

RHETORIC AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL OF OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN NEW EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Searching for novel ways of overcoming communication barriers is dictated by new realities and forms of communication that appear in the educational system of the present day in Russia. In this paper, the authors reveal the basic barriers of communication in new educational environments and make an attempt to prove that rhetoric can serve as an effective tool of breaking these barriers. Materials and instruments aiming at the solution of the studied problem are investigated with regard of the communication situation, roles of participants of communication and ways of communication which communicants undertake. The leading research method implemented in this study is an experiment conducted by the authors with the aim in view to prove that knowledge of rhetoric enables both university faculty and students to overcome communication barriers arising in new educational environments. The research allowed the authors to empirically identify the role of teaching rhetoric in class and verify it to be effective while overcoming the barriers of communication. The results of the study can serve as a general guideline for faculty and student body of the university.

Key words *Communication, etiquette, participants of communication, principles of effective communication, rhetoric, types of communication barriers, ways of overcoming communication barriers.*

INTRODUCTION

The turn of the century has visibly put forward new challenges in the system of education in Russia. New forms of communication, when real communication is giving way to virtual one with its new rhetoric rules, have become a reality, university faculty and students have to face up to. Only a few approaches to regarding this up-to-date issue have been made so far (Sinitsyna, 1983; Berezovin, 1989; Michalskaya, 1998; Vagapova, 1999; Murashov, 1999; Savostyanov, 1999; Vagapova, 1999; Savkova, 2000; Skovorodnikov, 2000; Vvedenskaya & Pavlova, 2000; Antipina, 2007; Skazhenik, 2006; Gorobets, 2007; Rumyantseva, 2007; Timonina, 2012; Assuerova, Desyaeva, Zinovyeva, et al. 2013).

The authors state that the problem of finding novel ways of building up teacher-student communication has become utterly topical. With this regard, the authors set a goal to identify in what way rhetoric can impact on overcoming communication barriers in new educational environments.

In this study, the nature of communication barriers and the way of their overcoming were investigated. As a most effective tool, educational rhetoric was nominated. To this end, the authors conducted an experiment in order to empirically identify the role of rhetoric as an effective tool to overcome the barriers of communication in new educational environments.

The methodological basis of the study became the post-classical idea of education which underlines a great role of person-to-person interaction in diverse types of educational communication.

A study to identify the level of rhetoric knowledge of students who do a Bachelor program was carried out.

An original way based on role-play was offered by the authors to solve the problem of breaking communication barriers with the help of acquisition of new rhetoric rules.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic principles of verbal communication

Communication is based on the following principles (Goldin, 1983)

- principle of the sequence (question-answer);
- principle of the preferred structure (immediate accord, acceptable failure, ability to keep a pause);
- principle of cooperation (respect for the interests of others): according to this principle, communicants must seek mutual understanding to continue a dialogue and either agree or refuse, politely or rudely;
- ethical principle: non-ethical practice leads to moral losses for the addresser and for the addressee, because a moral person is apt, in case of an involuntary violation of the code of ethics, to feel shame and remorse; moreover, the violation of ethical norms of communication often leads to communication mistakes and barriers.
- principle of tolerance: it is difficult to overestimate its importance - in any sphere of communication, tolerance educates mutual confidence, understanding, frankness; helps to overcome conflict situations; contributes to the manifestation of kindness and deep humanity; finally, helps to overcome communication barriers.

Basic units of verbal communication

Basic units of verbal communication embrace (Vvedenskaya and Pavlova, 2000)

- speech situation, which includes rules of speech etiquette and participants, time and place of communication;
- speech event, i.e. a complete whole with its form, structure, boundaries (for example, a school lesson, a faculty meeting, a lecture, etc.);
- speech interaction, i.e., speaking, speech perception by the addressee (the decoding of the content of another person's speech), evaluation of the received information and non-verbal response means.

The nature of communication barriers

A communication barrier is a psychological impediment to the adequate transfer of (educational) information between communicants, which can lead to distortion or loss of its original meaning.

