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The New Educational Review

Peculiarities of Professional Plurilingual Competence of Future International Business Activities Managers

Abstract

The article focuses on one of the trends in modern language education, i.e. the plurilingual approach towards language teaching, since one of the important components of IBA managers' professional competence is their ability to function and communicate in a foreign language environment successfully. Modern high-grade professional training for IBA managers and principles of plurilingual education require research into the problem of the formation of IBA managers' professional plurilingual competence, which presupposes extension of the linguistic repertoire of students. On the basis of a questionnaire survey it was identified that the plurilingual repertoire of the students qualifying in International Business Activities includes the Russian, Ukrainian, English, and German (or French) languages. Besides, specific features of professional plurilingual competence of IBA managers are also identified, which can be used in further research to elaborate effective methods for professional plurilingual competence formation.

Keywords: *language (plurilingual) repertoire, professional plurilingual competence, professional training, mother tongue, dominant language, foreign language*

Introduction

Integration of the Ukrainian economy into the global economic system and the level of competitiveness of domestic businesses and specialists on interna-

tional markets depend greatly on the quality of professional training of students qualifying in International Business Activities (IBA). Professional competence of future IBA managers is revealed through their ability to function and communicate effectively in international professional environments. An important component of the professional competence of IBA managers is their ability to operate and communicate successfully in a foreign language professional environment. Thus, language education is an important part of IBA managers' professional training.

According to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001) one of the main principles of language policy is a plurilingual approach. The relevance of plurilingual education at the current stage is determined by the overall global trend towards integration in the economic, political and cultural spheres. In education, this trend is reflected in the integration of acquiring substantive knowledge, focusing on learning a holistic view of the world, developing students' ability to adapt to international education, science and industry. Plurilingual training includes not only learning different languages and gaining expertise in a particular area based on the use of languages as a means of educational activities, but also the formation of professional plurilingual competence (PPC) of future IBA managers as a universal professional and personal quality, which integrates the linguistic and professional knowledge of the mechanisms and algorithms of speech actions and characterizes the ability and willingness to participate in specialist professional intercultural communication.

Here, the distinction should be made between the notions of "plurilingualism" and "multilingualism". The latter is the knowledge of several languages and the coexistence of different languages in society. Multilingualism can be simply achieved by encouraging students to learn more than one language, or decreasing the dominant position of English in international communication. In contrast, the plurilingual approach emphasizes the fact that the language experience of each person includes the language they use at home, the language of society, and the languages of other nations. Languages and cultures do not exist apart in human mind, but create the so-called plurilingual competence, which includes linguistic knowledge and experience, and in which languages interact. In different situations, people may refer to this competence to achieve effective communication with a particular person. For instance, the parties can move from one language or dialect to another, developing their ability to express their views in one language and understand other languages. Moreover, a person may use competences gained in several languages to understand the meaning of a text (written or oral) in an unknown language by identifying words of Indo-European origin in a new form.

The person who has at least a poor knowledge of a language can be a mediator between people who do not know a common language. If there is no such agent people are equally able to achieve a certain degree of understanding, using all the linguistic stock, experimenting with alternative forms of expression in different languages and dialects using paralinguistic means (gestures, facial expressions) and simplifying the language (Coste, 2009).

From this perspective, the goal of language education has changed significantly. Now it is not simply viewed as achieving excellence in one, two or even three individual languages with an ideal native speaker as a model. Instead, the goal is to develop a plurilingual repertoire of students at different linguistic competence levels (CEFR, 2001).

The issues of multilingualism and plurilingualism have been investigated from different angles. EU experts on plurilingual education (Beacco, 2009; Breidbach, 2003; Cavalli et al., 2009) consider political aspects of the notions. Plurilingualism has been the object of research both from the linguistic (Weinreich, 1953; Haugen, 1953; Vinogradov, 1990) and psychological viewpoints (Vygotsky, 2005; Vereshchagin). D. Atkinson (2011) and M. Canale (1980) focus their research on language teaching methodology. However, the researchers consider learning different languages as purely second or third language acquisition, but not as a unique process of plurilingual competence formation that presupposes considering some specific psychological features, taking into account the educational environment, and overcoming certain difficulties.

Thus, the presented research aimed at investigating the peculiarities of professional plurilingual competence of IBA managers. This was achieved by analyzing the linguistic repertoire of IBA students and identifying specific features of their plurilingual competence.

Research Methodology

The research on the target group of students qualifying as students of a bachelor's degree in International Business Activities at Donetsk National Technical University (DonNTU) was conducted in 2013 in the form of a questionnaire survey and language competence test. The primary goal of the research was to identify the language repertoire of IBA students on the basis of a questionnaire survey and analysis of academic curriculum. The second goal was to identify specific features of PPC development, which was achieved through careful study of literature on the research problem and the target group testing.

