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A one-minute talk in teaching speaking for specific purposes

The article responds to the increasing need to teach successful speaking in situations of problematic nature, which include almost all instances of professional communication as well as oral exams in the academic context. The approach is research – based and relies on certain provisions of the cognitive processes involved in speech production, the principles of communicative mobility and problem-based learning. Based on the results of the literature review, we can assume that there are several factors determining the nature of oral communication for professional purposes (SSP) as a special genre of foreign language communication. This paper describes a practical teaching technique that helps to develop students' ability to use a foreign language for professional communication effectively. The main stress in designing the tasks is carefully constructed scaffolding leading to the acquisition of all necessary skills for a student to be a successful independent communicator even in stressful environment. The system of teaching steps based on the suggested approach tested in English language classes at National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow.

Key words: speaking for specific purposes (SSP), professional communicative competence, foreign language for professional purposes, educational context for developing SSP, structured speech, a one-minute talk

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Одноминутный монолог в обучении говорению для специальных целей

В статье рассматривается актуальная проблема обучения эффективному говорению на иностранном языке в ситуациях проблемного характера, включающих ситуации профессиональной коммуникации наряду со сложными академическими ситуациями, такими как устные экзамены. Описываемый подход базируется на практических исследованиях при учете основных положений теории когнитивных процессов, связанных с порождением речи, принципах коммуникативной мобильности и проблемно-ориентированного обучения. В работе описывается практическая обучающая методика, направленная на развитие и совершенствование способности эффективно использовать иностранный язык для профессиональной коммуникации. Основной акцент – это разработка системы заданий, направляющих и поддерживающих процесс усвоения и развития навыков успешного самостоятельного высказывания на иностранном языке в различных условиях коммуникации, включая проблемные или стрессовые ситуации. Система обучающих заданий, основанная на предлагаемом подходе, апробирована на занятиях по английскому языку со студентами факультета мировой экономики и мировой политики Национального исследовательского университета «Высшая школа экономики» (Москва).

Ключевые слова: говорение для специальных целей, профессиональная коммуникативная компетенция, иностранный язык для специальных целей, развитие навыков говорения для специальных целей в академических ситуациях, структурированная речь, краткий монолог

Due to the expansion of cross-cultural contacts, the possession of such a resource as a foreign language for professional and academic purposes is of increasingly growing practical importance. The growing need for professionally oriented language skills has been noted by a number of researchers worldwide [3; 17] It is argued that possessing the ability to interact comfortably and confidently with people of all backgrounds is critical for both cross-border mobility of students and future successful functioning in a global labor market. The results of the survey conducted with the graduates of National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE, Moscow) seem to support the tendency. The survey responses came from 96 respondents graduated from the University during a period of 6 years. Most respondents (78%) mentioned that good command of foreign languages, English in particular, played a crucial role in their employment. 64.5% of the respondents continued learning with a purpose of raising the English language proficiency level for their professional and academic advancement. Moreover, the latest popular trends of expanding social and mass media job market possibilities exhibit a tendency to shorten professional formats: for instance, there is "an explosion of shorter podcasts" of one to five minutes long [22]. Passing international language exams necessary for academic and professional mobility is another pragmatic purpose. Currently, the framework of the exams, mainly IELTS and BEC, are included in various forms and combinations into the curriculum of a number of universities, NRU HSE being one of the examples. Half of the mentioned respondents obtained one of the international certificates by passing examinations after their graduation. Thus, the need for developing communicative competence stems from the practical purposes of teaching foreign languages in non-linguistic universities. Despite the rapid advancement of methods to teach foreign languages for professional purposes, theoretical studies in this field are far ahead of developing practical and applicable teaching methods. Theoretical studies have an indisputable value. Still, in foreign language teaching context the results of studies related to educational practice may be of utmost interest. They allow teachers to match the content of learning materials as well as training and instructional techniques to the specificity of students' future academic and professional activity.

