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DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENT TEACHERS' PHONETIC COMPETENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The article is devoted to the peculiarities of development of phonetic competence in English language student teachers in the times of crisis. The article focuses on the fact that mastering English phonetics plays an important role for student teachers of English, as their ability to articulate and intonate their own statements and understand the speech of others which is based on a complex dynamic interaction of relevant knowledge, skills and general linguistic and phonetic awareness is fundamental. The difference between the concepts of «distance learning» and «emergency distance learning» is considered. The article describes the software used for teaching the elective course Linguistics of English Academic Discourse: Phonetic Aspect is taught to 4th year students studying in the speciality 014 Secondary education, specialisation 014.021 The English language and literature in a distance modality in the times of crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. The article highlights the purpose of studying the elective course and the expected results, describes in detail what served as teaching material and what tasks were performed by students at the lessons and during their independent work to develop their phonetic competence in a distance modality. The paper also reveals the results of a survey of bachelor's graduates, who chose this elective course, on the effectiveness of organising the study of this elective course for the development of phonetic competence in English language student teachers in the times of crisis. The factors that caused the most difficulties in mastering the discipline are presented and recommendations and suggestions for improving the teaching of the elective course aimed at developing phonetic competence in the times of crisis are provided.

Keywords: *elective course, emergency remote teaching, English language student teachers, phonetic competence, the times of crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

The current conditions of education for Ukrainian students are far from being ideal, as for the fourth year in a row, the learning process in Ukrainian educational institutions has been taking place in times of crisis. The rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 and the subsequent lockdown, which provoked an abrupt transition to distance learning, forced all participants of the educational process almost all over the world to adjust to new realities. The weakening of the pandemic enabled educational institutions to gradually switch to blended learning. However, the Russia-Ukraine war made the Ukrainian educational authorities to transfer the educational process to a distance modality again, as the security situation in the country was extremely perilous.

The new conditions of the educational process stimulated teachers from all educational institutions including higher education institutions to urgently adapt to teaching remotely (Ali, 2020; Cavite & Marcial, 2022; Ferri et al., 2020; Khmurova & Hrachenko, 2020; Mospan, 2023; Osadcha et al., 2022; Schlesselman, 2020; Trotsko & Chernozubkin, 2023). Philological disciplines were no exception (Kovalenko, 2021), including practical phonetics

of English (Ashby, 2006; Kobylanska, 2018; Mospan, 2022; Perdana et al., 2019; Priya, 2020) which plays an important role especially for would-be English language teachers who need to be able to articulate and intonate their statements correctly and understand the speech of others, to transfer this knowledge to their future students; these abilities are based on a complex dynamic interaction of relevant knowledge, skills, general linguistic consciousness and phonetic awareness. That is why the **purpose of this paper** is to explore the peculiarities of developing future English teachers' phonetic competence in the times of crisis using the example of teaching the elective course *Rhetoric of English Academic Discourse: Phonetic Aspect*.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the problem of online or distance teaching has been actively studied by both domestic and foreign researchers (e.g., Aleksandrova, 2017; Demianenko, 2018; Burgess, 2015; Mospan, 2023; Thalheimer, 2020). At the same time, the outbreak of COVID-19 and the introduction of lockdown caused social isolation that immediately made teachers switch to teaching online (Damsa et al., 2021). Thus, some experts believe that the adaptation of this modality of teaching cannot be considered as online learning due to the fact that this modality of the educational process emerged at the moment of crisis and propose to call it 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al., 2020). This term is justified by the argument that online teaching requires a carefully developed syllabus and curriculum, appropriate technical support for students and teachers, which takes a long time to implement.

At the same time, in March 2020, there was an abrupt transition to emergency remote teaching, which is considered to be forced and temporary alternative way of teaching, presupposing the return to the traditional teaching modality after the crisis has passed. Such conditions urged educational institutions and teachers to choose the format of classes that would make the educational process as effective and comfortable as possible, as that choice was mostly influenced by the specifics of the educational program, the number of students in groups, technical support for participants of the educational process, etc. Furthermore, it was crucial to decide which format of classes to have – synchronous (the teacher and students are separated by space, but communicate in real time using available video conferencing platforms) or asynchronous format (the teacher and students are separated by space and time, communication takes place mainly through learning management systems, cloud-based file repositories, messaging platforms, and emails).

