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Distance Learning – projecting a learning unit. Example of good practice

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Abstract

Distance Learning is a flexible form of university education which focuses on students` self-study, the institution which organizes the study programme provides the students with the adequate learning resources. Designing a university course addressed to Distance Learning students represents a key point in the process of education. The purpose of our research is to specify the demands in designing a Distance Learning university course, examining and illustrating each aspect in designing a learning unit with the topic: *The Concept of "Stylistic Field"*. The learning material is designed according to established objectives, it is accessible, accurate, yet attractive in design, and it presents the expected results and the competences aimed at. The university course proposed by us can be easily uploaded on the e-Learning platform and it can be accessed by students.

Keywords: Distance Learning, learning unit, stylistic field, stylistic space, textual networks, discourse configurations.

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Statement

Distance Learning provides students with increasing chances for professional conversion, they can integrate into labour market easier and perform their initial training. At present, this form of education is focusing on students` self-study and self-training with the help of adequate learning resources ensured by the educational institution organizing the programme of study. The main objective of a Distance Learning programme is the continuous preoccupation for designing, organizing and implementing the education process with a view to complying with European academic standards and with a view to accomplishing standards/ quality indicators. The curriculum has the same structure for all types of education programmes: full courses, distance learning, extra-mural education, they differ in the manner of projecting the teaching/ learning material. Designing materials for Distance Learning courses represents one of greatest challenges teachers confront with. Taking into account the fact that students enrolled in a Distance Learning program do not interact with the teacher very often, the teaching manner has to be adjusted to

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their needs. Designing a university course represents a key point in the educational project as students` skills, abilities, competences and performances as well as the final learning outcomes depend on the quality of the course. The material has the same content as in full courses, yet it is presented differently depending on specific requirements and on the teacher`s professionalism. Every teacher who was assigned a discipline from the curriculum designs the syllabus and establishes the necessary teaching materials. The learning resources needed for self-study are: the syllabus, the course outline, lectures, lecture notes, tutorials, practical work, questionnaires, texts for translation, video and audio material for learning foreign languages, video courses, access to virtual university.

1.2. Methodology

The content of an academic course addressing to Distance Learning students is divided into modules and units which need to be examined step by step. When projecting a unit we need to take into account the fact that every teaching material represents a work instrument which replaces the instructor who is present in the traditional type of education. The course comprises a general outline of the subject, the total hours, methods of assessment, the number of transferable credits, the competences acquired during the course: general, specific, instrumental/ practical as well as behavioral ones. The subjects tackled must "be presented sequentially, each module must rely on the previous ones, must be a continuation and must make reference to them." (Agenţia Română de Asigurare a Calităţii în Învăţământul Superior [ARACIS], 2010 [the authors`translation]/ The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education regulates and monitors quality in Romanian higher education). Each module comprises a larger topic and it includes one/more units so as the students` intellectual work must not be longer than 2-3 hours/unit. A learning unit is an open and flexible structure, it represents a sequence in a module, it has the capacity of generating competences, and it has to be designed according to educational principles specific to Distance Learning. Thus, the information has to be presented in close relation with the purpose and objectives established in the syllabus, yet it has to be accurate, accessible, with an attractive layout which can easily elicit students` attention and which can facilitate a systematic acquisition of knowledge. A unit comprises the following items: course descriptors (essential concepts); the structure and length of the learning unit (the average period of time necessary for self-studying the content); the purpose as well as "a preliminary presentation of the results expected and of the competences acquired after learning the content" (ARACIS, 2010, 18 [the authors`translation]); the theoretical content (accuracy, cohesion, precision, accessibility, correctness in expressiveness); observations, conclusions (multiply retention of essential data); practical work: homework and/or (self)control work; recommended reading list.

2. Application

The purpose of our research is to outline the exigencies is designing a Distance Learning university course, we illustrate our undertaking with designing a learning unit on the subject: *The Concept of "Stylistic Field"*, within the discipline *Stylistics*.

MODULE I: *Stylistics. An Introductory Study /***UNIT (UI 1)**: *The concept of "Stylistic Field"*

2.1. Descriptors: Stylistics – an autonomous discipline, stylistic field, stylistic space.

2.2. The average period of time necessary for self-study the content: 2-3 hours.

2.3. Purpose: Versing students in a fundamental concept of stylistics: "stylistic field".

2.4. General and specific competences:

- E The correct and accurate acquisition of specialized terms: defining the concepts "stylistic field", "stylistic space", "isotopy";

ᴇ   The capacity of scientifically approaching a research topic within stylistics: argumentation of some points of view regarding the autonomy of stylistics as a discipline;

ᴇ   Strengthening the abilities of critical appraisal and of researching linguistic phenomena: versing students in Romanian and foreign researchers` views on the concept of "stylistic field"; making a presentation of the characteristics of the stylistic field viewed from different perspectives of interpretation;

ᴇ   The capacity of applying both the knowledge and the competences acquired: description of the stylistic field of the Romanian adjective.

