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TEACHING THE UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE UNDER CONDITIONS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

Summary

The article deals with the methods of implementing the communicative-activity approach to mastering the Ukrainian language under conditions of distance learning. The author of the publication shares the practical experience of distance work with freshmen of the Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University, foreign students studying the Ukrainian language. The publication considers problems that arise at the initial stage of learning the Ukrainian. The particular importance is attached to the following issues: the language divide, its types, reasons of its occurrence and ways to overcome it; typical mistakes made by students in the process of distance learning of reading and writing, as well as ways and methods for their prevention and elimination; the methodology for pronunciation training. The author of the article tends to consider the usage of podcasts, mental maps and communicatively oriented authentic textbooks to be the most effective methods of distance work.

The article provides the description of textbooks which are focused on the communicative-activity approach to the language learning and also enable to essentially achieve the educational goal during the distance learning process. The publication emphasizes that of the four types of speech activity - speaking, writing, reading, listening – reaching the first one is especially challenging in the distance learning process. The joint use of exercises from the textbook and the students' involvement in real speech situations is successful for developing speaking skills. The author proposes patterns of real speech situations, describes their content and methodology of their application. He also vividly proves the effectiveness of using podcasts, mental maps, and authentic textbooks in the language learning process.

Keywords: communicative-activity approach; language divide; distance learning; foreign language

Introduction

Formulation of the problem: Teaching foreign languages, especially at the initial stage, in the conditions of distance learning requires a specific methodology and system of exercises. Modern approaches to learning a foreign language distinguished by the scientists comprise the following ones: cognitive, informational, innovative, communicative, intuitive-conscious, "thematic", pragmatic, etc. Our attention will be focused on the communicative-activity approach.

Today's well-known programs for remote work with students such as Zoom, Meet and Google Class Room, of course, greatly facilitate the teacher's work with students, but they do not solve all the problems that teachers face. The connection and sound quality during video sessions are not always of high quality (the words pronounced by students are not distinct enough, sometimes parts of words or even sentences are lost in the flow of speech, etc.). The teacher cannot ignore it. Preference in studying grammar rules and acquiring proficiency in writing are not the methods to resolve the situation, because good knowledge of grammar alone does not ensure the achievement of the required level of foreign language proficiency, which will allow to communicate with native speakers. With regard to reading, it is impossible to ensure mastering the language without the ability to read, for the main part of educational material is presented in the form of texts, grammar tables and exercises. Good language skills imply the ability not only to read and write, but speak as well. They also presuppose a developed linguistic intuition, i.e., a subconscious cognition of the language structure.

How to ensure high-quality teaching of a foreign language if it takes place remotely? What methods and what system of exercises should be used, if the communicative-activity approach is considered to be the main one in the study of foreign languages?

Purpose, subject and research method

Aims of the work: to publicize the methodology of distance learning of the Ukrainian language as a foreign language, as well as to give practical recommendations for the implementation of communicative-activity approach to learning process.

Material and method: Modern scientists such as V. Bykov, Yu. Bogachkov, M. Kuharenko, N. Syrotenko, and O. Rybalko are engaged in the research work of the methods and methodology of using ICT during distance learning process. The designing of a distance course, the processing of information materials and control in distance learning are among the problems investigated by these scientists [4]. The issue of the ICT use in the study of foreign languages was also studied by Ya. Bulakhova, G. Degtyareva, O. Zymovets, L. Zlatic, O. Zubov, O. Kamenskyi, D. Kutsoyannis, A. Manako, F. Maniu, L. Morska, V. Osadchyi, V. Osova, P. Panaiotidis, Ye. Polat, O. Radzievska, V. Romashenko, P. Serdiukov, A. Trotsko, V. Ulishchenko, A. Finkov, N. Fominykh, A. Khatzhypanaiotidu, E. Khristodulu, A. Yankovets and others [4; 5; 6].

