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DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF A THEMATIC DICTIONARY FOR GERMAN AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGE STUDENTS

DESARROLLO DE HABILIDADES ORALES MEDIANTE EL USO DE UN DICCIONARIO TEMÁTICO PARA ESTUDIANTES DE LENGUA ALEMÁN Y RUSO

Alfiya Zaripova¹

E-mail: alfija_kazan@mail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4602-3315>

Olga Pasiukova²

E-mail: o.pasuikova@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5766-0403>

Olga Olshvang³

E-mail: olga020782@yahoo.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4418-9186>

Anara Zhumasheva⁴

E-mail: anara-zhash@mail.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2552-6565>

Elena Pogozheva⁴

E-mail: pogosheva@mail.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8100-633X>

Anna Gorokhova⁵

E-mail: agor_80@mail.ru

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5820-1687>

¹ Kazan Federal University, Russia.

² Moscow State University of Technology and Management named after K.G. Razumovsky, Russia.

³ Ural State Medical University, Russia.

⁴ Toraihyrov University, Kazakhstan.

⁵ Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia.

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ABSTRACT

The paper is devoted to the problem of developing foreign language speaking skills with the use of a thematic dictionary. The authors analyze literature concerning the method of teaching foreign languages and the formation of communication skills. Using the example of the analysis of the German version of the thesaurus, the authors conclude that thematic dictionaries are an important tool in learning a foreign language, helping both to expand the vocabulary and to better understand the contextual use of words. In conclusion, it is proposed that thematic dictionaries can considerably improve the qualitative development of the target language, minimizing errors associated with language interference at different levels. The authors suggest that the use of thematic dictionaries as an educational tool develops speaking skills and improves the level of foreign language proficiency.

Keywords:

Modern Education, communication skills, foreign language, thematic vocabulary.

RESUMEN

El artículo está dedicado al problema del desarrollo de habilidades para hablar lenguas extranjeras con el uso de un diccionario temático. Los autores analizan la literatura sobre el método de enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras y la formación de habilidades comunicativas. Utilizando el ejemplo del análisis de la versión alemana del tesoro, los autores concluyen que los diccionarios temáticos son una herramienta importante en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera, ayudando tanto a ampliar el vocabulario como a comprender mejor el uso contextual de las palabras. En conclusión, se propone que los diccionarios temáticos pueden mejorar considerablemente el desarrollo cualitativo del idioma de destino, minimizando los errores asociados a la interferencia del idioma en diferentes niveles. Los autores sugieren que el uso de diccionarios temáticos como herramienta educativa desarrolla habilidades orales y mejora el nivel de dominio de la lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave:

Educación Moderna, Habilidades de comunicación, Idioma extranjero, Vocabulario Temático.

INTRODUCTION

The development of speaking skills in students is one of the most challenging tasks in studying and teaching a foreign language. At present, students successfully manage to master certain grammar skills and learn new vocabulary, but the skills of fluently speaking in a foreign language or translating into it cause difficulties, as this involves “independent expression of one’s thoughts and feelings by means of a non-native language (Leontev, 1991; Tsvetkova, 1991). Here the speaker needs to have mastery of not just the syntactic and morphological structure of the language, but also a complex system of word combinations, which is always specific and to a greater extent does not coincide with the combinations in the native language of the speaking subject (Töpel, 2014). This incongruity of words in the pair “foreign language/Russian language” poses an additional obstacle for students trying to solve the complicated task of producing speech in a foreign language (Aleksandrova et al., 2023).

As a solution to this problem, a textbook of the thesaurus type was compiled to help develop the skills of oral communication in a foreign language (Pavlova et al., 2022). The authors of the thesaurus were Pavlova et al. (2022), lecturer at the Department of the Russian Language, Faculty of Applied Linguistics, Translation Studies, and Cultural Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz (Germany), as well as co-authors from the Vyatka State University (Russia), the Khakassian State University (Russia), and the University of Trier (Germany).

This textbook is geared toward students studying a foreign language (in this case, native German speakers learning Russian and native Russian speakers learning German) to correctly and competently construct sentences and write texts in the language they are studying.

