

SPECIFICS OF PEDAGOGICAL SPEECH IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Natalya Zhadko

Moscow City Pedagogical University

Abstract. From the perspective of the activity approach, the author examines the difficulties faced by university teachers when conducting classes in a digital environment (in distance learning). The research objectives are: 1) conceptual analysis of the content, specifics, and conceptual modeling of the structure of pedagogical speech; and 2) conducting field research (observation) from 2020 to 2023. A conceptual model of pedagogical speech was created and proposed, consisting of oral speech, written speech, and nonverbal speech. The field research (observation) showed that in the conditions of distance learning, the existing shortcomings and limitations of pedagogical speech intensified. The majority of university teachers during the field research demonstrated significant difficulties with oral, written, and non-verbal speech in online classes. An analysis of the specifics of pedagogical speech in distance learning in the TIMS program from 2020 to 2023 was carried out. Practical recommendations for using pedagogical speech as a tool in the digital environment are provided.

Keywords: pedagogical speech; activity-based approach to teaching, interaction with participants; oral; written; non-verbal speech of the teacher

Introduction

During the COVID-19 period, teachers had to quickly switch all university classes to a digital environment, to a distance format. The transition from offline to online learning often caused difficulties and resistance among teachers and students. These challenges were largely due to the loss of “live” contact between teachers and students in the digital environment. Today, four years later, classes in the digital environment are actively continuing. However, the main complaint about distance learning is still the low involvement of students and teachers in interacting with each other. One of the reasons for these challenges is the lack of understanding of the structure, possibilities, and limitations of pedagogical communication in the digital environment.

Let us note the insufficient development of the concept of “pedagogical speech” in pedagogical literature. Unfortunately, there is practically no active discussion of

options for implementing the activity approach in teaching practice in professional literature (Zhadko 2016; Leontiev 1974). While the teacher's speech culture is actively discussed in the professional sphere, pedagogical speech as a key tool in the teacher's activity is only considered in printed publications and rare studies devoted to the formation of foreign-language speech in classes on teaching a foreign language or English as a foreign language.

Methods

Research methodology: the systemic, activity approach, conceptual modeling, observation. The theoretical framework of the study: theory of speech activity by Leontiev. Leontiev formulated the concept of "speech activity" as a central tool of activity and defined it as an abstract activity, synonymous with practical activity, which has all its properties and components, including actions, motives, purposefulness, and objectivity (Leontiev 1997; Leontiev 1974).

In the theory of speech activity, Leontiev drew attention both to the specificity of speech activity, which "in the form of separate speech actions serves all types of activity, being part of the acts of labor, play, cognitive activity," and to its uniqueness, self-worth, manifested in the fact that "lying at its basis, the motive that motivates it cannot be satisfied in any other way than through speech."

Research objective

The research objectives are: 1) conceptual analysis of the content, specifics, and conceptual modeling of the structure of pedagogical speech and 2) conducting field research (observation) in the period from 2020 to 2023. The author observed the pedagogical speech of 27 teachers of Moscow City Pedagogical University conducting master's classes in TIMS.

Results

1.1. Conceptual analysis of the content, specifics, and conceptual modeling of the structure of pedagogical speech.

In the course of achieving the first objective, a conceptual model of the structure of pedagogical speech was developed and proposed, consisting of three components: oral speech, written speech, and nonverbal speech [1, 2].

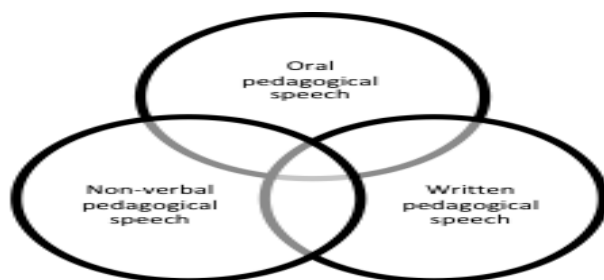


Diagram 1. The model of pedagogical speech

Oral pedagogical speech consists of direct speech utterances, as well as “working” (creating the rhythm of speech) and “speaking” (focusing on the content and action) pauses. Oral pedagogical speech aimed at developing the students’ competencies is represented by instructions, a description of the sequence of actions that students should perform.

Written pedagogical speech in the classroom is inferior to oral speech and is used as a supplement, in the form of presentations, synonymous with oral speech.

Nonverbal pedagogical speech is usually represented by facial expressions (demonstration of the teacher’s attitude toward speaking and toward what is happening) and hand gestures (strengthening oral speech or demonstrating disagreement with one’s own verbal statements).

