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METHODS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Анотація. У статті розглянуті основні методи навчання російської мови як іноземної, різні техніки і підходи до викладання мови в аудиторії. Також дано короткий огляд різних сайтів і програм, які можуть допомогти студенту-іноземцю оволодіти російською мовою.

Ключові слова: фонетика, лексика, граматика, звук, словосполучення, носій мови, рівень, помилка, спілкуватися, підхід, техніка, метод.

Аннотация. В статье рассмотрены основные методы обучения русскому языку как иностранному, различные техники и подходы к преподаванию языка в аудитории. Также дан краткий обзор различных сайтов и программ, которые могут помочь студенту-иностранцу овладеть русским языком.

Ключевые слова: фонетика, лексика, грамматика, звук, словосочетание, носитель языка, уровень, ошибка, общаться, подход, техника, метод.

Abstract. The article deals with the main methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language, various techniques and approaches to teaching the language in the classroom. It also provides a brief overview of various sites and programs that can help a foreign student to master Russian.

Keywords: phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, sound, collocation, native speaker, level, error, communicate, approach, technique, method.

Problem statement. The teaching of Russian as a foreign language (RFL) is one of the most popular subjects among foreign students coming to study in Russia. It is present on the curriculum of practically any large university that has a philological department.

What are students likely to find difficult when learning Russian? When it comes to the language itself, students, who before their arrival in Russia, have never learnt Russian will have to tackle three areas: phonetics, vocabulary and grammar.

For example, the Russian sound [ы] presents no difficulty for native speakers but is a nightmare for most foreign students. Soft and hard consonants are also a minefield because in Russian they are used to differentiate words, e.g. мат [swear language] and мать [mother], брать [to take] and брат [brother].

Main content. In vocabulary, the challenge is not only to learn new words but also to grasp their collocations. For example, native speakers of English will have to remember that in Russian we say “strong rain” (сильный дождь) rather than heavy rain, or “stiff tea“ (крепкий чай) rather than strong tea, and that our grass is not long but tall (высокая трава). Also, Russians wash their head (мыть голову) instead of their hair.

As for grammar, I think the most difficult areas are verbs of motion and verb aspects. For a native Russian speaker, there is no difficulty here, we use the right forms without even thinking: Сейчас я иду наработу [I am on my way to work]. But: Каждый день я хожу на работу [Every day I go to work]. Or: Каждый день я иду на работу пешком, а возвращаюсь на такси. И когда волнуюсь, я по комнате хожу [Every day I walk to work but I take a taxi back. When I am anxious, I pace around the room].

If you ask an ordinary Russian native speaker to explain why they say иду in some cases and хожу in others, they will not be able to explain. At more advanced stages, in addition to the идти-ходить pair, students have to tackle the verbs: прийти, уйти, отойти, перейти, зайти, обойти, пройтись and so on.

It is believed that to reach the B1 (threshold) level, it takes 460 academic hours, i.e. six to seven months of intensive studies (six academic hours a day four times a week). Having said that, it is obvious that the number of hours can vary depending on conditions, schedule, students' native language and ability.

If by a "comprehensive course" you mean reaching the C2 (near-native) level, then calculating the exact number of academic hours is more difficult here.

Language teaching methodologies

1. Direct method (education). The direct method of teaching, which is sometimes called the natural method, and is often (but not exclusively) used in teaching foreign languages, refrains from using the learners' native language and uses only the target language. It was established in Germany and France around 1900 and contrasts with the grammar–translation method and other traditional approaches, as well as with C.J. Dodson's bilingual method. It was adopted by key international language schools such as Berlitz and Inlingua in the 1970s and many of the language departments of the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. State Department in 2012.

Characteristic features of the direct method are:

•teaching concepts and vocabulary through pantomiming, real-life objects and other visual materials;

•teaching grammar by using an inductive approach (i.e. having learners find out rules through the presentation of adequate linguistic forms in the target language);

•centrality of spoken language (including a native-like pronunciation);

•focus on question-answer patterns.

2. Grammar-translation. The grammar–translation method is a method of teaching foreign languages derived from the classical (sometimes called traditional) method of teaching Greek and Latin. In grammar–translation classes, students learn grammatical rules and then apply those rules by translating sentences between the target language and the native language. Advanced students may be required to translate whole texts word-for-word.

The method has two main goals: to enable students to read and translate literature written in the source language, and to further students' general intellectual development. It originated from the practice of teaching Latin; in the early 1500s, students learned Latin for communication, but after the language died out it was studied purely as an academic discipline. When teachers started teaching other foreign languages in the 19th century, they used the same translation-based approach as had been used for teaching Latin. The method has been rejected by scholars, and has no theoretical basis.

