

DISCUSSIONS OF POLITICAL ISSUES AT FOREIGN LANGUAGES' CLASSES FOR UNIVERSITY LEVEL STUDENTS

Svetlana Iljina

Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia

Karīne Laganovska

Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia

Mārīte Opincāne

Rezekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia

Abstract. Discussion is a methodological instrument, which helps to perfect students' communicative competence and the central process through which students can be encouraged interact with one another, their academics, and the information sources.

A foreign language academic encourages discussion using newspaper headlines. The topicality of the headlines contain indirect impulses, which encourages a reader (a student) to develop and express his/her own opinion.

Migration issues have become topical and up-to-date recently. Higher education also is a sphere of life, which is concerned with this topic. The topic is also in the focus of students and academics' attention at Rezekne Academy of Technologies and is used successfully at foreign languages' classes.

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate methodological approaches how to develop students' discussion skills on political issues through the acquisition of migration terminology using newspaper headlines and using of them in discussions on the migration issues.

Communicative, discourse analysis content and critical analysis methods were used in the research.

Vocabulary is crucial in learning and teaching for specific purposes. Three C's (conveying meaning, checking, and consolidation) approach has been used in acquisition of new vocabulary at foreign language classes. Foreign languages for specific purposes concentrate more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures.

Keywords: an authentic text, discussion, foreign languages for specific purposes, migration issues newspaper headlines, three C's approach.

Introduction

Discussion is a vehicle for helping students reach a critical understanding about a topic, for promoting self-understanding, for fostering appreciation for diversity of opinions, and for leading to informed action. Discussion is the

central process through which students can be encouraged interact with one another, their academics, and the information sources.

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate methodological approaches how to develop students' discussion skills on political issues through the acquisition of migration terminology using newspaper headlines and using of them in discussions on the migration issues.

Migration issues have become topical and up-to-date in Europe and all over the world lately and they have influenced all spheres of people life. Higher education also is a sphere of life, which is concerned with this topic.

The topic is also in the focus of students and academics' attention at Rezekne Academy of Technologies and is used successfully at foreign languages' classes. The headlines from the British newspaper "The Independent" and the German newspaper "Die Zeit" were selected for vocabulary acquisition and discussions at foreign languages' classes to represent a spectrum of the newspaper industry. The period selected was determined by the European migrant crises or refugee crises so, the years 2015 and 2016 had been chosen.

Orientation function of newspaper headlines is a key component in their interpretation. The focus on headlines was chosen for vocabulary acquisition and discussions at foreign languages' classes because, while a lot of the news consumers do not read whole articles, media studies have proved that even casual readers pay attention to headlines, which therefore serve as cognitive shortcuts that influence large number of readers (Infantidou, 2009). They also particularly influence the readers who do not have their own opinion on the topic, these readers are more likely to read only the headlines and will be more influenced by their messages. Dor explains that newspaper editors who decide about the headlines do their best to attract readers' attention to stories while still applying to their "prior expectations and assumptions" (Dor, 2003, 714). Headlines are thus coined by non-specialist editors for non-specialist readers and they are more likely to reflect the prevailing common beliefs than the full-text articles. Moreover, they have an independent impact on readers' perceptions of events and sometimes essentially differ from the full text of the articles (Infantidou, 2009; 700). The readers often bring their own interpretation schemas after reading of the headlines.

Communicative, discourse analysis content and critical analysis methods were used in the research.

Terminology acquisition – theory and practice

For this study, theory on vocabulary and terminology acquisition is essential. The students have to be trained to use the vocabulary learning strategies and acquire them appropriately at foreign languages' classes. Specific

terminology is an inseparable part of any teaching syllabus and it has to be taught in a well-planned way and on the regular basis. It is essential to decide carefully what vocabulary items will be selected for teaching. Students usually face difficulties while acquiring new foreign vocabulary. It is not easy to learn new vocabulary items, especially the terms of different academic and professional fields because they are low frequency words and are not encountered very often. New vocabulary items are acquired over a certain period of time. Schmitt considers that the aim of vocabulary learning is to transfer lexical items from short-term memory, where they reside during foreign language courses at university level, to long-term memory, where they are designed based on students' needs depending on their study fields. (Schmitt, 1997, 131). The aim is to develop students' proficiency and prepare them to be ready to cope with a variety of situations in their study and future professional fields. In order to develop an ability to acquire new vocabulary and terminology, for both general foreign and specific vocabulary the students have become aware of the importance of language learning strategies and are trained to use them appropriately. The academics put a lot of effort in assisting them to acquire vocabulary related to their study field. Foreign languages for specific purposes refer to the learners, the languages required and the learning context, and thus establish the priorities of needs.

