FEATURES OF USING THE STAGING METHOD IN TEACHING
LEGAL SPANISH AS THE SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

At present, in Russian and foreign pedagogics foreign language teachers have approached the indisputable idea that a foreign language cannot be understood or taught in isolation from the context and environment of the language. Teaching is not considered any more as a mere fact of transferring a certain set of formal structures with an almost religious awe enshrined in textbooks to a student - structures that are not always applicable in real communicative situations. We believe that this article can be useful, and its relevance is determined by the needs of modern linguo-didactics. Therefore, probably, every teacher is entitled and obliged to mix and match a variety of techniques depending on the purpose, learning environment, and other factors. The more alternative methodological decisions, the more fruitful will the search for new ways of learning the subject be. One of the ways that the authors see and use in their practice is staging. We rely on Spanish as well as Russian scholars’ opinions and find the staging method in teaching a worthwhile idea to make students forget their fears, be able to hear and listen to other people, be heard and listened by their partners, become a real professional in his/her job.

Keywords: staging in the classroom, linguo -didactics, language communication skills, games, motivation, creativity.

1 INTRODUCTION

A person may be able to quote poems or myths in any foreign language, but be not able to simple communication. One of the authors has heard an anecdote at a scientific conference in St. Petersburg University about one of the University graduates who, undertaking an internship in Spain was able to quote verbatim Cervantes, but unable to ask to pass her the salt in university canteen. In this regard, we believe that this article, devoted to linguo-didactics.

Nowadays educational institutions are switching to a new system based on competency approach that requires more attention to the development of creative abilities of an individual. Thus, the tasks for teaching a foreign language are expanding. In addition to foreign language communication skills it is necessary to develop the students’ foreign language-based professional skills; to teach them how to independently acquire the language; to motivate their independent acquaintance with the culture of the target language country; with linguistic traditions of professional environment, where later the graduate might work as an expert in a certain field.

1.1 Strategies to develop competences

Foreign language teachers can develop these communicative competences through a variety of activities, which assumes strong motivation, an incentive that intensifies the desire to create a joint project, and joint expansion of knowledge. In this respect, we assume that one cannot overestimate the use of different techniques associated with staging of the educational process. Surely, we are not talking about creating any theatre company within the educational institution. The aim is to develop practical verbal competences named destrezas in the textbooks of Spanish as a foreign language, by including in the training activities various strategies suggested by the principles of dramatic games, creating a space filled with real communicative and socio-cultural content of the Hispanic world, which is difficult to achieve by other non-theatrical and game methods. It is in this area, bordering theater and life, that the student may make any mistakes without being scared of looking ridiculous: any teacher knows how difficult it is to block or disperse the student’s psychological fear. While teaching a foreign language games and theatre techniques allow the students to feel freer and find the best psychological contact with his/her fellow students and the teacher. The founder of Russian scientific psycholinguistics A. Leontiev in his “Psychology of communication” stated that the language teacher must actively intervene into the emotional atmosphere of the lesson to ensure as far as possible the occurrence of emotional states of students, conducive to their learning activities [4, p.186].
teacher G.Boquete in his “Interacción y motivación en el aula: enseñar desde el teatro” ("Interactivity and motivation in the classroom: learning from the standpoint of the theatre") also mentions this very important aspect for Spanish reaching. [12, p.18].

1.1.1 Views on the theatre

In Russia the theatre has always been closely linked to the learning process. School theatres that originally appeared in the XVII - XVIII centuries in educational institutions, were staging plays about the Russian history and then-existent Russia. In the XIX century, theatre played an immense role in the upbringing and education of children in high schools, military schools, orphanages. Peasant theatre for children was very popular. In European countries, the tradition of theatre for children is associated with Christmas performances based on biblical and folk stories [1, p.576]. Theatre as a phenomenon originates from mass religious ceremonies and shows, requiring transformation. Since the ancient times the performance was one of the main ways of teaching and socialization of a child and of a person. We would like to elaborate on the phenomenon of the theatre or rather, the staging in the educational process. One of the pedagogical dictionaries gives the following definition: “Staging in education is a multi-genre dramatization of theatrical performances based on extracurricular educational sources with a large number of participants, long-lasting, with decorations, etc.” [3, p.88]. However, in our view, it is not fair to limit staging in education by only extracurricular activities. In modern pedagogy, the staging is used to this or that extend in learning activities in the classroom, and above all, learning a foreign language.

