SOME ASPECTS OF GRAMMAR "NONTRADITIONALITY" IN TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

E. Palekha, L. Akhmerova, J. Kapralova

Kazan Federal University (Volga Region) (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The article deals with the specific features of a “new” communicative approach to the teaching of the foreign language grammar. The work aims to determine the distinctive criteria of traditional and “non-traditional” approaches to the teaching of grammar, to find differences between the varieties of the communicative approach and to determine the place of this approach in the contemporary methodical “worldview”. The authors raise the question of the continuity of methodical tradition, tracing the origin of the communicative approach and its theoretic background and considering its involvement in the contemporary humanitarian paradigm. The opinion of G. A. Zolotova is being referred to, according to which it is the anthropocentric point of view that explains grammarians’ interest towards communicativity and functionality. The authors postulate that traditional grammar used to deal with the structure of the language whereas “non-traditional” grammar is interested in its functioning. Consequently, “non-traditional” grammar is speech-oriented, the speaker's intention determines his speech behavior and the choice of linguistic means. The methodological similitude of traditional and “non-traditional” grammar is being emphasized in the article, although both approaches contradict to each other taking into consideration their being onomasiologically or semasiologically oriented and their preference of the specific type of verbal activity. Further, the three species of communicative “non-traditional” grammar approaches are characterized: the functional-communicative grammar of G. A. Zolotova, the theory of functional grammar worked out by A. V. Bondarko and the applied theory of functional syntax of M. V. Vsevolodova. It is also highlighted in the article that all the above mentioned species of communicative grammar are discourse- and text-oriented. The authors point out their following differences connected with the consideration of comparative and methodical criteria. The functional-communicative grammar considers the unity of systematic idea of grammar and the text analysis within the specific language whereas the theory of functional grammar takes comparative criterion into account. The applied theory of functional syntax is both speech- and system-oriented. On the basis of the brief overview of various grammar tasks in the contemporary textbooks on Russian as an foreign language it is concluded that it is the functional-communicative grammar that builds the core of the contemporary linguididactic model of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

Keywords: teaching methods, Russian as a foreign language, the functional-communicative grammar, the theory of functional grammar, the functional syntax.

1 INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of the modern educational process has undergone, on the one hand, some changes in comparison with the pedagogical principles of the XX century. On the other hand, it retained the methodical continuity, the “basicity” of the postulates of basic approaches and techniques. So, at the end of the XX century in teaching Russian as a foreign language practice the traditional approach (based on a descriptive formal grammar) has been replaced with the new teaching principles and explanations that go back to those directions that received in the scientific discourse the conditional names “communicative grammar” and “functional grammar”.

However, is it worth talking about the emergence of a “different” – “non-traditional” – grammar opposed to “traditional” one? The variety of the names of the “new” grammar is also alarming – functional, communicative, functional and communicative – Is their semantic content identical?

At first sight, formal, communicative and functional principles should be recognized as characteristic features of grammar itself, so the question of contrasting formal and semantic grammars may seem meaningless. On the other hand, if one is not referring to the grammatical structure of a language but to the science of it, this opposition acquires a different meaning in the light of the idea of the two-sidedness of a language sign (a form and a content) and the existence of two possible approaches to the analysis of linguistic facts – onomasiological approach and semasiological approach.
In a "New Dictionary of Methodological Terms and Concepts" [1, 50-51], in the article "Grammar" the following methodically significant varieties are indicated: pedagogical (or traditional, practical), communicative (also active, or productive), functional, passive (or receptive). It should also be noted that in this case the classification is given according to several criteria: the orientation to the type of speech activity (active and passive, productive and receptive), the selection and presentation of the material, the object and purposes of the study (pedagogical, communicative and functional).

Pedagogical (or practical) grammar is aimed at teaching a certain language as a foreign language, it is "the reduction of the grammatical material of the studied language in accordance with the aims of instruction" [1, 51]. In fact, this is a simplified formal grammar, which contains information about the cognitive activity of a person, the contextual use of grammatical forms, and the language picture of the world of the language being studied.

Communicative (active, productive) grammar means "a description of a language that reveals the rules for the functioning of language units in speech, depending on the content of the utterance" [1, 98]. In practice, sections of such grammar can be as following: "Expression of spatial relations", "Expression of temporary relations" and others. The movement of studying thought here is carried out in the direction from the content to the form (onomasiological approach). That is why this grammar is active: it is aimed at studying the functioning of grammatical constructions in speech (unlike traditional practical grammar, which represents the approach "from the form to its content" and thus represents the semasiological aspect of the study and is supposed to be passive or receptive grammar).

Information about the functional grammar is located in a separate dictionary entry, that is significant. The term "functional grammar" is not synonymous with the term "communicative grammar", although they have some in common: both varieties represent active / productive grammar style with an onomasiological approach to the facts of language. In contrast to the communicative grammar which studying the rules of the functioning of units of language in the speech, functional grammar studies either "the functions of language units and the patterns of their usage in interaction with their word and form surroundings in utterance and integral text" or "semantic categories and their variants, expressed in interacting multilevel language means " [1, 342], which is convenient for organizing grammatical material for students.