The structure of the teacher’s oral speech in an online lesson consists of two components: direct speech actions/speech acts (verb phrases) and pauses. It should be emphasized that pauses are understood not as forced silence, not as absent speech, but as a necessary component of the teacher’s oral speech actions not only online but also in the classroom. There are several reasons for consciously including a pause in the composition of pedagogical speech. The deliberate stopping of the speech process itself demonstrates the meaning of the statement, allows the teacher to pay attention to the meaning of what is said, changes the pace of speech, making it possible to avoid monotonous mumbling that lulls the audience to sleep, and gives the participants time to comprehend what has been said. In addition, it is pauses that make it possible to emotionally demonstrate the seriousness of the attitude toward the content and toward what is happening, as well as the teacher’s intentions in the process of an online lesson. Speaking about the meaning of pauses in the teacher’s oral speech, it should be noted that it is the pause that ensures the rhythm of speech, metaphorically creates a common speech space of interaction between the teacher and students, which is absent in reality. It is also worth paying attention to the fact that 40 – 50% of any monologue speech usually consists of pauses, and the frequency of

using pauses in online learning exceeds these figures. This leads to the hypothesis that the teacher's speech actions online become shorter.

Speaking about the structure of the teacher's written pedagogical speech, it should be noted that written speech allows both the teacher and the student to clarify, return to the basic schemes, and move in the planned logic. As an auxiliary one, it can always be and should be turned off in situations of priority contact, for example, when answering a student's question. It is included again in the case of returning to explanation. The process of switching from the window of contact to the presentation and vice versa is very important to keep participants engaged. Attempts to transfer the traditions of spontaneous visualization accepted in classroom work – a whiteboard or a flipchart – to the online lesson turned out to be ineffective only because the teacher has to turn away from the screen, move away from the point of contact – and lose the attention of the participants, and with it the interaction with them. Significant additional efforts are related not only to the technical translation of the visual sequence into the presentation format but also to the substantive revision of visual accents. Since the presentation is an auxiliary tool that supports the teacher's oral speech, the main requirements here are accuracy and brevity. In addition, in an online presentation lesson, excessive floweriness, which excessively attracts attention, is literally harmful. The presentation should not draw attention to itself, otherwise the oral speech will cease to lead, and contact with the participants will be lost.

As for the non-verbal speech and facial expressions of the teacher in the classroom, in the conditions when only the face is demonstrated (less often – the face and hands), an important role is played by the demonstration of three actions: interest in the content of what is happening, interest in the participants, their reactions, opinions, and questions, and showing one's attitude toward the participants' actions. In practice, this means that the teacher's absent-minded gaze is directed at the dialogue windows of the participants throughout the online lesson. When speech is addressed to a specific participant, it changes to a direct gaze directed through the peephole of the video camera.

A teacher who acts unconsciously in an online class, for example, preening him/herself by constantly looking at his/her video image, looking at the clock, looking at the door, propping his/her head with his/her hands, simultaneously answering emails, answering the phone, as well as drinking tea or eating (!), automatically loses the audience's attention. It should be emphasized that facial expressions are part of pedagogical speech, and online enhances the concentration of participants' attention on the teacher's face.

Note that all three components of pedagogical speech are connected with each other and are intended to solve pedagogical tasks, including:

- 1) Maintaining constant contact with the participants;
- 2) Description of the context of the activity (for example, trends and causes of events and phenomena considered in the lesson);

3) Stimulation of the audience activity of participants (involvement in the discussion, asking questions);

4) Formulation of tasks for individual, mini-group, and general group work (as a method of teaching activity);

5) Feedback and answers to questions from participants.

A conceptual model for the correspondence of types of pedagogical speech in an online lesson in Table 1 was developed.

Table 1. Tasks and types of pedagogical speech in an online lesson

Tasks of pedagogical speech in an online lesson	Types of pedagogical speech		
	Oral speech	Written speech	Non-verbal speech
1) Maintaining constant contact with the participants;	Speech constructions Pauses	-	Facial expressions Look at the camera Attention to the participants
2) Description of the context of the activity (for example, trends and causes of events and phenomena considered in the lesson);	Speech constructions Pauses	Demonstration of the presentation	Look at the camera Questions for the participants
3) Stimulation of the audience activity of participants (involvement in the discussion, asking questions);	Questions Responses	-	Facial expressions Look at the camera Attention to the participants
4) Formulation of tasks for individual, mini-group, and general group work (as a method of teaching activity);	Speech constructions Pause	The task is written at the presentation	-
5) Feedback and answers to questions from the participants.	Responses Speech constructions Pause	-	Facial expressions Look at the camera Reaction only to the participants

