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ASSESSMENT AS MOTIVATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR NON-LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The article dwells on the mechanism of assessment as a means of motivation of students to study foreign languages in a non-linguistic university. The classic five-grade system of assessment used in Russia does not have any serious alternatives neither from the standpoint of theoretical nor practical pedagogy. Conventional testing and formal assessment are not ideal for students of non-linguistic higher education institutions. Improper assessment might adversely affect the students' self-esteem, motivation and attitude towards learning the foreign language in general. The authors show that the students need such a system of assessment that would respect their individual characteristics and specific professional skills within the context of their future specialization. Informal assessment is shown to be instrumental that way: the article describes several ways of informal assessment the objective of which is to provide incentives even for the modest progress and try and augment it by assistance and praise. The authors give practical cases in which the tutors of the Institute of Facultative Education of the Samara State Technical University implemented informal assessment in their work and find the increase of interest on part of the students to the tasks in hand, increase of confidence and capacity to assist their peers.

1. Introduction

Communication in a foreign language is to be taught with a variety of means of communication, methods, technologies and approaches via different interactive forms of working with students in all stages of language learning. The complex reform of the system of higher professional education in Russia has resulted in a surge of interest towards learning of foreign languages using various information resources. The students' skill of correct assessment of themselves and their partners in communication is a multi-faceted problem that still needs exhaustive studying. Teaching students to use the system of assessment is to be done at the very outset of studying when this process is seen as one of the most efficient factors of successful learning of a foreign language.

2. Problem Statement

The classic five-grade system of assessment used in Russia does not have any serious alternatives neither from the standpoint of theoretical nor practical pedagogy. The system of assessment is there to help students gain self-confidence, adequate amount of self-criticism and self-esteem (Gubareva, 2017). A tutor won't be able to approach the process of assessing the students without respecting their individual characteristics.

Within any educational process the learners are to be able to see their individual progress in order to effect a successful transition to the next level. Thereby a question arises: how can the assessment process be made more efficient? Conventional testing and formal assessment are not ideal for students of non-linguistic higher education institutions. Improper assessment might adversely affect the students' self-esteem, motivation and attitude towards learning the foreign language in general. The students need a system of assessment that would take into account their specifics and professional skills based on their future specialization (Semenova, 2018).

One needs to keep in mind the fact that assessment is important for all parties involved in the learning process. In other words it is safe to say that assessment is a means to measure the students' activity in various levels, to diagnose their problems and achievements, all made in a positive form (Maley, 2003).

The problem of teaching foreign languages in higher education institutions is of special importance in the context of Russia's integration in the Bologna process (Borisova, Kyuregyan, & Protchenko, 2019). The authors of the Third generation of Federal State Educational Standards suggest taking into consideration the psychological characteristics of students as well as the necessity of forming in them a motivation to learn foreign languages; in this respect the assessment process becomes one of vital processes capable of positive influence on the successful learning.

The goals of motivation that are of importance at the outset of learning (Moon, 2000) are to be considered as well. The assessment of conventional language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) as well as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation is to be performed as an integral part of a broader task. Besides, one needs to assess, inter alia, how fast and efficient students are at using the foreign language to perform adequate communication (Walvoord, 2014).

A not unimportant role in this process belongs to informal assessment that includes a system of observation and acquisition of data on what the students are outside the classroom.

The objective of informal assessment lies in the ability to notice even the slight progress and to try and augment it by assistance and stimulation. This is achieved by various means including:

- spoken encouragement even in the event of modest positive results;
- detailed written comments in the students' workbooks;
- various informal assessment systems, such as
- self-assessment;
- cross-assessment by peers;
- groups assessment;
- systems of assessment based on the project method;
- compilation of a portfolio.

3. Research Questions

We shall now dwell on the informal assessment methods applied to the studying of a foreign language. Self-assessment means independent work of students on comparing their results with a model (efficient for some learning situations, requires tutor's intervention); cross-assessment by peers means the students undertake some of the tutor's functions i.e. checking their peers' work (efficient in a broad range of learning tasks, requires tutor's supervision and intervention); groups assessment means collective controlled work of students on one and the same task. The system of assessment based on the method of projects suggests a more active engagement of the group and distribution of roles/functions therein (see below). Acting by these practical recommendations enables the tutor to evaluate, control and make the most of the learning environment in the classroom.

Informal assessment is explicit and therefore helps in avoiding the stress that is part and parcel of conventional grading system. Sooner or later the students will have to face the formal grading, and it is the tutor's task to make this process as comfortable as possible.

By moving from informal assessment to self-assessment with self-assessment scales, and further to group assessment the tutor is able to make students understand the system of formal assessment in a proper way. Feedback is very instrumental in helping students analyze their strengths and weaknesses in the way that is most painless for the learner.

