

FEATURES OF DECODING RUSSIAN SPEECH TO REPRESENTATIVES OF DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

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Abstract: The article deals with the description of some lexico-grammatical, phonemic, lexical, linguistic peculiarities of oral speech in the context of the problem of decoding communication in Russian as a foreign language. Different approaches to the process of decoding of oral speech, produced by foreigners studying Russian language are also under analysis. The results of exercises carried out under the proposed scheme among representatives of different countries are shown and described in detail. The practical application has revealed that these types of exercises greatly contribute to improving the skills of Russian speech decoding by inophons (the students of Russian as a foreign language). General positive dynamics of application of the methodology used and its prospects become apparent. The article stresses the importance of taking into account the level of proficiency in Russian, the language features of the native language of a foreign student and his/her motivation in learning Russian language.

Keywords: Vocabulary teaching, lexico-grammatical relations, phonemic system, lexical system, decoding of Russian speech.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems of modern cognitive linguistics is certain imbalance in creation and understanding of speech. In terms of “cognitive science a person is treated as an actor, actively perceiving and producing information and being guided in his/her mental activity by certain activity schemes, programs, plans and strategies” (Plakhotnaja 2011). Language serves as a cognitive mechanism in cognitive linguistics, playing an important role in decoding and encoding of speech.

Speech production mechanism can be presented as the following scheme:

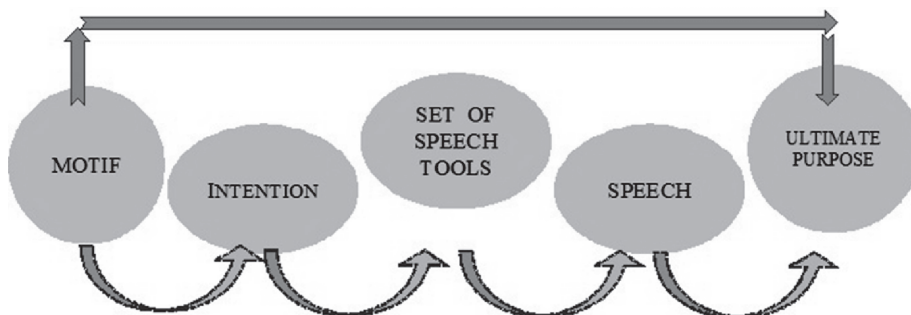


Figure 1: Speech production mechanism (Akishina and Kagan 2002)

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When transmitting information, a speaker formulates a thought, addressed to an interlocutor, in the form of statement, i.e., encodes speech. Listener, for his part, analyzes the perceived speech and turns the expanded statement into reduced thought–decodes it (Plakhotnaja 2011).

When studying a foreign language, it is important not to simply memorize a large number of words, but also to use them correctly, construct sentences and pronounce correctly, encoding them. Assuming that each language has its own peculiarities, an inophon can be disoriented by experience and knowledge of the mother tongue, presence/absence of certain sounds in it, differences in definitions, lack of any sememes or tokens, in presence of concepts-pairs. It is necessary for him/her to be able to differentiate which ones have semantic differences (including connotations) and which refer to duplets etc.

THE FACTORS AND THE FORMATION OF ABILITIES

The Factors Promoting Development of Shortcomings of Russian Speech Decoding

Shortcomings of Russian speech decoding of inophons can also be formed because of the following factors:

- lack of listening as a part of the study of Russian as a foreign language, including authentic texts in practice of an inophon: listening to television, radio, video films in Russian;
- absence of will or unwillingness of a foreigner to clarify/ask for clarification of the statement meaning. In some cases the Professor believes, because of own considerations, that the meaning of the text is clear, a priori. For example, in the classroom a teacher “read the text several times, and a student did not understand its meaning as from the first time, and did not understand it after repeated reading” (Akishina and Kagan 2002);
- at the lessons of Russian as a foreign language a teacher pays a lot of attention to clarification of complex elements of listening, hurries to translate difficult words, allows students to read the text for listening. Thus, foreigners do not have ability to think independently, and become accustomed to prompt.

Studying a foreign language, taking into account the above-mentioned complications, it is necessary, first and foremost, to master grammar. Also, on the one hand, each addressant has own individual psychological characteristics of the statement formulation, on the other hand, an addressant has the ability to perceive speech that can exacerbate mutual understanding of speakers, “it turns out that the speaker does one thing, the listener does another thing, and they realize the third thing” (Reformatskiy 2005).

