PSYCHOLINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: *The psycholinguistic approach to language teaching has become a topical issue lately. We have chosen this direction to our cognitive research because many of the methods used previously in language teaching have proved to be inefficient. Our study is based on the ideas which stress the congruence between language and thinking as well as between language and culture. A third necessary componentappears, which is of psychic nature – the linguistic identity. The national characteristic of the linguistic identity is reflected in the vocabulary and in the nature of the relationships within the associative-verbal network, which represents the lingual picture of the world. For this reason a reliable way of linguistic identity reconstruction is the associative experiment - a technique that aims to identify the existing associations in a person's memory which have appeared under the influence of his/her previous experience.*

1. Although the educational system has been focused primarily on the student's cognitive and intellectual development for a long time, at present it has become an axiom that the success of this system is ensured by the balance between the synchronic development of the cognitive side and of the psycho-emotional one: or, according to the holistic view, the teacher's main goal is to develop the student's personality in all its dimensions. In order to improve the teaching process, we aim to reveal the tools and techniques that would give us the opportunity to involve both student's knowledge of the outside world and his/her knowledge of the inner world in the teaching process. At present, the methods that are based on the data from psycholinguistics are gaining more importance. Traditional methods are content-based, while those of psycholinguistic nature are student-centered and take into account his/her psychological peculiarities. These methods owe their success to the fact that they take into account the student's ethno-linguistic features, his/her cognitive and cultural peculiarities, life style, education, the individuality of the structure of his/her phono-articulator apparatus etc.

1.1. Psycholinguistics studies the fundamental model of human communicative competence. Hence, one of its areas of concern is the methodology of teaching foreign languages. Therefore the psycholinguistic approach to language teaching has become a topical issue. We have chosen this direction to our research, since some of the methods previously used in language teaching, which, as has been claimed, were scientific, have proved to be inefficient. As has already been proved, the success of learning a foreign language does not depend only on the teacher, but also on the student andon his peculiarities[1]. Therefore, to optimize the learning process, the teaching methods should focus on using the full potential of students'skills/competences.

2. The teaching methods and strategies should be student-centered and developed individually according to the student's perceptual capacities. A multilingual person's motto should be: "Languages are not taught - they are learnt"! The student, on the other hand, has to learn to use his/her potential, to identify and mobilize his/her own resources, to develop his/her perceptual (visual, auditory) strategies, to develop strategies for internalization of the linguistic material at the phonetic, lexical and grammatical level, to use his/her cognitive and emotional resources in the language learning process etc.

2.1. The idea lying at the basis of our research is the congruence between language and thought, since "the reflexivity of human thinking goes hand in hand with verbalization" [9, p. 49]. In other words, linguistic constructions represent the medium of insertion in the thinking process because "the reflexive operations of thinking are reflected in linguistic operations" [*ibidem*]. Language operations cannot be separated from cognitive operations because they develop in coalescence: "Language represents all the means that thought has systematized and established in it in order to give itself the opportunity to operate a permanent, quick and clear perception [Fr. *saisie*] immediately, if possible, of what develops in itself" [11, p. 122]. What distinguishes man from animal is precisely the capacity and power "to speak the thought, to express it [...], to take the reality in itself, to represent it mentally, with all the consequences of this way of representation" [9, p. 76]. "Language internalization in human thought, says G. Guillaume, is such that, even if humans wanted, no matter how much, to evade at least a little from language, they would not be able to do it" [8, p. 10-11].

2.2. The language teaching method cannot ignore the link between language and culture. According to the linguist E. Coșeriu, "language is governed by two universal principles: creativity and alterity. Language is the place of manifestation of the relationship between you and me, a way of knowing oneself, but also the other". Approaching the language mechanism, Ferdinand de Saussure believes that it "is entirely based on identities and differences, some being just the counterpart of the others" [10, p. 123].

Significance is originally and essentially *forthe other* and also *of the other:* that is why language represents the primary manifestation of a man's *being-with-another*. Alterity is a specific feature of the linguistic act and constitutes the basis of language historicity, *alias* the permanent manifestation of solidarity with a community of speaking subjects who have their traditions and, in addition to that, the manifestation of the social essence of individual's intrinsic historicity.

According to the opinion expressed by psycholinguists, in a communication, especially in an intercultural one, we resort to lingual signs, relying on our cultural knowledge. In other words, for an effective communication the common lingual code is not enough. One also needs common knowledge and conscience.

3. According to the new methods, the relationship between language and culture necessarily involves a third component of psychic nature – *the linguistic identity*. In the last two decades, foreign language teaching methodology makes use of the concepts *linguistic identity* and *secondary linguistic identity*, which are related to the theories of intercultural communication, ethnolinguistics, ethnic psychology, comparative pragmatics etc. However, up to now the process of teaching foreign languages (both theoretically and practically) is characterized by a lack of consistency between training objectives and the methods/procedures used which aim primarily at training the verbal-semantic level of linguistic identity.