This paper describes a practical teaching technique which helps students develop the ability to use a foreign language for professional communication effectively. The complexity of a foreign language teacher's task consists in the necessity to comply with a range of requirements within the limited number of contact hours fixed in the syllabus. It implies meeting both the practical needs of students for developing vital language skills and the formal regulations of the State standard for higher education regarding the level of language competence. The students of National Research University Higher School of Economics are to master English at the levels of an independent user (level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages CEFR). The students of the educational programs with an extended foreign language curriculum such as World Economy and International Affairs are required to obtain the level of a skilled user (level C1–C2).

The steps taken as a preparatory research for grounding the suggested teaching method are as follows. The first step was the analysis of the most required competences and the main difficulties in professional foreign language communication. Then we set to identify the basic structural components of professional foreign language communicative competence as a tool for development of a globally competent worker. Outlining the didactic principles for designing learning tasks and activities followed. We conducted a pilot experiment, with the tasks based on the outlined principles implemented. It was followed by the students' survey and interviews concerned with personal perception of the task fulfillment, with the subsequent analysis of the participants' answers, including responses of the students who passed international Cambridge BEC exam.

Review of the literature in this field revealed that the predominant form of professional communication is either an oral [14; 17; 24; 25] or a multimodal speech activity, which involves the use of both oral and written language [20; 23]. The survey of the NRU HSE alumni also reflects the findings: the majority of respondents acknowledged that development of oral communication skills is a priority for their professional advancement. Moreover, the level of oral communication skill is often crucial for successful employment [14]. The results of the graduates' survey support this assumption that half of the respondents presumed that they got jobs largely because they were able to demonstrate the required level of oral communication in English at job interviews. The analysis of the alumni survey answers revealed that 50% of all the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of their oral communication skills in professional context, and 64% of them continue English studies after graduation to upgrade their oral communication skills.

The survey conducted among Russian professionals working in various areas of corporate business, international relations and academia, identified the forms of discourse in a foreign language, in which the speakers experience the greatest difficulties [21]. These are mostly the forms of spontaneous oral communication, in particular: informative statements, opinion statements, adequate responses to a statement of the communication partner. Most respondents considered such communication tasks challenging, experienced both in person and by phone. Thus, the needs analysis revealed that speaking is the most frequent mode of using a foreign language at workplace. It also showed an insufficient level of skills in spontaneous speaking, especially in situations when it is necessary to formulate and express one's point of view or give an immediate response to the interlocutor/s statements or questions, these being critical in both professional and academic contexts.

Currently, there is a shift of educational focus to developing multiple competences. Professional communicative competence is a complex construct where foreign language skills are inseparable from a wide range of other skills. International studies point out that education has a focus on developing skills in critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making. Working situations require communication and collaboration skills, social and emotional skills that help people live and work together. Communication is an interactive social activity [15] and the communicative situation is a unique and dynamic combination of specific factors: time, place, activities and people involved in collaboration. Thus, there is a spectrum of interacting situational elements considered in the process of teaching a foreign language, especially for professional and academic purposes. Based on the results of the literature review, we can assume that there are several factors determining the nature of oral communication for professional purposes (SSP), as a special genre of foreign language communication. The most important of these factors are:

- speaking as the most demanded and the least developed ability;exchange of ideas and answers to questions rather than presentations and speeches as most common types of oral communication discourse;
- SSP requirements for good listening skills and the ability to evaluate oneself and interlocutors critically;
- SSP discourse basic requirements for clarity, directness in presenting one's ideas [19], the balance of implicit and explicit [7], and understanding of propositional logic differences in different cultures [19];
- utmost importance of cultural competence in intercultural and corporate aspects, especially compliance with the rules of politeness [7];
- time constraints for thinking over and delivering one's statements/ arguments in the real world of SSP communication;
- significant impact of non-linguistic factors on the success of SSP communication.

