

Development of Methods of Teaching English in Russia: Chronological Survey and Analysis

Nikroshkina S.V.

Foreign Languages Department of Technical Faculties
Novosibirsk State Technical University (NSTU)
Novosibirsk, Russia
sofiascience@mail.ru

Abstract—The article gives the chronological retrospective into methods of teaching English in Russia. The author dwells on the main principles of various methods under study. Special attention is paid to the communicative method. The advantages and disadvantages of various methods as well as their effectiveness are studied in the paper.

Keywords—the English language, methods of teaching, principles, chronological development

I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Methods of Teaching English in Russia has been a long one. It is important to point out that the development of the methods mentioned above was neither chaotic nor unsystematic. There were several factors, both objective and subjective, that gave rise to the development of new methods. Among objective ones scientific, political, cultural and social factors should be mentioned. For instance, certain isolation of Russia from other countries in the beginning and in the middle of the twentieth century influenced the development of methods of teaching greatly. Moreover, the achievements in psychology, pedagogics and linguistics contributed to the breakthroughs in Methods of Teaching English (MTE) in Russia as these sciences give the necessary methodology basis for any teaching method. The personal preference to this or that method determined the subjective factor of their popularity and advancing. A good example of systematic development of MTE can be a long controversy between the followers of the so-called direct method and the grammatical-translational one.

The article presents the study of the development of methodological thought in Russia since the 19th century as well as analyzes and estimates their main principles, media, peculiarities, effectiveness, advantages and drawbacks. Such an analysis, in its turn, can definitely help in estimating the effectiveness and novelty of the methods appearing currently as well as their practical applicability in the classroom.

II. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The main method of teaching English in Russia in the 19th century, and probably the only one, was Grammatical-Translational Method (GTM). In fact, this method equaled learning the English language to the process of learning English grammar only. Students had to learn numerous grammar rules because specialists in Methods of Teaching English treated

language as a system. There is no point in arguing this fact, but such an approach led to the following principles of language learning: students had to learn grammar rules with all the exceptions, they had to find examples in the texts given, find the equivalents in their mother tongue, they had to be able to make affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences. The main students' task during the English lessons was to translate the texts from English into Russian and vice versa. The goal was achieved through profound knowledge of English grammar and the assignments were formulated in the Russian language.

The major peculiarities of GTM are as follows: the goal of teaching is the knowledge of the language system rather than the development of language skills. What is more, a systematic approach to studying grammar material was considered to be the main principle. It means that students learn grammar by learning the rules of the use of parts of speech. GTM does not take into consideration how important the grammatical phenomena is for native speakers. Further, deductive logic is used in teacher's explanations: a grammar rule is given and only then it is followed by an example and never vice versa. Besides, a student's mother tongue is used as a basis for comparison and as a media in knowledge acquisition. All coursebooks are bilingual, they are never written in English only.

GTM is fairly criticized for several reasons. First of all, coursebooks devised according to this method are supplied with a range of repetitious, uniform exercises. Students have to insert the missing words in a definite grammatical form, ask questions of different types to various sentences, transform the sentences from one grammatical form into another, translate from Russian into English and vice versa, learn new words outside any context and write dictations. The selection of tasks is limited and monotonous, it is basically one and the same in every unit. Critics claim that it leads to the decrease in motivation and the pace of work. Learning English becomes a routine for the student. Moreover, these exercises are presented in the form of separate sentences not connected by any context. As a result, a student has a very vague notion of how these grammatical phenomena work in real spoken English. The formulation of the tasks is rather strict and does not add to the creation of interactive atmosphere among the students during the lesson.

GTM is also criticized for its approach to vocabulary learning. The list of words to be memorized is always given in the form of a bilingual glossary. Students have to memorize

them mechanically and there is no other way of explaining the meaning of words than by giving their translation. On one hand, according to the world teaching standards the principle of accessibility should be followed in the classroom. On the other hand, learning a foreign language should be interesting and accessible to students. Thus, the methods that appeared after GTM tried to correct this drawback and pay more attention to lexical material.