In the twenty-first century, the language of interpersonal communication is the language of culture – the culture of social consciousness, the general culture of personality, communication culture, culture of society as a whole. The outcome of the process of learning a language is the formation of linguistic identity[2], and the result of learning a language should be the formation of secondary linguistic identity – an indication of a person's competence to participate in intercultural communication. Secondary linguistic identity represents all the abilities a person has in order to study a foreign language at intercultural level, involving an appropriate interaction with representatives of other cultures" [13, p. 46].

The cultivation of secondary linguistic identity as an ethnic phenomenon is based on the primary linguistic identity. The purpose of this process is the integration of cultural differences, so that the student can adopt the new culture by feeling part of it. The secondary linguistic identity is a category of language didactics and it represents the goal, and also the result of learning a foreign language.

3.1. The idea referring to the interdependence between the linguistic identity and the ethnic character of the picture of the world is not new. "By virtue of its essence, the language provides the individual with the frame that keeps his "picture of the world", expressing, as specified (in the same context) by Humboldt, "the spirit of the peoples". At the same time, language is always a way "to live" in the world" [5, p. 1]. The specific national character of the linguistic identity manifests itself at all the glottic levels, which makes it possible to reveal the importance of the ethnic component in the structure of linguistic identity (cf. [18] *et alii*).

3.1.1. According to A. Karaulov's model, the specific national character of the linguistic identity is reflected in the vocabulary and in the nature of relations in the associative-verbal network, which represents the lingual picture of the world. This involves not only learning the new verbal code and the ability to use it in communication but also training in the student's conscience the "picture of the world" specific to the speakers of the language which he/she studies. This fact involves familiarizing students with the system of notions characteristic to the foreign lingual society.

3.1.2. In the same vein, I. Haleeva believes that the ability to communicate at intercultural level requires mastering the verbal-semantic code of the target language, i.e. of the lingual picture (developing the secondary lingual consciousness/awareness) and the "(conceptual/notional) global picture of the world", the learning outcome being the fact that the linguistic identity is capable to penetrate the "spirit" of the target language and the "bone" of people's culture with whom one can achieve intercultural communication [22, p. 26]. Therefore, the student should take a new ethnolingual vision, which will allow him to understand a different social reality. The linguist Irina Haleeeva mentions that in the description of the secondary linguistic identity model one should take into account the changes occurring in the linguistic identity in the process of learning a non-native language. In the opinion of the Russian linguist, the intercultural communication requires the owner of a lingual picture belonging to a cultural society to learn how to understand the owner of the other lingual picture [*idem*, 70].

The notion of secondary linguistic identity does not refer only to the lingual code; it has a more complex and multi-aspectual nature, referring to the national character and mentality. That is why the given concept is the focus of researchers in anthropological linguistics, ethnolinguistics, intercultural communication etc. Therefore, we must abandon the idea that in the process of learning a foreign language, one also learns a ”foreign” culture (generated by the term "foreign language"), because, in fact, one adopts a new ethnolingual vision of the world.

3.2. Natural language reflects the result of the process of knowing the class system, that is of the way the reality continuum is segmented, with different configurations and proportions, from one language to another. The segmentation of reality appears in the zone of metalinguistic representation in various ways of semantic configuration, through the componential paradigms of semantic and associative fields. The human factor plays a huge role in organizing and in structuring the vocabulary in consciousness. Proceeding from this, the organization of lexical units should be analyzed from the perspective of the psychological processes of memory and thinking (*apud* [15, p. 52])[3]. "The word, as pointed out by J. Elman, does not carry meaning; it is a means of direct access to mental representations, to the semantic memory" [7, p. 296]. It has been proven experimentally that lexical units are not stored in the mental lexicon in isolation. In order to memorize them, consciousness creates certain semantic, formal and spelling associations, the most common being the semantic ones. Thus, when using any lexical unit, another word, which is "adjacent" to the given one, appears in the speaker's and in the interlocutor's mind. This interconnection between words is determined by the similarity or semantic opposition and also by the realia they name" [21, p. 228]. It is believed that all existing concepts in language are distributed into groups which are more or less closed on the basis of formal and content closeness or opposition. In these groups, each

concept exists only because of its connection with the other terms/concepts in the given group, and any change/disappearance involves restructuring the whole group [*ibidem*].

3.2.1. A safe way to reconstruct linguistic identity is the *associative experiment* - a technique that aims to identify the existing associations in a person's memory which appeared under his/her previous experience. At the moment, this type of experiment is the most effective tool for studying linguistic consciousness: the interdependence of ideas, notions, concepts represents the result of psychological relations, i.e. of associations.