A questionnaire with closed-ended questions was applied in the research. The questionnaire was divided into three parts: 1) basic information about the respondent; 2) information about an individual's language repertoire; 3) self-evaluation questions to identify specific features and difficulties in the process of various languages acquisition.

A language competence test was applied to investigate the target group's competence level in English as the first foreign language to determine if there is a certain correlation between an individual's competence level in the dominant language and the process of acquiring a second foreign language.

The language competence test in Ukrainian was conducted to identify the level of the Russian language positive or negative effect.

Research Findings

The language repertoire of the IBA students studying in DonNTU can be described in terms suggested in the *European Reference Document for Languages of Education (ERDLE)*:

- LE – languages of education which are a part of curriculum;
- LS – language as a subject;
- LAC – language across the curriculum used for teaching and giving instructions in other subjects;
- MT – mother tongue;
- FL – foreign language.

According to the questionnaire survey, the language repertoire of the IBA students comprises the following languages shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Language repertoire of future IBA managers

Languages within DonNTU		Languages beyond DonNTU	
LS	LAC	MT	FL3
Ukrainian	Russian	Russian	French
FL 1 (English)	Ukrainian	Ukrainian	Spanish
FL 2 (German or French)	English	Armenyan	Italian
		Turkish	Japanese

Ukrainian is a part of the language repertoire of the students majoring in IBA as 1) a separate discipline; 2) language of instruction in such subjects as the History of Ukraine, the History of Ukrainian Culture, Sociology, etc.; 3) mother tongue.

The language repertoire of the IBA students includes Russian as their mother tongue and as the language of instruction in such disciplines as Philosophy, Statistics, Marketing, International Economy, etc.

Future IBA managers learn English as a subject (FL1). Besides, English is a means of instruction in the following subjects: Higher Mathematics, Business Communication, Communication Training, Cross-cultural Management, etc. The language repertoire of the IBA students includes also German or French (optional) as a subject (FL2).

National minorities languages (Armenyan, Turkish) are a part of the language repertoire of approximately 2% of the students. Apart from this, about 32% of the respondents learn FL3 (French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese) beyond the curriculum. Since the research into the problem of PPC formation is limited by the conditions of organized study in DonNTU, we focus attention only on languages as subjects and means of instruction.

According to the curriculum, the professional plurilingual education of IBA students presupposes learning such disciplines as English for Professional Purposes, Ukrainian for Professional Purposes, Business English, FL2 (German or French), Business FL2 (German or French). The structure of language training shows that the educational environment of DonNTU provides favourable conditions for the development of professional plurilingual competence of the IBA students (cf., Table 2).

Table 2. Structure of Language Training in DonNTU

Terms	1	2	3	4	5	6
Subjects	English for Professional Purposes	Business English	Business English	Business English	Business English	Business English
			Ukrainian for Professional Purposes	Ukrainian for Professional Purposes	Ukrainian for Professional Purposes	
			FL2 (German or French)	FL2 (German or French)	Business FL2 (German or French)	Business FL2 (German or French)

The following specific features of the IBA managers' professional plurilingual competence in DonNTU have been identified on the basis of the questionnaire survey, FL1 competence test and Ukrainian competence test:

1. The process of the IBA managers' PPC formation under the conditions of organized study in DonNTU is characterized by elements of natural bilingualism and artificial subordinate bilingualism. Natural bilingualism presupposes mastering two languages in early childhood. Bilingual individuals are able to use freely their mother tongue and the language of society and to switch languages when the situation requires it. According to the questionnaire results, almost 100% of the IBA students are natural bilinguals, with Russian being the dominant language of approximately 83% of the respondents. Ukrainian is the official language of state institutions, science, education, TV and radio broadcasting; so students immerse into the Ukrainian language environment from their early childhood and continue learning it in schools and universities. Thus, we identify Russian as MT1 and Ukrainian as MT2 according to the order of acquiring the languages.

Learning English and German (or French) is of artificial subordinate character. It means that students gain competences in these languages under artificial conditions of school and university study. Subordination is revealed through the order of learning the foreign languages. Thus, English is dominant (87% of the respondents) among foreign languages taught in the university.

2. In contrast to bilingualism, which is the coexistence of two languages, plurilingualism is a more complex phenomenon, i.e. in our case the coexistence of four languages in the consciousness of the IBA student who uses these languages in different communicative situations depending on the purpose and place of communication. Here, the difference should be traced between collective and individual plurilingualism. Future IBA managers are characterized by their own individual plurilingualism, since it does not presuppose that the speech community they belong to must use these four languages. All the four languages forming individual plurilingualism of a student are in relationships of functional dependence and addition.

Figure 1 shows the plurilingual repertoire of the IBA managers as a system of interconnected and interdependent elements. In the process of almost simultaneous acquisition, Russian and Ukrainian affect each other both positively and negatively. When children start learning the FL1 at school their MT1 becomes a linguistic basis for acquiring English. Later, when students start learning FL2, English, in turn, becomes a linguistic basis for FL2, but FL2 also influences FL1 competence development.