The multifaceted requirements for the SSP pedagogical context define a synthetic nature of SSP learning and teaching principles applied to task design based on the integration of:

− Galperin's procedure of the formation of mental actions and his proposal systemic-theoretical instruction involving internalization of external actions [1];
− Kahneman's theory of the interaction between two cognitive systems, which pays great attention to the decision-making process under conditions of uncertainty [16];
− challenging nature of SSP communicative context [8; 10];
− students' participation in solving communicative problems [3];
− blending cognitive and communicative approach to teaching SSP [10];
− introducing elements of rhetorical approach [5];
− employing formative assessment as a teaching tool for developing self-monitoring skills [9].

Specificity of SSP as a discourse genre needs student-centered learning environment and designing pedagogical tools for the development of SSP skills. An example of didactic units in teaching SSP, that reflects the demands, may be the task type, which we define in this study as *delivering one's ideas/ opinions/arguments clearly, in an appropriate linear logic format, following particular cultural and ethical standards for presenting information, performed in a very limited timeframe, at minimal preparation.* One of the main goals of the suggested SSP teaching practice, besides acquiring language command and developing the four skills, is *formation of students' communication mobility* – a special situational ability to perform successfully in SSP dialogical communicative situations [21]. In accordance with the stated principles of learning and the objective requirements of the pedagogical conditions, the identified basic principles for designing teaching activities are:

1. Nature of teaching activities: student centered.

2. Stages: from simple to complex, from conscious actions to their internalization and automation.

3. Essential feature: an obligatory element of uncertainty at each new stage.

4. Universality: the level of tasks complexity is an independent parameter and does not relate to contents and language level.

5. Discreteness: possibility to use each task separately, not necessarily within a framework of educational activities.

6. Compactness: learning activities designed for a period not exceeding 10–15 minutes.

7. Transferability of acquired skills to other types of language activity such as writing and listening.

8. Transparency of evaluation and assessment; a focus on the formative component, self- and peer analysis and evaluation with the use of student-friendly reference materials (rubrics).

The system of successive learning tasks, under a working title '*A 1-Minute Talk*' complies with the pedagogical and methodological principles presented in the article. There are practical reasons for choosing the specific format of a 1-minute monologue speech:

The average length of an essay paragraph containing one statement does not usually exceed one minute when spoken;

The existence of such concepts in Business English as "a 1-minute business presentation", "elevator pitch" and "BDNS 60-second speech" [23];

The limited resources of short-term memory that dictate the optimal amount of information for processing and storage;

The need to use higher cognitive processes in order to analyze and restructure information to fit the constrained format;

The presence of stress factors due to time constraints, which simulates a real situation of communication;

The format of the international oral exams that implies time constraints.

The experiment took place at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow. It involved 74 senior non-language majors divided into two groups. Three learning groups including 37 students (experimental group) engaged with the designed learning tasks in ESP classroom once a week for 9 weeks. We designed the cards with specific format questions for performing SSP tasks. Discussion topics and an assessment rubric for evaluating the students' oral performance in English based on the requirements of BEC Higher international exam of English were prepared [13]. We assigned the control group of 37 students by a random selection from the rest of the students in this course. Control group were not involved in performing specially designed learning tasks for SSP and studied regular ESP learning material. The experimental and control group performance was compared, quantitative and qualitative methods applied for the results analysis. A t-test analysis of BEC oral exam results of the two groups of students (the experimental and control ones) was performed. The data collected included the BEC exam results of the experiment participants and their answers to the open-end questionnaire.

Students received a card with topics/questions 1 minute before their speaking. The topics/questions were based on the current syllabus material with the level of thought processes required for data processing taken into account. Moreover the topics/questions had a potential for discussion, which is an important prerequisite for the creation of cognitive dissonance as a natural part of speech interaction. For example, the question "Is there a commonly accepted view on globalization" instead of "What is the definition of globalization" makes students consider not only the factual information

covered at the English class. They also turn to their own knowledge and experience, and then use the higher cognitive processes to analyze, evaluate and then synthesize the information to present orally in English. The topic cards, rubrics and checklists may be adapted to whatever level the students are.

