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### TEACHING VOCABULARY, GRAMMAR AND PRONUNCIATION IN COMPLEX TO STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE (AFTER GERMAN)

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Most work done by third language acquisition (TLA) researchers has been concerned mainly with separate language aspects of speaking: vocabulary [1; 3], grammar [2; 8; 9] or pronunciation [4; 11]. In practice these methods, though productive, result in getting students express themselves freely in English but with numerous grammar mistakes or stumble for necessary words which, however, are accurately organised in sentences. The aim of acquiring approximate, if not native-like, pronunciation still remains unachievable for most students learning English as a second foreign language.

There are several possible causes for such one-sided and, therefore, sketchy knowledge of English, thus making the speaker sound unintelligible:

– a brief (three-year) term of TLA specified in syllabus forces teachers to limit grammar material in favour of vocabulary work and v.v., while pronunciation practice often comes to an end after the Introductory Phonetic Course;

– as there are few coursebooks for TLA available, teachers have to use materials on teaching English as a first foreign language inevitably transferring the methods of working with them on teaching English to students of other language departments;

– large language experience gained while studying German is often neglected even by the teachers who can speak their students' first foreign language;

– the teacher's preference of some language aspect may play its role as well;

– last but not least, materials writers and teachers pay scant attention to organic interrelation between the three

aspect sides of speaking which makes an English lesson consist of three distinct stages: warm-up activities (tongue-twisters, limericks, rhymes, etc.); grammar and vocabulary work (presentation, practice or revision).

In second language acquisition (SLA), however, more studies have appeared on combining, for example, vocabulary and grammar [7], grammar and pronunciation [5]. Having proved successful, these methods of interrelated teaching brought us to the idea of combining *all* aspects of language in teaching speaking skills in English after German.

It can be argued that if structures, vocabulary items and sounds are *parts* of many language learning activities then they are *automatically integrated* into speech. It is possible to state the case even more extremely: whenever students hear English and try to speak themselves they are 'having speech practice'. Yet the results of our observation, stated above, show that the target items involved into speech production appear to go much deeper and are obviously much more complicated than we have been led to believe. This article, thus, will survey the main principles of third-language teaching and discuss some possible ways to make the mechanism of application of rules work automatically through interaction.

There is a solid theoretical foundation for teaching vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in complex. We will briefly summarize the findings of a few studies that have been carried out:

– Linguistic analysis has proved that all language items (lexical, grammatical and phonetic) are closely

connected and co-exist in the complex system known as language. That means that words are always grammatically and phonetically organised in speech and carry therefore different kinds of information.

– ‘Marriage of lexis and grammar’ has made it possible to point out the following levels of interrelation between their items: *word – word combination – sentence – text* [7].

– Interestingly, it has been found that speakers who hesitate a lot tend to have many pronunciation problems: *My parents ... has ... I has ... have ... four elder sisters* [12]. We can easily consume that speakers make pauses because they cannot automatically recall necessary words and structures and constantly use self-correction and grammar restructurings. There must be a link between lack of confidence about pronunciation and grammar and vocabulary knowledge, which in turn makes the person difficult to understand.

– It is generally accepted that the brain often has difficulty in handling two competitive cognitive demands at once – carrying on a conversation and being accurate (grammatically and phonetically). It is possible that once the cognitive burden is lessened, the learner might be able to apply some of the rules.

The problem then appears to be how we are going to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical.

According to **communicative approach**, teaching pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar is probably most effective when these are integrated into activities that use the target items meaningfully for some communicative purpose.

If this is accepted, then the question arises: where should we start? Teach the smaller bits first (separate words *cup, coffee*, etc.; the use of articles and the plural, *of*-phrase to express quantity: *a cup of coffee*) and then get students to communicate information about their drinking habits: *I usually have a cup of coffee for breakfast* or ordering a drink when eating out: *Waiter, two cups of coffee, please*. Or get them to try to communicate such information, teaching them the items as they need them? Or provide them with a ready-made text where a situation needs to be identified and later analyse its components for intensive study?

The answer to this question seems crucial for our research, as these methods are related to totally different approaches of teaching language, i.e. the first method comes from the so-called **bottom-up approach** and the third one – **top-down approach**.

Seeing these approaches as a continuum rather than as a dichotomy, we can say that they both are expected to be practicable and effective. But what is more important for us is the principle that *different* language segments should be combined: that we should not lose sight of the importance of the communicative acts and overstress accurate grammar, vast vocabulary or native-

like pronunciation; and conversely, that we should not spend all our time on communication only, neglecting useful intensive study of specific language problems.

That is why we stick to the second, **mixed**, method of presenting new material and practicing specific items that are relevant to the target theme (topic), as it will help students engage more intensively with the language associated with it. This means that such relatively non-communicative activities as grammar exercises, drills of various sorts, translating, etc. do not lose their value when involving students in real communication about interesting, relevant subject matter and therefore must have a place in the curriculum.

But if we are going to combine pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar with more communicative language segments such as functions and notions, how do we select what to study with what? Some associations may seem quite straightforward: the topic “Food”, for example, implies notions such as foodstuffs, containers, methods of cooking, cooking equipment, etc. and vocabulary such as *coffee, cup, to grind, coffee grinder*, etc. A more problematic association is that between functions and grammar. It may seem obvious that any function has its corresponding grammar structure, for example, one might think that the function of giving instructions in cooking would go with the imperative: *Put some coffee beans into the coffee grinder*. However it is possible to give instructions which are clearly not imperatives: *You should put some coffee beans into the coffee grinder*.