2.5. The theoretical content

Stylistics has lately raised an increasing number of debates and controversies regarding its "return" and its "recovery". Its main object of study is represented by "individual and functional styles as well as figurative expressive language and speech" (Matei & Sporiş, 2010, 38 [the authors`translation]). Artistic and non-artistic individuality is defined by the specific way of linguistically rendering ideas and emotions. One of the operational concepts in stylistics is the "stylistic field". "Field" is a polysemantic word with different connotations: metaphysical, social, historical, scientific, cultural, stylistic. Consequently, this lexeme is present in different word associations or collocations. Linguists speak about "lexical field", "semantic field", "synonymic field". Any field encompasses a nucleus around which elements gravitate, its vicinity is in a state of continuous movement. The nucleus of a stylistic field radiates "rays", stylistic "waves".

In French stylistics the notion of "champ stylistique" was tackled by Pierre Guiraud, Georges Molinié, Marion Colas-Blaise. We will briefly refer to the "champ stylistique"/ "stylistic field" as tackled by them. Guiraud (1979) represented the stylistic field of the words "gouffre" ("abyss") in Baudelaire`s *Fleurs du mal* (pp.112-114) and "ombre" ("shadow") in Valéry`s poetry (pp.114-117), emphasising their special connotations. Molinié (1986) defines "stylistic field" as "la somme des matériaux susceptibles d'offrir prise à l'analyse stylistique" (p. 13) which comprises three sub-fields that require investigation: the word field, the field of topicality and general characteristics of words, the field of phrastic organization. The figures of speech field (*Le langage figuré*) is differently tackled by Molinié, due to its complexity. Colas-Blaise (2008) discusses the problem of stylistic field extending it to "discourse field": "Le champ stylistique à l'épreuve de la matérialité de l'écrit dans le cadre d'une réflexion sur la spécificité d'une « linguistique de l'écrit », qui retient l'analyse de discours comme discipline englobante, cet article défend une conception tensive du champ stylistique qui, sur la base d'une articulation des niveaux morphosyntaxique et textuel, des points de vue énonciatif, pragmatique et rhétorique, permet de rendre compte de la dynamique du sens dans le texte littéraire." (*Résumé*). In her opinion, the stylistic field must be considered a "tensive" one.

Romanian researchers in stylistics have tried to establish different synonyms for the word "field": "space", "matrix". Paul Magheru (1998) – a contemporary researcher in stylistics, author of numerous books – believes that the phrase "stylistic field" is synonymous with "stylistic space": the motion (field) "situated between the flowing limits of rhetoric and grammar, the limits of **beautiful** expressiveness devoid of any constraints and of **correct** speech subject to grammar norms" (p. 6 [the authors` translation]). Beyond stylistic space, there is a large one, grammar space. Lucian Blaga (1977) establishes a relation of synonymy between "stylistic matrix" and "stylistic field": "a complex of unconscious category functions" (p. 85 [the authors `translation]); "The categories which represent a «matrix» or a «field» complement one another in a «cosmogenetic» way; together they make up the frame or the foundation of possible words." (p. 88 [the authors` translation]). As a consequence, stylistic fields vary in time and space, from one individual to another, from one culture to another. The stylistic field or stylistic matrix has an imprint on each culture. Thus, one can speak about cultural field with a large meaning. Blaga identifies among others the Roman stylistic field and the Greek stylistic field. In the field of applied semantics from a translational perspective it is worth mentioning Teodora Popescu`s fine analysis of semantic prosody on Mircea Eliade`s *La Ţiganci* (2007).

In our opinion the stylistic field is of great importance in the actualization and promotion of a text meaning, in the logic and in the global meaning of the text discourse. At the level of text discourse, the stylistic field is directly generated by the isotopic activity. In structural semantics, the term "isotopy" corresponds to the idea of overall significance posited for a message (Greimas, 1975) or for the entire text which is made up by an ordering set of significances which follow a hierarchy aiming at revealing the meaning of the message. We make reference to Groupe μ`s definition of isotopy as "logical rules of concatenating sequences and a semantic coherence" (1997, 26 [the authors` translation]). The etymon contains the prefixe *iso-* (the same) and the term -*topos* (an equivalent of the "semantic field" defined as a "lexical network" which is organized around a fundamental concept without overlapping and irregularity. It is known that "the vocabulary of a language is totally structured through the juxtaposition of such fields and the overall organization would correspond to a given society`s vision on the world." (Groupe μ, 1997, 28 [the authors` translation]). Being very close to the semantic paradigm, the stylistic field is ascribed both to language associations (linguistic behaviour, networks or textual "identities") and to speech acts (illocutionary, locutionary, perlocutionary), materialized by configurations or "discursive identities". In delimitating stylistic fields one has in view the validity, the redundancy and the identification of certain lexemes in a text and inventorying them up to the exhaustion of the lexematic corpus opting for the basic isotopy, or for thematic configuration (in our opinion). If we take into account Greimas`s definition of isotopy as: "a redundant set of semantic categories which makes possible the uniform reading of the text as it is revealed by partial readings of an utterance after eliminating its ambiguities, this elimination itself being guided by the search for the unique reading" (1975, 3 [the authors` translation]), we notice similarities between isotopy and stylistic field, out of which of utmost importance there is the understanding of a discourse message as a hierarchic set of significances in accordance with the spirit of the represented period. From the perspective of the semiotic interpretation, the stylistic field behaves like a macrostructure of the text-discourse which is directed towards two layers: the behaviour and the expressiveness of the linguistic fact, as a manifestation of the textual dynamics, a component which is materialized by textual networks, respectively paradigms of discursive configurations (an example referring to the correspondence between textual networks and discursive configurations: grammar network and logical syntactical configuration; events network and narrative configuration; semic network and isotopic configuration, figural network and tropical configuration, etc), components which, according to Fontanille (1999) correspond to "textual identities" and to "discursive identities" (p. 195 [the authors` translation]). The stylistic field acts on the three levels of discourse: on text level confirming the actantial role (the actors who are present in the discourse); on the discursive practices level by the reading of isotopies, a rhetorical perspective which proposes theme/ thematic isotopy (the ethical model or the ethical code – Chiorean, 2006, 134-135); on the level of socio-cultural practices by configuring the writer`s profile or the extra-discursive ethos.

