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SMALL-SCALE MEDIA TEXTS AS A MULTIMODAL RESOURCE IN THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING

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Abstract

The article is devoted to revealing the specifics of multimodal small-scale news media texts and to describing their linguistic and didactic potential in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language in accordance with new trends in education on the broad background of the general development of the multimodality theory in European linguistics. The advantages of these texts in the teaching of foreign languages consist in authenticity, variety and relevance of the problematics, accessibility, brevity, polycode / multimodal nature that provides different ways of encoding information. Written elements embedded in the content structure of the news multimodal text provide written support for audio and video information. Such texts have not only evident linguistic and cultural information (knowledge about the country and the world, political and cultural events that are significant for the entire humanity), but also properly linguistic value (frequency common lexis, syntactic minimalism, borrowings, socio-political abbreviations, toponyms, etc.), which makes it rational for them to be more actively involved in the educational process already at the pre-university education stage and in the future, at main stages, for competence building in the educational and professional area of communication. The article presents the experience of working with such texts on the basis of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia when training international students and substantiates the effective form of their implementation on the basis of telecommunication complexes in the MOODLE shell, which meets their multimodal nature to the fullest.

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1. Introduction

The interest of Russian and foreign linguistics in modern media texts is widely known, as evidenced, in particular, by its developing area of *Media linguistics*. At the same time, in Russian and foreign methodical science, as well as in the practice of teaching foreign languages, the possibilities of broad and effective use of modern media texts have been studied to a lesser extent. Attention is hardly paid to them within the framework of such an important discipline for Russian universities as Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language, the methodological base of which has a fruitful tradition not only in Russia but also abroad.

This is proved, among other things, by the proceedings of the conference "Russian Outside Russia: The Challenges of Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language Outside the Language Environment", held in November 2017 by the Russian Language Center in London. The conference materials cover a wide range of topics, but only one article ("Increasing the Motivation and Development of Communicative and Speech Skills through Reading and Discussion of Newspaper Articles at the B1 Level" by E. Voronova) directly touches upon the important problem of working with media texts in a foreign-language class (Voronova, 2017).

At the same time, the linguistic and didactic value of media texts is unquestionable and is most closely associated with new trends in education, which require the modernization of basic traditional courses, on the one hand, and the development of new special courses on their basis, on the other hand (Remchukova, Sokolova & Zamaletdinova, 2017).

The relevance of our approach is explained by turning to modern *multimodal media texts* as an effective tool for the formation of properly linguistic and sociocultural competences in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

2. Problem Statement

With the development of digital technologies, new forms of communication are emerging in the educational process. This fundamentally new type of communication, network communication (third after oral and written), has a great didactic potential; and its most obvious feature consists in texts of a fundamentally new structure, which V. Kostomarov defined as *display texts* (Kostomarov, 2010). In this article, we will use the term *multimodal text* (synonymous to the term *polycode text* (Maksimenko, 2012), which is a complex of verbal and non-verbal components, as today multimodal sign compositions are supplanting the usual traditional texts (Kress, 2016).

The novelty of the approach proposed by us is that the *"display"* media text is presented on the broad background of the multimodality theory, which can be used as a tool to increase the effectiveness of modern learning in the practice of teaching a foreign language. In addition, in our concept, the use of the *multimodal small-scale media text* (captions under photographs, headline complexes, messages of news agencies, captions under fragments of news TV programs, news tickers on TV channels) is linked with the gradual formation, complication and improvement of various student competencies.

3. Research Questions

Russian linguistics has traditionally used the term *polycode text*. This term has been the focus of attention of linguists for the last two decades (Maksimenko, 2012; Kress, 2010; Ménier, 2011; Terrier,

2013). It is a paralinguistically active text, i.e. a text in which paralinguistic means carry information or, at least, add additional nuances to the content of sign systems. Drawings, photographs, diagrams, real objects of the surrounding world making the subject of communication (including facial gesture and certain types of body language, and even elements of clothing, watches, etc.) can act as non-verbal signs. One of the features of the *polycode text* which is important for our research is "verbal and photographic unity, where the verbal and visual components form a visual, semantic and functional whole, providing its complex pragmatic impact on the addressee" (Pedagogical speech studyб 2017).

