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GENERAL COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: The content of foreign language teaching or what to teach is one of the main problems the Methods deals with. In this chapter an attempt is made to touch on the chief components which, we think, should constitute the content of foreign language teaching in schools; a more detailed consideration will be given in appropriate chapters dealing with teaching various aspects of the language and language skills.

INTRODUCTION

The first component of "what to teach" is habits and skills which pupils should acquire while learning a foreign language. According to the aims of learning this subject they are: hearing (listening comprehension), speaking, reading, and writing. The level of habits and skills is determined by the syllabus for each form. However, quantitative and qualitative characteristics of skills, or the so-called terminal behaviour, is not defined yet for different types of schools and stages of instruction. This is one of the problems for methodologists to investigate and solve. Nevertheless, some attempts have been made in this respect. Thus in school syllabi we can find some directions as to the level of skills that should be reached in each particular form and their development from form to form. For example, the requirements for hearing and reading skills differ in the 9th and 10th forms. In the 9th form pupils should be able to understand oral language on the basis of the material previously learned and within the topics covered, while in the 10th form the material for hearing should include 1—2 unfamiliar

words for pupils to guess their meaning, and to understand a text received by ear, based on the material learned and on a topic close to those pupils have worked at. This is a new "qualitative step" for pupils in understanding oral language. If in the 9th form pupils should read with the speed of 1 000 signs per academic hour, in the 10th form the speed of reading is 1 300.[1]

The second component of "what to teach" is language (textual) material, arranged in topics and serving as starting points for the development of oral language and written language, which allows the teacher to reach the practical, educational, and cultural aims set by the syllabus. For example, in the junior stage (the 5th-and 6th forms) pupils should speak and read about school, home, town and countryside, nature, physical training and sports. In the senior stage the textual material should cover the following topics: the life of the youth in the USSR and abroad; sport in the USSR and abroad; industry, agriculture, and science in the USSR and abroad; history and geography of the country whose language pupils study; art and literature in the USSR'and abroad. Topics for speaking and reading are developed from form to form, i. e., the pupil's ability to read and speak on a certain topic is widened as his vocabulary and grammar are enriched.[2]

The third component of the content of foreign language teaching is linguistic material, i.e., phonology, grammar, and vocabulary carefully selected for the purpose. The selection of linguistic material, the compiling of the so-called minima, for instance, minimum vocabulary and minimum grammar, has always been one of the most important and difficult problems to be solved and, although a great deal of work has been done in this respect,[3] we are still on the way to its solution. A limited body of linguistic material is required by pupils who have about 600 class hours at their disposal spread over six years (extensive course), and at the same time it must be laige enough to serve as a sound basis for developing pupils' language skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods of foreign language teaching are based on the fundamental principles of didactics; among them, a conscious approach to language learning, activity, visualization, and others. However, in foreign language teaching, due to the specif ic features of the subject in which means and ends are equally essential, these principles are used in a particular way.

The principle of conscious approach to language learning implies comprehension of a linguistic phenomenon of language material by the pupil usually through the medium of the native language, or the arrangement of the material in sentence patterns graded in difficulties with the emphasis on some elements which are singled out as "teaching points". In all cases pupils- understand both the form and the content of the material they are to learn, and they are aware of how they should treat

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[1] Программы средней школы. Иностранные языки. М., „Просвещение", 196G, с. 5—6.
[2] for instance, the topic "School" in the 5th and the 6th forms.
[3] Словарь наиболее употребительных слов английского, немецкого и французского языков. Под ред. проф. И. *В.'* Рахманова. М., 1960.

the material while performing .various exercises which aim at developing habits and skills in using it. Such an approach to language learning usually contrasts with "mechanical" learning through repetitive drill. A great deal of research work has been carried out in Russion psychology and Methods, and it has been proved that conscious approach to learning a foreign language promotes the acquisition of the subject. V. A. Artemov, a prominent psychologist, puts forward a theory of the unity of the language rule and the speech activity (language behaviour) in foreign language teaching. In teaching a foreign language therefore, it is more reasonable to help pupils in assimilating language rules which function in this language by introducing the rules, rather than to wait until the learners deduce these rules through speech activity. Proceeding from this consideration it becomes obvious that in learning a foreign language the pupil should acquire the rules of the language to be able to follow these rules in the act of communication; and the teacher's task is to help the pupil in this respect. From the definition given by the author it is clear that he does not mean "rules" in their traditional interpretation, but in the form of algorithms that can direct the pupil's learning and lead him along the shortest way to the desired end.

