ПЕДАГОГИКА
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ОБУЧЕНИЕ КОММУНИКАТИВНЫМ КОНТУРАМ КАК ОДИН ИЗ ПУТЕЙ РАЗВИТИЯ АУТЕНТИЧНОСТИ РЕЧИ НА ИНОСТРАННОМ ЯЗЫКЕ В ПРОЦЕССЕ ИНОЯЗЫЧНОЙ ПОДГОТОВКИ ПЕРЕВОДЧИКОВ

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Аннотация. Показано, что термин «коммуникативный контур» (КК), предложенный Б.М. Гаспаровым, в наибольшей степени отражает специфику переводческого владения и использования иностранного языка и может быть использован для обозначения таких единиц языка в контексте иноязычной подготовки переводчиков. Представлен алгоритм работы с КК, апробированный с участием студентов-переводчиков, обучающихся на 4 курсе программы специалитета. Сделан вывод об эффективности предлагаемого алгоритма, свидетельствующий о более успешном запоминании и оперативном извлечении КК; более активном и адекватном использовании КК в речи и при выполнении упражнений на перевод; приобретении студентами навыков самостоятельной работы с КК.
Ключевые слова: аутентичная речь, языковые фрагменты, многокомпонентные сочетания, иноязычная подготовка переводчиков, коммуникативные контуры.

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Original article

Developing nativelike proficiency in a foreign language through teaching communicative contours in translation-oriented foreign language instruction

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Abstract. It is shown that the term "communicative contour" (CC), proposed by B.M. Gasparov, reflects to the greatest extent the specifics of translation proficiency and use of a foreign language and can be used to designate such language units in the context of foreign language training of translators. An algorithm for working with K is presented, tested with the participation of translation students enrolled in the 4th year of the specialty program. The conclusion is made about the effectiveness of the proposed algorithm, which testifies to more successful memorization and prompt retrieval of CC; more active and adequate use of QC in speech and when performing translation exercises; students acquire skills of independent work with QC.
Key words: nativelike proficiency, chunks, multiword units, translation-oriented foreign language teaching, communicative contours.

Introduction

Nativelike proficiency in a foreign language is an essential component of the translator's professional competence because their task is to produce a text which can fulfil the same communicative purpose as the original and conform to the norms of the target language. Despite existing opin-

ions that translators should only operate into their mother tongue, it has been widely acknowledged that translation into a foreign language should be considered a normal and widespread activity, especially with languages with restricted distribution [23].

Nativelike proficiency is associated with the ability to use language that is natural and idiomatic which is achieved, among other things, through mastery of formulaic language which represents institutionalised ways of expressing ideas and meanings known to and widely used by native speakers [16; 28]. There seems to be a large variety of approaches to defining and classifying such multiword units (MWUs) or chunks [3; 5; 12; 19; 20; 21; 27; 28] a closer analysis of which, however, suggests that the language units they refer to share a number of common features.

Unlike lexical chunks, which seem to constitute the core of MWUs, sentence-level chunks have received undeservedly less attention and are therefore absent from some classifications of MWUs [8; 19; 20; 21; 22; 30]. However, it is our conviction that they are equally important for ensuring nativelike proficiency in a foreign language. In addition, it has been our observation that learners tend to favour sentence patterns that are simple, well-known and similar to those in their native language which points to the fact that the intentional teaching of sentence-level chunks should not be underestimated.

Among the existing terms and approaches to defining such units we tend to favour the concept of communicative contours (CCs) proposed by B.M. Gasparov [1]. We believe that is it more suited to the context, purpose and character of foreign language use in translation in that it:

a) is a broad and flexible concept which encompasses a wide variety of sentence-level chunks including those which may not necessarily fall into any formal category;

b) reflects the preferred ways of conceptualising and expressing different ideas and meanings in a language, thereby providing a clue to understanding the 'thinking for speaking' phenomenon [26];

c) is closely associated with a certain 'linguistic landscape' [1] and possesses a strong communicative charge;

d) offers a number of psycholinguistic benefits which are highly relevant to translation.