This approach towards control and assessment of knowledge and skills of students is oriented at their success and simulation that are accompanied by very specific actions of both tutors and students aimed together at the improvement of quality of the learning process on the whole. By combining the different types of assessment the tutor would be able to make this process most efficient and interesting for all parties involved therein as well as to make it motivating to achieve more in the process of learning. Positive assessment leads to a sustainable desire to talk, read, listen and write in a foreign language. The students learn better when their work is assessed in a positive way.

A comprehensive analysis of literature on this topic allowed drawing the following preliminary conclusions:

1. The new solution to the problem of cognitive motivation of students is formed in the person-oriented professional education by means of specially organized assessment activities. 'Assessment', for the purposes of this paper, means the process, the activity and the actions on assessing the progress and the results of the learning process.

2. Scientific and methodological recommendations have been formed to organize the assessment of students in the process of their professional learning that contributes to the formation of cognitive motivation of students in the context of using the grade and rating method of assessing the learning process and students' learning activities.

4. Purpose of the Study

For the purposes of further research the following priority areas are identified: search for alternative ways of organizing assessment that would form the students' cognitive motivation in the person-oriented professional education; development of methodology of organization of assessment of students of technical and non-technical specializations.

5. Research Methods

We shall now move on to reviewing several practical situations in which the tutors from the Institute of Facultative Education of Samara State Technical University used some systems of informal assessment (Blokhina & Kyuregyan, 2018). The authors selected some cases from classes of "Practical Spoken and Written Speech" and "Practical Professional Translation" for students of II-IV years of various specializations (mixed groups).

6. Findings

Case 1: self-assessment. It was identified that self-assessment is most efficient in 'traditional' exercises and tasks – vocabulary and grammar, selection of the correct translation variant, listening and reading tasks. By comparing their answers with the model the students mark their correct and incorrect answers. The tutor would check the final score and (if necessary) grade the work in the respective manner. The students show a greater willingness to perform the tasks knowing that it would be they who would check their own work first. To some extent it contributes to decrease of stress levels and stimulates further work.

Case 2: cross-assessment. It was shown that by checking their peer's work the students demonstrate more attention and criticism than in checking their own work which might be explained in some degree by the manifestation of internal competition. Cross-checking is instrumental in 'conventional' exercises and tests. It is also performed in controlled conditions and is accompanied with a double-checking by the tutor.

Case 3: group checking. The students have proved to be very active in analyzing a pre-modeled task (most often the task is to find and correct mistakes and to explain the mechanism of their emergence or explain the correct variant). Group checking stimulates students for collective work, cooperative analysis and mutual assistance and, in a certain degree, improves their skill of defending their standpoint

in front of their groupmates. Working with senior students the tutors would suggest that they perform tasks of this kind providing all the relevant comments and explanations in the foreign language.

Case 4: assessment within the system of project methods. The authors applied the project method within the course of "Practical Professional Translation" given in the specialization "Translator in the Sphere of Professional Communication". In the beginning of the semester the students were given a proposal of preparing for a 'conference'–a group-based learning event. The preparation included distribution of roles (speakers (5), interpreters (6) and the audience) and selection of material under the speakers' specializations. At the same time the students worked on preparation of their speeches (presentations) and on the interpreters' getting prepared for the work. For that purpose, time was allocated in the classroom to translate vocabulary and texts in specific areas (in this particular case the topics were "Production processes in food industry" and "Process automation in industry"); the assessment of correct translation was done by the group (with supervision from the tutor). The preparation process lasted 5 weeks following which on the final class of the project the 'conference' was organized with consecutive translation done by the students and the audience acting as an 'expert community' assessing the correctness and adequacy of interpreting. After the 'conference' a discussion was held where the work of every speaker and interpreter was assessed in an informal but justified fashion (the authors would like to make it a point that despite the inherent subjectivity underlying assessment of translation the results were rather high both in the opinion of the audience and in that of the tutors). The students were keenly interested in organizing the second round of the 'conference' and to 'swap roles'.

7. Conclusion

Whereas we may see the first 3 cases as rather traditional elements of conventional classroom work, case 4 brings some novelty to the learning process. It has demonstrated high engagement of students in the learning process (despite the length of the task– 6 weeks–there was no waning of interest), high degree of independence in addressing ongoing tasks (preparation of presentations, preparation of speeches, interaction between the 'speaker' and the 'interpreter'). Having been delegated the authority of assessing their colleagues, the students have shown unbiased viewpoints and the skill of giving justified and balanced opinions and–far more important–of being prepared to receive such assessments with no fear.

Can the mechanism of informal assessment become one of the elements of improving students' motivation in learning foreign languages? The authors are of the opinion that the above mentioned examples rather support this suggestion and are planning to use those cases both severally and jointly in order to increase the students' interest in the subject (foreign language), to increase the students' confidence in their knowledge and skills: in the end of the day, this is the basis of improving the motivation both to study and to use the foreign language.

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