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A foreign language acquisition

The article discloses historically based approaches of a foreign language education and throws light on the new study, which may revolutionize language learning. The main methods of teaching foreign languages, which are highlighted in the article, are: the grammar translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual method, the communicative language teaching method and the series method. And a modern research of a PhD from New Zealand is described below.

Key words: language education, Comenius, the grammar translation method, the direct method, the audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching, the series method, language lab, the learning through listening methodology.

Стаття розкриває історично сформовані підходи до вивчення іноземних мов, а також надає додаткову інформацію щодо нового дослідження, яке може внести революційні зміни до вивчення будь-якої мови. Основні методи навчання іноземним мовам, що будуть проаналізовані в даній статті, наступні: метод граматичного перекладу, аудіально-лінгвістичний метод, комунікативний метод, прямий метод та послідовний (серійний) метод. І сучасне дослідження доктора філософії з Нової Зеландії оглянуто нижче.

Ключові слова: вивчення мови, Комініус, метод граматичного перекладу, аудіально-лінгвістичний метод, комунікативний метод, прямий метод, послідовний (серійний) метод, методологія навчання через прослуховування.

Статья раскрывает исторически сформировавшиеся подходы к изучению иностранных языков, а также предоставляет дополнительную информацию про новое исследование, которое может революционно перевернуть изучение языков. Основные методы преподавания иностранных языков, которые будут проанализированы в данной статье, следующие: метод грамматического перевода, аудіально-лінгвістический метод, коммуникативный метод, прямой метод и последовательный (серийный) метод. И современное исследование доктора философии из Новой Зеландии рассмотрено ниже.

Ключевые слова: языковое образование, Коминиус, метод грамматического перевода, аудіально-лінгвістический метод, коммуникативный метод, прямой метод, последовательный (серийный) метод, методология изучения с помощью прослушивания.

The term *language education* is more commonly used with regard to second language acquisition, which means the learning of a foreign or second language [1] and which is the topic of this article. The article discloses the development of the original methods of language education, and its practical value is to help readers to elaborate the most appropriate for their style of learning way of a foreign language acquisition or teaching.

Although the need to learn foreign languages is almost as old as human history itself, the origins of modern language education are in the study and teaching of Latin in the 17th century. One of the linguists, who outlined theories of language acquisition, was John Amos *Comenius*. He held that language acquisition must be allied with sensation and experience, teaching must be oral and the schoolroom should have models of things, and failing that, pictures of them [2; p.14].

By the 18th century an oral work had been minimized, and students were instead required to memorize grammatical rules and apply these to decode written texts in the target language. This tradition-inspired method became known as the '*grammar-translation method*' [3].

Innovation in foreign language teaching began in the 19th century and became very rapid in the 20th century. It led to a number of different and sometimes conflicting methodologies, each trying to be a major improvement over the previous or contemporary methods. Among those methodologies, a '*direct method*' [4] is worth mentioning. The direct method of teaching foreign languages, sometimes also called the *natural method*, refrains from using the learners' native language and uses only the target language. It was established in Germany and France around 1900. The earliest applied linguists included Jean Manesca, Heinrich Gottfried Ollendorff (1803-1865), Henry Sweet (1845-1912), Otto Jespersen (1860-1943), and Harold Palmer (1877-1949). They worked on setting language teaching principles and approaches based on linguistic and psychological theories, but they left many of the specific practical details for others to devise [5].

Similar to direct method, the '*audio-lingual method*' [6] was used. The audio-lingual method, *Army Method*, or *New Key* [7], is a style of teaching used in teaching foreign languages. It is based on behaviorist theory, which professes that certain traits of living things, and in this case humans, could be trained through a system of reinforcement—correct use of a trait would receive positive feedback while incorrect use of that trait would receive negative feedback. Like the direct method, the audio-lingual method advised that students 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 didn't 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* [8; p.530], this 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. In this manner, 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 that - 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.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) [9] is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as “communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages” or simply the “communicative approach”. CLT places great emphasis on helping students use the target language in a variety of contexts and places great emphasis on learning language functions. Its primary focus is on helping learners create meaning rather than helping them develop perfectly grammatical structures or acquire native-like pronunciation. This means that successfully learning a foreign language is assessed in terms of how well learners have developed their *communicative competence* [10], which can loosely be defined as their ability to apply knowledge of both formal and sociolinguistic aspects of a language with adequate proficiency to communicate. Through the influence of communicative language teaching, it has become widely accepted that communicative competence should be the goal of language education, central to good classroom practice [11]. This is in contrast to previous views in which grammatical competence was commonly given top priority. The understanding of communicative competence has been influenced by the field of pragmatics and the philosophy of language concerning speech acts as described in large part by John Searle and J.L. Austin.

