METADISCIPLINARY ELECTIVE COURSES AS AN EFFECTIVE
METHOD FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL
PROGRAM (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE COURSE “SEMIOTIC
CATEGORIES OF AN ARTISTIC POSTMODERN TEXT”)

P. Povalko
RUDN University (Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia) (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract
The article is devoted to the analysis of elective (specialized) courses in the educational process of
higher education on the example of the course “Semiotic categories of an artistic postmodern text”,
implemented at the Philological faculty of Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University).
The course is designed for experienced master students who have knowledge and skills in linguistic
and literary analysis of literary texts. The main goal of the studies is to link the components of
philological education – linguistics, linguistic poetry, and literary studies in the aspect of
metadisciplinarity. Methodologically, the course is based on the ideas of such scientists as K. Lévi-
Strauss, R. Barthes, V.V. Ivanov, Y.M. Lotman, R.O. Jakobson and others.
The relevance of the course is determined by its belonging to the anthropocentric paradigm of
humanitarian knowledge that dominates today. This paradigm is based on the search for
interdisciplinary methodological approaches that will be the most effective and correct in relation to the
intentions of the participants of literary communication – the author, the text, and the reader.
It is important to note that the course material is contemporary literary texts. A common characteristic
of the modern cultural era is the postmodern, which determines the specifics of any texts generated
today. All or most of the modern literary works are influenced by postmodern aesthetics, as they are
created in the corresponding socio-cultural environment. Thus, one can speak of postmodern
tendencies with regard to most artistic and non-artistic texts.
The most important textual categories – primarily space and time – are viewed from an
interdisciplinary perspective. Characteristics, functions, methods of language representation of
chronotope are examined in the diachronic aspect. The author’s approach consists in the fact that the
functional and sense-generating specificity of text categories, features of the artistic method, and
language tendencies of the postmodern text are revealed in comparison with the texts of classical
literature and literature of the modern era.
Features of the modern text change research and reader tools. As an object of the analysis, a semiotic
complex postmodern text is proposed, which is examined from a substantive and interdisciplinary
perspective. At the linguistic level, students are given the task of decoding a text through identifying
the mechanisms and methods of the sign use and play on words, analyzing textual and cultural
allusions, deconstruction techniques, etc. At the general humanitarian level, students’ attention
focuses on historical, socio-cultural and philosophical contexts, author intentions, intertextual reflexes,
ways of constructing the content of characters, etc.
The set of tasks, the course material, and the linguodidactic tools used not only expand the
professional knowledge and skills of Philology students, but also form general humanitarian and
cultural competences.
The implementation of such elective courses creates the conditions for multi-disciplinary differentiation
of the training content, providing flexible opportunities for building individual learning path in
accordance with the changing conditions of the modern world, personifies the educational process,
and ensures that the student understands the modern cultural space.
Keywords: higher education, elective courses, metadisciplinarity, contemporary literary text,
postmodern text, semiotic categories.
INTRODUCTION

The course "Semiotic categories of an artistic postmodern text" proposed for the consideration in this paper is implemented at the Faculty of Philology at Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University).

This course is an optional course (elective course), which is included in the educational program of the second stage of higher education (master studies), and targets students with basic knowledge, skills, and experience in linguistic and literary analysis of artistic texts.

The goal of this course is to prepare a reader (= researcher) who is capable of thoughtful and competent reading of complex postmodern texts.

In the twentieth century Europe witnessed a situation of philosophical reflection and search for a new language describing of the changing worldview. Postmodernism arises as a reaction to a massive, commercial culture "Fordism" and sets the search vector for new, relevant to this time narratives and ways to analyze them. The texts created in the new paradigm (the text is not only separable fragments of written or oral speech in natural language, but any results of meaningful activity) require new reading and research practice.

The introduction of the elective course in the educational program provides enhancing the linguistic, communicative and general cultural competence of master students in accordance with their desires and abilities. It also ensures the formation of a new quality of knowledge in general and is consistent with modern educational trends.

