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ACQUIRING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES BY CADETS OF MILITARY HIGHER MILITARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Ongoing war in Ukraine intensified the necessity to have a good command of English for military personnel. Consequently, tertiary education establishments are facing an urgent requirement to create or tailor syllabuses and programs of instruction for the disciplines that account for mastering foreign language for professional purposes which, in turn, involves creating courses and textbooks based on the assessment of goals and needs, as well as functions for which English is required.

The article tackles the problem of designing and delivering a course in military specialized English, considers its stages, provides an analysis of its methodological foundations, describes the course structure, presents a complex of effective tasks and activities that enable acquiring communicative competence in a foreign language for professional purposes.

Key words: *communicative competence; future officers; foreign language for professional purposes; course; feedback.*

Introduction. Present day military and political challenges require an effective response and an increase in the level of operational interoperability between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and NATO member states to perform joint tasks and training abroad. We cannot but agree with M. Hrebenuk and V. Krykun who state that “one of the essential tasks in the language training system is formation of sufficient level of foreign language communicative competence of Ukrainian service members, which will enable them to successfully accomplish professional tasks in foreign language environment, partake in international defence cooperation activities and multinational peacekeeping operations” [1]. Accordingly, the responsibility of service members to master English as the main working language of NATO is increasing. In this context, higher military educational institutions are tasked to train future officers to acquire the necessary competencies, which include the ability to communicate in a foreign language in official activities during the performance of professional duties in a foreign language environment.

At the Hetman Petro Sahaidachnyi National Army Academy the discipline «Foreign language for professional purposes» is included in the selective component of the educational program and is studied during the second and third years if chosen by future officers. A unique feature of this discipline is the preparation of future officers for effective communication, which is determined by the ability to express one's own thoughts and understand the thoughts of the interlocutor in a real professional situation

[2]. Therefore, systematic work is needed to transform the goals of learning a foreign language into a practical plane. Its essence can be seen in the development of adequate methods, restructuring of the process of learning a foreign language in the interests of effective assimilation of communicative skills by cadets [3].

Analysis of relevant research. The relevance of the discussed topic is substantiated in the Roadmap for improving language training in the Armed Forces of Ukraine for 2021-2025, the Draft Law on the Use of the English Language in Ukraine, the Standardization Agreement STANAG 6001. The formation of foreign language communicative competence was studied by Ukrainian scientists R. Hryshkova, O. Yefimova. The effectiveness of using the competence approach in learning a foreign language was substantiated by R. Docking, communicative and student-centered approaches by K. Brown, D. Nanen, J. Richards. I. Zaichenko described the principles of systematicity and consistency, accessibility and visibility in pedagogy. N. Shalyhina analysed the development of communicative competence of multinational HQs in the process of military professional training for participation in peacekeeping operations. Despite substantial research on the problem of foreign language training in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the problem of acquiring communicative competence in foreign language for professional purposes by the cadets of military higher educational institutions has not been considered enough.

The purpose of the article is to reveal the rationale and specifics of the course «Military Specialized English (Mechanized and Tank Troops)», describe the stages of its creation; tackle its methodological foundations and structure; present a set of effective exercises that form the ability to communicate in a foreign language for professional purposes based on the feedback received from teachers and cadets of the experimental groups.

Research methods applied in the study included methods of analysis and synthesis, systematization, induction and deduction.

Results. The program of discipline «Foreign language for professional purposes» is compiled on the basis of cadets' goals and needs analysis, as well as the duties for which the English language is necessary in the official activities of the future officers. The needs and goals for learning English change in accordance with the requirements of time, qualification characteristics and documents that regulate the organization of military specialists training system. Accordingly, it is necessary to review them regularly and make changes to the curriculum of the educational discipline in order to improve the organization of the educational process and contribute to the formation of the necessary competences for communicating in English in a professional environment. Therefore, the teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages and Military Translation of the National Army Academy conducted a study of the needs and goals of studying the academic discipline «Foreign language for professional purposes», as well as an analysis of the educational and professional programs «Mechanized troops command and control» (2022) and «Tank troops command and control» (2022) and changes were made to the syllabus, training programs of the discipline «Foreign language for professional purposes», taking into account the requirement to study professional topics specifically for units of mechanized and tank troops. As a result of these additions