Seal is aware that if the teacher considers that the word is worth to be acquired, then it is essential that this is done efficiently, and a set of procedures should automatically be set into operation (Celce-Murcia, 2013, 299). It can be called the three C's approach: convey meaning, check understanding and consolidate (Celce-Murcia, 2013, 301-304). The approach comes from teaching English as the second foreign language but it can be successfully used also in teaching foreign languages for specific purposes. First, the foreign language academic should convey the meaning of the lexical item. This can be done by choosing from a variety of opportunities (a synonym, a definition, visual aids, word relations, pictorial schemata, context, word roots and affixes). Second, the academic checks if the student has understood properly. It can be done by series of questions, filling in the blanks or finishing the sentences, matching pairs, sorting exercises and pictorial schemata. Third, the lexical item should be consolidated and the students should relate the lexical item to their personal experience, preferably using it in a personally meaningful context. Consolidation can be done through problem-solving tasks, values clarification, a speech or dialogue, role-play or a dialogue. The main mistake is to stop at stage 1. With the 3 C's approach it is achieved that students demonstrate that they have understood and can use the lexical item. At the same time the academic can feel confident that the students will be able to comprehend them on a future encounter and use them appropriately.

Discussions on political issues are up-to-date and attracting for students as the issues of migration have become the integral part of our life. This is the reason why the topic was chosen for discussion. First, the differences among three main terms “a refugee”, “an asylum-seeker” and “a migrant” were clarified and it was found out that it was not always used correctly in the newspaper headlines.

Why have exactly the newspaper headlines been chosen for this purpose? What are their advantages in foreign language acquisition? First, it is work with authentic text, which includes authentic language, which sometimes can be too complicated for students' knowledge level. Second, but not less important, academics have to take into consideration two essential factors: digital technologies are an integral part of education process (online information is preferred to printed materials) and students read fast or as it is defined, in a selective way, choosing the most important information, which is essential, bright, useful, etc. Online newspapers and their headlines are the most appropriate for such purposes – short and authentic texts in a foreign language, which contains an expedient informative material. The headlines arouse interest, encourage to interpret information acquired and formulate one's own opinion. Headlines are transmitters of information between a sender and a recipient and they are a key of the text but in the particular research they are a key to discussion.

New lexical items and terms linked with migration issues were identified and acquired through three C's approach in order to develop students' discussion skills (Table 1). The groups of translators-in-training were chosen. The main foreign languages these students master are English and German. The students read the headlines of the articles and put down the vocabulary items linked with migration issues.

Table 1 Lexical material for preparing of discussions on migration issues using newspaper headlines

	English	German
verbs	<i>to arm, raise, demolish, pledge, cope with, deport, combat, smuggle, sink, trap, escape, dispatch, debunk, retract, skewer, unleash, ignite, resettle</i>	<i>bedrohen, brauchen, gefährden, überfordern, verfolgen, übersetzen, verdienen, sichern, wachsen, schaffen, scheitern</i>
nouns	<i>clash, official, camp, snooper, charter, riot, influx, aid, plight, shelter, border, rule, exclusion, hostility, campaigner, surge brawl, backlash, allegiance, oath, concern, persecution</i>	<i>die Welt, die Macht, der Aufnahmezustand, die Altersbestimmung, der Sozialneid, der Bürger, die Willkommenskultur die Werte, die Grenze, das Problem, der Feind, der Helfer, die Integration, die Ausbildung, die Erstaufnahme, die Arbeitssuche, der Streit, die Jahrhundertchance</i>

adjectives	<i>violent, unacceptable, infamous, permanent, inhumane, bizarre</i>	<i>schmierig, unwürdig, gefährlich, schwarzarbeitend, menschlich, neidisch</i>
Semantic field	<i>aid agency, asylum seekers, discourage migration, economic migrants, illegal immigrants, immigration debate, illegal entry, immigration powers, immigration referendum, Mediterranean tragedy, Mediterranean migrants, Mediterranean crisis, Mediterranean migrant tragedy, Mediterranean refugee children, migrant boats, migrant plan criticism, migrant crisis, migrant deaths, refugee camp, refugee policy, refugee crisis, trafficked migrants</i>	<i>Flüchtlingspolitik, - camp, - hilfe, - kinder, - krise, - massen, - farce, - unterkunft, - heim,</i>

