DEVELOPING FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

D. F. Mymrina[1], M. O. Abdrashitova[2], E. O. Zakharova[2]

[1] *Tomsk State University of Architecture and Building, Tomsk, Russian Federation*
[2] *National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tomsk, Russian Federation*

The paper discusses the issue of the development of the English speaking communicative competence at a technical university, which is thought to have become one of the most essential skills of today's university staff. Due to this, many of the Russian universities are now reconsidering professional requirements to the staff, believing that good knowledge of English could contribute to faster integration of their universities into global scientific community. National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Russia, has designed a number of professional training programmes for the English language acquisition tailored to the specific needs of the academics. The paper focuses on the course outline "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" aimed to develop foreign language communicative competence for professional communication within academic society at the level B1/B2 (Independent User) of European communicative competences. During the course, which has been primarily created for the staff of a technical university, the major features of the academic style of communication, academic grammar and vocabulary as well as the structure of the presentation and the ways of presenting scientific contents are studied and practised. Consequently, upon completing the course, the university staff are able to share the results of their professional activity with their foreign colleagues. The learners are expected to obtain the skills of making and delivering a presentation on their professional profile, duties, and challenges, which appears to be one of the major outcomes of the programme.

Key words: *foreign language communicative competence, professional communication, English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes, presentation.*

Nowadays, at the time of emergence of global educational environment and rise in scientific and professional mobility, the English language, which has become a language of the global academic community, appears to determine the development of most educational programmes in higher education institutions. As a result, the majority of Russian universities have to reconsider their goals, objectives as well as the contents of most educational programmes in the English language.

National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (hereinafter – TPU), one of the leading and research-intensive technological universities in Western Siberia, Russia, has declared English language proficiency as one of the essential requirements for its research and academic staff. English appears to enable the employees to carry out their professional activities more efficiently, ensures a high level of scientific research, allows establishing international contacts and facilitates interaction in the multicultural academic environment. In particular, as an integral part of scientific and educational activity the university academic staff should be able to perform the following professional tasks through the medium of English:

• to deliver lectures in English for home and international students;
• to carry out business correspondence and hold oral negotiations;
• to make and deliver reports at various international scientific events;

• to write scientific papers;
and to work on scientific projects or do research in collaboration with international colleagues.

These types of activities ensure the university to perform more global and crucial tasks – university's competitive growth among other universities worldwide in such spheres as attracting international students, improving the quality of scientific research, etc.

The activities aimed to increase English language usage in all spheres of the university life at TPU underpinned the Decree presented in the National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University Programme for Promoting its Competiveness (the so-called Roadmap) for 2013–2020. In accordance with the Programme, 'by 2020 linguistic academic and social environment of the University will include two equal components: the Russian language and the English language, the latter renowned for being the language of world science' [1, p. 46]. By 2020, the percentage of students and the staff with a sufficient level of the English language proficiency should be 100 % [1, p.62] and the percentage of research and teaching staff members having publications indexed in the Web of Science or Scopus databases should be equal to 90 % [1, p. 53].

Thus, it tends to be that modern Russian universities often have special requirements for student and academic staff production, owing to the fact that the present-day society needs highly-qualified specialists who are well-equipped with theoretical and practical knowledge, able to speak foreign languages, navigate

in the global information space, share information on the latest science and technology news and transmit to students the information obtained from various information sources.

"English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" is a course pursuing teaching English with a specific aim: to develop and increase the learners' ability to study the language or conduct research in the language in some particular field (the field they specialize in). In the 21st century such approach for EFL teaching can be regarded as essential. This can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, a good command of English allows one to participate in special professionally-oriented events that are held in today's global economy and academic community. Secondly, it provides people with access to the research literature in the English language, which allows them to stay updated and learn about the latest inventions and innovative ideas.

The principles of the "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" course design are based on the findings by Russian and foreign scholars in such areas as language teacher education and course development [2, 3]; adult education and life-long learning [4–6]; theory and methods of teaching English for specific academic purposes (EAP) and an EAP approach to course design and teaching [7–11].

