

TEACHING HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: The article deals with some peculiarities of teaching the Humanities, especially, such disciplines as “Philosophy” and “the Russian language”, for the students of non-core profiles, mainly, of the Natural Science and Technical directions. These disciplines are required to study in the most areas of education (Philosophy – in all areas of education). However, the students of the Natural Science and Technical directions are experiencing some difficulties at learning the training programs on these disciplines.

The purpose of the research, described in the given article, was to find out the reason of these difficulties. The article asserts the viewpoint that one of the dominant reasons is the difference of the Humanities’ and the Natural Science’s types of thought and knowledge. It is based on the Humanities’ methodology concept by M. M. Bakhtin.

The gist of the concept lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the Natural Sciences are characterized by the researched objects’ description; while the Humanities, on the other hand, are exploring the human being, some cultural phenomena and their interpretation, which have a symbolic or iconic character.

Hence, there is a difference between the Humanities and the Natural Sciences’ perception, which gives the students the following difficulties:

- The lack of the unified paradigm in the Humanities and existence of many different viewpoints on the same issue;
- the lack of experimental means for testing the hypotheses and the limitation with abstract logical thought;
- A great role of the subjective factor of the scientist’s personality, having created the concept, and the person, perceiving the new knowledge.

In this regard, the students’ skills, developed at studying the relevant disciplines, are often unclaimed because they are inappropriate in the given situation.

Of course, these difficulties can be overcome, and here much depends on the teacher’s behavior. He/she should immediately explain the students that such a skeptical perception of the Humanities is wrong, and that it is caused by the fact, that they are unconsciously transferring the criteria of the Natural-Scientific knowledge to the Humanities’ perception.

In order to make the representatives of non-Humanities’ directions to get used to some peculiarities of the Humanities’ thought, the teacher should acquaint them with the original sources, the latest scientific research in the given area (even at the level of anthologies) and to encourage discussions among students.

Keywords: Teaching, higher education, the Humanities, Philosophy, the Russian language, the Natural-Science and Humanities’ types of thinking

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INTRODUCTION

“Philosophy” and “the Russian language” are considered to be non-core disciplines for the students of all directions (profiles), except for the Philological and Philosophic faculties, respectively.

However, there is a certain gradation between the students, who are not philosophers and not philologists. Of course, the historians or literary critics will be studying Philosophy much easier, because while studying their own specialized subjects, they get known with different philosophers, their biographies and their research papers (for example, the course “Ancient History” at the History Department contains information about Socrates and Plato; and the course “History of the Russian Literature” at the Philology Department presents information about L. N. Tolstoy and F. M. Dostoyevsky, not only as the writers, but as the thinkers too). Similarly, the students of the Foreign Languages’ Departments perceive the course “The Russian Language and Speech Culture” without any difficulties because, as a rule, they study the courses “General Linguistics” and “Rhetoric” during their study.

It is more difficult to study such disciplines as “Philosophy” and “the Russian language” for the students of the Natural Science and Technical Faculties and Universities.

It has been repeatedly noted by the higher education’s specialists or just by the higher school lectures. So, A.S. Ivanov writes: “It is not a secret, that the study of the social-humanities’ disciplines at Universities of Technical profile are often accepted by the students with little enthusiasm” [1].

E.Yu. Gorokhova conducted a survey for Engineering students, attending the course on Philosophy. So, 10% of respondents said that there was no need in teaching Philosophy in Technical University; other 25% of respondents said that, probably, there was no necessity in studying this subject (although, it should be noted that 40% of students shared the opposite opinion) [4]. What is the reason of it? To give clarification of this issue is the purpose of this article.

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

So, the aim of our research is finding the dominant reasons, because of which the non-Humanities’ students, especially the representatives of the Natural Science and Technical directions, are facing some difficulties at studying the Humanities at the University.

The disciplines “Philosophy” and “The Russian language” were chosen as an example. To achieve this aim it was necessary to solve the following tasks:

1. To make analysis of literature on the subject;
2. To describe some peculiarities of the Humanities’ and Natural-Science’s types of thought on the basis of the relevant special literature;

3. To make analysis of the main difficulties for the students of non-Humanities' (Natural Science and Technical) directions at studying such disciplines as "Philosophy" and "The Russian language";
4. To formulate the results of the research.

RESEARCH METHODS

During the research there were used some general scientific and logical methods, including: analysis, synthesis, abstraction, and modeling. For making some peculiarities' description of the Humanities' and Natural Science's types of thinking, we used as a methodological base, some ideas of the methodology concept for the Humanities by M. M. Bakhtin [1; 2].

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

There are many different reasons why the students of non-Humanities profile face some difficulties at studying the Humanities. In this paper we limit ourselves by highlighting the main cause, which is, in our opinion, the most fundamental and dominant one. That is the difference between the Humanities and Natural Science's types of thought.

It is written a lot about the differences between the Humanities and the Natural Sciences' study approaches [10]. M. M. Bakhtin wrote about this fact very expressively. In his paper «Methodology of the Humanities» he notes: "Exact sciences are a monologic form of knowledge when the intellect contemplates a thing and speaks about it. There is only a single subject - the knowing (contemplating) and speaking (speaking out) one. Only a voiceless thing is opposed to him. Any object of knowledge (including a person) can be perceived as a thing. But the subject itself cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, because as a subject, while remaining a subject, it cannot become voiceless, and, consequently, its cognition can only be in a dialogic form" [2].

