Concept-Based Content of Professional Linguistic Education

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The article deals with professional education of future linguists built on the basis of conceptual approach. The topic is exemplified by the Russian language and a successful attempt to implement the concept-based approach to forming the content of professional language education. Within the framework of the proposed research, the concept is accepted as the core notion of education. We also singled out the necessary and sufficient concept attributes providing the formation of a professional linguistic identity. The concept is considered as a unit of training. The aim of the research: to develop and theoretically prove, using the concept theory, the system of professionally focused education for the "Linguistics and Intercultural Communication" BA program. Methods used: system analysis of professional education in universities, conceptual description of the content of education, activity approach modeling, component and contrastive analysis as well as a number of empirical methods such as pedagogical experiment, integral analysis (observation, questionnaire survey, testing etc.). Major results include: concept-based approach in educating future specialists in linguistics and intercultural communication was scientifically justified; theory and methods of professional education was enriched by introducing new notions (concept-based approach, concept-language competency of a future specialist etc.); pedagogic professional regularities in forming professional language identity as a result of professionally oriented education in the framework of concept approach were found. The results of the research may be used in professional language education on the basis of concept approach, also, in further theoretical research of the problems of education modernization. Theoretical points and conclusions provide for scientific justification of practical improvements in today's university education in the field of linguistics and intercultural communication, they also lay the foundation for updating the curricula in a number of language specialties.

Keywords: pedagogics, concept-based teaching, concept-based approach, language and speech, concept, concept attributes, methods of teaching, cultural linguistics, education, Russian, the Russian language.

INTRODUCTION

Description of the problem to be dealt with

Today, in pedagogical education, due to transformations in science and society, actualization of culture-based knowledge application, and modern requirements imposed on a specialist, one may witness the transition from the subject-focused educational model (with an unambiguously prescribed scope) to the integrative

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model of substantive work of students, their social, cultural and personal capacities (Asmolov, 2008), (Berulava and Berulava, 2009), (Yakimanskaya *et al.*, 2008).

Professional education of future linguists must reflect the changes in educational demand, as well as paradigm requirements of today's linguistic education. The achievements in cognitive linguistics and concept theory allow us to otherwise raise questions and find answers in the area of professional linguistic identity development. This fact determines the search for effective approaches (linguistic-and-cultural, social-and-cultural, cultural-and-philosophic etc.) and education techniques.

Giving proper respect to works on professional education, it is noteworthy that problems of concept-based approach to university education were never duly theoretically considered and practically implemented. Theoretical and empirical analysis of the problem of professionally focused education of future linguists in a university made it possible to find the following contradictions:

- the aggregate of scientific knowledge about concepts as bearers of culturally meaningful essence of the language and their role in forming a professional language identity disagreed with the absence of a comprehensive concept-based approach to professional university education regarding training of linguists;

- the dynamic communicative model of a linguist's professional activity, as a special kind of intellectual, verbal and cogitative work, contradicts the prevailing subject-focused approach aimed at an unambiguously prescribed scope and curricula;

- the need to update professional education in line with the concept-based approach and create a professionally focused model of teaching went against the insufficient development of pedagogic and organizational conditions allowing to implement such a model;

- the need to use professionally focused teaching techniques (in respect of linguists training) contradicted the insufficient development of such techniques.

The call to solve these contradictions predetermined the problems and aims of the research: finding the governing factors and theoretical basics of concept focused education for future linguists; identifying the methods to implement concept-based approach to dealing with the subject of a linguist's professional activity; setting up technologies to shape a professional language identity of a future linguist; determine the most effective teaching conditions providing formation and development of a professional language identity.

The use of concept-based approach as the fundamental principle determines the researcher's methodology. The main peculiarity of the approach is the fact that it is based on the major tendencies in higher education, such as:

• the expansion of the scope of the language, not only as a means of communication but as a phenomenon of intellectual culture;

• the integration of the educational process, both the subject matter and the pedagogical content;

• the integration of humanities knowledge in a specific communicative situation determined by the text as the source of a linguist's professional activity;

• the acknowledgement of "individual-in-language" as the fundamental principle as well as psychological and pedagogical mechanisms providing various kinds of cognitive and communicative activities of a future specialist.

