

## RECYCLING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A MAJOR

*Borzova Elena*

*Doctor of Pedagogy, Professor*

*Petrozavodsk State University.*

*185910 Russia, Petrozavodsk, Lenin pr., 33.*

*english@petsu.ru*

*This article examines the role of recycling in teaching foreign languages as a major. The author specifies its characteristics by comparing recycling and revision. To highlight the importance of recycling at the advanced level of foreign language teaching and learning, the author provides the results of an empirical study. In conclusion, a few ways of promoting recycling at the advanced level are described.*

*Key words: recycling, revision, recycling at the advanced level, ways to promote recycling.*

The goal of this article is to highlight the issue of recycling at the advanced level of university foreign language teaching and learning. We set out to prove that recycling still plays a considerable role in teaching English as a major. In addition, we will provide a few examples of how to facilitate recycling in this context.

Recycling is defined mostly as “practising language that learners have seen previously. The recycled language will be re-introduced in a different context, or through a different skill” [6]. Davies and Pearse regard recycling as “continuing work on old language” [4, p. 16]. We view recycling as a process of reactivating and reusing appropriate components of a wide range of prior experiences under new conditions and in new combinations to generate a new product [2, p. 159].

Recycling is different from revision. The latter is often aimed at revising before tests and is organized by the teacher to wind up the material of a topic or a few units. The goal of recycling is to guarantee a continuous and appropriate use of what has been learned before to achieve some new purpose. Both of them turn on memory mechanisms, but recycling is much broader in meaning and its functions. Revision implies a review of a certain portion of the previously studied material (vocabulary or grammar) within a definite period of time. Conversely, recycling suggests an appropriate use of any components of the prior experiences, regardless of the time and place where and when they were acquired, under new circumstances whenever they suit the context and the situation. Therefore, revision mostly relies on recall and accurate reproduction while recycling is based on a wide range of psychological mechanisms, both cognitive and affective. Revision results in the mnemonic consolidation of the given portion of the language or knowledge that will be tested by the teacher. Recycling is more about the ability of the agent to quickly and efficiently recall and choose the appropriate components of the experiences from the long-term memory and then transfer them into the working memory in order to achieve the purposes of the activity that the agent is doing. Thus, recycling focuses on the transformation of the whole person`s experiences providing opportunities for further more challenging activities and their new products in the new circumstances. As a consequence, properly arranged and regularly practiced, recycling provides the agent`s flexibility and fluency in fulfilling some activity. In real life recycling occurs naturally. But in foreign language learning and teaching it needs special measures taken by the teacher even if the student have already reached an advanced foreign language proficiency level. Earlier we explored recycling at the high school level [1]. University majors could definitely benefit too if their foreign language programs offered at some point special assignments aimed at recycling,

though the teaching techniques to this end are different from those used for lower proficiency level students.

To prove this assumption, in the fifth semester of 2017, we applied a few empirical research methods: an interview (25 third-year majors of pre-service teacher education), observation of the students' participation in the conversation classroom, and analysis of the students' written essays. On the whole, the student proficiency level meets the requirements of B2-C1 levels according to the European Scale (18-9 students accordingly). The most common language errors are those related to the use of prepositions (25%), use of articles (30%), choice of appropriate words (35%), and complex grammar models (30%). The main drawbacks in the language use that we noticed are the following: a) limited diversity of the vocabulary (shortage of varied adjectives and adverbs) and of complex grammar structures (a limited variety of subordinate clauses); b) frequent word or idiom repetition. Nevertheless, in the first place our concern is mostly related to the characteristics of the content and discourse in general: a) lack of clarity of expression; b) insufficient quality of the arguments (low level of thoroughness and relevance of the evidence, of cause and effect relations) and counterarguments as well as of the conclusions which are often superficial and irrelevant. The students are good at structuring their texts, they split them into required paragraphs and use proper linking phrases, but the content of what they say or write is not always satisfactory. They easily express their ideas within the content area of the topic under discussion at the moment. But if the task suggests considering the issue from a broad perspective and requires the application of the facts discussed long before in order to come up with well-grounded arguments, we witness incidental pauses and stammering in their speech. In this case we observe numerous examples of superficial or even primitive content both in their written essays and in oral utterances. In their interviews all the students underline that they occasionally look through the vocabulary lists stored in their gargets or consult electronic dictionaries as well. But they don't refer either to the graphic organizers or PPP prepared before for the previously discussed topics. The respondents also point out that they recognize and understand the majority of the words while reading or listening, but it is often a problem to use them in spontaneous communication. They unanimously support the idea of regular recycling the materials they read, listened to, watched, or discussed earlier.