Speech, in turn, is a set of “quotations from the language, well-known for us, which words and expressions we usually use in our speech without speaking about sound system and grammar, where something “new” cannot be invented)” (Reformatskiy 2005). Key indicator of foreigners’ communication skills in Russian is the understanding of lexical-grammatical relations, phonemic and lexical system of the Russian language.

The Causes of Violation of Russian Speech Decoding by Foreigners

Violation of Russian speech decoding by foreigners occurs due to:

- lack of listening skills, listening to distinguish phonological couples and intonation tints, correlate sound shell with meaning;
- ignorance of phonological and grammatical structures, vocabulary; lack of ability to audio perception;
- inability to decipher sounds, i.e. match meaning with sound;
- misunderstanding of sound attitude of the speaker (“author’s position”), lack of own target listening position and reluctance to implement it in listening comprehension (Akishina and Kagan 2002).

The Development of Abilities Forming Russian Speech Decoding Skills

To receive and develop Russian speech decoding skills, it is necessary to develop such abilities as:

- imitation-through workout to differentiate sound pairs, listening to records with certain disturbances, “identification” of familiar words in the speech stream;
- memory-through method for memorizing words, texts, rules, etc.;
- guess and forecasting -are evolving with the help of special exercises, such as: “end the logical proposal/text”, “answer the question”, “explain why the character does that”, etc.
- attention - it is necessary to teach “to hold attention on the subject of conversation. It develops through such tasks as, for example: technique “echo”-repetition of certain phrases (addressant: it was good - addressee: it was good)” (Akishina and Kagan 2002), exercises on observation (for example: “describe the difference between words that closely match”), as well as working with texts, where it is necessary to determine the main idea, to remember any details while reading, to list specific criteria or to describe the main character, etc.
- hearing - is trained using exercises in intonation, including, practice of listening to the quiet/loud speech, etc.

The Factors Affecting Violation of Understanding by Foreigners of Logic-grammatical Relations

Violation of understanding by foreigners of logic-grammatical relations also occurs because of ignorance of logic-grammatical constructions meaning that make up the statement. To establish relations in logic-grammatical constructions of the Russian language like “events communication” (“the Sun went down behind the clouds”, “rain soaked asphalt”) and “relations communication” (“Sasha is stronger than Misha”, “Misha is stronger than Sasha”), one should take his mind off “direct meaning of some words and overcome that reversibility of the construction which is visible from the above examples, where the order of words or change of words inflectional signs changes meaning of the whole structure” (Luria, 2007).

In the case of foreigners, in violating logic-grammatical relations, in our view, the factors represented in the form of Table 1 may play a role.

TABLE 1: THE FACTORS PLAYING A ROLE IN VIOLATION OF THE LOGICAL-GRAMMATICAL RELATIONS

#	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description of the problem</i>
1	An inophon knows only one meaning of the word at a time when the word has several meanings.	A foreigner uses the word in only one sense in which he remembered it and he also perceives. Or knowing multiple meanings of a single word, he confuses them.
2	“Mentality”.	For example, in the English language, grammar refers animals to inanimate objects (“what?” but not “who?”); In the English language there is unified form of address “you”, while in Russian there is “ti” (and you can address to the person by name), and “vi” (the person can be addressed by name and patronymic name, while in English, as in most languages, there is no middle name).
3	Spontaneous speech.	If a foreigner has met in the speech of the addressee an unfamiliar word, he is fixed on its translation, losing attention and, consequently, understanding of further utterance.
4	Difficulties in understanding the use and appropriateness of prepositions and prefixes, relationships of comparisons and inversion constructions.	Especially difficulties appear when the mother tongue of the learner has strictly fixed word order (for example, French, German, English).
5	Incorrect “choice of the correct conjunction or conjunctive means” (Babalova 1984).	Difficulties stem from mismatch of conjunctions functioning in Russian and the inophon’s native language.

#	<i>Factor</i>	<i>Description of the problem</i>
6	Violation of “combination of modal-temporal plans of complex sentence parts” (Babalova 1984).	Specifics of grammatical or semantic structure of predicate units, which act as parts of complex sentences, are determined
7	Violation of “aspectual-temporal forms of verbal predicate” (Babalova 1984).	Especially when the language of the inophon has more or fewer tenses.

The Development of Phonemic and Intonation (Speech) Hearing

Speaking about a foreign student’s ability to perceive some words and structures, we mean training of his/her phonemic hearing, namely the ability to shape sound image of the word in memory, ability to hear and recognize it in the flow of speech.