Hypothesis

Today a linguist's professional activity is global and multifold: culture-creating, linguo-ecological, interlingual and cross-cultural. The ability to function in the intercultural space is especially valuable. Linguists act as intermediaries of intercultural communication in the sphere of concepts of different cultures.

Professional education of future linguists at a university is possible within the framework of concept-based approach if:

- the concept-based approach has been developed and proved as a methodological baseline, theoretical foundation and a way to implement the educational model;
- concept-based description of language units has been accepted as the system-forming element;
- a number of teaching techniques providing interlocutory focus of professional language cogitation has been developed.

The objects of linguists professional occupation are language, text and culture, as reflected in texts which are regarded as collections of ideas common for the ethnicity. Texts also act as intellectual culture, as human experience condensed in spiritual and moral values which reflect solutions to life challenges, e.g.: attitude towards people ("kindness", "mercy"), pursuance of harmony ("beauty"), creativity ("labor", "cognition", "communication").

METHODS

The methods used in the course of the research: system analysis of professional education in universities, conceptual description of the content of education, activity approach modeling, component and contrastive analysis as well as a number of empirical methods such as pedagogical experiment, integral analysis (observation, questionnaire survey, testing etc.). The major methods that influenced the entire research strategy and the outcomes were the system analysis and conceptual description of the content of education.

The method of system analysis of professional education in universities was conducted on the example of "Linguistics and Intercultural Communication" and "Russian Philology" undergraduate programs at Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod. Analysis procedures included scrutinization of curricula and content of study courses. This allowed to find the contradictions between the requirements to the professional language identity and the teaching techniques that failed to provide efficiency of the process. The next step allowed to determine the necessary conceptual design of the educational process. Conceptual description of content of education was selected as the top-priority method/technique of teaching because knowing an element of a language system presupposes its correct use aimed at transferring the meaning (which is culturally determined). The method of conceptual description of the language provides a good opportunity to master the necessary knowledge of speech activity theory, discourse theory, psycholinguistics, stylistics, intercultural communication.

THEORETICAL BASIS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Concept theory and university pedagogics

The concept-based approach is founded on the understanding of a language as an activity – the idea dates back to W. von Humboldt (Humboldt, 1984). Thus the inherent study of the language is replaced by its learning in close connection with human, his/her conscience, spirituality and morale.

Hence, the goal-setting for professional education is related to the transforming cognitive-and-functional kind of activity which acquires the status of a pedagogical term. This approach meets the methodology of professional pedagogy which interprets professional education as an uninterrupted professional development of a future specialist. The key value lies with the formation of a professionally competent

individual who is capable of self-development, self-education. He/she understands the essence of his/her own activity and realizes its transforming significance and moral basis (E.F. Zeer, E.A. Klimov, E.M. Korotkov, L.M. Mitina, G.V. Mukhametzyanova *et al.*).

In this regard the following statement seems methodically important: the concept-based approach features the understanding of the interdependence between language and speech as an interlocutory unity, it allows to join various language means around nuclear units, also to build wide semantic fields by uniting language units in accordance with the concept sphere of the national consciousness.

By studying speech we learn the language. By studying the language we learn speech.

Concepts are an active form of presenting the "language in action". The concept is the core notion of the concept-based approach as the theoretical foundation of education.

