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**THE GRADUALITY PRINCIPLE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
(THE LINGUISTIC AND DIDACTIC ASPECTS)**

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Abstract

The term graduality has been specified in accordance with Elena Arkhipova's (2014) theory of speech development as a progression from the zone of actual speech development to that of proximal one under the guidance of teaching, which eventually provides the condition for all the elements of the didactical system to manifest themselves with ever increasing intensity. Graduality in language teaching and speech development methodologies presupposes the partition of the system into several sections, each with a set of means, methods, forms and techniques of the same kind, devised for different stages of language teaching, with a gradual increase of the content volume, a growing complexity of the methods and forms of its presentation depending on the stage and the students' level of speech development. Graduality as a cognitive phenomenon represents an interdisciplinary category of linguistics and linguodidactics. This principle allows us to specify the content minimum to be studied, to determine the correlation of methods, forms and means at every stage of the process of teaching, allows to develop a system of exercises and becomes the theoretical basis for the language learning progress. It is necessary for creation of a system of exercises with gradual complication, gradation of speech tasks. In general, it represents the theoretical basis, on which the developing system of teaching native language and speech is built, as it marks the milestones for personal, meta-subject and subject results.

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1. Introduction

The graduality category in language has been a focus of attention in linguistics for a long time. Initially, it was considered in connection with language oppositions, the relation between their elements and their division into three categories: privative, gradual and equipollent. Binary (privative) oppositions originally reflected human mind's ability to categorize phenomena on the basis of dichotomous juxtaposition. That is why language oppositions were employed first as a method of categorization not only in linguistics, but also in the Russian linguomethodology (Ozerskaya, 1976). In particular, Pristupa (1973), formulating basic principles for teaching orthography, specifically mentioned spelling juxtapositions (orthographical binary oppositions), which are nowadays widely used by teachers in the presentation of various orthographical topics.

2. Problem Statement

The didactic principle of graduality originates from Lev Vygotsky's (2003) psychological theory of zones of actual and proximal development. In linguodidactics, this principle can be found at all the stages and levels of language study. But in the process of development of certain linguodidactical systems it is often ignored or applied incorrectly due to misunderstanding of its core meaning.

3. Research Questions

As the graduality principle is interpreted ambiguously by the international community, the issue subject to investigation should be considered as a notion in accordance with the theory of activity and from the points of view of Elena Arkhipova's (2017c) linguodidactical theory of speech development. Also, the conditions for this principle's effective use at different stages of language teaching should be determined.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to consider graduality as a cognitive phenomenon and as a basis for the didactical principle of language teaching, to specify it according to the theory of activity and the theory of speech development, to identify the conditions for this principle's effective use, and to trace the peculiarities of its application at different stages of language study.

5. Research Methods

The methods used in this research include content analysis of theses, monographs, educational publications; semantical and cognitive analysis of language means, thorough analysis of research works in the field of Russian language teaching, pedagogical observation, and ranking.

6. Findings

In the new century, the phenomena of language oppositions have produced a surge of interest because of the rapid development of cognitive linguistics, for binarity and graduality are basically cognitive terms. In the linguistics of the 21st century language oppositions are considered as cognitive notions and specifically binary oppositions as conceptual. Gradual oppositions, as more complex in structure than binary ones, attracted attention of linguists and methodologists only in the end of the 20th century. Almost simultaneously several doctoral theses were defended, dedicated to the graduality phenomenon in the modern Russian language from the point of view of linguistics (Kolesnikova, 1999; Khalina, 1996), and in linguomethodology the graduality principle was formed as the developing principle of the Russian language teaching (Arkhipova, 2017c; Arkhipova, 2014; Arkhipova & Lagunova, 2017). In light of ideas of developing training this principle, in particular, demanded that approaches to the methodology of speech development should be revised.

In the theory of linguomethodology of the 20th century one of the fundamental works providing the methodological basis for the method of speech development was the book by Fedorenko (1984) 'The patterns of native language acquisition', in which linguomethodological principles of the Russian language teaching were formed. However, the pattern of 'speech development acceleration' did not get any specification as a principle. This was done later by a follower of Fedorenko within the framework of her scientific school. The above-mentioned pattern of native language acquisition was called 'the graduality principle' (latin word '*gradus*' meaning 'a step') (Arkhipova, 2017c; Arkhipova, 2014; Arkhipova & Lagunova, 2017).

