ТЕОРИЯ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

P.J. Mitchell, M.A. Shevchenko

TEACHING MILITARY LINGUISTS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BRITISH ARMY

The article examines the British Army's experience of teaching military linguists. A review is made of the history of establishing, developing and perfecting schools, methods and means of training military linguists. The employed methods and means of education are analysed.

Key words: foreign language teaching, foreign military vocabulary, military linguist, military interpreter, teaching methods, British Army.

Статья посвящена опыту обучения военных лингвистов в британской армии. Рассматривается история становления, развития и совершенствования школ, методик и приемов обучения специалистов в области лингвистического обеспечения военной деятельности. Анализируются использованные методики и приемы преподавания.

Ключевые слова: обучение иностранному языку, иностранная военная лексика, военный лингвист, военный переводчик, методика преподавания, сухопутные войска Великобритании.

Modern military operations have demonstrated the existence of problems of language, cross-cultural communication and, therefore, a great need in military linguists to aid in overcoming these problems[1]. Crossey notes that language capability is of particular importance in peace-support operations where the absence of effective communication may lead to mistakes, which might, in a worst-case scenario, result in casualties[2]. With increasing multinational cooperation in defence, and the carrying

Mitchell Peter J. — ст. преподаватель, зам. декана по международным связям факультета иностранных языков Национального исследовательского Томского государственного университета; *e-mail*: peter_mitchell@mail.ru

Шевченко Михаил Александрович — подполковник, начальник цикла, ст. преподаватель учебного военного центра Национального исследовательского Томского государственного университета; *e-mail*: sheffcomms@mail.ru

[1] Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina / Ed. by M. Kelly, C. Baker. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

[2] *Crossey M.* Improving Linguistic Interoperability // NATO Review (Summer). 2005. URL: http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue2/english/art4.html (last accessed: 22.01.2013).

out of operations with military personnel drawn from a wide range of countries and language backgrounds, this need is unlikely to decrease.

We see, therefore, an emerging picture of the desirability of having military linguists with a foreign language capability for the conducting of a multitude of operations in a wide range of countries. When on joint and multinational missions, this is essential to militaries' interoperability: 'the ability of military, paramilitary and security forces, from different linguistic and national backgrounds, to work together for a common aim'[3].

The roots of military linguist education in the British Army go back to World War II. This was a time when the military establishment suddenly realised the lack of officers and men with any communicative competence in the language(s) of the enemy — specifically, German and Japanese. For obvious reasons it was thought undesirable to rely on non-British subjects of German or Japanese origin. Although the British Army was able to make use of a not wholly inconsiderable number of civilians with knowledge of German, the situation as regards Japanese was dire. The first courses in Japanese for (future) military linguists were offered at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) from May 1942. Given the urgency in preparing suitably capable linguists, emphasis was made on either spoken language (for interpreters) or written language (for translators) and grammatical explanations were avoided as far as possible. Film viewings and listening to Japanese speech on gramophones were common in order to improve listening skills and cultural knowledge. Overall, the teaching was innovative and effective[4]. Indeed, feedback from the Army was highly positive, in spite of mentioning the desirability of greater emphasis on military vocabulary[5].

Use of native-speaker teachers was common throughout the history of military linguist education in the British military; the particular advantages of employing native speakers as teachers for military linguists is noted in research literature[6]. Although in the British Army's experience, this was indeed seen to have a positive impact on learner's language skills, the quality and availability of such teachers was not always consistent[7]. After World War II there was less immediate urgency to produce communicatively competent military linguists. Consequently, the training

[3] *Woods P.* The Hedgehog and the Fox: Approaches to English for Peacekeeping // IATEFL Global Issues SIG Newsletter 16. 2005. P. 27—32.

[4] *Oba S.* The 'Japanese' War. Folkestone: Japan Library, 1995.

[5] Extracts from letter 22.9.44 from the Director, School of Oriental and African Studies, to Major General W.J. Cawthorn in *War-time Courses* (paper by Frank Daniels, SOAS 1945) in: *Oba S.* Op. cit.

