LECTURE 4

**PRINCIPLES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

1. The principle of conscious approach
2. The principle of activity
3. The principle of visualization

Methods of foreign language teaching are based on the fundamental principles of didactics; among them, a **conscious approach** to language learning, activity, visualization, and others. However, in foreign language teaching, due to the specific features of the subject in which means and ends are equally essential, principles are used in a particular way. **The principle of conscious approach** to language learning implies comprehension of a linguistic phenomenon of language material by the pupil usually through the medium of the native language, or the arrangement of the material in sentence patterns graded in difficulties with the emphasis on same elements which are singled out as “teaching points”. In all cases pupils understand both the form and the content of the material they are to learn, and they are aware of how they should treat the material while performing various exercises which aim at developing habits and skills in using it. Such an approach to language learning usually contrasts with “mechanical” learning through repetitive drill.

A great research work has been carried out in Soviet psychology and methods, and it has been proved that conscious approach to learning a foreign language promotes the acquisition of the subject. V.A. Artemov, a prominent psychologist, puts forward a theory of the unity of the language rule and the speech activity (language behaviour) in foreign language teaching. In teaching a foreign language therefore, it is more reasonable to help pupils in assimilating language rules which function in this language by introducing the rules, rather than to wait until the learners deduce these rules through speech activity. V.A. Artemov warns the teacher against putting this hard work on the learner’s shoulders. Proceeding from this consideration it becomes obvious that in learning a foreign language the pupil should acquire the rules of the language to be able to follow these rules in the act of communication; and the teacher’s task is to help the pupil in this respect. From the definition given by the author it is clear that he does not mean “rules” in their traditional interpretation, but in the form of algorithms that can direct the pupil’s learning and lead him along the shortest way to the desired end.

A conscious approach to foreign language teaching implies the use of the learner’s native language. Soviet Methods has devoted much attention to the problem of the mother tongue in teaching and learning a foreign language. If a man knows only his native language his concepts are directly associated with the expression of these concepts in this tongue. The associations which arise, extremely complicated in nature, are very lasting due to systematic speech practice. The acquisition of a foreign language means the transition to thinking in a second language. For this purpose, it is necessary to acquire the ability to establish direct associations between concepts and their means of expression in the second language. Indeed, when a pupil begins to learn a foreign language the words of this language are often associated with the words of the mother tongue first. However, thanks to constant practice the intermediate link — the native language — fades, and foreign language words come into the pupil’s consciousness directly in connection with the concepts they express. Mastery of the language means formulating one’s thoughts within the foreign language.

Proceeding from psychological peculiarities of foreign language assimilation, and taking into account the basic processes of thought, we may come to the conclusion that in order to master a foreign language pupils must have a lot of practice in hearing, speaking, reading, and writing in the language they study. As to the mother tongue we cannot eliminate it. We should use it as a means of teaching whenever it helps pupils in acquiring knowledge necessary for developing habits and skills.

In teaching and learning, the foreign language and the mother tongue are closely connected and influence each other. The pupil can transfer language skills acquired in the native language to those in the target language. For instance, in teaching the English alphabet the teacher need not drill pupils in writing such letters as a, c, e and some others which Russian pupils can write because the Russian alphabet includes these letters. In teaching reading and pronunciation, the pupils easily cope with sound-and-letter analysis of words, as they are acquainted with that kind of work from learning the mother tongue. Studies of transfer show, however, that such a psychological phenomenon as transfer is not automatic. Pupils should be taught to transfer. Bright pupils transfer learning more rapidly than slow pupils. Transfer is increased when the situation to which transfer is made is similar to the original learning. A proper utilization of transfer can undoubtedly increase the effectiveness of learning.

The pupil’s mother tongue often interferes with the target language, i. e., the formation of new habits is hindered by habits already acquired. For instance, pronunciation habits in the mother tongue hinder the development of pronunciation habits in a foreign language. Habits and skills of correct speech, from grammar viewpoint, lead to constant mistakes in the foreign language as the pupils try to transfer the structure of one language to that of the other. In studying French or English Russian-speaking pupils often make mistakes in word-order. We believe that the best way to overcome interference is, on the one hand, some comparison of language phenomena in both languages clearly showing the peculiarities of the foreign language, its distinctive features, its characteristics, and, on the other hand, constant practice in the foreign language that helps to overcome interference in developing pupils’ habits, skills in the foreign language.