After the glossary was completed, it was published separately in Germany and Russia. A distinguishing feature of each version is the source language. In the German edition, the source language of the thesaurus is German and the target language is Russian. In the thematic dictionary to be published in Russia, the target language is German and the source language is Russian. This circumstance is explained by the different target groups of students. Nevertheless, the principle of the bilingual thematic dictionary and the content itself is preserved. The thematic dictionary presents words as in a bilingual dictionary, yet the main emphasis is placed on capturing word combinations because they are what make part of a phrase or an entire phrase in speech. In addition, the dictionary offers many idiomatic expressions, which undoubtedly embellish the speech and most often reflect the peculiarity of

the language. In short, it has everything needed to create competent texts in the target language. The material given is broken down into several topics: time, number/measurement and weight, human character and appearance, re-telling a text, emotions and reactions, presentation, at the doctor’s, clothes, in the shoe store, grocery store, weather, etc. Each topic is then divided into sections.

A thematic dictionary is one of the varieties of an ideographic dictionary that is limited to the range of topics relevant to learning. The thematic principle of organization of the lexical material corresponds, first of all, to the communicative orientation of learning and allows memorizing ready-made combinations of words and expressions commonly used in a given situation. This approach provides an opportunity to memorize readily available frequently encountered phrases from the very beginning instead of constructing them independently, which can guarantee successful, free, and correct communication. The main task of a thematic dictionary is to record these lexical units. Numerous studies show that dictionaries, in general, continue to be not only a source of information capturing the meanings of a word in a particular language but also a crucial learning tool. The main criterion for a good dictionary for a modern user is the ability to quickly find in it the right word or the right, searched-for word combinations and phrases.

In this connection, the purpose of this study is to determine the effect of using a thematic dictionary for students learning Russian and German in the development of their speaking skills (Kotlyarova et al., 2023).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

First and foremost, our research focused on the process of working on a thematic dictionary and compilation of a training manual. Of note in this respect is the role of various online platforms that allow people from different countries to communicate without problems. Among these are Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Zoom. The sections of the thematic dictionary in consideration were developed by researchers at the Kazan Federal University (Russia), the Vyatka State University, the Khakassian State University, and the University of Trier.

The aforementioned platforms, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided improved connection quality and the opportunity for immediate communication and discussion not only via parallel chatting but also the feature of screen sharing and posting materials for a specific group of people.

Secondly, we studied the materials in the thematic dictionary. This research became possible starting in the 2021

academic year. The material was published for a wide range of users on the official website of Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, specifically on the page of the Faculty of Applied Linguistics, Translation Studies, and Cultural Studies to make it available to a wide range of users. The German version of the thematic dictionary is now published but is open for suggestions and corrections.

For this paper, we employed the methods of analysis of Russian and foreign literature on the problems of foreign language teaching and the development of communication skills.

The methods used for compiling a separate section of the thematic dictionary were the collection and synthesis of material on a particular topic and the comparison and generalization of the studied lexical units.

The research process focused on examining the content of the thematic dictionary. Below we present a fragment of one of the sections of a topic on appearance for further analysis (Table 1):

Table 1. Fragment of one of the sections of a topic on appearance for further analysis.

Eine	...	Ohren (ears):
	<i>kleine, große, abstehende, anliegende Ohren</i> – small, large, protruding, neat ears	
	<i>die Ohren schmerzen, brennen</i> – ears hurt, burn	
	<i>auf beiden Ohren taub sein</i> – deaf in both ears	
	<i>Dein Wort in Gottes Ohren (Spruch)</i> – from your mouth (lips) to God's ear(s) (proverb)	
Eine	...	Nase (nose)
	<i>dicke</i> – large	
	<i>große</i> – big / large	
	<i>lange</i> – long, long-nosed (man)	
	<i>stumpfe, eine Stumpfnase</i> – snub-nosed, upturned nose	
	<i>spitze</i> – sharp nose	
	<i>breite</i> – wide, flat	
	<i>krumme, gebogene</i> – curved, with a hump	
	<i>gerade</i> – straight	
	<i>eine Hakennase</i> – crochet nose	
	<i>eine Adlernase, die Habichtsnase</i> – aquiline nose	
	<i>die Nase rümpfen, die Nase krausziehen</i> – wrinkle your nose, frown	
	<i>sich die Nase schnäuzen (putzen, abwischen)</i> – blow your nose	

	<i>j-m läuft die Nase</i> – running from the nose	
	<i>mir blutet die Nase</i> – my nose bleeds	
	<i>durch die Nase reden (bei Schnupfen), nasal sprechen</i> – speak through the nose, nasally, hoot	

As can be observed from the above, examples of word combinations, including set and phraseological expressions, are given for a single word on a particular topic.

The topics contained in the thesaurus cover everyday conversational situations (in a restaurant, in a shoe store, at the doctor's, etc.), situations describing a phenomenon in class or as homework (character descriptions, emotional states, retelling a text, describing music, a movie, a book, a picture, a city, etc.).

