution of communicative competence*, Moscow 2004.

⁷ J. Flowerdew, *Discourse in English Language Education*, Routledge 2012, p. 7.

⁸ L. Bachman, *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*, Oxford 1990, p. 86.

⁹ O. Kucheryava, *Shlyakhy aktyvizatsiyi dyskursyvnoyi diyal'nosti studentiv filolohichnykh fakul'tetiv*, „Pedahohichna osvita: teoriya i praktyka” 2013, Vyp. 8, p. 213–216.

¹⁰ O. Liubashenko, *Tekstotsentrychnyy pidkhid u pobudovi linhvodyaktychnykh stratehiy navchannya u vyshchii shkoli*. Naukovi zapysky: zbirnyk statey, Kyiv 2013. p. 107–113.

Method

In our study, we have substantiated the use of an educational strategy (both learning and teaching strategy, **LTS**) for teaching oral speech skills with the help of a discussion method. According to Brookfield and Preskill, as the content of learning informing–and–linking questions, clarifying questions, open questions, cause-and-effect questions, hypothetical questions, summary-and-synthesis questions were used Brookfield & Preskill, as well as the answers to them. A particular level of discourse competence in spoken Ukrainian was aimed to be reached, thus enabling to check the efficiency of the discussion method in developing spoken skills in schoolchildren.

The participants of experimental stage of our research were the pupils of the 9th grade (20 persons) and the 11th grade (16 schoolchildren) and teachers of the Social Sciences and Arts Gymnasium №176 in Kyiv. Two teachers of Ukrainian language and literature from the mentioned above school assisted the author of the experiment: the teacher-methodical expert with 20-year pedagogical experience, and the teacher of the higher category with 16-year pedagogical experience. They provided suggested tasks for their groups of schoolchildren and collected data from their learning process. The experimental groups consisted of Ukrainian native speakers, and included 21 girls and 15 boys.

Results and discussion

Results of the survey carried out at the experimental stage of our research among the teachers of the Ukrainian language in Kyiv schools (total 24 teachers) proves that only 7 out the total number of survey participants use classroom discussion from time to time to develop discursive skills of schoolchildren; five out of 24 teachers know how to test the skills of text comprehension and text production during the discussion. The rest of the teachers usually develop coherent speech skills by means of written activities.

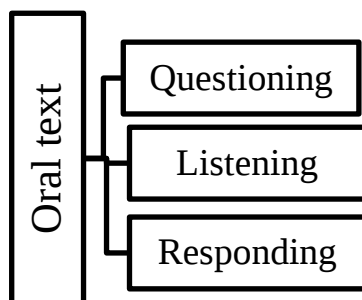
School curriculum gives a large spectrum of possibilities to use the discussion method at the lessons of Ukrainian¹¹, namely:

- The content of learning in the 9th grade according to the Curriculum is: non-conjunction complex sentence, sense relations between the clauses in non-conjunction complex sentence. The compulsory activity at the lesson: dialogue-discussion of achievements reached by famous Ukrainians who lived, created their masterpieces, and won the victory in the struggle with their diseases;

¹¹ *General Secondary Education, Curriculums. Zahal'na serednya osvita. Osvitni prohramy MON Ukrayiny 2019.* Rezhym dostupu: <https://mon.gov.ua/ua/osvita/zagalna-serednya-osvita/navchalni-programi/>

- The content of learning in the 11th grade according to the Curriculum is: the rules of composing complex sentences. Logical errors in complex sentences. The compulsory activity at the lesson: the exchange of impressions about the achievements of Ukrainian Paralympic sportsmen.

Experimental strategy implies the engagement of the schoolchildren in several types of learning activity: questioning, listening, oral responding (graph 1).



Graph 1. Learning and teaching strategy for developing discourse competence of students by means of discussion method

It should be noted that most researchers in education see these activities depending on the way they interpret the discussion method and dialogue in education. For example, R. Alexander, sees discussion and dialogue as the tool used by the teachers and represents them as allowing sufficient time for student responses, replying to questions, giving additional questions, seeking to understand the logic and rationale of students' responses, encouraging the students' answers, connecting their opinions¹². Therefore, the teacher develops student's discourse competence as the ability to listen to the discussion of partners and express opinions fluently and grammatically correctly by questioning and responding. At the same time, N. Burbules points out that oral text activities are the results of relations in discourse practice¹³. Then discourse skills are reflected in students' abilities to share their concepts, verify or test their understanding, and identify areas of common or individual knowledge. According to E. Wenger¹⁴, in discussion, relations between people are constituted with their activities (questioning, listening, responding), texts, and situations. Following the mentioned point of view, teachers should develop student's discourse skills as interaction practice and self-regulatory behaviour.

