Н. Г. АУЛОВА

BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING ENGLISH INTO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING MANDARIN TO RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

В статье предлагается общий обзор типологических особенностей русского, английского и мандаринского языков и преимуществ использования английского языка в процессе обучения китайскому языку студентов вузов в контексте учебного плюрилингвизма.

Ключевые слова: обучение языкам, китайский язык, учебный плюрилингвизм

N. G. AULOVA

BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING ENGLISH INTO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING MANDARIN TO RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The article provides an overview of the typological features of Russian, English, and Mandarin, as well as the advantages of incorporating English into the process of teaching Mandarin to Russian university students in the context of educational plurilingualism.

Key words: language learning, Mandarin Chinese, educational plurilingualism

Despite the rapidly growing popularity of Mandarin Chinese in Russia and the increasing number of studies conducted on teaching Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), there is still no generally accepted methodology for teaching Mandarin. What seems to cause the most heated debate is the question of whether any language of instruction should be present in the process of teaching Mandarin or the teaching process is supposed to be based entirely on maximum exposure to the target language, which implies a total absence of any language in the classroom other than Mandarin.

Ln-only pedagogy has proved to be one of the most popular methods in teaching foreign languages. It prescribes exceptional use of the language studied and frowns upon the use of L1 (first language) and any other medium of instruction [9, c. 211]. Such a method is substantiated by the assumption that the more exposure to the target language a learner gets, the more efficient the acquisition process becomes.

Ln-only pedagogy draws on the example of L1 acquisition, which successfully occurs without any assistance from another language. However, this analogy seems highly disputable as in many cases Ln acquisition takes place at a much older age when a learner is more mentally mature, more socially developed, and in possession of a larger memory capacity. Moreover, it completely ignores students' linguistic background and thus deprives learners of many benefits. L2 (second language)-only pedagogy seems especially inappropriate when dealing with such a high-complexity language as Mandarin. At the initial stage, students are likely to experience puzzlement and frustration due to the inability to process an enormous amount of new information without any facilitating tools.

Although it is commonly acknowledged that "maximizing the use of the L2 in the classroom is beneficial in providing linguistic exposure" [1, c. 18] research has shown that the use of L1 or any other familiar language as a medium of instruction can improve students' comprehension [3]. Reconsidering and redesigning the approach to teaching third languages engaging learners' full linguistic repertoires becomes a prerequisite for successful learning [6, c. 23].

Two features that pose the greatest challenge to CFL learners are the tonal phonetic system and the logographic writing system of Mandarin. It appears most difficult because it involves language phenomena unfamiliar to CFL learners. However, it is suggested that instead of emphasizing the uniqueness of the Mandarin language, CFL teachers should draw students' attention to the commonality between Mandarin and the previously acquired languages [10, c. 49]. It is advisable not only because accentuating exclusive attributes would eventually cause anxiety and frustration but also because Mandarin does have correlations with other languages. It is essential that CFL teachers identify special features that constitute the main elements of the distance between the Mandarin language and other languages, embracing students' pluriligualism, along with pointing out the similar points between the former and the latter.

Multilingual pedagogy, based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, advocates the idea that Ln development, as an instance of cognitive development, is a process facilitated by social interaction rather than an individual effort. Cognitive devel-

opment occurs in the zone of proximal development (ZPD); it is also where scaffolding takes place. In other words, scaffolding during utterances is of similar nature as general cognitive development, meaning that code-switching in a conversation in order to get a message through may be a beneficial part of linguistic development and should be taught and facilitated rather than hindered during the acquisition process. It is especially helpful when a learner needs affordances for learning or simple maintenance of their social position in conversation with the teacher and other learners, or when learners scaffold interactions toward intelligibility and learning.

Scaffolding is especially important for adult learners dealing with challenging tasks and content at the initial acquisition levels. Previously acquired languages may be employed in a classroom as a pedagogical tool to support the development of cognitive and academic skills and allow students to enjoy the learning process more.

Based on the interdependence hypothesis developed by Cummins [4] argued that if cross-linguistic transfer is bound to happen anyway, it is not reasonable to impede it. On the contrary, it makes much more sense to encourage and facilitate this transfer that may lead to a more successful multilingual development.