In addition to topics such as seasons, clothing, vacations, holidays, school, friendship, movie theater, music, books, movies, the environment, economics, appearance, human character, and so on, there are separate sections on such topics as numbers and measures, abbreviations, magnitude, size, whole and part, increase, decrease, or prepositions and adverbs and conjunctions.

The following is an example of how this material is presented in the thematic dictionary.

Zeitangaben – Данные о времени [Indication of time]

Präpositionen – предлоги [Prepositions]

bis – до (P.)

während, im Laufe – во время (P.), в течение (P.), на протяжении (P.)

nach – 1. после (P.), спустя (B.): Nach drei Tagen – три дня спустя 2. через ... после ... : eine Minute nach ... – через минуту после ...

in – 1. через (B.): In drei Tagen – через три дня 2. j-d erledigt etw. in (=binnen von) einer Woche – за (неделю)

für – на: Er kommt für zwei Tage. – Он придет на два дня.

vor – 1. (B.) назад: vor zwei Tagen – два дня назад 2. за ... до: eine Minute vor ... - за минуту до

Konjunktionen (leiten Temporalsätze ein) – Союзы (вводят придаточные времени) [Conjunctions (introduce time clauses)]

bis – до тех пор пока ... (не!) ...: Du bleibst im Bett, bis du gesund wirst. – Ты останешься на постельном режиме, пока не выздоровеешь.

während – в то время как

solange – пока: Du bleibst im Bett, solange du Fieber hast.
– Ты останешься на постельном режиме, пока у тебя высокая температура / пока температура не понизится до нормальной.

At the end of each topic, there are parallel and monolingual texts in which the vocabulary of the corresponding topic is used. The texts (originals) are partly borrowed from various Internet sources, but all of them are finalized by the thesaurus authors to meet the needs of the target group: e.g.: WETTER IM SOMMER (Table 2).

Table 2. Wtter in sommer.

<p>Wie wird das Wetter im Sommer, bleibt es trocken und warm eignet sich das Wetter zum Wandern, Partys feiern, Grillabende organisieren oder können Ausflüge Kurztrips oder gar der Sommerurlaub in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz geplant werden?</p>	<p>Какая погода будет летом, будет ли сухо и тепло, будет ли погода способствовать пешим прогулкам, вечеринкам, барбекю, можно ли планировать экскурсии, короткие поездки или даже летние каникулы в Германии, Австрии и Швейцарии?</p>
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In addition, the glossary lists some of the most famous movies and cartoons.

Es war einmal in Amerika – Однажды в Америке [Once Upon a Time in America]

Einer flog über das Kuckucksnest – Пролетая над гнездом кукушки [One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest]

Der Herr der Ringe – Властелин колец [Lord of the Rings]

Manche mögen’s heiß – В джазе только девушки [lit.: Only girls in jazz, orig.: Some Like It Hot]

... und täglich grüßt das Murmeltier – День сурка [Groundhog Day]

An undoubted advantage of the glossary, as we believe, is that the dictionary highlights phrases expressing agreement or doubt, a reaction on this or that topic.

The ratio of words to word combinations depends on the topic itself, some topics offer users more single words, some less. For example, the topics “Animals” and “Food” topic are associated with many names of objects, so these sections offer large lists of words. In contrast, the “Presentation” topic offers more word combinations and individual words play a minor role. The alphabetic order is not followed in the thesaurus. The grammatical indicators of parts of speech are not given, since they can be found in ordinary dictionaries.

Another feature of the thesaurus as compared to conventional bilingual dictionaries is that it clarifies words and concepts for which there is no direct translation (e.g., realities) – the so-called non-equivalent vocabulary. The

thesaurus also indicates the popularity of certain expressions compared to their synonyms. In addition, there are some recommendations on the use of certain word combinations to avoid possible mistakes. These recommendations are based on the accumulated didactic experience of the authors of the manual. The thesaurus is intended for people with A2 proficiency and above.

Learning any foreign language involves the use of different types of dictionaries. In linguistic pedagogy, it is recommended to use bilingual dictionaries at the initial stages of language learning and then gradually move on to work with monolingual explanatory dictionaries.

