

Application of Associative Experiment in Forming the Foreign Communicative Competence

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Abstract

The article focuses on some problems in teaching foreign languages, solution of which is successfully achieved through the method of free associations. The article also concerns the functioning of associative experiment in the course of teaching of foreign languages. In a technique of teaching of foreign languages free associative experiment is used, first of all, for studying of associative structure of memory at perception and interpretation of unknown foreign words, and also for research of problems of bilingualism and monolingualism.

Keywords: association, foreign language teaching methodology, free associative experiment

1. Introduction

Associative experiment has long gained recognition as an effective applied method of research. Born in the psychological science, at present it is considered to be a psycholinguistic method, widely used in teaching of foreign languages, logic, political science, sociology, computational linguistics, theory of communication, etc. Being one of the main verbal and cogitative mechanisms, associative mechanism has functional and universal nature and affects cognitive, cultural, emotional and conative part of speech perception and speech production. The associative mechanism controls emergence of involuntary probabilistic links, in a word, associations. Association is “logical link between two contents of consciousness (sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and so on) occurred in the experience of the individual, which is expressed in the fact that the appearance in the mind of one of contents entails the appearance of another” (Goroshko, 2006, p. 26). In modern psycholinguistics a set of associations is recognized as a model of language consciousness of a person (Karaulov, 2000).

The general scenario of a free associative experiment looks like this: a list of the stimulus words (or cue words) is presented to people who are asked to write without thinking one or more words-reactions (or target words) that come to their minds for a limited period of time. Then statistical data processing is produced, ranking of the target words by the frequency of their occurrence, in the process only those associations which are appeared not less than three times are counted. However, in the association dictionaries all target words are reflected, including single ones, their total number is indicated separately. Thus, researchers receive an ordered list of associations, which is considered an associative norm of the examined object. This associative array reveals sides of the object that are most clearly exposed in the minds of native speakers, giving the opportunity to recreate a semantic portrait of the stimulus word. The statistical results of associative experiment has a large number of potentially important applications, including: (a) constraining the language model both for speech recognition and optical character recognition (OCR), (b) providing disambiguation cues for parsing highly ambiguous syntactic structures such as noun compounds, conjunctions, and prepositional phrases, (c) retrieving texts from large databases (e.g. newspapers, patents), (d) enhancing the productivity of computational linguists in compiling lexicons of lexico-syntactic facts, and (e) enhancing the productivity of lexicographers in identifying normal and conventional usage (Kenneth & Hanks, 1990).

The mass free associative experiment (FAE) uncovers verbal associations of native speakers which are fixed in the form of associative dictionaries and thesauruses (Karaulov, Sorokin, Tarasov, Ufimtseva, & Cherkasov, 2002). On the one hand, associative experiment is characterized by simplicity and convenience of application, possibility of attraction of a large number of examinees at the same time, on the other hand, it is distinguished by high degree of a temporality of the results and need of the accounting of psychological, social, language, age and gender features (so-called biosocial characteristics) of the examinees. The object of associative experiment is the

system of words, and the research subject depends on the objectives. In the technique of teaching of foreign languages FAE is used, first of all, for studying of associative structure of memory at perception and interpretation of unknown foreign words, and also for research of problems of bilingualism and monolingualism and some others.

Our objective in this article is to explore the scope and functions of the associative experiment in the teaching methods of foreign languages, and to disclose specific methodological problems, which are successfully solved by means of detection of verbal associations. This problem is of interest because of necessity of search of new approaches in solving the eternal methodological issues of how to teach, what to teach and why to teach. The significance of the objective is also due to the growing interest in understanding the deep rehabilitating processes in the course of second language acquisition, which leads to the expansion of spheres of application of psycholinguistic methods in language education.

2. Literature Review

The features of memorizing of foreign words and ways of their search in memory, and problems of lexical typology from the point of view of methodology—these are the main linguo-didactic issues to disclosure of which the method of free associations is applied.