The general principles of formation, implementation and adjustment of the National Informatization Program in Ukraine, as well as the use of information technologies in the educational process, are determined by the following documents: the Law of Ukraine "On Basic Principles of Information Society Development in Ukraine for 2007–2015" [1] and the Law of Ukraine "On the National Informatization Program" [2]. Taking into account the requirements of the modern world, the expediency and necessity of using ICT in the educational process are also discussed in the Recommendations of the Council of Europe on language education [7]. Considering Ukraine's desire to integrate into the European Union, not only the foreign language training of future specialists, but also the formation of their skills to work in the information society are becoming extremely important today.

Modern researchers, O. Kovtun in particular [4], believe that during education process it is necessary to create such conditions so that students learn a foreign language like a person learning his mother tongue in the childhood. In their opinion the problem of linguistic didactics is that, according to its prescriptions, the learning process is oversaturated with exercises. Followers of the communicative-activity approach emphasize that unconscious language acquisition is deeper and better than conscious learning. Therefore, a full-fledged communication during the learning process is ensured owing to the refusal from conscious language learning that is determined as a strength of the communicative-activity approach.

The ability to memorize information plays an essential role in learning. A person is known to be able to memorize the same information to a different extent, depending on how it is presented and to which senses the source of information makes an appeal to. It is proved that the information that is not only heard or seen, but heard, seen, discussed, and supported by actions is best remembered. Taking into consideration these data, it can be argued that it is the

communicative-activity approach that can ensure success in learning a foreign language. Thus, the system of exercises should be planned by teacher in such a way that the same information goes through all the stages mentioned above: I – introduction of new vocabulary or acquaintance with a new text, II – regularization and consolidation of new vocabulary or discussion of the content of the text read, III – formation of skills of using new words or reproducing a part of the text (answers to the questions, listening comprehension, retelling, etc.) in a form that would be as close to the life communicative situation as possible. Each exercise, each technique in learning a foreign language should be a communication tactic that is part of the communication strategy.

Therefore, there exists an objective need to develop with students of non-linguistic majors the skills and abilities of effective use of Internet resources during the process of mastering a foreign language.

Research results

Communicative strategy is a general vector of a speaker's linguistic behaviour which is expressed in a system of well-considered and sequential actions aimed at achieving the ultimate communicative objective. When planning linguistic behaviour, the speaker must already have formed the appropriate ideas and knowledge about standard communicative situations to be able to make at least the basic analysis. Thus, a sample of similar template models / invariants of situations, which will be a collective basis for the individual formation of the speaker as a unique communicator should be present in the consciousness of students being linguistic personae [6].

For example, the Ukrainian language textbooks for foreigners by O. Antoniv, L. Pauchok ("The Ukrainian language for beginners. Modular course", an audio disc is provided), Danuta Mazuryk ("The Ukrainian language for foreigners. Step by step": the material is presented according to the communicative-cognitive principle), N. Svarych, N. Lysenko, R. Kryvko, S. Svitlychna, T. Tsapko, O. Barchuk and other authors have such system of exercises.

Some principles are to be observed: the principles of succession, coherence of presenting the educational material, the principle of age correspondence (all tasks are focused on a certain age category and take into account young people interests) and the principle of advanced learning (each successive section represents a more complicated level, exercises and texts contain a certain percentage of new vocabulary the student will be able to understand from the context even without knowing the translation, i.e. to guess; in addition, these words and

expressions are repeated in exercises, that contributes greatly to their memorizing). All these facts make learning feasible and interesting.

In addition, these textbooks are authentic, written by native speakers, and therefore, linguistic units presented in these textbooks correspond to the real system of the language studied (lexical and syntactic structures which are not really inherent to the system of the studied language may occur in textbooks written by non-native speakers). Unfortunately, there is no electronic version of these textbooks available on the Internet. It could make them easy to use for students during the distance learning process. Colleagues from Ternopil, Ya. P. Kodliuk and I. I. Chekrii in particular, emphasize that it is the electronic textbooks that have new opportunities able to provide a logically constructed lesson, the clarity of visual and graphic elements, increase motivation and interest of students [7]. Due to the fact that the tasks in these textbooks are given in the progression of an increasing complexity, a number of problems that arise during learning a foreign language (a language barrier, pronunciation, memorizing problems) are overcome fairly quickly. We are primarily referring to the issue of a language barrier; problems of quick memorization of new vocabulary or word grammatical forms and syntactic constructions; problems with long-term memorization, which cause the learning material to be forgotten in one or two lessons after the beginning of a new topic; problem of the predominance of the first foreign language (mostly English), which results in the automatic reproduction of information not in Ukrainian, but in the first foreign language; difficulties in solving situational and creative tasks, etc. All mentioned above is taken into account and anticipated by the authors of the textbooks.