In the 1990s, owing to the efforts of H.E. Wiegand, research on dictionary use emerged as an independent research area in lexicography. Referring to this direction of studies, Curcio (2015), notes that despite the presence of smartphones, electronic dictionaries, and various applications bilingual dictionaries are still in demand in the process of foreign language learning. Curcio (2015), further cites reasons why learners of German, in particular, resort to bilingual dictionaries. Among these reasons are ignorance of the variety of existing dictionaries, complete trust in the information in bilingual dictionaries, unawareness of the structure and presentation of dictionaries, searching for a word equivalent without considering its multiple meanings, collocation, and punctuation, and inability to pay attention to the dictionary notes. In addition, the researcher points out that students find it difficult to choose the right word from the dictionary string when a large number of words are given as an equivalent and, in this case, opt to choose the first word in the list. Similar problems arise for learners when using electronic dictionaries. Hence, Curcio (2015), concludes that the main criterion for dictionary users is the ability to find the right word quickly and accurately/unambiguously. Dictionary users often do not want to read the entire dictionary entry or delve into the concept of word compatibility, such questions simply do not arise.

In linguistic pedagogy, the attitude towards dictionaries, in general, has always been ambiguous. The dictionary was seen as the main teaching tool of the grammar-translation method (Shafazhinskaya et al., 2023). However, over time, representatives of other methods of foreign language teaching, even such as the communicative method, have stopped rejecting the use of dictionaries in the classroom altogether since the mastery of a foreign language includes the development of vocabulary.

Curcio (2015), also refers to Lewis’ (1993), lexical approach which points out the importance of memorizing

not a single word but combinations of words and learning collocations and chunks in the formation of vocabulary.

A. Stork generally distinguishes three types of vocabulary: incidental, formed directly in the classroom, and formed by the learner. Incidental vocabulary is formed casually; words are memorized in the process of communication, from films, or songs. Vocabulary formed in the classroom assumes work on the vocabulary, its semantization, consolidation, and control. The usefulness of various dictionaries in the formation of this type of vocabulary is undeniable. Here it is important to introduce different types of vocabulary and teach students how to work with dictionaries. Regardless of the type of vocabulary, the main goal of vocabulary work is to form an active, rich, and correct lexical vocabulary in a student.

Töpel (2014), discusses four directions of work on vocabulary presented in the monograph "Deutschdidaktik" by Hochstadt et al. (2013). These approaches are the traditional, lexicon-based, text-based, and robust vocabulary approaches.

The traditional approach involves focused work with the meaning of particular words, word families, and semantic fields. The disadvantages of this approach are the pursuit of completely different goals, such as the development of stylistic skills and knowledge of spelling, and an isolated, superficial approach to the study of vocabulary.

The lexically-oriented or lexical-semantic approach is aimed at the development of communication skills, active and passive vocabulary, and knowledge about word formation and the semantic meanings of lexemes. The disadvantage of this approach lies in the lack of an empirical basis and the predominant focus on working with native speakers.

The text-oriented approach consists in learning the meaning of words from the context. The disadvantage of this method is the absence of an empirical basis and the assimilation of the implicit and singular meaning of a word.

The basic vocabulary approach is similar to the text-based one, is associated with a large proportion of exercises, and allows to establish a limited basic vocabulary. The concept of robust vocabulary instruction was developed in the USA and is generally successful, although among its disadvantages we can note the limited vocabulary mastered by the learners.

Next, Töpel (2014), points to the fact that the monograph "Lexikon Deutschdidaktik" by Kliewer & Pohl (2006), has a special section on work with dictionaries. This section suggests that work with the dictionary in class has to be aimed at the development of language skills and not just

familiarization with various types of dictionaries and work with their macro and microstructures.

Concerning the influence of dictionaries on the development of learners' vocabulary, Curcio (2015), cites Laufer & Hill's (2003), study, which found that Korean students who studied English using dictionaries demonstrated better assimilation of vocabulary when completing various tasks. These conclusions have not been confirmed by other researchers, and Curcio (2015), suggests that working with a dictionary may have a positive effect on learning a foreign language because it assumes paying some attention to the dictionary entry, most likely in the case of working with a paper dictionary.

CONCLUSIONS

To form spoken communication and communicate freely in a foreign language, it is necessary to have a certain command of vocabulary. However, the possession of grammatical and phonetic skills, as well as knowledge of individual lexical units, are not exhaustive prerequisites for competent free communication. Each language is characterized by its peculiarity in the expression of thoughts and images and specific word combinations. There are reference books where this information can be found but the urgent requirement of the time is the ability to quickly search and accurately find the phrase needed.

In the process of learning a foreign language one can work purposefully on mastering the vocabulary on a particular topic. Among the most important elements that ensure and condition the effectiveness of foreign language learning, one of the top places belongs to the means of learning. One such learning instrument is a thematic dictionary.

We suggest that this kind of learning material will promote quality mastery of the lexical and grammatical material of the target language and will be able to eliminate errors associated with interference at different linguistic levels.

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