Three groups of communication barriers are allocated (Dmitriyev, 2000)

- personal;
- socio-psychological;
- physical.

We are interested in personal communication barriers.

Among the personal communication barriers, a large group of so-called barriers of incorrect installation of consciousness is distinguished

- the stereotypes of thinking;
- preconception;
- wrong attitude to each other;
- lack of attention and interest to others;
- disregard for the facts and some others.

The essence of educational rhetoric

Educational rhetoric as one of the special areas of rhetoric is tied to the skill of conducting an educational dialogue as well as to the culture of teacher's speech, on the whole (Assuerova, Desyaeva, Zinovyeva, et al., 2013). Educational rhetoric reflects creativity and public speaking skills of teachers (Antipina, 2007).

At the same time, educational rhetoric is an area of human culture, for rhetoric is the science of effective communication (Formanovskaya, 2003). Rhetoric equips a person with the ability to find possible ways of persuasion another person, which is considered to be crucial in teacher-student communication situations.

The role of rhetoric in educational environments

In the process of communication between a teacher and a student, there arises a task to convey information so that the latter could receive it adequately. The fact is that under the influence of the individual peculiarities of a teacher and a student and their attitude to each other and the situation of communication, the exchange of messages can be transformed.

Communicative competency of the teacher can help to build up students' personal communicative culture (Auhadeeva, 2014; Abdrafikova, Akhmadullina and Yarmakeev, 2015) and, in this way, provide their communication.

Thus, one who is engaged in the "teacher-student-system" needs to know and be able to apply the basics of educational rhetoric, which, in the authors' opinion, can create favorable educational environments for communication and become an effective tool of overcoming communication barriers, if any.

MATERIALS AND STUDY INSTRUMENTS

Research site and training materials

Realizing the necessity to show that the central role in overcoming communication barriers can be played by educational rhetoric, the authors performed this study.

The research site was Leo Tolstoy Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication in Kazan (Volga region) Federal University.

145 students of 17-18 years volunteered to participate in this experiment and made up 2 control groups and 2 experimental groups.

The training materials included role-plays designed by the authors.

The experiment consisted of three stages.

Students were also asked to describe their afterthoughts in reflection papers.

Data collection procedures

At the first stage the students were suggested to fill in a questionnaire that consisted of 5 questions with 5 options of possible answers. For example

Which strategy would you choose in case you have an argument with your peer?

- a) you get away from the situation
- b) you keep silence
- c) you unconditionally accept all claims
- d) you make a witty remark
- e) you blame your opponent.

The choice was not limited to one answer; in addition, students could give their comments. This stage allowed the researchers to measure the input knowledge of rhetoric rules by students and to select the appropriate materials for the second stage of the experiment.

The analysis of the collected data made it possible to conduct the forming stage of the experiment which, in its turn, included two sub-stages

- theoretical, when students got acquainted with some rules for the speaker and for the listener and the etiquette speech genres;
- role-play, when students acted out some typical situations of communication in classroom, e.g., teacher - student talk; student - student talk; teacher - students talk; student - students talk; teacher - teacher talk, etc., which enabled students to learn to choose the optimal formulas of etiquette speech, typical of communication in educational environments.

The authors chose role-play as a study instrument considering it the most effective for conducting their experiment. The authors share the opinion of S. A. Shmakov that role-play for educational or entertainment purposes allow its participants to operate within their chosen roles, guided by the nature of their roles and internal logic of the environments' actions (Shmakov, 1994).

The final stage checked the output knowledge of rhetoric rules by students.

For this purpose 2 tests consisting of 10 questions each were carried out. The first copyright test was aimed at checking basics of rhetoric. For example:

Question # 6. Choose non-verbal signals indicating readiness of your partner to communicate:

- a) a closed position;
- b) an open position;
- c) constricted pupils of the eyes;
- d) a body turn in your direction;
- e) a body turn away from you.

Four criteria were laid down in test # 2 on etiquette clichés' acquisition by students (Formanovskaya, 2003):

- Distancing - the use of sentence patterns giving the statement some apparent remoteness from reality.
- Assumption - an understatement when it says less than is meant and an overstatement that means less than what it says.