The modern era has placed the paralinguistic means of a *polycode text* in a single line with the linguistic ones and has expanded their composition and range. The *multimodality* theory emerged in social semiotics: "a multimodal approach implies the spreading of the message through all communicative modes: verbal texts and images, video, speech and gestures, size and color of the text" (Kress, 2010). In the article "Social Semiotics and the Challenges of Multimodality", G. Kress writes, "... what has been done with the help of speech or writing so far will be done with the help of other semiotic means... Multimodal sign compositions are increasingly supplanting the usual, mostly exclusively written texts. This obviously already applies to communicative practices and the presentation of information in "new media" (Kress, 2016).

It is the features of these "new media" that are not fully used in the practice of teaching foreign languages. Noting the specifics of the relatively new concept of *multimodality*, G. Kress also remarks that its content depends on the interests of the researcher and can be used both as theory and as practice, since this concept is often used to analyze certain communicative practices (ibid.). In our case, we propose to use this concept to describe the linguistic and didactic potential of the small-scale media text in teaching Russian as a foreign language. We would like to immediately note that, in our opinion, the solutions proposed here can be effective in the practice of teaching any foreign language.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to substantiate the linguistic and didactic value of authentic small-scale multimodal media texts and to propose specific forms of their use as learning material in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language, because at present they are used in Russian universities only occasionally and mainly as part of linguistic and cultural studies, while these texts are also a linguistically valuable material for the teaching of Russian as a foreign language.

5. Research Methods

Along with general research methods (comparison, generalization, observation, commenting, etc.), general linguistic and special research methods include traditional linguistic and didactic methods. To identify the didactic value of small-scale texts the following methods were used: the method of *empirical observation* of communicative and speech activity of students studying Russian during the preparatory course at MGIMO-university; the *psychological and pedagogical* method aimed at identifying new opportunities in learning a foreign language with the involvement of multimodal media texts; *surveys* and *tests* for identifying communicative competencies and determining the effectiveness of using small-scale media texts in teaching Russian to international students.

6. Findings

6.1 Authentic small-scale multimodal media texts

6.1.1. We live in the era of digital technologies, which provide us with constant access to multimedia texts of different formats both in the native language and in foreign languages. This is clearly manifested by the coexistence of paper and smart books in the educational process, which is one of the up-to-date topics in modern pedagogy (Staley, 2003). Thus, today communicative environment is mostly multimodal, both in education and beyond it. "Today we live in a scenario in which letters share space with images on screens. The popularization of television, then the computer and now the e-readers, tablets, and smartphones made the electronic assume the role that previously was restricted to printed materials" (Wei, 2017).

Multimedia elements (audio, video, photos, colorful themes, icons and symbols) are an integral part of the communicative environment surrounding the younger generation. This generation grew in the Internet age, and the multimodal form of text is familiar to its representatives. In this regard, "the modern sphere of education is undergoing a certain transformation, due to the rapid improvement and development of information technologies, the strengthening of the role of the media and Internet space, the intensification of the use of various applications, devices (smartphones, netbooks, etc.) as a means of obtaining / exchanging information (e-mail, websites, social networks, online games, chats, etc.). The information space surrounding us can be described as "multimodal", consisting of a plurality of visual, audial and tactile (touch-screen) flows, interacting with us" (Roitberg, 2017). With regard to the field of humanities, modern linguists talk about transforming traditional writing and reading (literacy) into their virtual incarnation (digital literacy) (Kress, 2003; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007).