Van Lier developed an ecological perspective of language learning, which implies that language learning is affected by social, political, and economic factors and must be viewed as a part of a complex network of systems interconnected with each other [7, c. 53]. Therefore, teaching methods should mirror the dynamics of language learning. Nowadays, third language acquisition is no longer a rare occurrence, it is more of a common trend. Teaching a new language should involve exposure to situations that students are likely to encounter in their professional and academic future lives, which are cases where bilingual communication takes place.

Another sphere of transfer worth mentioning is the transfer of competencies, i.e., linguistic, discourse, strategic, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and social. That is, by referring to learners' previous experience of developing the afore-mentioned competencies, teachers can avoid repetition of rebuilding the knowledge that is already possessed by learners. In the case of our research, simply invoking students' experience of developing linguistic skills in English can provide an understanding of what needs to be done to achieve the same result in Mandarin. For instance, eliciting information about the methods students found most useful for improving their English proficiency may set them on the right track in learning the L3.

The more popularity Mandarin is gaining more research on cross-linguistic influence it entails. We have searched top journals in CFL research in mainland China for articles related to cross-linguistic connections between the Chinese language and the English language. The four journals we looked into were Chinese Teaching in the World (世界汉语教学), Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies (语言教学与研究), Applied Linguistics (语言文字应用), and Chinese Language Learning (汉语学习). Our search for articles on cross-linguistic studies showed more than 200 articles related to correlations between English and Chinese published in the period from 2000 to 2024.

Despite the evident differences between Mandarin and English phonological structures, phonological awareness tasks in both languages require the same set of tools, such as audio perceptual skills, attention, and sensitivity to speech sound units. [12, c. 2]. In their corpus-based contrastive research on English and Chinese, Xiao and McEnery mention that "while Chinese and English are typologically different, aspect markers in the two languages show a striking similar distribution pattern" [11, c. 3]

The interest manifested in correlations between English and Mandarin proves that this research area is a promising field attracting a lot of academic attention. Models developed in recent studies can serve as a framework liberating us from conventional restrains in a CFL classroom. We propose a plurilingual approach to teaching Mandarin to Russian university students with knowledge of English, which enables teachers to use students' whole linguistic repertoire. Our suggestion draws heavily on personal experience of learning Mandarin and English and fifteen-year experience of teaching English and Mandarin to Russian speakers, as well as the theoretical foundation.

The structural closeness of languages to each other has been proved to be an important factor in L2 learning. If the foreign language is structurally similar to the L1, it is claimed, learning should be easier than in cases where the L2 is very different [3, c. 23]. The same principle is applicable to L3 learning, where the presence of a structurally similar language in a learner's linguistic repertoire will be facilitative for TLA. Further, we will outline general characteristics of Russian, English, and Mandarin, as well as specific instances of correspondences between English and Chinese in order to explain why recurrent references to English can be more beneficial for CFL learning process rather than simply relying on Russian.

Besides the obvious attribute that distinguishes Mandarin from any other alphabetic language (i.e., the logographic writing system), the chief feature responsible for the distance between Mandarin and Russian and that creates a certain correspondence between Mandarin and English lies in the morphological typology of the languages. Russian grammar encompasses a highly synthetic morphology and syntax, whereas English and Mandarin are analytical languages.

Russian uses prefixes, suffixes, and flections to convey meaning through changes in the composition of words. As a result, deviations from the default SVO word order are admissible, making the word order very fluid. By contrast, analytic languages use no or little inflection to indicate grammatical relationships. Words tend to consist of only one morpheme, while meaning is expressed through the addition of words (e.g., auxiliaries) and the movement of words within the given word order pattern. English escapes the need for inflection by following a relatively fixed word order and extensively using auxiliaries.

Originally, Classic Chinese was an isolated language with each of its words being uninflected, equivalent to the root and isolated. In other words, each character used to represent one word, which could not be inflected, and grammatical connections between words were derived from the position. A high presence of compound nouns in Modern Mandarin makes it less isolated, but the language remains analytic.