Video and audio lessons from YouTube as well as podcasts [9] are regarded as another indispensable tool in distance learning of a foreign language. They can be used both for introduction and consolidation of lexical and grammatical material, in particular in the study of the functional lexis. A number of YouTube channels created by the teachers contribute to the formation of literacy skills (if it is a podcast with subtitles) and speaking (there are podcasts that are video simulators of pronunciation, and this is perhaps the best way to learn to pronounce a sound remotely).

It is experimentally proven that modern digital applications can be used at all stages of language training, including the monitoring of intermediate assessment of students' knowledge [11]. For example, the "National platform for studying the Ukrainian language of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine" [3] contains electronic textbooks, Ukrainian language lessons, simulators and applications that you can use for independent training.

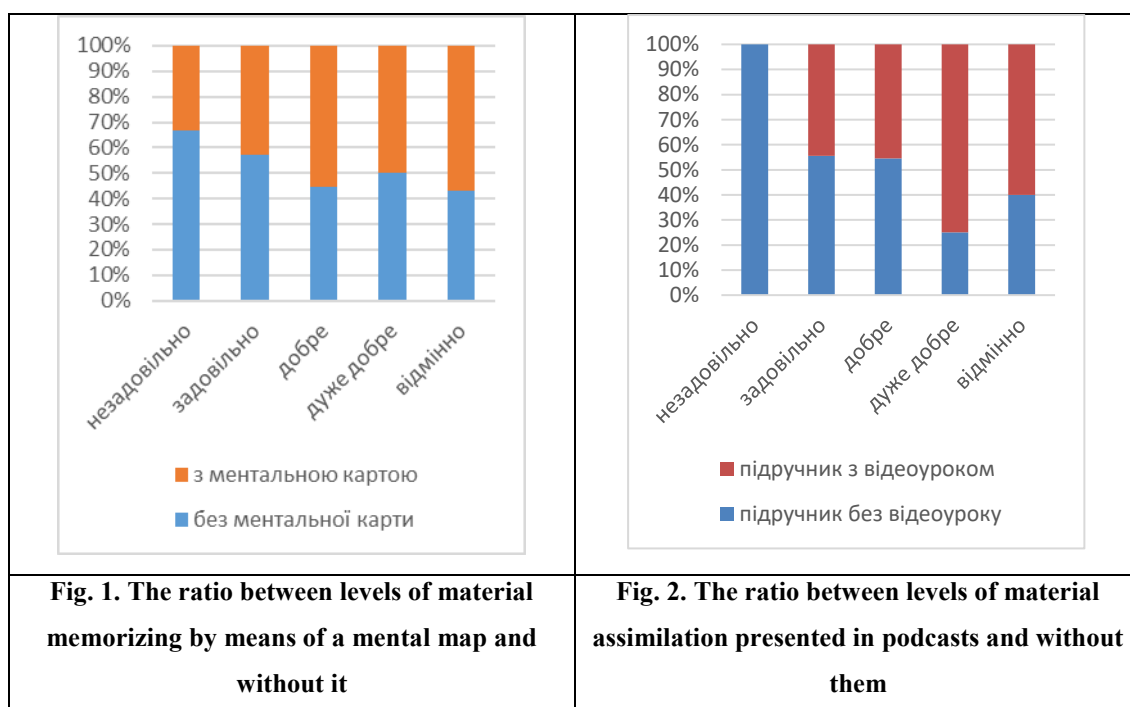
One of the methods we are currently using for teaching pronunciation is recording of small texts on a dictaphone or presenting texts in audio messages. This kind of technique activates the student's interest and inclusion in the life situation on the one hand, and enables the teacher to identify pronunciation errors and prevent the formation of incorrect pronunciation on the other hand. Unfortunately, none of the existing distance learning programs provides such a high sound quality during online classes that would allow you to hear pronunciation errors in the live speech.