The educational environment of today must adapt to these new conditions and make maximum use of the opportunities of the global information space. International students of Russian universities are no exception, and in the process of learning the Russian language they must show the ability to receive information about world events not only in their native language, but also in Russian. To ensure this, it is necessary to make media texts in Russian one of the main types of learning material in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

In this article, we will limit ourselves to an analysis of the experience that already exists in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation as part of training foreign students in the following areas: International Relations, Foreign Regional Studies, Political Science, World Economy, World Politics, International Journalism, International Business and International Energy Cooperation at the Faculty of International Relations, Faculty of International Law, Faculty of International Journalism, Faculty of International Business and Business Administration from the stage of pre-university training to the master's degree program.

6.1.2. A media text is a higher-order dynamic complex unit, through which speech communication is carried out in the sphere of mass communications. The concept of "media text" combines a number of existing terms: journalistic text, newspaper and publicistic text, TV and radio text, PR text, advertising text, Internet media text, etc. Media texts are a priori authentic and therefore are of particular value for the practice of teaching a foreign language.

In methodology, the word "authentic" defines a spoken or a written text, which is a real product of speech activity of native speakers and is not adapted to the needs of students, taking into account their level of language proficiency. It is work with such texts that teaches foreigners to understand Russian in the form adopted by native speakers at a given time in a natural social context. It is important to note that the integrated use of authentic text, audio and video materials contributes to the interest of students in studying not only the Russian language, but also the history and culture of Russia, allows for the diversification of the learning process and activates it. Therefore, teaching how to understand authentic media materials contributes to the formation, development and improvement of communicative competence of students in receptive types of speech activity.

Among media texts, a group of small-scale media texts can be identified. Linguists define the volume of a small-scale text differently. Most often, it is a single utterance, equal to one sentence, which can consist of one or two words. The main indicator of attributing the text to the small-scale type is the formal criterion, the brevity of its volume (according to some researchers, from 2 to 64 words). However, according to E. Kubryakova, a small-scale text is a text that is observable in every detail, possessing such important characteristics as individuality, prominence, formal and semantic self-sufficiency, thematic certainty and completeness (Kubryakova, 2001).

Researchers write about the usefulness of such small-scale texts as headlines and advertising slogans for the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language (Apostolidi, 2017; Omel'yanenko, 2017), but the focus of our attention is the news media text. Undoubtedly, multimodal advertising is also effective in teaching a foreign language, however it is much more difficult to perceive, as it is usually linguistically creative, polysemiotic and is based on the play of meanings. These features of multimodal advertising texts hamper their successful use in the practice of teaching at the initial stage of language learning.

6.2. Varieties of multimodal small-scale media texts

The simplest form of a multimodal complex is a photograph and a caption under it, representing a visual representation of a situation and a text commentary to it.

It should be noted that the semantic scope of the signature may be broader than the volume of the non-verbal means, it may have additional semantic and stylistic connotations. In the process of reception, students should be able to combine the content of the verbal and visual components into a single semantic complex. The following type of task can be suggested: Think of the possible captions to the proposed photos (or vice versa: What do you think can be shown in the photo, if the caption under it says the following: ""?).

Websites of news agencies are also sources of multimodal media texts. There one can find texts of minimal volume and medium-sized ones, accompanied by photographs and video clips. The leading news agencies of Russia are the TASS Information Agency (http://tass.ru/), the Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency (россиясегодня.рф, https://ria.ru/lenta/), Interfax (http://www.interfax.ru/), the Regnum Information Agency (https://regnum.ru/), etc. The analysis of texts taken from the news feeds of these agencies of a certain day allows students to see the general picture of the current events in world and in the country.

Трамп продлил на год санкции против России из-за ситуации на Украине / Путин пообещал приехать на Чукотку / Путин рассказал, чем бы занимался, не став президентом / Путин заявил, что борьба с коррупцией в Дагестане будет продолжена / Астрономы предупредили о приближении к Земле крупного астероида (https://ria.ru/lenta/, 02.03.2018).

(*Trump extends Russia sanctions for another year due to the situation in Ukraine / Putin promises to visit Chukotka / Putin tells what he would do if he didn't become president / Putin stated that the fight against corruption in Dagestan will continue / Astronomers warn of the approach of a large asteroid to Earth (https://ria.ru/lenta/, 02.03.2018).)