[6] См.: *Шевченко М.А., Митчелл П.Дж.* Обучение военных переводчиков в гражданском вузе (опыт Национального исследовательского Томского государственного университета) // Язык и культура. 2013. № 1. С. 125—131.

[7] *Elliot G., Shukman H.* Secret Classrooms: an Untold Story of the Cold War. St. Ermin's Press, 2003.

took on a more academic tone with the grammar-translation method being employed to a considerable extent.

Rivers emphasises the importance of avoiding the "artificial types of drills and practice exercises to which many learners are still subjected" in favour of having "practice in using the language for the normal purposes language serves in everyday life"[8], quoting Jespersen's observation that language textbooks often give the impression that learners "must be strictly systematical beings, who one day speak merely in futures, another day in [past tenses], and who say the most disconnected things only for the sake of being able to use all the persons in the tense which for the time being happens to be the subject for conversation, while they carefully postpone the use of the subjunctive until next year"[9]. Such a disjointed approach to language learning and teaching cannot but cause problems in terms of developing proficiency in a foreign language.

In discussing the grammar-translation method Harmer identifies three main features, which might be considered disadvantages: "In the first place, language was treated at the level of the sentence only, with little study, certainly at the early stages, of longer texts. Secondly, there was little if any consideration of the spoken language. And thirdly, accuracy was considered to be a necessity"[10]. The grammar-translation method presupposed literary language's superiority to spoken language and the texts used in foreign language teaching were frequently written by people trained in literature rather than language teaching or applied linguistics[11]. Howatt and Widdowson draw attention to the fact that the grammar-translation sentences had an additional purpose besides providing opportunities for practice in that, "They exemplified the grammar in a more concentrated and, it was hoped, clear way than texts could do"[12]. The main issue with the grammar-translation method, however, remains that its focus on individual written sentences and accuracy result in opportunities for interaction and oral communication and development of fluency being lost.

A particular problem in foreign language teaching is the lack in communication practice and using authentic language in situations which simulate real life[13]. It is the teacher, within the confines of the curricu-

---

[8] *Rivers W.M.* Principles of Interactive Language Teaching, 2007. URL: http://www.edevaluator.org/rivers/10Principles_0.html (last accessed: 01.02.2013).

[9] *Jespersen O.* How to Teach a Foreign Language. L.: George Allen and Unwin, 1904.

[10] *Harmer J.* The Practice of English Language Teaching. 4th ed. N.Y.: Pearson Education Ltd, 2007.

[11] *Richards J.C., Rodgers T.S.* Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

[12] *Howatt A.P.R., Widdowson H.G.* A History of English Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

[13] См.: *Тер-Минасова С.Г.* Что мешает повышению качества преподавания иностранных языков как средства общения между профессионалами // Вестн. Моск. ун-та. Сер. 19. Лингвистика и межкультурная коммуникация. 2006. № 3. С. 7—13.

lum, who must make the decisions on what to teach and how to teach it. It is imperative on the teacher to keep up-to-date on which methods are found to be effective.

Communicative competency, i.e. the ability to communicate effectively in the foreign language, being the aim that language teachers strive for, depends on both accuracy and fluency[14]. While it is true to say that accuracy, particularly for military linguists, is important in learning foreign languages, accuracy at the expense of fluency is disadvantageous to a foreign language learner's progress. The grammar-translation method's focus on the written word, too, is a serious disadvantage in its use with regard to military linguists who may at any time be called upon to participate in a multinational operation with all its attendant requirements of being able to communicate orally with foreign military personnel and local civilians.