and changes, a group of authors, namely M. Levko, O. Sovhar, V. Boychenko, I. Antoniv, O. Shcherba and I. Tychna designed a course and wrote the textbook «Military Specialized English (Mechanized and Tank Troops)» [4], which was tested in two experimental groups.

Ukraine's European integration aspirations include the recognition of European standards in the field of language policy. According to the data for 2021 of the EF English Proficiency Index annual study on determining the level of English language proficiency in different countries of the world, Ukraine belongs to the countries with an average level of English language proficiency and occupies the 35th position in the ranking out of 111 countries in the world [5]. The study also proves that adults are the driving force behind the development of English proficiency in Europe, undermining the common belief that most people learn English at school. Since 2015, young school leavers from Europe have held steady, while every other age group has improved significantly. Adults over the age of forty scored almost 100 points [5], which indicates the expediency of learning English in institutions of higher education and in intensive English language courses.

In June 2023, the President of Ukraine submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine «Law Draft the on the Use of the English Language» No. 9432 of 06.28.2023, which in the third article obliges command of the English language for military officers serving under a contract, the list of which is established by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine [6]. The document states that «the transformation of the status of the English language in Ukraine is a necessity and a strategic step towards the full membership of our country in the EU, because command of the English language is a key competence in the conditions of globalization changes» [6].

According to the Roadmap for improving language training in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (for 2021-2025), approved by the decision of the Minister of Defence of Ukraine on March 1, 2021 (No. 17108/z/11-2020 dated February 24, 2021), it is determined that it is a strategic goal is to ensure the achievement knowledge of a foreign language at a level not lower than the Standardized speaking level of Standardized Language Profile (SLP) Level 1+ «Survival» until 2024 and SLP Level 2 «Functional» from 2025 according to the NATO STANAG 6001 standard by officers [7] in listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

Therefore, at the first stage of developing a course, the teachers of the Department of Foreign Languages and Military Translation of the National Army Academy analyzed the needs of future officers of the mechanized troops in order to achieve the standardized level of SLP 2 during the study of the discipline «Foreign language for professional purposes. First, the description of the level of speech competence of SLP 2 Functional» was analyzed and the main competences in listening, speaking, reading and writing were determined; the educational and professional programs Mechanized troops command and control» (2022) and Tank troops command and control» (2022) were considered. Secondly, a survey was conducted among cadets regarding their communicative needs and a list of topics to be covered in the curriculum and, accordingly, in the «Military Specialized English (Mechanized and Tank Troops)» course.

Finally, a series of consultations were held with the faculty of the Department of Tactics to specify the selected topics and the content of the future course was approved, containing seven topics: «Mechanized and tank troops in the structure of the Army of the Armed Forces of Ukraine», «Small arms», «Military equipment», «Task organisation of mechanized and tank units», «Military topography», «Combat operations of mechanized and tank units», «Troop Leading Procedures», professional knowledge in which the cadets acquired studying the academic disciplines of the professional training cycle.

During the second stage – planning – a structural framework of the course was drawn up, its content, components, and deadlines were approved, as well as the scope and authors of each unit.

The course «Military specialized English (Mechanized and tank troops)» is designed for 100 hours of practical classes and 50 hours of self study and intended for the cadets of the Hetman Petro Sahaidachnyi National Army Academy, specialty 253 «Military management (by types of armed forces)» specializations «Mechanized troops command and control» and «Tank troops command and control». As a main resource for the course a textbook was created according to the thematic principle, including seven separate topics that do not depend on each other and, if necessary, providing an opportunity to study the content in any sequence. Each topic is a separate module, which consists of lessons corresponding to the topic of the module. Each lesson is designed for 2-6 hours of practical classes and self study.

