

UDC 811

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNER'S SPOKEN LANGUAGE FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS IN MILITARY ENGLISH

Summary. *The English language is a global language and applied as a language for specific purposes nowadays. Not only English for specific purposes but also the graduates should know General English. The target of assessment was to observe the English language ability of a class as a whole and evaluate aspects of language development the class needs to focus on. As it was impossible to observe all aspects of a class, the research was concentrated on grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and discourse. The research consists of two main Sections. Section 1 analyses interaction between theoretical background and language usage. Section 2 is divided into two subsections: first subsection considers the following aspects of the spoken language: grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and discourse; second subsection presents an assessment of the learner's spoken language, held among cadets. Finally, a conclusion deals with propositions for enhancing the learner's spoken language.*

Key words: *spoken language, linguistic knowledge, language competence, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, discourse.*

Introduction. The third-year cadets have English classes from Military English Campaign 2 coursebook and workbook. The book corresponds to level 2 Functional to STANAG 6001. Being the second-year cadets, they learnt from Military English Campaign 1 and got a Level 1 Survival.

According to the language development scale of STANAG, Level 1 has the following characteristics:

Vocabulary: Adequate for routine courtesy and minimum practical needs related to travelling, obtaining food and lodging, giving simple directions, asking for assistance.

Listening comprehension: Adequate for very simple short sentences in face-to-face situations. May require much repetition and a slow rate of speech. Fails in situations where there is noise or other interference.

Grammar and pronunciation: Errors are frequent and may often cause misunderstanding.

Fluency: Adequate for memorized courtesy expressions and common utterances. Otherwise lacking.

Level 2 is characterized:

Vocabulary: Adequate for simple social and routine job needs as giving instructions and discussing projects within very familiar subject-matter fields. Word-meanings often unknown, but quickly learned.

Listening comprehension: Dependable in face-to-face communication within well-known subject-matter fields and in common social contexts. Sometimes requires rewording or slowing of conversational speed. Incomplete in the presence of noise or other interference. Seldom adequate to follow a conversation between two native speakers.

Grammar and pronunciation: Meaning is expressed accurately in simple sentences. Circumlocution often needed to avoid complex grammar. Foreign-sounding pronunciation very noticeable but usually does not interfere with intelligibility.

Fluency: Often impaired by hesitation and groping for words [1].

The research was held in mid-term curricular, so cadets do not obtain knowledge of Level 2 in full but have skills in Level 1. That is why it is necessary to find a balance in evaluating the learner's spoken language.

Section 1

According to Scott Thornbury, "...the skill of speaking comprises extralinguistic knowledge, such as background knowledge of topic and culture, and linguistic knowledge, including discourse knowledge, and knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and phonology" [2, p. 26].

Linguistic knowledge is defined as obtained language competence in discourse, grammar, vocabulary and rules of shaping the form and content of sound systems. It is necessary to develop principles for interaction among all these aspects.

Joan Bybee proposed basic principles for achieving language competence.

The first principle is "Experience affects representation". It means that there exist two types of usage words: high-frequently and low-frequently. It would be possible to apply more or less different context for changing the strength of words.

Next principle assumes that "mental representations of linguistic objects have the same properties as mental representations of other objects". Implementation of the assumption is hard for non-native speaker because of different perception of properties, depending on what it belongs to analytical or syntactical language. Nevertheless, the goal could be achieved, applying strictly linguistic objects of the target language.

The third principle states "categorization is based on identity or similarity". It is the best principle for non-speakers to understand grammar rules of the target language, using more or less identity or similarity of the mother tongue.

The fourth principle affirms that 'generalizations over forms are expressed as relations among forms based on phonetic and/or semantic similarities". Any lexical topic should be presented through its generalization, enriching the target vocabulary with word-formation, collocations, idioms, phrasal verbs, etc. in the frame of certain lexical topic. The meaning of words is given strictly in

correspondence with the target language. In this case it should recommend using the target dictionary.

The fifth principle states that "lexical organization provides generalizations and segmentation at various degrees of abstraction and generality". It means the learning of words is connected with the norms of pronunciation in the target language. It refers to the necessity of taking phonetic and phonological knowledge into action through phonetic exercises, listening or watching authentic learning material.

Finally, last principle is that "grammatical knowledge is procedural knowledge". The studying of the target grammar should base on logics, simplified structures in recognition and gradually in procedure [3, p. 6-8].

Development of spoken language abilities absolutely connected with language competence, appropriating to the target language. Phonetics, phonology, grammar, lexicology and stylistics are fundamental background in success of learning process.

Section 2

Subsection 2.1

Firstly, *A Dictionary of Phonetics and phonology* defines pronunciation as "a manner in which speech sounds, especially connected sequences, are articulated by individual speakers or generally speakers" [4, p. 291].