1.2. Conducting field research (observation)

In a field study and observation conducted from 2020 to 2023 as part of distance learning for 27 teachers (6 men, 21 women) of Moscow City Pedagogical University conducting master's classes in TIMS, the features of pedagogical speech in the digital environment were identified. All the teachers held a doctoral degree and possessed a teaching tenure of 10 to 15 years at the esteemed University. The researchers observed 5 online lectures from each teacher. Each observed online lecture lasted 1.5 hours. The total observation time was about 200 academic hours.

As a hypothesis of the study, the assumption was put forward about the need to correlate the types of pedagogical speech with the tasks of pedagogical speech in an online lesson and the need to use various types of pedagogical speech – oral, written, and non-verbal – in various combinations. It was suggested that the lack of a common communication space in an online lesson determines the need to strengthen the role of oral and non-verbal speech. In order to solve the problems of contact with students, it is necessary to remove the barrier in the form of written speech by switching and even turning off presentations. To conduct the observations, a checklist was developed. The checklist of observations was based on the developed model of pedagogical speech, which included the following groups of indicators:

1) Oral pedagogical speech of the teacher (the speech rate – fast, monotonous, the presence/absence of pauses, the nature of pauses, emotionally charged);

2) Written pedagogical speech of the teacher (the presence of presentation, the quality of presentation, following the presentation in oral speech, the presence of a written assignment for work in groups or individual homework);

3) Non-verbal pedagogical speech of the teacher (demonstration of the face and hands in the camera, looking into the camera (at students), maintaining contact and expressing support facial expressions (nodding head, smiling)).

The study primarily showed that in conditions of distance learning, the existing shortcomings and limitations of pedagogical speech intensified. The data obtained during the study made it possible to identify several trends.

First of all, the analysis of oral communication in online lectures confirmed that many teachers showed a monotonous delivery devoid of emotional engagement. The lack of strategic pauses to capture students' attention, signal transitions between activities, or anticipate questions was noted. During online lectures, teachers exhibited a sense of detachment, leading to more than half of the students switching off their video feeds and disengaging from the session, thus indicating a decline in interest. Discussions with both teachers and students following the study confirmed heightened levels of stress experienced during online instruction. Additionally, students reported waning interest in lecture content within 10–15 minutes of class commencement.

Second, the analysis of teachers' written communication during online lectures revealed that the majority (22 out of 27 individuals) relied on the prepared

presentations for lesson delivery. Five teachers opted not to utilize presentations, instead reading from pre-prepared texts, resulting in a delivery akin to radio broadcasts. However, observations exposed deficiencies in the presentations, particularly in their integration with the spoken content. For instance, 18 out of 22 presentations primarily consisted of dense text in small font on slides, making them challenging to read on screen. This led students to either focus on reading the slides or listening to the teacher, but not both simultaneously.

Third, the presentation text failed to complement oral delivery effectively and proved to be a hindrance. Only four presentations included abstracts and diagrams that aided in clarifying the lecture content and revisiting key points. Furthermore, most teachers encountered technical difficulties with slide transitions and demonstrations, contributing to the students' disengagement. The study underscored that, despite using presentations in online classes, a substantial number of teachers struggled with structuring content effectively and utilizing presentations as a visual aid.

Evaluation of teachers' non-verbal communication during online lessons highlighted significant challenges. While discussions around the lack of interpersonal connection between teachers and students in online education have been prevalent, scant attention has been directed toward identifying the underlying issues and solutions to foster engagement in the digital realm. It was evident that teachers faced substantial hurdles in fostering meaningful interaction with students during online lectures. Notably, the majority of teachers, irrespective of gender or age, lacked proficiency in engaging with students during online sessions, such as prompting students to turn on their cameras, maintaining eye contact, and using gestures.

Many students were unable to see the teacher's face as they often gazed down at notes, thereby hindering visual engagement. The observations underscored teachers' deficiencies in adapting to the demands of working on camera, underscoring the challenges associated with online education.