One of the factors that have an effect on memorizing of the foreign word is ability of a new foreign word or its components to correlate with earlier or parallel acquired material, i.e. possibility of inclusion of the word in associative links of various types (Alferova, 2005, p. 40). Here methodical typology comes to the rescue to methodologists. Scientists interpret it as “differentiation of types of words according to the characteristics of activities of trainees for their assimilation” (Zalevskaya, 1971, p. 57). And this task “can’t be solved without research of mechanisms of acquisition and operating with the foreign word because only on this basis it is possible to provide the organization of activities for assimilation of lexicon adequate to features of material and the purposes of work on it” (Zalevskaya, 1971, p. 57). From this point of view the FAE method gives ample opportunities for improvement of efficiency of process of acquisition of a foreign language in general and foreign lexicon in particular. The data obtained by results of FAE can also help at introduction of phrases and various combinations of words in a foreign language to pupils for their more effective memorizing. This also achieved by understanding of the principles of combination of words in memory and ways of their reconstruction in unity of a form and value that is reached during the detailed analysis of associative thesauruses (Myagkova, 2006).

As a result of research of lexico-semantic structure of equivalent words in various languages by means of FAE, methodologists have a unique opportunity not only visually to trace matches and differences in their semantic portraits and psychological relevance of separate senses, but also to study types of links and the relations with other lexical units, and also to judge the degree of the importance of these words for native speakers. It allows building assumptions of probability of positive or negative transfer of skills in the course of interaction of these languages when training in one of them on the basis of another (Zalevskaya, 1971, p. 58).

It should be noted that for optimization of process of teaching of a foreign language it is extremely important to study strategy of origination of associations of pupils in the native language and its influences on the second. Definition of strategy of associative behaviour of the pupils living in conditions of monolingualism and bilingualism, allowed to establish in more detail the influence of this strategy on the second language and vice versa, and to reveal some conditions of destruction and generalization of models of associative links at interaction of languages in the conditions of an educational bilingualism (Zalevskaya, 1971, pp. 60-61).

There is a question: how much and in what way does the level of foreign language proficiency influence its interaction with native language in the course of training. Associative researches showed that at initial level of the foreign language proficiency only the actual types of verbal links are transferred to it from the native language. In the mid-nineties of the last century Sazonova and Tyagunova’s (2000) conducted the associative experiment which purpose was studying of specific signs of identification of meanings of English adjectives by the Russian-speaking pupils who know English at advanced level. The received material was compared with results of researches of Lachina (1990), made on the basis of the analysis of the associative thesaurus of English. According to the results of experiment the following strategies, allowing to identify an adjective were designated:

- The strategy of search of denotation (cognate word);
- The strategy of search of the words similar to destination;
- Opposition strategy;

- Morphological strategy;
- Automation of language stamps;
- Reference to a situation (the accounting of a context);
- Response to letter-sound structure;
- Pragmatical judgment.

Thus, the strategy of search of denotation and the strategy of reference of a sign to its potential haver were defined as the most relevant ones. However I.S. Lachina during comparison of the identification strategies which are carried out by the native speakers of different languages, came to a conclusion that the leading strategies are opposition and reference to a number of words, related on meaning. Strategy of identification of adjectives on similarity of a letter-sound complex also was recognized as very widespread.

Other similar research (Letyagin & Soldatov, 1992) was directed on studying of associative behaviour of the Russian students at perception of unknown English words as a part of which there are Latin morphemes. The set of stimulus words contained 35 seldom meeting lexical units which don't enter an active lexicon of the first-year student. In the instruction possibility of association in any language was noted, and the time was rigidly limited. Scientists Letyagin and Soldatov (1992, p. 85) came to a conclusion that at perception of unknown words quite often there is a subconscious orientation on similar words of the native language. These associations are sometimes so strong that lead to distortion of spelling rules of the native language by examinees.

Interference of models of verbal connections of both languages: the native and studied can occur at more advanced level of training. Here so-called "feeling of language" also makes a figure; using associative experiment in control of knowledge of pupils allows finding out the quantitative assessment of its formedness. Thus, the FAE method in the case at hand carries out not only research, but also controlling function.

Podrazhanskaya opened one more function of a method of free associations—training. Podrazhanskaya (1983) created a system of special exercises based on the inverted associative dictionary in which the list and number of the stimulus words that caused a certain reaction word is specified.

Large-scale research of the mechanism of associative thinking of bilinguals in the conditions of interference of Russian with Lithuanian, Italian, English and Polish separately moved scientists to formation of some linguistic hypotheses (Zavyalova, 2000, p. 88-89). The most important of such hypotheses is that the mechanisms operating the speech of monolinguals are other than the mechanisms involved in speech process of bilinguals. The bilingualism is no other than the split-level difficult mechanism of crossing of the interconnected elements and language processes.