The vertical arrow stands for knowledge or theory. The horizontal arrow represents the process of mastering the language. The author's interpretation of the process is as follows. The acquisition of knowledge (theory) cannot provide the mastery of the language. Nor can habits ensure this. Only language practice supported by theory can develop language habits and skills in a desirable direction and lead to the mastering of a foreign language. The author develops the following idea. Since learning a new language is connected with acquisition of new concepts by the learner, theory can help in forming these new concepts. One of the ways of doing this is an extensive use of translation-interpretation. However, this teaching technique is not approved of by a majority of methodologists and teachers because'pupils learn about a linguistic item more than they need for practical application, also it is time-consuming and, therefore, this contradicts the communicative approach to language teaching.

A conscious approach to foreign language teaching implies the use of the learner's native language. Russion Methods has devoted much attention to the problem of the mother tongue in teaching and learning a foreign language. If a man knows only his native language his concepts are directly associated with the expression of these concepts in this tongue. The associations which arise, extremely complicated in nature, are very lasting due to systematic speech practice. The aquisition of a foreign language means the transition to thinking in a second language. For this purpose, it is necessary to acquire the ability to establish direct associations between concepts and their means of expression in the second language. Indeed, when a pupil begins to le(arn a foreign language the words of this language are often associated with the words of the mother tongue first. However, thanks to constant practice the intermediate link — the native language — fades, and foreign language words

come into the pupil's consciousness directly in connection with the concepts they express. Mastery of the language means formulating one's thoughts within the foreign language.

Proceeding from psychological peculiarities of foreign language assimilation, and taking into account the basic processes of thought, we may come to the conclusion that in order to master a foreign language pupils must have a lot of practice in hearing, speaking, reading, and writing in the language they study. As to the mother tongue we cannot eliminate it. We should use it as a means of teaching whenever it helps pupils in acquiring knowledge necessary for developing habits and skills.

In teaching and learning, the foreign language and the mother tongue are closely connected and influence each other. The pupil can transfer language skills acquired in the native language to those in the target language. For instance, in teaching the English alphabet the teacher need not drill pupils in writing such letters as *a, c, e* and some others which Uzbek pupils can write because the Russian alphabet includes these letters. In teaching reading and pronunciation, the pupils easily cope with sound-and-letter analysis of words, as they are acquainted with that kind of work from learning the mother tongue. Studies of transfer show,, however, that such a psychological phenomenon as transfer is not automatic. Pupils should be taught to transfer. Bright pupils transfer learning more rapidly than slow pupils.' Transfer is increased when the situation to which transfer is made is similar to the original learning. A proper utilization of transfer can undoubtedly increase the effectiveness of learning.

The pupil's mother tongue often interferes with the target language, i. e., the formation of new habits is hindered by habits already acquired. For instance, pronunciation habits in the mother tongue hinder the development of pronunciation habits in a foreign language. Habits and skills of correct speech, from grammar viewpoint, lead to constant mistakes in the foreign language as the pupils try to transfer the structure of one language to that of the other. In studying French or English Russian-speaking pupils often make mistakes in word-order. We believe that the best way to overcome interference is, on the one hand, some comparison of language phenomena in both languages clearly showing the peculiarities of the foreign language, its distinctive features, its characteristics, and, on the other hand, constant practice in the foreign language that helps to overcome interference in developing pupils' habits and skills in the foreign language.

Consequently, from the analysis of the didactic principle of the conscious approach to foreign language teaching, we may formulate a specific methodological principle which reads as follows:

In teaching a foreign language it is necessary to cope with the mother tongue of pupils.

This means that teaching a foreign language, for example, English to Russian, Chuvash, Bashkir, Arabic-speaking pupils should differ in the arrangement of language material and in the techniques of its presentation and retention. We cannot ignore pupils' native tongue in teaching a foreign language when searching for the shortest and most sound ways to the desired end. Indeed,

Russian-speaking pupils and Arabicspeaking pupils have different troubles in learning English. The teacher either helps pupils to make a transfer, for instance, from Russian into English (little explanation, if any, and few exercises are needed in this case), or he gives pupils the necessary explanation and supplies them with exercises, which^p_upils perform within the target language, without stressing the difference by translation exercises; the latter work rather at comprehension than at forming new habits and skills.

