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Abstract. Despite the growing importance of acquiring proficiency in foreign languages, language instruction worldwide (with limited exceptions) appears to be relatively ineffective. This manuscript seeks to delineate prevalent challenges in general language education and explore potential remedies. The initial section identifies linguistic, psychological, methodological, and external elements impacting the learning journey. The subsequent section delves into strategies to address these issues, offering practical suggestions.

Keywords: linguistic instruction, second languages, pedagogy, psychological aspects, multilingualism, applied linguistics.

In numerous regions globally, excluding a few Central and North European nations, overall language instruction, regrettably, appears to lack efficiency despite the growing need for individuals proficient in multiple languages in today's highly interconnected international communications. Following years of studying a foreign language at both school and university levels, individuals acknowledge their limited ability to engage in basic conversations. The question arises: why do extensive class hours, textbook materials, teacher efforts, and public funding yield such suboptimal outcomes, and what potential measures can be taken to address this issue?

PROBLEMS

Challenges

Discrepancy between applied proficiency in foreign languages and theoretical linguistics. In contemporary educational frameworks, the exploration of foreign languages and theoretical linguistics is often treated as distinct (and occasionally conflicting) realms of knowledge and instruction. Many professionals in language-related fields, such as interpreters and educators, frequently rely on personal experience, with practical language proficiency not being deemed essential in linguistic studies or language acquisition research within academia. However, fostering closer ties between language learners and academic communities could prove mutually beneficial, addressing the fragmentation of knowledge in language studies [17, p. 4–5], [12, p. 134–135], [1, p. 6–7].

Lack of guidance in language learning methodologies. Although teacher education programs typically incorporate a module on language teaching methodology, students rarely receive instruction in the essential principles and practical techniques of language learning. It is widely acknowledged that success in acquiring foreign languages is increasingly dependent on individual educational self-management—embracing self-motivation, self-discipline, and the utilization of personally tailored learning methods and resources—rather than relying solely on external instruction [19, p. 3–4], [5, p. 72].

Insufficient awareness of language learning processes and methodologies prevails. It might be accurate to assert that a considerable number of individuals engaged in language education lack a scientifically grounded comprehension of language learning as a psycholinguistic and biological phenomenon, primarily due to the aforementioned absence of relevant instruction. Since the late 19th century, substantial progress has been achieved in language education methodologies. In addition to

the traditional grammar and translation approach, alternative methods such as direct, audio-lingual, and communicative methods, as well as suggestopedia and others, have emerged. Accompanying these are instructional materials like Assimil self-teaching textbooks, Pimsleur and Michel Thomas listening courses, among others. Familiarity with these resources is crucial for selecting the most suitable tools based on the learner's needs. Unfortunately, many students and language educators remain unaware of these methods and materials, and the practices and resources implemented in educational settings often lack coordination and consistency.

Negative experience. Adverse experiences significantly contribute to challenges in acquiring and utilizing foreign languages during adulthood, frequently stemming from negative emotions linked to previous language learning, particularly in primary or secondary school. The issue may arise from a lack of rapport with the teacher (absence of affinity or mutual respect), the student's inability to discover (or the teacher's failure to assist in finding) a captivating aspect of the language (insufficient motivation), or the presence of an unfriendly and intimidating classroom atmosphere.

Self-doubt arises as a natural consequence of past negative experiences. This challenge manifests as a diminished self-evaluation (a prevalent psychological issue worldwide), the perception of lacking "language learning ability" (contrary to the claims of polyglots who deny possessing any special talent), the belief that mastering a foreign language is exceptionally challenging (though the difficulty lies more in the learning process and methods), and the misconception that only children can successfully acquire languages (despite age limitations primarily affecting the natural acquisition of the mother tongue, not subsequent foreign languages).

Restricted perceptions of potential exist among many individuals in the realm of languages. They view attaining fluency in a single foreign language as barely attainable, and the notion of mastering multiple languages is deemed extraordinary. Nevertheless, in practice, becoming a polyglot is both feasible and within reach. The simultaneous use of several languages is a commonplace occurrence in many regions globally. In the 21st century, embracing multilingualism is imperative, and thanks to contemporary technologies, it is more accessible than ever before.

