

# Language of “International Relations” Major in the Classroom with International Students<sup>1</sup>

Wang Mo<sup>2</sup>, Juliya Viktorovna Ageeva<sup>3</sup>, & Lin Mei<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Currently, non-linguistic majors have begun to attract more and more international students who come to Russia to receive higher education, including in the area of International Relations. In this case, studies of the Russian language as a means of mastering the chosen university major is a prerequisite for the educational process. The paper provides evidence for importance of teaching the language of the university major to international students (non-linguists); the object and subject of the study are denoted; research methodology is described; the purpose, goals and novelty of the study are presented. A scientific literature review resulted in the summary of general principles and methods of teaching Russian as a language of the university major to international students. Having studied a number of educational materials, the authors set forth the features of the best workbook for future experts in international affairs, such as a clear structure of units, a variety of activities, visibility of the learning material, and, most importantly - the connection of language materials with the students' major. The paper shows the structure, purpose, and advantages of the sample unit "International organizations" designed on the basis of these criteria. Examples of assignments are given, principles adopted by authors in designing the unit and objectives of different assignments are explained. The results and summary are presented in the conclusion. Prospects for further research in this area are outlined.

**Keywords:** University Major's Language; International Relations; Academic Speaking.

## 1. Introduction

Recently, Russian universities have been conducting research on specific training of specialists in order to describe the real communication needs of various groups of international students, both in the field of the Russian language and in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Please cite this paper as follows:

Mo, W., Ageeva, J. V., & Mei, L. (2019). Language of “international relations” major in the classroom with international students. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 10(SP), 862-869.

<sup>2</sup> Kazan Federal University

<sup>3</sup> Xi'an International Studies University

development of their professional competence. A number of scientists consider mastering the language of a university major as key aspects of learning academic language.

The issue of enhancing students' command of Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL), including the language of their university major, is examined in various studies. Linguists and educators study numerous aspects of this issue, such as interactivity in teaching RFL (Egorov et al., 2016; Mollaei et al., 2014), the use of computer technology (Bochina et al., 2014), psychological characteristics of students in the Russian language studies (Varlamova et al., 2016; Godino et al., 2019), linguo-conceptual approach to teaching RFL (Shtyrlina, 2017); new techniques and methods in teaching RFL (Shakhmatova et al., 2017); new forms, for example, open education courses in the foreign language teaching system (Varlamova et al., 2017).

Upon analyzing a large amount of research papers we concluded that the relevance of the study is determined by lack of a unified methodological basis for teaching academic language to international students who do not major in linguistics. Teaching resources on academic speaking with due regard to different levels of proficiency in the Russian language of such students are not sufficiently designed yet; there are no teaching aids for international students majored in International Relations. The object of the research is the process of teaching speaking for academic purposes to international students through the Russian language (the major's language). The study is focused on the methodological system of teaching academic speaking to the international students who major in various areas (medicine, economics), as well as in International Relations and related areas (diplomacy, sociology, political science).

A novel workbook's fragment provides all types of speaking and writing activities, contains audio texts and materials for the development and further consolidation of speaking and listening skills. The use of the sample makes possible to enhance professional speech competence of international students-pro prospective experts in international relations who study the Russian language.

The purpose of the research is to study methodological approaches to teaching academic speaking to international students of non-linguistic majors. It is done in order to find the best options for presenting learning materials and design a fragment of a textbook on the language of International Relations major for international students of Russian universities.

To achieve the set goal, the following tasks were accomplished:

- *to outline* general principles and methodology of teaching academic speaking to international students;
- *to get an insight into* existing syllabuses on Russian as a Foreign Language;
- *to analyze and compare* the available resources on teaching the

major's language to the students - non-native speakers;

- *to examine* structure and contents of textbooks on the language of the International Relations and related majors;
- *to design* own syllabus for training prospective experts in International Relations.

## 2. Methods

The following research methods were used to achieve the goals:

- analysis,
- discovery learning,
- heuristic approach,
- qualitative-quantitative analysis and synthesis,
- contrastive and comparative method.

## 3. Results and Discussion

A review of the resources on teaching international students (non-linguists) academic speaking in accordance with their major has resulted in the analysis of requirements for mastering the Russian language at different stages of the university studies. The principles of teaching academic speech were highlighted, as follows:

1. consistency,
2. functionality,
3. interdisciplinary coordination,
4. visibility,
5. availability,
6. feasibility,
7. contextual-functional principle,
8. continuity,
9. communicativeness,
10. integrity,
11. correlation between different speech activities.

