

Training Foreign Language Teachers in Ukraine: Challenges and Objectives

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Abstract: The basic elements in any teaching situation are the teacher, the subject matter, the learner, and the aims of instruction. The most successful teacher will be something of an artist, but the art will be enhanced if it is exercised within a framework of scientifically established guidelines. In Ukrainian schools the teacher-dominated classroom used to be characterized by the teacher speaking most of the time, and constantly passing judgement on students' performance. Modern foreign language teachers should realize that in highly student-centered classroom students will be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups, each on distinct tasks and projects.

Keywords: *foreign language teaching, objectives in FLT, materials and aids in FLT, learner-centered teaching*

Introduction. A first dip into the methods of teaching foreign languages in Ukraine is likely to be a puzzling experience. Conscientious teachers-to-be would presumably hope to find in literature on methodology a coherent system of ideas, built up in an orderly fashion by the contributions of successive generations of authorities who made every effort to base their recommendations on experimental evidence and scientific facts. What novices actually discover, if they sample the works of Ukrainian scholars on the subject written over the last fifty years, is something quite different.

In fact, the most striking feature of the history of language instruction appears to be the great diversity of the methodologies that have been suggested. At relatively brief intervals one highly famous "method" or "approach" has succeeded another in the favour of educators, and the proponents of each have tended to deny the validity of all that preceded. In Ukrainian schools once the grammar-translation approach would be omnipresent. The focus was on grammatical parsing and a typical exercise was to translate sentences from the target language into the mother tongue. There was little use of the target language in class. As for the use of the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom it has been successfully emphasized, banned, required, and barely tolerated. The ability to speak the foreign language was once regarded as irrelevant in the Soviet methodology. Then when Ukraine became independent some elements of the Direct Method came which made speaking its primary aim. And later the triumphant Aural-Oral or Audiolingual Approach once again insisted on the primacy of speech. There have been similarly violent swings of the pendulum with the regard to many other elements of language teaching: the role of rules, the use of phonetic symbols, vocabulary control and the like.

New teachers will probably also be struck by the highly individualistic tone of foreign authors of methodological literature. They will note that such scholars as F. Gouin, E. B. De Sauze, M. West, M. Berlitz, W. Kaulfers, Ch. K. Ogden and others have built up large and highly enthusiastic groups of followers and have been able to share their systems of thought on generations of teachers but still have failed to develop a relatively acceptable doctrine. As these facts become clear to students who specialize in foreign language teaching, they are left with a series of deeply disturbing questions. Why does the pendulum swing so widely and rapidly from one extreme to another? Why have language teachers been able to achieve so little balance and

continuity in their work? What reason is there to believe that the currently approved methodology will meet the requirement of modern times and fit the era of increasing flow of information?

To judge by its pattern of development, language teaching in Ukraine in the post-soviet period has up to the present been partly an art and partly a science. It has been largely intuitive, dependent on the personal skill of the teacher. It is hardly been possible to see in it the characteristics of a systematically arranged body of knowledge developed through the use of time-tested and generally accepted methods.

Ways to teach in class: to be a scholar or an artist

The element of human nature and behaviour, precisely the element that is most difficult to treat with scientific rigor is so prominent in language teaching that it can probably be never made entirely explicable in scientific terms. The new teacher may distrust any methodologist who claim that enough is now known about the process of learning a language to permit the teaching of it in an absolutely scientific way.

Yet few thoughtful teachers would be willing to take the opposite position, that their profession is purely an art, basically not analyzable and not teachable, that can be improved only through the exercise of greater personal gift of insight and imagination. On the other hand, in today's world, educators are deeply uncomfortable if they cannot believe that their work bears some demonstrable relationship to established scientific fact. In Ukraine they cannot be happy in a situation where they can justify their actions only by their confidence in their own abilities, or by an appeal to the authority. They need a more durable and confidence-inspiring basis on which to build their work than their single professional skill. Modern teachers often address to various internet resources that offer information on scientific background of language teaching and provide tips how to be an artist in class.

The answer to the question then to be that language teaching must be both art and a science. To the extent that it remains an art, it permits individual teachers to exercise such personal gifts as they may be endowed with. To the extent that it can be related to a science or sciences it can be developed in a coherent way, be given continuity and be taught. The most successful teacher will always be something of an artist, but the art will be enhanced rather than

destroyed if it is exercised within a framework of scientifically established guidelines.

