

## TEACHING ENGLISH BY ASSOCIATIONS

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**Abstract.** The article addresses the problems of teaching English with special attention to a new teaching method – the Associative Symbols Method, which was developed by teachers from Lutsk schools. An authorial program for teaching English to children aged 5 to 10 years old was developed based on this method. Within the framework of the program, textbooks and workbooks (for kindergartens, grades I, II, III and IV) were created and approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The method focuses on non-verbal communication tools, through body movements, gestures, facial expressions, coded ideas and associations. The associative symbols method contributes to improving the perception of information and its better reproduction, capitalizing on the child's rich imagination and fantasy, on the basis of which images are created for any studied lexical or grammatical unit. This association with a specific image or action increases the speed of learning English words and integrates associative symbols into the study of a foreign language through imitation.

**Keywords:** MAS, imitation, associative images, positive motivation for learning a foreign language, methodological challenges of MAS, creating associative image-symbols, memorization, an imaginary object, kinesthetic learners, creative activity.

## PREDAREA LIMBII ENGLEZE PRIN ASOCIAȚII

**Rezumat.** Articolul abordează problemele predării limbii engleze cu o atenție deosebită unei noi metode de predare – Metoda simbolurilor asociative, care a fost dezvoltată de profesori din școlile din Lutsk. A fost elaborat un program autoral pentru predarea limbii engleze copiilor cu vârste între 5 și 10 ani, bazat pe această metodă. În cadrul programului au fost create și aprobate manuale și caiete de lucru (pentru grădinițe, clasele I, II, III și IV) de către Ministerul Educației și Științei din Ucraina. Metoda se axează pe instrumentele nonverbale de comunicare, prin mișcările corpului, gesturi, expresii faciale, idei codificate și asocieri. Metoda simbolurilor asociative contribuie la îmbunătățirea percepției informațiilor și la o mai bună reproducere a acestora, valorificând imaginația și fantezia bogată a copilului, pe baza cărora se creează imagini pentru orice unitate lexicală sau gramaticală studiată. Această asociere cu o imagine sau o acțiune specifică crește viteza de învățare a cuvintelor engleze și integrează simbolurile asociative în studiul limbii străine prin imitație.

**Cuvinte cheie:** MAS, imitație, imagini asociative, motivație pozitivă pentru învățarea unei limbi străine, provocări metodologice ale MAS, crearea de imagini-simbol asociative, memorare, un obiect imaginar, cursanți kinestezici, activitate creativă.

There are numerous studies on learning a foreign language, starting with Jan Amos Komenský, who criticized the old and difficult methods existing in the school of those times and who emphasized the importance of visual representation in this process, exemplifying the learning of Latin. Based on this approach, in which images play an important role, a series of modern research has been built, which capitalizes on visual representations in learning a foreign language.

The early school years are the most efficient for the formation of child's linguistic identity. In this regard, the primary school has to create conditions for early adaptation of junior pupils, in the communicative and psychological aspects, to the new linguistic world. Primary school teachers should help their pupils to overcome psychological barriers of communication in using a foreign language as a means, motivating them to develop a foreign language mastery, to be skilled and confident to take risks and be innovative when tackling the varied creative learning tasks in future. At this stage it is important to form elementary communicative competence and develop basic communicative skills in the major kinds of language activities (speaking, listening, reading, writing) at the A2-level according to the Common European Recommendations Framework of learning, teaching and assessing language knowledge.

- Learning of a foreign language by pupils of the first grade alongside with their native (Ukrainian) language involves: exploring new approaches to assimilation of foreign language educational material according to the age-psychological peculiarities of young learners; searching for the approaches that ensure academic success and intensive development of the pupil's individuality; searching for the adequate theories, relevant technologies and methods of teaching children. We have elaborated a new theoretical concept, which lays emphasis on the development of the associative nature of cognition and usage of associative symbols in foreign language learning process. This new approach will require significant changes in the classroom.

- Associative learning strategy is generally focused on modern innovative technologies of teaching, which comply with the new goals and tasks of teaching foreign languages in primary school. It takes into account age and individual needs of young learners, including the major ones: for game-playing (better absorbing of learning activities content through games), for movement, for external impressions, for cognition. To satisfy all these needs and to enhance learning efficiency, associative learning strategy involves everything that is recent, new and the best in other related technologies. Great importance on the associative relationships between language and imagery was placed by L. Vyhotskii. The scholar studied the interconnection of child's activity with speech symbolic

substitutions and concluded that linguistic activity has its peculiar prerequisites: gestures, play and drawing. It is the development of these kinds of semantic-symbolic activity that ensures the development of functional systems, which play an important role in learning both spoken and written language [18].

- The principle of matching innate inclinations forms the foundation of the associative learning strategy. This approach enables the creation of a foreign language learning environment through relatable life situations, making the learning process more accessible and spontaneous.