The group of teaching strategies in learning the major's language includes role playing, integrative and interactive methods, professional-oriented learning, and the use of computer technology in the learning process. It is required to select the most relevant principles and methods based on the context when preparing, and furthermore, designing new learning materials.

The analysis of the existing courseware has shown that command of the Russian language at the levels of vocabulary and grammar, as well as the ability to carry out speech activity for freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors can be improved only with the help of an integrated approach to learning.

As follows from the study of textbooks in related majors (diplomacy (Perevoznikova, 2013), sociology (Kaverina, 2008), political science (Kumbasheva, 2014) and textbooks of the given major (International Relations (Deryagina, 2013; Mir-Bagirzade, 2006), the best workbook for training experts in international relations should feature a well-defined unit structure, a variety of activities, clear presentation of the material. It is crucial that the language materials should be compatible with the students’ major.

Taking into account the above points, the unit *International Organizations* was proposed as a sample learning material in Russian as a Foreign Language for International Relations and related majors.

In this sample, linguistic phenomena of academic speech are taught to international students on the basis of the major’s texts. Textual material from the course of International Relations’ major was used in all activities (Tsygankova, 2012).

The three-part unit consists of: 1. pre-reading activities; 2. a text; 3. follow-up tasks. In designing assignments, all aspects of teaching academic speech were taken into consideration: grammar, speaking, listening, writing, and reading. All five aspects are essential to mastering the language of a particular major.

The unit contains review of vocabulary and grammar materials students are familiar with and new grammatical phenomena relevant for academic speech. New grammar structures are introduced in the main text. To enhance the use of speech structures, the following types of tasks are proposed:

- *answer the questions using the models;*
- *complete the sentences using the text 1, pay attention to the verbs in bold;*
- *rewrite the sentences.*

Such assignments help students to learn academic speech constructions and continuously review them.

To check for understanding, students are suggested to answer questions and *make charts based on the text information*. Writing activities in this sample are in the form of the development of a text plan in accordance with the curriculum for this period of study.

Particular attention is paid to speaking and listening activities. This feature distinguishes our sample from other available resources. The role playing approach is used in learning monologic and dialogic speech. Role playing enhances students’

interest and increases learning output. Through the role playing a teacher can simulate a learning and professional situation, create optimal conditions for communicative competence formation in the academic environment. Students are able to develop speech skills by building on and consolidating language material.

Listening exercises are placed both in the pre-reading and in the follow-up parts. Audio recordings are selected in connection with the main text, thus expanding the scientific perspective on the students' major. Video recordings are also used in listening and speaking activities to ensure effective teaching.

The unit's format is based on the following principles:

- Professional-oriented learning. In the sample, all texts and activities are closely related to the students' major. Their use in the context of future education of international students considers the needs of students in learning a foreign language as required by their future profession or major;

- Consistency. Since the scientific text is a principal element in academic language learning, the unit is centered on the text (412 words). Although pre-reading and follow-up exercises include additional information, they are fitted to the theme of the main text. By interacting with a science-text, international students understand the learning material more efficiently and fully; they also acquire knowledge important for their future professional activities. Moreover, continuous review of, e.g., professional vocabulary in both assignments and texts contributes to their acquisition by international students;

- Availability and feasibility. In the unit this principle is used to range the tasks according to their difficulty and complexity: from simple to complex;

- Visibility. This principle is implemented in the presentation of the scientific text, grammatical commentary and writing assignments with the help of diagrams, tables and signs to engage international students and stimulate their linguistic and associative activities.

The learning material should be introduced to students gradually in conformity with the assignments: at the pre-reading stage the tandem method is effective ("in the chain order"); role playing is preferable in the follow-up section (role play dialogue).

The unit should end with a progress test to help a teacher control students' understanding and mastery of knowledge.

#### **4. Summary**

The study defines general principles and methods of teaching the Russian language to international students according to their university major. The results provide a basis for determination of the principles of designing educational materials, including a textbook's fragment of pre-reading and follow-up assignments for international students with a major in International Relations. We consider an

integrated approach to teaching the university major’s language to be the only one useful for the development of academic speech skills of international students.