Despite its various drawbacks, the grammar-translation method continued to pervade language training in the British Army. This could be seen as recently as 1993, for the teaching of Serbo-Croat during the wars in the former Yugoslavia: "The traditional grammar-translation method contributed a legacy of grammatical tables, showing the inflections of root stems in different grammatical positions. One of the most complex examples was a hand-written matrix in 14 rows and 30 columns to represent the inflection of six different types of noun, adjective and pronoun in three different genders and seven different cases, in singular and plural. This grammar-translation method also involved vocabulary learning, with long lists of words to be memorised..."[15]

Such an approach was not unique to the British Army; Kelly and Baker point out that at least in the early stages of the Yugoslav conflict the teaching methods in most NATO countries were initially based on the grammar-translation method. When called upon to interpret, though, "military linguists [taught by means of the grammar-translation approach] were often ill-equipped to respond"[16]. The result of using the grammar-translation method for the purposes of training military linguists is perhaps best described by a former head of the Russian Language Wing of the UK Defence School of Languages, speaking about how military language teaching in the 1970s—1980s had not equipped learners with sufficient speaking skills: "I have to say that the [1970s] language course, though good in its way, was much stronger at instilling the rules of grammar than in encouraging spoken communication... And

---

[14] *Brumfit C*. Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching: The Roles of Fluency and Accuracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

[15] Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly.

[16] Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina / Ed. by M. Kelly, C. Baker.

it was very much the grammar translation method of language teaching. And when I left the language training and started work using the language, it was still being used in a very passive way. There was very little spoken language... And I think one of the things that struck me then, and still I find now, is that the language of the classroom is in many ways quite different to the language 'as she is spoke' (laughs), I think. And though I rarely got my case endings wrong, I did very often find it difficult to have an ordinary conversation with Russians, because it was not what we were used to"[17].

The grammar-translation method might be said, therefore, to produce students well versed in grammar, but unready for interaction. Indeed it was in response to this very problem which the grammar-translation method could not address that the British Army moved towards a communicative, scenario-based approach to teaching.

Larsen-Freeman describes how the communicative approach emerged in the 1970s when teachers "observed that students could produce sentences accurately in a lesson, but could not use them appropriately when genuinely communicating outside of the classroom"[18]. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT, also called task-based language learning or task-based instruction) emerged from the communicative approach to language learning and communication is central to it, but the difference is one of focus. As Long and Crookes write: "The departure from CLT... lay not in the tasks themselves, but in the accompanying pedagogic focus on task completion instead of on the language used in the process"[19]. TBLT is represented as being theoretically and empirically sanctioned by psycholinguistic and SLA research and "in view of the fact that [TBLT] seems to have the credentials of both practical effectiveness and theoretical validity, it is not surprising that it has become the new ELT orthodoxy"[20].

As mentioned earlier, the teaching of foreign languages at the British Army's Defence School of Languages (DSL) in the mid-1990s saw a shift from a grammar-translation approach to a communicative approach, making specific use of TBLT, directly as a result of the problems encountered in using the former, as Footitt and Kelly relate: "In-theatre experience in Bosnia-Herzegovina, compounded by longer-term experience of interpreting Russian for the Joint Arms Control Implementation Group (JACIG) and military liaison missions, encouraged [DSL] to base

---

[17] Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly.

[18] *Larsen-Freeman D*. Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[19] *Long M., Crookes G*. Units of Analysis in Syllabus Design: The Case for Task // Tasks in a Pedagogical Context / Ed. by G. Crookes, S. Gass. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1993.

[20] *Howatt A.P.R., Widdowson H.G*. Op. cit.

their course around scenario-based methods better suited to, and grounded in, the tasks that military linguists... could be expected to perform"[21]. Footitt and Kelly describe the change in approach: "This approach focused on the needs of the learner rather than the teacher, and encouraged a high level of initiative from the learners. It attached great importance to effective communication, encouraged maximum use of the target language and emphasised task-based activities, preferably related to a relevant socio-cultural context and using authentic materials as far as possible. In many ways, this matched the situation in which military personnel had a strong sense of the purpose for which the language was required and were accustomed to using their initiative to solve problems" (Ibid).