Consequently, from the analysis of the didactic principle of the conscious approach to foreign language teaching, we may formulate a specific methodological principle which reads as follows:

**In teaching a foreign language it is necessary to cope with the mother tongue of pupils.**

This means that teaching a foreign language, for example, English to Russian, Chuvash, Bashkir, Arabic-speaking pupils should differ in the arrangement of language material and in the techniques of its presentation and retention. We cannot ignore pupils’ native tongue in teaching a foreign language when searching for the shortest and most sound ways to the desired end. Indeed, Russian-speaking pupils and Arabic speaking pupils have different troubles in learning English. The teacher either helps pupils to make a transfer, for instance, from Russian into English (little explanation, if any, and few exercises are needed in this case), or he gives pupils the necessary explanation and supplies them with exercises, which pupils perform within the target language, without stressing the difference by translation exercises; the latter work rather at comprehension than at forming new habits and skills.

In connection with the analysis of the principle of conscious teaching, it is necessary to dwell upon the forming of habits and skills in a foreign language. All language habits and skills are extremely complex in their nature and are closely connected with conscious activity of students. What are habits? Here are some definitions of habits.

“A habit may be regarded as an instance of learning in which a relatively simple response is made, automatically and fairly frequently, to a relatively simple kind of situation.”

«Навыки – это усвоенные и упрочившиеся путем упражнений способы действия».

Consequently, a habit may be considered to be a dialectical unity of automatism and consciousness. The psychological basis of habits is conscious associations, their physiological basis is temporary nerve connections, conditioned reflexes, arising as a result of reciprocal actions of first and second signalling system.

As to skills, they are defined as follows:

“A skill might be defined as an economical organization of behaviour achieving an intended effect.”

«Умением называют и самый элементарный уровень выполнения действия, и мастерство человека в данном виде деятельности».

B.V. Belyaev also distinguishes two kinds of skills. He calls them primary skills (первичные умения) and secondary skills (вторичные умения). According to Belyaev, who is known to be a defender of the conscious approach to teaching and learning a foreign language, the process of assimilation may be presented as follows: (1) primary skills supported and directed by theory, i. e., the learner is told what to do and how to do it, he is conscious of the action he is to perform, (2) habits, i. e., the learner performs the action until it becomes habitual and does not require further attendance; and (3) secondary skills imply the use of the material in the act of communication.

**The principle of activity** in foreign language teaching, of utmost importance since learning a foreign language should result in mastering the target language which is possible provided the pupil is an active participant in the process, he is involved in language activities throughout the whole course of instruction.

In modern psychology activity is now generally considered to be a main characteristic of cognitive processes. Activity, arises under certain conditions. According to the Sets Theory the learner should feel a need to learn the subject, and have necessary prerequisites created for the satisfaction of this need. The main sources of activity are motivation, desire, and interest.

Young people in our country want to know foreign languages. To illustrate this we may refer to the entrance examinations of language departments of higher schools where the competition is great; to the growing number of people who wish to study at various foreign language courses; to the desire of parents to send their children to specialized schools, etc. I.F. Komkov gives the following data obtained by means of questionnaires among 3 368 pupils of town and village schools. 81 per cent of the pupils want to study a foreign language. About 11 per cent of pupils name it their favourite subject. The greatest desire to study a foreign language is observed among pupils of the 5th form, i.e., beginners (93 per cent). In other forms there is a tendency to the loss of interest in language learning. This shows that there is something wrong in teaching this subject. The teachers fail to sustain and develop the desire to learn which pupils have when they start the course.

Practice and special observations prove that pupils’ interst depends on their progress in language learning, If pupils make good progress in hearing, speaking, reading, and writing, they become interested in learning the foreign language.

The pupil willingly and actively learns the subject if he understands its social and personal “meaningfulness” (значимость).

Here are what pupils wrote in their questionnaires. «При изучении иностранного языка узнаем много нового, интересного». «Каждый культурный человек должен знать иностранный язык». «Люблю разучивать песни на французском языке».

However not all children can realize the necessity for learning a foreign language. The teacher’s task is to show them how important a foreign language is to every educated person, how people can get new information from various fields of human activity through foreign languages. Besides, the teacher should promote his pupils’ interest in studying the language and stimulate their desire to learn.