In Russian papers, there is a variety of opinions in defining the notions explaining the deep layer of noosphere called the concept: "notion", "genetic complex", "logoepisteme", "linguocultureme", "sapienteme" etc. The term "concept" has no unambiguous and commonly accepted definition. Concept is rendered as a representation (Askoldov, 1997); "an algebraic expression of meaning" (Likhachev, 1997); "a keyword of culture" (Vezhbitskaya, 1996); "the accumulation of culture in the mind of a human", "a bundle of ideas, notions, associations, experience, knowledge that altogether go along with a word" (Stepanov, 2001), "a grain of primary meaning" (Kolesov, 1999, 2006), "a unit of consciousness / collective consciousness referencing high spiritual/intellectual values… marked by ethno-cultural specificity" (Vorkachev, 2001). A dynamic entrance of the concept theory into education is worth noting (A.D. Deikina, L.G. Khodykova, T.K. Donskaya, L.I. Novikova, L.T. Sayakhova *et al.*). This is due to the fact that researchers pay attention to the formation of an individual's value-centered linguistic worldview, especially during his/her fledgling years and while topping the peaks ("akme") in his/her profession.

Based on the achievements in theory of concepts represented by works of E.S. Kubryakova, N.D. Arutyunova, V.Z. Dem'yankova, Z.D. Popova, I.A. Sternin, V.I. Karasik, Yu.S. Stepanov, Yu.E. Prokhorov we have singled out the following necessary and sufficient features of a concept as a unit of education providing the understanding of its structure and its representations in language:

1.   A sense-bearing integrative unit which manifests in language and speech and possesses national and cultural specificity.

2.   A global intellectual unit; an antinomy of absoluteness and relativity based on the relations of one concept with other concepts.

3.   An increment of structured knowledge; a three-component unit combining the impressional, meaningful and defining elements. The **defining** component is the features and the definition structure. The **impressional** component is the metaphoric, precedent and symbolic layers of the concept. The **meaningful** component is the position of the concept in the lexical system of the language. In other words, it is the paradigmatic and syntagmatic links of the concept.

4.   The semantic density is the representation of the ideas in the plane of expression by a number of language synonyms, theme lines and word fields, proverbs and sayings, symbols of folklore and literary storylines, precedent texts etc.

5.   The ethnic specificity is an array of semantic representation patterns disclosing the cultural and national specificity of language units.

The features of a concept as a unit of education are interconnected and interdependent. Each feature depends on all the other features and, at the same time, is a part of the whole (following the principle of mutual penetration and interdependence).

The set of features mentioned above provides the formation of professionally focused thinking. Concept is the core notion of professional thinking.

Practical application of the theory (an example of concept analysis)

Let us refer to the analysis of the Russian concept "**venets**" [ve'nets] (crown, wreath) as an example. The Russian word "**venets**" [ve'nets] is of Common Slavic origin, formed from the verb "viti" (['viti] modern "vit'" [vit'] – to weave) with the help of a diminutive-hypocoristic suffix "ts" [t's'] modern "-ets" [jets] (Abridged Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language, 1971).

The concept as a "grain of primary meaning", the primary semantic motivation: "venets-venok" [Ve'nets – ve'nok] (Ozhegov, 2008).

The integrative implication:

- a headwear, originally made of woven branches and leaves, afterwards, made of metal and decorated with precious stones (as a tiara) (Brokgauz and Efron, 2002);
- halo around the sun, the moon and other celestial bodies (Efremova, 2000);
- in icons, an aureole around the head (Dal, 2010);
- in a timber blocking, a timber set (Dal, 2010);
- a lady's hairstyle with braids put around the head (Efremova, 2000);
- a vintage lady's headwear, a headband (Dal, 2010);
- a hilltop, the crest of a structure (Dal, 2010);
- the crown put on the bridegroom and the bride during matrimony (Ozhegov and Shvedova, 1995);
- a precious headwear in the form of a wreath of a crown during enthronement (Lopatin and Lopatina, 1997);
- a wreath made of oak or olive awarded for civil achievements and the one made of laurel bestowed to a triumphator chieftain (Brokgauz and Efron, 2002).