In connection with the analysis of the principle of conscious teaching, it is necessary to dwell upon the forming of habits and skills in a foreign language. All language habits and skills are extremely complex in their nature and are closely connected with conscious activity of students. What are habits? Here are some definitions of habits.

The principle of activity in foreign language teaching **j**s of utmost importance since learning a foreign language **should** result in mastering the target language which is possible **provided** the pupil **is** an active participant in the process, **he** is involved in language activities throughout the whole **course** of instruction.

In modern psychology activity is now generally considered to be a main characteristic of cognitive processes. Activity arises under certain conditions. According to the Sets Theory [1] the learner should feel a need to learn the subject, and have necessary prerequisites created for the satisfaction of this need. The main sources of activity are motivation, desire, and interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Young people in our country want to know foreign languages. To illustrate this we may refer to the entrance examinations of language departments of higher schools where the competition is great; to the growing number of people who wish to study at various foreign language courses; to the desire of parents to send their children to specialized schools, 'etc.

F. Komkov [2] gives the following data obtained by means of questionnaires among 3368 pupils of town and village schools. 81 per cent of the pupils want to study a foreign language. About 11 per cent of pupils name it their favourite subject. The greatest desire to study a foreign language is observed among pupils of the 5th form, i.e., beginners (93 per cent). In other forms there is a tendency to the loss of interest in language learning. This shows that there is something wrong in teaching this subject. The teachers fail to sustain and develop the desire to learn which pupils have when they start the course.

Practice and special observations prove that pupils' interest depends on their progress in language learning. If pupils make good progress in hearing, speaking, reading, and writing, they become interested in learning the foreign language. In this connection I. F. Komkov writes: „...

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[1] *Узнадзе Д. Н,* Экспериментальные основы теории установки. Тбилиси,- 1961.
[2] *Комков И. Ф.* Активный метод обучения иностранным языкам в школе. Минск, 1970, с. 12.

успешное обучение, обеспечивающее хорошее усвоение материала, формирует у учащихся активное, положительное отношение к изучаемым языкам. Отсюда лишний раз становится очевидной первостепенная роль методов обучения"

In teaching a foreign language it is necessary to stimulate pupils' activity by involving them in the act of communication in the target language either in its oral (hearing, speaking) or written (reading, writing) form.

If pupils are not involved in the act of communication in the target language and remain on the level of performing drill exercises, they soon lose interest in the subject and become passive at the lessons. One needs a lot of practice in the use of the language to master it. Consequently the problem arises how to enlarge the real time available for each pupil during the class-period.to make him an active participant of the lesson, of the work done during the lesson. It is pupils who should work, and not the teacher as is often the case.

Methodologists and teachers are searching for ways to solve this problem. Some ways may be recommended. Tney are as follows:

(a)   work in unison, when pupils are told to pronounce a sound, a word, a phrase, a sentence, or to read something out loud in chorus in imitation of the teacher, or a speaker if a a tape-recorder is used;

(b)   mass work, when pupils are invited to listen to a text, to read a text silently, to do some exercises in written form, in other words, when they learn for themselves, and each does the same work as his classmates;

- work in small groups when pupils are divided into four- five groups, and each group receives a special assignment either for reading or speaking; the work results in conversation between group 1 and the class, group 2 and the class, etc.;

- work in pairs, when pupils sitting at the same desk have an opportunity to "talk" in the target language: reciting a dialogue they are to learn, doing an ask-and-answer exercise or making up a dialogue of their own;

- individual work in programmed instruction, when each pupil can work with the programme he receives either through visual or auditory perception at his own pace.

Getting the physical arrangements right is often a big part of getting a speaking activity to work well. That may seem an obvious enough comment, but it's interesting how often teachers set up a group speaking activity and then, for example, leave students sitting in shoulder-to-shoulder lines.

It's hard to talk to someone you can't make eye contact with (though sometimes you may want to play around with this idea, for example, deliberately keeping students apart when practicing 'phone calls').

Learners usually need to be able to:

• make eye contact with those they are speaking to;

• hear clearly what the other person / people are saying;

• be reasonably close together.

If you find a good picture, rather than using it once, keep it and slowly build up your stock of resources. To start collecting, you need to approach the world with a 'flashcard' frame of mind! Whenever you look at a magazine, advertising leaflet, etc, keep your eyes open for suitable pictures. When the publication is ready to head for the bin, cut out the pictures you need. Generally, choose larger pictures that will be clearly visible even from the back of the classroom. You will find some subjects are very easy to find (cars, food products, perfumes, etc) whereas others (people doing specific everyday taste, faces expressing different moods, etc) are harder. After a while, you'll need to start looking for specific things that fill in gaps in your set.