METHODODOLOGY

Along with general scientific methods (comparison, synthesis, observation, commenting, etc.), general linguistic and special research methods include traditional didactic methods. Thus, in identifying the didactic value of postmodern works of modern Russian-speaking authors, the author of the research used the method of empirical observation of students' communicative speech activity; psychological and pedagogical method aimed at identifying new opportunities in the analysis of a literary text (using the author's own methodology); methods of questioning and testing in order to identify analytical and communicative competencies and determine the effectiveness of mastering the material by philology students.

RESULTS

3.1 Methodological guideline and course content

3.1.1 Semiotic categories of space and time as the object of study

The object of analysis in the proposed course is a literary text and its semiotic categories of space and time. It is known that the world is determined by language through the personality-space-time coordinates. Formed by the categories of space and time, the system models the narration in a literary text, provides a holistic perception of the artistic reality, organizes the structure of the work and, importantly, forms the artistic meaning. According to M.M. Bakhtin, «any entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of chronotopes» [1]. That is, each of the categories is a separate semantic sign system.

In the text of any work of art, the categories of space and time are lined up «as a hierarchical structure of coordinated meanings» [2] and, transforming from the categories of geometric and physical into the category of semiotic, they become «a language capable of expressing different meaningful concepts» [3]. Thus, the semiotic and linguopoetic character of the categories of time and space in the artistic text is being actualized.

Space and time as textual universals become the methodological platform of the author's game, leading to the most complex transformations of space-time relations, expressed in the unique application of specific language tools that become the subject of research interest.
3.1.2 **Metadisciplinarity as a methodological approach**

The methodological setting of the course is to refer to the current anthropocentric paradigm of humanitarian knowledge. This paradigm is based on the search for interdisciplinary methodological approaches that will be the most effective and correct in relation to the intentions of the participants of literary communication – the author, the text, and the reader.

The students of the course are offered to consider the semiotic categories of the artistic text with regards to interdisciplinarity:

a) Understanding the philosophical essence of these categories is necessary to identify the features of the spatial and temporal organization of the artistic world created by the author.

b) The literary outlook is manifested in the awareness of how language means are involved in creating the genre features of the work, the ideological and imaginative structure of the text, the semantic and emotional representation of the artistic world.

c) The linguistic side is connected with the form of artistic expression in the text, with the definition and study of the arsenal of multi-level language means representing the space-time continuum of the artistic text.

To combine these areas of research, it is proposed to use a semiotic approach, which forms in a certain sense a special «metalanguage», integrating various methods within the framework of all the listed approaches.

The perception of things external to a person, as well as human actions, is addressed to the subject of this perception. The knowledge of reality and actuality (of the worlds of things and actions) is carried out by a person through the use of signs. Semiotics becomes a tool for studying the world that exists in consciousness: in our own consciousness and in the consciousness of others. Here follows the interpretation of the special role of semiotics, for example, by J. Locke: considers «the nature of signs that we use to understand things or transfer our knowledge to others» [4]. It is for this reason that we can talk about the semiotic approach as a universal research apparatus suitable for the humanities and social sciences, an apparatus that focuses on meanings expressed in signs: «whatever these meanings, they must take <...> a symbolic form, visible and heard by us» [1].

The idea of considering semiotics as a metadiscipline, a kind of “mathematics” for the humanities and social sciences, belongs to C.W. Morris, who believed that it should become a unified tool for studying any phenomena that are of a sign nature [5]. A similar thought was expressed by Yu.S. Stepanov, who noticed the need, inevitability and internal justification of the semiotics placement into a science of a special rank, in a kind of metascience [6].

The semiotic view is reflected in the consideration of the various contexts that serve to codify the spatial and temporal characteristics of an artistic text. It is a semiotic language that allows us to overcome a certain “narrowness” of a purely linguistic view when analyzing such difficult categories as space and time, and to reveal the links of language studies with other forms of intellectual and spiritual human activity. Given the philosophical, philological, cultural, and historical connotations, the researcher has the opportunity to achieve the completeness and authenticity of the analysis, to reveal and interpret all the meanings inherent in the text.

3.1.3 **Postmodern contemporary text as the course material**

For analysis, students are offered the prose works of Russian modern prose writers such as V. Aksyonov, A. Kabakov, T. Tolstoy, V. Sorokin, V. Pelevin, L. Petrushevsksaya, A. Salnikova, etc.

