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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE HUMANITIES: PROFESSIONAL POLYLOGUE IN A MULTILINGUAL WORLD

Review of the first international scientific and practical conference
“Professional polylogue in a multilingual world:
language, culture, method”
(Moscow, April 6–7, 2023).

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Abstract: This paper presents a review of the first International Scientific and Practical Conference “Professional Polylogue in a Multilingual World: Language, Culture, Method”, which was held at MGIMO University (Moscow, Russia) on April 6–7, 2023. The conference aimed to explore various issues related to linguistics, foreign language teaching, and socio-cultural factors in modern language education. The event brought together over 300 specialists who participated as speakers and active listeners in seven sections, three online discussion panels, a round table, and a student section “Potential”. Discussions included significant aspects of foreign language learning, trends and stages in foreign language teaching methods, the formation of professional identity in a multilingual world, and the cultural aspect of learning and self-development of both students and teachers.

Keywords: professional communication, multilingual world, teaching foreign languages, conference, cross-cultural communication.

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The modern world is currently experiencing a period of rapid transformations. The advancement of new technologies and the widespread dissemination of technological progress have led to the emergence of novel forms of activity and cooperation. In this era of change, shocks, and crises, successful development hinges on the ability to harness the synergistic effects of interdisciplinary approaches, flexible methods, and effective collaboration between diverse fields.

In this context, it is more important than ever to foster a professional dialogue that cuts across language barriers, enabling constructive engagement towards the common goals of enhancing education quality, promoting academic research communication, and facilitating intellectual exchange and inter-university cooperation.

The International Scientific and Practical Conference “Professional Dialogue in a Multilingual World: Language, Culture, Method,” held in April of this year at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, offers an exciting new platform for interdisciplinary discussion on teaching foreign languages in a professional and multilingual context. The conference’s concept, fully reflected in its goals, emphasizes the importance of creating and maintaining productive scientific discourse within a multilingual space while exploring novel perspectives on current trends in research.

The conference brought together over 300 specialists from various fields and disciplines from leading universities in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Perm, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Smolensk, Tomsk, Voronezh, Arkhangelsk, Kaliningrad, and many other cities. Representatives of the professorial and teaching staff of the Minsk State Linguistic University (Republic of Belarus) actively participated in the event. The global goal of such a large-scale collaboration was to analyze current scientific trends and seek interdisciplinary and inter-professional connections in modern humanities research. The conference was organized by the Department of French Language at MGIMO University, namely members of the Organizing Committee: Ogorodov M.K., Loseva N.V., Samorodova E.A., Bakayeva S.A.

The main topics of research and discussion presented at the conference included: foreign languages (Romance, Germanic, rare languages) in synchrony and diachrony: phonetics, vocabulary, phraseology, morphology, syntax; current issues in teaching foreign languages in the modern multilingual world; cultural, psycholinguistic, and didactic aspects of multilingualism; professional competencies and language identity of a foreign language teacher in the modern world, issues of training specialists to work in a multilingual audience; the language of profession as the foundation for forming the professional identity of future specialists: current approaches to teaching; translation studies: theory and practice, conceptual framework, methods and problems; cultural code in teaching foreign languages: literature, art, history.

The conference’s work took place in seven thematic sections, where participants presented their research.

At the conference, special attention was given to the reports presented at the plenary session, which focused on the professional discourse in foreign languages as an object of linguistic and didactic research. The main themes were the paradigms of preparing specialists for communication in the multilingual dimension of their professional activities, interdisciplinary approaches to studying professional discourse, and dialogue as a principle for teaching a foreign language. These studies served as a starting point for further discussion within thematic sections dedicated to various aspects of linguistics, foreign language teaching methodology, cultural issues, and the formation of a modern teacher’s professional identity in the multilingual world.

The section on “Foreign Languages (Romance, Germanic, Rare Languages) in Synchrony and Diachrony” was dedicated to various issues of linguistics and language studies and allowed the identification of several main research trends in these areas. The topics included the semantics and stylistics of modern language, phonostylistics, lexical analysis of the press, the structure and semantics of modern prose, and phraseological expressions in modern professional discourse. A wide range of research was dedicated to changes in vocabulary and the emergence of new lexical units as an inevitable consequence of progress. Thus, current linguistic concepts in the modern language of certain European countries, the reflection of linguistic changes in political media discourse, and neologisms as a positive “side effect” of the pandemic were examined. This section was one of the most extensive and was divided into two subsections: “Germanic Languages in Synchrony and Diachrony: Phonetics, Lexicon, Phraseology, Morphology, Syntax” and “Romance and Rare Languages in Synchrony and Diachrony: Phonetics, Lexicon, Phraseology, Morphology, Syntax. General Issues of Linguistics”.

During the conference section on “Translation Studies: Theory and Practice. Terminology, Methods, and Issues,” various types of translation were discussed. Presentations on literary, political, simultaneous, and consecutive translation were given by conference participants. Translation is one of the most challenging language-related activities and requires extensive preparation from specialists. In this section, participants engaged in discussions not only on theoretical issues but also on translation strategies, as well as the training of specialists for working with students in the study of political, legal, and economic translation. Experts also paid attention to machine translation and artificial intelligence – phenomena that cannot be ignored, given the speed of development of new technologies. Social and political contexts were also touched upon in the discussion of manipulations in media translation and the specificities of interpreting and conveying realities.