In modern methods of teaching a foreign language functional and communicative grammars turn out to be varieties of one and the same "active" direction (although under the productive and active grammar the compilers of this dictionary understand the communicative grammar, "refusing" this functional status). The obvious shift in the gramarians' interests to the "active" role of a grammar is a natural phenomenon.

The relevance of this study is determined by the importance of the problems associated with the role of traditional and nontraditional technologies in teaching of foreign languages, on the one hand, and the lack of research of their integration possibilities, on the other hand.

The novelty of our research is connected with the fact that it offers some new interpretations to traditional and nontraditional grammar teaching technologies as a variant of speech practice oriented approach in teaching of Russian as a foreign language.

2 METHODOLOGY

Research methods are descriptive and analytical method (refers to the study and problem analysis of psychological, pedagogical, cinematographic, cultural, linguistic, methodological sources of the theoretical and practical nature); grammar and discourse analysis (unlike grammar analysis, focused on the singular sentence, discourse analysis focuses on the broad and general use of language).

3 RESULTS

In modern Russian philology there are three areas of functional-grammatical research: 1) the functional-communicative grammar (FCG), based on the concept of G.A. Zolotova; 2) the theory of functional grammar (TFG), developed by a group of scientists led by A.V. Bondarko; 3) applied theory of the functional-communicative syntax (FCS) by M.V. Vsevolodova.

The functional-communicative grammar connects the system concept of grammar and text analysis: significant units of language are subjected to analysis in connection with the communicative activity of the speaker, the main object of study is the text and its constituent grammatical models. In a broad
sense, it studies hierarchical links between linguistic units (paradigmatic and syntagmatic); if the angle of view is slightly narrowed, the focus of the research in it is coming to identify the functional and semantic features of each grammatical unit of the language.

The "theory of functional grammar" creates a classification, system-descriptive model of categorical grammar; the Russian grammar system was described in a series of grammars of other languages, referring to the aspects of comparison and comparison, unlike the functional-communicative grammar, which refers to the text of one language and analyzes the speaker as the creator of this text.

In contrast to the "traditional" grammar, the functional-communicative grammar and the theory of functional grammar are focused on the study of how the grammar functions, and not how it is arranged. The functioning of the units of the language structure (grammatical forms of the word, syntactic constructions and "building lexemes") is realized in interaction with elements of the intralinguistic and extralinguistic environment. Inclusion of this interaction in the sphere of research and description expands it, but it does not contradict the existing understanding of the essence of grammar, since the categorical basis of the linguistic structure remains the focus of attention. At the same time, the functioning of linguistic units is understood as the interaction of different levels of the language system and environment, conditioned by the system of language and actualized in the speech. Thus, the analysis of any grammatical phenomenon assumes a two-sided view of the student: from the positions of language and from the positions of speech.

The functional-communicative syntax combines the ideas of functional-communicative approach and formal-descriptive and semantic approaches. It describes the linguistic methods of Russian speech generation. M.V. Vsevolodova formulated the task of such an approach to language teaching as the formation of "linguistic thinking", teaching "awareness of the language as a communicative system that will allow it to be seen from the inside" and present the possibility of other configurations of meanings, other means of expression and mechanisms" [2, 4]. The main objects of description here are the content plan (semantic speech space – lexical, grammatical and lexical-grammatical schemes and their value systems, which form functional semantic categories and functional-semantic fields); the expression plan (formal units of the language – syntaxum and utterance – and objects of study – word combination and text); language mechanisms that ensure the emergence and functioning of speech constructions. This concept declares the organizing role of syntax, therefore the central unit of study and learning is a sentence (utterance), the only sphere of functioning of which is discourse.

It is obvious that the presented three directions demonstrate a completely new idea of the grammar – it is supposed to be subordinated to the speech element, the pragmatism of the speaker, the semantic predetermination of the situation of communication.

The communicative grammar as a new direction appeared in the second half of the XX century (G.A. Zolotova, O.A. Krylov, A.V. Bondarko, N.K. Onipenko), and was based on the following concepts:

1. the concept of linguistic pragmatics, which transferred attention of grammarians to the speech-producing personality, which is included in the "a sign – a user of a sign" relationship (goes back to the works of Oxford philosophers (B. Russell, J. Austin, H. Grice, J. Searle),
2. structural literary studies using grammatical categories in order to interpret the prose and poetry (R.A. Jacobson, J. Mukarzhovsky, Ts. Todorov);
3. narratological understanding of the literacy text as a two-sided phenomenon (a content and its expressions) (N.A. Kozhevnikov, B. Schmidt);
4. art semiotics theories (Yu.M. Lotman, B.A. Uspensky);
5. theoretical units of interpretational semantics (E.V. Paducheva).

In the Russian science, the foundation of the communicative grammar of the Russian language was made by G.A. Zolotova. She opposed the basic methods of the "traditional" descriptive grammar to the "unconventional" grammar (explanatory or communicative) and turning to the phenomenon of the triune essence of the language unit (meaning, form and function) as the basis of the grammar of speech. The object of study at first was "the relationship between the component of the sentence and the wordform", later she formulated it as the relationship between the typical value of the sentence and the categorical meaning of parts of speech which participate in its organization [3].