All these authors obviously work in a postmodern way. As it seems, it can be stated that we live in an era of postmodern dominance, surrounded by relevant sociocultural tendencies. Therefore, all or most of the literary works are undoubtedly influenced by postmodern aesthetics. Because of this, we can speak about postmodern tendencies in relation to the majority of artistic texts, including those written in Russian - regardless of conscious authors’ attitudes and subjective bias: «Since the modern world is generally postmodern, in whatever genre, type or kind the writer is working now, he is constantly attached to this postmodern language, where everything is established, everything is equal, everything is the basis of <...> staging and some kind of intertextual dialogue» says O. Dark [7].

The text of the postmodern era rejects the metaphysics of presence, in accordance with which the sign refers to some material carrier, representing another entity related to reality. Reality for the postmodern is fictitious, and signs refer only to signs. The concept of reality is formed depending on
the conceptual models and views of the participants of the semiotic process. At the same time, any aspect of the text, including its categories and lexical and grammatical means, can potentially act as signs.

Thus, the modern author appeals to the sophisticated reader, the reader, who is able not only to decode the text, respond to the language game, grasp all contexts, but also to act as a “co-author” of the work, incorporating additional, due to personal experience, meanings, constructing his own content of characters that may differ from the author’s intention. Thus, A.A. Potebnya suggests: «The listener can understand much better what is behind the word, and the reader can better comprehend the idea of his work» [8]. That is, the leading role of the reader in modern prose is determined by the fact that «it is only the perceiver who is thought to be the subject of interpretation as the only possible form of re-expression of the meaning of the work» [9].

The latter does not negate the need for complex internal work for the reader of postmodern texts: in order to fully grasp the concept, the language of the postmodern novel co-author (he is the reader) must not only overcome the modernist project in himself, but also know its cultural codes, be able to identify and interpret them in the given by the author meanings.

It seems appropriate to analyze the modern literary text in close connection with the literary tradition, in relation to the classical literature and the literature of the modern era. Declared postmodern refusal of the literary tradition turns into its actualization. The postmodern text is in continuous dialogue with the texts of the classics and modern, and the literary tradition is a necessary and natural cultural background for the implementation of the “reading postmodernist work” scenario.

Considering the above, the semiotic categories of the modern literary text, the linguistic poetics of modern prose are offered for analysis and consideration in dynamics – in comparison with the representation of the chronotope and the linguopoetics of the previous literary paradigms.

So, students are invited to identify the features and functions of the categories of space and time in the classic works of Russian writers (N.V. Gogol, F.M. Dostoevsky, I.S. Turgenev, L.N. Tolstoy), in prose works created in the era modernism (D. Merezhkovsky, V. Ivanov, A. Beliy), and in the era of social realism (A.S. Serafimovich, A.T. Tvardovsky, A.A. Fadeev, M.A. Sholokhov).

In the course of the analysis, students come to the conclusion that modern Russian literature has a tense, productive dialogue with classical realism, modernism, socialist realism, and world postmodernism.

3.2 Didactic techniques and aspects of the implementation of the course

3.2.1 Didactic tools

The described elective (special) course is practice-oriented. The key didactic techniques are: workshops, independent and group work with the text, discussions in the class.

For the analysis of the text read by the students, a system of questions aimed at the development of linguistic and metadisciplinary observation and skills of hermeneutic interpretation is proposed.

Students will have to master an integrated research methodology, which synthesizes various methods and types of text analysis and its constituent multi-level units. This includes contextual and some types of analysis of lexical material; textual-analytical method of careful reading (in other words, slow reading) of a work of art, naturally associated with immanent analysis; hermeneutic method, which allows in an accessible degree to objectify the interpretation of works.

The result of the course is implemented in the form of a reader’s conference, in which students prepare an independent analysis of one of the modern Russian artistic texts by the author of their choice. The presentation of the research work requires the application of all the approaches and methods of analyzing a semiotically complex postmodern artistic text that is analyzed from a substantive and interdisciplinary perspective.

