

NAME MOTIVATION AS A VOCABULARY LEARNING BOOSTER

The major LII vocabulary learning difficulties are analyzed. An overview of the results of experiments on learning different types of English nouns by Russian-speaking adults is presented. It is argued in the paper that motivation of a name is a language universal which helps to focus attention on the specific feature of a concept, to capture its prototype and semantic boundaries, to activate perception, emotions, thinking, and memory, and thus becomes a booster, catalyst accelerating the processes of remembering and recalling. However, name motivation may also become a hindrance for a second language learner when a motivated native word correlates with its non-motivated equivalent in LII, and it should be taken into account in the methodology of LII teaching.

The vocabulary system in any human language is very numerous and extensive. The names for the concepts to be learned in our native language (**LI**) are far more than a million. The often cited in the media data about the individual vocabulary state that an average college graduate uses in speech about 25,000 words and understands about ten times more, quite an impressive number, even though these figures lack in research credibility /1/. Yet the reason for the ability to learn words and the mechanism for its primary development is still a matter of very hot linguistic debates /2/.

What is undoubted so far is that the human mind remains sensitive to learning new words of the native language through all the life span alongside with learning new concepts, and it contributes a lot to general knowledge acquisition. According to 'a critical period' theory vocabulary is the only component of the language structure that does not have age restrictions for its acquisition in contrast to phonological learning or learning some grammar features and we enjoy this ability throughout our life /3/.

Learning a second/foreign language (LII)¹ is different from vocabulary

¹ Bilingualism is treated here in its broadest sense as an ability of a person to communicate in

acquisition in the mother tongue. It is based on the already acquired native language. But it does not make the process easier or quicker. Vice versa, second language learning (SLL) is a life-long job.

Vocabulary learning plays a special role in SLL. To a very great extent, SLL is possible due to the *ever functioning vocabulary learning ability* which only slightly decreases with age. This ability also contributes a lot to grasping the grammar and basic phonological features of the second language.

But what does learning a LII word mean?

Inexperienced second language learners usually have a strong intuitive belief that to be fluent in it they need to learn mainly words.

To a big extent such learners are right. All human beings are provided with similar cognitive experience by the common structure of mind and language architecture. For example, sentences, at least simple ones, are structured similarly in all human languages because they are based on universal grammar rules. Thus, Subject-Predicate-Object word order is characteristic of all the languages as it is the most common rule for their sentence structure. No matter how different the LII may be, a learner is learning a human language, and it makes its learning possible.

In this process of learning vocabulary the differences in LI and LII **word forms** are the most obvious and come on the onset.

An English language learner, for example, needs first of all (at least on the initial stage of the language learning) *the English label* that may substitute a certain *native name*, in our case, a Russian one, to utter and recognize it in speech. The process of learning English words by a Russian adult speaker is facilitated by the presence in English, like in any other human language, of some **international words and borrowings** that make second language words *similar in 'outer' sound and written forms* to the conceptually related native words (*capital* and *канина*, *sputnik* and *снудник*).

The process of learning the English vocabulary is also facilitated by the existence in it of some **cognate words of the common origin** (*water* and *вода*, *brow* and *бровь*).

The genealogical relatedness of the languages as well as extending processes of internalization and globalization give us the foundation to believe that even in most exotic languages there will be such kinds of words, and we may start our second language vocabulary learning with them, to get a better idea of the phonetic forms of the studied words and their grammar.

Learning of word-forms is very important, but it's not yet all vocabulary one of his two languages, even if it is learned in artificial environment as a foreign language.

learning. Learning LII vocabulary requires much more than memorizing just new phonetic, written or grammar forms of isolated words. It requires learning a lot of other formal and informal information.

The crucial and most difficult stage in learning a word, however, is acquiring its correct and language-specific *meaning and usage*.

It is well known that word-meaning is the result of differently tailored semantic space in the process of naming, and it is practically never the same in different languages. **The contents and semantic boundaries** for the LII words are to be learned anew because they practically never coincide with boundaries caught by the native tongue words. For example, the contents and semantic boundaries for the concept named by the English word *a herring* ‘sea-fish, valued as food (*fresh, salted, or dried*)’ and by the Russian word *сельдь* ‘small sea-fish usually consumed salted’ are close and yet different. (Cf. also a wider semantic space of the English word *blue* that includes the spaces of two Russian words *голубой* and *синий*).

