

ТЕОРИЯ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

P.J. Mitchell, M.A. Shevchenko

TEACHING MILITARY LINGUISTS: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

The article examines the United States 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, United States Army.

Статья посвящена опыту обучения военных лингвистов в американской 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 США.

The importance of language teaching and learning in the military has long been acknowledged in the United States of America: “Knowledge of languages in the military should be considered as important as the ‘development of a weapon, as important as the training of a man to fight in hand-to-hand combat’ ”. — US Congressman Leon Panetta¹ in 1981.

The question of effectiveness in teaching foreign languages for military purposes, however, is not a new one². Yet the importance of foreign language capability in the military cannot be understated; absence of effective communication may lead to mistakes which could prove fatal³. Moreover, in a climate of increasing cross-national collaboration in military

Митчелл Питер Джонович — 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 Müller K.E. On the Military Significance of Language Competence // The Modern Language Journal. 1981. N 65(4). P. 361—370.

² Languages at War: Policies and Practices of Language Contacts in Conflict / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly. Basingstoke, 2012.

³ Crossey M. Improving Linguistic Interoperability // NATO Review (Summer). 2005. URL: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue2/english/art4.html> (accessed: 22.01.2013).

operations, foreign language capability is essential to interoperability: “the ability of military, paramilitary and security forces, from different linguistic and national backgrounds, to work together for a common aim”⁴.

A variety of methods, such as grammar-translation, audiolingual, communicative and task-based language teaching, have been used in teaching foreign languages to military linguists, varying according to historical context and country. In the United States Army, the favoured method proved to be audiolingualism.

The audiolingual method was based on the US Army’s Army Specialised Training Program (ASTP), colloquially known as the “Army Method” or “G.I. Method”, an ambitiously large-scale scheme running from 1943–44 to teach the combatant countries’ languages to selected US Army personnel. The Army Method was developed as a response to the perceived need to urgently train a considerable number of military personnel in key foreign languages.

The method itself was relatively simple: “Once the linguistic content had been identified by the teaching team, the senior instructor was supposed to create the teaching materials for the students and then introduce the new items and provide any necessary explanations. He then left the native-speaker teachers, known as ‘drillmasters’, to practise the new patterns by a simple method of imitation and repetition. This became known as the ‘mim-mem’ method (mimicry and memorisation), and is the obvious forerunner of ‘pattern practice’ and the Audiolingual Method”⁵.

The Army Method emphasised intensity of contact with the target language and did not espouse a well-developed methodological basis, but was innovative in terms of its procedures and intensity rather than any underlying theory⁶. Charles Fries, director of the first English Language Institute in the USA, based at the University of Michigan, added what he called “contrastive analysis” which involved a comparison of the structure of the mother tongue with that of the foreign language in order to identify any differences that might cause learning problems⁷. Fries had been a proponent of structural linguistics⁸. Richards and Rodgers list structural linguistics’ view of language characteristics as follows:

1. Elements in a language were thought of as being linearly produced in a rule-governed (structured) way.

⁴ Woods P. The Hedgehog and the Fox: Approaches to English for Peacekeeping // IATEFL Global Issues SIG Newsletter 16. 2004. P. 27–32.

⁵ Howatt A.P.R., Widdowson A.G. A History of English Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Oxford, 2004.

⁶ Richards J.C., Rodgers T.S. Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 2nd ed. Cambridge, 2001.

⁷ Howatt A.P.R., Widdowson A.G. Op. cit.

⁸ Fries C.C. The Structure of English, An Introduction to the Construction of English Sentences. N.Y., 1952.

2. Language samples could be exhaustively described at any structural level of description (phonetic, phonemic, morphological, etc.).

3. Linguistic levels were thought of as systems within systems — that is, as being pyramidally structured; phonemic systems led to morphemic systems, and these in turn led to the higher-level systems of phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Structural linguistics propagated that language is first and foremost what is spoken and only secondarily what is written⁹. This emphasis on spoken language, as might be expected, resulted in less advancement in non-verbal language skills.

In 1950s USA behaviourism began to make its mark, claiming that occurrence of behaviour depends on three learning elements: a “stimulus” which elicits behaviour; a “response” to the stimulus; and “reinforcement”, either positive or negative, which encourages the future repetition or suppression of the response¹⁰. Ideas from behaviourist psychology began to influence language teaching and “[t]his combination of structural linguistic theory, contrastive analysis, aural-oral procedures, and behaviourist psychology led to the Audiolingual Method”¹¹.