The main point of this principle consists in the following: speech develops if the content of the training, its methods and techniques incorporate the gradation between the zones of actual and proximal development. Graduality in language teaching and speech development methodologies presupposes the partition of the system into several sections, each with a set of means, methods, forms and techniques of the same kind, devised for *different stages of language teaching*, with a gradual *increase of the content volume, a growing complexity of the methods and forms of its presentation* depending on the stage and the students' level of speech development. The term has been specified in linguomethodology according to the theory of activity and theory of speech development, which interpret development as progressive quantity and quality changes. In linguomethodology the term of graduality is understood as a steady movement from the zone of actual development to that of proximal one under the guidance of teaching, which is provided by all the elements of the didactical system manifesting themselves with growing intensity: the increased volume of information about a language unit and a deeper notion of it being given; the complication of methods (productive and creative instead of receptive and reproductive ones) etc. (Arkhipova, 2017c; Arkhipova, 2014; Arkhipova & Lagunova, 2017).

The content analysis of dissertations on specialty 13.00.02 has shown that in the 21st century in more than one hundred works the graduality principle has been appreciated by the methodology of Russian as a native language, and not only by the representatives of the speech development scientific school (Dzyubko, 2006; Lagunova, 2016; Lagunova, 2015; Sofronova, 2006), but also by research scientists of other schools, including authors who have reached a high level of generalisation in their works (Alekseeva, 2016; Mishatina, 2017; Yurtaev, 2015); by the Russian language teaching

methodology in the national school (Arkhipova, 2017a), and by the methodology of Russian as a foreign language (Arkhipova, 2017d; Cherkashina, 2017).

In some methodological works the term of *graduality* is inconsiderately substituted with the word 'sequential', which, to our regret, leads to the loss of the main quality of this principle - the increasing degree of the phenomenon intensity. The terms 'gradation' and 'gradual' are fixed in the linguistic dictionary (Akhmanova, 2004), and 'graduated' in the linguomethodological one (Azimov, Shchukin, 2009), while the word 'sequence' is only given in the meaning of 'the same as 'row'. A linear sequence. A nonlinear sequence' (Akhmanova, 2004), and in the dictionaries of methodological terms and notions the words 'sequence' and 'sequential' are absent (Azimov & Shchukin, 2009).

Obviously, a sequence can be different: gradual and linear, continuous and discontinuous, progressive and regressive, so the use of the word 'sequential' instead of 'gradual' would mean that the principle of a stepwise movement from one level to a higher one (a transition making a feature more intensive) is violated. The term 'gradual' cannot be adequately substituted with 'sequential', as it destroys the essence of the phenomenon and nullifies the developing character of teaching in the teaching methodology, where the transition from the zone of actual speech development to the proximal one should be observed.

If in general science *graduality* means an increasing or decreasing intensity of a feature, which is a stepwise sequence, in methodology the term denotes a steady increase of a feature starting from the current level, namely:

- the increasing complexity of exercises, content of educational information, methods of its presentation;
- a deeper comprehension of the content material, complication of language notions;
- an increment of knowledge, competences, skills, speech production experience of the student, that is the intensity of development;
- an increasing volume and a higher rate of information presentation.

We use this term in relation to a gradual increase of information complexity level, deepening of the concepts in the process of study, complication of methods and forms of presentation, which results in speech and intellectual development, that is the transition from the zone of actual development to the zone of proximal one (according to Vygotskiy, 2003)).

Graduality in lexicography appeared first of all during compilation of gradual dictionaries for teaching Russian as a foreign and as a native language. Small dictionaries for the primary school are certainly different from those for the secondary one, in vocabulary volume as well as in the depth of dictionary entries. However, such educational dictionaries gradually expand the students' range of concepts considered in a dictionary entry. The most comprehensive information about lexical units can be found in academic explanatory dictionaries. Similarly, the linguomethodological principle of graduality, which forms the basis for children's stepwise, gradual vocabulary growth and improvement of their grammar skills, demonstrates how it can be applied in teaching vocabulary and grammar at different stages of general education.

Nikitina (2011), the first author of the textbook series 'Native speech' for 5-10th grades, in which the graduality principle actually found its realization in the methodology of speech development for

secondary school pupils, wrote in her article about the importance of this concept's introduction into the terminological system of linguodidactics: 'The introduction of the term 'graduality' by Arkhipova into linguodidactics is justified by the fact that it reflects the essential aspects of the stepwise process of teaching, based on the expansion of scientific notions learned by pupils, on the gradual complication of the methods and forms of information presentation, which eventually leads to the high level of generalisations' (Nikitina & Arkhipova, 2006).

7. Conclusion

The methodological principle of graduality, having its origin in Vygotskiy's (2003) psychological theory, on the one hand, and in the linguistic phenomenon of graduality that is present at every language level, on the other hand, is necessary when structuring *all the components of the methodological system*. The principle allows to specify the *content minimum* of training process at different stages, to establish the optimum correlation of methods and techniques at every step. It is necessary for creation of a system of exercises with gradual complication, gradation of speech tasks. In general, it represents the theoretical basis, on which the developing system of teaching native language and speech is built, as it marks the milestones for personal, meta-subject and subject results.

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