Then, the culturally bound or taken at random **prototypes of conceptual categories** expressed by the correlated words in two languages almost never coincide, either. For example, Thus, a Russian speaking language learner of the English language has to learn that a typical *house* is a two-storied building for one family only, and that a multi-storied building with apartments is not a house, as it can viewed by the Russian-speaking people.

And then, a name for the concept in LII **keeps a different company with other names** both in the vocabulary system and in speech in comparison with the correlated name in LI. It has different:

morphological relations (derived words from *fruit* are: *fruitarian, fruiter, to fruit, fruit-pie, fruit-fly*, and some others, while its Russian correlated name *фрукт* has the only derived word *фруктовый*);

epidigmatic relations (in contrast to the Russian word *фрукт*, having only two senses, or rather names created by lexical-semantic naming (**1**: ‘a succulent plant part used chiefly in a dessert’ **2**. (in the phrase: *Hy у фрукт!*) about a person with a difficult character’), the English word *fruit* has many senses (**1a**: ‘a product of plant growth (as grain, vegetables, or cotton)’ **b**: ‘the usu. edible reproductive body of a seed plant; a succulent plant part used chiefly in a dessert’ **2**: ‘OFFSPRING, PROGENY’ **3**: ‘PRODUCT, RESULT’ **4**: ‘a male homosexual);

paradigmatic relations (synonyms of *fruit* are: *product, production, re-productive structure; consequence*; etc.);

syntagmatic relations (examples of collocations with the English word

fruit are: *organic fruit, to run out of fruit*, etc, and most of them are different from collocations of the correlated Russian word *фрукты*).

A learner has also to study **stylistic registers and connotations** of the words in the target language, as they also may be different. (Russian *миссия* ‘special task’ is *bookish* while its English correlative name *mission* is quite *neutral*; English and Russian speakers have different connotations with the correlated words *mushrooms* and *грибы*, for example).

A learner should also be aware of a **different frequency of usage of correlated words** (e.g., in the English language the words *love, happy, special, and dear* are much more frequently used than their equivalents in Russian).

And then, an English language learner should be aware of **lexical gaps in Russian for some English words** (e.g., *caboose, marshmallow, scoop, cobbler, sandwich course, middle-school, yuppies, gingerbread, eleven-plus, tooth-fairy, brownie, bloater, or back-to-back houses*) as well as of **lexical gaps in English for some Russian words** (many Russian words are rendered in Russian-English dictionaries descriptively, as *горемыка* ‘poor/unfortunate fellow’, *дипломник* ‘student working over his diploma paper’, *декада* – ‘ten days’, *валежник* – ‘wind fallen twigs and branches’, *безденежье* – ‘lack of money’).

Meaning differences between LI and LII words are very difficult to learn, and they are usually ignored by the learners for many reasons.

Firstly, they are not obvious as differences in word-forms are. Moreover, they are usually believed to be the same, and thus these correlated words in two languages may be wrongly viewed as perfect cross-language synonyms. Such a belief has a cognitive ground because conceptual space in minds of all human beings is largely the same due to the common cognitive architecture and to the basically the same outer world. Thus, both the Russian word *фрукты* and the English one *fruit* stand for the concept ‘plant growth with seeds, like apple or plums, usu. eaten for dessert’, and this common semantic core may easily provide understanding between speakers of the two languages in many situations.

Then, semantic differences between LI and LII words are still poorly presented in modern dictionaries.

Remaining within semantic boundaries of native words a LII learner will inevitably make gross and annoying **lexical-semantic mistakes**.

These mistakes are similar to those made by a child in acquiring his mother tongue words. The LII word-meaning is thought to be broader than it is accepted in the language community due to **overextension** and is expressed in

the wrong use of the word (as *place* for *‘a berth’ or for *‘a piece of luggage’, or *salted* in **a salted cucumber* for ‘a pickled cucumber’) or narrower due to **overnarrowing** revealed in misunderstanding of LII word by a LI speaker (e.g., the word *fruit* in *the fruit of an oak-tree*). These lexical-semantic mistakes in SLL are not connected with a person’s cognitive development but with a different language community belonging and they are more difficult to eradicate.

So, learning a word meaning in LII is learning:

- new prototypes for familiar conceptual categories;
- different contents and semantic boundaries of a concept labeled by a LII name;
- a different set of a name relations with other lexical units in LII;
- lexical gaps for correlated names in Russian and in English.