3.2.2 Linguistic level of analysis

The subject (linguistic) aspect of the analysis of a literary text involves the mastery of various methods of decoding a modern work by students in the framework of linguopoetics.
The focus of the researcher’s attention is on linguistic means representing these or other particularities of the lingopoetics of the modern artistic text. Among them: symbolic and language games, aesthetic mutations, eclectic mixture of artistic languages, styles, genres, deconstruction techniques, irony, etc.

Students are given the task of defining the mechanisms and methods of implementing the sign and language game, identifying genre and stylistic mixes, mixtures of artistic languages, mechanisms of verbalization of irony, and methods of deconstruction and destruction of the text.

3.2.3 Interdisciplinary level of analysis

The interdisciplinary level of analysis of a literary text implies finding, recognizing and including in the interpretation of various contexts of creation, existence and reading of the text. It is contextual analysis that actualizes connotations in a literary text. Connotation shows the meaning of the sign, taking into account the ontological and linguistic experience of the author and the reader, their picture of the world, possible circumstances and specific cases of the functioning of the sign in the text, the full range of contexts (historical, social, cultural, aesthetic, etc.). R. Barthes defines connotation as «a bond, correlation, anaphor, a tag that can refer to other — previous, subsequent, or completely out-of-place — contexts, to other places of the same (or different) text» [10].

The recipient has to turn to his own and national socio-historical memory, cultural and aesthetic space, world philosophy.

From the point of view of verbalization of contexts, the focus of attention of students is aimed at identifying intertextual reflexes – direct or hidden borrowings, quotes, transcriptions, text cross-talks, conscious or unconscious hints and reminiscences. This requires a researcher with extensive multidisciplinary knowledge, linguistic and ontological experience and reading.

3.3 Formed competencies

Educational results of the course implementation form professional, general humanitarian and general cultural competences.

In the linguistic (professional) field, after mastering the discipline, students should: know the ways and methods of analyzing the sign of a complex artistic text; be able to see the aesthetic function of language means and artistic details of the work; understand the mechanisms, techniques and methods of text encoding used by the author; be able to carry out research work on the analysis of a literary text from metadisciplinary positions; be able to establish and take into account the internal and external context of a work of art; have a sufficiently high level of development of oral and written skills, critical thinking and autonomy, and research skills.

Within the framework of general cultural and general humanitarian competences, students should: be guided in the modern cultural space, know and understand the logic of the country’s historical and social development, know and use philosophical and cultural concepts in interpreting the text.

Thus, the goal of implementing the described course is not only acquiring a certain amount of competencies among students but also the formation of a new type of reader/researcher: sophisticated, competent, perceptive, able to engage in the dialogue with any semiotically complex text, catch, disclose and interpret all the meanings in the text.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the elective course “Semiotic categories of an artistic postmodern text” on the basis of the Faculty of Philology at RUDN University showed its effectiveness as a tool for training qualified philologists with knowledge and skills to analyze a complex, simiotically rich artistic text written in the contemporary post-modern paradigm.

As it was shown, the complex of the proposed assignments, sophisticated postmodern texts as the course material, the arsenal of used didactic tools not only expand the professional knowledge and skills of philology students, but also form general humanitarian and cultural competences.

The introduction of such elective courses creates the conditions for multidisciplinary differentiation of the content of training, based on the interests, needs and dominant features of student groups. On the other hand, such courses provide the creation of flexible opportunities for building individual educational path in accordance with the changing conditions of the modern world (in particular, the
cultural paradigm) and personalize the educational process taking into account the needs and plans of a specific student.

The drawing up of the elective courses becomes the life practice. For example, there is an case of implementation of e-learning courses into informational and educational system of Kutafin Moscow State Law University [11]. The implementation of such courses becomes an effective method of developing higher education students’ both philological competencies [12] and interdisciplinary scientific vision.

Having studied metadisciplinary subjects, a master student gets the opportunity to expand the scientific worldview, opens up broad prospects for the interaction of different disciplines in solving complex problems of interpreting the modern text, and plunges into the global cultural and scientific space.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge the management of RUDN University. The publication has been prepared with the support of the “RUDN University Program 5-100”.

REFERENCES