Pronunciation is a way a language, a particular word, or a sound is pronounced. It includes the sound of the language, stress, rhythm and intonation. The pronunciation of English phonemes is very hard for non-native speakers, especially the vowel system, which is classified 1. by stability of articulation: monophthongs, diphthongs, diphthongoids 2. by position of a tongue: a. horizontal position: front, mixed or central, back; b. vertical position: high or close, mid or half-close, low or open, 3. by position of the lips: rounded or labialized and unrounded or non-labialized vowels, 4. by length: short or long. The consonant system is easier than the vowel for non-speaker, but at the same

time, it has some peculiarities, for example, absence of dental sounds in Ukrainian.

Next, David Crystal's *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* gives a notion of "grammar" in versatile meanings, but as a traditional interpretation defines as "a level of structural organization which can be studied independently of PHONOLOGY and SEMANTICS, and is generally divided into branches of MORPHOLOGY and SYNTAX. In this sense, grammar is a study of the way WORDS, and their component parts, combine to form sentences" [5, p. 217-218].

Grammar is a set of rules that define how words are combined to form acceptable units meaning within a language. In contrast to Ukrainian, the English language demands strict word order. There are grammar notions in the English language that do not exist in Ukrainian such as articles, gerund, causative form, etc. The problem question is when grammatical phenomena is in both languages but has different meanings, for instance, modality.

Thirdly, vocabulary is a set of words or group of words (collocations, lexical chunks) we learn in the foreign language or the words that a person knows or uses. It is very important to pay learners attention on meaning of words in formal and informal styles. It is obvious that some meanings of words have descriptiveness, some – are specified in place, time or manner. Some words have quite different notion that causes perception of words incorrectly.

Finally, discourse is the use of language in speech and in writing in order to produce meaning. The important point of discourse is ability to apply all aspects of language in accordance with the norms and rules of the target language. The development of speaking skill is impossible without phonetics, phonology, grammar, lexicon and style.

Moreover, the level of complexity gradation should be well-structured, consequence and have logical interconnection between all stages of the learning process.

Subsection 2.2

Profile of the learners:

The assignment was held on January 31, 2020. The group of learners, whose spoken language was evaluated, consisted of 12 third-year cadets, aged twenty. The basic learners' book is Campaign, level 2, according to STANAG.

The group is almost even, pre-intermediate level. Some cadets have more fluency in the target language. Learning styles, abilities, experiences and aptitude are slightly different, as in any other group.

The learners find it easy to use language standard phrases and active vocabulary referred to group's level. So, the group needs more practice, encouragement and help.

Topic: Visiting the Headquarter.

Language focus: asking and giving directions *how to get to...*

Objective: revising previously taught vocabulary; practice in giving directions; develop fluency in practice; ear training; using authentic video to build awareness of verbal communication.

Grammar

It is concerned that asking and giving directions is closely connected with the Imperatives, modal verbs *need, could, would, should* and using the Prepositions. Cadets have some knowledge in these grammar points.

Firstly, it must be said that the Imperative form was put into practice correctly.

S1: Should we turn left?

S2: No. Go straight two blocks and then turn right.

Secondly, there are no difficulties in using *could, would* for asking directions,

S1: Excuse me, how could I get to Pecherska Square?

S2: Would you go on foot or by bus?

but as for giving directions the usage of modal verbs were spontaneous. The influence of L1 caused inappropriate usage of modal verbs. The sentences sounded awfully.

S1: How could I get to the nearest post-office?

S2: You need to turn left over there.

As a modal verb, *need* expresses absence of obligation but necessity, and without – *to* (bare infinitive). So, the meaning is “You *have no obligation to* turn left over there.” It raised two questions. First, if there is no obligations turn left over there, what should I do? Second, if someone asks the way to the nearest post-office, what obligations or necessity do you say about? The interference of L1, taken together with non-knowing the meanings of modal verbs, may account for a majority of grammar mistakes which a cadet made when giving direction.

However, some students have difficulties with the usage of prepositions. Given examples show that most errors are concerned confused prepositions that have slightly or quite different meaning.

S1: Cross Lesya Ukrainka Boulevard, turn right. Denis School is in among KFC and the chemist. (not *among*, but *between*).

S2: Go straight ahead to Vladimyrskya Street, cross it. You see a monument to Hrushevskiy. Institute of Philology is near it. (more correctly *next to*)

Nevertheless, the group demonstrated ability to interact successfully, carrying out the communicative task.

Pronunciation

During the lesson, a group demonstrated a problem in phonological aspect. Their speech was monotonous without any intonation, stress, rhythm. The broad and narrow vowel sounds [æ], [e] articulated and pronounced without any differences. [ɛ:] sounded as a mixture of [o] and [jo], for example, *turn* [tjon]. The dental sounds [θ] resembled more soften [z] versus [ð] – [s]. Some cadets articulated consonants [l], [t], [d] with palatalization, and [w] pronounced more similar to [v]. The mother tongue has a great influence on learners because the

English and Ukrainian/Russian languages have different sound systems and articulation base.

