

## **PEDAGOGICAL GRAMMAR AS THE FRAMEWORK OF TEFL RESEARCH. PART 12. FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: MECHANICAL MEMORIZATION AND OVERGENERALAZATION**

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The paper presents the results of the analysis of experimental research data in this area. Over a long period of observation, the author studied two groups of subjects of different age categories with diverse social characteristics, using the oral interview as a way of obtaining research material. It was found that both mechanical memorization and overgeneralization are distinct features characteristic of the process of foreign language acquisition. Specifically, the manifestations of mechanical memorization were observed in the use of *is not it* (*she, he, etc.*) as a universal means to form disjunctive questions in sentences with *can, have (got), going to, and is/are*, as well as the simultaneous use of several of these verb forms; the use of *what/where is* as a universal question word; the use of *I am* instead of *I* or *my*; the use of *going to* or *go to* as one word; the use of *it is* as a universal formula and *is* as a universal operator to form general questions; simultaneous use of two operators, accompanied by the wrong word order, as well as the use of 'empty' forms. Overgeneralization was manifested in the use of *are (is)* as a universal operator, in particular in its simultaneous use with other operators (modal verbs, *have (got)* and *do*); use of articles with possessive pronouns, proper names, quantitative numerals, uncountable nouns or with countable nouns in the plural, or with other parts of speech (not nouns); the use of the long plural ending (*-es*) and *the* simple past tense (*-ed*) with already marked plural and past forms; the use of the *-er* marker to form the comparative degree of polysyllable adjectives; the use of the operator *do* in special questions to the subject; the double marking of the same grammatical feature, in particular the past tense, definiteness, negation, auxiliary verbs, and possessiveness. The author states that there is no reason to believe that the functioning of mechanical memorization and overgeneralization in the process of learning a foreign language is fundamentally different from the acquisition of the native language.

**Key words:** acquisition of a foreign language, acquisition of a native language, double marking, mechanical memorization, overgeneralization.

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**Problem statement.** *Introduction to the series.* Numerous research in teaching foreign languages, specifically in the development of grammar competence, often seem to lack a common framework to integrate them into a single area with uniform approaches, terminology, and criteria. It accounts for the *current importance* of the issue under consideration.

*Introduction to this paper.* Taking into account the material analyzed in our previous articles in the series (see [4]), we may attempt to suggest a model of ‘learning’ a foreign language (in Krashen’s [5; 6] terminology), which implies the conscious processing of the input (the speech samples coming to the individual’s mind from the environment). As it follows from the said analysis, the samples of speech or/and the explicit grammar rules (in formal teaching) get into the learner’s mind. If the input contains speech samples only (without an explicit grammar rule), the learner either additionally requests the rule or attempts to formulate it on his/her own based on the available speech sample analysis. It is followed by the rule memorization, which is usually done through mnemonic activity, i.e., the learner tries to memorize it by rote learning. It results in the acquisition of knowledge, which is sometimes mistakenly taken for the ultimate aim of foreign language learning, as, in popular belief, the knowledge of the rule guarantees its correct use in communication. However, knowledge itself may not be enough to carry out a corresponding speech act spontaneously. To develop the required elements in the learner’s grammar mechanisms of speech, it might be necessary to perform a certain amount of activities (exercises), which may serve as a link between the knowledge and the said mechanisms. It may happen only if the amount and nature of the activities provide for the development of the appropriate automated (without the participation of the actual consciousness) skill, i.e. an ability to use a specific structure in real communication situations. For this purpose, the conditions of skills development have to correspond to the conditions of their functioning in speech. Specifically, the activities must take into account the features of real communication. They should also provide for the development of both formal (related to the form of the grammar structure) and functional aspects of the skill. Finally, the amount of the said activities (which may have significant individual variations) should ensure that the performance of an action is carried out at the skill level. Failure to conform to any of those conditions might result in the fact