We believe that the intentional teaching of CCs can significantly expand translation students' linguistic repertoire in a foreign language and improve the retention and active use of CCs, thereby making their speech more natural and idiomatic. Thus, the aim of the present study is to develop and test the learning procedure for teaching CCs in translation-oriented foreign language training. To produce the desired results, the procedure should aim to: a) raise learners' metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness; b) develop noticing skills; c) restructure learners' linguistic knowledge; d) engage learners through conscious effort; e) develop learner autonomy.

The theoretical significance of the study is determined by the fact that it provides theoretical foundations for and justifies the relevance of the teaching of CCs in translation-oriented foreign language teaching. The practical contribution of the study consists in the development of a learning procedure which includes several steps, each with its own exercises and tasks, and can be used in teaching foreign languages to translation students.

Theoretical foundations

Nativelike proficiency and formulaic language

Nativelike proficiency can be defined as "a level of language proficiency (potentially) equal to that of native speakers" [29, p. 117]. It relies, among other things, on two essential linguistic capacities – nativelike selection and nativelike fluency [22].

Nativelike selection emphasises the ability of the speaker to select expressions which, besides being grammatically correct, are natural and idiomatic, while nativelike fluency reflects the speaker's ability "to produce fluent and connected spontaneous discourse" [22, p. 191]. The problem with these capacities is that it is difficult to describe and explain the factors that come into play and guide the choice between 'nativelike' expressions and those which are seen as "unnatural or highly marked" [22]. However, researchers seem to be unanimous in considering formulaic language to be "the heart and soul" [16] of nativelike language use and the key to idiomaticity [28].

Formulaic language is described as "ready-made chunks or multiword units of language" [27, p. 2]. There exists a plethora of terms which are used to refer to formulaic language (formulaic lan-

guage units [27], (lexical) chunks [19; 20], lexical phrases [21], lexical bundles [3], prefabricated patterns [12], formulaic sequences/ expressions [28], prefabricated expressions [5]), as well as quite a number of classifications of formulaic expressions which vary considerably in terms of criteria and types of expressions they include.

Despite the variety of terms, prefabricated multiword units (MWUs) share a number of key features. They:

(a) are fixed or semi-fixed;

(b) are stored, processed and retrieved automatically as whole units [16];

(c) are likely to have independent representation in the mental lexicon [6; 14];

(d) operate as single semantic units and convey holistic meanings [11];

(e) recur in language use [14] and form the "building blocks" of discourse [18];

(f) are often context-sensitive [13] and are used in predictable situations [16];

(g) correlate with specific textual functions and registers [18].

Due to their specific character, multiword units play a significant facilitating role in communication as they:

(a) decrease the processing load, thereby allowing for the economy of effort in speech production and processing (Sinclair's idiom principle) [25];

(b) have a strong framing power and tend to be closely associated with certain conceptual frameworks;

(c) facilitate understanding among speakers through reference to shared experience which they represent.

Overall, formulaic language is seen as central to language knowledge and communicative competence [14] and indispensable for performing at a nativelike level and processing language idiomatically and fluently [7].

Sentence-level chunks

Many classifications of formulaic expressions include units relating to sentence structure such as (lexicalised) sentence stems [22], sentence builders [21], sentence frames and heads [19], sentence frames [8], sentence starters [20], sentence starters and academic expressions [30]. Some of them refer to the same concepts and can be used interchangeably (e.g., sentence starter/head); others are defined differently by different authors (e.g., sentence stem). A common feature shared by all these chunks is that they provide frameworks for sentences or their parts and allow for permissible expansions, variations or substitutions [22].

It has been argued that such language units are critically important for creating nativelike utterances in that they represent certain institutionalised sentence structures [22] used in a language to express concepts, phrase ideas and convey emotions [9]. Many practitioners emphasise the need for "the intentional teaching of language structures" [9] as they can:

a) provide support and scaffolding for constructing sentences in a foreign language by making the teaching of sentence-level structures "easy and accessible" [31]:

b) reduce the cognitive load involved in producing utterances in a foreign language, especially in oral communication;

c) allow students to focus on the content [24];

d) require creativity on the part of students to expand or complete the sentences;

e) decrease student anxiety;

f) serve as entry points into oral and written communication.