The methods applied include general scientific and specific teaching methods (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, descriptive and comparative methods, modelling etc.). They allow analyzing the present studies in the sphere under consideration, choosing the best techniques in English language teaching and applying them in the design of the course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes", which is expected to meet the needs of the TPU academic staff, ready and willing to collaborate with their colleagues across the world.

The foreign language training courses which are being developed in accordance with the new requirements for educational programmes should create special conditions for training employees of a modern technical educational institution and focus on the development of their foreign language competences. The Strategic Development Programme of Tomsk Polytechnic University states that advanced training courses for TPU academic staff are aimed at gaining foreign language proficiency, acquiring social and cultural competences for international cooperation achievement in scientific and educational fields due to the development priorities of TPU as a national research university.

One of the training courses that can allow the academic staff of TPU to gain foreign language proficiency, thus, to master English is the course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes". The course aims to equip learners with professional foreign language communicative competences for professional and research experience exchange with the representatives of international academic community. The course is taught within the Modular training programme designed for the TPU academic staff. The Modular training programme includes five stages of education according to the basic level of English proficiency (from A1 at the first stage to B2 at the fifth stage of education). The course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" is taught at the fourth stage. It is designed for learners of the level proficiency equal to the required level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning. B1/B2 language level is an essential tool for comprehending the features of academic and scientific communication styles and is a prerequisite for the described discipline. It implies that the learners are aware of the basic rules of the English grammar, phonetic and lexical peculiarities of the English language. A learner can percept general English speech by ear and produce the utterances of common and more specific topics orally and in the written form. At the end of the course the participants increase their level of language proficiency from B1 to B1–B2/ B2 depending on individual features of learners and groups. To obtain the targeted foreign language proficiency level, traditional teaching approaches are delivered alongside with the active teaching methods such as IT-methods, case study, problem-based and experience-based learning.

The course is coherently connected with the other courses of the previous stages and is the basis for the students' following (fifth) stage where the focus is put on specific engineering topics and where learners should be ready to freely communicate with their home and international colleagues on professional issues.

The duration of the course is 18 weeks, including 36 contact hours and 18 hours of learners' self-study work.

To obtain the course objectives, the following tasks are supposed to be fulfilled:

• acquiring and developing the skills in presenting the results of research or professional activities to the international academic community;

• acquiring and developing the skills in making reports on the results of research or professional activities in compliance with the genre, stylistic, compositional and linguistic features of English scientific communication.

The course focuses on the development of learners' competencies related to oratorical skills, namely, public speaking skills, strategies and tactics used in the after-presentation speech (giving direct answers to a question, avoiding answering, redirecting questions back to the audience), keeping listeners' attention. Therefore, all the material taught within the course is divided into 6 sections logically linked to each other.

Each section of the course includes topics related to the parts of the presentation as well as special means of expressing numerical values in the English language, units of measurement adopted in the English-speaking academic environment, and so on. Every part is aimed at acquiring a particular set of lexical and grammatical ways of expressing ideas while communicating on scientific topics.

Six sections of the course covering six topics:

1. The introductory part to the presentation: the peculiarities of the first part of the presentation, basic ideas of presentation structure and organisation.

Here the key information that should be included into the first part of the presentation (the relevance and novelty of scientific research, contributions to the issue, previously made by other researchers) and appropriate lexical and grammatical means of expressing it as well as the ways of attracting the audience's attention are discussed in detail.

2. The main part of the presentation: the specifics of lexical means of expression.

This part focuses on the main lexical means of expressing the information and ways of emphasizing the key points of the presentation. Some attention is drawn to signposting, linguistic means of expressing difficult issues, adding new ideas or reference to the ideas stated above.

3. The main part of the presentation: tools of presentation.

Here the usage of various facilities of oral presentation, namely flipchart, whiteboard, Power Point slides, data projector, overhead projector, pin board, pointers are studied. Moreover, in this part of the course learners are introduced to signposting, in particular, language means of intensifying the key ideas of the presentation.