In our view, recycling promoted at more advanced levels of foreign language acquisition is not less important than before for a number of reasons.

In case it is properly organized, it makes students' skills more flexible and considerably improves their fluency in both oral and written self-expression. Regularly enforced by the teacher or self-initiated by learners, recycling consolidates, transforms, and enriches their experiences as well as develops compensatory strategies. Due to all this, students become more confident, successful, and independent in foreign language communication.

To facilitate recycling at the advanced level, teachers can use a variety of techniques that will enhance the students' foreign language communicative competence. Among these techniques are the following

- ***Vocabulary Mix / Grammar Mix*** which provides an inventory of the vocabulary that students have retained in their long-term memory or which they seek in a dictionary to complete an exercise. This technique consists of such traditional language focused exercises as: "give synonyms / antonyms / derivatives" or "make up all possible combinations / idioms with the given words" or "what words are missing in a phrase / idiom?", or "change the structure of the sentences using..." etc. In modern foreign language teaching these exercises are completed either

in pairs or in circles or mingles [3], when one student must do the task and his / her partner has the key to check the accuracy of the neighbor. These exercises can also be done on the PC individually.

- **Scanning personal experiences** for what is relevant. Introduction to every new topic or a new issue of discussion / reading / listening / watching starts with scanning what they know for what is related to the new topic in terms of general knowledge, personal ideas, and attitudes, trying to express themselves in the foreign language. Scanning can take the form of mind mapping and brainstorming or making meaningful lists or filling out charts.

- **Retrospective Assignments** which refer students to the materials that they have studied before. They may be both language or information focused.

Here are a few examples of the latter that work well with university foreign language majors: “Work out a quiz / quest based on the information of the articles / videos that we discussed at the beginning of the semester”. “Look through a few texts from the past, copy out appropriate characteristics / facts / arguments to prove ...”. “Review a few PPP that you prepared for you previous projects and compare the information”. “Look through your previous essays and decide if your opinions have changed or not”.

- **Cross-topical discussions, debates, essays, and projects / surveys** are a wonderful way to recycle all the experiences that students have acquired inside and outside the classroom.

- **Study skills for recycling** enable students to regularly apply recycling in their learning. To develop such skills, we encourage students either to use the teacher`s prompts or create their own long-term ones and later use them on a regular basis whenever they fit. One of the examples of a long-term prompt is an outline for analyzing the content of a media article. Teachers should always encourage students to generate various graphic organizers and apply them again and again. It is also beneficial to stimulate students to find their own convenient ways of storing information for their future work.

Thanks to systematic and regular recycling even at a higher level of foreign language acquisition, learning takes the form of “*a spiral of increasing ability* in using language in order to get something done” [5, p. 91], connecting the past, the present and the future. Students activate all personal resources, they refine and enrich them. It makes them more efficient agents both of foreign language acquisition and communication. As a result, their learning efforts are not wasted.

#### **References:**

1. Borzova, Elena. Povtoreniye na starshei stupeni obucheniya inostrannomu yaziku. Inostraniye yaziki v shkole [Foreign languages at school]. 2003. №1. P.19-25 (in Russian).
2. Borzova, Elena. (2009). Recycling as an integral part of learning foreign languages. ViKipeda2009 Joensuu University, Finland. P. 155-168.
3. Borzova, Elena. (2014). Mingles in the Foreign Language Classroom. English Teaching Forum 52 (2): 20-27. US Department of State. US ISSN 1559-663X.
4. Davies, Paul & Pearse, Eric. (2009), Success in English Teaching. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 221 p.
5. Edge, Julian (1996), Essentials of English Language Teaching. Fourth impression. Edinburgh, Harlow: Longman Group UK Limited. 160 p.
6. Teaching English/British Council /BBC. Available at:  
<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/recycling> (accessed March 10, 2018).