In fact, however, not a single language can be viewed as purely analytic or purely synthetic. Every language has the features of both synthetic and analytic languages. For example, Mandarin Chinese has many compound words, giving it a moderately high ratio of morphemes per word (e.g., 火 – fire, 车 – vehicle, 火车 - train). English is not totally analytic since it uses inflections for number (e.g., 'one book - two books), possession (e.g., 'teacher's book'), and verb form (e.g., 'fire – fired'). And Russian is not completely deprived of the usage of auxiliary verbs (e.g., 'была уволена - будет уволена').

Because of these structural differences, Russians often struggle with sentence formation at the initial stages of learning Mandarin, attempting to follow the flexible word order typical of a Russian sentence. We suggest that making references to English sentence structures, which in most cases are highly dissimilar to Russian structures, may help CFL students to identify the correct word order faster and teach them to rely less on their native language.

Besides the overall difference between Russian, English, and Mandarin language systems, there are several specific grammatical phenomena that highlight the correlation between Mandarin and English and thus deserve to be mentioned. We have drawn up a list of linguistic appearances in Mandarin, which normally pose difficulty for native speakers of Russian, which, however, is present in English and can be explained through English.

1. Grammatical meaning in English is usually defined by auxiliary words. Generally speaking, Mandarin lacks the marking of grammatical tense; one has to rely on contextual cues in order to figure out the temporal position of the action [8]. However, there is a number of phenomena that bear a certain resemblance to English grammar. For example, the progressive aspect in Chinese (reported by the use of 正在/正/在) appears somewhat reminiscent of English continuous forms. As in 她正在打电话 (She is speaking on the phone), where the progressive form of the action is indicated by the use of the word 正在. In English it is conveyed through the present continuous tense. In contrast, in Russian no indicator of progressive tense will be present: 'Я разговариваю по телефону' can refer to both regular actions in the present and progressive actions at the present moment.

2. Articles are not present in the Russian grammar in any form. Officially, there are no articles in Mandarin either; nevertheless, there appears to be a resemblance between the use of indefinite articles in English and the use of measure words in Chinese used to indicate the singular form of a noun. For example:

我有一个朋友。– I have a friend. – У меня есть друг.
他是一名作家。– He is a writer. – Он писатель.
我买了一件衣服。– I bought a dress. – Я купила платье.

As it can be seen from the structure of the sentence, a 'one' followed by a measure word seems to replace the indefinite articles in the English sentences.

The role of measure words in such cases is not clear from the Russian grammar perspective. Russian learners tend to translate the measure word as 'one,' which is not typical of a Russian sentence when there is no emphasis on the quantity. However, an indefinite article in English mirrors this function of a measure

word in Mandarin. Therefore, if a learner has a decent command of articles in English, it will be easier for them to grasp the concept of using measure words as an indicator of a singular indefinite noun.

3. The verb 'to be' in the Russian language is frequently omitted in sentences of SVO pattern, which is unacceptable both in English and Mandarin. For example:

Он врач. – He is a doctor. – 他是医生。

Это стол. – This is a table. – 这是一张桌子。

4. There is a structural similarity in the way how compound nouns are formed in Mandarin and English. Some research views it as the foundation of crosslinguistic transfer [5]. To be specific, Mandarin and English both use the right-headed structure to form compound nouns, with the head (the main word) of the compound being placed on the right and the word that specifies the head (the modifier morpheme) being placed on the left. For instance, in '教室', the Mandarin word 'classroom', on the left is the modifier morpheme – '教', which means 'to teach', whereas on the right is '室' – the head morpheme, meaning 'room'.

A similar modifier-head pattern can be observed in possessive noun structures. For example, in Mandarin phrase 'sister's car', the head word 车 (car) is placed after the modifier word – '姐姐的' (sister's). However, in Russian, the structure will be opposite – 'машина сестры', wherein the head word 'машина' (car) precedes the modifier word.

5. Both English and Mandarin have completive and durative adverbials. In- and for- adverbials in English roughly correspond to pre-verbal and post-verbal temporal expressions respectively in Mandarin [11, c. 3]. The distinction between in- and for- adverbials in English is principally mirrored by the different positions of time expressions in Mandarin. However, position does not appear to play such an important role in English, where the majority of both in- and for- adverbials occur in the post-verbal position. For example:

我一个月就看完了这本书。–'I read this book in a month'.

这本书我看了一个月了。–'I've been reading this book for a month'.

