



Teaching Foreign Language: Teaching... Or Fraud?

Sergey Anatoljevich Filatov

Tollyati, Russia

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ABSTRACT

The article demonstrates impossibility for people without phenomenal abilities or not willing to devote their lives to study foreign languages, i.e. for most people in the world, to master them using modern techniques. This article gets us back to the roots of studying foreign languages, to physiological rules, human memory rules, pedagogical and methodological rules. Violation them resulted in teaching foreign languages becoming probably the greatest fraud in human history.

1. Introduction

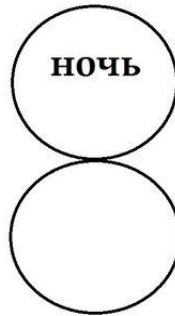
Undoubtedly, English is the most popular foreign language in Russia and throughout the world. There is a great deal of English language courses in the vastness of our Motherland. “Golden”, “Platinum”, “Diamond”, “Easy” courses and God knows what else... They promise to teach you English in a month, a couple of weeks and even in a few days! However, I will not criticize any particular method of teaching, neither will I persuade you to buy at a bargain. Here I would like to go back to the origins of teaching foreign languages. I would like to show you the basis for **any** foreign language teaching. Teaching is not a simple thing, it implies several sciences joint together.

I will try to explain all this in such a simple way so that anybody, even not quite competent, would properly understand me. At the end of this article you will find a reference list, so that everybody will be able to read all these books.

2. Physiology

It is widely known that mastering any language, including one’s native language, was described a hundred years ago by a great Russian physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov in his “Rational Study on The Second and First Signal Systems”. This study says that a word, being an element of the second-signal system, causes a corresponding image in the cortex. For example, if we see, hear, write, or pronounce a Russian word *ночь* ‘night’, our consciousness will create an image of night — wet, cold, dark, etc. It is broadly shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1



Every such correspondence (word — image) is called a stereotype, and as there are a lot of words in the language, these stereotypes form a system. Such a system is called a **system of dynamic stereotypes**. The word “dynamic” indicates that both the system as a whole and each individual stereotype do not stand still, but rather develop or degrade in time depending on the way we cognize the external world. When we begin to learn a foreign language, its language system overlaps the existing system of dynamic stereotypes. Now, it is two words that will correspond to one image of the first signal system (Figure 2).

Figure 2.



Each image of the first signal system should have several components: audial, visual, hand motor, speech motor, tactile, etc.

Thus, it is 100 years ago that Ivan Petrovich Pavlov stated the following: if at least one of the components is missing in creating new images (i.e. memorizing new words), this image very rapidly destroys.

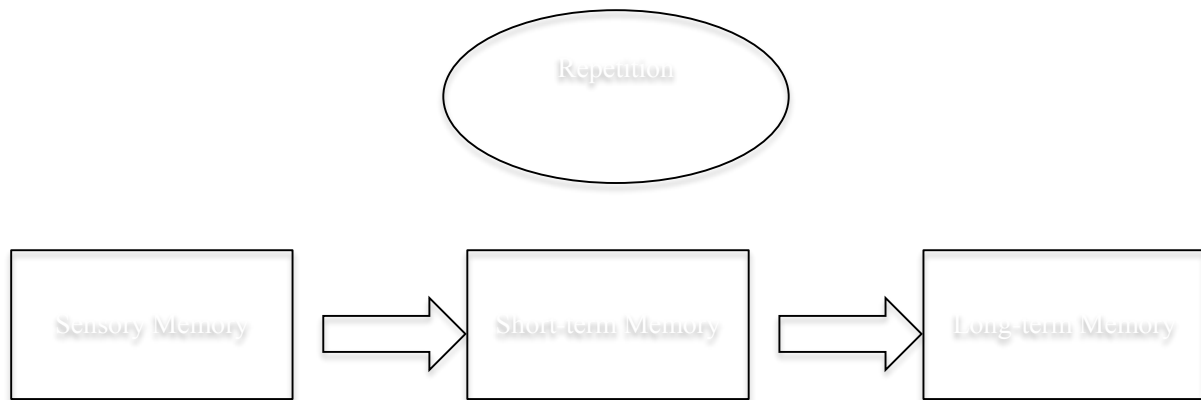
Almost all modern methods of teaching foreign languages focus on speaking and listening comprehension, i.e. they lack two other speech activities, writing and reading.

Some theoreticians go so far as to abandon writing and replace it by typing; however, it is totally wrong from the point of view of human physiology.

3. Model of human memory

In terms of time, man has three kinds of memory, see Figure 3:

Figure 3.



Sensory memory. Sensory memory holds information only for a moment. If we **need** the information from sensory memory, it **can** pass to the next stage of memorizing.

Short-term memory. Lifetime of short-term memory is measured by seconds. Information can be held here only under of repetition. However, repetition has only mechanic effect on memory and does not give long-term results.

Long-term memory. It is long-term memory that holds information for a long time. New information will pass to this stage in case there is a motivation and reflecting on this information, which would arrange and structure the memorized information.