Communicative contours

The terms most commonly used today in teaching foreign languages are sentence frames and sentence starters. The former provide a more detailed scaffold for constructing sentences by using a fill-in-the-blank format and structures that are higher than the learners' current language level, while the latter are more open-ended and offer less support as they provide only a partial frame which starts the sentence and needs to be developed and completed by the students on their own.

While admitting the usefulness of the abovementioned concepts, we favour the concept of communicative contours (CCs) put forward and developed by Gasparov [1]. He defines the CC as "a prototypical image of an utterance which represents a directly imaginable whole and is easily recognised by speakers as an outline of concrete utterances" [1, p. 193]. The CC includes a holistic rhythmic-intonational image/curve, supporting verbal elements/expressions, compositional lacunae and possesses the following characteristics: 1) direct imaginability; 2) wholistic nature; 3) prototypical character; 4) communicative charge; 5) multiplicity; 6) a certain degree of openness; 7) forming and integrating capacity which allows the communicative contour to act as a direction vector, control mechanism and correctness criterion [1, p. 189–192].

While offering some benefits similar to those of sentence frames and sentence starters, CCs, however, have a number of significant advantages, especially for translation-oriented language learning and teaching. First, based on Gasparov's treatment of the CC, it can be concluded that it is a broad and flexible concept which encompasses a variety of sentence-level chunks, including sentence fragments and complete sentences, which may not necessarily fall into any formal category but still be useful for expressing certain ideas and meanings or simply represent students' personal preferences and choices. Having an extensive knowledge of sentence-level chunks in a foreign language allows the translator to choose the one which best conveys the content and meaning of the original in a nativelike way in a given context.

Second, CCs represent form-meaning patterns [17] which:

a) reflect the preferred ways of conceptualising and expressing different ideas and meanings in a language;

b) are for the most part culturally predetermined;

c) provide a clue to the concept of "thinking for speaking" [26], i.e., the ability to 'think' in a foreign language using its logic and linguistic features;

d) are closely associated with specific contexts, genres, themes, communicative situations, meanings and even vocabulary, thereby creating a certain "linguistic landscape" [1] with a strong communicative charge;

e) blur the boundary between language and speech.

In the context of translation, reliance on CCs can contribute to the selection of communicatively equivalent units in the target language on the one hand, and nativelike language production in a foreign language on the other.

Third, reliance on CCs offers a number of psycholinguistic benefits which are highly relevant to translation. It: a) increases the speed of retrieval of linguistic resources in a foreign language; b) reduces planning time; c) increases the fluency of the target text production and d) improves its quality. These benefits are achieved largely, but not exclusively, due to the processes of radiant thinking and spreading activation. The former involves "associative thought processes that proceed from or connect to a central point" [4, p. 57] while the latter explains why words related to each other in various ways are retrieved more quickly and easily. Close association of CCs with contexts, genres, themes, communicative situations, meanings and vocabulary suggests that any of these factors can act as a trigger and start the processes of spreading activation and radiant thinking, thereby facilitating the retrieval of the required CC.

Methodology

Participants

The participants were two groups of 4th-year full-time translation students enrolled on a 5-year translation training programme with English as their L2 language and Russian as their native/L1 language. The groups included 16 (Group 1) and 17 (Group 2) students (33 overall) with comparable L2 proficiency.

Research design

When designing the research, we proceeded from several assumptions. First, it was essential to adopt a balanced approach to teaching sentence-level chunks by considering their potential downsides as well as their advantages which have been outlined above. The possible negative as-

pects of teaching sentence-level chunks may include: a) over-framing [2], i.e., excessive use of sentence frames/starters which can result in b) the loss of student interest and engagement [31]; c) failure to develop metalinguistic awareness and noticing skills if sentence-level chunks are presented as fill-in-the-blank models; d) lack of internalisation and analysis of language due to reliance on ready-made models and rote learning [2].