3. Audio-lingual method. The audio-lingual method, Army Method, or New Key, is a style of teaching used in teaching foreign languages. It is based on behaviorist theory, which postulates that certain traits of living things, and in this case humans, could be trained through a system of reinforcement. The correct use of a trait would receive positive feedback while incorrect use of that trait would receive negative feedback.

This approach to language learning was similar to another, earlier method called the direct method. Like the direct method, the audio-lingual method advised that students should be taught a language directly, without using the students' native language to explain new words or grammar in the target language. However, unlike the direct method, the audio-lingual method did not focus on teaching vocabulary. Rather, the teacher drilled students in the use of grammar.

Applied to language instruction, and often within the context of the language lab, it means that the instructor would present the correct model of a sentence and the students would have to repeat it. The teacher would then continue by presenting new words for the students to sample in the same structure. In audio-lingualism, there is no explicit grammar instruction: everything is simply memorized in form.

The idea is for the students to practice the particular construct until they can use it spontaneously. The lessons are built on static drills in which the students have little or no control on their own output; the teacher is expecting a particular response and not providing the desired response will result in a student receiving negative feedback. This type of activity, for the foundation of

language learning, is in direct opposition with communicative language teaching.

Charles C. Fries, the director of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan, the first of its kind in the United States, believed that learning structure, or grammar was the starting point for the student. In other words, it was the students' job to recite the basic sentence patterns and grammatical structures.

4. Community Language Learning. In this method attempts are made to build strong personal links between the teacher and student so that there are no blocks to learning. There is much talk in the mother tongue which is translated by the teacher for repetition by the student.

5. The Silent Way. This is so called because the aim of the teacher is to say as little as possible in order that the learner can be in control of what he wants to say. No use is made of the mother tongue.

6. Immersion. This corresponds to a great extent to the situation we have at our school. ESL students are immersed in the English language for the whole of the school day and expected to learn math, science, humanities etc. through the medium of the target language, English. Immigrant students who attend local schools find themselves in an immersion situation.

7. Task-based language learning. The focus of the teaching is on the completion of a task which in itself is interesting to the learners. Learners use the language they already have to complete the task and there is little correction of errors.

(This is the predominant method in middle school ESL teaching at Frankfurt International School. The tasks are subsumed in a major topic that is studied for a number of weeks. In the topic of ecology, for example, students are engaged in a number of tasks culminating in a poster presentation to the rest of the class. The tasks include reading, searching the internet, listening to taped material, selecting important vocabulary to teach other students etc.).

8. The Lexical Syllabus. This approach is based on a computer analysis of language which identifies the most common (and hence most useful) words in the language and their various uses. The syllabus teaches these words in broadly the order of their frequency, and great emphasis is placed on the use of authentic materials.

9. Communicative language teaching (CLT). The focus of this method is to enable the learner to communicate effectively and appropriately in the various situations she would be likely to find herself in. The content of CLT courses are functions such as inviting, suggesting, complaining or notions such as the expression of time, quantity, location.

10. Total Physical Response (TPR). TPR works by having the learner respond to simple commands such as "Stand up", "Close your book", "Go to the window and open it." The method stresses the importance of aural comprehension.

11. Suggestopedia. The theory underlying this method is that a language can be acquired only when the learner is receptive and has no mental blocks. By various methods it is suggested to the student that the language is easy - and in this way the mental blocks to learning are removed.

12. The structural approach. This method sees language as a complex of grammatical rules which are to be learned one at a time in a set order. So for example the verb "to be" is introduced and practised before the present continuous tense which uses "to be" as an auxiliary.

Teaching foreign language in classrooms

Language education may take place as a general school subject or in a specialized language school. There are many methods of teaching languages. Some have fallen into relative obscurity and others are widely used; still others have a small following, but offer useful insights.

While sometimes confused, the terms "approach", "method" and "technique" are hierarchical concepts.

An approach is a set of assumptions about the nature of language and language learning, but does not involve procedure or provide any details about how such assumptions should be implemented into the classroom setting. Such can be related to second language acquisition theory.

There are three principal "approaches":

1. The structural view treats language as a system of structurally related elements to code meaning (e.g. grammar).

2. The functional view sees language as a vehicle to express or accomplish a certain function, such as requesting something.