And now let us apply all these data to learning a foreign language. Almost all methods of teaching foreign languages use direct translation (i.e. translation from foreign language into native language) to memorize new words. Let us imagine that there is a sentence “I go home” that should be translated. Let us imagine that I do not know the word “home”, and the only way for me to learn it is to look it up in the dictionary. When I find a corresponding dictionary entry and pass from this word into its meaning, which is described in my native language, my long-term memory throws it away as unnecessary, because this word is still not clear for me; in physiological sense, it has no stereotype — I just do not know it yet. **At this moment, the word “home” is still a number of meaningless letters for me.** And when I meet the same word in the same text in five minutes, I cannot remember its meaning. I remember that I saw it, because when I was looking for it **I was thinking about how to find it**, but I don’t remember its meaning.

However, let us go back once again and consider this example through the above shown scheme of memory model. So,

1. I saw a word “home” and decided to look it up in the dictionary, i.e. I need this information and my sensory memory let it pass.
2. When I was looking for a necessary dictionary entry, I was holding it in my mind, i.e. it was supported by repetition in my short-term memory.
3. When I found a dictionary entry I needed, my mind shifted completely from the word “home” to its meaning, there is no mental operation in it. Besides, from physiological point of view, there is only one type of speech activity here — reading.

4. Regularity of cognizing external world by a human

This regularity almost always puts an **end** to all “non-translation methods”, “methods of total immersion”, and all preschool and almost all school foreign languages teaching. **First, a picture of well-known past should**

be made occur in a learner's cortex, while new information should overlap a picture that already exists in the learner's cortex.

Let us think a bit! What remains new and unknown in learning foreign language and what is old and well-known?

Undoubtedly, it is our native language that is well-known for us, and it is foreign language that is new and yet unknown.

Any competent teacher of foreign language knows an axiom that **it is impossible to learn any foreign language without knowing one's native language.**

What knowledge of native language do children kindergartens and primary and middle schools have?

Almost nothing! There can be no teaching from scratch, it is native language that is a support in teaching foreign language.

5. Pedagogical principles

Few people know what it is. These principles have been formed and polished for centuries, and they are a kind of **pedagogical laws**. People who break the law are called criminals.

5.1. Principle of activity

Pedagogical principle of activity immediately puts an end to all methods that suppose teaching foreign languages by affecting the subconscious, because, according to this principle, a learner should be directly involved in the process. **What we speak or write is purely a work of our muscles**, and it is impossible to develop these skills and abilities by affecting the subconscious of the human brain.

5.2. Principle of consistency

I didn't see a textbook which would comply with this simple principle. Everybody thinks only about how to throw students in the pool of "total immersion" without knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, phonetics and without experience in translation? It isn't a teaching from **simple to complicated**? In my opinion, it is actually the other way around.

Everybody is proud that his or her texts are authentic and that his or her teachers are native speakers. But everybody forgot what listening comprehension is and what happens in a person's head when he listens and comprehends the other person's speech

Listening comprehension is first of all identification of the words that we perceive with the words that we hold in our long-term memory. It is at the later stage that these words are arranged into sentences and comprehended. First of all, perceived words should be identified. Thus, there is a conclusion: **we should... know these words in order to identify them.** In native language, you know nine words out of ten and can somehow understand the tenth word by intuition. In a foreign language, where this ratio is much lower, intuition can play tricks on you. However, listening comprehension is just one out of four speech activities, and nothing more.

5.3. Principle of individuality

This principle puts an end to all the group studies, as **each learner should take such a burden that he is able to take — no more and no less.** But how can this criterion be matched if there are 15 students?

5.4. Principle of scientificity

Now everybody can see that all modern methods are based on nothing. The person who does not possess extraordinary abilities is not able to memorize a word and begin to use it in speech if he just have hears or seen it some times, because human memory has its own laws which do not subject to our wishes.

6. Conclusion

Now I can assert that teaching foreign languages is nothing more than a kind of fraud. Teachers take money from people and give them back only hope, a bubble that very soon blows out and bursts once funding ends. If a person is not successful, there is always an explanation: he was a bad student, he wasn't motivated, and he has poor mental abilities. But nobody wants to notice that your own methods do not correspond to anything at all.

Thus, learning foreign languages is neither a game nor a joke. It is a kind of **sport. “sweat and blood” — this is what a foreign language is. There can be no “easy English” courses at all.**

Human speech is very complicated. A human brain should not think what exactly he has to say in a particular situation. It should adjust breathing, as a person can speak only when he or she exhales. Only after a person starts exhaling, the brain gives a command to our vocal cords and sets timbre and volume of a future statement: we can cry or whisper, squeak or speak in a deep voice. Vibrations created by our vocal cords are caught by the exhaled air and enter the mouth cavity. Here we begin to manipulate our speech organs: tongue, lips, and lower jaw. Each word that we know is fixed in neural connections of our cortex. **We cannot change it because this is our physiology. We need to change our physiology in order to change it.**

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