Second, it has been found that requiring learners to make a conscious effort makes them more engaged in the learning process which, in turn, makes it more effective [15] and contributes to better knowledge retention [10].

Third, we felt it was important to place the teaching of communicative contours in the context of translator training to ensure that it contributed to the acquisition and development of the relevant skills and was not counterproductive. In particular, special emphasis was laid on the development of learners' the ability to:

a) pay more attention to the input and notice CCs (metalinguistic awareness);

b) compare the contours with their typical output (conscious effort and linguistic knowledge restructuring);

c) identify the pattern behind the CCs and analyse them (metalinguistic awareness);

d) find corresponding contours in the native language and compare them in terms of their differences and similarities (crosslinguistic awareness);

e) identify contours in a foreign language which have no direct correspondences in the native language (crosslinguistic awareness);

f) form associations between CCs and their contexts of use, genres, themes, situations and vocabulary (metalinguistic awareness);

g) integrate CCs into the learners' interlanguage (linguistic knowledge restructuring);

h) independently accumulate, store and use CCs (learner autonomy).

Both groups followed the same syllabus for the 'English as a major foreign language' course. Group 1 (treatment group) followed our learning procedure for working with CCs (3 Units/4 months) in addition to the traditional approach followed by Group 2 (control group). The learning procedure was implemented in two stages and included the following steps:

1) the teacher identified CCs in the texts which were studied as part of the course material or prompted the learners to do this through appropriate exercises;

Exercise 1. Find sentences in the text which express the same idea as the Russian sentences below.

Быть путешественником – это больше, чем просто быть туристом.

What's the difference between travel and tourism? Well, being a traveller is more than just being a holidaymaker. A holiday is just a short time away, and it normally involves relaxation.

Exercise 2. Match the following words and phrases to make sentence models from the text. Translate them into Russian.

1. Tradeable goods	are consumed	to pay over the odds
2. Non-tradeables	are prepared	all over the world
3. Too many customers	are exported	where they are produced

2) the teacher and the learners collaboratively identified the patterns behind these contours and analysed their structure, functions, possible contexts of use and genre, gave their Russian equivalents; the contours were then presented in graphical form;

3) the learners were given exercises to practise using the CCs in different contexts; the exercises required the learners to:

a) generate sentences of their own according to the model using active vocabulary from the unit;

Exercise 3. Make sentences of your own according to the following models.

Being a traveller **is more than just being** a holidaymaker.

b) translate sentences from Russian into English;

Exercise 4. Render the following sentences into English.

Учеба в университете предполагает самостоятельную работу.

4) the learners were encouraged to use the CCs in speaking tasks and discussions.

Exercise 5. Develop the following statements using your own ideas.

Being a traveller means … .

Exercise 6. What information in the text did you personally find most amusing, surprising and shocking?

What amused/interested/surprised/shocked me was …

Exercise 7. What are your immediate reactions to the article you have just read?

I think it overstresses … and underestimates … .

Exercise 8. Prepare a set of questions about the article/on the topic. Use these question starters:

What's the reason behind …? What's wrong with …? What do you understand by …?

This learning procedure aimed to model the steps which need to be taken to identify, practise and integrate thew CCs into the learners' interlanguage (Stage 1). However, to ensure the learners' ability to achieve the desired result on their own, during Stage 2 they were required to follow these steps independently.

Data collection and analysis

This study used a quantitative approach. To assess the need for and the effectiveness of the proposed learning procedure, we conducted a pre-test and two post-tests upon completion of units 1, 2 (Stage 1) and 3 (Stage 2) respectively. They aimed to assess the degree to which the CCs were integrated into the learners' interlanguage and followed the same procedure.