4. The main part of the presentation: description of graphs.

This part of the course focuses on presenting information with the help of visual means for the purpose of comparing various materials. Specific lexical and grammatical means of describing the information given in the graphs within the presentation are considered. It should be mentioned that this section of the course is partially based on the material of the electronic educational sources presented on various Internet websites. (For example, teaching materials are allocated on the platform of the partner-university, University of Southampton https://www.elanguages.ac.uk/tomsk).

5. The concluding part of the presentation: the specifics of the final part of the presentation.

Here the linguistic means of summarizing the information of the presentation, restating the key ideas, drawing listeners' attention to crucial questions that should be considered further are discussed.

6. The after-presentation section: discussion of the information given in the presentation.

This section is devoted to lexical and grammatical means of formulating questions and answers or requiring specification on the information presented, echo-questioning and interruption.

As for the teaching material for the course described, most of the original texts and video lectures are taken from available online Internet websites of British and American leading research-intensive universities and are employed in the educational process. The information presented on these websites gives the idea of the specifics of academic style of communication and facilitates practising presentations skills (oral performance and structuring information on slides). It allows one to introduce the learners to original academic texts in English as well as to give the idea of communication peculiarities within the international academic society.

An integral and essential part of the course is a special type of activity individually performed by the participants of the programme. In the present paper this kind of activity is called learners' self-study work, which can be of two major types:
• *current self-study work*;
• *creative problem-oriented self-study work.*

Current self-study work, aiming to deepen and solidify the learners' knowledge and develop practical skills, includes: doing individual home assignments and preparing for achievement tests. *Creative problem-oriented self-study work* implies preparing for the pass/fail exam, which includes delivering the final professional presentation in English.

Learners' self-study work involves completing tasks and exercises aimed at applying the obtained knowledge to some practical material (learners' individual research projects within the fields of their specialization). The possibility of getting strong theoretical knowledge basis along with hands-on skills as well as the practice oriented outcome of the course (a well structured scientific presentation in English) is of crucial importance to this category of learners. As it was mentioned above, the participants of the course are TPU professional academic staff, i.e. adults demonstrating personal and professional features such as self-discipline, goal-and practice orientation, consciousness of their weak and strong learning skills. They are not passive recipients but active participants of the educational process, capable of working individually and sharing the results of their work and their experience with the audience; capable of giving immediate feedback on some critical aspects of the programme, drawing the teacher's attention to them, giving comments. Besides, they eagerly work in pairs and groups practicing and refining their communicative competences. In this respect, the learners' self-study work is considered to be the key course activity as it facilitates preparation of the individual final practice oriented product.

The targeted result of the course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" aims at practical acquaintance with the language. Learners should be able to apply the gained professional competences, knowledge, abilities and skills in their professional and research activities, for instance, while making and discussing professional presentations in English in scientific and academic settings.

Due to the approach described, the targeted result is obtained by fulfilling the following tasks: *know, be good at,* and *be experienced in.*

Thus, learners should *know*:

(1) functional features of scientific and academic communication in English, rules (including structural features, visual means, etc.) for making presentations in English in academic settings.

(2) linguistic features of presentations in English in scientific and academic settings.

(3) functional and vocabulary features of presentation discussions in English with colleagues in scientific and academic settings.

Learners should *be good at*:

1. differentiating functional features of scientific and academic communication in English, utilizing appropriate linguistic means for academic reports, introducing necessary changes.

2. analysing and selecting appropriate linguistic means in accordance with the purpose of the utterance at every stage of presentation preparation in scientific and academic settings.

3. selecting appropriate words and grammar constructions for presentation discussions in the English language.

Learners should *be experienced in:*

1. preparing and making professional presentations in English in scientific and academic settings.

2. using words and grammar constructions in accordance with *the purpose of the utterance* at every stage of presentation preparation in scientific and academic settings.

3. discussing a presentation with colleagues as a part of scientific and academic communication in English.

Obviously, assessment is an essential part of the learning process. The following tools are used to assess the skills acquired through the course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes":

• Informal assessment tools: for example, questions that the learners have to answer in front of the audience (*To sum up, what are the main principles you need to consider working on the body of your presentation? Could you give any examples of the language means to be used in the introductory part of your presentation?*).