So, vocabulary information is very extensive, and LII vocabulary learning is the most *time-consuming activity* for a second language learner, especially for an adult one. In addition, it is never sufficient. An adult is never satisfied with the vocabulary stock which is already learned because she/he always wants to express more than he/she can for being limited by the vocabulary. Second language vocabulary learning process is also very *tricky* because no matter how intensive is the individual vocabulary of a second language learner, it inevitably ends in numerous and various lexical-semantic mistakes in speech. It is also of interest to note that learning this vast information about the form and meaning of LII words **neither deletes nor mixes up in mind the previous semantic information about the words in the mother tongue**. Two vocabulary systems happily coexist together except cases of lexical-semantic inferences caused by the lack of proper knowledge about any of them.

Our mind is a most powerful remembering and retrieving system, and yet it remains an enigma *how we manage to learn so much vocabulary information*, especially being adults and having a matured brain which is less flexible than a baby’s. To acquire such a huge complex of information about the second language vocabulary in addition to the vocabulary in the native tongue one should be equipped with a special language learning mechanism which is supported both by the language system itself and the psychological process of learning.

Leaving out here the questions of the neurological and psychological bases for vocabulary learning that are the subject matter of special cognitive investigations, we shall focus our attention here on the purely linguistic

question:

In what way does the language system provide this learning?

We shall consider here only one **linguistic factor** inherited in any human language system and promoting learning words, and namely, on a name **motivation, or ‘inner form’**, i.e., the presence within its form structure of some other language unit.

Linguists following St. Ullmann distinguish three types of motivation: **morphological motivation** (*loveliness* [from (**love** + **-ly**) + **-ness**]), **phonetic motivation** (*a cuckoo* [from the characteristic call of this bird]), and **semantic motivation** (*a leg of a table* [from ‘a **leg** of a person or animal supporting the body’]) [4].

All newly derived names in a language are motivated, some of them are losing motivation for various reasons, but the fact that most of them retain this quality through centuries point out to the necessity of this quality for the language functioning. The absolute majority of all naming lexical units in any language are motivated. In English, for example, according to some estimations there are about 70 percent derived words, which are morphologically motivated, and the total number of motivated names there will be still greater adding other types of motivated names.

Some of the words that lost motivation may **become remotivated**, and this fact also adds to the importance of this language phenomenon for the language functioning.

We assume here that motivation of a name may be viewed as a language universal contributing to the learnability of a huge name inventory in the first, and what is more important for us here, in the second language.

Intuitively and from our learning experience we may say that such names as **loveliness, a cuckoo or a leg** (of a table) are easy to remember and to recall. But to prove the dependence of recalling a LII name on its motivated or non-motivated character the following **experiment** was carried out.

Experiment 1

Subjects of the experiment:

Ten Russian-speaking University students of English.

The material for the experiment:

Different groups of English words, presumably unfamiliar to the respondents, motivated and non-motivated, and differently related from the point of view of motivation to their Russian equivalents.

So, first we got two groups of English **non-motivated** words that:

1) *correlate with Russian motivated words*, as **gazebo, yolk, bile, aspic, fossil, groom, consent, tendon, or thistle**; and

2) *correlate with non-motivated Russian words*, e.g.: **wreath, willow, blister, hyphen, itch, pun, slander, or cuff**;

and two groups of English **motivated** words that:

3) *correlate with non-motivated Russian equivalents*, as **peanut, golden eagle, pan-cake, sailor's jacket, egg-plant, stomach-pump, humming-bird, burner, or lightning**;

4) *correlate with motivated Russian equivalents*. This group of English motivated words, however, is subdivided into 2 subgroups:

a) *having similar motivation with Russian equivalents*, as **book-printing, free-thinking, glass-blower, hunter, needle-holder, owner, waterfall, over-heating, soft-heartedness, or super-sensitivity**; and

b) *having different motivation with Russian equivalents*, as **Lady-bird 'божья коровка' – lit.: God's little cow, Palm Sunday 'Вербное воскресенье' – lit.: Pussy-willow Sunday, fortune-teller 'гадалка' – lit.: the woman who guesses, lightning-conductor 'громоотвод' – lit.: thunder-conductor, nobleman 'дворянин' – lit.: a court-man, wheel-chair 'инвалидная коляска' – lit.: a carriage for an invalid, money-box 'копилка' – lit.: an equipment for saving money, wood-louse 'мокрица' – lit.: related to the wet, ice-hole – 'прорубь' – lit.: a hack into, or construction paper 'цветная бумага' – lit.: coloured paper**.