The elective course *Linguistics of English Academic Discourse: Phonetic Aspect* is taught to 4th year students studying in the speciality 014 Secondary education, specialisation 014.021 The English language and literature; degree programme: Foreign languages and literatures, methodology of teaching foreign languages and world literature (the English language and second Western European language) at Kyiv National Linguistic University (KNLU). The aim of this elective course is to develop phonetic competence in future English language teachers by familiarising them with the specifics of non-verbal, namely prosodic, presentation of texts in different genres of academic discourse. At the lessons, students get acquainted with the software for working with sound files and conducting speech analysis (PRAAT), study the intonation organisation of the speeches by famous personalities at the educational institutions, the lectures of the most famous phoneticians, the speeches of the leading scientists at the conferences, etc. They identify characteristic prosodic patterns typical of instructing pupils/students in the classroom, and analyse intonation patterns inherent in a successful presentation of scientific material. The successful completion of the course guarantees mastery and brilliant practical application of the acquired skills of using the

intonation in public speaking within the framework of academic discourse. The undoubted advantage of the proposed elective is the use of authentic video and audio materials.

In order to successfully function in a remote modality in the times of crisis, KNLU purchased Microsoft 365, a cloud-based proprietary Internet service and software from Microsoft, which enabled all the participants of the educational process to use various products of the company and work synchronously. Classes in the elective course were held on the Microsoft Teams platform, one of the Microsoft products, which tends to be extremely convenient because it allows to create an account for each participant of the educational process and to make planning and conducting classes as comfortable as possible. In addition, this platform allows teachers to create a team (a specific classroom online) for each academic discipline and bring together only those students who have chosen a particular elective course, upload the necessary materials, create assignments, check students' homework, evaluate students written works, and test them regularly. It should also be noted that other Microsoft products are used in the teaching process as well, namely Outlook, SharePoint, OneNote and others. It is also worth mentioning that the private group's chats were created on Telegram messenger, which allowed educators to keep in touch with their students, especially those who were facing adverse circumstances and did not have access to their laptops or PCs and required other communication channels. The final test was composed and conducted on Classtime – another teaching application for creating tests online.

During the lessons, students were introduced to the texts of various genres that belong to academic discourse. The teaching material included speeches by Steve Jobs, Tony Blair, Theresa May, Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton, the lectures by Ruth Wodak, John Wells, David Crystal, the classroom instructions by Dr Anita Archer and others. The students' task was to listen to the proposed audio text, analyse the peculiarities of the interaction of intonation components in the process of speech production, identify the specifics of functioning of speech melody, sentence stress, loudness, tempo, rhythm, pausing, and voice timbre which play an important role in highlighting the most significant pieces of information, revealing the speaker's attitude towards the presented message, their intentions and are typical of academic discourse. The students also studied the specifics of dividing the speech flow into intonation groups and dividing intonation groups into rhythmic groups, determined the types of scales and terminal tones inherent in academic discourse.

Particular attention should be paid to students' mastery of the PRAAT programme, which is widely used in Phonetics in order to analyse speech and teach students the proper English pronunciation (Gorjian, 2013; Le & Brook, 2011). The use of this programme allows not only to conduct the auditory analysis of the proposed audio texts but also the acoustic one, namely to investigate pitch, intensity, duration of pauses, and direction of the pitch movement. Such visualisation helps to better master the intonation patterns typical of different genres of texts within the academic discourse and to reproduce them more adequately in students' speech.

In addition, this programme is successfully used by students to analyse their own recorded speech, since the aim of this course is to develop the phonetic competence of future English language teachers; therefore, to master the intonation patterns typical of different genres of academic discourse and to apply them in practice while communicating in an academic environment is their paramount task. At the same time, it should be stated that the classes took place under extremely difficult circumstances which significantly affected students' emotional state; from time to time, the students might have problems with the electricity due to emergency or planned outages, periodically the Internet was disconnected and/or adverse family circumstances made it impossible for the students to attend classes regularly.