3. The interactive view sees language as a vehicle for the creation and maintenance of social relations, focusing on patterns of moves, acts, negotiation and interaction found in conversational exchanges. This approach has been fairly dominant since the 1980s.

A method is a plan for presenting the language material to be learned, and should be based upon a selected approach. In order for an approach to be translated into a method, an instructional system must be designed considering the objectives of the teaching/learning, how the content is to be selected and organized, the types of tasks to be performed, the roles of students, and the roles of teachers.

Examples of structural methods are grammar translation and the audio-lingual method.

Examples of functional methods include the oral approach / situational language teaching.

Examples of interactive methods include the direct method, the series method, communicative language teaching, language immersion, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling and Dogme language teaching.

A technique (or strategy) is a very specific, concrete stratagem or trick designed to accomplish an immediate objective. Such are derived from the controlling method, and less directly, from the approach.

Online and self-study courses

Hundreds of languages are available for self-study, from scores of publishers, for a range of costs, using a variety of methods. The course itself acts as a teacher and has to choose a methodology, just as classroom teachers do.

Audio recordings and books

Audio recordings use native speakers, and one strength is helping learners improve their accent. Some recordings have pauses for the learner to speak. Others are continuous so the learner speaks along with the recorded voice, similar to learning a song.

Audio recordings for self-study use many of the methods used in classroom teaching, and have been produced on records, tapes, CDs, DVDs and websites.

Most audio recordings teach words in the target language by using explanations in the learner's own language. An alternative is to use sound effects to show meaning of words in the target language. The only language in such recordings is the target language, and they are comprehensible regardless of the learner's native language.

Language books have been published for centuries, teaching vocabulary and grammar. The simplest books are phrasebooks to give useful short phrases for travelers, cooks, receptionists, or others who need specific vocabulary. More complete books include more vocabulary, grammar, exercises, translation, and writing practice.

Also, various other "language learning tools" have been entering the market in recent years.

Internet and software

Software can interact with learners in ways that books and audio cannot:

Some software records the learner, analyzes the pronunciation, and gives feedback.

Software can present additional exercises in areas where a particular learner has difficulty, until the concepts are mastered.

Software can pronounce words in the target language and show their meaning by using pictures instead of oral explanations. The only language in such software is the target language. It is comprehensible regardless of the learner's native language.

Websites provide various services geared toward language education. Some sites are designed specifically for learning languages:

Some software runs on the web itself, with the advantage of avoiding downloads, and the disadvantage of requiring an internet connection.

Some publishers use the web to distribute audio, texts and software, for use offline. For example, various travel guides, for example Lonely Planet, offer software supporting language education.

Some websites offer learning activities such as quizzes or puzzles to practice language concepts.

Language exchange sites connect users with complementary language skills, such as a native Spanish speaker who wants to learn English with a native English speaker who wants to learn Spanish. Language exchange websites essentially treat knowledge of a language as a commodity, and provide a marketlike environment for the commodity to be exchanged. Users typically contact each other via chat, VoIP, or email.

Language exchanges have also been viewed as a helpful tool to aid language learning at language schools. Language exchanges tend to benefit oral proficiency, fluency, colloquial vocabulary acquisition, and vernacular usage, rather than formal grammar or writing skills. Across Australasia, 'Language Perfect' - an online vocabulary learning site- is frequently used as it enables teachers to monitor students' progress as students gain a "point" for every new word remembered. There is an annual international Language Perfect contest held in May.

Many other websites are helpful for learning languages, even though they are designed, maintained and marketed for other purposes:

All countries have websites in their own languages, which learners elsewhere can use as primary material for study: news, fiction, videos, songs, etc. In a study conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics, it was noted that the use of technology and media has begun to play a heavy role in facilitating language learning in the classroom. With the help of the internet, students are readily exposed to foreign media (music videos, television shows, films) and as a result, teachers are taking heed of the internet's influence and are searching for ways to combine this exposure into their classroom teaching.

Translation sites let learners find the meaning of foreign text or create foreign translations of text from their native language.

Speech synthesis or text to speech (TTS) sites and software let learners hear pronunciation of arbitrary written text, with pronunciation similar to a native speaker.

Course development and learning management systems such as Moodle are used by teachers, including language teachers.

Conclusion. Web conferencing tools can bring remote learners together; e.g. Elluminate Live. Players of computer games can practice a target language when interacting in massively multiplayer online games and virtual worlds. Some Internet content is free, often from government and nonprofit sites such as BBC Online, Book2, Foreign Service Institute, with no or minimal ads. Some is ad-supported, such as newspapers and YouTube. Some requires a payment.

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