

MAKING A TARGET LANGUAGE YOURS BY THINKING IN IT

It is already a proven fact that mastering foreign languages gives an individual cognitive and emotional freedom and it changes his/her perception about life and surrounding world. The given article is devoted to the scientific investigation, according to which, those who master foreign languages think definitely in another way. It is worth mentioning that language level is not essential: its usage is of much importance. Some specialists believe that while learning a language it is significant to develop not only the vocabulary and grammar, but thinking in the target language as well. This is the reason why people get to know foreign cultures closer and much more easily. Moreover, following to some scientists idea learning foreign languages prepares fertile consequences to understand one's own culture better.

Key words and expressions: thinking skills, target language, teaching to think in a foreign language.

Global economic, social and technological rapid changes, as well as realization that English has become an integral part of career success, give rise to increasing interest in the idea of teaching thinking skills and strategies in the target language. Within the world of education we can perceive thinking as a set of transferable skills, such as problem solving and learning to learn, that all schools should be seeking to promote and which is considered to be the corner stone of the recent educational reforms in Armenia.

Learning to think in a foreign language is not a new idea. It dates back to Socrates and Plato and has been investigated by great philosophers and educationalists throughout the century. Undoubtedly, the most exciting developments in the "learning to think" field are now arising from practical applications of cognitive psychology. Research has demonstrated that few young adults have acquired efficient thinking techniques by the time they leave school. A large number of learners cannot explain why they fail, or what skills and strategies they have acquired, or if they are necessary for certain learning tasks. However, there is an increasing evidence that training individuals in thinking skills results in improving their ability to learn, in other words, developing their cognition.

Many psychologists believe that the child's culture shapes cognitive development by determining what and how the child will learn about the world. They prove that language in the form of private speech guides cognitive development. In fact, language provides a means for expressing ideas and asking questions and it proves the categories and concepts for thinking. When we consider a problem, we generally think in words and partial sentences. Cognitive development occurs through the child's interaction with more capable members of the culture— adults or more able peers. These people serve as guides and teachers, providing the information and support necessary

for the child to grow intellectually. Most of this guidance is communicated through language, which is called scaffolding assistance.

Thinking in a new language is a decision a person can make. If you know even a few dozen key grammar words you can begin to think in your target language. It is easier than speaking in the language because you will not be embarrassed. It requires less confidence but more motivation than speaking. During the early stages students may be using more of their native language than target language. They will also probably be translating at first rather than “thinking fluently”. What is important is that learners make a conscious effort to use the target language in their thoughts, not just in conversations.

It is also quite useful to talk to yourself. Apart from being quite liberating and useful in organizing your thoughts, it also allows you to practice pronunciation. Act out different situations. If you make a conscious and continuous effort to think everything you can in your target language. The context of thinking in the language will also mean that you pick up new words you are exposed to without even realizing it.

It is globally accepted now, that it is necessary to find ways of helping learners become more flexible, adaptable and autonomous; in other words to develop their cognition through school subject teaching, with the final aim to enable them to deal with their own learning as well as with issues arisen at the dawn of the 21st century. It seems curious that we have invested vast amounts of time and energy in teaching children basic access skills, like reading and writing whilst paying relatively little attention to consciously developing and extending their range of thinking skills and

strategies. And yet, in our controversial world which changes discontinuously in many unexpected ways and unforeseen directions, when it is difficult to predict what knowledge will be essential or useful for the future, developing self-knowledge and the ability to learn how to think in a target language is surely more important than ever before. In Roger’s words: “*The only man who is educated is the man who has learned how to adapt and change; the man who has realized that no knowledge is secure; that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security*”[6,p. 104].

It is becoming clear that the quest to teach thinking skills and strategies is a necessary underpinning to the educational reforms in Armenian educational system rather than an additional component. In this context, students are assessed not only on facts and information but also on a wide range of conceptual, linguistic and procedural knowledge. Students require the skills necessary to study a wide variety of evidence, comprehend and extract information from it, notice gaps and inconsistencies and detect bias. Additionally they need to be fluent in a range of basic procedures involved in classification or comparison.