To ensure the best possible processing of the material by the students, the teacher recorded the most important fragments of the lessons which were stored in Microsoft Stream for the next 60 days, allowing the students absent at the lessons to work with the material asynchronously. For example, the students had the opportunity to watch a fragment of the lesson where the teacher explained the basics of using the PRAAT software, which was actively used in the classroom and the students used it on their own to acquire the necessary skills to work with this software. The students could also make a video of them doing their homework, for example, voice over a 2-minute piece of academic text and send it to the teacher in any convenient way – Telegram, Microsoft 365 Chat on Microsoft Teams, and Outlook.

METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the effectiveness of teaching the elective course *Rhetoric of English Academic Discourse: Phonetic Aspect* in the times of crisis, an anonymous survey was conducted among bachelor's graduates who studied this elective course in the 2nd semester of 2021–2022 and 2022–2023 academic years. 24 out of 52 people who studied that elective course took part in the survey.

RESEARCH RESULTS

First, the respondents were asked to assess how hard they had worked on their elective course in the times of crisis (pandemic/military emergency) (see Fig. 1). Most of them indicated that they highly appreciated their efforts devoted to studying the elective course. Thus, one-third of respondents stated that they had worked very hard, more than half of respondents indicated that they had worked quite hard, and only one person mentioned that he/she had made maximum efforts and one claimed that he/she had made almost no efforts in order to study the subject.

Rank how hard during the semester you worked on your elective course in the times of crisis (pandemic/military emergency).

24 відповіді

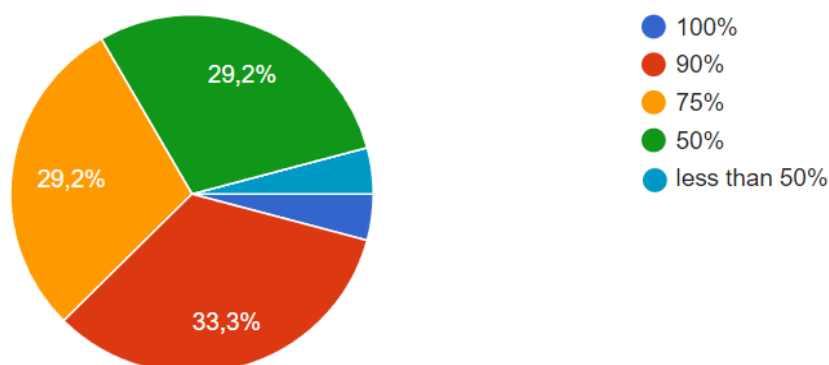


Figure 1. The level of efforts put into studying the elective course
Developed by the author

If you believe that you did not work hard enough, please indicate what personal factors influenced your performance. Among the personal factors that had a negative significant impact on respondents' performance, the most frequently mentioned were anxiety, stress, mental health problems, emotional state, the need to work, moving to another country or internal migration, absence of electricity and/or the Internet connection, lack of time, and adverse family circumstances.

The majority of surveyed (58%) said that their expectations coincided with the elective course content, the other 37.5% said that the content of the elective course rather coincided with their expectations and only 4.2% said that it was difficult to answer (See Fig. 2).

Did the course content of the elective meet your expectations?

24 відповіді

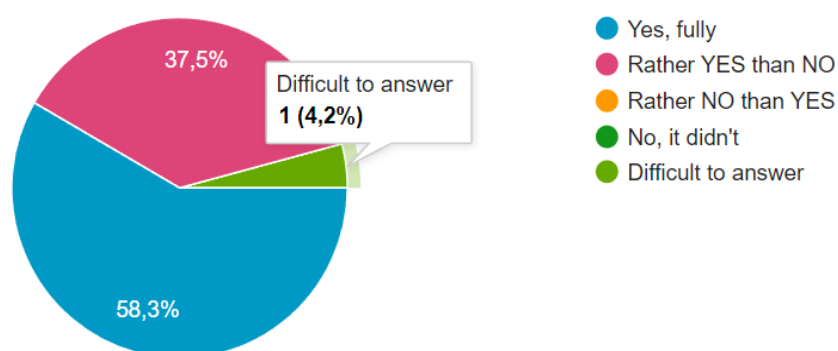


Figure 2. **The expectations from the elective course**

Developed by the author

Besides, the vast majority of respondents (95.5%) indicated that the process of studying an elective course in a distance modality in the times of crisis (pandemic/military emergency) was organised effectively. Only 4.2% were undecided.