The audiolingual method, perhaps due to its roots in US Army history, remains ingrained in the US Army’s language training, now provided by the Defence Language Institute (DLI) where language learning is to this day based on audiolingualism¹². Hare and Fletcher point out problems involved with using the audiolingual method where, at the DLI, “[t]he instructor introduces new language through short dialogues which are then drilled and practised. The approach is very much instructor-centred with the teacher as a language model working in lockstep with the trainees, but it allows few opportunities for the students to have real communicative oral practice with each other”.

Harmer describes the audiolingual method as having certain similarities to grammar-translation teaching: “Much audiolingual teaching stayed at the sentence level, and there was little placing of language in any kind of real-life context. A premium was still placed on accuracy...”¹³ Although the audiolingual method has a firm focus on the spoken word, “[s]tudents were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through Audiolingualism to real communication outside the classroom, and many found the experience of studying through audio-

⁹ *Brooks N.* Language and Language Learning: Theory and Practice. 2nd ed. N.Y., 1964.

¹⁰ *Skinner B.F.* Verbal Behaviour. N.Y., 1957.

¹¹ *Richards J.C., Rodgers T.S.* Op. cit.

¹² *Hare P., Fletcher N.* Resolving Conflict via English: the British Council’s Peace-keeping English Project // Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building / Ed. by H. Footitt, M. Kelly. Basingstoke, 2012.

¹³ *Harmer J.* The Practice of English Language Teaching. 4th ed. N.Y., 2007.

lingual procedures to be boring and unsatisfying”¹⁴. Such lack of communication practice and using authentic language in situations which simulate real life is a phenomenon recognised in foreign language teaching literature¹⁵. It is also very much a teacher-centred method, with the teacher controlling all classroom procedures¹⁶.

It is the lack of interaction in the audiolingual classroom that is particularly worrying as regards military linguist training. The audiolingual method’s focus on accuracy in individual spoken sentences results in few opportunities for oral communication and subsequent development of fluency. We see, therefore, a great many similarities between the audiolingual and grammar-translation methods, albeit with their different respective focuses on spoken and written language. We see also that they have common drawbacks: focus on the sentence, lack of real-life context, lack of interaction, and the focus on accuracy at the expense of fluency. Indeed, it was the experience of the British Army that a communicative, task-based approach brought real advantages to language teaching and learning¹⁷.

The experience of preparing military linguists in Russia also lends weight to the use of an interactive approach¹⁸, which ought to be combined with the use of language tests to assess students’ progress and, by implication, to evaluate teaching methods¹⁹.

Success in language tests, however, must nonetheless be viewed with caution. McBeath, a teacher of English to military students for over 25 years, discusses the quantifiable data that satisfy many of the stakeholders in the US Army’s American Language Course (ALC): “Broadly speaking, students who attend courses at the Defense Language Institute and who plough through the 36 volumes of the ALC, five hours a day, six days a week, will make gains of some 3 percent to 5 percent on their [test] scores for every book they finish”²⁰.

¹⁴ *Richards J.C., Rodgers T.S.* Op. cit.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ *Brooks N.* Op. cit.

¹⁷ *Mitchell P.J., Shevchenko M.A.* Teaching Military Linguists: the Experience of the British Army // Вестн. Моск. ун-та. Сер. 19. Лингвистика и межкультурная коммуникация. 2014. № 3.

¹⁸ *Mitchell P.J.* The Storyline Method in Foreign Language Teaching: the History and Main Principles // Язык и культура. 2013. № 2. С. 101—109.

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ *McBeath N.* English for Military Purposes in the Age of Information Technology // TESOL LAW Journal. January 2006. N 1. P. 50—60.

At first glance such results would seem to lend support to the view that the US military's audiolingualism-based language course is effective in its teaching. There is, however, the problem that test results are not particularly revealing in explaining the reasons behind student progress. As McBeath continues, "[T]he success rate of the ALC is probably dependent on the instruction being based in Texas", with the learners being immersed day-and-night in an English-speaking environment throughout the course. The effect of the immersion of foreign learners in an English-language setting makes it virtually impossible to state that their gains in English are due entirely to the teaching method employed. This underlines the importance of conducting empirical research that takes particular account of the participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of the employed teaching method in the teaching and learning process.

Arguments on which teaching methods are most effective in foreign language teaching are certain to continue. In our globalised world, the need to better teach foreign languages for military purposes is only likely to increase. This is a point recognised in the USA and, indeed, ought to serve as a reminder to all countries that efforts must be continued to improve the effectiveness of foreign language teaching in their armed forces. For in today's climate of increased multinational military deployment and calls for greater interoperability, "language, regional and cultural skills are enduring warfighting competencies that are critical to mission readiness in today's dynamic global environment". — US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta²¹ in 2011.

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²¹ *Luzer D.* Who Needs Foreign Languages? // Washington Monthly. 2011. August 20. URL: http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/college_guide/blog/who_needs_foreign_languages.php (accessed: 31.07.2013).

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