When you have a number of pictures, you'll have to find some way to organize them, maybe in folders sorted by topic. It may also be worth taking the extra time to make cards longer-lasting, by sticking them down on cardboard, keeping them in plastic pockets or even by laminating them.

What can you do with them? Here are a few typical uses:

• to quickly show the meaning of a lexical item, eg *to iron*;

• to illustrate presentations of language, for example by giving a visual image to an imaginary character, eg ***This is Marilyn. Every day she gets up at six o'clock*** ...etc;

• to tell a story, providing occasional images to give students something tangible to look at and help their understanding, eg... ***and then a large green lorry turned around the corner and drove towards them;***

• as prompts to remind them of a specific grammar point or typical error, eg a flashcard with the word ***past*** on it to quickly remind students to make verbs in the past form;

• as seeds for student-based storytelling activities, eg handing out a small selection of pictures to groups of students and asking them to invent a story that incorporates all those images;

• as prompts for guessing games, definition games, description games, etc. For example, one person in a team has a picture of a person, which they describe.

Then the other students are shown a pile of seven pictures (including the original one) and have to work out which picture was described.

Pictures and picture stories can be in a book or handout, drawn on the board or OHP, on flashcards or on posters. Traditionally they have been used as a starting point for writing exercises, but they are also very useful for focusing on specific language points or as material for speaking and listening activities. Most picture stories seem inevitably to involve practice of the past simple and past progressive

This heading suggests that we start by looking at the language involved in the story and work

on getting this understood and correct before we move on tc on telling the story. Thus we could follow this route:

- Introduction of topic / subject

- Focus on interesting or essential lexis, grammar or function

- Look at the pictures and discuss; possibly more language focus

- Tell the story

- Writing exercise

An alternative lesson procedure could start with a fluency activity and only focus in on accurate use of language at a later stage. The lesson might have this shape:

- Introduction of topic / subject

- Look at the pictures and discuss

- Tell the story

- Focus on interesting or essential lexis, grammar or function

- Tell the story more accurately

- Writing exercise **Variations**

These basic recipes for picture-story lessons are easy to adapt or abandon. A little thought will reveal many ways of doing each of the stages differently, or not doing one of the stages at all, or doing them in a different order, or doing something completely different with the pictures. For example:

• Introducing the topic: set up a 'TV debate' on UFOs with role cards.

• Written work: instead of getting students to write out the whole story, give than a text that you have written earlier. Students have to decide on missing words and fill in blank spaces, or perhaps put jumbled-up sentences in the correct order.

Songs on recordings, video / DVD or perhaps played on a guitar in the classroom are often used as a 'filler' activity to change the mood or pace of a lesson. They sometimes tend to get relegated to the 'Friday afternoon' slot as a sort of reward for the week's hard work. Fine, but do be aware that songs can also be usefully integrated into the main flow of your course.

Many course books nowadays include songs that specifically focus on grammatical or functional items; these may have been selected because of them content (eg *Tom's Diner* uses a lot of present progressive) or specially written and recorded for students of English. Of course, you can also select interesting authentic songs yourself, with the advantage, perhaps, that they are often more up-to-date.

Songs can be used in many of the same ways that you might use an ordinary speech recording. Interesting lyrics and clarity of vocals help to make a song into appropriate classroom material, and for this reason folk music or a solo singer- songwriter are often a better bet than a heavy metal band.

With CLT began a movement away from traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills, and toward the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work.

CONCLUSION

The type of classroom activities proposed in CLT also implied new roles in the classroom for teachers and learners. Learners now had to participate in classroom activities that were based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students had to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model. They were expected to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning. And teachers now had to assume the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error-free sentences, the teacher had to develop a different view of learners' errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language learning.

Since the advent of CLT, teachers and materials writers have sought to find ways of developing classroom activities that reflect the principles of a communicative methodology. This quest has continued to the present, as we shall see later in the booklet. The principles on which the first generation of CLT materials are still relevant to language teaching today, so in this chapter we will briefly review the main activity types that were one of the outcomes of CLT.

Accuracy Versus Fluency Activities**.** One of the goals of CLT is to develop fluency in language use. Fluency is natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence. Fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns.

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