Lack of concrete goal. Absence of specific objectives can hinder learners who harbor unclear aspirations, like aiming "to enhance general language knowledge." In such instances, the learning process becomes perpetual, and evaluating the efficacy of studies becomes challenging. It appears more advantageous to establish tangible practical goals as concrete outcomes of classes, such as reading a book in its original language, comprehending a film without translation, or effectively communicating during travels abroad, among other objectives.

The conflation of language, speech, and the writing system is typically perceived as a unified entity in language study. However, Saussure's fundamental differentiation between language as an abstract system of signs and speech as tangible language use (spoken or written) holds significance not only in linguistic theory but also in educational practice. The fundamental questions arise: What should be learned and taught—language (the rules governing language elements) or speech (common speaking patterns)? The proportion between these components in classes and textbooks becomes pivotal in shaping the educational process for foreign languages. Boris Belyaev proposes the following correlation: 10–20% for language theory and 80–90% for speech practice [4, p. 149]

Another concept requiring distinction is the writing system. Learners sometimes equate sounds and letters, but a letter merely represents a conventional way of depicting a specific sound. The writing system is a secondary system designed to graphically reflect speech. In the learning process, the script can be more intricate than the language itself, as seen in languages like Chinese and Japanese. In such cases, it might be reasonable to separate the study of the language "substance" and its writing system, incorporating phonetic transcription in the initial stages of study.

Mixing up the phases of assimilation and practice is a common issue in the overall process of learning a foreign language. Broadly speaking, this learning journey can be divided into two phases: "assimilation," aimed at internalizing speech patterns for basic communication (exemplified by textbooks like *Japanese for Beginners* by Gakken), and "practice," focusing on acquiring more stylistically varied expressions [10, p. 105]. The challenge often lies in introducing activities and exercises suitable for the practice phase (focused on expanding vocabulary) into the assimilation stage (which requires extensive and, perhaps, repetitive exposure to the most typical and frequent speech patterns), or vice versa.

Inadequate exposure remains a significant issue. Numerous studies indicate a direct correlation between a learner's proficiency in a foreign language and the volume of input (language material assimilated through listening and reading) processed by the brain [17, p. 32], [9, p. 115], [13, p. 258–259]. For this input to be internalized, it must be comprehensible—achieved through transparent vocabulary, context, or translation—and aligned with the student's needs and interests. A primary reason for the widespread dissatisfaction with language education outcomes globally is the insufficient provision of authentic foreign language input in classrooms and textbooks. For instance, it has been estimated that Japanese students studying English for six years in junior high and high school read only around 40 thousand words in English [22, p. 17]. However, recent research indicates that achieving an intermediate functional level in a foreign language (B1-B2 in the European framework) requires exposure to about 1 million words [14]. In essence, after six years of study, Japanese students receive only 4% of the necessary input, primarily because much of what they encounter in class and textbooks consists of explanations in their native language rather than conversations and texts in English.

Disrupted language learning processes are common, often due to traditional language education being excessively prolonged and lacking concentration. Achieving confident and fluent language proficiency necessitates consistent daily study, particularly during the initial stages. Mastery of a language is not merely the accumulation of memorized data but rather a skill that develops through regular practice. Emphasizing concentrated, daily language learning over a limited period (a few months) would likely yield more productive results than extending the process over years with infrequent study sessions once or twice a week.

Excessive focus on memorizing individual words is a common practice, with students often dedicating time to reading lists of foreign language words and their translations, as frequently observed in Japan, for instance. This could be an assigned task from the teacher or an expectation from examiners. However, the reality is that we communicate using larger units, such as phrases. For more effective memorization, it would be pragmatic to learn phrases or entire texts by heart. This approach not only allows one to use them in speech in their fixed form but also demonstrates the natural way to combine language elements within a sentence.

Prioritizing tests over overall proficiency in a foreign language is a common issue, particularly in East Asia. Many students focus solely on honing their skills for standardized written exams like TOEIC or TOEFL, which serve as formal criteria for university admissions or job applications. However, improving language proficiency cannot be achieved solely through test preparation, as these exams typically aim to assess existing language knowledge rather than impart new linguistic skills.

Shortcomings in formal education encompass external factors, not directly linked to language learning methodology improvement, such as the necessity to maintain classroom discipline (especially in secondary school), fixed class schedules, prescribed textbooks, and the teacher's personal attributes (competence, communication style, physical and emotional well-being, enthusiasm, and workload). Additionally, the current academic qualification system appears to have limited relevance in evaluating teaching capabilities. Since language is a skill akin to music or sports,

holding a PhD in linguistics doesn't necessarily translate to being a more effective foreign language teacher. While academic degrees qualify individuals for research and theoretical lectures, proficiency in conducting practical language classes might be better demonstrated through language examination certificates, translation experience, and textbook publications. Considering this, one can envision the development of a parallel system of didactic qualifications alongside the existing research degrees.