The choice of texts in the coursebooks is also arguable. Generally, they are taken from classical literature and students have to translate them from English into Russian using the knowledge of grammar material. Such texts are predominant in the coursebooks because one of the main goals of GTM was to bring up the students and to instill high aesthetic ideals. As a result, the texts were taken from famous Russian classical literature. Similar texts are used in order to acquaint students with country study material. This problem is still acute nowadays. H. Congchao and W. Weihong emphasize this aspect [1].

Nowadays this method has been seriously modified. It has accumulated some features of the newest approaches. For instance, the authors of the course books have partly refused from formulating tasks bilingually, substituted classical literature extracts to broadly educational ones giving country-specific information. The course was also supplied with listening comprehension tasks. However, the basic principles of the method were constant: the cognitive approach to learning language as a system and the deductive approach to presenting grammar rules from the rule itself to the examples.

Methods of teaching English were widely discussed in the 19th century in Russia. Grammatical-translation method was criticized by the followers of a new, so-called direct method. They opposed themselves to grammatical-translation method followers. The main difference was the refusal from teaching the English language as a system. "Live" or everyday spoken language has become the purpose of teaching students. By that time linguists had already noticed speech. All these contributed to the development of a new method.

This method was based on associating a foreign word with the thing itself. Such a method is very effective because it is very economical and the goal can be achieved very quickly. Grammatical-translation method was based on purely rote learning and it was necessary to get rid of it. The main difference between the direct and the grammatical-translation methods is the manner of presenting grammar rules, that are explained only after they have been given and repeated as speech samples during the lesson as well as trained through the system of speaking exercises with the help of a course book. The priority of practical use of this or that speech sample without compulsory learning of theoretical material (rules and exceptions) is a characteristic feature of the direct method and is called inductivity. There are two more characteristics that follow the inductivity. First of all, repeating speech samples after the teacher and thus learning them, students imitate their teacher. That is why the direct method is often called imitative. Secondly, modifying speech samples students make mistakes and correct them at the same time, relying on language intuition rather than the knowledge of the rule. As a result, we can define

the direct method as intuitional one as compared to the grammatical-translational method.

The direct method seemed the most progressive one at that time because it was based on learning "live" speech. Moreover, at the beginning of the 20th century only direct method implied teaching speaking practice. However, it should be noticed that Russian pedagogics was disconnected from the outer world because of World War I and the Civil War. The direct method promoted in Russia at that time differed greatly from the orthodox one. Western direct method did not imply the comparison with mother tongue while Russian method used such an approach. There were several instructions for the teachers using direct method in the classroom. They had to explain basic grammar rules; the most difficult rules should be given in comparison with the students' mother tongue, paying special attention to both similarities and differences; grammar exercises had to be used to make the students' knowledge more profound. It was also recommended to introduce some elements of comparative linguistics into the direct method. Later a comparative method of teaching English was formed. It is called comparative because it is based on the comparison with the students' mother tongue. The combination of the direct and the comparative methods gave rise to a mixed method. Depending on the prevailing principles, it can be closer to the direct or to the comparative method.

The direct method also gave rise to the development of such specific hi-tech methods as audio lingual and audiovisual ones. The linguistic concept of a language as a combination of structures found its reflection in these methods as well as psychological notion of behaviorism which is based on the explanation of human behavior through the formula "stimulus-reaction- backup". The essence of both methods is as follows: the presentation of the English language through ready-made formulae (structures) and their learning with the help of technical equipment (special language laboratories, tape recorders). Audio-visual method had the following characteristic features: it used human visual and audial abilities of receiving the information simultaneously. It was achieved by showing the picture/slide and pronouncing the word/phrase denoting it at the same time. The appearance of stable associations is expected thanks to this method. As a result, speech structures and patterns are acquired automatically and can be reproduced even if one of the stimuli (visual or audial) and later both of them is missing.

Both the methods described are interesting from the point of view of their scientific basis. Every step taken is explained in linguistic or psychological terms. Both audio-visual and audio-lingual methods are very intense. They need many-hour trainings both in the presence of a teacher and without pedagogical guidance with the help of technical equipment. The aim of teaching is mastering a spoken language. The main skill to be developed is speaking. The intensity of training, the frequency of repetitions, the time spent on it and the use of technical equipment contribute to the high speed of mastering various skills, especially speaking ones.