that the grammar mechanisms will not possess the element providing for the operation of the corresponding structure in speech. In case of the insufficient number of activities, the grammar action would not reach the level of automatism and will be carried out (at best) in a discursive way, i.e. accompanied by constant reference to knowledge, slowly and with frequent errors. In the worst case, the command of the corresponding structure will remain at the level of knowledge, i.e. the learner will have an idea about the structure but will not be able to use it in spontaneous speech. If the conditions of the skill development do not match those of its functioning in speech (for example, if the development of the skills to use passive structures is based solely on the exercises involving the transformation of Active Voice structures into the Passive Voice ones), it will predominantly result in the development of the formal aspect of the skill. In this case, the learners will carry out the corresponding transformations in the classroom without errors and automatically, but may find themselves relatively helpless in elementary communicative situations that require the use of the passive structures. It is explained by the absence (in the learner's speech grammar mechanisms) of the situation recognition matrix that would connect the said situation with the corresponding structure stored in the learner's mind.

It is worth admitting that this description of the adult learners' FLA strategy is rather simplified. It does not represent the sequence of stages within any specific method of teaching, except, probably, the Grammar Translation Approach, whose days have long gone by. In real teaching, depending on the principles it is based on, other combinations of the stages, as well as completely different stages, are possible. Many inductive approaches excluded the stage of the conscious analysis altogether. However, it does not mean that the said analysis, as the learners' problem-solving activity, has been excluded from the FLA process. You may exclude the conscious analysis from the content of teaching, but you cannot exclude it from the learners' minds. Since adults view the language acquisition process as an intellectual task, they attempt to solve it by corresponding methods, trying to understand the structure and the principles of the said solution, irrespective of the conditions the teacher creates in the classroom.

A natural question arises: how do the *acquisition* (the predominantly subconscious) and *learning* (the predominantly conscious) processes correlate? Do they function as two independent systems that never

overlap or can the rules formulated through conscious analysis eventually become integrated into the intuitive grammar mechanisms? Can the FLA of the 12-year-olds and older learners be based on *acquisition* or is it unavailable to them? Do the hypothetic language universals that determine, as our analysis in the previous papers of this series showed, the sequence and the nature of grammar rules acquisition in the NLA continue to operate in the FLA as well? To answer these and many other questions, it is necessary to analyze the FLA process taking into account the characteristics established in the NLA process research. Specifically, in this paper, we are going to focus on two of them: mechanical memorization and overgeneralization.

**The aim.** The *object* of this part of the series is the comparative aspect of the native (NLA) and foreign languages acquisition (FLA) with the *subject* being the characteristics of the FLA. Its *aim* is to analyse the latter with the purpose of its further comparison with the NLA. This is the twelfth paper (see [4]) in a series of articles focusing on the Pedagogical Grammar (PG) issue [1], where the author, based on the research data, discusses the various aspects of the problem.

As it was mentioned in the previous papers of the series (see [4]), the development of an effective PG should be based on a sound psycholinguistic theory of the FLA. This kind of PG has to take into consideration the specifics of the speech grammar mechanisms development in general and the foreign language grammar mechanisms in particular, especially in the spheres where the NLA and FLA features are different. In our earlier articles (see [4]), we reviewed the strategies, procedures, and processes in the NLA. Specifically, in one of our previous contributions [4], we analysed the mechanical memorization and overgeneralization in the NLA. In this paper, we are going to review the same features in the FLA to compare them with those observed in the NLA.

**Analysis of current research.** There have been a number of investigations focused on mechanical memorization and overgeneralization in the FLA. The mechanical memorization research was mostly focused on rote learning. One investigation [9] found that though rote memorization was useful and effective in the Chinese ELT context, students should be acquainted with other vocabulary learning strategies. Similar conclusions were made concerning the Burmese learners who regard the rote learning strategy as effective not only in the initial stages but also at higher levels of learning English [8].

As far as overgeneralization is concerned, one study [7] established that Kenyan learners of English develop an interlanguage with its own phonological, morphological, and syntactic features based on overgeneralized rules. The authors thought it was due to the wrong teaching methodology. In another study [3], it was found that at earlier stages of acquisition, the constructional meaning of lexical causatives triggers the overgeneralization of causatives, but at the advanced stage, the main impact source was the lexical constraints of the learners' native language. Other authors [2], based on a single child's language acquisition observation, concluded that overgeneralization was primarily an innate faculty of the human mind.

