

Проблемное поле

Синергия современных лингвистических, дидактических и психологических подходов в развитии современного языкового образования

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МЕТАФОРЫ В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются различные подходы к обучению иностранному языку. Процесс овладения вторым языком рассматривается метафорически: как строительство кирпичной стены и как выращивание сада. Обсуждаются особенности и преимущества внедрения подхода «органического сада» при разработке планов занятий. Особое внимание уделяется обучению грамматике.

Ключевые слова: обучение иностранному языку; метафора; метод обучения; подход к обучению; обучение грамматике; овладение языком.

METAPHORS IN EDUCATION

Summary. The article deals with different approaches to foreign language teaching. The process of second language acquisition is seen metaphorically – as constructing a brick wall and as growing a garden. The advantages and implications of implementing organic garden approach to developing lesson plans are discussed. Emphasis is placed on grammar instruction.

Key words: teaching a foreign language; metaphor; teaching method; teaching approach; grammar instruction; language acquisition.

Metaphor and metonymy reflect the result of cognitive processing of various phenomena of reality and are initially conceptual in nature. The attention to the systematicity of metaphorical concepts was drawn by G. Lakoff in his work “Metaphors we live by” where the author revealed how people understand their language and their experience: “ <...> metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” [1, p. 3].

Thus metaphorical thinking helps mastering any sphere of life with education being no exception. We are used to metaphors when learning – that is getting new information, new knowledge. We are familiar with the effective use of metaphors when teaching – that is giving new knowledge, being a facilitator in transmitting the experience to the learners. However the educational process itself can be seen through and with the help of metaphors. Above all it helps the teachers to look on to their educational activities and reorganize and restructure it in order to make the instruction, especially grammar instruction, workable and valuable.

This article deals with the teaching of foreign languages, particular attention being paid to grammar instruction as a most intricate and complex part of foreign language acquisition. The three more or less traditional teaching approaches are the following: grammar-translation method involving practicing grammar through translation exercises after the teacher has presented the grammar rules by giving examples of isolated

sentences; audio-lingual method focusing on speaking practice of repeating sentences again and again until they memorize them; and communicative approach that dwells on the idea that people learn language if they have opportunities to use it, if they have a desire to communicate and a purpose for communication – as opposed to translating and drilling involved in previously mentioned methods.

Grammar instruction can also be thought about in a metaphoric way when the approach to grammar teaching – the way how learners acquire the grammatical rules – isn't thought of symmetrically and linearly. Under linear approach D. Nunan understands that “learners acquire one grammatical item at a time and that they should demonstrate their mastery of one thing before moving on to the next” [2]. The linear approach (partially corresponding to the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods) that follows the syllabus proves to be ineffective. It doesn't coincide with the learners' pace – that is different for every single person.

Thus in “Teaching Grammar Communicatively” D. Nunan mentions two approaches to teaching grammar – brick wall approach and organic garden approach, both implying metaphor. Brick wall approach compares learning a language to constructing a wall “erected one linguistic ‘brick’ at a time” with the easy grammatical bricks put at the bottom of the wall thus serving a foundation for the more difficult ones [Ibid]. The right order of the bricks is the crucial characteristic of this approach.

Observations made on the way the learners acquire another language made linguists notice that its acquisition is not a step-by-step process. Grammar accuracy does not increase linearly; it may even decrease at times. Different ‘metaphoric’ terms were suggested to describe this situation, for example ‘u-shaped behaviour’ [3], the organic (garden) approach [2]. The latter “sees second language acquisition more like growing a garden than building a wall. From such a perspective, learners do not learn one thing perfectly, one item at a time, but numerous things simultaneously (and imperfectly)” [Ibid].

The ‘organic garden’ metaphor describes the acquisition of grammar skills in the best way possible. In this way foreign language acquisition can be compared to the process of mother tongue acquisition by kids and the regularities of this process. The evolution of speech habits is not a symmetrical and steady process – it is irregular, uneven and sporadic, covering different amount of language material (phonetics, grammar, vocabulary) at varying lengths of time. Thus second language instruction (its grammar as well) should take place in the environment similar to the natural setting: it must be flexible and put into real life contexts. Instruction that follows the organic garden approach is bound to succeed as it in some way runs a similar apprehensible ‘program’ of language patterns acquisition in our brain.

Therefore, teaching a language should move beyond the linear traditional approaches that involve form-focused methodologies as it will contribute to the right and relevant use of grammar resources in communicative situations.

Learning a language thus can metaphorically be presented as constructing a brick wall where a brick ‘not laid well’ (e.g. a grammar rule that was not drilled to proficiency level) can cause the wall to collapse, and as growing the organic garden, where every flower (e.g. certain grammar skill) does not appear at the same time or grow at the same pace. Any language skill development as well as any learner's language progress can be seen as a growing plant.

The preparation of the lesson plans that follow the organic garden approach is rather time- and energy-consuming. In this case one can think of developing at least some tasks that follow the organic garden approach, taking into consideration different levels of students' knowledge, different study pace and involvement in the class activities so that the tasks of various levels of complexity are distributed to the students who are able to cope with them and engage all of them in the activities.

Other implications of this approach are as follows. Judging from experience, not all students are enthusiastic about this students-centered methodology. They are tired of the translation method mentioned above, but are not always motivated and ready to get involved into communication-based learning. It can be overcome by practice – offering organic approach activities can get the learners motivated. Being an enthusiastic and motivated teacher also helps a lot. The next thing to add here is that even if students know the grammar rules, but when it comes to communication a certain 'brick' is difficult to find in the wall. Is it a wall or just a heap of bricks? When the task of the activity is concrete – e.g. 'Use the verbs in the correct tense form' – all students have excellent results. As soon as their goal is to share their thoughts on some topic, speak freely – they fail every now and then as sometimes they forget either where the needed brick is or where it should be put.

Thus, in order to make grammar classes a success both for teachers and for students proper planning must be accomplished. There are some significant points that the teacher must pay thorough attention to. Grammar rules should not be given ready for memorization and drilling. The tasks the students perform must not be devoid of any communicative load – that is the meaning and the function of the target items in real life situations. The lesson objective should be met with the help of tasks that put students into recognizable environment and stimulate their communicative activity. The main focus should be made on the meaning and function, not on the form of the grammar under study. Students should be encouraged to use the patterns without paying much attention to the mistakes they make at this stage. There are some other aspects that the teacher must try to avoid when preparing/conducting classes. These are Teacher Talking time (it must be reduced to minimum), following Brick Wall approach that provides the Inert knowledge – the knowledge the students can't use outside the class (the term suggested by D. Larsen-Freeman [4]). Another key element of effective grammar instruction is attaching importance to the nature of the activities selected: they must be meaningful, focused and engaging. All this will help following an organic garden approach that offers exciting opportunities for teachers and students to look at language in a new way.

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