Through the associative experiment it is possible to create associative-verbal networks and to identify the picture of the world of representatives belonging to a particular culture as well as the system of cultural stereotypes. Taken together, they reflect the national character. Or the associative field, resulting from the associative experiment for a given stimulus word, is not only a fragment of human verbal memory, but also a fragment from the picture of the world characteristic to an ethnic group, reflected in the consciousness of an ordinary speaker (representative of the given culture) and therefore a *cultural stereotype*[4].

N. Ufimtzeva claims that the constant nature of cultural perception as a system of consciousness related to a particular ethnic group is provided by the cultural stereotypes of consciousness, i.e. by the paradigms of consciousness image – perceptive ways accumulated as a repertoire of structured contexts (scheme, frames) [23, p. 99]. Our perception is based on experience, education, language, culture. In certain circumstances (even when it comes to the representatives of various ethnic groups and cultures), the same stimulus can induce different perceptions and different stimuli - identical perceptions.

The Russian linguist A. Leontiev points out that the associative method makes it possible to reveal the cultural specificity of linguistic units and of secondary semantic relations which are often not revealed in everyday communication [20, p. 114-128]. In A. Zalevskaja's opinion, the associative experiment provides rich material for intercultural and interdisciplinary studies and makes it possible to identify the universal characteristics of associations and also their unique character (*apud* [16, p. 1]).

3.2.2. The associative fields revealed through the associative experiment may serve to solve an important problem which methodologists face – the selection of lexical material indispensable for the linguistic and cultural immersion of an individual willing to learn a language, in the context of perpetual glottis development. The associative standards of the given language have an undeniable value in this respect, since they are based on the "energetic" nature of the language (cf. the famous Humboldtian idea of language as activity (Tätigkeit), called by E. Coseriu "Grundlage aller Sprachtheorie"), and not on its interpretation as a result, as a finished

product and as an object in itself: "Language in all its forms should be regarded as a phenomenon which is essentially *enérgeia*. This means that the language generally should be understood and defined as linguistic production (creation), not simply as a whole of what has already been produced" [6, p. 145].

The associative norms are the most common reactions to a stimulus which represents the associative core. They contain virtually all the relations between the stimulus and the other words stored in the memory of each representative of an ethnic language and culture[5]. We believe that this could constitute the *minimum minimorum* that every language student should learn. It has been demonstrated that the reaction words to various stimuli words refer to phenomena that are well known to all representatives of a lingual-cultural society and, in addition, are present both at the cognitive level and at the emotional level (an extremely important aspect, given the dynamic nature of language evolution).

It has been shown that the more frequently a word appears in speech (text), the more frequently it occurs in response to various stimuli in the associative experiment. It follows that what appears in speech (texts), in one way or another, is reflected and "cemented" in speakers' linguistic consciousness and vice versa - what exists in the speaker's linguistic consciousness, in one way or another, is reflected (or it could appear any time) in speech, texts (and in the associative experiment, too). The associative mechanism is considered the basic functional cognitive mechanism. This mechanism is universal, since speech is a psychic process which reflects a personality's cognitive, emotional and volitional spheres [12, p. 30].

3.2.3. Selecting the method of working with vocabulary is not an easy task from the methodological point of view, being determined not only by the tastes and preferences of the teacher himself, but, first of all, by the psychological regularities - peculiarities of learning the word, its place in the glottic system, psychological factors of word perception etc. As highlighted by Fr. Nietzsche, the "disclosure" of "truth" occurs only in the reference system of the speaker, but true comprehension depends on the hearer. Thus, in the game between the speaker and the hearer, the word becomes opening and closing at the same time in that it reveals and hides, it acts as message carrier and as mask, as mediator and as brake in the act of communication (*apud* [4]). Therefore, for this stage of the lesson, the associative experiment could be extremely useful. The main objective of the associative experiment is to reveal the association spectrum for a given word, and to motivate this choice. This technique will help students to identify associative relations in different contexts/texts. In addition to this, it will help them interpret the implicit meanings in a text, for "a new word expresses a psychic experience and an image of the world simultaneously" [4, p. 3].

Undoubtedly, the results of the associative experiment cannot be used directly – they require a preliminary interpretation, which consists in determining the types of communicative behavior recorded in the experiment. There are several types of associations: *formal* (for example, phonetic) and *content* (syntagmatic, paradigmatic, thematic, etc.). Some individuals prefer the paradigmatic associations, others - the syntagmatic ones. Depending on the respondents' preferences one can reveal *the individual associative tactics* (cf. [18]) and this will help the teacher choose the appropriate and effective teaching methods.