- Mitigation - ways to mitigate the sharpness of the statements with the help of introductory sentences and clichés.
- Ways to keep the conversation going by means of filling pauses, short questions, question tags, echo questions, interjections, introductory phrases.

To test the above criteria the following diagnostic tools of evaluation of etiquette clichés' acquisition by students were implemented: Table 1.

Table 1
DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS OF EVALUATION OF ETIQUETTE CLICHÉS' ACQUISITION BY STUDENTS

Criteria	Researched indicators	Diagnostic tools
Distancing	knowledge of sentence patterns, e.g. I wonder if you could lend me your computer? Will you join us in 10 minutes? Could /would you do that for me? etc. allowing to give the statement some apparent remoteness from reality	Testing through the use of on-line tests on etiquette clichés http://oltest.ru/tests/lingvistika_i_filologiya ritorika_rechevoy_etiket/
Assumption	usage of words of uncertainty, e.g. somehow, somewhat, something; expressions: kind of, sort of, so to speak, more or less; verbs of intention: to be inclined, to tend, to intend; adverbs minimizing the meaning of the message, e.g. just, only, a bit, a little	Testing through the use of on-line tests on etiquette genres
Mitigation	usage of introductory sentences and clichés that express a speaker's opinion, e.g. mind/view phrases: to my mind, in my opinion, from my point of view, etc.; as-phrases: as far as I know, as I see it, as for me, etc.; if-phrases: forgive me if I'm wrong, if I'm not mistaken, if you ask me, etc.; verbs: think, guess, feel, say, mention, point out, etc.; words expressing probability: maybe, perhaps, by chance, happen, seem, prove, turn out, appear, (un)likely, etc.; why-questions; tag-questions; I wonder pattern	Testing through the use of on-line tests on etiquette clichés
Ways to keep the conversation going	skills of critical analysis of information; abilities to greet a partner, to attract his attention, to suggest advice, to express his approval/ disapproval, to maintain deep conversation, etc. using filling pauses, short questions, question tags, echo questions, interjections, introductory phrases	Diagnosis of personal and group satisfaction with the communication processes in educational environments

SUMMARY

At the initial stage of the experiment students' poor knowledge of rhetoric rules were revealed. Students failed to demonstrate either theoretical aspects of rhetoric or practical skills in the situations of communication suggested in a questionnaire. The results of the ascertaining experiment are presented in Table 2:

Table 2
THE RESULTS OF THE ASCERTAINING EXPERIMENT

Group	Number Of Students	Theoretical Knowledge	Practical Skills
Control group 1	35	12	15
Control group 2	38	10	14
Experimental group 1	35	11	16
Experimental group 2	37	14	19

The purpose of the forming experiment was to increase theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills of students in rhetoric, for it was believed that this knowledge would make it possible to correctly and competently build up relationships in communication situations.

At the final stage the output knowledge of rhetoric rules learnt by students was examined. The qualitative analysis of the results obtained in this research is presented in Fig. 1 and Fig 2:

Figure 1
RESULTS OF CHECKING BASICS OF RHETORIC

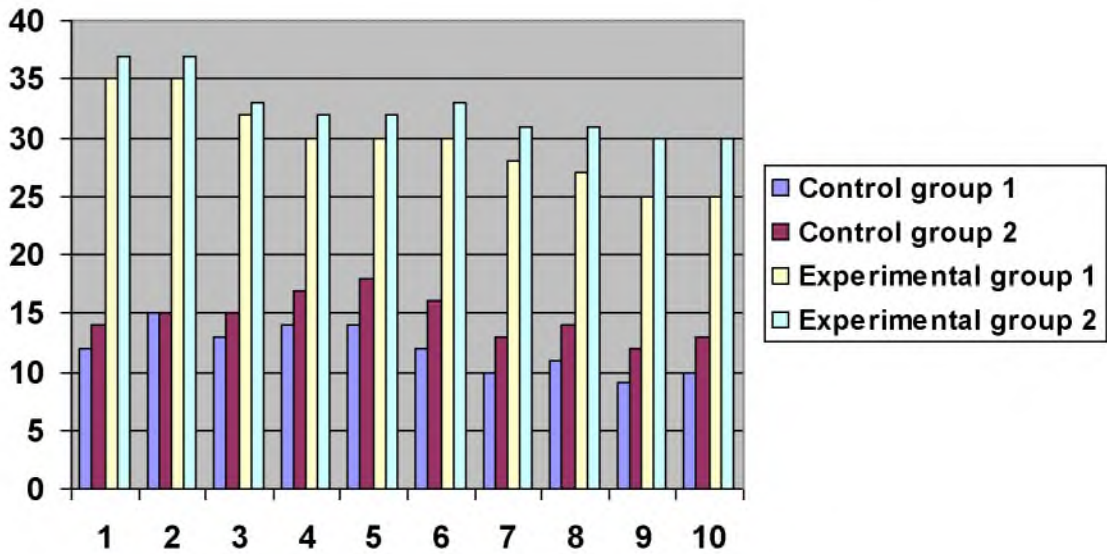
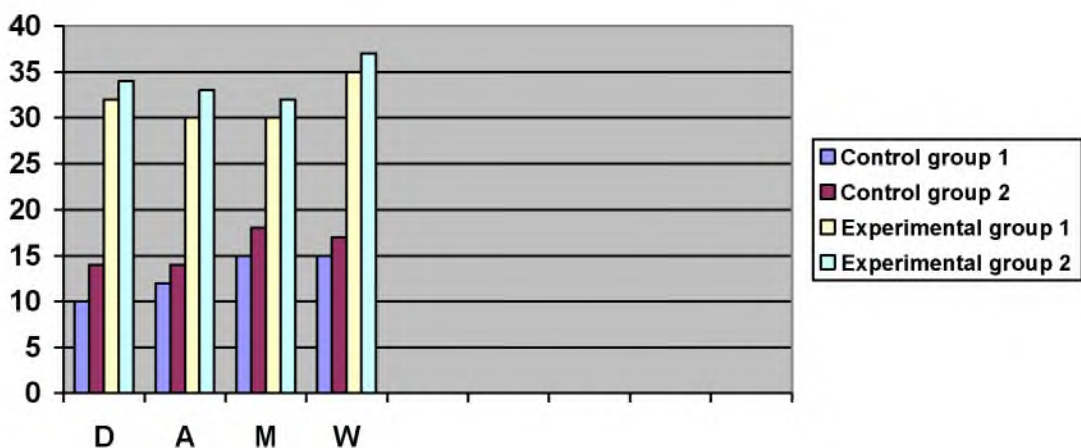


Figure 2
RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION OF ETIQUETTE CLICHÉS' ACQUISITION BY STUDENTS



Notes: D - Distancing; A - Assumption; M - Mitigation; W - Ways to keep the conversation going

It should be noted that in the reflection papers students admitted that some personal communication barriers interfered with the suggested communication situation at the play-roles stage of the experiment, which might make the topic of further investigation of the problem on the part of researchers.

CONCLUSION

Rhetoric as a tool of overcoming communication barriers in educational environments became the focus of this study. To achieve the goal, an experiment was conducted. The authors implemented a set of copyright tests aiming at evaluating students' communicative competences which were manifested in choosing right behavioral strategies and verbal tactics of communication. It became possible only after they volunteered to take rhetoric class.

The authors share an opinion that rhetoric allows to breed a personality who shares such universal human moral values and simple rules of morality as respect, humility, trust, candor, honesty, selflessness, compassion, caring, gratitude (appreciation), the performance of duty and true to his word, politeness, desire to help another person in trouble, etc. Teaching rhetoric in classroom allows teachers to create a communication situation which also can foster students to experience the feeling of benevolence, guilt, shame, remorse, camaraderie, empathy, solidarity.

The findings of the study can be used as general recommendations for university faculty and students. The resulting figures revealed a positive trend on the part of students to continue learning rhetoric rules.

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