• Informal assessment tools including projects done by the learners individually and presented in the classroom (*How else can you express this idea? What is the appropriate presentation structure?*).

• Formative assessment tools available at the EAP Toolkit interactive learning platform.

• Formative assessment tools in the form of achievement tests, measuring the learners' level of skills, accomplishment, or knowledge in the studied area.

The conclusion of the course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" is marked by the final assessment process which is of two types. The first type of final assessment implies the performance of the task based on the material studied in the course. Basically, at this stage of assessment the two variants of final assessment sheets are provided for the learners in order to reveal their knowledge and skills obtained in the educational process. The second stage involves making and delivering individual presentation projects on specific academic topics. While giving presentations in class, the learners are expected to listen to the presentations of their colleagues as well as to participate in the after-presentation discussion session, asking questions and giving feedback on the information presented.

It may be concluded that the course "English for Scientific and Academic Communicative Purposes" can enable the academic staff of National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University to achieve the major objective of the professional Modular training programme designed for teaching English to the TPU academic staff, which consists in developing and refining a professional foreign language communicative competence of researchers. The skills trained within the course can be applied for presentation projects where the learners could demonstrate the results of their scientific work to the international academic community in the appropriate manner.

When teaching the course presented in the paper, the specific character of the audience should be taken into consideration. In particular, adults engaged in professional scientific activity demonstrate their aspiration to obtaining foreign language competences in the sphere of academic communication along with getting a practical result. Therefore learners' communicative activities are carried out mostly in the form of pair- , mini group- or individual work, which is essential for better communication and preparation of their reports and presentations on professional academic issues.

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Mymrina D. F., Tomsk State University of Architecture and Building (pl. Solyanaya, 2 Tomsk, Russian Federation, 634003).
E-mail: dina_mymrina@yahoo.com

Abdrashitova M. O., National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (pr. Lenina, 30, Tomsk, Russian Federation, 634050).
E-mail: abdrashitova@tpu.ru

Zakharova E. O., National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (pr. Lenina, 30, Tomsk, Russian Federation, 634050).
E-mail: zakharova@tpu.ru

РАЗВИТИЕ ИНОЯЗЫЧНОЙ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ НАУЧНО-ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИХ РАБОТНИКОВ В ТЕХНИЧЕСКОМ ВУЗЕ

Д. Ф. Мымрина[1], М. О. Абдрашитова[2], Е. О. Захарова[2]

[1] *Томский государственный архитектурно-строительный университет, Томск*
[2] *Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет, Томск*

Для осуществления быстрой интеграции в глобальное научное сообщество российские университеты пересматривают профессиональные требования к своим сотрудникам, называя важнейшим среди навыков иноязычную коммуникативную компетенцию. Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет предлагает программы повышения квалификации, направленные на изучение английского языка с учетом конкретных потребностей сотрудников технического университета. Представлен опыт реализации программы повышения квалификации «Английский для научных и академических целей», направленной на развитие коммуникативной компетенции на иностранном языке для осуществления профессионального общения в академической среде на уровне В1/В2 (уровень независимого пользователя) по шкале «Общеевропейские компетенции». Среди основных анализируемых результатов обучения – способность сотрудников университета поделиться результатами научных исследований с иностранными коллегами и ведущими экспертами в своей области в форме устного выступления и презентации.

Ключевые слова: *иноязычная коммуникативная компетенция, профессиональная коммуникация, английский для научных и академических целей, презентация.*

Мымрина Дина Фёдоровна, кандидат филологических наук, доцент, Томский государственный архитектурно-строительный университет (пл. Соляная, 2, Томск, Россия, 634003). E-mail: dina_mymrina@yahoo.com

Абдрашитова Мария Овсеевна, кандидат филологических наук, Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет (пр. Ленина, 30, Томск, Россия, 634050). E-mail: abdrashitova@tpu.ru

Захарова Елена Олеговна, кандидат филологических наук, Национальный исследовательский Томский политехнический университет (пр. Ленина, 30, Томск, Россия, 634050). E-mail: zakharova@tpu.ru