Thus, the participation of both mechanical memorization and overgeneralization in the FLA is quite probable; however, their concrete manifestations are not clear and require further research.

**Presentation of the main material.** To clear up the problem, we have conducted our own original research, which is described below.

*Subjects.* Two groups: Group 1 – 11 adults, factory engineers – 7 males and 4 females, ages ranging from 27 to 50, all started learning English mostly from the zero level. The period of observation: two years. The subjects had had regular classes (2 times by 2 hours a week) 10 months a year followed by a two-month break. Group 2: 5 adults, students of an evening English course, age: 14-41, 2 males and 3 females. Regular classes (2 times by 3 hours a week). Upper elementary/lower intermediate level. The period of observation: 7 months.

*Elicitation procedure.* Oral interviews.

*Results. Mechanical memorization.* Like in the NLA, the subjects' speech contained many structures that had got into their mind as a result of mechanical memorization. They are stored there as holistic units without a clear understanding of their constituents or, if it is a single element, without any awareness of the dependence of its use upon the type of the sentence, the presence of the similar words or structures in the clause, etc. Here, like in the NLA, we may regard it as the result of the lexical principle of their memorization. The subjects' speech abounds in the examples of the language units retained in their mind due to mechanical memorization. Below follow the most typical of them observed in the subjects' speech:

(1) the use of *is not it (she, he, etc.)* as a universal tag to form the disjunctive question:

(a) with *can* – Subject (S) 1: *She can't swimming, isn't she?* S 4: *He can speak English, isn't it?* S 8: *We can translate, isn't?* S 9: *She can drive (a) car, isn't it?*

(b) with *have (got)* – S 8: *They have got many (=much) works, isn't it?* S 12: *We have (=can) translate ourselves, isn't?* S 14: *They have a rest, isn't it?*

(c) with *going to* – S 1: *You are going to be an engineer, isn't he?* S 2: *You (are) going to be a doctor, isn't it?*

(d) with *is /are* – S 1: *Is the bus, isn't it? (=It is a bus, isn't it?)* S 5: *They (are) working, isn't it?* S 9: *He isn't can swim, isn't it?* S 10: *Is working lawyer, isn't it? (=Your lawyer is working, isn't she?)* S 13: *Is there windier in our town, isn't it?*

(e) mixed cases – S 3: *Can she write English, can is not she?* S 4: *You go in to (going to be an) engineer, is not go in to?*

(2) the use of *what/where is* As universal question collocations – S 1: *Where is bus change? (=What bus must I change to?)* S 2: *Where is the live? (=Where do you live?)* S 4: *Where is can you buy (=Where can you buy it?)* S 7: *Where is a storeys your flat? (=What floor is your flat on?)* S 8: *What is (=Is there) anything in garage?* S 9: *What is college teacher? (=Is she a college teacher?)* S 15: *What is kind of doctor? (=What kind of doctor is he?)*

(3) the use of *I am* instead of *I* or *my* – S 1: *I am not can (=I can't)* S 2: *I'm this is know myself (=I know it myself);* S 4 and S 8: *I'm don't know* S 7: *May I'm open this bottle?* S 5: *I'm near (=seldom) go there;* S 9: *I'm isn't married;* S 16: *I'm is a lawyer;*

(4) the use of *going to* as one word – S 3: *Do you tell going to today? (=With whom are you going to talk today?)* S 4 (answer to the question: *Are you going to telephone?*): *No, I'm not going to be;* S 7: *They must are going to;* S 8: *We are going to at the yard;*

(5) other cases: (a) the use of *go to* as one word (cf. item 4) – S 1: *Go to three stops and get off;*

(b) the use of *it is* as a universal formula: S 9: (answer to the question: *Are you going to telephone John?*): *No, it's not (=No, I'm not going to);* S 12: *it's not speak (=Don't talk);*

(c) the use of *is* as a universal operator to form general questions – S 7: *Is this block has got a post office?* S 9: *Is the street has got bank and shop?*

(d) simultaneous use of two operators in combination with the wrong word order – S 3: *Not do you can (=Don't do it);*

6) the use of 'empty' forms – S 1: *What about is the bus?*; S 2: *You may change to be bus*; S 3: *When they are feel a better now (=Do they feel better now?)*; S 4: *Can do you talking with him? (=Do you want to talk to him?)*; S 8: *What do you feel our workers? (=How do our workers feel?)*; S 9: *What do you secretary head engineer? (=What is the head engineer's secretary doing?)*.