Difficulty often occurs when in the native language of the foreigner there are no certain sounds of the Russian language. The most striking example: problems for Chinese students with pronunciation of the sounds “yi”, “ch” and “r”. “It is possible to develop students’ phonemic hearing by providing appropriate phonetic exercises, when the students not only hear isolated sound, but they must reproduce it by simple imitation (exercises have imitation-intuitive nature), or explaining to students in what position organs of articulation should be and which sound should be pronounced as a result” (Moskovkin and Schukin, 2010). Experts recommend to develop phonemic hearing of trainees by “maximum attraction of their thought processes” (Babalova 1984), as the realization that the foreigner should hear and imitate by voice contributes to thinning of his/her motility and hearing.

Phonemic and intonation (speech) hearing develops using exercises of psychological nature. For example, there are such psychological techniques as:

“different images, comparisons, views help call impalpable moment of articulation. When training hard (Plakhotnaja 2011), this advice is useful: pronouncing this sound, imagine that you have a mouth full of milk. This percept leads to subsidence of the middle part of the tongue dorsum. Or the following tips help right speaking of sounds: pronounce soft consonants in female voice, hard in male; pronounce voiceless consonants in order to blow away little sheet of paper from hands, and pronounce voiced consonants in such way that it could not move” (Moskovkin and Schukin, 2010).

Violations of the lexical order of Russian speech lie in impossibility of differentiated listening by a foreigner of similar sounding words and nebulosity (or total impossibility) of unstressed words perception which are endings, suffixes and prefixes, perceiving often only stressed part (usually root) of the word. This leads to “cut”, blear and insufficiently sustainable formation of auditory images, which adversely affect decoding of lexical part of speech.

METHODOLOGY

As the formation of skills to decode Russian speech, we offer to use a set of exercises, aimed at teaching of inophons to correct understanding of Russian speech of announcers that acts as one way to work out the perceived ability to analyze perceptive speech and convert expanded statement in reduced thought.

So, at the intergroup lessons, students are encouraged to perform the following tasks on a specific scheme. Typical tasks are some scheme-based, developed by L.S. Krasnova (2009).

- Section “Phonetic dictations”, i.e. accurate recording of the sounds of the foreign language with special, adapted for that purpose alphabet (“phonetic”) (Shcherba, 2004).
- Section “Dictionaries”. The teacher pronounces the word, which the student must listen and then repeat three times without training. Totally seven words are given. Words should be pronounced fast as in everyday speech of native speaker, in order it would be easier for an inophon to comprehend them during real communication. Then the student works out every word. After training, the teacher pronounces the words again, and the student repeats after, perceiving the said by ear, without looking at the written word.
- Section “Listening - comprehension”, aimed at training of phonemic hearing of the student. “Depending on the proficiency level, an inophon is given individually oriented exercise. This is typically a hundred examples of recognition of words or phrases” (Krasnova 2009).
- Section “Phrasebook”. Foreign students form a dialogue on one of the suggested topics. Teacher reads part of the dialogue (for one of the characters); the second part should come up with a student. Generally, the dialogue is made up in catechetical form. By listening to the answers by student it is determined whether he understands meaning of the teacher’s saying, having identified key information
- Section “Audio Recording”. Students listen to audio - recording, passage from television announcer speech, dialogue from the film or broadcast. Students listen to the record, and talk about their impressions, remember details of the record, define basic meaning, specificity and situation, in which one or another dialogue/monologue could be pronounced. This exercise trains perception and identification of the intonation of the Russian-speaking person among other.
- Section “mistakes”. The students are divided into pairs. Each student compiles a small story on given topic and then he reads it (this is not homework, everything happens directly at the lesson). One student in the pair reads his/her story to the other. The second student should identify the main elements of the story and, most importantly, articulate and point out errors.

This kind of exercises has proved real improvement in Russian speech decoding skills of inophons. However, the degree of positive dynamics depends on the level of proficiency, linguistic features of the native language of a foreign student and his/her motivation.

Note that you should use audio records of diverse nature, using male, female and children's voices, noisy (against the background of wind, raging sea, zooming vehicles, etc.) and without, with the usual tempo of speech, which corresponds to the standard situation in reality under household or business communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having had classes on the described scheme, we identified the positive dynamics, which could be traced back to the below presented diagram. In the inter group there were students from Poland (2), Italy (4), France (1 person), Germany (1 person), South Korea (1 person) and Mexico (1 person) - just 10 students. Proficiency level is B1. Scores were given on 50-pointed scale.