In principle, any grammatical structure or vocabulary item may be used within a variety of notions, functions, topics and situations – and vice versa: there are few, if any, “one-to-one” relationships. For example, imperatives can also be used for giving directions and *should* can also express advisability.

Thus, if we accept that a grammatical structure should be practiced within the context of an appropriate function or situation, and that introducing a topic should include practicing relevant vocabulary, the selection of actual items may not be so simple. The way out, as it seems to us, is to reduce the language load by selecting only those items which answer the communicative purpose of the situations under study leaving the rest to study later, in other relevant situations. Advanced students may be encouraged to cover new material beforehand in self-study.

Despite the obvious advantages of this method adopted by most materials writers, native-speakers of English, it has its disadvantages. Being aimed at focusing on fluency, i.e. developing speaking skills, it often provides little, if any, practice to gain grammar accuracy, causing pronunciation to lag behind. Besides, grammar and vocabulary, although combined, have a striking “one-to-one” relationship within each teaching unit which implies work with a coursebook from cover to

cover not to get scanty information about language. This makes foreign coursebooks for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) inconvenient to adapt for TLA.

The analysis of “home-produced” coursebooks for teaching English as FL1 edited, for example, by V.D. Arakin; L.P. Khristorozhdestvenskaya, etc. has shown that they provide thorough *aspect*-orientated coverage of material and may lack real-life situations for discussion. The few coursebooks specially written for teaching English as FL2 (by T.I. Pozdrankova; R.A. Yakovleva; I.I. Kitrosskaya; V.G. Viljuman; N.D. Ivitskaya; S.M. Lebedeva), though some of them provide comparison of some phenomena of foreign languages, resemble coursebooks for SLA and therefore have the same drawbacks.

So we can say that now we face an urgent necessity to design such materials where topics, notions and functions, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, therefore, *all* have a useful part to play in a TLA syllabus and it seems misguided to focus too much on one to the possible exclusion of the others. To achieve this aim, we should work out a new technology of developing speaking skills which will allow:

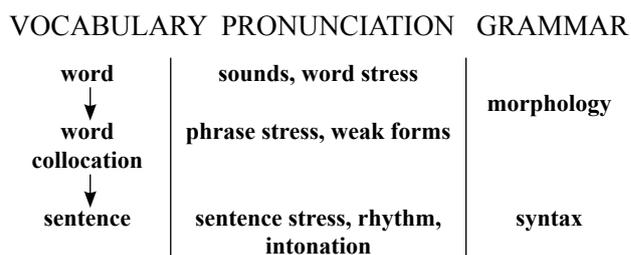
- to strike a balance between the three aspects of language: vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation;
- to recycle words and structures with parallel work on their pronunciation in “expanding rehearsal” that will continue throughout the course;
- to involve students into activities presenting a higher degree of challenge, both cognitive and linguistic, which will be beneficial to their cognitive development;
- to encourage students to make crosslinguistic comparisons leading them to discoveries about the grammatical, semantic and phonetic systems of contacting languages;
- to develop readiness to transfer learning strategies and language skills gained before and prevent from interlingual interference from previously acquired languages;
- to provide students with encounters with the reality of target language use because much of their exposure consists of written language at sentence level: they are used to reading textbook exercises and hearing carefully-scripted dialogues and instruction-focused teacher talk.

The first requirement is a *key* point for our technology. Methodologically, it found its way into practice in the approach known as **complex**. This approach is aimed at organising the material under study in such a way that vocabulary learning is based on grammar studied earlier and vice versa: learning structures is possible only on the basis of known words with parallel practice of pronunciation which in turn is supposed to

develop speaking skills in English faster, more easily and efficiently.

In principle the question: what should be studied first, words or structures, comes from the ever-lasting problem of the *grammar/vocabulary* dichotomy. Its supporters are known to have formed two opposing approaches – **lexical** and **grammatical (structural)**.

The analysis of the studies reviewed here brought us to the idea that in choosing what to start with it is natural to focus on the *word* as the primary unit. The way to the production of utterances (text as a product of transactional speech is not of our concern here) lies thus through the following stages:



Now it is becoming increasingly clear that achieving the main goal of teaching speaking skills will depend on the proper organization of the material as we know from memory theory that organized information is easier to learn. We have chosen communicatively-intentional blocks consisting of texts and activities built around them as items of managing the materials adequate to our goal. We borrowed the notion from Poznyak I.S. who believes that communicative intentions of these blocks motivate students to interact and produce utterances in the form of word combinations, sentences and then texts [6]. Work with various lexical, grammatical and therefore phonetic contents of these blocks (there may be up to ten such blocks within the topic) is supposed to teach students to integrate new language material with the old and make their speech fluent.

It is common knowledge that one of the underlying currents running through TLA research is the importance of teaching FL2 not in isolation, but teaching NL-FL1-FL2 background knowledge which can make students more aware of the differences and similarities between the languages, and therefore enables them to use their knowledge effectively. Having etymological and sound similarity, German and English can go hand in hand, making thus Poznyak’s blocks *bilingual*.

In conclusion we would like to say that we have examined only some of the theoretical positions underlying the problem which requires further discussion and practical illustration.

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