The believe that it is necessary to relate language teaching to an established scientific discipline is certainly not new in contemporary education system in Ukraine. However, there has been little agreement as which discipline or disciplines are the essential ones. Some scholars look exclusively to psychologists for guidance [7], some try to bring some aims and subject matter of social sciences into language instruction [5], some base their concept of language teaching on structural linguistics [4].

It is only during the last few years when a new Law of Higher Education was passed in Ukraine that the realization has begun to emerge that past methodologies and approaches to training future foreign language teachers have been too narrowly based mainly on linguistic preparation of students. Now educators at universities agree that more than one cornerstone is necessary for the development of a type of teaching which will be both flexible enough to meet the manifold language needs of modern society and the steam of information that is to be quickly processed and used. It is an encouraging fact that this realization has not been the work of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and universities but appears to have forced itself almost simultaneously upon a large number of school headmasters who hire foreign language school teachers. The fact is encouraging because it seems to hold out the promise of a methodology that will not harden into a closed system but will remain open to new ideas arising from the advances made in several related scientific disciplines and will guarantee a sufficient training of a modern foreign language teacher.

The basic elements in any teaching situation are the teacher, the subject matter, the learner, and the aims of instruction. These elements are tightly related to one another. There is a noticeable shift in Ukrainian foreign language teachers' preparation which recognises that the methods of language teaching should be based on at least three cornerstones: a) what is known about the nature of the language; b) what is known about the nature of the learner; c) the aims of the instruction. The science which analyzes the nature of language in general as well as that of particular languages is linguistics. The science that has studied the process of human learning deeply is psychology. The aims of instruction are not scientifically determined but depend on the needs felt by the society and the individual at a given moment. A number of scientific and humanistic disciplines can throw light on these needs.

Of the various branches of linguistics, which treat most directly the kind of problems which teachers must concern themselves with, at least in the elementary stage of instruction, is synchronic and descriptive linguistics. Diachronic linguistics deals with the development of languages over long periods of time and with the discovery of the genetic relationships among them. Descriptive linguistics was developed in order to provide a rigorous method for analyzing living languages as they are used today. In spite of the irrefutable logic of establishing a close relationship between methods of teaching language, on one hand, and the fact available about language, on the other, the teachers in Ukraine tend either to overestimate the role of linguistics played in future teachers' training or undervalue linguistics assuming that it casts very little light on the human element

in the language teaching process. Some linguistically sound materials (grammatically correct disconnected sentences, linguistic terminology) are often not enough to be called models of teachability. On the other hand, those who reject linguistics as mechanical and unnecessary need to be convinced that the tie is essential.

To learn the nature of the learner and learning a future teacher should address psychology and understand that language learners are rational human being who are able to analyze data and make generalizations. They like their sentences to come out in logical sequences and hope that they bear some relationship to the real world around them. Learners dislike endless mechanical repetitions and they appear to learn things in various ways. No matter what they are forced to do, they do not learn at all unless they want to do so. Future language teachers are in grave danger of losing sight of some of these apparent truths. Only psychology and other social sciences could tell us whether they are really facts or merely beliefs held to be self-evident.

Of the three cornerstones of teaching a foreign language, the aims of instruction are the most important, especially nowadays when students are overloaded with information poured from different resources. In a teaching situation the methods used determine the results achieved. If the results do not coincide with objectives the teaching is at least partially unsuccessful. Future teachers should realize, that in any given classroom the teacher must have as clear an idea as possible of what s/he wants to accomplish and must choose the techniques and materials accordingly.

The objectives of foreign language teaching at modern schools

The aims of instructions can be reconsidered in order to meet the requirements of modern society needs even if they conflict with methodological conclusions. The ability to communicate in English and get information from resources provided in English is the mostly required competence of a qualified worker today. So, if a class is made up of students who need, above all else, to learn to communicate in English in various life areas, objectives can be precisely formulated in terms of scientific skill. The teacher may have learned that first of all the ability to pronounce English depends primarily on being able to recognize one English sound as different from another. S/he may therefore be tempted to conclude that all classes in oral English should be devoted to hearing and discrimination drills. But the teacher's objectives point in another direction, toward having the class spend its time in actually practising speaking English in the situations that may happen in a real-life situation. In this case, a reconciliation is certainly possible, since there is clear justification for both types of activity: both can be included in the class hour, but most time students should be given to the type which most resembles the terminal behaviour prescribed by the objectives. Future teachers must realize that objectives of learning are to be drawn up from which the most promising teaching could be deduced in a step-by-step analysis, so a serious consideration of methods can occur. This is indeed the way the planning for any particular class or any single meeting of a class should begin.