¹² R.J. Alexander, *Improving oracy and classroom talk: achievements and challenges*, "Primary First" 2013, 10, p. 22–29.

¹³ N. Burbules, B. Bertram, *Theory and Research on Teaching as Dialogue*, In: *Handbook of research on teaching*, 4th Edition, ed. V. Richardson, Washington 2001.

¹⁴ E. Wenger, *Communities of practice*, Cambridge 1993.

Within our study a discussion is an intrinsic mode of discourse. Then dialogical interactions through speech are the subject matter which students should learn and teachers should teach. With LTS for developing discourse competence, the teacher and students provide dialogic interaction through questioning, listening and responding and compose a coherent text of the discussion.

In the course of experimental study, within participation in the discussion the students had to: read the text – A; put questions of a particular type – B; reason the choice of the question recipient, then listen to his/her response – C; give responses to questions of particular types – D (Graph 2).

A. Pre-discussion stage: Reading Strength and Weakness /Сила і слабкість (The text is in the original Ukrainian language with its translation that follows) <i>Нейрохірург Людвіг Гуттман організував змагання для ветеранів з ушкодженнями хребта. Він був певен, що спорт — найкраща допомога для людей, які внаслідок отриманих поранень пересувались на візках. Слабкість тіла не є перешкодою для сили і волі до життя.</i> <i>Здавалося б, — чи можна вимагати більшого від людей, які й так живуть у постійній боротьбі з недугою? Але вони звикли самі вимагати від себе більшого. Чи так само багато вимагають від себе цілком здорові люди?</i> <i>Українець Демчук став чемпіоном XV літніх Паралімпійських ігор-2016 у фехтуванні на шаблях серед спортсменів-візочників категорії А. В інтерв'ю він зізнався, що втратив в АТО двох друзів і присвячує бійцям АТО свою перемогу.</i> <i>Але що тоді слабкість сильного і сила слабого? Чи можна засуджувати того, хто не боровся і здався?</i> <i>Translation:</i> <i>Neurosurgeon Ludwig Guttman arranged a competition for the veterans with back spine injuries. He was sure that sport is the best support for people in wheelchairs, since the weakness of the body should not be an obstacle for the will to life.</i> <i>The question seemed to be quite evident – is there any right to demand more efforts from people who live in constant struggle with untreated diseases? But it appeared that such people got used to demanding more from themselves. Do healthy people demand from themselves similar efforts?</i> <i>A Ukrainian, named Demchuk, became the champion of XV Paralympics, in 2016 in fencing with sabers among wheelchair sportsmen, category A. In his interview, he confessed that he had lost two good friends of his, who died in the AntiTerrorist Operation in the east of Ukraine, so he decided to commemorate his victory to all the soldiers in ATO.</i> <i>But then what is the weakness of the strong and the strength of the weak? Can we judge those who hadn't fought, but surrendered?</i>		
B. Questioning Chose the type of your question, construct it and address to the discussion participant	C. Listening Listen the answer to your question and the question to you	D. Responding Answer the question of the other discussion participants

Graph 2. Classroom discussion “Strength and Weakness” for the 9th and 11th grade students

The necessary condition for textualisation of a question and a response is the presence in complex sentences of non-conjunction relations, arranged accor-

ding to the rules of Ukrainian grammar. As a result, there was traced certain progress in the level of development of students' discourse competence in several groups of discourse skills, which refer to the CEFR descriptors for B1-B2 level (Common European). The schoolchildren of all experimental grades showed positive dynamics in developing the discourse skills (table 3)

Table 3. Observation of students' discourse skills development (frequency out of 36)

Discourse skills	Level	Pre-experimental stage	Post experimental stage	Percentage data	
Thematic development: can develop a clear description or narrative, expanding and supporting his/her main points with relevant supporting detail and examples; can reasonably fluently relate a straightforward narrative or description as a linear sequence of points.	high	6	12	17%	33%
	medium	13	22	36%	61%
	low	17	2	47%	6%
Coherence: Can use a variety of linking words efficiently to mark clearly the relationship between ideas; can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some "jumpiness" in a long text	high	8	14	22%	39%
	medium	15	21	42%	58%
	low	13	1	36%	3%
Processing text: Can summarise a wide range of factual and imaginative texts, commenting on and discussing contrasting points of view and the main themes; can summarise opinions, argument and theses of discussion.	high	6	13	17%	36%
	medium	13	21	36%	58%
	low	17	2	47%	6%
Formal discussion skills: can follow the discussion on matters related to his/her field, understand in detail the points given prominence by the speaker; can contribute, account for and sustain his/her opinion, evaluate alternative proposals and make and respond to hypotheses.	high	4	12	11%	33%
	medium	10	18	28%	50%
	low	22	6	61%	17%
Informal discussion skills: can with some effort catch much of what is said around him/her in discussion, but may find it difficult to participate effectively in discussion with several native speakers who do not modify their language in any way; can account for and sustain his/her opinions in discussion by providing relevant explanations, arguments and comments.	high	7	18	19,4%	50%
	medium	24	18	67%	50%
	low	5	-	14%	-