Students came from abroad into the territory of the Russian Federation to study the Russian language. Training was held for three weeks.

The results demonstrated by foreign students before and after an experiment considerably differ. The points of the experiment are represented in the Table 2.

TABLE 2: THE LEVEL OF RUSSIAN SPEECH DECODING BY FOREIGNERS

<i>Foreign students</i>		
<i>The level of Russian speech decoding</i>		
<i>No.</i>	<i>Points, issued before the experiment</i>	<i>Points, issued after the experiment</i>
1	34	47
2	31	39
3	30	50
4	27	41
5	28	43
6	25	26
7	41	50
8	29	38
9	32	47
10	24	29

Based on the data in the table, we see a significant improvement in the ratings and, consequently, the level of Russian speech decoding. Initially, foreign students were slightly dissatisfied with this technique. They were mostly confused with the speed of teacher's speech and audio recordings to perform any other tasks.

However, when coming up in the street, in simple everyday situations with real Russian speech, inophons found that they started to develop actively the skill of Russian speech understanding, unlike that, which they had had before coming to Russia.

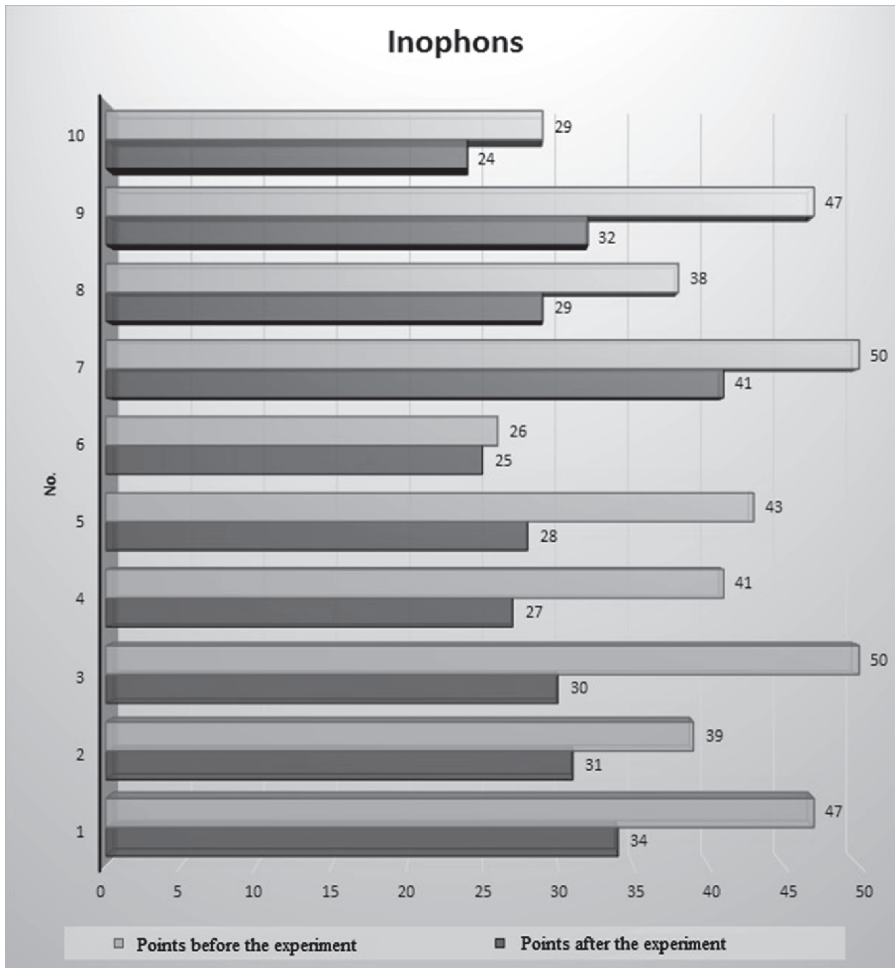


Figure 2: Assessing the level of Russian speech decoding by foreign students on the scale of 50

CONCLUSION

The scheme of exercises used in educational process, certainly has a wide range of opportunities to evolve and improve in various ways, depending on the capabilities, needs and level of proficiency of foreign students.

The base of these exercises is the authentic texts, included in the students-inophons curriculum.

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