We also got the group of non-motivated English words similar to the Russian equivalents in their outer form (spelling and pronunciation) because of *having a common origin or the source of borrowing with the correlated non-motivated Russian words*. Such English words are:

a) *almost identical to the Russian names in sound and spelling forms*, as **alligator, arsenal, duel, cascade, or quartet**; and

b) *similar to the Russian words sound and spelling forms*, as **Aryan, jug-**

gler, or *hierarchy*.

All in all we got 7 groups of 140 English names, with 20 words in each of them.

The procedure of the experiment:

The experiment had three stages.

First, the students were given sheets of paper with alphabetically arranged 140 English words with their translation into English, and were asked to mark on a special graded scale (from -3 to +3) the presumptive (intuitive) degree of their recalling, e.g.:

1. <i>alligator</i> 'аллигатор'	-	-	-	0	+	+	+
2. <i>arsenal</i> 'арсенал'	-	-	-	0	+	+	+

After the students had given in the papers, they were given another sheets, and tested on the actual recalling of these English words by means of translation from Russian into English, though they had not been instructed to remember these words. After that the experimenter read the keys, and the corrections, if necessary were made.

The student handed in the papers, and then, again, half an hour later, a second test on the students' word recalling was done to test their later recalling.

The experiment results and discussion:

The easiest English names to recall according to the students' intuition are the words of the following 4 groups:

- *having practically identical 'outer' sound and written forms with Russian ones: alligator 'аллигатор', arsenal 'арсенал', duel 'дуэль', etc.*

These names are marked on the scale mostly as + 3;

- *with practically identical 'inner forms' with Russian equivalents, like owner 'владелец', waterfall 'водопад', or needle-holder 'иглодержатель' were also marked on the positive part of the scale on average from + 3 to + 2.*

On the positive scale and close to these groups are also the words:

- *with similar 'outer' form to Russian names: Aryan 'ариец', or barge 'баржа'. They are marked mainly on the positive part of the scale from +3 to +1;*

- *motivated names that correlate to non-motivated Russian equivalents: peanut 'арахис', golden eagle 'беркут', milk-can 'бидон'. They are also marked on the positive part of the scale mainly from +3 to 0.*

The following three groups of English words were felt as the units that

need special efforts to remember:

- *motivated names correlating to motivated Russian names, though their motivating features or word-derivation are different* as **runaway** ‘беглец’, **madman** ‘безумец’, **Lady-bird** ‘божья коровка’, etc. The degree of recalling from **+2 to -1**;

- *non-motivated names correlated with non-motivated Russian ones*, as **kennel** ‘будка’, or **wreath** ‘венок’ were next to them in difficulty, yet the students were much more optimistic about the possibility of their recalling: it was not too low and marked on the scale from **+2 to -2**;

- *non-motivated lexical units correlated to Russian motivated names*: **mutton** ‘баранина’, **gazebo** ‘беседка’, **yolk** ‘желток’, etc. These words were regarded as **the hardest to recall** and marked on the scale mostly as **-3**.

So, word motivation is felt to perform a dubious function. On the one hand it may be a beneficial factor for better remembering and recalling English words when its character coincides in both the languages or when English words are motivated but correlated native words are not motivated at all.

Yet motivation may also play a restraining function in case the word is motivated only in the native tongue or when the character of motivation in correlated words is different.

The first test on actual recalling these English names almost completely confirmed their intuition. But the number of correctly recalled English motivated names, especially those with different from LI motivation (e.g., **wood-louse** ‘мокрица’, **ice-hole** ‘полынья’) turned out to be greater than the students had anticipated. And this fact points to the importance of English word motivation for better remembering the word.

In the second test on recalling the correctly recalled English names with ‘inner form’ like **wood-louse** ‘мокрица’ even outnumbered the names with similar ‘outer’ (sound) structure to the Russian names like **Aryan** ‘ариец’.

Only non-motivated words in both the languages like **hyphen** ‘дефис’ or English non-motivated words related to Russian words with an ‘inner form’ like **bile** ‘желчь’, **mutton** ‘баранина’ still caused some difficulties. The latter group of the English nouns was as predicted most difficult for recalling.

The probable reason is that that learning LII is based on LI, and in the process of recalling such words the learners begin with translating the Russian constituent-morphemes literally into English and try to assemble them in a similar derivational pattern, which is completely wrong, as the correlated English words are non-motivated. So, the motivated forms of the Russian

names in such cases are quite misleading for the students in recalling the English simple non-motivated words.