Stanislavsky, the outstanding Russian character actor, characterized the theatre as follows: “It is stronger than schools, stronger than preaching. You might want to go to school, but people go to the theatre willingly, because they always want to have fun. At school, you should remember what you are taught. In the theatre you do not have to remember: everything is poured itself and is remembered” [8, v.5, p.154]. According to Stanislavsky, theatre activities are a means for socialization and development of children as such activities are natural for them. “It is a miracle that can develop creativity in the child, stimulate the development of mental processes,..., and help to reduce the spiritual gap between adults and children. The child's whole life is full of game; every child wants to play his/her role in this game. The child not only receives information about the world,... but also learns to live in this world, build relationships with others, and this in turn requires a creative activity of a person, ability to behave in a society” [8, v.9, p.123]. As A.Maklakov, a famous psychologist, the author of books on psychology notices, in terms of psychology a game is a “form of activity in relative situations, aimed at the reconstruction and assimilation of social experience, fixed in socially embodied methods of actions, in science and culture” [6, p.126]. Every game requires a certain role, but a special place for the “role” goes to staging. A theatre part assumes a text specified by the play, behavioural paradigm, place and time of the action. It is the presence of pre-specified conditions that can be used in a play while teaching certain knowledge and skills.

S.Ozhegov in his “Dictionary of the Russian language” gives the following definition of the verb “to stage”: “to adapt for performing in the theatre” [7, p.731]. A similar definition can be found in the dictionary of D.Ushakov: “Staging is the application of something for the theatre, giving some theatrical features to something. e.g., Staging of a novel.” [9, p.908].

1.1.2 Contributing to staging abilities

It seems that a foreign language is also well suited to be “adapted for the performance.” A student becomes an actor in the framework of the staging method. Of course, when performing, some parameters and situational conditions are set, but within this framework, the student is completely free and works independently and proactively. Given the fact that one of the main goals of modern pedagogy is developing the initiative of a creative personality, capable of decision-making and self-learning, generating new knowledge, able to take any role, communicating with the audience - it becomes clear why the staging method is gaining more and more popularity in linguo-didactics. Language teaching sets the mission of acquiring certain educational competencies by the students.

A Russian scholar V.Vartanova allocate a set of competencies that contribute to the development of theatrical activities in pedagogics (for vocational training): “Performing: 1) promotes the release of internal resources of the individual and association of professional knowledge with the standard of speech, the opportunity to be fully heard and understood; 2) promotes the formation of the autonomy of the students; 3) develops the ability to manage one’s own visions, keeping an imaginary object in focus, treating it, emotionally reacting to the concepts and imagination; 4) develops expressiveness, facial expressions, sense of rhythm, intonation; 5) develops the expressive capacity; 6) develops...
motor functions and ideomotor coordination; 7) develops creative thinking; 8) develops one’s imagination; 9) develops the ability to think under the notion of efficient and event categories; 10) develops the ability to reveal awareness in related professions; 11) develops the ability to manage one’s emotional state; 12) relieves muscle and psychological clamps; 13) contributes to mastering of skills: proper breathing, phonation, clear diction, the U accent and laws of speech logic; 14) develops the ability to pass one’s own positive attitude to others; 15) develops the ability to a positive assessment of one’s inclinations and capabilities” [2, p.1-2].

If we are talking about educating students (lawyers) of foreign language and training them in the field of professional communication, it should be noted that each of the above-mentioned competences might be recognized as one of the primary. These competencies will be useful for a professional lawyer not only in the formation of discourse in a foreign language, but also in their native language while exercising their professional activities. After all, the legal activity is a kind of a theatre. It is hard to imagine a clamped, amimic lawyer, a prosecutor, or a judge. Undoubtedly, the democratic nature of the activities taking place in the form of performance, allows both students and teachers to form resistance to stress; create group atmosphere assisting to master a particular competence; save interest to a language, using the so-called linguo-cognitive motivation.

2 WHAT DOES STAGING TAKE US TO?

It is important to note that the joint work over the staging of a language task develops the participants’ listening comprehension, creates conditions for mutual understanding, and strengthens the responsibility for the success of the common goal. A.Makarenko, a Russian and Soviet educator, social worker and writer, called it “dependent responsibility” [5, p.103]. In their classes, the authors have repeatedly faced a situation where one student is doing his/her work, while the others are busy revising or checking their own work. Yes, students are thus not involved in distracting activities, and at first glance, they are within the educational process, but obviously, they do not possess the skills to hear and listen to their partner, which is a big disadvantage in today's society. Speaking about the legal profession, then this lack takes us to the category of professional incompetence. While staging the task, the student has to listen to his/her partner to be able to answer with the correct sentence, especially when they have to improvise in the task, previously suggested to them. Thus, the students learn to work in team, be tolerant to each other, which are certainly a positive feature of theatrical techniques in lawyers’ training, whose work assumes team spirit, tolerance and respect to partners and clients. Unfortunately, in our everyday activity we often witness teasing, or intolerance to fellow underachievers. Hopefully, the unfettered atmosphere of theatrical setting, where every student plays his/her role, has a certain educational effect and teaches some tolerance.