On the one hand, it is also often inferred or even stated that the oldest methods were completely ineffective or have died out completely, however the oldest approaches are still used (e.g. the *Berlitz* [12] version of the direct method). One reason for this situation is that proponents of new methods have been so sure that their ideas are so new and so correct that they could not conceive that the older ones have enough validity to cause controversy. This was in turn caused by emphasis on new scientific advances, which has tended to blind researchers to precedents in older work [13; p.5]. These have led to the positive evaluation of *Gouin's 'series method'* [14]. In the 19th century, Francois Gouin went to Hamburg to learn German. Based on his experience as a Latin teacher, he thought the best way to do this would be to memorize a German grammar book and a table of its 248 irregular verbs. However, when he went to the academy to test his new language skills, he was disappointed to

find out that he could not understand anything. Trying again, he similarly memorized the 800 root words of the language as well as re-memorizing the grammar and verb forms. However, the results were the same. During this time, he had isolated himself from people around him, so he tried to learn by listening, imitating and conversing with the Germans around him, but found that his carefully-constructed sentences often caused native German speakers to laugh. Again he tried a more classical approach, translation, and even memorizing the entire dictionary but had no better luck [14]. When he returned home, he found that his three-year-old nephew had learned to speak French. He noticed the boy was very curious and upon his first visit to a mill, he wanted to see everything and be told the name of everything. After digesting the experience silently, he then reenacted his experiences in play, talking about what he learned to whoever would listen or to himself. Gouin decided that language learning was a matter of transforming perceptions into conceptions, using language to represent what one experiences. Language is not an arbitrary set of conventions but a way of thinking and representing the world to oneself. It is not a conditioning process, but one in which the learner actively organizes his perceptions into linguistics concepts [15].

The report from the 27th of January, 2009, provided by PhD graduate Paul Sulzberger, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand [16], suggests that the best way to learn a language is through frequent exposure to its sound patterns, even if you haven't a clue what it all means. "Our ability to learn new words is directly related to how often we have been exposed to the particular combinations of the sounds which make up the words. If you want to learn Spanish, for example, frequently listening to a Spanish language radio station on the internet will dramatically boost your ability to pick up the language and learn new words"[17], - Dr Sulzberger says. Without going into all the findings of the research, it rings true in the sense that this is surely the natural progression in first language acquisition: toddlers learn to speak by first listening, then imitating the sounds, and only then beginning gradually to formulate words in isolation. Another fact, which proves the theory of '*learning through listening*', was experienced by my foreign friends, who moved to another country with their 5-7-year old children. They observed their kids learning a foreign language from their school friends; moreover their sounds and intonation were not at all native-sounding, but very authentic as to the language the children were learning. Of course, adults and children do not learn languages in the same way. This is undoubtedly true: it takes a 5 year-old only few months to reach the communicative level of a foreign language, but there are not many adults who could do that. As adults the way we learn a second (third, fourth etc.) language may differ significantly from the way we learnt our native language. Nevertheless, the researches should not overstate the difference. This "new" research suggests that simply listening to a new language sets up the necessary

structures in the brain required to learn the vocabulary. "Neural tissue required to learn and understand a new language will develop automatically from simple exposure to the language—which is how babies learn their first language"[17], - Dr Sulzberger insists on. He was prompted to undertake the research after spending seven years teaching Russian to New Zealand students and observing drop-out patterns: "I was very conscious of the huge difficulties students have when they tackle another language, especially at the beginning. Many drop out because they feel they are not making progress"[17]. One interesting line of enquiry which motivated the research was what makes it so difficult to learn foreign words when we are constantly learning new ones in our native language. It was found that even as adults each time we hear new combinations of sounds our brain develops new corresponding neural structures. The more exposure to the sounds, the better prepared we are to learn and retain the language. "Teachers should recognise the importance of extensive aural exposure to a language. One hour a day of studying French text in a classroom is not enough—but an extra hour listening to it on the iPod would make a huge difference... Language is a skill, it's not like learning a fact. If you want to be a weight lifter, you've got to develop the muscle - you can't learn weightlifting from a book. To learn a language you have to grow the appropriate brain tissue, and you do this by lots of listening—songs and movies are great"[17] - Dr Sulzberger says. And all the arguments from the research of New Zealand linguist play a role of proponents to the discussed above theories on methodology of a foreign language acquisition.

So what does that all mean for language teachers or people, who are being self-educated? And if the goal is to help learners exercise their linguistic neurons, rather than simply offload language facts, should a teacher adopt the model of “trainer” or “coach” rather than “teacher”? How to help learners keep their motivation levels high? The answer could be a truly flexible one. The practical application to all the approaches highlighted in this article are limited only by teachers’ imagination and a desire to teach!

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