Summing up the results of the 1-st experiment, we may say the following.

1) Motivated LII words that differ in the character of motivation from motivated words in the native tongue need special attention on the part of the learner and the teacher.

2) Nevertheless, motivation plays a very important role in the remembering and recalling LII words as it plays in acquiring LI words in our early childhood.

The results of our research prove that motivation of a LII name not only facilitates the remembering of word-form. It contributes a lot to its **proper meaning acquisition**, capturing its prototype and even semantic boundaries, and that is proved by the following experiment.

Experiment 2

We asked the ten Russian-speaking students involved in the previous experiment to try and give definitions to the English words of different groups.

First to define were English non-motivated words having Russian motivated equivalents. They were most difficult to learn because motivated character of their Russian equivalents distracted their attention and even misled them (*mutton* ‘баранина’, *bile* ‘желчь’, *gazebo* ‘беседка’, *yolk* ‘желток’, *cornice* ‘перелесок’, etc).

Semantic boundaries, prototypes of correlated words in different languages are different, and these differences are often reflected in dictionary definitions. These words are not exceptions, compare, for example:

mutton – ‘the flesh of sheep, esp. of mature sheep, used as food’ and *баранина* [from *баран* ‘ram’] – ‘мясо барана или овцы, употребляемое в пищу’ – ‘the flesh of **ram** or sheep, used as food’;

bile – ‘a bitter greenish to golden brown alkaline fluid secreted by the liver and stored in the gall bladder’ and

желчь [from *желтый* ‘yellow’] ‘желто-зеленая или желто-бурая горькая жидкость, выделяемая печенью и желчным пузырем’ ‘**yellow-greenish** or **yellow-brownish** bitter fluid ...’;

gazebo – ‘a summerhouse, garden pavilion, or belvedere, **sited to command a view**’ and

беседка [from *беседа* ‘talk’] – ‘крытая легкая постройка в саду, парке

для отдыха, беседы, защиты от дождя и солнца’ ‘a sheltered light construction in the garden, park **for rest, talk, protection from rain and sunshine**’;

coppice – ‘a thicket or dense growth of small trees or bushes, esp. one **regularly trimmed back to stumps** so that a continual supply of small poles and firewood is obtained’ and

перелесок – ‘1. небольшой лесной участок 2. молодой лес среди крупного леса’ ‘1. little woodland 2. young wood among the thick one’.

But without being acquainted with dictionary definitions, the students’ definitions of the English non-motivated words were totally the same as for the Russian ones. They remained **in captivity of their mother tongue words, their contents, boundaries and prototypes.**

The students’ definitions, however, to the *English motivated names* having Russian *non-motivated equivalents* in most cases were *much closer* to the English dictionary definitions. Thus, student’s definition of *jelly-fish* is ‘a sea-creature with a *jelly-like* body’, and it doesn’t remind the dictionary definition of the correlative Russian word ‘*медуза*’: ‘a sea-creature with a *bell- or umbrella-like* body of a *galantine-like* consistency’).

Thus, motivation of LII name contributes not only to better recalling of a name form but also to adequate meaning acquisition by focusing on the prototypical features of a semantic category and making the word learning process informative, entertaining, and efficient. A similar technique of remembering words by establishing associations was worked out by methodologists and is known as *mnemonics technique* (e.g. /5/).

Conclusion

- Words being the product of mind are created and organized in the way to be effectively and efficiently processed by it.
- Motivation is one of the language’s tools in this machinery. It creates imagery, establishes reliable associations with familiar words and concepts. In this way motivation provides a human mind with a natural innate perfect memory device.
- LII vocabulary learning makes a wide use of the native vocabulary knowledge. In many ways it simplifies but in some ways complicates this process, as in the case of learning non-motivated LII words related to the motivated ones in the mother tongue.
- Methodologists should take into account the misleading influence of

some native language motivated words on learning their second language equivalents, and organize their effective learning.

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1. Words being the product of mind are created and organized in the way to be effectively and efficiently processed by it. Motivation is one of the language's tools in this machinery. Motivation creates imagery, establishes reliable associations with familiar words and concepts, and thus it provides a human mind with a natural innate perfect memory device (7/).

2. LII vocabulary learning makes a wide use of the native vocabulary knowledge and that in many ways simplifies but in some ways complicates the process. Methodologists should take into account the misleading influence of some native language motivated words on their second language equivalents, and organize their effective learning.