Although there is a clear difference in Russian as well, it is quite common to encounter students' misunderstanding of the difference between completive and durable adverbials.

6. There is a number of semantic relevancies between English and Mandarin that do not exist between Russian and Mandarin. These relevancies can be especially useful in cases of homonyms in the Russian language, that is, when one word can be used in two different meanings without any differentiation in form in Russian, whereas in Mandarin (and similarly in English) it would be two different words. For instance:

решать – decide/solve – 决定/解决

час – hour/o'clock – 小时/点

7. The concept of countable and uncountable nouns in English appears to be highly facilitative for understanding the function of measure words in Mandarin. Essentially, all nouns in Mandarin are uncountable. In order to add a plural form to a noun, a classifier (i.e., a measure word) should be used. A similar occurrence can be found in some of the uncountable nouns in English. While there are nouns like-

wise uncountable in both English in Russian, some are countable in Russian, but uncountable in English. Among such nouns are the words 'advice', 'furniture', 'research'. In order to pluralize such nouns, a classifier is added, as in 'two pieces of advice' or 'three items of furniture'. A comparable phenomenon occurs in Mandarin, wherein a measure word accompanies the quantity, e.g. '三个人' (literal: three units of people), '二十把椅子' (twenty handles of chairs), '两棵树' (two roots of trees).

A classifier in Mandarin normally reflects some kind of conceptual classification of nouns. For instance, there is one classifier for nouns representing people, another for nouns denoting flat objects, another for nouns representing periods of time etc. [11, c. 3].

8. Complex object in English coincides with similar phrases in Mandarin, unlike in Russian, where the word 'как' (how) is added to connect the two parts of the sentence, e.g., 'Я слышала, как он стучал в дверь' (literal: I heard how he knocked on the door). Meanwhile, no conjunction is needed in either English and Mandarin, e.g. 'I heard him knock on the door' – '我听见她敲门'.

With regard to the phonological system, on the one hand, there is a number of researchers arguing that Mandarin phonology must be accepted as a unique system, elements of which do not exist in Russian or any other languages, hence any attempt to find similar sounds in other languages is unacceptable. On the other hand, it is undeniable that pinyin (official romanization system of Standard Chinese) bears much more similarity with English than with Russian. Not only is it manifested in the fact that pinyin uses letters present in the English alphabet, but it can also be confirmed by the presence of sounds that are pronounced similarly in Mandarin and English and are non-existent in Russian (e.g., 'zh', ng). Moreover, English can be used to exemplify the fact that some sounds simply do not exist in the Russian language (e.g., ð or θ), and instead of attempting to find an equivalent in Russian, a new sound must be mastered.

By no means are we suggesting a total correlation between English and Mandarin grammars. We realize the tremendous difference lying between the two languages' syntactic systems. A number of ungrammaticalized notions such as number and tense in Chinese, difference in functions of passive voice (i.e., in English passive is used to present impersonal, objective and formal register, whereas in mandarin it is normally an "inflictive voice") [11, c. 4] are just a few examples that highlight the difference between the two grammar systems. However, we do not want to focus too much on the phenomena that create distance between languages because the existence of distance between two languages is considered a norm. The idea that there could be a language with grammar patterns totally similar to another language is simply unrealistic. Instead, we propose taking into consideration the correspondences between English and Mandarin that can be used as a bridge to unfamiliar linguistic phenomena in the Mandarin language for Russian learners of CFL in the context of educational plurilingualism.

ЛИТЕРАТУРА

1. *Butzkamm, W.* The Bilingual Reform. A Paradigm shift in Foreign Language Teaching / W. Butzkamm, J. Caldwell – T.: Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, 2009. – 261 p. = Бутцкамм, В. Билингвальная реформа. Парадигмальный сдвиг в обучении иностранным языкам / В. Бутцкамм, Дж. Кальуэлл – T.: Издательство Гунтер Нар Тюбинген, 2009. – 261 c.

2. *Cenoz, J.* Cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition: Implications for the organization of the multilingual mental lexicon/ J. Cenoz // Bulletin VALS/ASLA. 2003. – № 78. – P. 69-82. = Сеноц Дж. Взаимовлияние языков при освоении третьего языка: последствия для организации многоязычного ментального лексикона / Дж. Сеноц // Бюллетень VALS/ASLA. 2003. – № 78. – С. 69-82.

