

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2020.22.2.27>**КОММУНИКАТИВНО-ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ТЕКСТОВ ТЕСТА НА ЗНАНИЕ ЯЗЫКА (НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ТРКИ И CAMBRIDGE ESOL)**

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена анализу прагматических компонентов коммуникативного уровня тестов на знание русского и английского языков. Материалом для исследования послужили тексты тестовых систем ТРКИ и кэмбриджских экзаменов Cambridge ESOL, принятых CEFR. Выявлено, что тексты системы ТРКИ более склонны к проверке лексико-грамматических компетенций. В текстах кэмбриджских экзаменов преимущественно оцениваются коммуникативные навыки. Доказано, что структура запроса информации и вопросо-ответные единства в текстах ТРКИ носят псевдо-диалогический характер в отличие от тестов экзаменов Cambridge ESOL.

Ключевые слова: коммуникативный уровень текста, прагматические компоненты высказываний, ТРКИ, кэмбриджский экзамен, вопросо-ответные единства.

COMMUNICATIVE AND PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF TEXTS FOR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST (A CASE STUDY OF TORFL AND CAMBRIDGE ESOL)

Research article

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Abstract

The article analyzes the pragmatic components of the communicative level of Russian and English language proficiency tests. The research material is based on the texts of the TORFL and Cambridge ESOL test systems, adopted by the CEFR. It is revealed that the texts of the TORFL test system are more intent to checking lexical and grammatical competence. In the texts of the Cambridge Exams communication skills are primarily assessed. It is proved that the structure of information query and question-answer consistency in the texts of TORFL tests are pseudo-dialogical nature in contrast to the Cambridge Exams tests.

Keywords: communicative level of text, pragmatic components of utterances, TORFL, Cambridge ESOL, question-answer consistency.

Introduction

The Russian system of tests for Russian as a foreign language (hereinafter TORFL) appeared in the late XX – early XXI century. In its provisions, the TORFL system should be guided by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [1], which was formed two decades earlier [2]. According to A.V. Sazonova, «the functioning of the state testing system for Russian as a foreign language was recognized as successful at international level» [3, P. 127-134] in 2002.

Consequently, the final formation of the structure of tests and their lexical and grammatical content arised about 20 years ago. In accordance with the concept of the CEFR, one of the tasks of the TORFL system is to postulate the compliance assessment of communication competencies and language skills. However, the communicative level of the TORFL texts particularly differs from the communicative level of texts, for example, Cambridge ESOL. The texts of TORFL by their internal nature are more focused on checking lexical and grammatical skills, in contrast to the texts on the English language proficiency tests, in which the communicative and pragmatic approach is objectively prevailing. The purpose of the article is a comparative analysis of the communicative and pragmatic components in the texts and procedures of the TORFL and the Cambridge English Exams. For this purpose the structural features of the lexical expression of information query and question-answer consistency features are revealed, [4, P. 58] which are presented in the texts of and the texts of TORFL and Cambridge ESOL tests.

Pragmatic components

In the considered test systems, the addressee most often acts as the primary initiator or hearer of the oral activity in the process of perception or production of speech. However, many communication acts, such as dialogues, are two-way and the conditions in which communication takes place must necessarily be taken into account. Non-verbal components of communication play paramount importance in this process. In the TORFL and Cambridge English Exams texts, interrogative constructions and responses form non-breakable fixed unities. Despite the fact that the main purpose of TORFL tests is to assess the General language and speech competence of the addressee, the freedom to choose communication tools is constantly limited. This restriction is imposed not only by the lack of certain language and speech competencies, but also by the hierarchy of communicative situations that mutually occur. On the one hand, the addressee is constantly asked to perform language and speech tasks from the everyday sphere of communication, in which the conversational functional style prevails. On the other hand, this requirement is complied with the situation of official communication on the exam. In addition, the addressee must constantly be at the level of the metalanguage and evaluate in advance what he says in terms of lexical and grammatical norms

of the language. In the case of TORFL, these difficulties are aggravated by the fact that the dialogue looks like an interchange with the replicas of the tester only, sometimes performed as a recording on computer media. In addition to this affectation, an instruction is given before completing the task, which indicates the need for a mandatory «pause for response: 10 seconds» [5, P. 20-29]. In the Cambridge English Exams, test participants perform the functions of speech production and perception in turn within the scope of mutual polylogue with the tester or among themselves. There is neither presentation of replicas no recording of the conversation by using the electronic medium. Consequently, the TORFL procedure is characterized by a greater artificiality of the communication situation, while the Cambridge English Exams procedure is proposed to be have natural conditions for speech perception and production [6].