However, the subject is presented to the scholar-humanitarian not directly, but through the text or the system of symbols and signs: "The text is the primary given (reality) and the starting point of any Humanities" [6].

The scientist-naturalist is only committed the object's description and further elucidation of causal relationships between it and other nature's phenomena.

The scholar-humanitarian tries to interpret correctly the researched object (language, artwork, historical period, and philosophical category) and to determine the level of adequacy of his interpretation in the existing special texts, so that to relate it to the historical and cultural context.

There are various points of view, their collision, the interference of subjective factors related to the peculiarities of the authors' personalities, their ideological positions and the stereotypes of the epoch.

Finally, the object, located on the other side of interpretations and dropping down through them, is often beyond the boundaries of experience and cannot be described in the empirical terms.

All this fully applies as to Philosophy [8], as to the Russian language [7].

While studying specialized subjects the students of the Natural and Technical directions acquire some certain skills, which they unconsciously try to implement at studying Philosophy.

In particular, in the textbook on Philosophy they expect to find the standard theory, recognized by the scientific community and affirmed, at least, by some observations, in case if the experiments in this area are impossible.

However, they face some various schools and trend viewpoints' multiplicity, and, in this respect, the textbooks often do not even show the logical evidences' base for one or another concept.

Just the same state of things is with the course "Systematic Philosophy," which sets out some philosophical problems. The students of the Natural and Technical directions are used to be given the tasks, based on the clear conditions and algorithms, with a help of which the tasks of the given type are usually solved. It remains only to apply this algorithm.

However, they will not be offered any algorithms for solving the problems on Philosophy. In order to make the first steps towards their solution, it is necessary to read the primary sources, their interpretation, and the modern scholars' critique.

But it's something that a student-naturalist is not used to, because for studying the classical mechanics he was not asked to read "Beginning" by Newton.

Finally, when the teacher tells him about the essence, truth, and beauty as the ideal objects, which cannot be detected by means of devices or senses and which are given to us as speculation – it sounds like nonsense for him. He is used to dealing with some ideal models of the real things that are entirely tangible. Just the similar situation is with teaching the Russian language [9].

The teachers-philologists often hear from their students-naturalists, "If we are used to speaking this way and it is so convenient for us, then why should we use the literary version of the word, but not the one, which is mostly used in everyday speech?" Let's say, they pronounce "place" instead of "lay down", "quartEr" instead of "qUArter" and become indignant at their teachers' comments. In addition, they are quite sincere: the natural-scientific thought taught them to look at all things strictly functionally and not to take into account such phenomena as tradition, accepted norms, etc.

It is very difficult to explain the meaning of the concept 'the language taste' to such students, because they perceive 'the taste' as something subjective, no matter what you should remove for achieving the objectivity and neutrality's ideal.

Such a student cannot accept the fact, that the same linguistic phenomenon has got several concepts, when the scientists cannot come to an agreement, which one is correct. As a result, the student has to study both versions in order to make a choice. While studying the Natural Sciences the student is not provided any choice at all - for example, all modern physicists generally accept the relativistic mechanics; and if some Einstein's critics exist, they can be only outside the scientific community and quite marginal.

Finally, the language itself, as an object of study, seems to be very strange and incomprehensible for them: on the one hand, it certainly exists; on the other hand, it consists of signs or material-ideal formations (because they mate sounding words and their meanings), but the very existence of the ideal objects is not obvious for them.

Therefore, the students of Natural Science and Technical directions are characterized by the perception of Philosophy, Philology and other Humanities as some defective sciences, having a lower gnoseological status.

Thus, the results, that we came to during our research, are as follows. Successful perception of the Humanities by the students of the Natural Science and Technical directions is prevented by some differences of the Humanities and Natural-scientific types of thought and knowledge.

Among them we can mention the following ones:

1. The lack of the unified paradigm in the Humanities and the presence of many different viewpoints on the same issue;
2. The lack of the experimental means for testing hypotheses and limitation only with abstract logical thinking;
3. A great role of the subjective factor of the scientist's personality, having created the concept and the person, perceiving the new knowledge.

In this regard, the students' skills, developed at studying the relevant disciplines, are often unclaimed because they are inappropriate in the given situation.

CONCLUSION

Of course, these difficulties can be overcome, and here a lot depends on the teacher's behavior. You should immediately explain to these students that such a skeptical perception of the Humanities is wrong and that it is generated by the fact when students unconsciously carry on the criteria from the Scientific knowledge into the Humanities. The Humanities are not worse than the Natural Sciences, but just different (as the literature of the East is not better than the West one, but just different). They are not applicable with the Natural Sciences' methods and approaches, because they have different objects. The object for the Natural Sciences is nature, presented as a logical skeleton, a set of quantitative mathematical models; while the object for the Humanities is a person himself, represented in the cultural creations.

The simplified logical-mathematical models can be objectively described, but it cannot be done with the people's creations, because we cannot be absolutely objective as we need to relate them to different interpretations.

So that to help the science-related students to get used to some peculiarities of the Humanities' thought, the teacher should acquaint them with the original sources, the latest scientific research in the given area (even at the level of anthologies) and to encourage discussions among students.

In this situation, the training process, based only on the textbooks' usage, seems to be in effective.

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