

Title: Hen or Egg? Vocabulary versus Syntax in Russian for the Professions.

Author: Irina Six, University of Kansas

Abstract:

Language for specific purposes (LSP) courses are those in which the methodology, the content, the objectives, the materials, the teaching, and the assessment practices all stem from identified set of specialized needs (Trace, Hudson & Brown, 2015). Importantly, the context and the learners involved drive LSP curriculum—unlike general purposes language instruction, which is often driven by theory alone (Widdowson, 1983).

The paper explains these considerations in application to teaching Russian for the Professions course at KU, and describes the choice of methodology, materials, teaching and assessment practices that have evolved in the process of addressing the specialized needs of Russian students with intermediate level of proficiency. “The learners” and “the context” are the third year students of Russian of various majors united by the interest in contemporary Russia. “The objective” is narrowed to a specific task of presenting about different aspects of contemporary Russia. For the “methodology,” the paper suggests the re-examination of the principles used in applied linguistics for teaching Russian research register. Contrary to the beliefs that “teaching foreign languages for specific purposes in Russia is a rather new developing direction in methodology” (Kazakova), the “scientific research register” (научный стиль речи) as a field of methodology was exceptionally well developed and commonly taught in the Soviet Union. To a less extent, it is still being taught in Russia. The article explains the alteration of some of its categories in view of: 1) thematic factors; 2) learners’ language factor; 3) vocabulary updates based on corpora data. The primacy of training syntax models and developing derivational skills to acquisition of vocabulary and terminology is advocated.