Individual plurilingualism of the majority of IBA students is characterized by mastering Russian and Ukrainian as their mother tongues, B2 competence level in English, and the competence level in German (or French) ranging from A1 to B2 (cf., Table 3).

Figure 1. IBA managers' plurilingual repertoire development

Russian (MT 1) ⟷ Ukrainian (MT 2)

↘

English (FL1)

↕
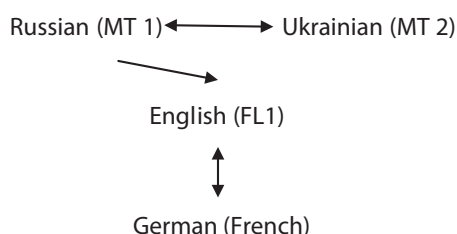
German (French)

Table 3. Language competence level of IBA students

Competence level	Ukrainian (%)	Russian (%)	English (%)	German (%)	French (%)
Native speaker	72	98	-	-	-
C1-C2	-	-	10	3	-
B2	19	-	44	15	17
B1	7	2	39	20	19
A2	2	-	5	32	36
A1	-	-	2	30	28

The differences in language competence levels are not contrary to the definition of plurilingual competence as an individual's ability to use a repertoire of languages and competences of different kinds and levels within the repertoire (From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education, 2007). Subordination of plurilingualism is also revealed through the multilevel competences in the four languages. A distinctive feature of this kind of plurilingualism is that Ukrainian (MT2) and English (FL1) are subordinate to Russian (MT), and FL2 (German or French) is subordinate to FL1. FL2 acquisition is supported psychologically and linguistically by the three previously learned languages.

3. PPC developing in terms of contacting the four languages (Russian, Ukrainian, FL1 and FL2) generates, at least, the following two patterns:
   a) problems of interference (negative impact);
   b) opportunities for positive transfer.
The interference caused by the negative impact of the MT on Ukrainian and FL1 on FL2 covers all the linguistic levels of language (phonetic, lexical, grammar, spelling) (cf., Table 3), but to varying degrees and cannot influence the overall

development of FL2 competence (productive and receptive), and can also affect the non-verbal behavior. The negative effect of MT1 and MT2 is usually traced at the lexical level. As a result of the Russian language influence students often confuse Ukrainian collocations with the norms of their MT1, and vice versa. MT1 interference is mostly revealed in FL1 in pronunciation, i.e. a noticeable "Russian accent". The negative effect of FL1 is revealed at the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical levels and in spelling while students start to learn FL2.

Positive transfer can occur at four levels:

a) at the level of speech and thinking activities: the more languages one knows, the more developed are the speech and thinking mechanisms, e.g., short-term memory, mechanisms of perception, mechanisms for selecting and combining, mechanisms of reproduction in speaking and writing, etc.;

b) at the language level: similar linguistic phenomena in their MT1, MT2 and FL1 are transferred to FL2. Positive transference between Russian and Ukrainian occurs at the grammatical, phonetic, and syntactic levels because of the common synthetic nature of the languages. A positive impact of FL1 on FL2 is mostly revealed at the grammatical level;

c) at the level of educational skills that the student has mastered in the process of learning the MT1 and MT2, and especially FL1, which are transported to master FL2 and, thus, also facilitate the process of acquisition;

g) at the socio-cultural level: socio-cultural knowledge acquired in the process of studying FL1 and the new socio-cultural behavioural skills are also the objects of transference, especially since there is a proximity of Western European cultures.

4. The frequency of interference and transfer phenomena occurrence depends on three factors:

a) the level of speech development in the student's MT and its conscious use;

b) the FL1 competence level: FL1 (English) positive transfer is determined by the FL1 competence level. 71% of the students whose level of competence in English according to the European Languages Framework is above B2 experience a positive impact of English while learning German (or French);

c) the interval of time between FL1 and FL2 acquisition: the smaller the gap, the greater the FL1 impact on the FL2 acquisition.

5. The influence of FL1 on the process of FL2 acquisition is stronger than the influence of the MT1 or MT2.

Conclusions

Formation of a plurilingual individual is the result of organized purposeful learning in which the student's linguistic consciousness adapts to the multilingual environment. A plurilingual person has the ability to integrate into the global multilingual environment, i.e. they are able to adapt to different social and cultural conditions.

We believe that mastering the PPC is not consistent learning of different languages, but learning to identify similar and specific features in languages, which requires creating new teaching methods.

The languages which comprise the plurilingual repertoire of an IBA student are affected both positively and negatively by dominant languages (Russian and English). Thus, further research into the field of plurilingual education can be focused on creating new methods in PPC formation to overcome negative influences of MT1, MT2 and FL1 and FL2.

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