The levels of discourse competence development were defined according to the following criteria: 1) the presence or absence of errors in speech, 2) comple-

teness of the text in questions and responses for the flow of the discussion, 3) correspondence of the text content with the question type.

Conclusions

Summarizing the results of the study, we confirmed the assumption that the discussion method gives an opportunity to provide students with samples of oral speech and edit their speech and non-speech behavior. Research results show that discussion method effectively serves as a tool for the development of discourse skills of students. The schoolchildren considered their questions and responses as a complete text and tried to use them according to the goal of communication: contradict, add information, provide additional comments, support the speaker's opinion, develop and idea. The proposed strategy helps students to improve their skills, such as thematic knowledge, text coherence, processing the text, which were viewed as discourse skills. The changes that have taken place in the spoken Ukrainian of students of secondary school have shown that two thirds of the students participating in the experiment improved the oral text performance skills due to the application of discussion method used in classwork. The most interest was noticed in the activity of putting questions of different types and responding to them, namely, cause-and-effect questions and hypothetical questions.

A promising area in the study of the links between discussion method application in learning the languages and growing up to be a skilful speaker is designing specific techniques for different types of dialogic interactions, namely, blended discussion, conversation, discussion in rounds. All-time topical remain the issues of designing assessment scales for oral speech in a discussion and discourse dialogue skills of students.

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Summary

This empirical study focuses on the overall question of how discourse competence, participation in classroom discussion, and language learning are related. The value of discussion method and its application in developing discourse competence of students at the lessons of the Ukrainian language in secondary schools have been substantiated. The author shares the results of development and experimental verification of the strategy enabling the educator to teach schoolchildren to create oral text in discussion replicas in the course of questions and answers. Discussion method has been used to teach schoolchildren to produce oral dialogue according to the rules of grammar and verbal etiquette of the Ukrainian language. At the same time, questions and answers of the schoolchildren reflect their ability to use language for mutual development and expressing opinions.

According to the author, language classes are a training platform for the discourse competent speakers who arrange words, phrases and sentences in the oral text being compliant with a topic of the discussion. In this respect, the procedure of assessment of schoolchildren's questions and answers according to the criteria of discourse competence has been presented in the article. The criteria have been selected in relation to CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and adapted to the specificity of teaching the Ukrainian language at secondary schools.

Keywords: discussion method, discourse competence, spoken Ukrainian.

Metoda dyskusji w rozwijaniu kompetencji dyskursywnych wśród uczniów na lekcjach języka ukraińskiego w szkołach średnich

Streszczenie

Badania empiryczne koncentrują się na ogólnym pytaniu o to, jak powiązane są kompetencje komunikacyjne, udział w dyskusji w klasie i nauka języka. Potwierdzono wartość metody dyskusji i jej zastosowanie w rozwijaniu kompetencji dyskursywnych uczniów na lekcjach języka ukraińskiego w szkołach średnich. Autorka dzieli się wynikami opracowywania i eksperymentalnej weryfikacji strategii umożliwiającej nauczycielowi nauczanie uczniów w celu tworzenia tekstu ustnego w trakcie pytań i odpowiedzi. Metodę dyskusji zastosowano w celu nauczania dzieci w wieku szkolnym prowadzenia dialogu zgodnie z zasadami gramatyki i etykiety ustnej języka ukraińskiego. Jednocześnie pytania i odpowiedzi uczniów odzwierciedlają ich umiejętność posługiwania się językiem w celu wzajemnego rozwoju i wyrażania opinii.

Według autora zajęcia językowe są platformą szkoleniową dla kompetentnych mówców, którzy formułują słowa, wyrażenia i zdania w tekście ustnym zgodnie z tematem dyskusji. W tym względzie w artykule przedstawiono procedurę oceny pytań i odpowiedzi uczniów w oparciu o kryteria kompetencji dyskursu. Kryteria zostały wybrane w odniesieniu do CEFR (Wspólny europejski system opisu kształcenia językowego) i dostosowane do specyfiki nauczania języka ukraińskiego w szkołach średnich.

Słowa kluczowe: metoda dyskusji, kompetencje dyskursywne, ukraiński mówiony.