It should be emphasized that the Russian students have to obtain many new highly specialized and professionally oriented training programs within the specialty of “Jurisprudence”, meaning the learning of a large amount of professional terminology in two or three languages. Moreover, assuming that we train specialists in various areas of international law and diplomatic activities, teachers have to take responsibility on expanding the general and linguistic scope of the students, giving them the facts of reality of the target language country, its power structures, and so on. It should also be taken into account the fact that in foreign languages teaching the modern linguo-didactics consider communicative competence (or expertise in communication) as a key element. Combining and settling these problems are possible with games and staging (dramatization). The performance (staging) is an as if performance of a real activity by its participants and it creates conditions of real communication. Roleplaying enhances the associational base in mastering the language material, the formation of educational co-operation and partnership. An important factor in increasing the productivity of learning is the use of thematic staging, similar to the problems being currently studied in other disciplines of the professional education.

2.1 Staging idea by Spanish scholars

Speaking about the possibility of the use of staging techniques in education, we would like to quote T.Motos and F.Tejedo, who were researching different staging practices in the classes of Spanish as a foreign language: “dramatic game is a collective practice that brings together a group of players involved in collective improvisation on a pre-selected subject and (or) a particular communicative situation” [15, p. 59]. Thus, one should recognize dramatization as a process of creativity, which uses theatre techniques as a means of pedagogic and didactic support. Some Spanish authors, and in particular, G.Boquete Martin, consider that dramatization and staging are different notions: “the idea of
the drama is associated with the activity that is developing at any given moment, for the first time and may not be repeated, while the theatre has more to do with the production of works already written, memorizing the lines." [11, p. 8]. The Spanish author believes that by dramatizing, the learner of a foreign language is involved in the communicative situation and improvises within it, whereas he/she is limited to stage memorization and reproduction of a written text. S.Arroyo, who has studied the use of theatre techniques in teaching Spanish as a foreign language, also prefers the term “dramatization”. His work is called: “La dramatización y la enseñanza del español como segunda lengua” (“Dramatization and learning Spanish as a second language”) (Arroyo). The Ushakov dictionary gives the following explanation for the dramatization: “Dramatize: 1. Arrange a piece of work into dramatic form. 2. Perform, play the parts of somebody” [9, p.114]. Thus, D.Ushakov also uses the word “dramatization” as a pedagogical term, but at the present stage, the Russian scholars often use the term staging (as it has a broader meaning). The term “dramatization” today is closely linked with impersonation, while “staging” includes apart from the performance, a complex of different kinds of games. We believe that it is better to use the term “staging” for the characteristics of communicative teaching methods.

According to S.Arroyo the main advantages of these techniques, having the basic purpose to “serve” the communicative function of the language, are the following: the development of cognitive abilities, the mechanism to learn yourself and your own capabilities to use them in practical language learning; affective abilities, namely, increasing self-esteem and the ability to express oneself freely in a cordial atmosphere, as well as the chance to work in a team; linguistic abilities, related directly to the act of communication and the use of verbal language; development of vocabulary, and strengthening and development of logical skills in making phrases; abilities related to socialization, communication and representative capacity [10,p. 60].

3 STEPS TO TAKE

We assume that in order to create a real possibility of applying the staging techniques in the classroom practice, you must radically revise (and change if necessary) the relations and the interactions between the teacher and students. The main task here is to change the students' opinion about the role of the teacher. The teacher should not be regarded as the only source of knowledge, nor the arbitrator who decides, “what is good and what is bad”, the one who exclusively determines if the situation was simulated rightly or wrongly. Of course, here we do not have in mind the need of checking of the grammar, vocabulary, intonation, or other possible errors. The function of the teacher in the modelling of such staging of communicative situation should be initiation to activities, as the Spanish teachers call “poner las cosas en movimiento”, (to launch everything in motion), to become a kind of animator. Spanish scholars I. Cómitre and J.Valverde, who studied the importance of staging techniques in the development of verbal competence when learning a foreign language, call the teacher an animator [13, p. 84].