The complexity of the equipment used, strict sequence of actions and a great deal of speaking drills based on repeating one and the same structures give the teacher a very specific role.

Critics claim that the use of these methods makes it impossible to understand language structures deeply because the range of exercises is very limited, they are not diverse enough. Their aim is to teach only speaking skills by reproducing speech patterns. As a result, other language skills are not developed properly. Reading and writing skills are introduced only at the advanced level. Listening comprehension as a skill is not developed consistently. It remains a means of achieving the aim, but not the skill to be developed in succession and certainly not the goal to be achieved.

Besides, the texts of the course books compiled according to both these methods were often criticized. As a rule, they were artificially designed. In other words, they were synthesized and were not real, so they differed greatly from the texts and speech a native speaker would produce. As a matter of fact, neither audio lingual nor audio visual methods refused from their grammatical basis. Grammar was still used as a building material for so-called structures. In contrast to the grammar method, the sequence of introduction of these structures is defined not by the logics of classical languages (according to the parts of speech) but by the place of each grammatical phenomenon within the language itself from the point of view of its simplicity or complexity. The result of such approach was the fact that those texts were overwhelmed with similar grammatical structures making a strange impression on the readers. In the exercises that follow the text, it is literally subdivided into separate structures which are drilled till students can do it automatically. The principal thing for both methods is the inductive approach to studying grammar: from examples to the rule itself.

Methods of teaching foreign languages in pre-war Soviet Union could be characterized by constant struggle of two main approaches. One of them was called conscious-comparative. It was targeted at students' analytical work at the texts, at the transition from consciously learned rules to the formation of speaking skills on their basis, at the broad use of mother tongue as the support in learning a foreign language. Another approach is connected with the spreading of various modifications of the direct method in the beginning of the 20th century. Such an approach was targeted at unconscious learning of different language skills in the course of speaking practice. It can be characterized by total refusal from using grammar rules (they could be introduced as the last step to systemize and generalize the previously acquired knowledge and skills), the development of speaking skills, refusal from using students' mother tongue as a support. There were several attempts to synthesize both approaches into one in the 1930s within the so called combined or mixed method. On one hand, the method proposed an oral introduction course. On the other hand, it suggested the use of translation of the texts and analyzing them as well as comparing them with the students' mother tongue at the advanced levels of studying a foreign language. This combination led to the attempt of some prominent psychologists and methodologists to formulate the whole concept of the process of studying a foreign language through primary understanding of its system followed by further formation of spontaneous and unconscious speaking skills on its basis. Such specialists as L.S. Vigotsky [2], L.V. Sherba [3] and S.I. Bernstein [4] contributed to the development of these ideas.

The flourishing of the comparative method in the Soviet Union took place in the second half of 1940s and in the beginning of 1950s and is connected with the names of I.V. Rakhmanova [5] and A.A. Mirolobova [6]. This period can be characterized by a definite movement forward in several directions. First of all, the linguistic justification of the principles of selection and presentation of language material was offered. However, the prevailing methods, study programs and coursebooks could not provide a full-value practical command of a foreign language. The teaching process was aimed at the formation of reading and translating skills. Thus, study programmes and coursebooks were overloaded with rules, especially at the starter level. All these contributed to the appearance of a conscious-practical method which was developed in the middle of the 20th century. This method combined a distinct speech development direction with psychologically justified use of conscious systematisation during the process of mastering a foreign language. The creators of the method recognized the rejection of the reliance on students' mother tongue as well as the refusal to use translation in the course of studies.

By that time the majority of specialists took a compromise position and returned to conscious-practical method. Such prominent specialists in foreign language teaching as E.I. Passov [7], V.A. Bukhbinder [8], I.L. Bim [9], T.P. Leontyeva [10], P.B. Gurvich [11] were among its developers.

Eventually the goals of teaching foreign languages changed. The standards and requirements of language proficiency were also altered. Intensive methodical research contributed to the development of communicative teaching approach. Nowadays, communicative-oriented methods based on communication and creativity of students play a major role. Communicative-oriented concepts such as project-oriented, intensive, activity-oriented and communicative are being developed currently.