The figurative meanings: the royal power, throne, matrimony, Mystery of Marriage, the superior limit, the top of something, a successful accomplishment. Different spheres are combined: socio-political, socio-ethic, religious, vernacular. The efficiency of concept learning is provided by meaning and structure analysis (the defining, the impressional and the meaningful components). E.g.: the use of the word "**venets**" [ve'nets] (wreath, crown) points to its ability to enter into paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations.

The syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of the word representing a concept make it possible to determine the collocation of the concept with other words, e.g.: a crown of thorns, a maiden crown, a wedding crown, a radiant crown, an imperial crown, a precious crown, a lunar halo/crown, a crown of pearls, a crown of diamonds; to see the halo, the halo opalesces, to show the crown. The associations that arise are: head, gold, picture, brow, joy, church, grass, emerald, temple, reward etc. The synonyms are: wreath, crown, peak/top, climax, top, nimbus, high, wedding, marriage ceremony.

As a member of precedent sayings "**venets**" [ve'nets] (crown, wrath) is used in the following contexts:

Man is the apex of creation; the crown of one's labor is above all rewards; the end crowns the whole work; the end crowns the work; crown of thorns, crown of glory.

E.g.:

"And then his wreath, a crown of sloe,
Woven with bays, they put on Poet's head" (Lermontov, 1954).
"Your name with me I sped to battle
To seek my grave or crown of glory" (Batyushkov, 1934), (Note 1).

Word combinations – only they produce associations in a text – expose the necessary shades of meaning, just like color combinations overcome the unambiguity of one color in a painting conventional word meanings (usually shown in dictionaries) are overcome in a text (Likhachev, 2015), (Note 1). It is in a combination that a word acquires a lot – the numerous shades of meaning.

For example, in A.S. Pushkin's poem "Monument" the phrase "no crown shall be required" literally means "no reward shall be required" and is translated into English as "nor seeking fame":

"Indifferent alike to praise or blame

Give heed, O Muse, but to the voice Divine

Fearing not injury, nor seeking fame,

Nor casting pearls to swine." (Pushkin, 1959).

The cultural and national specificity puts extra-linguistic factors in the foreground. These factors manifest in a text, combinations of factors manifest differently in different texts.

An important fact for professional and pedagogic description of a concept is that concepts serve to process personal experience by adjusting information to certain categories elaborated by society. A concept is a professionally significant unit reflecting the necessary subject matter, the knowledge that the specialist needs.

RESULTS

The concept-based approach is realized as a way to organize "man in language" with regard to the situationality and individual perception (subjectness). The subjectness is a student's participation in perception-mnemonic and interpretation activities. The situationality is the content and the structure of basic cultural concepts.

After theoretic research and a series of experiments aimed at implementing the concept-based approach in education we have developed a number of methods of teaching. These methods reflect the specificity of concept-based training.

The totality of teaching methods – the exemplary method, the task-focused method, the workshop method – is focused on a dialog and contains interlocutory procedures triggering the search for intrinsic meaning.

The **exemplary method** is aimed at learning the language units that represent concepts, adopting the idea of "deducing" the meaning of an utterance, interpreting, shaping a professional way of thinking as a component of the operational facet of professionalism.

The content of the method comprises examples of actions and operations aimed at analyzing the concept-based description of language units.

The following things were determined as means of learning: dictionary definitions, concept representation programs, comprehensive reflection aimed at finding and estimating texts.

Performance indicators and criteria:

- theoretical knowledge of cognitive linguistics, pedagogics, culture and ethnic psychology;
- didactic functions, cultural, national and personal values, generalized features of a specialist's labor;
- considering the procedural aspect – mastering the mechanisms allowing to determine concepts, the ability to rank language units "at the input" and "at the output" of the text; the ability to justify concept parametrization and select integral concept features;
- finding structure and sense elements that organize conceptual description, understanding of the subject and procedure of deriving and interpreting the meaning, interpretation skills and models.

The aim of the **task-focused method** (conversing with others) is the reflexive intrusion to establish and support contact with subjects of education, to find ways to shape students' professional mentality and professional style of thinking.