The examples given above convincingly prove that, like in the NLA, mechanical (without structure awareness) memorization is actively used in the FLA as well.

It may be assumed that, as in the FLA, subsequently such structures are gradually separated into constituent elements resulting in the emergence of the rule of their application while their use as formulae recedes and is not observed at the more advanced stages. Some of the examples given above may be also regarded as overgeneralisation (see further).

*Overgeneralisation.* As it was mentioned in the other papers of our series, generalization and overgeneralisation are among the key notions inherent in the NLA process. Overgeneralisation, caused by multiple intercategory connections of the semantic network in the individual's mind, signals that the process of the corresponding rule formation has entered its final stage. The very presence of the phenomenon of overgeneralisation means that there is a corresponding rule in the consciousness and this rule is at the stage of fine-tuning. A significant number of overgeneralisation cases were also recorded in the subjects' speech during the FLA. Some of them are presented below:

(1) the use of *are (is)* as a universal operator:

(a) with modal verbs – S 2: *We are not must read this (a) book, are we? – No, we are must*; S 4: *They are can have*; S 5: *They are must bring the instruments*; S 7: *We are can't put the bus here*; S 8: *We are can't*; S 9: *We are not must cross the street*; S 12: *They are not must read a book*; S 16: *We are not may put the bus*;

(b) with *have (got)* – S 8: *And are what for we've got the bus?* S 10: *On the street are have not shops*;

(c) with *do* – S 1: *Are you like she (her) work?* S 2: *Are you like is (=to be) here?* S 4: *Are they always so feel? What are they usually have for lunch?* S 7: *Where are you pitch the tents?* S 9: *What are now does your friends and family?* S 9: *She is often talk with you?* S 10: *Is she speak English?*

(2) overgeneralisation of articles:

(a) the use of *the* with possessive pronouns: S 1: *the your flat*; S 2: *This is my the pen*; S 14: *This is the my pen*;

(b) the use of *the* with proper nouns – all subjects;

(c) the use of *the* with cardinal numbers – S 1: *the four rooms*;

(d) the use of *a* with uncountable nouns or countable nouns in the plural – S 10: *a classes*, S 15: *a money*;

(e) the use of articles with other parts of speech (not nouns) – S 9: *She is a single*.

(3) overgeneralisation with *-es* (plural): S 1: *eyeseses*; S 2: *skylarkses*; S 5: *bookses*;

4) overgeneralisation with *-ed* (Simple Past Tense) – S 2: *wroted* (=wrote), *taked* (=took); S 5: *writed* (=wrote), *writes* (wrote), S 16: *maked* (=made);

5) overgeneralisation with *-er* (comparative degree of adjectives) – S 1: *expensiver* (=more expensive), S 13: *interestinger* (=more interesting), S 15: *bester* (=better);

6) overgeneralisation of *wh*-questions formation (the use of the operator in the questions to the subject) – S 1: *Who does write letters?* S 4: *Who did write letters?*

7) double marking (the use of excessive means to mark the same grammatical feature):

(a) Past tense – S 2: *Did you talked?* S 3: *Did she went?* S 4: *She couldn't wrote*; S 12: *Did you waited*; S 14: *I couldn't moved*; S 15: *Did she came in?*

(b) article – S 3: *in the\_they flat*; *that a instruction*;

(c) negation – S 1: *never... not*; S 3: *never\_not go*; *never can't drink*; S 8: *No any brushes on the bookshelves is not*;

(d) auxiliaries – S 4: *There is a big carpet is on the floor*; *there is the cup is on the table*; S 9: *This is are apple*; *Are apples is on the basket?* S 11: *Is this (=there) on the shelves is some the brushes?* S 12: *Is this kitchen is not water?*

(e) possessiveness – S 9: *Jane is my's grandmother*; *They are my's nieces*.