Thus, having the text recorded on a dictaphone or in an audio message, the teacher can analyze it, give recommendations in regards to the improvement of pronunciation skills. In our opinion, there is no need to assess students' first sound recording at the elementary level, especially when a great number of mistakes was made. In this case we advise to bear in mind the teacher's comments on the correct pronunciation and try again. Usually, the speech is much clearer the next time. This approach to assessment during the distance learning process contributes much to an optimistic attitude towards learning a foreign language, belief in one's abilities and moreover forms respect for the teacher. It prevents occurrence of the language divide but as a psychosocial phenomenon (when there arises a conflict between a teacher and a student), i.e., prevents the emergence of a language barrier on psychological grounds. Rapid sequence of words will be useful for eliminating the language barrier, which is a consequence of the already formed incorrect pronunciation (in this case we are dealing with the language barrier as a purely linguistic phenomenon). Colloquial rhyming is well remembered, so in a short time one can learn a lot of tongue twisters to train different sounds. The rhythm of tongue twisters promotes to the development of language perception and understanding. This is probably the simplest and most accessible method of eliminating speech inaccuracies.

Fiction films, especially those ones which gained a worldwide popularity are also very important for distance learning. Watching such films in the original language even at the initial stage of learning a foreign language has a very positive effect, because the methodology of teaching foreign languages involves the study of the language in symbiotic relationship with the world and culture of the nation whose language is studied. "A full-fledged communication in a foreign language requires not only the knowledge of the linguistic material, but culture and customs of a certain community of people as well. ... General competencies consisting of declarative knowledge (knowledge of the world), sociocultural and intercultural awareness are formed in the process of learning a foreign language" [8]. The socio-cultural competence, in particular, envisages students' assimilating socio-cultural peculiarities of the country whose

language is studied, cultural values, moral and ethical norms, as well as the formation of skills to use them in practice (e.g., social skills, everyday life skills, etc.).

Mental maps are considered to be frontmost among current teaching aids that also facilitate the teacher's distance work with students. They are easy-to-use in reflecting the thinking process and structuring information. They are of great help to better memorize educational material, including grammar. It has been proven that more than 80% of information perceived by a person is the information obtained visually. Thus, mental maps can be successfully applied for studying the material that requires systematization or for presenting information that has a systemic nature (i.e., mental maps would be appropriate in studying morphology referring to learning Ukrainian as a foreign language). Despite its perceptual simplicity the use of a mental map requires the teacher's explanations and comments. The experiment conducted offers proof that the effectiveness of memorization in the visual perception of diagrams and tables is much higher than lectures or explanations without visualization. (See Fig. 1, 2).



The mental map saves time not only for presenting material, but also for its studying. Visualization, in particular, is defined as the creation of images for expressing symbols, which contributes to an absolute understanding of the text, data, information, complementing the scientific explanation or logical argumentation [10].

According to information sources, the Java programming language is used for creating a program FreeMind which enables to develop memory cards. FreeMind is distributed under

the general public license of GNU and has advanced export capabilities. XHTML export allows you to create a map with an extensive structure and links to external sources [12].



Figure 3. Sample memory card used at the Ukrainian language lessons while studying the grammatical theme "Conjunction" [12]

Experience demonstrates that speaking skills are the most difficult to be formed. This problem is easily solved provided that the teacher has a communicatively oriented textbook. What is the way out if there are no ready tasks? The learning process should start with this type of speech activity because the naturalness of the language acquisition process is one of the requirements that is currently brought for foreign language teachers. Similar to a child who starts learning a mother tongue with speaking, not with reading and writing, an adult who learns a foreign language must also start with speaking. Understanding of language is developed in case of its audio perception together with the further consciousness of its intonations, rhythms and logical pauses. When the speech basis of the simplest words and expressions is already established, then one can move on to reading and speaking.