A decisive condition of stimulating interest in language learning is the pupils’ understanding of its specific content, that is, they acquire a second language to be able to use it as a means of communication. For this purpose, from the very first step, the learners should see this, they should perform exercises of natural communicative character. They must feel that the language they study can be used as a means of intercourse, of getting information while hearing, speaking, and reading it. Therefore if the teacher wants to stimulate pupils’ interest in the subject he should make them use their knowledge for practical needs while talking, reading, doing various exercises of a communicative character which are creative by nature. Hence the methodological principle may be formulated as follows:

**In teaching a foreign language it is necessary to stimulate pupils’ activity by involving them in the act of communication in the target language either in its oral (hearing, speaking) or written (reading, writing) form.**

If pupils are not involved in the act of communication in the target language and remain on the level of performing drill exercises, they soon lose interest in the subjected become passive at the lessons. One needs a lot of practice in the use of the language to master it. Consequently the problem arises how to enlarge the real time available for each pupil during the class-period to make him an active participant of the lesson, of the work done during the lesson. It is pupils who should work, and not the teacher as is often the case.

Methodologists and teachers are searching for ways to solve this problem. Some ways may be recommended. They are as follows:

(a) work in unison, when pupils are told to pronounce a sound, a word, a phrase, a sentence, or to read something out loud in chorus in imitation of the teacher, or a speaker if a tape-recorder is used;

(b) mass work, when pupils are invited to listen to a text, to read a text silently, to do some exercises in written form, in other words, when they learn for themselves, and each does the same work as his classmates;

(c) work in small groups when pupils are divided into four-five groups, and each group receives a special assignment cither for reading or speaking; the work results in conversation between group 1 and the class, group 2 and the class, etc.;

(d) work in pairs, when pupils sitting at the same desk have an opportunity to “talk” in the target language: reciting a dialogue they are to learn, doing an ask-and-answer exercise or making up a dialogue of their own;

(e) individual work in programmed instruction, when each pupil can work with the programme he receives either through visual or auditory perception at his own pace.

**The principle of visualization** has always been very important for language learning since the gaining of knowledge begins either with sense perception or with what has been formerly perceived, that is, with previous experience. Visualization, as it is understood here, may be defined as specially organized demonstration of linguistic material and language behaviour characteristic of the target language with the purpose of helping the pupil in understanding, assimilating, and Utilizing this in connection with the task set. Since pupils acquire a second language in artificial conditions and not in real life, as is the case when children assimilate their mother tongue, visualization should be extensively used in foreign language teaching. Through visual presentation of the material and the pupils’ observation of language behaviour of native speakers they acquire the necessary habits and skills in spoken language, namely, in intonation, word usage, and grammar. Visualization allows the teacher to create natural conditions for pupils’ oral practice and “free conversation”. Visualization can be utilized in teaching various aspects of the language: phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, and in developing different language skills: hearing, speaking, reading, and writing.

Soviet psychologists distinguish various kinds of visualization. For instance, B. V. Belyaev suggests the following classification for visualization.

The use of visualization makes foreign language lessons emotionally coloured, gets the pupils interested and awakens their thought. All these provide favourable conditions for the realization of the principle of conscious and active teaching and create natural situations for the use of the language as a means of communication.

Visualization implies an extensive use of audio-visual aids and audio-visual materials throughout the whole course of foreign language teaching for presentation and retention of the linguistic material, and for developing oral and written language, although they are to be used differently depending on the stage of instruction, the age of pupils, their progress in the target language, and other factors.

The extensive use of audio-visual aids and audio-visual materials the teacher of a foreign language has at his disposal nowadays, together with the use of carefully selected and graded linguistic material, create favourable conditions for teaching pupils to understand the foreign language when it is spoken and to speak it themselves. This is the first step when dealing with beginners. Hence the methodological principle may be formulated as follows:

**In teaching a foreign language at schools it is necessary to follow the oral approach as it is the one that allows the pupil to deal with the language in its primary function — as a means of communication.**

In teaching foreign languages other didactic principles such as the principles of systematic teaching, of consecutiveness, of accessibility, of durability, are used. (See “Methods of Teaching English in Secondary Schools” by I. E. Anitchkov, V. N. Saakyants. M. — L., 1966, p. 47—55.).