The grammatical structure of a particular language is regarded as an instrument of communication and thinking, of cognition of the surrounding reality, and receives the status of a mentally conditioned category. In this new aspect the structure of a sentence is described as the result of the interaction of
"two plans, in one of which there is reflected the connection between the proposal and the objective world, in the other – its connection with the process of thinking is represented" [4, 24-25]. At the same time, the language structure of the "thought-proposal" (in Zolotova’s terminology) becomes the object of the study, and the set of typical meanings of the sentence in the language is considered as a reflection of the work of consciousness over the comprehension and categorization of the surrounding world [4, 26].

Obviously, in such a scientific paradigm, research interest concentrates around the text, around its grammatical analysis: the interpretation of the meanings of the verbal categories is possible only within the boundaries of textual analysis. Followers of the direction proposed "a model of four stages of interpretation of the text", which includes:

- language models (language tools);
- speech patterns (communicative speech registers);
- text tactics (compositional structures);
- strategy of the text.

That is, the language system is considered as a means of carrying out the communicative activity of a person, and the content of the utterance determines the rules for the functioning of language units in speech.

So, for example, in the practical course of the Russian language the following sections of the communicative grammar are considered: "Expression of spatial relations", "Expression of temporal relations", "Expression of conditioning relations", "Expression of modal relations", etc.

Despite the fact that the concept, built by GA. Golden and developed by her students mainly on artistic texts, organically connects with a number of modern Western studies in the field of cognitive science and psycholinguistics (in particular, with the theory of "thinking for speaking", proposed in American linguistics by Slobin 1987).

The grammatical structure of a particular language was regarded as an instrument of communication and thinking, of cognition of the surrounding reality, of getting the status of a mentally conditioned category. Currently, the scientific community observes the communicative grammar as a theory of language learning, the communicative-grammatical approach in the Russian as a foreign language teaching and cognitive-experimental D. Slobin’s theory ("thinking for speaking"). M.Yu. Sidorova, studying the potential of the interaction of communicative grammar, the communicative-grammatical approach in the Russian grammar and the world experimental methods in teaching a foreign language, found a significant difference between them. She wrote that in communicative grammar the author's position is the goal-setting and it is the most important subject and the organizing center of linguistic analysis of a subject: he chooses and combines linguistic means in accordance with his communicative intention and language qualification. In such experiments as picture naming or object / scene description, there is no intention of talking – the participants in the experiment, who describe the object or a picture, are treated as "representatives of the language", the mediators of its capabilities, they are not taken as subjects of conscious or intuitive selection and combination of language means [5, 279-281].

It is obvious that here the communicative grammar is placed in subjection to the speech pragmatics and grammar of the speaker, which has linguistic and nationally conditioned meanings. This ability of the language to display reality in the language dimensions of a nation must be taken into account in the practice of Russian as a foreign language teaching, because the Russian language picture of the world is reflected in its vocabulary and syntactic models, and in morphological forms, and in intonation, and in speech etiquette, as well as in mimicry and gestures.

In most modern Russian textbooks grammatical material is given in “active” forms – in diagrams, tables, and also through “passive” educational forms – in speech patterns, through texts, dialogues, and the system of exercises itself. An effective form of the hidden representation of grammatical material is that phenomenon that most authors recognize as a system of speech patterns aimed at forming a speaking skill by building statements by analogy, while grammar plays a supposedly "subordinate" role. Sometimes the presented speech model receives a culturally oriented comment (for example, the specificity of impersonal and existential sentences, verbal control, possessiveness).

It should be remembered, however, that the initial unit for constructing a speech sample is the minimal sentence with the structural scheme of the predicate basis and its necessary actors. Each mastered
grammatical phenomenon is consistently conducted through the stage of preparatory exercises (exercises for substitution) to the stage of speech exercises (construction of texts, dialogues).

Thus, the modern methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language borrowed from communicative grammar not only the basic approach to a language, but also took some individual principles of working with modeling the units of the discourse practice of the speaker.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions of the presented scientific and methodological review are the following postulates:

- The core of the linguodidactic model of teaching Russian as a foreign language is the functional-communicative grammar.
- The functional-communicative grammar (grammar of speech) is based on the achievements of the traditional formal-descriptive grammar (grammar of the language), although in many respects it is opposed to it.
- The competence of the functional-communicative grammar includes some peripheral issues of "traditional" grammar, necessary for mastering the skill of producing speech in a foreign (Russian) language.
- A unit of training is a statement (sentence, speech pattern).
- The aim is to immerse in the discursive space of the studied language and its development by mastering syntactic models (from word-combinations to text).
- Morphology has a subordinate role.
- In the syntax it is usually introduced the concept of "speaker" (author, person), his intention determines the logic of constructing the statement, the selection of lexical and morphological means of the language.
- Some features of grammar are explained by the specific type of thinking of the Russian person.
- Mastering grammar is interpreted as a necessary condition for acculturation, mental immersion in the space of another's language.

REFERENCES