At the third stage – design – the methodological foundations and principles of learning, which were the basis of the course and the textbook, were discussed, among which a competence-based, communicative and student centered approach to language learning was defined, as well as the principles of systematicity and consistency, accessibility and visibility. Based on the competency-based approach to language learning, the authors understood that it was necessary to «shift the main focus from what students know about the language to what students can do with it» [8].

Since a communicative approach to language learning involves the creation of «an environment in which a student has the opportunity to learn an authentic language» [9]. And authentic language is language that is used in the real world to discuss meanings and accomplish tasks. D. Nunan notes that «the communicative environment emphasizes interaction, conversation, and language use, not learning about the language» [10]. Therefore, when planning the lessons, it was necessary to develop activities, the main focus of which would be on teaching communication through interaction in the target language.

Adhering to the principles of student-centered learning, authors made sure the classes were «focused on the needs and abilities of students, as well as topics that relate to life, needs, and their interests» [11].

It was agreed that the modern military doctrines of Ukraine and the USA, the provisions of field manuals and other military documents would be used in the training process, which would allow the cadets to learn about the main military equipment and weapons of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and NATO countries, to master the basic English military and professional terminology, grammatical and

lexical specifics inherent in American military-technical texts, field guidelines, instructions, descriptions, etc.

Together a group of authors developed a sample of a lesson, which contained a text, a word list in English and Ukrainian, providing the lexical minimum corresponding to the topic of the lesson, and tasks to check comprehension of the content of the text. It was agreed on the use of authentic and adapted materials that can be used both in the classroom and during self study. A set of exercises aimed at assimilation of lexical material was also developed, from which the teacher can choose the most appropriate ones, taking into account the level of the cadets and time allotted for classes.

The authors also developed tasks for understanding the discourse heard or read, the development of dialogic, monologic and written speech, which are designed to develop the ability to communicate in a foreign language with service members from other countries while performing their professional duties. As typical exercises, cross-choice exercises (true/false), matching tasks, multiple choice tasks, gap-fill tasks, question and answer exercises, tasks of the extended responses» type, student dictation, reading the text to obtain information, skimming and scanning, replacing/inserting lexical items, retelling, abbreviated-selective retelling, retelling-translation, acting as an interpreter, translating were used. The pilot lesson was tested on a group of future officers, the strengths and weaknesses of activities and text were analyzed and appropriate changes were made.

The fourth stage – developing the course (writing the textbook) – involved authors writing their lessons, testing them on other authors, as well as separate groups of future officers, correcting errors, amending ineffective tasks. In addition, at this stage an introduction, methodological recommendations were added, a list of abbreviations was created, audio recordings and audio scripts were processed, a list of resources was compiled, and an electronic version of answer key for teachers was developed. After the publication of the first edition of the textbook, it is currently undergoing the fifth stage – the validation stage based on the example of two groups – one group specializing in «Mechanized troops command and control» and the second – «Tank troops command and control». The authors discuss the exercises, lessons and topics with the teachers of the groups and analyze the useful feedback from the cadets doing the course regarding various aspects of its effectiveness. As a result of the analysis, the authors make corrections and additions to its future publication.

When giving their feedback the teachers and cadets of the experimental groups highlighted exercises for the development of listening skills as a positive aspect of the textbook. Taking into account the requirements of the NATO STANAG 6001 for listening, the group of authors has developed a series of activities to develop this skill in each lesson appropriate for Level 2 (Functional), which is «sufficient for understanding conversation on everyday, social and personal professional topics» [12].

Based on the principle of accessibility and moving from easy to difficult, from known to unknown the authors gradually increased the complexity of the exercises. The teachers of the experimental groups state that incorporating visual aids is effective for the development of speaking and writing skills, as well as increasing the vocabulary, because the textbook contains figures, diagrams, maps, and slides that

serve as a support for speaking activities. Nation and Newton also believe that visual aids «provide a conceptual framework through cultural context or other clues, and this helps with natural associations of images and words» [13].