Throughout the lesson the cadets asked questions and gave replies. Sometimes it was not easily to guess what sentence is affirmative or question and where is full stop or question tag. There are tones neither falling nor rising in questions, for example, *Where ↓ is the nearest post office?* instead of *Where is the nearest p↓ost office?* The main difference in intonation of *yes/no* questions and *wh-* questions is the placement of the high pitch accent, which falls near the beginning or mid- sentence in Ukrainian/Russian, but closer to the end, on the focus word, in English.

Nevertheless the ear training task was successfully completed by learners. The task was to watch a video and say who give an answer in question how to get to... . The video was produced by Real English and titled "Can you tell me the way to...?" The interviewer asked one question to ten different people. The video was watched twice. Cadets demonstrated that they are able to perceive the target language speakers by ear.

Vocabulary

First of all it should be noticed that cadets applied a different range of lexical items: fixed phrases, phrasal verbs, collocations. Lexical problems could be divided into three kinds of errors: false friends, confused words and homophones.

Most frequent error was false friends, for instances,

S1: How could I get to **Prospect** Peremogy?

S2: Excuse me, where is **Gymnasium** # 3?

The word "**prospect**" has a meaning of "the possibility or the idea of something that will or might happen in the future", but not a road. "**Gymnasium**" ("**gym**" a shorten form) means "a building with equipment for doing exercises", rather than educational institution. False friends denote words in the source and the target languages which are more or less similar in form. The similar sounding

causes misunderstanding and sometimes laughing, but problem could be solved by paying learners attention to the notion.

Moreover confusing words was caused by the interference of L1. The following examples proved it, ‘*on the left/right*’ instead of “*to the left/right*” or “*Straight*” instead of “*Straight ahead*”. Both examples demonstrate that the mother tongue, Ukrainian/Russian, strongly interfere with the target language, e.g. “*на ліво/право*” - ‘*on the left/right*’, “*Прямо!*” - “*Straight*”.

Final problem was homophones that have the same or similar sounding but differ in meaning. Some learners expressed misunderstanding and then were confused.

S1: Where is the nearest **inn**? (*inn – in*).

Having heard the question, S2 was confused and gave no reply. S1 understood what the problem was and substituted “*inn*” for “*hotel*”. The substitution led to misunderstanding for English native speaker because “*inn*” – a small hotel in the countryside and “*hotel*” – a place where you pay to stay when you are away from home. So the problem is where you are looking for hotel in the nearest countryside or the nearest place from a position where a question was asked.

Generally, cadets demonstrated that their knowledge of topic vocabulary is good and they are well-motivated in learning vocabulary.

Discourse

The group approved awareness and willingness to interact with each other. Kiev residents actively helped to non-Kiev residents in defining position of unknown places. The atmosphere was open and friendly. Cadets communicated with each other in polite and respectful manner without any interruptions.

It should be noticed that learners actively expressed their emotions by using interjections such as “Wow”, “Oops”, “Oh” and expressions such as “Really?”, “Great”, “Not at all.”.

The sentences were simple, sometimes complicated by the conjunction *and*. They were mostly well-structured, logically sequenced and correct in grammar. However, it should be mentioned that some students didn't use conjunctive adverbs in full.

Regarding speaking styles, mostly cadets' speech was good in articulation but circuitous which naturally caused pauses. Learners used formal style, expressing their thoughts by means of standard phrases.

Conclusions. We suppose that the evaluation on learner's spoken language is the best to observe all aspects of language in practice because it bases on pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. The group demonstrated the ability to interact with each other to perceive and handle information.

In general, cadets have communicative skills in giving directions clearly, according to Level 1. They apply them in correspondence with some basic vocabulary, grammar models skills in giving directions clearly, pronouncing sounds shows the interference of the mother tongue greatly.

In addition, ear training is a very useful teaching method for developing perceptive skills and training understanding natural speed of speech. It was not surprising that there was interconnection between the velocity of speech and recognition of the context. The higher the speed of speech is, the less context recognition is. It was not surprising that learners were strongly disintegrated when they heard some phonetic phenomena such as assimilation, sound alternations, elision and reduction.

Obviously, there is time and practice for language development, encouraging and developing their abilities in language learning process by different kinds of activities such as peer interaction, role-play, simulations, brainstorming, information gap, storytelling, playing card.

Furthermore, it would be a good idea if learners focus on articulation and intonation, develop ear training gradually by watching authentic videos to

enhance listening and speaking skills. As a result, it would definitely improve learner's language awareness in communication.

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