- Analysis of theoretical studies of associative learning induces us to consider concepts closely related to the term «association» and their significance for the perception and reproduction of educational information.

- Association (Latin Associo – «linking», «bind») is a concept-image that arises at the mention of another. The concept of «association» was introduced by John Locke, who considered associations as an important means of creative thinking. In his work «An Essay on Human Understanding» scientist devoted a paragraph entitled «Of the Association of Ideas» to explain the role of associations in human mental activities, and it was there that he first used this term. In view of this, John Locke considered associations as the basis for the formation of habits and a compulsory condition for the emergence of complex ideas, and treated association as the main mechanism of complex ideas formation.

The concept of «association» has a long history. Its definition and interpretation was initiated by the ancient Greek philosophical science. Plato noted that associations arise by similarity and contiguity at the mention of some images. Aristotle emphasized that the association occurs when the image emerges for no apparent reason, spontaneously. It is believed that Aristotle was the first to offer his classification of associations. His classification is based on the threefold basis: the similarity (cat – tiger), contiguity in space (field – flower) and time (night – sleep), and contrast (cold – hot). In fact, Aristotle may be considered to be the founder of *the theory of associations* [16].

- A prominent linguist W. Humboldt was the first who actualized the problem of associations in language. He pointed out that perception of the world and language acquisition are associative by their nature.

Regarding the linguistic interpretations of associations within the framework of psycholinguistics, A. Zalievskaia [19]. Identified four stages of the research work in this field. The first stage began with the experiments of Galton (1879) and lasted until the emergence of the first list of associative standards of English, known as Standards of Kent-Rozanov (1910). The second stage was characterized by the influence of behavioristic psychology that restricted relations in an associative pair to exclusively mechanistic connection between stimulus and response. Associations were also studied in terms of ethnic psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and so on. This stage lasted until 1954,

when the so-called «Complete Minnesota Standards» were published [15]. The third stage of associations studies (60-70-ies) is characterized by the prevailing study of the specific features of a language, the formation of human linguistic capacity, analysis of a word meaning structure. The fourth stage is considered to be the beginning of the associative linguistics. At this stage an integrated model of constructing internal lexicon of a person has been worked out, and associative techniques had extended the theories of pato-and psychodiagnostics. In addition, associative lexicography has been extensively developing. Cognitivists' theory became very popular at this time. They suggest that in human consciousness there exists something like a net, in the nodes of which information is stored. Actualization of one site (e. g via word-stimulus) leads to the stimulation, activation, «pulling out» or «flashing» information. Scientists claim, if the memory of a man is figuratively represented as a set of file cabinets, where each word corresponds to a separate card, you can draw the conclusion that an arbitrarily selected card from file cabinets will definitely bring about all the files, and we can pull out a bunch of cards, closely related to each other. According to this theory language/speech can be presented not only as a system of relations, not only as a large collection of texts, but also in the form of verbal-associative network (AVN), which corresponds to the linguistic capacity of a person. AVN is represented as a set of relationships between words, word forms and their combinations, which can be examined on the material of direct and reverse associative vocabulary.

Many works in the field of linguistic were published at that time by Potebnia. He reveals the word in its internal form as an associative relationship of objects and phenomena in accordance with their defining feature. In terms of his theory, association in its inner structure can be treated as «semantic relationship model»: «if *A* came to your mind it is inevitably followed by *B*, *C*, *D* in the mind. The more inevitably you think of *B* as *A*, the stronger is the association». In Potebnia's words, language arises from the association, and vice versa it gives rise to new associations» [13].

– The fourth stage of associative linguistics development stimulated the emergence of the fifth stage of the study of associations – stage, which is related to the methodology of associative learning and teaching of foreign languages at primary school. This stage is characterized by scientific psychological and pedagogical studies aimed at developing the theory about associative nature of cognition in the foreign language learning process at primary school. At this time there appeared numerous theses related directly or indirectly to associative learning. Among them it is worth mentioning the research papers by O. Goroshko and U. Marchuk dealing with the investigation of verbal associations as a specific field of linguistics, and dissertations by R. Ibragimova and N. Markova, who shed the light on the developmental peculiarities of language/speech activity of primary school children based on the associative imagination.

– This age is considered to be fairly sensitive for learning a foreign language, due to the peculiarities of child's psychical development and, above all, the peculiarities of a young learner's mental activity. Children at this age are characterized by: the innate language abilities, plasticity of the brain and speech apparatus, highly-differential auditory sensitivity, the ability to imitation, the need for communication, the need for playing with sounds and others. In this connection there is a need to teach primary school pupils taking into account empirical mechanisms of psychological processes. L. Vygotsky, following the conceptions of the developmental education theory, emphasizes that there are certain optimal periods in child's development, when learning is «the most economical, fruitful and easy process».

