

## Using Dictionaries in Teaching English as A Foreign Language

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### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the problem of mastering new vocabulary at the English language classes. The brief review of the bilingual English-Russian printed and electronic Dictionaries used at the practical classes of English for the students of the first and second courses of the Germanic Philology Department of Kazan Federal University. The method of compiling thematic dictionaries, its approbation and results are presented.

### KEYWORDS

Mastering vocabulary, thematic dictionary, teaching English as a foreign language, cognitive activity, communicative activity

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### Introduction

High school teachers and secondary school teachers consider the selection of educational material for the development of all kinds of speech activity to be the beginning of implementation of communicative learning objectives. The basic problem is the selection criteria of vocabulary. L.V. Scherba (Scherba 1974), I.V. Rakhmanov (Rakhmanov 1956), P.N. Denisov (1974, 1976, 1993), V.V. Morkovkin, Yu. Safyan (Denisov, Morkovkin & Safyan 1978), Bogachev G.F. (Bogachev, Lutsk, Morkovkin & Popov 2003), Nation P. (Nation, P. & Newton, J. 1997) and many other domestic and foreign linguists and methodologists dedicated their studies to this issue of research and established a clear set of requirements for the selection of vocabulary (Yusupova 2014, Kharisov&Kharisova 2014, Ashrapova &Yusupova 2015, Varlamova&Safiullina 2015). The main academic principle of vocabulary selection is linguistic and statistical analysis of lexical units from selected sources; the analysis of a text starts with ranking of lexemes according to the frequency of usage. Wide

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application of dictionaries contributes to the effectiveness of foreign language teaching. Intensification and improvement of the quality of foreign language teaching require not only basic or innovative technologies, but also the availability of the primary database language. Linguistic teaching manuals comprise textbooks, work books, tests, teacher`s book, but all of them are based on the primary and most important element of the framework - dictionaries, specialized and customized for the needs of the pupils/- students. The following dictionaries are used by the teachers and students at the practical classes of the English language: the New large English-Russian Dictionary by Apresyan Yu.D (Apresyan 2002) in three volumes comprised of 250 thousands entries; the revised edition of the large English-Russian Dictionary by Muller V.K. (Muller 1995) consisting of 66 thousands entries; among the e-dictionaries the preference is given to the new version of Andrey Pominov`s ABBYY Lingvo 12, that includes 6 mil. entries on 6 European languages ([www.lingvo.ru](http://www.lingvo.ru)), and Multitran, that is an automatic online dictionary, one of the fullest part of which is English-Russian part ([www.multitran.ru](http://www.multitran.ru)). Lexicographical sources supply the main reading material; provide the user with multiple meanings of the word under study. Thus, a careful selection of vocabulary minimum serves as an important prerequisite for efficient learning. Thematic dictionaries material is necessary for the expression of an idea or a concept. It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the thematic dictionaries can be included in the frame of dictionary for learners, as, for example, the English-Tatar dictionary for learners (Safiullina 2014) contains terms and lexical units of 62 terminological systems in addition to the spoken language vocabulary.

### Methods

The first stage of mastering vocabulary is provided by learning of thematically organized lexical units, while the core language picture of the world of the foreign language culture is set in the minds of the students. To form the motivation and to affect language learning it is necessary to have a specific set of tools for language study or, namely, a bilingual dictionary for learners. With the help of this tool a student is able to accomplish difficult tasks. Process of words learning and transmission from passive vocabulary into active vocabulary is facilitated with the dictionary. Tasks based on dictionary usage can be performed not only individually, but also in pairs, or in groups, thereby the new material is reinforced. (Meara 1983, 1987)

The methodological basis of our research is provided by the systematic analysis of printed and electronic bilingual English-Russian dictionaries that are used by teacher of the first and second courses of the Germanic Philology Department of Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication of Kazan Federal University. The aforementioned analysis is accompanied by statistical analysis of the dictionary use, systematization of the use of lexicographic sources, general analysis of the dictionary use technique by learners, approbation of a new method of enhancement of students` command of new lexis – creation of a thematic vocabulary on their own or under the supervision of the teacher and application of the new method in increasing the level of motivation of students for learning English as a foreign language in groups and individually.