Accordingly, it can be deduced, that there is a strong implication for English as a foreign language teachers and their contribution to developing young people who will effectively meet the challenges of the new millennium. As Vygotsky claims, *it is by means of language that culture is transmitted, thinking develops and learning occurs*. English language teachers need to be trained, first of all, to be able to teach thinking skills and strategies through English language tasks. Teaching thinking in the English language class can provide a real purpose for using the language as well

as developing the language itself. Such an approach provides real educational value to the tasks used in the language classroom because the skills involved in critical and creative thinking, as well as in solving problems are necessary for effective functioning in the world, in general [7, pp. 23–34].

The biggest challenge with thinking in the language is the frustration that comes with not being able to fully express yourself inside your own head. The key to thinking fluently is your frame of mind. The real victory is when one day you wake up from a dream and not even register that it was not in your native language.

Thinking in a foreign language is essentially a form of visualization or rehearsal that prepares you for an actual conversation. With visualization we can go through the steps of making an attempt, to identifying a mistake, to correcting it in a very short period of time. The most astonishing thing is that the brain cannot fundamentally tell the difference between real and imagined action. One study has shown that the brain sends identical impulses to the legs when imagining running. In another study, participants who imagined playing the piano showed nearly identical development in the motor cortex of the brain as those who actually played the piano. It means that thinking in a language is much more relevant than we may have previously believed. Every thought that passes through your brain has the potential to act as a mini-exercise in your target language, not just as passive rehearsal but also as an active exercise. When you add up all the thoughts you have in a day, the potential for change is quite impressive.

Normally what we want to remember are not only a few sentences or a word but instead we need to remember a series of stories

or principles, or may be a chapter of lesson we've just learnt. All of the contents need to be in order. Some may not require that but it is easier if they are organized in order. For example, if we want to remember the names of the first ten presidents of the United States, we would rather need it in order although the teacher may not require that. Write it down in paper. If it is already in the text book, take the note out the major headings. Organizing the materials will help the process to be smoother and more effective. Make them in sequence and order.

However, if considering whether to include or encourage thinking in the language thinking, it might be wise for teachers to consider some of the following factors, adapted from Cohen [1, p.45].

Firstly, since “the formal properties of language, such as word order and sentence sequencing, constitute the medium in which our connected thoughts can be presented and organized,” without a rich vocabulary and a good knowledge of the language structure, thought formation may be prevented or certainly hindered [3, pp.34–36].

Secondly, as Slobin [1996] points out “*a desire for similarity in structure might even be motivated by a preference to have verbalized thoughts in a language that describes reality in similar ways.*” [1, p. 24].

Besides linguistic considerations, students may be more proficient in the language teaching in particular areas through personal interest in certain subjects, for example, a television program, sport, music or computers. If enough interest is taken in these subjects and enough exposure given, a type of immersion situation may occur where they are totally absorbing themselves in a subject in which they have no point of reference in their mother tongue.

Hudson [4, pp.4–12] states, there is “*very*

little to say about language divorced from its social context." Keeping this in mind, teachers certainly have a hard task in trying to immerse their students into a language when the true context is absent from the classroom.

Hence, when learning a foreign language, it makes sense to start thinking with the new set of labels as soon as possible, instead of vocabulary lists, with words in the native language on one side, and the foreign language on the other. Learners use pictures, pictograms, and symbols to demonstrate a word's meaning. They simply change the label. It is the same like when you were little and learning how to read and write in your native language, the mind starts to relearn labels. The mind starts associating the word *head* with the same objects as գլուխ. Slowly, as the vocabulary grows, or perhaps simply as it becomes easier, thought in a foreign language occurs. It's nothing that can be forced, but slowly my *head* is no longer translated to գլուխ.

