ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES ACCORDING TO ILYA FRANK’S READING METHOD BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF RUSSIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

In the modern world foreign language skills are crucial in many spheres, thereby there are a great number of techniques that could be used in studying languages.

One of the most popular and controversial at the same time is Ilya Frank’ reading method for beginners. Such a method provides learners with the opportunity to read so-called parallel texts devoted to various topics in the origin and compare them with the translations without using a dictionary or additional sources of information. It helps to understand and remember basic lexical structures naturally as they are frequently used in texts. Moreover, the Frank method gives insight into the correct usage of collocations in a particular context.

However, there are a few disadvantages of such a method of studying, for instance, during the initial period learners can be overwhelmed by the amount of new words, thus, they may be puzzled and, as a result, discouraged to learn languages. Furthermore, parallel texts (the technique) do not give the explanation of grammar; therefore, it will be impossible for beginners to create a compound sentence on their own. In our article we reveal the results of the conducted research among various groups of students as well.

Keywords: Franks reading method, learning foreign languages, language skills, parallel texts.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays learning foreign languages has become increasingly relevant due to various factors, in particular, the process of globalization, which encourages states and nations to interact and cooperate both at a regional and international level. For instance, English is one of the official languages of such organizations as the United Nations, the European Union and the Organization of the petroleum exporting countries and etc.

From an educational standpoint, studying a language enables people to expand horizons by means of travelling and partaking in exchange programs, thereby opening up new vistas for getting a decent education in any part of the world. Moreover, to keep pace with modern life one should be multitask and think outside the box in order to fast track a career growth.

All these factors have paved the way to the emergence of many language-learning methods, whose fundamental task is to help leaners make this process easier, less time-consuming and, in so doing, more efficient. This article specifies the pros and cons of one of the popular approaches of studying, namely Ilya Frank’s reading method based on the example of Russian students.

2 METHODOLOGY

Having an opportunity to teach a language to the students of different English levels, we used qualitative techniques while conducting our research, which revealed all the advantages and disadvantages of Ilya Frank’s method. The total number of students participating in the inquiry was 106. We selected intermediate level students studying at the International Journalism Faculty and divided them into two groups. One group focused on learning words of the particular texts by rote, translated them using dictionaries and then presented the rendering at the class, whereas the second group studied the same texts adapted by Ilya Frank’s method and delivered the results at the class as well. All the texts had been given to them in advance as a home assignment and they had a few days to prepare. The results were impressive. The second group rendered all the texts given with better outcomes having memorized all the essential vocabulary. We brainstormed the results with the students and the following responses were announced: “Rote-learning was boring”, “there was no
need to refer to dictionaries all the time”, “it was less time-consuming”, “convenient and up-to-date the method was”. Moreover, the students pointed out a few disadvantages of the method saying: “Many words in the text were old-fashioned”, “First it was very hard to understand the text and prompts but then I got used to it”, “I was puzzled by every explanation even of the familiar words”.

3 RESULTS

Ilya Frank’s reading method is based on parallel translation while reading the book in the target language. Notes, prompts and comments come along with each sentence. The uniqueness of Ilya Frank’s reading method is that there is no need in memorizing words due to their frequency in texts. One opens a page and sees an adapted text peppered with literal Russian translation with a small lexicographic commentary. Then there is the same text but already in the origin without any prompts. “The exact purpose of the untranslated passage is that for some amount of time, no matter how short, the reader is “swimming on his own”. [1] All the basic vocabulary is frequented in other texts, thereby facilitating remembering and learning. This method differs from the parallel text method: in the latter, the page is divided into two columns, in which the first one presents English texts and the second one constitutes the full-fledged translation without any additional comments.

3.1 Advantages of Ilya Frank’s approach

First of all it is worth mentioning that this method is quite widespread and a large amount of literary material is adapted. Over 300 books have been published using Ilya Frank’s approach and have become popular with people learning foreign languages in Russia.

While reading the book one does not have to resort to the dictionary all the time. A person can read all the prompts and translation right after every sentence or collocation and reread the passage afterwards without any prompt. It is considered to be less time-consuming and more effective. A student is not annoyed or puzzled by tedious memorization, therefore the speed and high performance is noted.

Furthermore, this method shows the use of unknown collocations and words in the context and makes it easier to understand them. For instance, if the word translated is hard to understand in the context, then a better translation of the word is provided, what makes a better understanding of the whole sentence. The possibility to read transcriptions is also foreseen for beginners, which, in its turn, allows learning the theoretical part of studying languages such as phonetic symbols.
Thus, the method is based on high-frequency words, which means the more books one reads the more words one learns and the larger vocabulary a person obtains. In addition, the books based on Ilya Frank’s method have an audio version, which allows students to listen and improve their pronunciation as well not only in theory by using phonetic symbols but by repeating words after a speaker.

This technique provides students with the opportunity to read and to improve their skills without using any additional informational sources. One can start learning and practicing any time at any place: in a café, in the subway or in a journey. It is highly important in the modern world regarding people’s desire to save time. What is more, this method responds to the faster pace of life, thus a large number of mobile applications are developed, making this approach more available and convenient in many ways. There is no need to carry any additional material, laptops or even buy books: one can just get an application on a phone, which is very appealing to the youth.