The sequence of learning activities responds to the principle of increasing complexity. Although these activities might seem traditional, they are quite challenging as they contain elements of innovation and require critical thinking. It is worth mentioning that each successive stage in learning activity appears to be unexpected for learners and requires readiness for quick decision-making, which is a key factor in developing situational communication mobility. Otherwise, a repetition of any stage aiming at making performance perfect as a prerequisite to starting the next activity transforms the whole sequence into a behaviorist drill. Although every learning task of the designed sequence taken separately has a certain academic potential for training and developing certain skills, the full potential of approaching realistic oral communication conditions can only work within the sequence of learning activities. The sequence introduces a step in every consecutive class through two stages: individual and interactive with an intermediate formative assessment. The final step activity is organized in the form of discussion.

The individual framework includes the following steps:

1) *Introduction of the time limit* (1 minute to prepare and 1 minute to speak), raising awareness of the possible difficulties associated with the preparation and production within the time limit, discussing the ways to cope with them;

2) *Practicing in formulating the main idea* of the statements in the format of "*topic, comment, the development of the topic*"; peer evaluation of utterances;

3) *Practicing speaking in the paragraph format* (topic sentence + supporting sentences); analysis and peer evaluation against the criteria;

4) *Practicing evaluation and self-evaluation* of utterances: introduction of the assessment rubric (adapted for students (Appendix 1), discussion of its meta-language with the students (for example, what it means in practical terms to use 'simple' and 'complex' grammatical forms', how 'range' differs from 'wide range', and what makes speech 'coherent'). The rubric allows students to self-control their performance with a focus on language accuracy. This is an essential component of self-study necessary both for class and exam preparation. Students peer evaluation is followed by collaborative resolving any problem students encounter while speaking;

5) *Students oral performance assessment* is done in the class by peers and the instructor against the rubric, with the subsequent class discussion.

The interactive framework involves working in pairs and in groups. Pair work includes two following steps:

6) *Listening to the partner and presenting* his/her point of view;

7) *Listening to the partner and responding* with one's comments;

8) *Work in groups* involves students' presenting their oral homework on a particular topic in groups, analyzing the information together, which is followed by 1-minute oral reports presented by every student to the whole class;

9) *Preparations for the debate* involve (a) *Practicing responses in pairs*: students prepare debatable statements on a suggested topic individually, then respond to each other's statement (in a1-minute paragraph structure format) and counter the partner's arguments;

10) *Practicing responses in groups* implies that a teacher offers a debatable statement for group discussion. Students must structure the responses according to a paragraph format (topic sentence/thesis and 2–3 arguments to support it). Class discussion of the solutions to the communicative problems the students may have encountered concludes every step.

The data analysis shows that although there was no significant correlation found at $p = 0.05$ between the intervention and the BEC result in the case of the experimental group, still the analysis revealed a positive tendency in the experimental group compared to the control group. Table 1 below shows some difference in the mean (M) in favor of the experimental group (a mean of 21.973 for the experimental group compared to 21.527 for the control group). Higher minimum and maximum scores were in the experimental group even though both groups shared the median at 22.5. Standard deviation as a measure of the boundaries in most values showed a smaller range in the experimental group, as well as the interquartile range (IQR), which reflects lower variability in the experimental group data set.

Table 1

The two groups' BEC exams scores (speaking)

Group	BEC exams scores						
	M	SD	Median	Min	Max	IQR	*n*
Experimental	21.973	2.351	22.5	16.5	27.0	3.00	37
Control	21.527	3.046	22.5	15.0	25.5	4.05	37

Graph 1 below illustrates the distribution of the scores and reveals the symmetry of the data set in the experimental group and the left skew of those of the control group around the median. That means the scores of the experimental group are closer around the median than the scores of the control group, skewed towards the lower score end.