Conclusion

The following are identified as features of oral pedagogical speech in distance learning: the absence of direct personal contact between the teacher and the participants – students, the physical absence of a common space and the possibility of spontaneous interaction, the lack of the opportunity to see the face, body, arms, and legs of the interlocutor as a whole, limited non-verbal statements and their interpretations for these reasons, technical limitations unsuitable for conducting online classes (the need for additional tools, for example, to wear headphones and interact in an online class using a smartphone, in which there is limited visibility of the interlocutors' faces and visual material), and, as an extreme form – the absence (turned off) of a student's video, when the student's presence can only be seen in the list of participants in the chat.

The main changes that occur in the structure of pedagogical speech in an online lesson were identified. First, in oral pedagogical speech, the role of the pause is changing, which provides a common speech space for interaction between the teacher and students, which is absent in the electronic environment. The frequency of use of pauses in speech should increase, there will be more pauses, and the teacher's speech actions should become shorter. Oral pedagogical speech regarding the formation of activities is often presented in the form of instructions, a description of the sequence of actions that students should perform. A frequent problem of oral pedagogical speech, which is usually paid attention to in classroom lessons, is monotonous "verbless" (inactive) speech, which is a retelling of events and phenomena, in streamlined formulations, without pauses.

Second, the requirements for non-verbal speech and facial expressions of the teacher in the electronic environment are changing. Since there is no opportunity to use body language entirely, the face is always shown (less often, the face and hands), and the face and hands of the teacher express three actions: interest in the content of what is happening, interest in the participants, their reactions, opinions, and questions, as well as the manifestation of a reciprocal attitude toward the participants' actions. Third, in the digital environment, the teacher's written speech is represented only by the text of the presentation. Since written pedagogical speech is of an auxiliary nature, in a lesson in a digital environment, there is a need to constantly switch the attention of participants from oral pedagogical speech to written speech.

Therefore, the demonstration of the presentation should be disabled in situations when contact is a priority, for example, when answering a student's question (and re-enabled when returning to the explanation of the content). The process of switching from a contact window (oral speech) to a presentation (written speech) is usually not required in an offline format, but is important for maintaining interest, attention, and involvement of participants in a lesson in a digital environment.

The results of the observation also showed that teachers were not aware of and did not correlate the solution of pedagogical tasks with the types of their own pedagogical speech online. Oral speech dominates in online classes; however, the pauses necessary to place accents and attract attention are only 20–30% of the time, the oral speech itself for most teachers lasts almost without pauses, monotonously. In most cases, the visual speech represented by the presentation is overloaded with text and pictures, and teachers do not pay attention to changing different types of speech to solve pedagogical problems. It seems that teachers are hiding behind a presentation, and it is not an auxiliary tool in the classroom, but a barrier to communication with students. The most vulnerable part of pedagogical speech in an online lesson is non-verbal speech. Teachers do not maintain eye contact, do not show their interest in questions and answers, and do not control their movements and facial expressions.

Practical recommendations

In 2024, based on the proposed model, a special 12-hour training course “Pedagogical speech as a learning tool in the electronic environment” was developed and implemented for 25 undergraduates. As part of the training, the competencies of oral, written, and non-verbal pedagogical speech of participants in the electronic environment were developed. The training showed that all three types of pedagogical speech needed correction. Therefore, special training in the structure and content of pedagogical speech in the digital environment seems today to be a necessary condition in the training and retraining of teachers.

Thus, oral, written and non-verbal pedagogical speech is the main tool for solving learning problems and interaction between the teacher and participants both offline and in the electronic environment. The lack of consideration of pedagogical speech as the main pedagogical action leads to a decrease in the effectiveness and efficiency of learning both in a traditional lesson and in a lesson in an electronic environment. Moreover, in the conditions of the electronic environment, all the problems of the classroom use of pedagogical speech as a teaching tool only intensify. Therefore, special training for teachers of pedagogical speech in the digital environment becomes a condition for their effective work in distance learning.

REFERENCES

- ZHADKON.V., 2016. Competence approach in the content and methodology of education. In: *Trends in the Development of Education: Leadership in School and Preschool Education: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow. Materials of the XII International Scientific and Practical Conference*, pp. 193 – 202.
- ZHADKO N.V., 2021. Pedagogical speech as a tool of formation activities and solutions to the problems of interaction with participants in the online lessons. *Problems of Modern Education*, no. 1, pp. 144 – 151.
- LEONTIEV A.A., 1997. *Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics*. Moscow: Smyslov.
- LEONTIEV A.A., 1974. *Fundamentals of the Theory of Speech Activity*. Moscow: Prosvetschenie.

Natalya V. Zhadko
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-2425-6708
Moscow City Pedagogical University
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: njadko@gmail.com