Next, the respondents evaluated the selection of teaching material. The vast majority (91.7%) stated that the teaching material was well selected, while 8.3% of respondents indicated that the material was not well selected.

Regarding the satisfaction with the results of studying the elective course in the distance modality in the times of crisis (See Fig. 3), 45.8% claimed that they were absolutely satisfied with the results, 37.5% stated they were rather satisfied than dissatisfied. 12.5% of respondents indicated that they were dissatisfied with their results of studying the elective course, and 4.2% admitted that they found it difficult to answer.

How satisfied are you with the result of studying your elective in the distance modality?

24 відповіді

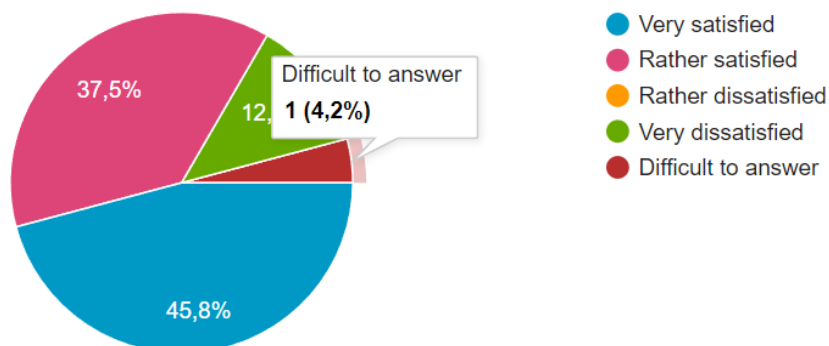


Figure 3. The level of satisfaction

Developed by the author

As for the practical application of the knowledge gained from studying the elective course *Rhetoric of English Academic Discourse: Phonetic Aspect* (See Fig. 4), 33.3% of the respondents stated that they actively use the knowledge gained, the same number of respondents (33.3%) indicated that they use the obtained knowledge to a greater extent, less than a quarter of the respondents indicated that they rather do not use the knowledge gained than use it, and 8.3% of the respondents do not use the gained knowledge at all. At the same time, 4.2% indicated that they found it difficult to answer this question.

Do you apply the knowledge gained from the elective course in practice?

24 відповіді

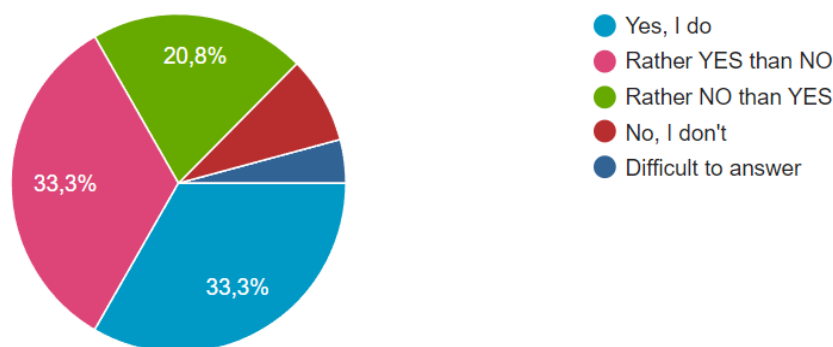


Figure 4. Practical application of the knowledge

Developed by the author

In general, a significant number of respondents noted that the major difficulties that arose during their studying of the elective course in the distance modality in the times of crisis (pandemic/military emergency) included the inability to communicate personally with group-mates, working without cameras on due to the poor Internet connection, which resulted in not allowing them to feel the teamwork and did not motivate them to study hard. What is more, being out of the classroom contributed to students being more distracted by extraneous

stimuli, succumbing to procrastination and not considering it necessary to prepare for the lessons properly as they could always peek and even cheat. The respondents also noted that the workload, despite the efforts of the university administration and teachers, had increased due to the announcement of forced holidays and the need to catch up with the schedule; another aspect that caused difficulties was the lack of electronic instructional materials.