This is not a process that can be rushed, or forced. Your mind will think in the foreign language, when it feels ready. All that you can do is let it happen. A strange thing starts to happen, as foreign language skills begin to improve. Native language skills start to disintegrate. This is especially a problem, when exposed to a foreign language for a long period of time. Sometimes this is in the form of simply thinking and saying *head* instead of գլուխ, in the middle of an Armenian conversation. Sometimes it's in the form of an Armenian sentence, with English grammar structure. Sometimes, it's

simply speaking in one language, when you meant to use the other.

Learning a foreign language is a process, which is sped up only by spending time surrounded by that language. Perhaps it will only take a year, to begin thinking and functioning in English, perhaps it will take a little longer. Getting to this point in your language skills, is a part of the experience of living abroad, and is a skill that will make life abroad much easier.

How much you can think in the foreign language you are studying obviously depends on your level. The learners shouldn't try anything too complicated at the early levels. But even if you are a beginner you can mentally repeat the same dialogues which you studied on your course — simple dialogues, such as meeting people and saying hello, checking into a hotel, etc.

Thinking in a foreign language doesn't mean thinking directly in English, French, Spanish or whatever language you are studying—at least not at the early stages. If necessary, decide what you want to say in your own language and then think how to say it in the foreign language. The more you practise, the easier it becomes to think directly in the language you are studying. At higher levels, when you know most of the grammar and basic vocabulary of the language, you can think about anything you want to. The ability to express complex meaning simply is one of the most important skills you can learn when you study a foreign language.

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ՏԻՐԱՊԵՏԵԼ ՕՏԱՐ ԼԵԶՎԻՆ՝ ՄՏԱԾԵԼՈՎ ԱՅԴ ԼԵԶՎՈՎ

ԱՆԻ ՄԱՆՈՒԿՅԱՆ

Խ. Աբովյանի անվան հայկական պետական մանկավարժական համալսարանի Օպար լեզուների դասավանդման մեթոդիկայի ամբիոնի սահպրենսր, մանկավարժական գիտությունների թեկնածու, դոցենտ

Վաղուց արդեն ապացուցված փաստ է, որ օտար լեզուների իմացությունն ավելի-մեծ ճանաչողական և հուզական ազատություն է տալիս մարդուն, փոխում է մարդու ընկալումն աշխարհի հանդեպ: Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է գիտնականների այն ուսումնասիրությանը, ըստ որի՝ օտար լեզվին տիրապետողները այլ կերպ են մտածում, քան նրանք, ովքեր ոչ մի օտար լեզու չգիտեն: Ընդ որում, օտար լեզվի իմացության մակարդակն այստեղ էական չէ. կարևորը դրա կիրառումն է:

Մասնագետները նշում են, որ օտար լեզու սովորելիս պետք է ուշադրություն դարձվի ոչ միայն լեզվի բառաֆոնոլին և քերականությանը, այլև յուրացվի տվյալ լեզվին հատուկ մտածողությունը: Սա է հիմնական պատճառը, որ օտար լեզուներին տիրապետողները այլ աշխարհայացք ունեն: Նրանք առավել հեշտությամբ են յուրացնում տարբեր մշակույթներ: Ավելին՝ գիտնականների համոզմամբ՝ օտար լեզուներ սովորելը նպաստում է նաև սեփական մշակույթը լավ հասկանալուն:

Հոդվածի ներկայացման փարեթիվը՝ 02.10.2012 թ.

ОВЛАДЕТЬ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКОМ, ДУМАЯ НА ЭТОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

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Тот факт, что знание иностранных языков способствует эмоциональной и познавательной свободе человека, а также меняет его мировоззрение, обсуждению не подлежит.

В данной статье рассматриваются исследования ученых, согласно которым владеющие иностранными языками думают иначе, чем не владеющие ими. Более того, уровень знания иностранного языка не имеет значения, главное – общение на данном языке.

Специалисты отмечают, что при изучении иностранного языка следует не только обращать внимание на лексический запас и грамматику языка, но и попытаться приблизиться к присущему данному языку образу мышления. Этим и объясняется тот факт, что мировоззрение владеющих иностранными языками иное. Последние воспринимают различные мировые культуры по-особенному свободно. Ученые утверждают, что изучение иностранных языков способствует основательному осмыслению собственной культуры.

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