It is also effective to use textual materials of TV news programs in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language. For example, the website of Channel 1 (www.1tv.ru) contains video recordings of news reports: they are divided into stories, each of which is described in one sentence expressing the main content of the video. Each story, along with the text, makes a multimodal complex. Written elements are built into the content structure of the story and make a certain framework denoting the most important aspects of the text. This type of organization of information within a multimodal text increases the reliability of the information transmission and the correctness of its perception and makes it possible to overcome the irreversibility and irreproducibility of an oral media report through written support.

See, e.g.: Владимир Путин вручил олимпийцам награды и поблагодарил за российский гимн после хоккейного финала; Новый канцлер Австрии Себастьян Курц с первым за пределы Евросоюза визитом поехал в Москву; В Восточной Гуте террористы обстреляли гуманитарный коридор, у которого находились старики, женщины и дети (программа «Время», 21:00, 28.02.2018). (*Vladimir Putin awards the Olympians and thanks for the Russian anthem after the hockey final; Austria's new chancellor Sebastian Kurtz pays visit to Moscow as the first trip outside the European Union; Terrorists open fire on a humanitarian corridor with old people, women and children in East Ghouta, (the Vremya program, 21:00, 28.02.2018).)

A headline complex is one of the most important structural elements of the media text. It is a collection of elements of the title of the text, which are systematically related to each other: title – subtitle – lead. In its entirety, the headline complex can consist of a rubric, a header, a title, a subtitle and an introductory paragraph (a lead).

Палестина хочет лишить США дипломатической монополии – заголовок; Аббас привёз Путину план по выходу из арабо-израильскому конфликта – подзаголовок, «Палестинский лидер Махмуд Аббас прибыл с визитом в Москву с целью представить российскому президенту Владимиру Путину свой план, который предполагает лишение Соединённых Штатов монопольной роли в процессе арабо-израильского урегулирования. В экспертной среде считают подобный ход Палестины логичным, но отмечают, что России вряд ли выгодно сейчас продвигать подобный механизм» - лид (Независимая газета, 13.02.2018).

(*Palestine wants to deprive the US of a diplomatic monopoly – title; Abbas brings Putin a plan to withdraw from the Arab-Israeli conflict – subtitle, "Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas arrived in Moscow to present his plan, which involves depriving the United States of a monopoly role in the Arab-Israeli settlement process, to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Experts consider such a move of Palestine

to be logical, but note that it is hardly profitable for Russia to promote such a mechanism at this point" – lead (Subbotin, 2018).

In news reports, a lead is a short content that enables the reader to get an idea of the material without reading the main text, so its development is optional if at the first stage of work with the multimodal media text other elements of the headline complex draw the student's attention to the media topic.

Captions or "tickers" are short, interchangeable messages appearing on a TV screen. Researchers call them a fundamentally new semiotic phenomenon: oral and written forms of speech in the context of television are becoming complementary. A news ticker carries one line of short, most up-to-date news messages (events, exchange rates, weather, etc.) during the broadcast of the main story. Thus, the information capacity of television time is increased.

The federal state information channel Rossiya 24 (https://www.vesti.ru/onair/), the regional television channel 360˚ (https://360tv.ru/air/ news /) and the city 24-hour information channel Moscow 24 (https://tv.m24.ru/) can serve as sources of such small-scale multimodal texts. Video and text materials are also available for viewing directly on the websites of TV channels.

Written elements embedded in the content structure of the multimodal text provide written support for audio and video information. The main properties of such statements, relevant in terms of learning, include extreme brevity, uniformity, rigidity, standardization and high informative value of the language form. Their "shortcomings", from a methodical point of view, include the frequency of abbreviations and shortenings, as well as the brevity of the appearance of a "ticker" on the screen.

6.3 Multimodal media text and stages of teaching Russian as a foreign language

The final result of mastering the content of learning is the formation of communicative competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, competence in the field of professional communication), providing the opportunity of oral and written communication in various communication situations (https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf).