Among the suggestions/recommendations expressed by surveyed regarding the organisation of classes and independent work in the elective course in a remote modality in the times of crisis, the most frequently expressed recommendation was to have more opportunities to practice the intonation patterns typical of the scientific texts of various genres, to increase the number of exercises to develop the communicative skills needed for the successful functioning in the academic surrounding. There were also suggestions to choose shorter video and audio texts when selecting the teaching material, as it was quite difficult to work through large texts under extreme circumstances. There was also a suggestion to organise group project work, which, according to the respondents, would significantly improve interaction between students and motivate them to work more productively.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Thus, for the past four years, Ukrainian educational institutions, including higher education institutions, have been operating in the times of crisis that initially arose due to the rapid spread of coronavirus infection and, accordingly, the introduction of a lockdown and the Russia-Ukraine war. The sharp transition to distance learning pushed all participants in the educational process in Ukraine and worldwide to adapt to the new conditions of both teaching and learning remotely, to look for new ways to successfully teach and learn educational material, and to acquire a profession. For future English language teachers, it is important to master all the linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines included to their individual curriculum. However, the Phonetics of English stands out among them, as its obtaining helps students to achieve a high level of phonetic competence. It is undeniable that the effective organisation of the teaching-learning process in a distance mode as well as the usage of appropriate software play a crucial role. At the same time, the teacher should also pay attention to the psycho-emotional state of students, as distance learning in the times of crisis significantly affects their ability to successfully learn the material.

Further research can be devoted to the study of the specifics of development of other competences in future English language teachers in a distance modality in the times of crisis or to a more detailed study of the peculiarities of using software in the educational process to improve the quality of disciplines in a distance modality in the times of crisis.

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СПЕЦИФІКА ФОРМУВАННЯ ФОНЕТИЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ В МАЙБУТНІХ ВИКЛАДАЧІВ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В КРИЗОВИХ УМОВАХ

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Стаття присвячена специфіці формування фонетичної компетентності в майбутніх викладачів англійської мови в кризових умовах. У статті акцентується увага на тому, що опанування фонетикою англійської мови відіграє важливу роль для майбутніх викладачів англійської мови, оскільки їхня здатність коректно артикуляційно та інтонаційно оформлювати власні висловлювання і розуміти мовлення інших, яка базується на складній динамічній взаємодії відповідних знань, навичок та загальної мовної свідомості і фонетичної усвідомленості, є фундаментальною. Розглянуто різницю між поняттями «дистанційне навчання» та «екстрене дистанційне навчання». У статті описано, яке програмне забезпечення використовувалося під час викладання вибіркової дисципліни «Лінгвориторика англійської академічного дискурсу: фонетичний аспект» студентам IV курсу, які навчалися за спеціальністю 014 Середня освіта у дистанційному форматі в кризових умовах, що були спричинені пандемією COVID-19 і збройною агресією російської федерації проти України. Представлено мету вивчення вибіркової дисципліни та очікувані результати її вивчення, детально описано, що слугувало навчальним матеріалом та які завдання виконували студенти-майбутні викладачі англійської мови під час практичних занять та самостійної роботи для формування у них фонетичної компетентності в дистанційному форматі. У роботі також наведені результати опитування випускників бакалаврату, які обирали зазначену вибіркoву дисципліну, щодо ефективності організації її вивчення для формування фонетичної компетентності в майбутніх викладачів англійської мови в кризових умовах. У статті також представлено, які фактори викликали найбільше труднощів під час опанування дисципліни й наведено рекомендації та побажання щодо покращення викладання вибіркової дисципліни, спрямованої на розвиток фонетичної компетентності в кризових умовах.

Ключові слова: вибіркова дисципліна, екстрене дистанційне навчання, кризові умови, майбутні викладачі англійської мови, фонетична компетентність.