The other important assumption was that speech and language connections in consciousness of a bilingual are influenced by such factors as language experience, received in this language, and structure of this language. The above-mentioned conclusions of scientists were stimulated by the analysis of number of similar and various reactions to equivalent words of two languages, the analysis of comparative characteristics of associative behaviour of examinees in different languages, existence of words of the direct translations, and number of stereotypic answers in associations.

Modern techniques of teaching of a foreign language are more directed on knowledge of ethnolinguistic consciousness and disclosure of the national language personality, finding interrelation of language education with psycholinguistics, linguoculturology and philosophy (Abdrafikova, Akhmadullina, & Singatullova, 2014). According to Alifirenko and Yu's definition, the ethnolinguistic consciousness is the highest spiritual category representing an associative and semantic form of reflection of valuable and informative space of this or that ethnocultural community (Alefirenko, 2009, pp. 6-7). Ethnicity of national consciousness is reflected, first, in system of subjects' meanings, social stereotypes and cognitive schemes, which in turn find reflection in verbal associations of native speakers (Privalov, 2006, p. 10). Therefore, the direct appeal to results of associative researches in the course of teaching of a foreign language is considered very expedient. To such, for example, as research of Ufimtseva who has made the comparative analysis of a kernel of language consciousness of the Russians and the British according to the inverted associative dictionary (Ufimtseva, 1996, p. 141). In our opinion, the conclusions presented in this work, is the most valuable material for those who study Russian or English as foreign languages, allowing to understand depths of language consciousness, and to experience features of the perception of the world, not quite realized even by the native speakers. Therefore, N.V. Ufimtseva concludes that unlike the English the Russians have a peculiar "human and friend centricity" that is shown in need of the Russian people for the friend (other person) and for readiness to accept him as a good person. While the most frequent reaction to the word "friend" in English is "enemy" and "opponent" (Ufimtseva,

1996, p. 148). On the other hand, in the Russian language consciousness there is completely no understanding of the person as individuality, contrary to English language consciousness in which the person sees each other, first, as the individuality. “If the English language consciousness is consciousness, first of all, of the social being directed on the outside world, that Russian language consciousness is directed both on itself, and on another. ... The Russians live as though on an axis I – he and in internal space” (Ufimtseva, 1996, p. 160).

In connection with the solution of problems of cross-cultural communication there is a comparative studying of strategy of associative behaviour in various languages which purpose is research of features of language consciousness of representatives of various cultures with the subsequent creation of methods of “cross-cultural training” (Sazonova, 2000, p. 15). Relevance of such researches is caused by need of prevention of the communicative conflicts based on mutual misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. Data of associative experiments directly display images of consciousness and the traditional models of behaviour peculiar to this or that society. “Comparison of associative fields of words equivalents in two cultures—a method of fixing and measurement of national and cultural specifics of images of consciousnesses, with these words. Fixing of the general and specific parts of such images of consciousness determines approach to formation of the technique of cross-cultural teaching” (Ufimtseva, 1998, p. 6).

Other similar research in which Russian and American linguocultures were compared from the point of view of images of time, showed that in associative fields of the Russian words the verbs and concrete nouns meet more often, besides, verbs of passive voice exceed the verbs in active voice. It allowed the scientist to draw a conclusion on more passive relation to the time by Russian-speaking examinees. In addition, the results of research unveil the big importance of the present time in consciousness of the Americans and orientation to the future in consciousness of Russian native speakers (Sirimolot, 2000, pp. 225-226). All these small particles of knowledge about views and language picture of the world, inherent in different ethnocultural communities, developing in a uniform mosaic, represent a valuable regional geographic material which can successfully be used not only at lessons of a foreign language, but also be applied in the solution of the international conflicts.

3. Conclusion

Thus, associative researches of lexical units allow opening the communicative potential of separate words, all variety of their semantic contents, and also the most effective ways of their memorizing in the course of learning a foreign language. FAE is applied not only as the research method helping with the solution of a wide array of methodical problems but also serves as a mean of teaching and control of knowledge in a teaching technique of foreign languages. Many opportunities of detection of the maintenance of a mental lexicon and verbal memory of the person allow associative data to act also as an object of teaching, being the shortest way of learning about world-view of the people at regional geography lessons.

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