

UDC 37

DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.50.97.014

Direct method of teaching foreign languages: pros and cons**Tamara V. Agapova**

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Abstract

Knowledge of the theory and practice of teaching a foreign language allows the teacher to see the methodical idea in a broad educational perspective and better orientate in the choice of teaching methods. The article deals with the direct method (monolingual method) of teaching, when both the classes themselves and the textbook exclude the use of the native language. According to the author, a very important role is assigned to the teacher. His speech should be clear, understandable and phonetically correct. Therefore, it is preferable in this case to use a native speaker as a teacher. However, in our country, this method does not have such popularity as in Europe. This is explained by the fact that the proximity of Western European languages to each other and belonging to one group allow students to build training without referring to their native language. However, the author does not exclude the use of a direct method in teaching a foreign language. But it is necessary to find out when and how we can do it. According to the author, explanations should be given in Russian, especially at the initial stage, but increasing the level, gradually go to a foreign language. This improves the awareness of students and reduces the time spent trying to explain the material.

For citation

Agapova T.V. (2021) Direct method of teaching foreign languages: pros and cons. *Pedagogicheskii zhurnal* [Pedagogical Journal], 11 (4A), pp. 133-138. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.50.97.014

Keywords

Foreign language, teaching methods, direct method, Berlitz schools, interference, non-linguistic university.

Introduction

The success of teaching a foreign language largely depends on the teaching methods and on the teacher's ability to use them depending on specific educational tasks. However, organizing the educational process, not all teachers have a clear idea of the peculiarities of methodical approaches in teaching a foreign language, their advantages and disadvantages [Kashina, 2006]. In addition, knowledge of the theory and practice of teaching a foreign language allows the teacher to see the methodical thought in a broad educational perspective, better orientate in the choice of teaching methods, consciously and creatively apply them in the work.

For several centuries, the grammar-translation method dominated in Europe. Its heyday dates back to the 18th – 19th centuries and in our country it was the main officially accepted method in educational institutions. Representatives of this school believed that teaching foreign languages in educational institutions was mainly of general educational value and its purpose was to develop logical thinking, memory, and outlook. The course was based on the grammatical system. In the educational process, special attention was paid to grammatical analysis of the text, memorization of rules and translation. This method did not provide even basic knowledge of a foreign language. However, despite all the shortcomings, the grammar-translation method gave positive results in teaching analytical reading and translation. The dominance of this method for a long period is explained by the traditions inherited from Latin schools and the formal goals of education [Mirolyubov, 2003].

Direct method as an innovative technology in teaching

“Currently there is an objective need to use innovative psychological and pedagogical technologies in teaching. The modern education system has a wide variety of different technologies. However, practice shows that the most effective among them are those that do not give facts, but require their analysis and comprehension” [Shirshov, 2013].

From the name of the direct method, we can see the main conceptual idea: learners enter the world of the language “in a direct way”, that is, in the same way as a child masters his native language. It is believed that an intermediary language inhibits the development of skills and abilities of the target language. This idea has a serious methodical consequence: both the lessons themselves and the textbook exclude the use of the native language. The direct method is monolingual. Consequently, in order to explain and achieve understanding, it is necessary to develop special forms of explanation. Thus, a sophisticated system of ways of semantizing (explaining the meaning) of vocabulary arises, based on the clauses of lexicology on the relationship of words to each other, semantisation through synonyms, antonyms, definition, description, etc. Semantization is most widely used through visualization: mediated (pictures, illustrations) and direct (demonstration of the objects, actions, etc.).

The direct method also does not provide for the use of a deductive method for the presentation of grammatical material. The rule of using this or that grammatical phenomenon is deduced only after its assimilation in the course of multiple repetitions of speech patterns (phrases) both during the lesson and through the system of exercises [Naidenova, 2008].

The practical application of one or another speech pattern without the obligatory assimilation of theoretical material is characterized as the inductance of the direct method. The following characteristics should be derived from the inductance:

- repeating and in this way memorizing speech patterns, students imitate a teacher or a textbook;
- modifying speech patterns, students act by trial or error, relying not on knowledge of the rules,

but on intuition.

A very important role within this system is assigned to the teacher. He should be a model in every sense of the word. His speech should be clear, understandable, phonetically correct. Therefore, it is preferable in this case to use a native speaker as a teacher [Palmer, 1960].

Direct method in Europe and in Russia

In Europe today, the Berlitz schools work using this method. Its main features can be highlighted:

- lessons are conducted in the foreign language;
- only the vocabulary that is necessary in everyday life is studied;
- speaking and listening are taught through sequential speech patterns and the exchange of questions and answers between a teacher and students;
- grammar is not explained separately, but is presented inductively;
- new words are explained through the demonstration of visual aids, facial expressions and gestures, but never through translation;
- the number of students in the group is small and there are 3-4 hours of classes every day.

The full course of study at Berlitz schools covers four courses, of which the first three are aimed at teaching students all types of speech activity – speaking, reading and writing, and the fourth course is specialized – the study of commercial correspondence, literature, etc. [Aleksandrov, 1970].

However, this way is not always as simple as it might seem at first sight. There are many obstacles to the implementation of successful language skills: poor memory for studying new vocabulary, difficulty in listening to speech, lack of aptitude for language learning, etc. There is also such a phenomenon as interference. Interference is “the interaction of language systems, the impact of the native language system on the foreign language in the process of mastering it” [Azimov, Shchukin, 2009]. Interference, as a rule, is always expressed in deviation from the norms of the second language under the influence of the first one, that is, the native language. However, interference appears not only due to the fact that a person is a native speaker, but also due to its direct use in teaching.