The main approaches and methods of teaching foreign languages in the context of the use of new technologies were discussed in the section on “Current Issues in Teaching Foreign Languages in the Modern Multilingual World.” The works presented an enormous experience of specialists in Eastern, European, and African languages, reflecting the main trends in modern language didactics and pedagogy. The authors of the presentations shared their knowledge of the use of modern information and communication technologies in foreign language learning and demonstrated the organization of the language learning process using modern educational platforms and the teacher’s personal website. All presentations sparked great interest and led to lively discussions, ultimately resulting in the participants arriving at conclusions that allow for the establishment of new concepts for teaching foreign languages, based on the interaction of old and new schools, merging traditions and new technologies.

The challenges of multilingual communication have become a key topic of discussion regarding cultural, psycholinguistic, and didactic aspects of multilingualism. Research topics have included interlingual and intercultural interactions, multilingual spaces in universities, code-switching, artificial intelligence, and psycholinguistic issues related to foreign language acquisition. Participants in the section concluded that the modern world requires new concepts and approaches to foreign language learning within the context of multilingual collaboration. Additionally, the concept of the identity of the modern language teacher was examined from a communicative standpoint, specifically addressing the value of plurilingualism for language professionals. Attendees of the symposium agreed that learning a second or subsequent language inevitably leads to a transfor-

mation of language consciousness and a reorganization of verbal and conceptual connections that support cognitive and communicative activities. The unique plurilingual competencies of language professionals were discussed, particularly for those in humanities professions for whom language serves as both the goal, content, and means of professional activity.

The section “Foreign Language Teacher: Professional Competencies and Language Identity in the Modern World” focused on questions related to the preparation of foreign language teachers. A teacher-inspirer is the foundation of a successful educational process. What should a teacher be like? What competencies must they possess to meet the requirements of the modern world? During the session, a comparative analysis was presented of the activities of teachers during extended periods of stability and during times of change. A complex of “personal qualities - competencies – strategies” was proposed for the successful implementation of teaching practice. Speakers and participants discussed the prospects of modeling the context of cultural and educational activities within the process of foreign language teacher training, the use of modern technologies to improve the professional competencies of specialists, and the importance of a teacher’s polycultural competency.

The conference gave particular attention to the section titled “The Language of the Profession as the Foundation for the Formation of the Professional Identity of Future Specialists: Current Approaches in Teaching.” The foreign language of a profession, as an integral part of many humanities professions, plays a key role in forming the professional identity of future specialists. New and effective teaching methods for the language of the profession were proposed in the reports presented at the conference. The existing educational materials were analyzed and the vector of further development was outlined. Colleagues paid special attention to the stages and trends in teaching foreign languages in the fields of law, international relations, international journalism and PR technologies, commercial correspondence, and other related areas.

In the section titled “Cultural Code in Foreign Language Education: Literature, Art, History,” issues of an interdisciplinary approach to teaching foreign languages were discussed. The processes of globalization and new technologies open up a vast and complex multilingual world for future professionals, in which it is impossible to compete without a “cultural reference.” When studying a foreign language for professional purposes, students are obliged to have an understanding of the culture and traditions of the country they are interested in. Should the foreign language teacher include new tools that expand the intellectual range of the student in the teaching program? This question sparked a lively discussion among the section participants. They concluded that in a rapidly changing world, oversaturated with information, it is necessary to seek new methods not only for mastering specific language competencies but also for increasing student motivation. Engaging literary works and their adaptations, cinema, music, theater, painting, etc. is an excellent way to offer the student a new educational experience, pursuing several practical goals at once. The section included twenty presentations dedicated to cultural approaches to the development of teaching methodology, cross-cultural communication, art as a tool for teaching foreign languages, teaching through home reading, prose, and poetry, the importance of cultural code in academic writing education, engaging creative artifacts to form foreign language communicative competence, the influence of theater on motivation, the relationship between machine translation and cultural literacy of students, and much more.

On the second day of the conference, the “Potential” section was organized, where students from different universities (Moscow State Pedagogical University, Moscow State Linguistic University, Nosov Magnitogorsk State Technical University, Institute of International Education at Moscow State Pedagogical University, Saint Petersburg State University, Plekhanov Russian Uni-

versity of Economics, Perm State University, MGIMO University, MGIMO-Odintsovo, and others) gave in-person and poster presentations on their initial steps in scientific research in the fields of linguistics, language teaching methodology, translation studies, literary studies, and cultural studies. The students not only shared their work but also actively participated in discussions, exchanged opinions, and received feedback and comments from expert teachers who attended as listeners and moderators.

Following that, a round table discussion entitled “Teaching Today: Antifragility, Flexibility, Creativity, Interdisciplinarity” was held, during which colleagues discussed issues related to the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, talked about innovations and technical possibilities that have emerged after the transition to online, and held a discussion on the topic of the personality of the modern student. Colleagues discussed the portrait of the modern student in cognitive and cultural aspects, considered the influence of gadgets on the level of teachability, and debated the introduction of new forms of teaching that would take into account changes in the formation of the personality of the student - a representative of a new generation.

The completion of the second day of the conference included three parallel online discussion panels, which provided an opportunity for specialists who were unable to attend the event in person to fully participate in the conference. The first panel was titled “Teaching Foreign Languages Today”. The second panel focused on “General Issues in Linguistics,” while the third was dedicated to translation studies, multilingualism, and language for the professions.

The conference was conducted in a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding. This new direction in the development of inter-university international polylogical communication made it possible to bring together different schools of foreign language teaching, consider the most important issues of developing the professional and cultural identity of future specialists through the study of foreign languages, and the development of linguistics and language teaching during a period of transformation.

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