Although the communicative approach to foreign language teaching applied in the British Army made use of what has been described as a "scenario-based approach", this was basically TBLT by another name. Footitt and Kelly (Ibid) write that language teaching was "increasingly organised on a functional or communicative basis. Learning focused on tasks that might need to be carried out on the ground and included role-play and simulated scenarios. This largely replaced the grammar-translation approach, and proved more effective and more motivating to learners." The advantages of using TBLT for foreign language teaching were not unnoticed in the British Army: "The scenario-based approach had several benefits. First, it was likely to motivate students by confronting them with situations they could expect to encounter on active service, and they could therefore understand the practical purpose of their language learning <...> Second, if the scenarios were carefully chosen, they would provide a script for the learner to use in real-life situations. The importance of this was recognised by military educators, who made a point of ensuring that the experience of people who had returned from active service could be incorporated in the course"[22].

The experience of the British Army shows that TBLT has certain distinct advantages over the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods. First among these is the focus on ability to communicate, i.e. function in the target language and negotiate meaning in interaction with speakers of the target language, be they military personnel or local civilians. Of no less importance is the question of motivation. Motivation is a fundamental factor in language learning and is recognised as promoting effective acquisition[23]; this is no less the case in the foreign language teaching of military personnel.

---

[21] Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly.

[22] Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina / Ed. by M. Kelly, C. Baker.

[23] *Dörnyei Z.* Motivational Strategies in the Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Another criticism of the communicative approach as a whole, including TBLT, is that it "may offend against educational traditions which rely on a more teacher-centred approach"[24]. Notwithstanding such concerns, Footitt and Kelly observe that in training military linguists for the British Army during the Yugoslav conflict: "The [task-based] approach was well aligned with wider military practices in training. Scenarios and simulations were widely used, both for small-scale tasks and for larger operations, up to the level of military exercises <...> Whereas the use of these simulations was commonplace in military training, this was probably the first time that language issues had been incorporated in such a simulation"[25].

We see, therefore, that the modern-day teaching of military linguists has — with some innovation in terms of TBLT — to a significant extent returned to its beginnings during World War II. The emphasis on training a communicatively competent professional is ever-present and, although technology has changed, it is the focus on the learner being able to make use of language skills post-training that provides the foundation to the British Army's effectiveness in military linguist education.

References

Тер-Минасова С.Г. Что мешает повышению качества преподавания иностранных языков как средства общения между профессионалами // Вестн. Моск. ун-та. Сер. 19. Лингвистика и межкультурная коммуникация. 2006. № 3.

Шевченко М.А., Митчелл П.Дж. Обучение военных переводчиков в гражданском вузе (опыт Национального исследовательского Томского государственного университета) // Язык и культура. 2013. № 1.

Brumfit C. Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching: The Roles of Fluency and Accuracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Crossey M. Improving Linguistic Interoperability // NATO Review (Summer). 2005. URL: http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue2/english/art4.html (last accessed: 22.01.2013).

Dörnyei Z. Motivational Strategies in the Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Elliot G., Shukman H. Secret Classrooms: an Untold Story of the Cold War. St. Ermin's Press, 2003.

Harmer J. The Practice of English Language Teaching. 4th ed. N.Y.: Pearson Education Ltd, 2007.

Howatt A.P.R., Widdowson A.G. A History of English Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

---

[24] *Harmer J.* Op. cit.

[25] Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly.

Interpreting the Peace: Peace Operations, Conflict and Language in Bosnia-Herzegovina / Ed. by M. Kelly, C. Baker. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Jespersen O. How to Teach a Foreign Language. L.: George Allen and Unwin, 1904.

Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Larsen-Freeman D. Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Long M., Crookes G. Units of Analysis in Syllabus DDesign: The Case for Task // Tasks in a Pedagogical Context / Ed. by G. Crookes, S. Gass. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1993.

Oba S. The 'Japanese' War. Folkestone: Japan Library, 1995.

Richards J.C., Rodgers, T.S. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Rivers W.M. Principles of Interactive Language Teaching. 2007. URL: http://www.edevaluator.org/rivers/10Principles_0.html (last accessed: 01.02.2013).

Woods P. The Hedgehog and the Fox: Approaches to English for Peacekeeping // IATEFL Global Issues SIG Newsletter 16. 2004.