Experimental Group (*n* = 37)

Control Group (*n* = 37)
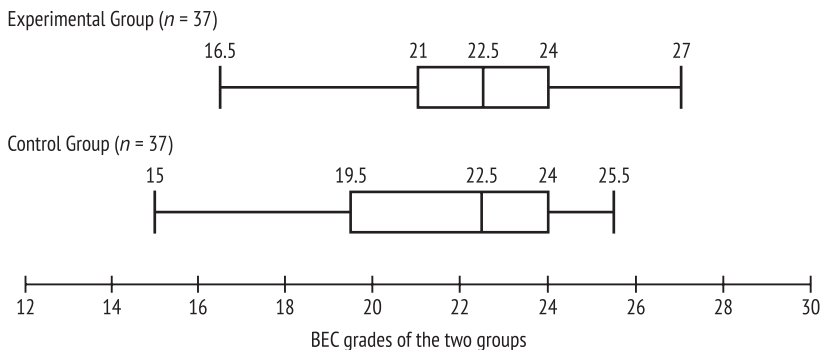
Graph 1. The two groups' BEC exam scores (speaking)

The analysis might suggest a possibility that the learning activities in the experimental group could have had a positive impact on one or more factors that determine the success of oral communication at the exam. Analysis of the questionnaire responses of the students in the experimental group registered a change in the students' self-perception and attitude towards the tasks involving elements of stress caused by time constraints as well as their own performance of the tasks. They also reported the need for extensive practice in logical structuring of utterances and interacting in pairs or groups. Twenty-four students out of thirty-seven admitted that at the beginning of the experiment they felt discomfort when performing the tasks. At the end of the experiment, all students reported that they felt comfortable speaking in the suggested circumstances and format. Some students had no difficulty from the start but still wrote that the experience helped them to be more organized, better formulate their arguments, and that they would like to have more practice in performing similar tasks. Some of the students' original comments about the difficulties they encountered while doing the tasks are below:

‒ "My silence felt awkward";
‒ "No 'internal' clock: it is difficult not to get too involved while speaking and not to talk too long";
‒ "It is difficult to think in English";
‒ "Very difficult to combine what you learned in Russian and in English";
‒ "I did not expect it to be so difficult to agree on something in a group. We spent a lot of time to come to a shared opinion".
‒ "My attitude's changed a lot! At first, I could not perform the tasks and considered them stupid. Now I am interested and I want to learn how to speak more".
‒ "I was constantly missing the words trying to control the time and structure; now I don't. Very helpful!"

The learning activities used in the experiment represent one example of the possible framework for the development of oral communication skills for specific (professional and academic) purposes. There are multiple opportunities for development. For instance, it would be interesting to expand the repertoire of speaking discourse types and rhetorical discourse structures that reflect the diversity of real communication by using a variety of information sources (text, charts, tables, multimedia sources). The rubric, checklists and topic cards may be adapted to whatever level the students are. There may also be variations in time limit tailored to specific academic or future professional needs. Training specialists who would acquire competence in foreign language for professional communication should be one of the top priority tasks in nonlinguistic universities. It requires an integrated approach to the development of instructional techniques based on the consideration of all aspects of professional discourse and innovative learning environment for their implementation. Foreign language teachers must be aware of the academic and professional needs of the graduates entering competitive global labor market.

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Appendix 1

Sequence of teaching activities

Step No.	Function	Content
1	Introduction of the time limit	Introducing requirements of 1 minute to prepare and 1 minute to speak and raising awareness of the possible difficulties associated with the preparation and production within the time limit; discussing the ways to cope with them
2	Practicing in formulating the main idea	Practicing structuring statements in the format of '*topic, comment, the development of the topic*'; peer evaluation of utterances
3	Practicing speaking in the paragraph format	Practicing structuring utterances in the format of 'topic sentence + supporting sentences; analysis and peer evaluation against a checklist (Appendix 2)
4	Practicing evaluation and self-evaluation	Introduction of the evaluation rubric (adapted for students), discussion of its meta-language (for example, what it means in practical terms to use "simple" and "complex" grammatical forms, and how "range" differs from "wide range", what makes speech "coherent" etc.)
5	Intermediate control (formative assessment component)	Assessment of individual students' oral performance (1 minute to prepare and 1 minute to speak) against the rubric. It is obvious that it is not possible to assess interactive communication at this stage