It is worth noting that, according to the future officers, the most interesting of the seven topics was the topic «Military equipment» and especially the task of comparing the specifications of various types of military vehicles. As the most difficult to study, the cadets named the lessons «Defensive operations» and «Offensive operations». The probable reason is that those lessons contain a significant amount of new vocabulary, so one of the solutions to this problem may be to increase the number of hours for classroom study. Among the exercises on learning and consolidating lexical material, the future officers named exercises for finding Ukrainian equivalents of words in English-language texts and exercises for deciphering abbreviations as quite engaging. Exercises in which it is necessary to give answers to questions to the text were named as the least motivating.

Conclusions. Designing and developing a course «Foreign language for professional purposes» in a military institution of higher education requires a thorough study of the future officers' needs for the formation of the necessary foreign language communicative competences in the professional sphere, as well as meeting the requirements of guidelines to achieve the necessary learning outcomes.

The stages of course preparation included needs analysis, planning, design, development, and testing and validation; involved a detailed selection of topics required for study, methods and principles of teaching, testing of trial exercises and lessons, and making changes.

Discussion and analysis of feedback from teachers and cadets of the experimental groups allows the authors to monitor the positive and negative aspects of the exercises, correct shortcomings and make suggestions for changes in the training programs of the discipline so that they remain relevant, effective and interesting for future officers, and, therefore, motivate them to acquire the necessary communicative competences.

Prospects of further research are envisioned in supplementing the course with interactive e-course on LMS Moodle to enable blended learning and enhance development of foreign language professional competence of future Armed Forces of Ukraine officers.

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РЕЗЮМЕ

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ФОРМУВАННЯ ІНШОМОВНОЇ КОМУНІКАТИВНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ З ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ ЗА ПРОФЕСІЙНИМ СПРЯМУВАННЯМ У КУРСАНТІВ ВІЙСЬКОВИХ ВИЩИХ НАВЧАЛЬНИХ ЗАКЛАДІВ

У часи воєнного протистояння України з російською федерацією зростає практична потреба володіння англійською мовою як мовою міжнародного спілкування для військовослужбовців офіцерського складу Збройних Сил України. Відповідно, перед закладами вищої освіти постає необхідність внесення змін до силабусів і програм дисципліни «Іноземна мова за професійним спрямуванням», щоб задовільнити потреби майбутніх фахівців відповідно до вимог сьогодення, що зі свого боку передбачає створення курсів підготовки, які базуються на оцінці цілей і потреб, а також функцій, для виконання яких необхідна англійська мова.

У статті описано етапи створення курсу «Військова спеціалізована англійська (механізовані та танкові війська)» на базі підручника авторів М. Левко, О. Совгар, В. Бойченко, І. Антонів, О. Щерби, І. Тичини, проаналізовано його методичні основи, описано структуру і на основі розгляду зворотнього зв'язку від викладачів та майбутніх офіцерів експериментальних груп Національної академії сухопутних військ імені гетьмана Петра Сагайдачного виокремлено комплекс ефективних завдань, які формують та розвивають комунікативну компетентність з іноземної мови за професійним спрямуванням.

Створення курсу складалося з п'яти етапів: аналізу потреб, планування, проектування, написання та апробації. Курс включає сім тем, які не залежать одна від одної і можуть вивчатись як окремі модулі і покликані формувати у курсантів спроможність використовувати лексичні одиниці за професійними темами у самостійних усних і письмових висловлюваннях; висловлювати та обґрунтовувати власну думку в дискусіях; описувати схеми, малюнки, складати доповіді до слайдів; а також розвивати навички читання, сприймання мови на слух, усного та письмового перекладу текстів із військово-професійної тематики.

Ключові слова: *іноземна компетентність; майбутні офіцери; іноземна мова за професійним спрямуванням; етапи написання; зворотній зв'язок.*