Upon completion of each unit, the learners were given two tasks:

1. Speak on the following points using the information and language from the unit. The learners were supposed to revise the material at home; however, they could not prepare the answers in advance as they were not given the points to speak on. The task was performed in class, each learner was expected to speak for 2-3 min on a point they had randomly picked and had ≈5 min for preparation. The leaners were expected to use the active vocabulary and CCs from the units. However, our primary focus was to assess the use of the CCs which the study materials contained (Unit 1 – 7 CCs; Unit 2 – 9 CCs; Unit 3 – 8 CCs). For each CC used, the learners could earn 1 point. This task aimed to assess the ability of the learners to select the most suitable CCs from the unit, speedily retrieve and adequately use them to express their own ideas in English.

2. Translate the following sentences from Russian into English using the language from the unit. The sentences lent themselves well to using the CCs studied during the units. The task was performed in class, contained 5 sentences (1 point for each correct answer) and aimed to assess the ability of the learners to select and retrieve the CCs in response to their Russian equivalents.

We understand that the learners could have been familiar with some of the CCs from the course material before studying it. However, it has been our observation that this knowledge does not necessarily translate into use, and the learners tend to give preference to familiar sentence structures that are often similar to those in their native language.

To assess the results, for each group of participants we:

a) calculated the standard deviation to show the gap between the highest and the lowest data;

b) found the mean and the median value to measure the central tendency in each set of data. Both values were found as the median, unlike the mean, is not influenced by skewed distribution of data values or outliers.

To determine the statistical significance of the data obtained we used:

a) the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test (comparison of the Pre-test and Post-test 1 and 2 performance of Group 1);

b) the Mann-Whitney U test (comparison of the Post-test 1 and 2 results of Group 1 and Group 2). The results are summarised in the tables presented in the following section.

Results and discussion

The comparison of the results for the Pre-test (Table 1) and Post-test 1 (Table 2) reveals a significant change for both tasks for Group 1 while the results for Group 2 remained approximately the same. Though the standard deviation for the speaking task for Group 1 has not been affected (1.86 vs 1.8), which suggests that the spread of the data remained the same, the mean and the median values demonstrate a significant increase (2.87 vs 6.56 and 2 vs 7 respectively). These findings indicate that the number of CCs used by the learners from Group 1 in the speaking task has increased, which, in turn, testifies to the effectiveness of the learning procedure used in the treatment. The results for Group 2, however, show no significant changes, thereby suggesting that the performance of the learners has not improved. This proves our hypothesis that learners may fail to notice and remember CCs from the material in the absence of the intentional teaching of such language units.

As regards the translation exercise, the data obtained show similar dynamics. Group 1 has demonstrated a significant improvement with a lower standard deviation which indicates a less significant spread of the data (1.14 vs 0.92) and higher mean (1.75 vs 3.62) and median (2 vs 4) values. The results for Group 2, however, show no observable differences.

The validity of these results is confirmed by:

a) the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test (Table 3) which shows that Pre-test and Post-test 1 results of Group 1 are statistically significant at $p < .05$ and testify to the improved performance of Group 1 after the treatment;

b) the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 4) which confirms the statistical significance of the results obtained and the observable differences between performance on Post-test 1 of Group 1 and Group 2.

Table 1

Pre-test results

	GROUP 1 (treatment group)			GROUP 2 (control group)	
	Standard deviation	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Mean
Speaking task	1.86	2.87	2	1.75	2.82
Translation exercise	1.14	1.75	2	0.84	1.52

Table 2

Post-test 1 results (Stage 1)

	GROUP 1 (treatment group)			GROUP 2 (control group)	
	Standard deviation	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Mean
Speaking task	1.8	6.56	7	1.99	3.29
Translation exercise	0.92	3.62	4	1.07	1.7

Table 3

**Comparison of Pre- and Post-test 1 results of Group 1
(the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test)**

	W-value	Critical value	Result
Speaking task	5	for W at N = 16 (p < .05) – 29	W < critical value result is significant at p < .05
Translation exercise	10.5	for W at N = 16 (p < .05) is 29	W < critical value result is significant at p < .05