Another method of developing speaking skills is communicative situations. Their presence in the textbooks is of great benefit to the teachers. Otherwise, the teacher's skill to create such communicative situations for students will prove to be useful. Foreign students studying Ukrainian language should be given feasible tasks that require speaking skills, namely, to call to the Dean's office or to go there and ask (in Ukrainian) for a class register, to buy stationery in the store, to read an announcement or a poster and report to the group about what they have read, to ask for a route, to present a small project of acquaintance with the city where they study, to order food or tickets to the theater or museum, etc. Creating artificial situations is also productive, but not as productive as experiencing a life linguistic situation, where the knowledge of a foreign language itself is a stimulus and goal for speaking. Implementing a language strategy by means of such tactics enables us not only gain time but also make the

process of language learning natural, which is considered to be the basis of the communicative-activity approach.

Since there exists a need to reinforce the knowledge the students have already gained, the out-of-class studying of the Ukrainian language also continues. To memorize educational material students are given small tasks (to watch an educational film, repeat the alphabet with podcasts, etc.) This form of learning resembles in its essence a distance learning and is in our opinion useful, because psychologically a person tends to forget what he has learned immediately after the lesson. This is how our memory works. Hence, there is a necessity to repeat the training material in an interesting and feasible form. The textbooks on the Ukrainian language for foreigners written by Ukrainian authors contain the necessary lexical and grammatical material, visualized by tables and diagrams.

The main negative aspect of the educational literature available for studying the Ukrainian language by foreigners is the lack of non-standard tasks which provide impetus to activate imagination, make students think and move gradually from simple, standard tasks towards more complicated requiring a creative approach. Such tasks should be unexpected for the student, impress with novelty and creativity, encourage to learn the language in action, in out-of-class situations that are as close to life as possible. However, the textbooks contain tasks aimed at reading and translating, formulating written questions to the text or answering the questions, grammar tables and rules with a huge number of exceptions typical of the Ukrainian language. All these things make the Ukrainian language, according to the students themselves, “an incredibly difficult language”. Actually, such tasks make the current textbooks more of grammar guides with exercises than expedient means for teachers and students, and in our view do not contribute to the development of communicative competencies at the appropriate level. Therefore, in addition to Ukrainian language textbooks for foreigners, teachers also use other training resources prepared by themselves or in a best-case scenario find in a store or on the Internet (podcasts, educational, documentary and feature films, electronic books, etc.).

One of such books that can be successfully used for teaching purposes is a book created by Ukrainian artist and illustrator Yulia Osyka from New York. According to the author, the idea of creating a book that would help English speakers understand Ukraine better and learn the language, came by chance. There was a desire to create something purely Ukrainian [13].

An easy-to-understand book that can suit anyone assists foreigners learn the Ukrainian language. “Ukrainian in Pictures: Learn Ukrainian. Make your Baba Proud!” is an easy and exciting introduction to Ukrainian culture. Since the author of the book is not a writer, drawing

was chosen to be a main tool. After the creation of illustrations there appeared a main character (Baba) who presents the information.

The book is currently available for free download on Amazon and iBooks. Only in the first few days it was downloaded more than 50 times.

Conclusions

In our opinion, modern textbooks on the Ukrainian language should be supplemented with audio discs, podcasts or films. It would enable foreign students not only hear the language, but also see a situation in which the minimum vocabulary of the topic is used. It would also contribute to the implementation of a communicative-activity approach in learning the Ukrainian language as a foreign language.

The textbooks will be based on the principles of succession, coherence, illustrative purpose, compliance and advanced learning and will be convenient to use during the distance learning process. Since the above mentioned methods of communicative-activity approach proved their effectiveness in practice, we are planning to use the communicative-activity approach and the principles of succession, illustrative purpose, advanced learning and compliance (to the communicative purpose and age characteristics of students) as a basis for the creation of our own textbooks as well as podcasts and mental maps for practical classes in foreign languages, for teaching Ukrainian to foreign students in particular.

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