Research material

Information query

All interrogative constructions of tests are interrogative sentence with standard semantics. In other words, all questions are aimed at getting information from the addressee. Here, following E. V. Paducheva, we foreground the «semantic category of a question as a statement that is information query» [7, P. 236.]. O. Jespersen divides utterances according to their communicative purpose into utterances that express information query and utterances that have interrogative elements in their structure, but do not necessarily express a request for information [8, P. 297-300] (*Well, isn't he stupid?*). There are two types of elements in the text of the TORFL tests in the General structure of the information query. The first one is formed by cliched instruction for the task, without any interrogative constituents. The second is formed by questions of various types within the tasks. Regardless of the element type, the semantic information query is always presented. In the texts of Cambridge English Exams, on the contrary, interrogative constructions are contained in the instructions for the task as in the oral (KET, PET, FCE) (for example, in the examiner's utterances in the oral part of PET and FCE «*Can I have your report card, please?*» or «*What's your name? Where do you live/where do you come from?*») [9, P. 75], and in the written part of the tests (KET, PET) (for example, in the task instruction of the listening part: «*You will hear Simon talking to Maria about the party. What will each person bring to the party?*») [10, P.32].

The syntax of instructional information query can be expressed differently in both test systems, depending on the test level and the specific goals of specific tasks. The addressee is expected to provide an extremely complete logical response that does not cause ambiguous understanding. For this purpose, the information query in the instructions for the task is extremely logical: «*Listen to the dialogues and complete the tasks. You need to understand the topic of dialogues*» [11, P.16], «*You will hear people speak in eight different situations. For questions 1-8, choose the best answer (A, B, or C)*» [9, P. 55] and others.

The type of questions within the tasks of the analyzed testing systems are more often related to special questions [12] from the everyday sphere of communication aimed at assessing of the addressee's language competence: «*How do stores work in your city?*» [11, P.16], «*What job do you do? What subject do you study?*» [10, P.42]. The completeness and logic of the response is already contained in the structure of the instructional information query and special question. For the addressee, the question components related to the instructional part become more important than the special questions within the task. Moreover, at the lower test levels, there is no direct production of the utterance. You only need to specify the correct answer from the list of alternatives. As a result, the success of communication depends primarily on understanding the task instruction. The summarized information query turns into an alternative multiple-choice question [7, P.236]. Within the tasks, the addressee must put the corresponding noun word or noun group in place of the interrogative pronoun. As pointed out by E. V. Rachilina, «to get a complete answer, the question word must be replaced with a language expression from a certain syntactic class, in such way that this replacement would result in a grammatically correct sentence» [13, P.14]. Alternative type of questions with one correct answer is more typical for the official or scientific language style and is rarely found in the conversational style, which mainly serves everyday speech communication. However, TORFL texts of test, like Cambridge English Exams, at the lower levels are designed to assess communicative competence in everyday speech communication, and at the higher levels assess communicative competence both in official and professional communication. It is stated that direct speech communication is primarily evaluated.

The test systems under consideration have fundamental differences in the procedure of managing the speaking part of the exam. Cambridge English Exams are taken by two experts, one of whom acts as an interlocutor and observer (interlocutor and assessor), the other does not participate in the dialogue and only monitors the progress of testing (assessor). The test is taken immediately from two candidates, who in some tasks have to enter into a dialogue with each other. The TORFL procedure involves one test-taker. The results of the response, as mentioned above, are recorded on tape. The number of experts and their functions are not specified in the standard TORFL test.

The main difference is that speaking part of the test in the Cambridge English Exams takes much less time (10-12 minutes for two candidates) than in the TORFL test procedure, where each candidate has 60 minutes of testing. Such a detailed and continuous dialogue with the test-taker leads to the display of negative factors (fatigue, anxiety, distraction, etc.).

Significant differences are also observed in the number of tasks for the subjects. In contrast to the Cambridge ESOL, TORFL tasks do not have strongly marked specialization. The elements of monologue, dialogue, conversation and discussion are spread through different tasks. While performing a number of tasks, TORFL test-takers are allowed to use a dictionary, which is not anticipated in more natural procedure of Cambridge English Exams.