The content of the method includes philological, psychological and pedagogical hermeneutics in the context of concept description, also realizing mutual understanding mechanisms, verbal and non-verbal means of communication, the hermeneutic manner of clarifying the meaning, knowing the work features.

The means to implement the task-focused method are the didactic units that allow actualization of the aforesaid content.

Performance indicators and criteria: theoretical, hermeneutical, psychological, pedagogical and philological knowledge providing the professional use of the interlocutory (task-focused) method.

The method presupposes the arrangement of a conversation in professionally oriented learning. It focuses on learning the theoretical knowledge necessary to describe the concept, the worldview content of basic concepts.

The **workshop method** presupposes generating texts as a means of self-fulfillment, shaping research skills in the field of conceptual description of language units, transforming learning into research, building an individual path of personal education, forming professional competency of the future specialist.

The content of the method consists of individual and joint projects aimed at developing the major functions of future professional activity: management of information, text analysis, understanding the unity of cognitive and communicative situation. Development of intellectual and creative abilities, communicative skills, affirmative analytical thinking.

The means of the method include: designing plans and research projects, professional mastery of scholarly apparatus, modeling of texts, conversations, comparative analysis of concepts ("us" VS "them"); working out peculiar versions of concept representations and analysis, building of frames.

Performance indicators and criteria:

• theoretical knowledge about culture, philosophy, linguistics, literature, history, ethnology, pedagogics, psychology, intercultural communication;

• development of scientific, cognitive, linguo-creative abilities;

• considering the procedural aspect – production of texts of different types and genres, research projects, educational products (glossary of concepts, text etc.), presentations at contests and conferences, arrangement of "round tables"; academic products, individual programs, activity-centered techniques.

DISCUSSION

The test of pedagogic efficiency proved the well-formedness of the scope of the concept-based professional language education. The efficiency of professional formation of specialists has been checked by different parameters. The most important ones are as follows: derivation of conceptual meaning, finding nationally and culturally relevant components, building relevant models that testify to the correct understanding, correct interpretation of language units representing a concept as well as creative solution of linguo-pedagogic problems.

The conceptual approach which represents a complex basis of cognitive, hermeneutic and cultural elements was used in teaching not only Russian but also foreign students. The conducted experiment witnessed a greater progress of professional development of Russian students, as compared with foreigners, due to the fact that their mastery of the Russian language and culture was much higher. Better knowledge of their native language and culture made their tasks easier to fulfill. Efficiency evaluation parameters were identical. The biggest problem that

foreign students faced was to understand the content of a Russian concept, particularly to define its structure and nationally and culturally relevant elements, especially with peculiar Russian words like "volya" ['volja] (will) "avos' " [a'vos'] (perhaps, maybe, blind trust), "miloserdiye" ['milo'serdije] (mercy) etc. This is why it is necessary to develop new ways and methods to introduce Russian cultural concepts in order to secure their proper interpretation as well as further refining of the three methods offered above.

CONCLUSION

The framework of professional education of future linguists relies on the concept-based approach which takes into account the leading tendencies in higher education: the widening of language field both as a means of communication and as a cultural phenomenon; the integration of education both in subject matter and pedagogic content; integration of humanities knowledge in a specific linguistic situation.

The concept-based approach rests on interdisciplinary integration of knowledge about the language, speech, oral activity. It actualizes the notion of concept as a mental unit of communication reflecting subject matter of knowledge which is necessary for linguists.

The system of dialog methods, as implemented in the three methods mentioned above (the exemplary method, the task-focused method, the workshop method), encourages the search for true meaning as well as verbal-and-cogitative activity carried out by students both individually and collaboratively. It shapes professional communication skills, provides for the development of one's own viewpoint in various communicative situations.

A promising development of the research may be the creation of professionally-oriented education model where the concept-based description of language units is acknowledged as the content of such education.

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NOTES

Note 1. Translation from Russian into English is ours.

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