Possible solutions

Polyglottery, the intentional attainment of individual multilingualism, holds significant promise as a rich source of innovative ideas and inspiration for enhancing language training in widespread educational practices. Just as athletes draw inspiration from Olympic champions and musicians from virtuosos, it is logically sound to glean insights and guidance from the experiences of polyglots—exceptional language learners. A substantial body of published memoirs by polyglots, including works like *How I Learn Languages* by Kato Lomb [18], *The Art and Science of Learning Languages* by Erik Gunnemark & Amorey Gethin [7], *Kak Stat’ Poliglottom* by Dmitry Spivak [23], and others, provides a valuable resource.

Recent developments in the research literature on polyglottery include works such as *Kak Naiti Svoy Put’ k Inostr*

Incorporating language learning methodology into curricula could be implemented through specialized courses for language teachers and applied linguists as part of their higher education or professional development seminars. An experimental course of this nature was conducted at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies, Moscow State University, in 2012 [11]. Relevant topics could also be integrated into existing university courses on language teaching or introduced in introductory sections of foreign language classes for a broader audience of language students. This outline would likely cover the nature and principles of language acquisition, efficient learning materials, and techniques, as well as include psychological encouragement for students to foster ongoing language study [19], [20].

Expanding the use of video and audio materials is crucial, given the current overemphasis on printed text in language teaching. Modern technologies allow for more extensive utilization of listening and video resources, providing exposure to authentic language use and enhancing learner engagement. Timur Baytupalov argues that video holds the supreme rank in the hierarchy of learning materials, followed by audio recordings, with printed text occupying the lowest position [3, p. 28, 109]. A suggested sequence for learning a language involves starting with a listening course, progressing to video courses, and ultimately studying original films with subtitles [3, p. 154].

Emphasizing extensive reading, especially for developed literary languages, is crucial for comprehensive language acquisition. Extensive reading focuses on understanding the general content of large amounts of writing and guessing the meaning of unknown words from context, proving to be more favorable for practical language use and accessing information from foreign sources [17, p. 73]. For beginners, the progression from bilingual editions to adapted literature and finally to originals is recommended [16, p. 12483].

Studying subjects of interest through the target language serves as a highly motivating and productive approach to language acquisition. Engaging in activities where the target language is a medium for obtaining information related to personal interests can enhance communication and cognition. This approach involves reading professional literature, watching specialized talks, taking classes on various subjects offered in the target language, etc. Focusing on the content from these sources, provided it is comprehensible, rather than on the verbal structure, indicates progress in language acquisition [17, p. 66].

Conclusion

The challenges discussed earlier can be categorized into linguistic (limited input); psychological (negative experiences, lack of confidence, constrained beliefs about possibilities,

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absence of concrete goals); methodological (lack of specific guidance, inadequate knowledge, confusion between language, speech, and writing, as well as assimilation and practice stages, interruptions in the study process, excessive focus on memorizing isolated words, overemphasis on tests); and extralinguistic or external issues (disconnection between language learning and linguistics, flaws in formal education).

Linguistic issues pertain to the inherent nature of language acquisition, while psychological challenges revolve around the emotional and volitional state of the learner. Methodological shortcomings are linked to the structure and priorities of the learning process, and extralinguistic factors emanate from the broader environment where the study process occurs. Although all these factors contribute to suboptimal outcomes, both research literature and learners themselves emphasize psychological problems as the primary hindrances to successful language acquisition [24, p. 48]. Therefore, addressing these psychological challenges should take precedence.

In conclusion, contemporary language education is generally deemed ineffective due to the significant expenditure of time, money, and effort without achieving satisfactory results. However, despite the numerous problems, there are ideas and methods available for resolution. A shift is suggested from the language teaching paradigm to that of language learning, wherein the teacher's role evolves to motivate and advise students in their self-studies. The improvement process should involve both rationalizing formal training programs based on language acquisition methodology data and achievements and fostering informal, independent public initiatives that promote language interest, idea and experience exchange, and mutual support among learners.

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