We apply our theory with a short demonstration in which we refer to the stylistic field as behaviour and as expressiveness of a linguistic fact in textual networks. For example the grammar network and the logical syntactical configuration of each part of speech is associated with the figural network and with the tropical configuration, which reveals the stylistic values represented by words and structures that acquire figurative expressive values, including figures of speech. A lexical and grammatical class which has a good representation in a language can coin its own universe of figurative expressive images.

2.6. Self-control application: Describe the stylistic field of the Romanian adjective.

2.6.1. Proposal of solution:

The parts of speech perform their stylistic function starting from the lexical, semantic and grammar content as well as in close dependance with their occurrence in a linguistic, extra-linguistic or literary-artistic context. Due to its autonomous semantic (over)load the adjective can make its own way and adventure, creating a stylistic field, a field of adjectival esthemes which bring together the expressive and impressive values (represented by words, impressionable structures, figures of speech that make use of the qualifying adjective lexeme). Along its diachronic evolution the Romanian adjective inherited aspects of the Latin stylistic field: antithesis (e.g. Ars *longa*, vita *brevis*.); repetition (e.g. Mens *sana* in corpore *sano*.); syntactic parallelism (e.g. Ausi sunt transire *latissimum* flumen, ascendere *altissimas* ripas, subire *iniquissimum* locum.); hypallage (e.g. *Nova* urbium fundamenta iaciuntur. (Smarandache, 2005, 36); hyperbole (e.g. nive *candidior*); litotes (e.g. *non parvus*); euphemism (e.g. *minus habens*).

If we can speak about a nominal or a verbal style we can also add the adjectival one. The adjective (dis)qualifies the objects of the surrounding world, renders different characteristics of real and imaginary objects, takes part in the process of rendering the meaning of the literary style. It can be easily identified in objective, scientific descriptions as well as in subjective, literary ones.

2.*7. Control Homework:* Find the stylistic field of the Romanian adjective (landscape description, portrait description, semantic relations and categories, conversion – re(adjectivization) (Arhire, 2011), elements of morphological stylistics, elements of expressive syntax, phonetic expressiveness, figures of speech).

2.8. Control Question: Give examples of other stylistic fields identified in Lucian Blaga`s work.

2.9. Conclusions:

Beyond the different interpretations of the concept of stylistic field, we believe that the elements gravitating on its surface are the words. Words are flexible, they move easily inside the space of oral, written, linguistic or artistic communication, developing multiple contextual significances. Our own use of words in communication coins different styles, various "fields" or "spaces". The following aspects referring to the definition of stylistic field worth being mentioned: it behaves like a macrostructure of the text discourse built on "reading isotopes" (Chiorean, 2007, 76 [the authors` translation]) or like the poli-isotopes of connotation with an important role in the overall reading; tropic configuration is influenced by the lexical grammatical class "adjudicated" by the discursive ethos (the level of discursive practices); it represents a reference point for the rhetoric, ethical and aesthetical codes of the discourse; it offers the perspective of interpreting imagist fields and poetical imaginary (sensible, comprehensible, metaphysical, anti-metaphysical); it represents a reference point in emphasizing/validating the adopted poetical model/discourse/writer (examples for Romanian literature: the noomorphic model in Mihai Eminescu`s and in Nichita Stănescu`s works; the "continuous end" model in George Bacovia`s poetry; the organic model in Liviu Rebreanu`s work; the anamnesis model in Mircea Eliade`s work); it is of utmost importance in the authentic perception of a style/a literary theory/a writer.

3.   **Recommendations**

The high development in IT and modern communication facilitate the uploading of the university course designed by us on the e-Learning platform, providing the students with user-friendliness and with the possibility of accessing the course at any time and from any place.

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