3.1 To do or not to do

We believe that as a good animator, the teacher should make all the students get to work simultaneously, and not to divide them into the audience and the actors. It is also necessary to set the students a clear and specific task, explaining the role of each of them, give some examples and then let everyone improvise within the allotted role. It should be noted that not all students have the same abilities and can work in the same pace. That is why you should not criticize them and thus, should not provoke any competitive spirit to emerge. We strongly believe that within the same group of students, you should not cultivate the competition. Staging a situation, you may start with training the verbal competences, but then it is a good idea to offer them to reinforce a skill in writing, for example, via writing a sort of script. It is also necessary to give the students some time to prepare: pure improvisation is unlikely to be didactically useful. We have repeatedly witnessed how some students, being too self-confident, eager to be the first, the best, and wanting to quickly perform their task, exhausted their language capacity after the first lines, making phrases with plenty of both grammatical and logical errors. Therefore, the teacher should ensure the right balance between improvisation and retaining the content of the communicative situation, as well as carefully observing the grammar rules. On the other hand, it is also interesting to have the opportunity to repeat the communicative situation by changing the roles, that is, the situation is played several times, with students switching their parts. Students need to understand that they have to fulfill the task, to realize the communicative situation, and in case they come across any unfamiliar word, they have to find a synonym, synonymous constructions, a paraphrase, and terms with similar meaning, use those means that the Spanish
scholars call *circunloquio* (circumlocution). In such staging situations students must learn to carefully listen to their partner, to understand the basic ideas expressed, which, taking into account the improvising nature of the line may not always be simple; to learn to use the translators’ intuition and imagination, and even coming across an unfamiliar word - to try to identify its meaning from the context, to invent what was left unsaid.

### 3.1.1 A case

Talking about our experience in working with students of legal profession, then in our view, the staging technologies may have a significant learning effect not only in terms of mastering a foreign language, but also in terms of the acquisition of professional qualities of a lawyer. Staging assignments make the participants take on a role, the role of their character, to appear in someone else's skin: in legal profession this skill can also be very useful.

Here is an example of a stage setting that we suggest to our second year students. Students are encouraged to read a small text on any police topic: “Mr. Lopez was found dead in his house”. The text describes the story of a man who was found murdered, the crime scene, human evidence of the neighbours, etc. The text does not have an end, because the police that arrived on the scene did not find any evidence. The teacher can hand out any additional support materials: photos, drawings (for example, the plan of the house), documents. Next, the teacher provides the whole group with cards of roles (“the police officers” and “neighbours”); neighbours and other characters that appear in the text are also given the cards with the words “guilty” or “not guilty”, and it is not clear who received the card “guilty”. Students, who become “police officers” in-group can make up questions for the examination of witnesses, can determine the possible cause and time of the death, etc. At a more advanced stage of training you may include some information about any signs on the victim’s body and add the role of a court expert or a forensic, and these new features will allow to study the medical lexis. “Neighbours” in the group discuss possible alibi, defence strategy and support of each other. The “guilty” works in the same group with them, but also thinks how to explain the reasons for committing the crime, etc. Next, the groups meet, and then general staging starts with a significant share of spontaneity and improvisation: the students build their own dialogues simulating real communicative situations with various perspectives and answers. Then the police officers can represent a scene of reasoning based on the information obtained and try to come to the solution of the riddle. If the perpetrator is named incorrectly, then the real offender confesses and explains the motives for the crime. This situation can be prolonged involving “lawyers”, “judges” and other characters.

Likewise, the students can be suggested an adapted detective story, a small book, which they have to read in advance. The teacher should introduce only that part of the book, where there is the suspense, but continuation is not clear. At the same time, all active participants are named. For the teachers of Spanish we can suggest detective story series “Lola Lago, detective”. The books in this series have different degrees of difficulty (A1-B1: nivel bajo, intermedio y avanzado - low, intermediate and advanced level) and can be used to work with younger students, even at the early stages of learning (physical description of the suspect, etc.). [14]

### 4 DISCUSSION

We assume that these kinds of tasks, using dramatization techniques can have a high degree of efficiency and thus, can enlarge traditional teaching methods. As a positive aspect we may admit the development of students’ artistic abilities, undoubtedly necessary for a professional lawyer. We may as well conclude that the use of staging techniques for teaching law students involving creative approach to professional activities gives positive results, contributes to the formation of general and professional foreign language communicative competence and meets all requirements of the competence-based approach to learning.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that though both Russian and foreign linguo-didactics the staging method has a long history, however, it deserves its value. In modern conditions, when the interactive and competence-based approaches are the bases of pedagogics, it takes on particular significance.

### REFERENCES