Although E.A. Fechner wrote: “It is clear that the limited use of the native language required by the direct method cannot begin directly with its absolute expulsion, but it must be approached gradually” [Fechner, 1924], nevertheless, this method did not take root in our country in its original form. This can be explained by many reasons; the main ones are:

- differences in the native (Russian) and Western European languages. The proximity of the latter to each other and belonging to one group made it possible to do the teaching of students without using their native language. Let’s compare: Father – Vater, Mother – Mutter. But it is not possible in a Russian audience.

- Russian pedagogical traditions. So, K.D. Ushinsky wrote: “Here it is not only necessary to understand completely the translated thought, not only to grasp all its shades, but also to find the corresponding expression in the native language. Mind, imagination, memory, the gift of speech should be exercised at the same time” [Ushinskii, 1948]. These features in the tradition of teaching foreign languages affected the further development of the methods.

Working with students of intermediate and upper intermediate levels without involving Russian language is really justified. But what to do if students have just begun to learn a foreign language, and the teacher does not speak Russian at all at the lessons. The students do not understand any word, but the lesson time goes on.

There is an opinion that there is no need “to torture” a person at the “beginner” and “elementary” levels, inculcating inferiority complexes of misunderstanding the language. There is nothing wrong with using your native language if necessary, if you need to translate a word quickly. After all, the use of translation in some cases really simplifies the task for both the student and the teacher, and saves a lot of time. And if this is a non-linguistic university, where a limited amount of time is allocated for teaching a foreign language, then the bilingual method can help very well. Why do we need to create difficulties when trying to explain to non-understanding students the phenomena of a foreign language in a foreign language? A pile of grammatical constructions, complex explanations do not contribute much to correct perception. Isn't it better to reach the pre-intermediate level, presenting everything for the student in Russian, and then go on to full “immersion” at the lesson? Experience shows that it is much more effective to explain grammar in native language, and only then practice the constructions in oral speech in a foreign language. This increases awareness and reduces the unnecessary time spent trying to explain, through visualization or interpretation, what can be translated in two words.

Direct method in a non-linguistic university

After conducting a survey among students (100 participants) of the Krasnoyarsk State Agrarian University, the following results were obtained: only 2 of the respondents would like the teacher to speak only a foreign language, 78 students prefer to hear foreign speech in the classroom periodically (if necessary) and 20 want lessons to be held only in Russian.

The most respondents (more than half) would like the teacher to use the native language during the explanation of grammatical material. Some students (22 people) prefer that any explanation of the teacher should be only in Russian.

As we can see, students of a non-linguistic university do not have a positive attitude to the use of a direct method by a foreign language teacher. Although most of the respondents want Russian to be used in classes only when necessary.

From this it can be concluded that students who do not have a high level of mastering a foreign language prefer the use of a bilingual method by a teacher, rather than a direct one, since it is in this case that they feel comfortable and confident [Dodson, 1998].

It is necessary to thoroughly think over what and how to say to students, otherwise they may have a feeling of confusion from misunderstanding, and as a result, the motivation for learning the language disappears, disappointment arises, both in the teacher and in the language.

Disputes about the advisability of using the native language in foreign classes often appear. In our opinion, the question is not whether to use or not to use the native language, but when, how and to what extent. It is necessary to find a “golden mean”. There are situations when the use of the native language is really justified.

Explanations should be given in Russian, especially at the initial stage, but increasing the level, gradually go to a foreign language. At the initial stage, using the native language, we can save a lot of time by giving the necessary explanations on the pronunciation of English sounds that are difficult in pronunciation of words. Grammar, which includes the explanation of grammatical structures, comparison, difference, should still be introduced in the native language. Since explaining some grammatical phenomena in native language, we have the opportunity to show all the details more precisely. And no foreign language will be able to do this better than the native language. However, it is necessary to remember that the higher the level, the more foreign language we use.

Conclusions

We can make learning a foreign language an exciting process. But this will require the professionalism of a teacher who will be able to build his work in such a way that various methods will be used competently, and not one taken separately.

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Прямой метод обучения иностранным языкам: плюсы и минусы

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Аннотация

Знание теории и практики преподавания иностранного языка позволяет преподавателю видеть методическую мысль в широкой образовательной перспективе и свободно ориентироваться в выборе приёмов обучения. В статье речь идет о прямом методе (одноязычный метод) обучения, когда как сами занятия, так и учебник исключают использование родного языка. По мнению автора, очень важная роль отводится преподавателю. Его речь должна быть четкой, понятной и фонетически правильной. Поэтому предпочтительно в этом случае использование в роли учителя носителя языка. Однако в нашей стране этот метод не имеет такой популярности как в Европе. Объясняется это тем, что близость западноевропейских языков друг другу и принадлежность к одной группе

позволяют строить обучение без обращения к родному языку. Однако автор не исключает использование прямого метода в обучении иностранному языку. Но необходимо выяснить, когда и как мы можем использовать этот метод. По мнению автора, пояснения следует давать на русском языке, особенно на начальном этапе, но с повышением уровня, постепенно переходить только на иностранный. Это повышает осознанность обучающихся и снижает временные затраты на попытку объяснить материал.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Агапова Т.В. Direct method of teaching foreign languages: pros and cons // Педагогический журнал. 2021. Т. 11. № 4А. С. 133-138. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2021.50.97.014

Ключевые слова

Иностранный язык, методика обучения, прямой метод, школы Берлица, интерференция, неязыковой ВУЗ.

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