Step No.	Function	Content
		Interactive framework:
6	Pair work: Oral comprehension	Listening to the partner and presenting his/her point of view. The focus is on oral comprehension
7	Pair work: Oral comprehension and response	Listening to the partner and presenting his/her point of view with one's own comments
8	Group work: Analysis and synthesis	Presenting individual homework on a shared topic in groups, analyzing the information together in the format suggested by the teacher and presenting an oral report to the whole class
9	Preparations for the debate	a) *Pair work*: Practicing responses in pairs: 1) students prepare debatable statements on a suggested topic individually, then 2) respond to each other's statement (in a1-minute paragraph structure format) and 3) counter the partner's arguments. Discussion of the results in pairs, then a general discussion of difficulties and solutions to them follows b) *Group work*: Practicing responses in groups: students decide on and deliver a group response for or against a debatable statement suggested by the teacher. The students are asked to follow the format of the topic sentence/thesis and 2–3 (but not more) arguments to support it. A class discussion of the statements' strengths and weaknesses and argumentation follows
10	Debates	The activity involves the whole class and follows the organizational chart of Appendix 3. It can be carried out with the participation of another group/other groups without prior notice which may highlight the problematicity of the task

Appendix 2

Assessment rubric "1-minute talk"

	5.0	7.0	10.0
Grammar	A good degree of control of simple grammatical forms, and attempts some complex grammatical forms	A good degree of control of a range of simple and some complex grammatical forms	Control of a wide range of simple and complex grammatical forms
Lexis	Appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views, but only when talking about familiar topics	A range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on familiar, and unfamiliar topics	A wide range of appropriate vocabulary to give and exchange views on familiar, and unfamiliar topics
Discourse	− Provision of relevant factual information; − stretches of language despite some − hesitation; − relevant and there is very little repetition; − a range of cohesive devices	− Provision of relevant substantive factual information; − extended stretches of language with very little hesitation; − relevant and there is a clear organization of ideas; − a range of cohesive devices and discourse markers	− Provision of relevant personal comments to substantive factual information; − extended stretches of language with ease and with very little hesitation; − contributions are relevant, logically organized, coherent and varied; − a wide range of cohesive devices and discourse markers
Pronunciation	− Intelligible; − generally appropriate intonation; − generally accurately placed sentence and word stress; − individual sounds are generally − articulated clearly	− Intelligible; − intonation is appropriate; − sentence and word stress − is accurately placed; − individual sounds are articulated clearly	− Intelligible; − phonological features are used effectively to convey and enhance meaning
Interactive communication	− Starts conversations and responds; − appropriately; − sustains and develops the interaction and negotiates to get to a result with very little support	− Starts conversations and responds; − appropriately, linking contributions to those of other speakers; − sustains and develops the interaction and negotiates to get to a result with no support	− Interacts with ease, linking contributions to those of other speakers; − extends the scope of the interaction and negotiates to get to a result

Appendix 3

Debate form "1-minute talk"

Statement for the debate:

Introduction of the opinion

Statement Group A:	Statement Group B:
A 1:	A 1:
A 2:	A 2:
Conclusion: Yes / Not clear / No	Conclusion: Yes / Not clear / No

Debates

Statement Group A:	Statement Group B:
A 1:	A 1:
A 2:	A 2:
Conclusion: Yes / Not clear / No	Conclusion: Yes / Not clear / No

Statement Group A:	Statement Group B:
A 1:	A 1:
A 2:	A 2:
Conclusion: Yes / Not clear / No	Conclusion: Yes / Not clear / No

Results of the debate:

Group A: .... (points)   Group B: .... (points)

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O.A. Marina – overall direction and planning of the research, organization and participation in data collection, analysis of primary data, drafting the manuscript and revising it for publication

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