It should be noted that observations were made on the type of associations that prevail at a certain age in boys and girls, in healthy children, as well as in those with developmental disabilities etc. The importance of such data is undeniable. Moreover, in order to obtain exhaustive information about the respondents it is necessary to identify not only the types of prevailing associations, but also *the individual reaction strategy* [14, p. 226-233]. Reaction strategies are determined by assessing the associative material from the communicative point of view. The results obtained through the associative experiment are a source about the respondents' performance and communicative potential.

3.2.4. In order to make the process of learning foreign vocabulary more efficient one can use the method of *semantic associative clusters*. A cluster represents uniting more homogeneous units in a group; an *associative cluster* represents all the associations grouped under a common topic. The basis of the association may be common semantic features, as well as the common functional value of the given units. For example, the associative experiment could reveal the following associative cluster of the lexical unit *spring*: *flowers, season, green, warm, summer, snowdrop, life, resurrection, beautiful, green, sun, early, flourishing, start, mud, beauty, late, joy, winter, freshness, rebirth, cold, renewal, Easter, birthday, wet, rainy, swallow, in blossom, leaves, a new beginning, pink, trees in blossom, desire comes, ice, colorful, happiness, early, wind, mild, tulips, joy, autumn, fresh, winter, quiet, freshness, holidays, flourish, green, birth, vivacity, mărțișor, pleasant* etc. It should be noted that the associative cluster is not immutable, but vice versa, is valuable due to its dynamic and changing character.

In the process of realia lexicalization, it is also possible to use the procedure *picture* - *word*: before naming a new reality, we aim to create its verbal image: identify related concepts, reveal specific features of the realia, list a number of details referring to it, creating the associative field of the given concept. For example, the associative field of *winter* may include the following subfields: precipitation (*snow, flakes, snowflake, blizzard*); natural phenomena (*cold, frost, nature*); features (*frosty, cold, hard, warm, mysterious, gentle, long, great, white, frosty, gentle, green, beautiful*); specific actions (*make a fire, it snows*); specific realia (*skiing, light, smoke, sledge, white trees, wilderness,*

4. The verbal associations are undoubtedly a reflection of the connections between extralingual phenomena: realia from the world around, history, culture etc. The lexical units which name these realia make associations in the linguistic consciousness, just as the realia associate themselves in the human consciousness. The study of the associative links that actually appear in speakers' linguistic consciousness can help identify and interpret the nature of the relationships between words, of typology and reasons of metasemy, of the steps taken by a free word combination to become a phraseological unit etc., hence their importance for the linguistic and educational disciplines. Using the results of the associative experiment contributes to optimizing the process of learning vocabulary from any lexical-thematic group and to creating a basis for a better lexicographical description of the lexical layer.

The national character of the linguistic consciousness is a a topical issue in modern linguistics and involves inevitably erasing certain boundaries between linguistics and psycholinguistics since the aim of language and of speech is to render the state of consciousness, the psychic contents of a person's internal world. It has become axiomatic already that it is impossible to study the language outside the human psyche, which represents the foundation of language learning. The methods based on psycholinguistics data, particularly on the associative experiment, allow a new approach to language teaching problems by providing an intercultural dimension of the learning process, the possibility of teaching a language using the communicative perspective, enhancing student's emotional, creative, social, cognitive and language skills.

Notes
[1]If this were the case, all the students of the same teacher would have similar results.
[2]According to Iu. Karaulov, linguistic identity is "a form of plenary manifestation of personality. It includes a psychic, a social and an ethnic component, refracted by language and speech. The Russian scientist reveals three levels of the structural model of linguistic identity: first - the verbal-semantic level, which reflects the level of knowledge of spoken language. Its elements are the words - units of the associative-verbal networks. The acquisition of the systemic and structural relationships of the studied language occurs at this level. It aims to achieve communicative tasks. The second - the cognitive-glottic level, linked to the lingual picture of the linguistic identity. The third - the motivational (pragmatic) level is represented by the personality's communicative action needs, which includes identification and characterization of motives and goals [17, p. 53].
[3]It is the human memory that stores information on the structure of our consciousness. Moreover, it does not just store it, it changes it, as well [15, p. 52].
[4]Any reality is perceived by a particular ethnic group not only in terms of its spatial and temporal dimensions, but also in terms of *meaning*: in other words, the cultural

stereotype fixes an invariant of the fragment of the picture of the world characteristic of this ethnic group.

[5]The associative rules contain words settled in the conscience of every representative of a linguistic culture (of course, if his∕her psyche corresponds to the norm).

[6]These associative fields were revealed through the associative experiment conducted within the project of developing the Associative Dictionary of the Romanian Language. About three thousand respondents have been involved in the experiment so far. They are all students at various faculties of universities from the Republic of Moldova and Romania. The respondents have been given a list of about 100 stimulus words and have been asked to respond with the first words that came to their minds - reaction words. 500 lexical units have been selected as stimulus words. They all belong to the core vocabulary of the Romanian language.

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