Ukrainian language teachers argue endlessly about objectives. The questions that arise are: shall a teacher aim at a speaking knowledge only, a reading knowledge, or both; shall a teacher work toward a native-like perfection in pro-

nunciation; is it enough to develop practical language skills or must a teacher also impart an understanding of how language works? The list of question could be even longer. Objectives can play their dominant role only under circumstances which permit their being clearly defined. They should ensure the modification of general methods in specific situations.

The needs for English felt around the world today, including Ukraine. The reasons for teaching it are particularly diverse and pressing. In Ukraine a foreign language (English) is taught at schools as a compulsory subject, college or university students take a course of General English or English for Specific Purposes, adults learn it to function effectively in a globalized society.

In order to ensure an effective teaching-learning process a future foreign language teacher should make a good decision concerning the choice of an approach or method or a combination of them and take the following steps: 1) Assess students needs: why are they learning English? for what purpose?; 2) Examine instructional constraints: time (hours per week, days per week, weeks per term); class size; materials (syllabus and text); physical factors (classroom size, light, temperature); 3) Determine needs, attitudes and aptitudes of individual students [3, p.10]. Having done all these, the teacher will be in a position to derive useful techniques or principles by studying all the available approaches and methods.

As it was mentioned before, the lesson structure and elements of the lesson depend on the objectives a teacher has in mind. However, the first element of a lesson is often the first component of the traditional “present-practice-evaluate” sequence which constitutes teachers’ understanding of basic lesson structure.

Materials for the teaching instructions

Nowadays, the increasing quantity and quality of internet teaching materials means that teachers are do not have to depend on their own resources. Without materials, the average teacher is probably more likely to dominate the classroom by taking up class time. However, modern school teachers should realize the increasing recognition of foreign language learning as a process of skill acquisition, which implies the importance of practice, in other words, output rather than mere input. Future teachers need to remain aware that they are not in the classroom to fill up the time with the sound of their own voice, but to arrange matters so that their students do the talking or writing or listening. In teaching a foreign language class time is so valuable that the teacher should get offstage as soon as possible after giving an appropriate presentation of material and giving clear instructions for some practice exercise.

Let us assume, that the teacher decides that a given teaching objective calls for some support in the way of materials. The major resource today is undoubtedly the Internet where a teacher can find a great number of useful websites, online resources, webinars. In general, teaching aids fall into two categories [1, p.105; 8, p. 87]: Printed materials and non-printed materials or nontechnical aids and technical (projected) aids. The former (realia, flashcards, pictures, charts, videos and so on) can be taken from the Internet resources. The latter include the overhead projector, smart board, audio- and videotapes. Today a teacher has no doubts whether to use them both or not. A modern teacher realizes that their use stimulates more student talk,

their use constitutes an efficient use of a class time. When using online resources a teacher spends less time required to produce them by himself. The information taken from online resources can be used as a teaching aid, some parts can be adopted, some elements adapted, some exercised can be dispensed.

Clearly, teaching materials available online can aid in arranging different types of activities in a foreign language class. Most teachers, in discussing their class plans and behaviours, will use a term “activity”, although specific activities often have particular names. It is worth mentioning, that through the years there has been little standardization of either a definition or a delineation of the set of possible language teaching activities [3, p. 51]. “Activity” is often used as an alternative to the term “task” or “exercise”. We suggest to apply “activity” to a separable element of a lesson, which is primarily geared to practicing language, usually involving students working with each other and which has a specific objective.

In language teaching the concern is on the nature of skill use, drill types and types of communicative interaction [9]. Fairly extensive taxonomy of drill types has been detailed now, ranging from “controlled” to “free” or “mechanical” to “meaningful”, to “communicative”. The frequent dictum is that, for a specific learning point, learners need to develop from more controlled and mechanical to more free and communicative. Modern teaching a foreign language in Ukrainian schools favours the following teaching activities, which are most frequently used in class: students working in pairs or small groups; role-plays; language games; reading topical articles; students making oral presentations; cloze exercises; using video materials; students repeating teacher drill; exercise in free writing; listening and note taking; repeating and learning dialogues. The use of online resources can broaden the list of activities.