## 5. Conclusions

Currently, non-linguistic majors have begun to attract more and more international students who come to Russia to receive higher education, including in the area of International Relations. In this case, the study of the Russian language as a means of mastering the university major is a prerequisite for the educational process. At Kazan Federal University international students of the School of International Relations study Russian at the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language. First-year students learn Russian by using textbooks that are not related to their major. In the second year, the textbook is *Russian Language for Diplomats* which was reviewed in this study. As seen from the results of the analysis of the available educational resources on this and related majors, a universal textbook for international students has not yet been designed and published. In this context, the task of designing a new textbook for international students of Kazan Federal University and all Russian universities majored in International Relations is of the immediate interest.

The study covers general principles and methods of teaching international students Russian as a language of their major. Common features of textbooks in teaching academic Russian were identified. The requirements for command of the Russian language in each year of undergraduate education are analyzed. These theoretical findings could be the foundation for the further development of didactic materials and guidelines for teaching international students the language of their university major; they will be relevant for teachers of Russian as a Foreign Language and teachers of some non-linguistic majors when selecting teaching resources. The list of available textbooks on the language of the major may be useful in-situ of teaching Russian to international students from different schools, as well as in developing new curricula.

The presented sample of the textbook’s unit can be used in teaching at the Department of Russian as a Foreign Language; in designing teaching materials for international students majored in International Relations or other related majors at Russian universities or abroad. Speaking and listening assignments are emphasized in the sample to avoid the limitations that were listed during the evaluation of the textbooks. As a research perspective, we suggest increasing the number of speaking and listening tasks in order to enhance the formed speech skills. Future study should explore how to design more interesting and more effective educational materials in order to motivate students to study, engage them in classroom work with a teacher, and to increase interest in independent work.

This is an issue for future research to examine given that practice of teaching Russian as a Foreign Language still has many unsolved issues that require attention and further studies.

### **Acknowledgements**

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

### **References**

- Bochina, T., Ageeva, J., & Vlasicheva, V. (2014). Multimedia presentation as a strategy of teaching speaking. *INTED2014 Proceedings 8th International Technology, Education and Development Conference March 10th-12th* (pp. 7661-7669). Valencia, Spain.
- Deryagina, S. (2013). *Russian language for experts in international relations: A textbook*. Moscow: RUDN.
- Egorov, D., Palekha, E., & Akhmerova, L. (2016). On psycholinguistic features in teaching Russian as a foreign language. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 7(2), 241-244.
- Godino, J. D., Rivas, H., Burgos, M., & Wilhelmi, M. R. (2019). Analysis of didactical trajectories in teaching and learning Mathematics: Overcoming extreme objectivist and constructivist positions. *International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education*, 14(1), 147-161. <https://doi.org/10.12973/iejme/3983>
- Kaverina, V. (2008). *Russian Language for Sociologists*. Moscow: Courses of the Russian language.
- Kumbasheva, Y. (2014). *Russian language for consulate employees*. Moscow: Courses of the Russian Language.
- Mir-Bagirzade, S. (2006). *Russian language: A textbook for students of school of international studies*. Baku: Nurnal.
- Mollaei, B., Gorji, Y., & Rezaei, F. (2014). Comparison of anxiety, children, and single with two children in secondary schools during the first and second year in the academic year 2013-2014 of Bandar Abbas. *UCT Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 2(2), 127-130.
- Perevoznikova, A. (2013). *Russian language for diplomats*. Moscow: Courses of the Russian Language.
- Shakhmatova, T., Moskaleva, L., & Savenkova, L. (2017). The description and interpretation of linguistic and cultural component of the precedent phenomena

in the mass culture. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 7(12), 232-238.

Shtyrlina, E. (2017). Concept as a linguistic guideline in teaching Russian as a foreign language. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 7(12), 88-94.

Tsygankova, P. (2012). *International relations: Theory, conflicts, movements, and organizations: A textbook*. Moscow: Alpha-M: INFRA-M.

Varlamova, M., Bochina, T., & Miftakhova, A. (2016). Interactivity in teaching a foreign language. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 7(3), 190 – 194.

Varlamova, M., Bochina, T., & Zharkynbekova, Sh. (2017). Courses of open education in the system of foreign language teaching. *QUID Investigación, Ciencia Y Tecnología*, 1, 2502-2507.