### Experiment

The approbation of the method of generating a thematic vocabulary and forming it up in a dictionary of the group of students finished in high increase of the interest of the learners to the process of study, effective mastering of lexis and new thematic vocabulary, parallel to the process of lexeme enrichment the grammar rules and forms were learnt, as every dictionary entry is supposed to include basic grammar characteristics, such as morphemic and functional. The task was to compile a thematic dictionary on the material of the unit in writing. The task was individual and was for homework. In class students had an opportunity to compare their results, to discuss them and unite in a group dictionary, joining their efforts. Depending on the learning objectives, tasks given by a teacher can vary. Speaking about the topics of the dictionary, they can comprise wider and narrower concepts and notions of the general themes, such as:

- Relationship;
- Communication;
- Work;
- Emotions and feelings;

Students of the first and second courses would necessarily have to polish their knowledge of the English as a foreign language on the following broad thematic areas: 1. Person; 2. Society; 3. Work, employment; 4. Leisure time, hobbies; 4. Foreign countries, travelling; 5. Environment, etc. depending on the level of the group and requirements of the program. (Spirina 2014)

The dictionaries created through joint efforts of the student and the teacher in the form of communicative and informative activity can follow the example of the existing specialized thematic dictionaries

The compilation activity increases cognitive activity of the learners and develops their mental abilities.

The process of working on the English-Tatar dictionary for learners usually involves the following steps:

- 1) determination of the structure of the dictionary;
- 2) determination of the volume of the dictionary;
- 3) selection of word units;
- 4) drawing up a list of frequency;
- 5) the location of the most frequent translations words in order.

The selection of units is conducted in accordance with the objectives of learning, taking into account the following criteria:

- a) lexical units belonging to the definite branch of knowledge;
- b) their frequency;
- c) word-formation ability.

Ignorance of grammar characteristics of words leads to a wrong understanding of the text a large percentage of errors. That is why in the English-Tatar dictionary for learners the grammatical characteristics of a lexeme is given after each of the word, as a second part of the dictionary entry. It is necessary to focus students' attention on the semantic and causes of a sentence. Sometimes complex relationships between the elements of semantic text cause difficulty for students. The words as *still*, *conversely*, *while*, *however*,



*thus, furthermore, as a result, to be more precise*, and others are included within the text of the English-Tatar dictionary for learners. They express different logical relationships within the text: explanation, clarification, comparison, the expansion of the concept, the opposition, summing up. Thus a user is enabled to build a complete statement and to perform the correct translation (Arslanova 2003, Ayupova 2014).

The major principle of compiling the ET dictionary bulk is sufficiency of the word stock. This principle is enriched by the principle of communicative value and compatibility. Thus, the ET dictionary makes possible the communicative form of learning. The prior step, though, is the recognition and understanding of the meaning of the word. Thus, the "passive" vocabulary of the learner becomes "active". The thematic dictionary can be compiled by students and teachers in class, this activity will contribute to communicative and cognitive activity of a learner. In the course of work with the ET dictionary the use of the lexis is optimized and the memorization of vocabulary is enhanced.

### **Dictionary Use Skills: Instruction and Practice**

Dictionary minimum can significantly save time necessary for looking up the word and optimize the process of reading and writing texts on one's own. One of the advantages of bilingual English-Russian or English-Tatar Dictionaries (ERD or ETD) for learners is close connection with the educational process. Dictionaries of this type offer the units that are to be mastered at a certain stage of learning. Students following their progress, recognize its effectiveness, and are motivated for better results of their work.

The ERD or ETD for learners make a simple tool for individual work, as they fill the gaps of knowledge of students. Individual work creates a more stable motivation in the process of mastering new knowledge and consolidating the original lexis database. Contemporary studies on methods of teaching make an accent on organization of individual work of students, as it indicates certain mental characteristics of a personality. Work with the dictionary is largely a constituent element of independent work of students. One of the tasks of the teacher is to show the students to use and work with a bilingual dictionary to develop the learning ability of a student. The following operations are to be demonstrated and practiced under the supervision of a teacher: search for words in alphabetical order; plural form of nouns; meanings of ambiguous words; same-rooted words; conversed words; collocations; idioms, etc. This aforementioned list shows what an important role in the study of foreign language skills is the creation and usage of the ERD or ETD for learners, especially in cross-cultural communication (Gilazetdinova 2014).

At the contemporary stage of teaching English as a foreign language at the preference is given to printed versions of dictionaries as it reassures that the user knows the alphabet, has an idea about the structure of the dictionary. Working with traditional printed form dictionary requires concentration and logical thinking. Translation made with the help of a printed bilingual dictionary is neither downloaded, nor copied, it a product of intellectual labor of the author. Therefore, for the secondary school students it is recommended to use a paper dictionary.