The development of the communicative method abroad is also very interesting. Firstly, the method was designed in relation to the English Language as a means of international communication. Communication-oriented teaching was targeted in its base to overcome the drawbacks and limitations of the well-known methods. Nevertheless, the followers of a new method did not call to refuse from everything that had been done before. They proposed to use rational principles that are comprised in the previous methods that stood the test of time. The achievements in linguistics, psychology and sociolinguistics were taken into consideration. From this point of view, the communication principle was not new. It was further development and logical continuation of the direct method focusing its attention on teaching speaking skills. Numerous foreign researchers, such as J. Mackienics [12], E. Tuma [13], A. Riazzi [14] devote their studies to similar problems.

Further the European Union made an attempt to develop a special program to intensify the process of foreign languages teaching. A series of research was initiated and a group of experts worked on personality-oriented teaching approach. It was targeted at the formation and development of students' ability to communicate in a foreign language in the personality-

oriented teaching context. It increased the opportunities of practical implementation of this approach:

- 1) to develop new teaching techniques
- 2) to create new teaching materials
- 3) to create a comprehensive technological system of teaching
- 4) to develop the assessment system
- 5) to design special recommendations for professional foreign languages teacher training.

The analysis of the communicative method gives the opportunity to display some results.

III. RESULTS

The structure of the communicative method comprises the cognitive, the developing and the teaching aspects which are aimed at students' education. The main principles of the communicative method are:

1) The principle of mastering of all aspects of foreign language culture through communication. The followers of the communicative method were the first to propose that communication should be taught only via communication. In this case communication can be used as the channel for upbringing, cognition and development. Communication is a social process in which communicators exchange the results of their activity and experience conditioned by material and spiritual culture. Emotional and rational collaboration of people as well as their mutual influence takes place in the process of communication. It is the main condition of appropriate education. The process of teaching a foreign language on the basis of the communicative method is the model of real life communication taking into account the main parameters of education: motivation, focusing, informativity, novelty, functionality, the nature of interaction of the communicators, the system of speech tools. Due to all these factors the conditions adequate to real life are created and all these contribute to providing the successful mastering of speaking skills and their use in communication.

2) The principle of interconnection of aspects of foreign language culture. The complex character of teaching is shown in the unity and interconnection of its educational, cognitive and developing aspects. Thus, any activity and exercise within the teaching process integrates all four aspects of foreign culture and involves an interaction and intersectionality of all four forms of speech activities: reading, writing, listening and speaking within the teaching process.

3) The principle of modeling of the content of aspects of foreign language culture postulates that all the volume of linguistic and country study material cannot be learnt during school years. Thus, it is necessary to select the sufficient material depending on the goals of teaching and the contents of the course of study. Selecting the material, cognitive requirements of individuals should be taken into consideration. It is necessary to design the model of development within the system of education, to compile the minimum set of materials necessary for meeting the challenges of the teaching process.

4) The principle of the management of the teaching process on the basis of its quantization consists in its division into definite parts. It gives the opportunity to program and manage the teaching process. The quantization ensures the implementation of the systemic principle and its effectiveness.

5) The systemic principle of the organizing of foreign language teaching means that the system of training is designed by a reverse way: first of all a set of goals is identified and only then the tasks that can lead to this goal are determined. It holds true to all the aspects of each course of study, each year, lesson cycle and separate lessons. It provides systematic approach as well as integrity and targeting of teaching. All the regularities of a student's learning of each language aspect are taken into consideration in the process of the development. All the teaching process is organized on the basis of the cyclic and concentration rules. The cyclic aspect is manifested in the definite volume of material learnt within the cycle of lessons, each of which includes a definite number of them. Each cycle is built on the basis of stage development of this or that skill in each aspect of speech development. The cyclic aspect is supported by concentration approach which deals mostly with speaking skills development. Interdisciplinary connections are used as the means of additional motivation for students who are not interested in foreign languages. The systemic organization of teaching process also implies mastering language skills stage by stage. It includes various levels of teaching process: the level of steps of studying; the level of periods of studying which are defined within the steps; the periods of formation of different lexical and grammatical skills and their development; the level of stages of teaching which are defined within the segments (the stages of imitation, transformation, reproduction and combination). Each level has its own specificity which is determined by psycho-physiological peculiarities of learners.

