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TO THE PROBLEM OF DISCOURSE COMPETENCE FORMATION OF STUDENTS AT LESSONS OF ENGLISH

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Learning a language always implies not only studying the words and grammar, but also learning the functionality of these words and grammatical structures, remembering and being able to use these structures in an appropriate way. This all happens in the process of communication, written or spoken, during which the people exchange ideas. The words, phrases, messages, dialogs, and letters are all considered to be discourses and the task of a learner is to understand the discourse and its purpose and give something in return. This is how communication works. As long as the discourse exists, there is communication. The ability to teach this competence is a challenging task for teachers of a foreign language, as this competence is not only difficult to check, but it is arduous to form, given that this competence implies the constant use of analytical and critical thinking.

There are a plethora of researchers studying communicative competence in general, its functions, importance, and formation; however, only few sources investigate the discourse competence solely, its subcompetences, assessment criteria, and ways to form, especially in school, to be more specific, in high school students. As English has become an intrinsic part of the trilingual education in Kazakhstan, and given that the number of English lessons has been increased in all classes, it is important that school alumni have a well-formed communicative competence, and discourse competence as well. Therefore, there is a high necessity to study the possible working methods which can be applied to form the discourse competence in high school.

The use of the word 'competence' has been taken from the original Chomskian term which encompassed the 'linguistic competence' as a set of knowledge of different layers of the language including its phonetic, syntactic, morphemic and semantic constituents. [1, 34] Through the years, this notion has been modernized and then changed into the well-known 'communicative competence' which not only covered aforementioned structural layers, but focused on the purpose of communication, its cultural, social, and stylistic importance. "In that sense, communicative competence

is defined as the knowledge which enables us to use language as a communication device in a given social context; it is a dynamic concept based on the negotiation of meanings among interlocutors, which can be applied either to written or spoken modes of communication". [2, 98] Even though there is still controversy over the subdivision of the communicative competence; the level of discourse, textual or discourse competence is agreed to be a rightful part of the communication competence. [3, 281]

The most popular communicative competence structure presented by Canale and Swain is agreed to comprise grammatical competence, strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence. [4, 25] In this structure discursive competence controls the organization of a spoken or written text, as well as its cohesion. Thus, the discourse competence can be defined as "...the ability to understand, create and develop forms of the language that are longer than sentences (stories, conversations, letters, …) with the appropriate cohesion, coherence and rhetorical organization to combine ideas." [5, 16] Another, simpler definition of the discourse competence is "...the ability to use (produce and recognize) coherent and cohesive texts in an oral or written form" [6, 29]. This report agrees with these notions and considers discourse competence as the ability of a speaker to understand, use the knowledge of the structure of the discourse (both written and spoken), and produce coherent sentences and utterances in compliance with the style, register, and format with no interference in communication.

To form the discourse competence, a teacher has to be fully aware of these competence peculiarities. So when talking about discourse competence, the following abilities are meant. Firstly, the participant of the communication act has to fully understand the topic and focus of the written or spoken dialog, which can be uttered directly or hidden behind metaphors. Secondly, the one having the discourse competence can identify between the information which has already been discussed and the new one which has just appeared in the spoken or written conversation. This can be checked and seen by the ability of a speaker to use personal (he, she, it, etc.) or demonstrative pronouns (this, that, etc.) to substitute the objects mentioned before. Thirdly, the ability to structure coherent sentences implies understanding and, hence, correct sequencing of clauses and predicates. The easiest example of which would be to say: '*I took a sip of water and swallowed it'*, and not the other way round as in '*I swallowed it and took a sip of water'*. Fourth, one must easily identify the various relations between actions and predicates with the most popular one being cause and effect, problem and solution, etc. Indeed, breaking the sequence would definitely break the logic of communication. The next important skill, which involves the analytical and critical reserves of the mind, is logic and order of the discourse. Everyone studying English knows that the essays are all structured in the following way: first is the introduction, then the main body, and the last part is the conclusion. However, this raises another problem for students of all foreign languages. One has to master the skill of not only thinking in another language but also structuring the speech or writing in accordance with this logical order. Finally, probably the most important constituents of the discourse competence mentioned by linguists are coherence and cohesion. They are definitely interrelated and include aforementioned skills, yet they are much broader. [7, 83-125]

High school is a challenging yet extremely important period of a person's development. This period is vulnerable at all levels - psychological, physiological, and behavioral and starts at the age of 14-15 and finishes at 17-18. Adolescent cognitive development, according to advocates of Piaget's theory, is divided into numerous phases. Adolescents develop the ability to think more abstractly when they move beyond the constraints of specific brain activities. This is a so-called formal operation which is happening at this moment. Students start to think about something intangible or nonexistent throughout this time [8, 30]. When dealing with coherence and cohesion, the teacher may use these peculiarities and give students tasks related to planning their future, proposing the consequences of some of their actions, and making objective predictions and conclusions.

Another distinct feature of cognitive development of adolescents is the ability to be aware of everything they do, so it is now easier for them to plan the activity, divide it into substeps, control themselves while doing and assess the result of their actions. Of course, this skill is mastered with age, yet it is important for teachers to show students they can do it even being adolescents. This skill of theirs is called metacognition and it is closely related to the follow-up skills of coherence and cohesion which are the main markers of discourse competence. [9, 86]

Having analysed all the peculiarities of adolescents, the teacher who wishes to form the discourse competence should:

remember about the emotional instability of children at this age;

take into consideration the gender, temper, and behaviour of a child;

subdivide the discourse competence teaching into the smallest parts building the explanation of new knowledge on old bases;

keep choosing the interesting and topical topic to promote the discussions;

praise the students for their success due to their emotional vulnerability;

give objective yet motivating feedback;

encourage group work, peer discussions;

reduce teacher talking time and serve as a guide for students rather than a dictator or lecturer.