Some sentences look like double marking, but in fact, they are not. For example, S 8 and S 9 generated sentences like *I'm isn't married*; *I'm is a lawyer*; *Where I'm must get off*; *I'm don't know*, but it is not double marking. The analysis of the said subjects' utterances showed that *I'm* is used in their speech as an indivisible unit and functions as *I*, i. e. the said sentences should be interpreted as *I is a lawyer*, etc. The



same applies to the sentences observed in the speech of S 4: *Why we don't must cross the street? They are don't working now*, where *don't* is an equivalent of *not* (it follows from the other cases of the use of *not* in the utterances of this subject). Thus, the sentences above should be interpreted as *Why we not must cross the street* (the inversion mechanism has not been formed yet) and *They are not working now*. Some other cases of double marking given above may be interpreted in different ways, but we may go back to them after we have considered other procedures inherent in the FLA, specifically, the mechanism of analogy.

**Conclusions.** Summarizing the brief review of the functioning of mechanical memorization and overgeneralization in the FLA, it should be concluded that both mechanisms are distinctive features inherent in this process. Simultaneously, there is no reason to claim that either of them is fundamentally different from the similar mechanisms observed in the NLA. However, to formulate more reliable conclusions, more research is required, which is the *prospect of our further investigation*.

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## ПЕДАГОГІЧНА ГРАМАТИКА ЯК ФРЕЙМОВЕ ПОНЯТТЯ ДЛЯ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ У ГАЛУЗІ МЕТОДИКИ НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ. ЧАСТИНА 12. ЗАСВОЄННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ: МЕХАНІЧНЕ ЗАПАМ'ЯТОВУВАННЯ І НАДГЕНЕРАЛІЗАЦІЯ

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Наводяться результати аналізу експериментальних даних досліджень у згаданій сфері. Протягом довгого періоду спостережень автор дослідив дві групи випробуваних різних вікових груп із різними соціальними характеристиками, використовуючи усну співбесіду як спосіб одержання матеріалу дослідження. Встановлено, що як механічне запам'ятовування, так і надгенералізація є чіткими характеристиками, притаманними процесу засвоєння іноземної мови. Зокрема, проявами механічного запам'ятовування є вживання *is not it (she, he* тощо) як універсального

засобу для утворення розділових питань у реченнях із *can*, *have (got)*, *going to* та *is/are*, а також із одночасним застосуванням кількох із цих дієслівних форм; уживання *what/where is* як універсального питального слова; використання *I am* замість *I* або *my*; вживання *going to* або *go to* як одного слова; застосування *it is* як універсальної формули, а також *is* – як універсального оператора для утворення загальних питань; одночасного використання двох операторів, що супроводжується порушенням порядку слів, а також вживання «порожніх» форм. Надгенералізація проявлялась у використанні *are (is)* як універсального оператора, зокрема в одночасному їх уживанні з іншими операторами (модальними дієсловами, *have (got)* та *do*); використанні артиклів одночасно з присвійними займенниками, власними назвами, кількісними числівниками, незлічуваними іменниками чи зі злічуваними у множині або з іншими частинами мови (не іменниками); застосуванні довгого закінчення множини (*-es*) та простого минулого часу (*-ed*) до вже відповідно маркованих форм множини та минулого часу; вживанні маркера (*-er*) для утворення порівняльного ступеня багатоскладових прикметників; використанні оператора *do* у спеціальних питаннях до підмета; подвійному маркуванні однієї й тієї ж граматичної ознаки, зокрема, минулого часу, означеності, заперечення, допоміжних дієслів та присвійності. Автор констатує відсутність підстав уважати, що функціонування механічного запам'ятовування і надгенералізації у процесі засвоєння іноземної мови принципово відрізняється від засвоєння рідної мови.

**Ключові слова:** засвоєння іноземної мови, засвоєння рідної мови, механічне запам'ятовування, надгенералізація, подвійне маркування.

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