The Frank method helps people both to read and understand the words and sentences of a foreign language, and to immerse into the culture and literature of the country, learners start to get a deeper picture of the folk and its foundation.

All in all, the method is relevant not only for beginners, who start learning the language from scratch, but also for students with a higher level of knowledge, who may broaden their vocabulary and enhance the use and understanding of words and collocations.

3.2 Disadvantages of the approach

However, there are some disadvantages of Ilya Frank’s method. Firstly, literary translation diverts attention from the texts in the origin; therefore, Russian students do not delve into collocations with prepositions or prefixes insomuch as everything is translated for them.

Secondly, English, like other languages, is constantly evolving: the vocabulary, pronunciation norms, grammatical structure of the language are changing, thus, some words become obsolete and new ones replace them. In the following we will provide a few examples:

The first one is taken from a short story collection “English with smile”, a story, written by Bret Harte «The stolen cigar case»:

> I found Hemlock Jones in the old Brook Street lodgings (я застал Хемлока Джонса в старой квартире на Брук-Стрит; to find – находить, оппиксивать; обнаружить, застать /за каким-л. занятием/; lodging – жилище, жилье), musing before the fire (/сидевшим/ у камина в глубоких раздумьях; to muse – погружаться в размышления; fire – огонь, пламя; печь, камин). With the freedom of an old friend (с непринуждённостью старого друга; freedom – свобода; вольность, фамильярность /разг./) I at once threw myself in my usual familiar attitude at his feet (я тут же, как обычно, бросился к его ногам, /принял/ свою привычную позу; to throw; usual – обыкновенный, обычный; familiar – связанный с семейными традициями; привычный), and gently caressed his boot (и нежно погладил его ботинок; gently – благородно; мягко, нежно). I was induced to do this for two reasons (меня побудили сделать так две причины; reason – соображение, умозаключение; повод, основание): one, that it enabled me to get a good look at his bent, concentrated face (во-первых, это позволяло мне хорошо рассмотреть его склоненное сосредоточенное лицо; to get – получать, добывать; в сочетании с последующим существительным выражает действие, соответствующее значению существительного; look – взгляд; to bend – гнуться, согнуться/ сы; наклоняться/ сы/), and the other, that it seemed to indicate my reverence for his superhuman insight (а во-вторых, /мне/ казалось, это свидетельствовало о моем благоговении перед его сверхчеловеческой проницательностью; other – другой, второй; to indicate – указывать, показывать).

Figure 2. The Frank method. [3]

I plodded conscientiously through the twenty-six letters (я добросовестно проработал двадцать шесть букв /алфавита/; to plod — с трудом брести, тащиться; продвигаться с трудом /в работе и т.д./; упорно работать, корпеть над чем-либо), and the only malady I could conclude I had not got was housemaid's knee (и единственной болезнью, /которой, как/ я мог заключить, я не болел, было воспаление сумки надколенника; to conclude — делать вывод, приходить к заключению; to get; housemaid — горничная, уборщица /особенно в частном доме/; maid — служанка, горничная; дева, девушка; knee — колено).

These examples clearly demonstrate that the language used sounds artificial in ordinary life, as it is difficult to imagine how often people use such phrases as «indicate my reverence for his superhuman insight» or «housemaid’s knee» during the day.

Thirdly, while reading only the text, one may not pay attention to grammar constructions, thus do not learn the rules and get poor knowledge of the whole language and fail to understand the bigger picture of it. Besides, the perception of information is intermittent and inconsistent, which makes a difficult read and discourage undisciplined students to proceed. [5]

There is another weakness, students concentrate only on one aspect as reading and do not take heed to other important parts of education such as speaking or writing. It becomes crucial, especially if a language does not belong to the same language family as the native one for the reason that one is unlikely to realize grammar structures and various parts of speech on their own way. All these factors could become an impediment to start conversations in real life and to practice and master language writing skills.

In addition, the method of Ilya Frank is not absolutely unique. It shares much in common with the interlinear and facing-page translations that appeared at least a century or two ago. Moreover, there exist many computer and mobile applications and programs that allow a learner to click on any unfamiliar word and find an instant definition and translation of a term or a collocation.

Der Wunsch Gregors, die Mutter zu sehen, ging bald in Erfüllung. Während des Tages wollte Gregor schon aus Rücksicht auf seine Eltern sich nicht beim Fenster zeigen, kriechen konnte er aber auf den...
4 CONCLUSIONS

Despite the shortcomings, to which we have referred in the article, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Ilya Frank’s method is a perfect instrument enabling students not only to enrich vocabulary and to feel the beauty of the language but also to immerse themselves into the culture and literature of the target country. In addition, it gives a common understanding of the usage of collocations in a special context, which is highly important in various spheres such as reading tasks, writing essays. Ultimately, the method is suitable for those who have already studied at least the basics of the English language or another foreign language, in particular, for those who love reading or are eager to improve their reading skills and replenish their vocabulary through literature.

REFERENCES


