TEACHING ADULTS: GRAMMAR AND LEXICAL CORRELATION

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Abstract

Life Long learning approach assumes acquiring new knowledge and developing new skills regardless the age of the learners. However, teaching and training grown-ups is different from teaching the younger learners. First, grown up people have less time for studying due to their responsibilities at work and family matters. Their motives are focused not on getting a diploma or any other certificate, but on the opportunity to get a promotion in their career or realize the demands of the heads of the department or an office. Other motives are self-development and self-education. In addition, the older the learners are the more psychological problems they face: their memory capacity, attention, concentration etc. are not as powerful as they were earlier, they gradually fade with age.

All issues mentioned above should be taken into consideration when starting courses of foreign languages for grown up learners. The goal of the paper is to examine a new approach to teaching language and speech skills. Under this approach studying English grammar should be integrated into the extension of the active and passive vocabulary, on the one hand, and developing speaking skills, on the other hand. The paper presents the examples of the experiment of teaching adults on short-term intensive courses of the English language in the RUDN University. The paper compares the output of the diagnostic and achievement tests, shows the lingo didactic technologies of the presentation and practice of the language units under study as well as the results of the learners’ speech activities.

The findings of the paper can be implemented in the practice of teaching adults the English language.

Keywords: teaching adults, lifelong learning, teaching English, teaching lexis, training grammar skills.

1 INTRODUCTION

More and more people realize the importance of the English language. Little children and young people learn English starting from the kindergarten and school, and then they continue learning it at colleges and universities. When adults realize the importance of the English language they must be enrolled in some special courses. In case the English language proficiency is related to the professional activity of a person, the administration of the institution holds some kind of courses for continuing professional development of the staff. These courses are generally short term and have a specific purpose.

The RUDN University is an international higher education institution. It assumes that its staff can and must speak English to communicate to foreign students that are going to study at the University and very often to the colleagues coming from abroad. The fact is that it is not always possible due to some circumstances such as a great gap between the time when the language was studied and the time when it was necessary to use; the lack of language practice or the lower level of the foreign language proficiency. That is why the idea of special courses for the University staff is very topical.

Teaching adults is quite challenging. A teacher should remember that grown up learners differ greatly from the younger ones. On the one hand, adults are usually very happy to be back to the time when they studied; they are highly motivated, very enthusiastic and energetic. Such students are eager to learn new things, recall something they knew and use the material they have just learnt. Adults are very hard working, industrious and determined to achieve the goal.

On the other hand, adult students face two main challenges. First, one cannot say that the mental abilities of the adults decrease. Apparently, adult learners’ memory capacity is lower due to their age and because they cannot get distracted from family problems and their responsibility at work. Second, another problem is related to the fact that the adults have little free time for studying. All these determine some special methodological technologies that could make a positive effect on the output of adults’ learning [1, 2].
2 METHODOLOGY

An instructor who is going to teach adults should take into consideration the obstacles mentioned above. The practical experience of the realization of educational programs for adult learners in the Institute of Law, RUDN University specified the following main tendencies in teaching adults:

1. the main part of the learning time should be focused on the interactive activities;
2. the presentation and input of grammar and lexical material should not be traditional;
3. the material just presented should be immediately incorporated into interactive speaking activity;
4. the grammar and lexical material should be presented, practiced and produced in cohesion;
5. the learners should be motivated to repeat the new grammar and lexical units as many times as it is necessary to remember them.

The simplest utterance that can be said by the fresh learner is the personal information. They should realize that they can say something even on the basis of a very simple grammar pattern.

The forms of the verb “to be” are presented not in a paradigm, but in sentences. The length of the sentences extends as the chains of lexical units are increased. As the word-stock of the learners is not so big, they are taught to use online dictionaries and translation tools such as “Google Translate” or “Multitran” [3, 4]. E.g.: I am Maria. I am from Moscow (St. Petersburg/Tula). I am an economist (a businessman/a tutor). I am at University (on business/ on holidays/ at home). I am a student, but I am not at University today.

Then such units as “to be good at; to be afraid of; to be interested in; to be fond of, to be responsible for” are added and the learners are supposed to say something about themselves using the new vocabulary in simple sentences, e.g. “I am fond of art” etc.

Then the teacher presents the form “is” and such patterns as “It is It is Monday, Tuesday (today). It is frosty (rainy/sunny) (outside). Now the students can make up a short utterance using not only simple sentences but compound as well: I am Maria. I am a tutor. It is Monday. I am at University. I am responsible for the students. It is cold outside. I am afraid of frosty weather. As adult learners are very busy and they do not have much time for doing much at home, their homework should be focused on the revision of the material studied in classes, e.g.: “Think over/Write down some information about your family member (friend, colleague)”. The assignment assumes the use of the form “is” in a familiar context: “Nick is my friend. He is from Moscow (St. Petersburg/Tula)” etc.

The next class the learners speak about another person. If the information is written down, the students can change their short stories, read them silently and then retell the information to the fellow students. This way the all language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening) are developed. The new grammar material (negative and interrogative forms of the verb “to be”) can be presented and practiced on the same material. They can ask questions about the person they have just listened about. Also, a good way to practice question forms is a game “Guess a famous person”, when one student thinks of a well-known personality and the others should guess who s/he is.

Then, the students learn about the use of the verb “to be” in the Continues/Progressive Tense and in the forms of the Passive Voice. Any new grammar phenomenon is studied in the background of constantly extending vocabulary. It can be compared with a stone (grammar phenomenon) thrown into water and each circle appeared on its surface means another vocabulary extension.

This way the students learn and train grammar and extend their active vocabulary, moreover they develop their language skills.

3 RESULTS

The efficiency of this technology was proved experimentally during the final testing. The students of two groups were supposed to do a multiple-choice test on the forms of the verb “to be”. The test consisted of 15 statements on the material studied.

The test results are shown in the table.
Table 1. Final test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Mastery</th>
<th>Traditional Way of Teaching and Learning</th>
<th>Grammar and Vocabulary-Integrated Teaching and Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The test output showed that among the learners who studied in a traditional way only 10% of the students could get excellent marks, 30% of the students learnt and can use the material quite well and 60% of the students could get satisfactory marks. At the same time among the students who had grammar and vocabulary-integrated classes 30% of the students succeeded in the test excellently, 50% passed the test quite well and 20% had satisfactory results.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Apparently, teaching adults is a challenging task connected with many psychological and social problems of the learners. To overcome these problems a teacher should think over and use in practice the specific didactic technologies. One of which is the grammar and vocabulary integrated learning and teaching that assumes studying grammar phenomenon on the basis of constantly extended vocabulary. The regular use of the grammar patterns and the lexical units under study helps the learners master them better.

Moreover, the immediate use of the new material in practice makes the students cope with their embarrassment and provides them with more positive from the psychological point of view environment to develop their language skills. The learners are eager to speak about themselves and other people. Moreover, they try to speak out and share their opinions not only on familiar topics.

The intention to communicate develops the students’ abilities in the use of dictionaries and online resources.

The efficiency of the didactic technology suggested was proved in a teaching experiment held in the Institute of Law of RUDN University.

REFERENCES

[3] https://translate.google.ru/?hl=en&tab=wt