As a result, understanding the cognitive development of adolescents allows teachers to select appropriate tactics and activities, as well as parse instruction so that all students are challenged throughout the class. The teacher is supposed to structure the lesson in accordance with the physiological, psychological, and cognitive characteristics of high school students, based on the aforementioned peculiarities.

The most modern approaches to form discourse competence are the use of content-based language learning or content and language integrated learning, critical thinking, contrastive rhetoric, and metacognition.

The first approach on discourse competence formation of high school students is taken from their cognitive development and requires teachers to use the discourse topics closely connected to the disciplines studied by these students at school. When studying the information closely related to those from the school disciplines, the students frequently complete the tasks which are discourse related, for example, students read the paragraph and locate the most important information, learn to read the maps, compare the information from different sources, present information in group activities, and seek for the solution to the problems. These tasks if completed in the English classes are a perfect way to improve the discourse competence and academic competence which will be of good help in later life when writing theses, academic articles, dissertations, reports, and the like. [10, 387]

The second modern approach is classified from the adolescents' newly obtained ability to think critically and reflect on the actions made. The main advantage of such a method is that the true ideas, conclusions are found out and remembered when speculating, discussing the issues, rather than by simple mechanical repetition of the same steps again and again with no reflection done. As this method implies communication, it is by itself forces a learner to use the second language and therefore improve the discourse competence, as to find the truth, one should maintain the conversation, get the ideas from the opponent, argue or agree with the opinions, and come to a certain conclusion without losing the thread of the conversation. [10, 476]

The third approach is a cognitive lingua-cultural method which is developed in Kazakhstan, is a method which absorbs all the advantages of the cognitive, cultural and critical approaches and implies the use of reflection, awareness of the cultural differences and similarities, as well as the focus on the school curriculum related information which helps students study English aspects thoroughly due to the reflection and from different angles thanks to the cultural focus. [11, 85]

The state standard of secondary education claims that by the end of middle school the students are expected to acquire 'high B1' level, which equals being a confident pre-intermediate user of the English language. During the next two years, the students have to master their skills up to B2 and become confident intermediate users. This level implies that the students are able to use English in everyday life situations easily and without hesitations. The learner can create a coherent written or spoken discourse, which will be clearly conveying the message and opinion to the opponent.

During high school 11th year of education, the students of Humanities class cover the following topics: "Making contact" (10 hours), "Investigate and report on the animal world" (12 hours), "Interviews and instructions" (12 hours), "Investigate and report on timekeeping devices" (10 hours), "Work and inventions" (12 hours), "Social change" (12 hours), "Reading for pleasure" (10 hours), "Making statements and providing information" (12 hours), "The science of clothes" (12 hours). It was decided to use the cognitive lingua-cultural approach to form the discourse competence of 11th year students. The method was approbated during the teaching practice at school located in Karatas village, Turkistan Region of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The lessons were taught in two subgroups of 11 "A" and "B" classes, as it has shown that both subgroups have similar academic achievements for the end of the second term of 2021-2022 school year: the progress percentage was 75% in both 11 "A" and in 11 "B".

To check the effectiveness of the lesson plans prepared with the focus on discourse competence, the decision was to teach 11 "A" with the lesson plans focused on discourse competence, whereas the second subgroup (of 11 "B") is to be taught as usual, in accordance with the curriculum, with no extra focus on discursive skills. The results of the teaching are assessed by the criteria of: a) students' participation in the class activities evaluated by counting the number of students actively participating during the lesson; b) the percentage of the students who have completed their homework correctly; c) the percentage of students who successfully passed the small quiz defining their awareness of coherence and cohesion devices in the end of the teaching process.

The process of teaching was held within six weeks, with three lessons a week being taught with a focus on discursive competence, which took no more than 15 minutes of each lesson. The activities used were varied and included individual tasks, tasks completed in pairs, and groups. Both at the beginning and the end of the teaching period, tests were conducted to check the students' progress over the period. Students were encouraged to complete activities in all four levels of the English language, namely speaking, writing, reading and listening. Reading and listening were used to form the passive skills of discourse competence, which are the awareness of the genres, their structures, and peculiarities, whereas speaking and writing were used to practice the active skills. The content of the lessons was taken in accordance with the main principles of the cognitive lingua-cultural method.

Taking into consideration the results of the experiment, in the beginning, the students awareness of the discourse competence, as well as of its peculiarities was low, as students, based on the results of the questionnaire conducted, had no idea of what coherence and cohesion are, yet they had some knowledge on the structure of the English essays, and the related knowledge of genres brought from mother tongue. The use of cognitive lingua-cultural method in discourse formation led to the fact that students of the experimental group (11 "A") were more involved into the learning process (the number of students who participated in the class activities equalled 100% compared to 75% of the 11 "B" which was taught with no changes). The homework preparation also showed a higher rate of 11 "A" than of 11 "B" with 92% and 75% respectively. With regards to the quizzes results, it was obvious that the use of cohesive devices, as well as the ability to recognise the text genres, their structures, and the ability to produce a coherent written or spoken discourse has increased in the group studied by the cognitive lingua-cultural method. 92% of students of 11 "A" showed positive results getting '5' and '4' marks for the quiz, whereas the students of 11 "B" have not improved their results getting 68% of good marks.

Thus, the results of the experiment prove that when studied with the main principles of psychological, physiological, and cognitive peculiarities of high school, as well as with the constant use of cognitive lingua-cultural method of discourse competence formation, the students show a better performance in spoken and written discourse production as well as they illustrate a better ability to recognise these types of discourse on receptive levels.

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