3. *Cenoz J., Jessner U.* English in Europe: The Acquisiton of a Third Language / J. Cenoz, U. Jessner – C.: Multilingual Matters, 2000. – 271 p. = Сеноц Дж., Есснер У. Английский в Европе: Освоение третьего языка / Дж. Сеноц, У. Есснер – К.: Мультилингвальные проблемы, 2000. – 271 с.

4. *Cummins, J.* Teaching for Cross-Language Transfer in Dual Language Education: Possibilities and Pitfalls / J. Cummins // TESOL Symposium on Dual Language Education: Teaching and Learning Two Languages in the EFL Setting, 2005. – pp. 1-17 = Камминс Дж. Обучение для межъязыкового переноса в двуязычном образовании: возможности и подводные камни / Дж. Камминс // Симпозиум TESOL по двуязычному образованию: обучение и изучение двух языков в условиях EFL, 2005. – С. 1-17.

5. *Lam, B. P. W., Sheng L.* The Development of Morphological Awareness in Young Bilinguals: Effects of Age and L1 Background / B. P. W. Lam, L. Sheng // Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 2016. – № 59(4). – Pp. 732-744. = Лам Б. П. У., Шенг Л. Развитие морфологической осведомленности у молодых билингвов: влияние возраста и родного языка / Б. П. У. Лам, Л. Шенг // Журнал исследований речи, языка и слуха, 2016. – № 59(4). – С. 732-744.

6. *Levine G.* Code Choice in the Language Classroom / G. Levine – C.: Multilingual Matters, 2011. – 208 p. = Левин Г. Выбор кода в классе языка / Г. Левин – К.: Мультилингвальные проблемы, 2011. – 208 с.

7. *Lier, L.* The Ecology and Semiotics of Language Learning: a Sociocultural Perspective / L. Lier – N.Y.: Springer, 2004. – 248 p. = Лиер Л. Экология и семиотика обучения языку: социокультурная перспектива / Л. Лиер – Х.Й. Спрингер, 2004. – 248 с.

8. *Sun C.* Chinese. A Linguistic Introduction / C. Sun – C.: Cambridge University Press, 2006. – 248 p. = Сун Ц. Китайский язык. Лингвистическое введение / Ц. Сун – К.: Издательство Кембриджского университета, 2006. – 248 с.

9. *Turnbull, M.* Teachers' Uses of the Target and First Languages in Second and Foreign Language Classrooms / M. Turnbull // Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 2002. – № 22. – Pp. 204-218. = Тёрнбулл М. Использование целевого и родного языков учителями на уроках второго и иностранного языков / М. Тёрнбулл // Ежегодный обзор прикладной лингвистики, 2002. – № 22. – С. 204–218.

10. *Wang, D.* English in the Chinese Foreign Language Classroom / D. Wang – Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2014. – 272 p. = Ван Д. Английский в китайском классе иностранного языка / Д. Ван – Берн, Берлин, Брюссель, Франкфурт-на-Майне, Нью-Йорк, Оксфорд, Вена, 2014. – 272 с.

11. *Xiao, R.* Corpus-based contrastive studies of English and Chinese / R. Xiao R, T. McEnery – L: Routledge, 2014 – 201 p. = Сяо, Р. Корпусные контрастивные исследования английского и китайского языков / Р. Сяо, Т. Макинери – Л.: Рутледж, 2014 – 201 с.

12. *Yang M., Cooc N., Sheng L.* An investigation of cross-linguistic transfer between Chinese and English: a meta-analysis / M. Yang, N. Cooc N, L. Sheng // Asian Journal of Second Foreign Language Education, 2017. – № 2. – P. 15–31. = Ян М. Исследование межъязыкового переноса между китайским и английским: метаанализ / М. Ян, Н. Куук, Л. Шенг // Азиатский журнал второго иностранного языка образования, 2017. – № 2. – С. 15–31.

Информация об авторе:

Аулова Нина Георгиевна – аспирант кафедры методики преподавания иностранных языков Нижегородского государственного лингвистического университета им. Н.А. Добролюбова, г. Москва, Российская Федерация.