Table 4

Comparison of Post-test 1 results of Group 1 and Group 2 (the Mann-Whitney U test)

	U-value	Critical value	Result
Speaking task	33.5	for U at p < .05 – 81	U < critical value result is significant at p < .05
Translation exercise	28.5	for U at p < .05 – 81	U < critical value result is significant at p < .05

Post-test 2 results (Table 5) indicate a slight decrease in the performance of Group 1 compared with Post-test 1 results while reflecting no significant changes for Group 2. As regards the speaking task, a slightly larger standard deviation (1.8 vs 1.92) may suggest a wider spread of the data, i.e., a wider gap between the highest and the lowest scores obtained by the learners. More importantly, this change was accompanied by a slight decrease in the mean and median values (6.56 vs 5.75 and 7 vs 6 respectively). A similar trend has been revealed in the results for the translation exercise. Though the standard deviation has slightly reduced (0.92 vs 0.82) which points to the more uniform character of the data, the decrease in mean and median values, though quite small, illustrates a decrease in the learners' performance (3.62 vs 2.75 and 4 vs 3 respectively).

Overall, these data indicate that when the learners followed the learning procedure individually without the supervision of the teacher, the results, though still higher than those for the pre-test, were slightly lower than those for Post-test 1 which suggests that more practice is required for the learners to develop and hone the skills needed for the successful identification, practice and integration of CCs into their interlanguage. Still, Post-test 2 results for Group 1 are statistically significant as confirmed by the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test (Table 6). The differences between Post-test 2 results for Groups 1 and 2 are also statistically significant as confirmed by the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 7).

Table 5

Post-test 2 results (Stage 2)

	GROUP 1 (treatment group)			GROUP 2 (control group)	
	Standard deviation	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Mean
Speaking task	1.92	5.75	6	2.05	3.41
Translation exercise	0.82	2.75	3	1.02	1.64

Table 6

**Comparison of Pre- and Post-test 2 results of Group 1
(the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test)**

	W-value	Critical value	Result
Speaking task	10.5	for W at N = 16 (p < .05) – 29	W < critical value result is significant at p < .05
Translation exercise	20.5	for W at N = 14 (p < .05) – 21	W < critical value result is significant at p < .05

Table 7
Comparison of Post-test 2 results of Group 1 and Group 2 (the Mann-Whitney U test)

	U-value	Critical value	Result
Speaking task	57.5	for U at p < .05 – 81	U < critical value result is significant at p < .05
Translation exercise	67.5	for U at p < .05 – 81	U < critical value result is significant at p < .05

Overall, the findings illustrate an improvement in the performance of the treatment group (Group 1) which testifies to the fact that the proposed approach to teaching CCs can ensure their better retention and retrieval as well as more active and adequate use by learners, thereby making their speech in a foreign language more nativelike.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to develop and test the learning procedure for teaching CCs in translation-oriented foreign language training based on the following principles: a) raising learners' metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness; b) developing noticing skills; c) engaging learners through conscious effort; d) restructuring learners' linguistic knowledge; e) developing learner autonomy. The results obtained have confirmed our hypothesis that the intentional teaching of communicative contours based on the above-mentioned principles can have a beneficial effect on the learners' interlanguage. More specifically, the findings have demonstrated an improvement in terms of: a) the retention and retrieval of CCs; b) a more active and adequate use of CCs in speaking tasks; c) better results on translation exercises; d) the acquisition and development of self-study skills.

However, the results revealed that after following the procedure independently, the learners demonstrated a slightly lower performance. This finding may be interpreted in several ways. On the one hand, it may indicate that the learning procedure may need to be improved to ensure successful independent performance of the learners. On the other hand, it may suggest that more practice is required for the learners to develop and hone the skills needed for the successful identification, practice and integration of CCs into their interlanguage.

This study is not without its limitations. It did not involve the collection of qualitative data through interviews, questionnaires etc., which could have provided insight into the learners' opinions about the experience of learning CCs.

Future research may focus on collecting feedback from learners and using this information to improve the proposed learning procedure.

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