Learner-centered teaching and learning

While training future foreign language teachers, it should be made clear for them that the way in which a classroom is organized can have a significant influence on language learning process. The key participants in the classroom organization are the teacher, the individual student and grouping of students, the class as a whole, the language presentational materials used (e.g., textbooks, online resources, audio and visual media) and any visitors. Combinations of these result in particular structures in class organization [12]. The dominant view in methodology of foreign language teaching in Ukraine today favours a shift towards the student-centered instead of traditional teacher-dominated classroom. In Ukrainian schools the teacher-dominated classroom used to be characterized by the teacher’s speaking most of the time, leading activities, and constantly passing judgement on students’ performance. Modern foreign language teachers should realize that in highly student-centered classroom students will be observed working individually or in pairs and small groups, each on distinct tasks and projects.

Learner-centered instruction has the benefits of greater individualization of learning objectives for increased students’ opportunities to perform with the target language, increased personal sense of relevance and achievements and, in fact, a relieving of the teacher’s constant supervision of all students. Moreover, students often will pay more attention and learn better from one another, since their per-

performances and processes of negotiation of meaning are more closely adapted to one another's level of ability. Nevertheless, future teachers should be prepared to develop fewer teacher-dominated activities and tasks, while remaining conscious of their students' need for guidance in setting objectives, for appropriate models and feedback about the target language, and for constructive and supportive evaluation of their progress.

Many methodologists (Jeremy Harmer, 2001; S. Rixon, 2013). consider pair and group work to be the most appropriate and effective for foreign language teaching [6; 11]. Contrary to a popular negative view of the outcomes of learner-dominated activities, classroom-centered research has demonstrated that the same time that students have many more opportunities to employ the target language, they manage to perform equally successfully in terms of grammatical accuracy as when the teacher is leading discussion [10].

While foreign language teaching in the last years in Ukraine has emphasized group work, a related development in mainstream education has focused on cooperative learning, which adds consideration of reward structures and sometimes team competition to the characteristics of group work. There is a large number of possible arrangements for cooperative learning tasks in language classrooms, and future teachers need to be familiar with three basic principles of this type of organization. Three essential elements are identified by S. Bossert [2]: a) students are told to work together; b) reward contingencies are arranged to encourage this; c) tasks are constructed which can only be completed if learners work together. It is quite clear that the first issue is simple to carry out, whereas the second one requires a little more planning. It is possible to allocate rewards to groups as wholes. Some forms of cooperative

learning allow groups to compete against other groups, in which case rewards may be allocated in inverse proportion to those of other successful groups. The third issue is probably the one to which most attention has been given in foreign language learning work since task interdependence is a major feature of information-gap tasks and related activities. In these cases, students know only one piece of the solution to a puzzle or information required to solve a problem, and must communicate it to others in their group.

Conclusions. In discussing the topic of main principles that should be taken into consideration by future foreign language teachers, we find vast areas of ignorance which should be replaced by special training provided for Ukrainian teachers-to-be. On the one hand, teachers should know that relatively firm information on foreign language teaching does exist, but there is also room for investigation. This should obviously aid their difficult decision making. Moreover, as the foreign language teaching profession develops and it is given new reconsideration in Ukraine, more teachers are qualified to conduct their own research or to collaborate with researchers on methodological issues. We are also seeing increased recognition of the importance of the student-centered teaching which starts with the realization of the classroom teaching objectives and teacher's role in class. On the other hand, teaching will always be a series of challenges. The real time cognitive complexity with the information flow towards teachers and students means that foreign language teaching will never be just a science or skills trained to be a successful teacher, it will become a combination of art, information operation and scientific methodological approaches, it will be the teacher's combined use of knowledge and educated professional reflection.

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Підготовка учителів іностринного мови в Україні: виклики і прагнення

Н. Г. Єсіпенко

Анотація: Головними елементами в освітній ситуації виступають учитель, предмет вивчення, ученик, цілі навчання. Успішний учитель розглядає свою роботу як мистецтво, але мистецтво повинно мати наукову основу. В українських школах домінування учителя на уроках проявлялось в більшій частині часу мовлення учителя і його постійної оцінки учеників. Сучасні вчителі іностринного мови використовують студентсько-центричний підхід, коли ученики працюють в парах або групах для виконання чітких завдань і проєктів.

Ключові слова: навчання іностринному мови, цілі навчання, навчаючі матеріали, студентсько-центричне навчання