Discussions at foreign languages classes

Foreign languages for specific purposes concentrate more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures. Brookfield and Preskill define discussion as “an alternately serious and playful effort by a group of two or more to share views and engage in mutual and reciprocal critique” (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; 6). Discussion is a vehicle for helping students reach a critical understanding about a topic, for promoting self-understanding, for fostering appreciation for diversity of opinions, and for leading to informed action. These outcomes can be achieved only if students possess a particular information. The specialists of discourse analysis recognize language use to be of primarily transactional not just of representative or expressive nature. It is particularly essential in the cases when foreign languages are to be used to naturalize political dominance or even legitimize power abuses (van Dijk, 2001).

In order to evolve successful discussions, the academics have to pre-plan and facilitate them actively. The academics have to facilitate the beginning of discussions keeping discussions going through questioning, listening, responding, and making of conclusions.

The students of the translators’ programme had to guess and discuss the content of the following articles from the newspaper headlines. The headlines were chosen by the foreign languages’ academics (Table 2). The students worked with the headlines of the newspaper articles. They tried to guess what the articles were about just from their headlines.

Table 2 The chosen newspaper headlines in English and German

Task for Discussion	English	German
Analysis of the facts	<p><i>Refugee crisis: EU pledges €700m in extra aid to cope with influx from Syria and Iraq (The Independent March 2, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Refugee crisis: 500 asylum seekers sheltering just miles away from EU summit in Belgium (The Independent March 6, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Refugee crisis: More than 3,500 migrants held in 'wholly unacceptable' conditions after crossing English Channel to UK (The Independent March 8, 2016)</i></p>	<p><i>Flüchtlinge: 1.500 geschenkte Leben (Die Zeit 26.Februar 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Flüchtlinge: Das hat überhaupt nichts mit Fremdenfeindlichkeit zu tun (Die Zeit 23.Juni 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Flüchtlingspolitik: Das war kein gutes Jahr (Die Zeit 29.September 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Integration: Zwei Drittel können kaum lesen und schreiben (Die Zeit 3.Dezember 2015)</i></p>
Headlines - questions	<p><i>Is immigration good for our economy? (The Independent April 13, 2015)</i></p>	<p><i>Flüchtlinge: Warum vermieten so wenige Privatpersonen an Flüchtlinge? (Die Zeit 19.Mai 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Asylpolitik: Heute Flüchtling, morgen Arbeitsloser? (Die Zeit 17.September 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Flüchtlingsunterkünfte: Wie teuer darf ein Container sein? (Die Zeit 31.Oktober 2015)</i></p>
Style figures	<p><i>Refugee crisis: Migrants trapped at Greek-Macedonian border escaped hell and are now stuck in purgatory (The Independent March 6, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>Dispelling the myth of the humane refugee camp (The Independent March 6, 2016)</i></p> <p><i>The tragic tide of refugees must be stopped at its source (The Independent April 16, 2015)</i></p>	<p><i>Flüchtlinge: Ein Teller Wärme (Die Zeit 12.Juli 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Flüchtlinge: Tod oder England (Die Zeit 30.Juli 2015)</i></p> <p><i>Flüchtlinge: Nix Gepäck, nix Job (Die Zeit 6.August 2015)</i></p>
Comparing of information in the texts of similar content	<p><i>1.The 900 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean were killed by British government policy (The Independent April 20, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>2.Teenage survivors tell of terror as migrant boat smashed into rescue ship and hundreds drowned (The Independent April 21, 2015)</i></p> <p><i>3.Refugee crisis: 25 killed after boat sinks off Turkish coast (The Independent March 6, 2016)</i></p>	<p><i>1. Wir brauchen Flüchtlingskinder (Die Zeit 3.April 2015)</i></p> <p><i>2.Die Flüchtlinge sind ein Glück für uns (Die Zeit 20.August 2015)</i></p> <p><i>3.In Bremen geht jedes Flüchtlingskind zur Schule (Die Zeit 15.Oktober 2015)</i></p>

The practical procedure of the research done

The foreign languages classes at Rezekne Academy of Technologies started with brainstorming on the migration issues that is a topical problem lately. The classes took place in spring, 2018. Two groups of students were chosen. The research was done by two foreign languages' academics both at English and German classes. The academic provided newspaper headlines on the migration topic. First, vocabulary work was done. New vocabulary items were acquired through three C's approach – first the meaning was conveyed through definitions, synonyms, word relations or examples Then the comprehension of the new vocabulary items was checked through a variety of the questions. At last, consolidation of the vocabulary acquired was started through moving to the discussions on the headlines. Students had to interpret and try to guess what the newspaper articles were about, what connotation, discourse and content they contained Students also expressed and shared their own opinions as well asked a variety of the questions to one another and to the academic.