Question-answer consistency

N. Belnap and T. Steele, considering the problem of question-answer consistency, describe this structure as follows: «a question offers a set of «alternatives» together with some suggestions or indications as to what kind of choice or selection among them should be made. The proposed account of the logical structure of interrogatives reflects this idea» [14, P. 282-283]. Test producers specify such alternatives-answers at any level. The structure of TORFL tests pre-determines in advance possible answers not only in relation to their grammatical or semantic-logical structure, but sometimes even in relation to their axiological attitudes. For example, the test-taker is asked to give a recommendation for «*Your friend/son, daughter of Your friend to get any of the specialties*» [5, P.20]. The recommendation should be based on five short advertisements about various

courses of secondary vocational education (locksmith, mechanic, driver, secretary, cook, salesman-cashier, model). There are no other options that take into account personal experience. In the texts of Cambridge English Exams, tasks of this type contain only the problem situation, the solution of which must be proposed based on a purely personal position and experience, or a jointly developed opinion in the course of a dialogue «*The task gives candidates the opportunity to show their range of language and their ability to invite the opinions and ideas of their partner*» [9, P. 72] or «*the candidates discuss their ideas together, making and responding to suggestions, discuss alternatives, making recommendations and negotiating agreement*» [10, P. 55].

The methodological task of TORFL prevails over the communicative and pragmatic one. The addressee must give grammatically correct detailed answers, otherwise his statement will be evaluated as inaccurate, incomplete, unsatisfactory, or incorrect. The test questions, in accordance with the aim of the test, needs to be a situational aspect of communication for the addressee similar to the purposes of Cambridge English Exams: «*Imagine that you and your friend have visited an exhibition of paintings of a young artist*» [15, P. 21]. However, the main attention of addressee is paid not to the fictional situation of the task, but to the situation of the exam with its speech norms. He should be guided by the instructive requirement to give a response within the framework of official communication style. Then it is necessary for him to evaluate the future utterance for compliance with various language and speech norms, i.e. to get up to the level of metalanguage. Only after these mental operations he can enter into a dialogue from the in everyday speech or official communication spheres. In the Cambridge English Exams, there is no time for a number of these preparatory operations. The situation and question are signified accumulatively and simultaneously. The request-instruction form used in the text of TORFL tests is more strict, since it is important for the inquirer «how he learns what he wants to know: it should be about a verbal response, and not about any arbitrary way to get the information he is interested in» [13. P. 18].

The Cambridge ESOL tests do not have special sections dedicated to checking only grammar, while in tests for Russian as a foreign language, one of the subtests of each certification level includes tasks on vocabulary and grammar. The position of Russian developers is that the structural integrity of the language is based on grammatical and lexical patterns. Our British colleagues, the test compilers, are aware that checking the level of structural language level can only be carried out adequately in the course of testing communication skills, i.e. actualized linguistic usage.

Conclusion

The standards of the TORFL and Cambridge ESOL test systems include the description of levels, the description of communicative and language competence. The classification of candidates' language competencies is based on models of communicative and speech acts that have developed in the world practice of teaching foreign languages over the past decades. The description of language competencies in these models is based on communication and speech skills, in terms of producing, comprehension, perception, interaction and mediation. In addition, it is important that a number of features of tests, both TORFL and Cambridge ESOL, reflect the tendency to test general competence in the process of testing communicative competence.

The principal differences between the two test systems concern both some forms of testing and internal aspects of the content of tests.

For example, in the Cambridge English test, none of the levels has a separate section dedicated to grammar and morphology, while in TORFL, one of the subtests of all certification levels presents tasks on vocabulary and grammar. The internal structure of the TORFL sections dedicated to assessing communication skills shows their pseudo-dialogical nature at the level of information query and question-answer consistency. Non-verbal communication in tasks of this type is minimized and forces the test-taker to focus on the lexical and grammatical aspects of the utterance. Apparently, the position of Russian authors is resolved into understanding the structural integrity of the language, in the bases of which they see primarily grammatical and lexical patterns. Our British colleagues prioritize checking the structural language level, which requires testing first of all communication skills and implemented language practices.

In terms of the question-answer consistency in the text of TORFL test the pragmatic component becomes more essential related to the situation of passing the exam. The addressee must first consider the information query in the instructional part related to the official style. Only then an answer can be given related to the conversational style of language and speech. The addressee is constantly restricted in response. Restrictions deal not only with the addressee's language and speech competence, but, moreover, they are imposed by various grammatical, lexical, communicative and stylistic cliched frames set by the TORFL texts. In requests-instructions, despite the fact that they relate to the everyday sphere of communication, arbitrary responses are not allowed. The modal framework for information queries is overly voluntative. The addressee of the utterance in the TORFL texts is extremely impersonal, in contrast to the Cambridge ESOL. Communicative tasks that have to be solved by the candidates, using language within the level; areas, topics, situations of communication must demonstrate the degree of not only linguistic, but also extralinguistic competence. This is the essence of the communicative approach to language proficiency assessment.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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