6) The principle of foreign languages teaching based on the situation as a system is worth mentioning. Communicative teaching is implemented on the basis of situations which are treated as a system of relationships. The situation exists in the form of a dynamic system of social status, role, activity and moral relationships of communicators. It is a universal form of teaching process functioning and serves as a means of speech tools organizing, the way of their representation, the way of speech motivation. It is also the main prerequisite for skill formation and speech development as well as the precondition for teaching the strategy and tactics of communication. Communicative method suggests the use of all these functions of the situation. Not only the so-called speech situation is referred to, but also the situation of training activities.

7) The principle of individualization is worth noting in the context of the communicative method because a student is treated as an individual and is considered to possess definite general and personal abilities. Communicative method is aimed at identification of their initial level and further development. Special means are used to achieve this goal: texts and exercises. Joint activity is organized for students to understand that the result of the activity depends on their individual and team work. One of the main components of the principle of individualization is the so-called personality individualization. It implies the use of personal experience, interests, hobbies, emotions and feelings of the students to motivate them.

8) The principle of developing of discourse activity and students' self-reliance is implemented through the system of discourse tasks of different degrees of complexity. This approach is based on students' different intellectual needs because they awaken their thinking activity and develop thinking mechanisms, such as the ability to navigate in the situation, to estimate feedback signals and to make decisions, to set goals and to choose the mechanisms of achieving it. Self-reliance within the communicative approach is connected with independence of thinking and self-control.

9) The principle of functionality implies that students realize the functions of all the skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) as means of communication.

10) Novelty principle involves the rejection of multiple reading of texts and exercises and the use of materials that contain new information. It provides heuristic nature of speaking skills and arouses interest to educational process.

Communicative method also comprises mastering of non-verbal communication skills, such as gestures, distance and mimic.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is worth mentioning that all the above principles are interrelated, interdependent and reinforce each other. Thus, it is vital to follow all the principles.

A contemporary communicative method is a harmonious combination of numerous techniques of foreign language teaching and it remains the main among a lot of other educational techniques. It does not possess pronounced negative sides. It probably contains some minor drawbacks but they are not distinctly shaped. It can be clearly seen that the

advantages of the communicative method are adopted by other methods.

References

- [1] H. Congchao and W. Weihong, "More than just Language Teaching: Ideologies in Language Textbooks." *Journal of Linguistics and Education*, vol. 48, pp. 98-99, December 2018.
- [2] L.S. Vigotsky, "Pedagogical Psychology," Moscow: Pedagogics, 1991.
- [3] L.V. Sherba, "Teaching Foreign Languages at Secondary School," Moscow, 1974, p. 57.
- [4] S.I. Bernstein, "Problems of Pronunciation Teaching, Problems of phonetics teaching," Moscow University Press, 1975, pp. 5-49.
- [5] M.V. Rakhmanov, "The Main Directions in Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages," Moscow, 1972, p. 211.
- [6] A.A. Miroljubova and I.V. Rakhmanova, "General Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages at School," Moscow, 1967, p. 164.
- [7] E.I. Passov, "The Basics of Foreign Languages Teaching," Moscow, 1977, p. 201.
- [8] V.A. Bukhbinder, "Intensive Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages," Kiev: Vishaya Shkola, 1988, p. 342.
- [9] I.L. Bim, "Methods of Teaching of Foreign Languages as a Science and Problems of School Textbooks," Moscow, 1977, p. 288.
- [10] T.P. Leontyeva, A.F. Budko and A.P. Ponimatko, "Methods of Foreign Languages Teaching," Minsk: Vishaya Shkola, 2015, p. 239.
- [11] P.B. Gurvich, "On the Question of Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages as a Science," *Foreign Languages at School*, pp. 3-9, 2013.
- [12] J. Mackienics and I. Thompson, "Spoken and Written-language in writing center talk," *Journal of Linguistics and Education*, vol. 47, pp. 47-58, October 2018.
- [13] F. Tuma, "Enabling audience participation and stimulating discussion after student presentations in English as a foreign language seminars," *Journal of Linguistics and Education*, vol. 47, pp. 59-62, October 2018.
- [14] A.M. Riazi, "Exploring the mixed methods research paradigm in language teaching and learning," *Journal of Linguistics and Education*, vol. 49, pp. 100-101, February 2019.