An important role in the development of speech and vocabulary is played by literature. The expansion of the vocabulary of the students can be achieved

through reading pieces of fiction presented in textbooks, or selected by a teacher. Fiction opens the world of human emotions, to the inner world of the character. By learning to through empathy with the characters students recognize and widen their understanding of moral values. Artistic form helps students to understand the beauty of foreign literary, for instance, the rhythm of Shakespeare's sonnets, the sonnet number 66, Hamlet's soliloquy, etc., and forms good taste in fiction.

Excessive moralizing of characters can turn students off literature; they must be given the opportunity of reading fiction and translating it using the ERD or ETD.

Education through language of art implies language competence of the learner and skills of using dictionaries. Summarizing the above, we can conclude that to achieve this challenging goal as mastering a foreign language it is necessary to use all means available to students; in particular, books, printed and electronic dictionaries. Their combined use and assistance of a teacher will help students to achieve their objectives.

### **Electronic dictionaries versus printed dictionaries**

The practical issues of creation of the bilingual Dictionary are based on the aforementioned theoretical issues.

Teaching English as a foreign language has to deal with the impact of electronic dictionaries on the process of study, and learners tend to apply them more often than printed versions. The operation on electronic equipment or access to the internet causes no difficulties for young generation of students. (Kamenskaya 2000).

Is it necessary to abandon the traditional printed dictionaries, and turn to electronic ones? The answer is unequivocal: no. Each version of the dictionary has its pros and cons. Electronic dictionaries cannot replace printed dictionaries, but traditional hard copy dictionaries are no longer able to satisfy all the needs of users. The advantages and disadvantages of both types of dictionaries depend on how one combines the use of electronic and printed dictionaries in teaching/mastering English as a foreign language. Using e-dictionaries saves a lot of time, as the translation of lexemes is found within seconds; e-dictionaries are mobile, such a dictionary is always at hand and can be easily applied in a classroom; e-dictionaries do not wear out; e-dictionaries fall within the tendency of extracting information from electronic media; e-dictionaries provide pronunciation of words. Nevertheless, there are some serious objections to usage of the e-dictionaries to declare. Shifting from thinking and analyzing to mechanical typing doesn't contribute to developing mental ability of learners. (Zelinskiy 2014). Sometimes the whole text given as a task for home reading is translated though the e-dictionary, which eventually ends up in decrease of quality of acquired knowledge. It is highly recommended to use e-dictionaries at examinations. (Grinshtain 2014)

Printed versions, no matter how dear they are to our heart, they cannot keep up with the dynamic changes in the language. Language is a reflection of real life, and is supposed to reflect come new words, terms, phrases. All this vocabulary can be easily added to e-dictionaries.

### **Results**



The results of the research under discussion can be divided in theoretic and practical. The main achievement in the pedagogical approach is the renewed method of application dictionary in the process of teaching English as a foreign language. The practical application of the method actually enhanced the motivation of the students, which added to the effectiveness of their work and statistically showed the better results of mastering the vocabulary of such topics as Medicine, Sightseeing, Teaching, and Cooking. Thematic vocabulary systematizes the acquired knowledge. The mechanism of organization of lexis can be worked out on the example of a dictionary making. That mechanism can be successfully applied by a learner in individual study. The process of making up a dictionary should start with a theme, well known to the learners, as the more acquainted they are with the material, the easier is the task for the students and the more positive emotions accompany process. The initial step is to include concrete objects within the thesaurus, and gradually switch to abstract notions that require more elaborate explanation. The first steps for the students in dictionary making were made with the help of electronic dictionaries, though prior to the practical part a teacher should introduce a dictionary entry from any of printed dictionaries that are used in classroom for everyday practical tasks. As a rule, printed dictionaries have more complicated, but more detailed and fundamental structure of a dictionary entry. The entry starts with the head word itself, is followed by pronunciation, then with the basic grammar characteristics of a headword, then the numerous translations come, in order of importance and frequency. This basic logical organization will be of great use for learners to systematize all the knowledge about a lexeme on all levels: phonetic, morphological, and semantic. Collocations and idioms can be introduced on the later stages, when the learners will show good results of the performed tasks.

### Conclusion

The methodology of teaching English as a foreign language is presented by various methods, and all of them are applied to some degree. Different methods can be applied in teaching of various aspects of a language, lexis and learning a new vocabulary represents a serious and basic part of studying the language at the first and second courses of the students of the Germanic Department. One of the interesting forms of methods renewal is the reform of one of the simplest and most fundamental skills that is taught at the initial stage, which is use of a dictionary. The suggested version of the method is compilation of a thematic dictionary by students either individually or in groups under the supervision of the teacher. The method has proved to be very effective in putting into practice the principles of communicative and informative learning.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

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