As is known, it is the formation of communicative competence that is one of the most important goals of teaching a foreign language in modern methodology. In our opinion, work with texts of the mass media makes a significant contribution to the formation of this competence at various stages of learning. We will now consider the possibilities of using the described varieties of multimodal small-scale media texts at the pre-university training stage.

Pre-university training stage (A1-B1 levels)

The goal of teaching Russian as a foreign language at the stage of pre-university training is to help students reach the level of communicative competence that would prevent them from facing unsolvable problems in the socio-cultural and educational and professional spheres. The knowledge and skills acquired by a foreign citizen during the period of training at the preparatory faculty / department lay the foundation for their further expansion, deepening and improvement at the advanced stage of studies at the bachelor's and master's levels.

One of the goals of introducing such a type of educational material as the media text is to facilitate the process of entering the Russian-language media space for international students, to teach them to

search and extract information from media sources in Russian. This skill will be one of their professional competencies, and therefore it is reasonable to form it before entering the first year of the bachelor's degree. Therefore, it is necessary to start teaching the reception of media texts already at the Basic level (A2).

As for international students at the pre-university training stage, they show great interest in reading authentic materials, from which they can independently obtain information about events in Russia and in the world. However, it should be noted that the specifics of the media language and the very content of authentic media materials require special attention at the lessons of Russian as a foreign language.

At the pre-university training stage, the teacher has to solve the problem of selecting and systematizing the multimodal material comprehensible for the students, which would gradually form the required skills while respecting the principle of authenticity of the printed texts themselves. It is the careful selection of media texts from the point of view of the accessibility of their linguistic content that makes it possible to start work on teaching international students already at the Basic level (A2), i.e. in the second half of the first semester of the preparatory faculty, since nonverbal components help to build the skills of reading and understanding.

In our opinion, the most suitable learning material for starting work on media texts is the multimodal complex "caption under the photograph". At the next stage of training (B1), one can gradually complicate the learning material by consistently introducing other varieties of multimodal small-scale media texts. We will further mention them in the process of complication: messages of news agencies, materials of news broadcasts, elements of headline complexes, "tickers".

The involvement of media news materials and the systematic nature of classes on this aspect contribute to increasing the effectiveness of teaching Russian at the 1st certification level stage (B1), ensuring better preparation of the preparatory faculty students for academic and further professional activities in Russian.

Bachelor's and master's programs (B2-C1)

Undoubtedly, the main work on media texts is already underway during the student's enrollment in bachelor's and master's programs. The competences to be mastered by international students studying at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-university) include:

SPC-7 (Special Professional Competence-7), the ability to understand detailed messages, to adequately perceive and process information of a special nature in a foreign language from authentic audio sources, in accordance with the objective set;

SPKC-10, the ability to understand, extract and professionally analyze factual information in a foreign language from various oral and written sources, including the Internet.

By the end of the training, students should be able to predict the dynamics of the development of the content of the texts by title; to make a thematic review of messages of news agencies; to understand information TV and radio programs, to create a multimedia presentation of a Russian medium's profile (optional). At the heart of these competencies of an international specialist lie the skills of working with the above-analyzed small-scale texts acquired the initial stages of training.

7.   Conclusion

The use of telecommunication systems based on the MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) educational platform is the optimal form of introducing media texts into the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language at all stages. This platform is a modular object-oriented dynamic learning environment that allows supplementing traditional education in Europe and Russia with new ways of obtaining knowledge due to the multiple use of didactic multimodal materials for an indefinite amount of time. Work with Moodle is an integral part of any modern course in the format of blended learning (Berardi 2009; Hubackova, Semradova & Klimova 2011; Marsh 2015), which provides an excellent opportunity to combine face-to-face classes with independent work of students. Ensuring conditions for group and individual learning with the help of various types of web tasks, this educational environment certainly brings higher education to a new level, conditioning, among other things, the integration processes in education between Europe and Russia.

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