

## ENGLISH WORD ORDER: SHOULD IT BE LEARNT OR ACQUIRED BY RUSSIAN LEARNERS?

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*English word order is quite a challenging issue for those learners whose native languages are more flexible. Teaching English to the Russian students shows that not all the learners suffer from this language difference at the same extent. According to the conducted study we suppose that analysis of Russian speech patterns produced by a particular learner in some cases can be a predictor of his/her future success or difficulties in the language learning. In case of difficulties it might mean that the learner needs additional assistance with “inner programming” at one of the stages of the speech production.*

*Key words: word order, Russian learners, inner programming, SVO (subject-verb-object).*

Since the middle of the XXth century word order has been attracting attention as a subject matter of linguistics, psycholinguistics and psychology. Ideas of such scientists as N. Chomsky, S. Pinker, R. Tomlin, D. Slobin and others have also influenced the approaches to understanding and explaining second and foreign language acquisition. Implicit or explicit teaching of word order to language learners is one of the first challenges teachers face at beginning and elementary levels.

It becomes even more challenging while teaching English with its quite rigid SVO (subject-verb-object) word order to adult learners whose native languages are more flexible ones, for example, Russian or Spanish. As EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers we know that this difference leads to teaching and learning difficulties not only in early stages of language learning but at more advanced levels as well [1], [5]. That persistence of mistakes in word order becomes even more perplexing taking into consideration the following fact. In one of his works S. Pinker writes “... Children's two-word combinations [appear at about 18 months old children] are highly similar across cultures. Everywhere, children announce when objects appear, disappear, and move about, point out their properties and owners, comment on people doing things and seeing things, reject and request objects and activities, and ask about who, what, and where. These sequences already reflect the language being acquired: in 95% of them, the words are properly ordered” [4, p.143]. Without any doubt such accuracy in word order can be hardly achieved by adult learners even after months of instruction. Moreover, from the evidences provided by the teaching practice it is clear that success in mastering word order often depends on the individual learner. Some Russian learners can easily acquire SVO word order whereas others struggle with it for much longer period. Thus, our research questions are:

Why do certain Russian learners face more difficulties acquiring English word order than others?

What can be done to help these learners to cope with such difficulties?

To shed light on the process of speech production we turned to the literature describing this process. The detailed description of speech act is provided in the papers by T.V. Akhutina (Ryabova), A.N. Leontiev, A.A. Leontiev, I. A. Zymnyaya, N.I. Zhinkin and others. These works are based on the notion of the phase structure of the speech act which is the special structure of the “inner speech” stage in utterance production proposed by L.S. Vygotsky. The summary of some of the model is given in the work by A.A. Leontiev and T.V. Ryabova (Akhutina) which says that speech production goes through the following sequence of stages (phases). It starts with the  **motive** which gives rise to the **speech intention** when “... the speaker has “an image of result”, but does not have a Plan of Action that must be performed to achieve this result” [3, p. 34]. The third stage is “**the inner program of the speech act**” or “plan” in N.I. Zinkin’s category when representation of the speech intention in the code of personal “senses” happens.

At the next stage **implementation of the inner programme** occurs through two processes: “transition from “senses” embodied in a subjective code to meanings of the “external” words of an actual language and “the transformation of the grammar of thoughts into the grammar of words”. The last stage is the stage of **the acoustic implementation of the utterance, or phonation**.

We suppose that word order mistakes are rooted at the third and fourth stages of speech act, namely in the development of the inner program of speech act and its implementation. SVO word order is not embedded into the inner program of the speech act for most Russian learners. Consequently, implementation of the inner programme English utterance leads to mistakes in word order or at least hampers speech production. It is hampered as additional transformations are necessary to adapt the inner program to SVO type, which significantly overloads working memory of the learners. Those learners who tend to produce in Russian SVO utterances face less difficulties acquiring English word order.

We suppose that one of the ways to predict and timely treat possible learner’s difficulty with word order is the analysis of Russian utterances produced by learners. We ask beginning learners of English to describe a photo or a picture. They can write different types of sentences, separate words, elliptic structures, be incoherent and incohesive. As a result we get utterances which can be analysed from word order point of view. If case most utterances of the learner lack SVO word order it may imply that this learner needs assistance in providing his/her inner programme with an instruction or algorithm responsible for the proper implementation of the inner programme.

From our point of view formation of SVO word order for those adult Russian learners who tend to have more flexible and various word orders in the native language must be done consciously, using preferably deductive rather than inductive approaches. Since fixed word order might be a completely new concept for Russian adult learners they can face difficulty deducing this rule and can be rather reluctant while developing the skill quite so to say “hostile” and “alien” for them. In order to help learners acquire English word order we propose to use Galperin’s model of the formation of mental actions. One of the descriptions of this model is given in the work by J. Haenen [2].

P.Galperin distinguished four steps for an action to pass through before becoming a fully-fledged mental action, namely they are orientation, communicated thinking, dialogical thinking

and acting mentally. According to him, every human action is accomplished on the basis of some orientation. In Galperin's teaching strategy, orientation plays a key role and is designed to provide the learner with all the information necessary for the correct execution of a new action. This orientation is fulfilled with the help of Schemes of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action (SCOBA) or operating chart which serves for the learners as a tool of action and gives them the course of the action and the sequence of its operations.

At communicated thinking stage learners are taught to communicate about the action and to think aloud as they perform it without operating chart. Then learners pass from this overt speech to covert one which is "speech minus voice". This overt form of speech turns into "the audible image of the word". Such an "audible image" can only evolve after the action has gone through overt speech. During this type of dialogical thinking, the action becomes more and more routine and abbreviated. When the action has been developed almost to the point of being automatic, there can be a transition to acting purely mentally. This Galperin's approach facilitates the teaching-learning process through development student's self-regulatory skills. Hence, introducing effective operating charts aiming to form and develop learners' ability to produce SVO utterances will provide Russian learners with necessary elements for proper inner programme at speech production.

So, the question is what can be considered to be an example of such operating charts and which activities might contribute to automaticity of the skill being acquired. Here we would like to share some teaching tools which can help Russian learners cope with such a challenging issue as English word order:

- Rearranging of Russian sentences so that they have English word order (Student's utterance: Обучение технологиям старшего поколения. – Changed utterance – Старшее поколение обучается технологиям; Student's utterance: У них старая обувь - Changed utterance: Они носят старую обувь/Они имеют старую обувь.)
- Use of substitution tables helps to internalise the different sentence patterns of the language through processes of habit-formation.
- Sentence building activities with the use of flashcards and other games aiming at sentence production (domino, see battles, snowball activity etc).
- Transformation exercises.
- Interactive workbooks.
- Discussion of emphatic word arrangement in English.
- Speech production with support on given schemes.

Thus, we would like to come to the following conclusions. First, only few Russian learners tend to produce the majority of utterances in Russian with rigid SVO word order. Second, acquisition of SVO word order for these learners needs special training and is quite time-consuming. Third, one of the effective and efficient teaching tools for this aims can be Galperin's Schemes of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action (orienting chart) which contain information on the course of the action and the sequence of its operation necessary to execute the task.

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