Students' home assignment was to choose one of the headline and prepare a structured speech on the topic using the vocabulary acquired. The table below reflects the chosen headlines both at English and German classes and the vocabulary acquired during discussions (Table 3). It is a synopsis of the students' answers created by both foreign languages' academics. 80% of the students in English group and 90% of the students in German group chose the articles mentioned above.

The students had to fill in the questionnaires after the work with the newspapers' headlines. The students were asked about their main gains after the foreign language classes of work with newspapers' headlines. According to the students' questionnaires and the observation of the paper's authors, the discussions on the migration issues brought the following advantages into the foreign language classroom:

- It leads to transformation of world perception;
- It helps to explore the diversity of perspectives;
- It teaches the breadth of world perception and develops empathy and tolerance;
- It develops communication skills and sharing of ideas;
- It helps students to comprehend and examine their assumptions on migration issues;
- It encourages respectful and attentive listening to others' opinion;
- It encourages students' involvement and interest in the topic;
- Students are involved and become co-creators of knowledge and information;
- Students acquire democratic discourse.

Table 3 The opinions expressed during the discussions and vocabulary acquired on the topics

Topics chosen for the encouraging of the discussions	The tragic tide of refugees must be stopped at its source (<i>The Independent April 16, 2015</i>)	Heute Flüchtling, morgen Arbeitsloser? (<i>Die Zeit 17. September 2015</i>)
Opinions expressed during discussions	<p>1) During illegal migration a lot of asylum seekers sink in the Mediterranean sea, but those who survive are trapped in refugee camps in plight.</p> <p>2) The world has to cope with migrant crisis.</p> <p>3) A large number of illegal immigrants ignites atmosphere in European countries.</p> <p>4) EU officials and politicians have to cope with migrant crisis.</p> <p>5) If a large number of refugees resettle to Europe, they bring different culture and problems, and it can cause hostility and backlash of local inhabitants.</p>	<p>1) Refugees have difficulties to integrate and find jobs.</p> <p>2) Accepting of refugees embargoes not only an additional social burden but also a huge responsibility</p> <p>3) An intensive influx increases a formal unemployment statistics.</p> <p>4) Refugees get lower salaries than the local inhabitants.</p> <p>5) A good education is necessary to get a good job. Unemployment of migrants is the consequences of poor education..</p>
Lexis consolidated during discussion	<p>cope with, deport, sink, trap, escape, dispatch, ignite, resettle, clash, official, camp, charter, influx, aid, plight, shelter, border, rule, exclusion, hostility, surge, surge of people backlash, violent, unacceptable, infamous, permanent, inhumane, aid agency, asylum seekers, discourage migration, economic migrants, illegal immigrants, immigration debate, illegal entry, immigration powers, migrant plan criticism, migrant crisis, migrant deaths, refugee camp, refugee policy, refugee crisis</p>	<p>bedrohen, brauchen, überfordern, verfolgen, verdienen, sichern, wachsen, schaffen, scheitern, der Aufnahmezustand, der Sozialneid, der Bürger, die Werte, die Grenze, das Problem, der Helfer, die Willkommenskultur, die Integration, die Ausbildung, die Erstaufnahme, die Arbeitssuche, der Streit, die Flüchtlingspolitik, die Hilfe, die Unterkunft, die Ausbildung, gefährlich, schwarzarbeitend, menschlich, neidisch</p>

Conclusion

Discussion is the central process through which students can be encouraged interact with one another, their academics, and the information sources. A

foreign language academic encourages discussion using newspaper headlines. The topicality of the headlines contain indirect impulses, which encourages a reader (a student) to develop and express his/her own opinion. It is essential that the work with newspaper headlines is work with authentic, not adapted texts. Discussion is a methodological instrument, which helps to perfect students' communicative competence. Students' interactive activities are simulated during discussions. They learn not only to provide arguments for their opinions, but also to listen to the others, ask and answer, look for additional information, check the facts and assumptions. The authors firmly believe that the processes they describe nurture and promote both human growth and democracy.

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