According to N. Zhynkin, language (native or foreign) can not be learned outside the context of the development of thinking and other mental processes, and apart from communication. The effectiveness of learning process and teachers' work productivity depends greatly on the individual characteristics of mental processes, their specificity, psycho-physiological characteristics, their composition, structure, and so on [20].

The main law of associations can be formulated as follows: the association is stronger and more relevant, the more often it is repeated. Scholars distinguish four main types of associations:

- by similarity;
- by contrast;
- by proximity in time or space;
- by the interrelation (causality).

Analysis of the theoretical and experimental studies of creativity demonstrates a lack of unified approach to the interpretation and understanding of its nature. However, according to N. Anchukova, association is the main component of the creative process. Overview of various definitions contributes to understanding of creativity as the ability to create new and original. Having analyzed the results of various scholars' studies, V. Kozlenko has identified the following characteristics of creativity [10]:

- qualitative characteristics of cognitive activities (divergent thinking, associativity, and so on);
- personal characteristics (initiativeness, independence, sensibility, and so on);
- productivity of the activities (originality of product).

Regarding the interrelationship between associativity and creativity, the following can be mentioned: on the one hand, scholars recognize the importance of associative processes in the creation of creative product, but on the other hand, the association is regarded as a unit of psychological analysis of creativity (D. Gilford, E. Torens, S. Mednyk, G. Eysenck and others) [1].

Having analyzed the relationship between individual's creativity and imaginative association, we can claim that the main point, where these two concepts intersect, is an *associative symbol*.

Personal qualities are essential in foreign language learning. Researchers emphasize creating conditions that support individual and group learning to maximize learners' potential. Associative learning strategies align with this goal by activating individual traits harmoniously.

According to the psycholinguist Naomi Chomsky [5], children possess a natural ability to learn languages effortlessly until about age 11-12. Associative learning leverages this innate talent, allowing primary school students to acquire foreign languages rapidly, often without explicitly learning grammar. According to the opinion of W. Butzkamm [3], children absorb foreign languages through imitation, interaction, and exposure to life-like contexts, like learning their native language [17].

Stages of Language Acquisition for Young Learners, defined by the research team of Peltzer-Karpf and R. Zangle [12], are:

1. *Initial Stage*: Focuses on receptive and reproductive learning during the first two years of schooling. Emotionally engaging materials and activities play a critical role.
2. *Reorganization Stage*: Involves analyzing speech, forming hypotheses, and synthesizing language. This stage begins mid-second grade and includes mastering grammar intuitively.
3. *Stability Stage*: Develops coherent speech and language application, paving the way for advanced learning.

From specialty literature analysis the Associative Learning Strategies are identified. Modern associative techniques incorporate innovative tools to enhance language acquisition by addressing children's cognitive and emotional needs, such as the desire for play, movement, and sensory input. Examples include:

- Graphic Associations: linking spelling with illustrative drawings [11].
- Sound Associations: using mnemonics to connect sound, meaning, and context [11].
- Rhythmization: transforming material into songs or rhymes [2].
- Thesaurus Method: enhancing vocabulary through associative word fields [8].
- Mind Mapping: employing visual maps to organize and recall information effectively [4].

These methods foster an enjoyable, brain-friendly learning environment, enabling children to overcome challenges in language learning while promoting retention and application of knowledge.

Having analyzed all the above-mentioned associative methods Luts'k scientific experimental group of teachers has developed the method of associative symbols (MAS), which is the procedural foundation of associative learning of primary school children.

The method of associative symbols leverages body language, gestures, facial expressions, and coded associations to enhance perception and reproduction of information. Rooted in children's vivid imagination and ability to fantasize, it facilitates the creation of images for any lexical or grammatical unit. Associating foreign words with specific images or actions enables quicker learning. This method integrates associative symbols into foreign language study through imitation, making the process engaging and effective.

The main advantages of this method for associative learning strategy are:

- assimilation of a large number of lexical items;
- possibility to develop pupils' ability to use actively the accumulated vocabulary for communication in a foreign language. Pupils easily transfer learned language samples to other situations;
- extremely strong motivation for learning can be created;
- possibility to remove psychological barriers.

Researchers propose the method of associative symbols as an effective tool to enrich students' speech experience during the initial learning stages. This approach helps children adapt to the sounds of a new language, develop proper articulation, and build a strong foundation of lexical-semantic patterns.

English lessons using the method of associative symbols create a natural and engaging learning environment for children. Teachers design lessons to inspire creativity while presenting linguistic material in an accessible and interesting way. This method helps students develop linguistic, speech, and socio-cultural competencies effectively.

Current research and experimental data highlight the need for innovative methods and strategies in teaching younger learners. Associative learning techniques offer effective solutions to overcome challenges in mastering English, benefiting both students and teachers.

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