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ОБУЧЕНИЕ ДОШКОЛЬНИКОВ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ СРЕДСТВАМИ ДЕТСКОЙ АВТОРСКОЙ МУЛЬТИПЛИКАЦИИ: ОПЫТ ПРИМЕНЕНИЯ

И.А. Гордиенко

Don State Technical University, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation

Аннотация. Рассматривается образовательный потенциал метода детской авторской мультипликации как современного средства обучения дошкольников иностранному языку. Целью проведенного исследования стало определение образовательных возможностей использования данного метода при обучении детей дошкольного возраста английскому языку. Особое внимание уделяется практическому аспекту использования средств мультипликации в сочетании с традиционными способами обучения дошкольников иностранному языку в рамках деятельностного подхода в условиях современного ДООУ, а также достигнутым результатам за двухгодичный период использования данного метода.

Ключевые слова: дошкольники, обучение английскому языку, авторская мультипликация

Introduction

Teaching preschool children a foreign language is a complex process. On the one hand, children have an excellent memory and easily remember new things, and on the other hand, due to their age, they do not have sufficient self-regulation that would allow them to maintain internal motivation for a long time. Thus, the motivation of students is completely concentrated in the hands of the teacher. However, the topic of personal characteristics of a teacher of a foreign language, that is undoubtedly important, will not be considered now.

Yet, modern challenges require modern solutions: technologies are developing, new teaching methods are emerging. To these we refer the method of children's authorial animation. Therefore, the goal of our research is to determine the educational potential of the method in teaching a foreign language to preschoolers.

The scientific novelty of the research is determined by the fact that in our study we tried to stipulate the educational and methodological possibilities of teaching English to preschool children by using modern animation tools supported by the creative potential of children.

Following from the above, the purpose of the experimental study was based on the assumption that the use of the method of children's authorial

animation in the foreign language acquisition by preschool children can contribute to a more effective development of their communicative competence.

The relevance of the current research is that, first, this method is relatively new and is now at the stage of its formation, and second, it was not previously used in teaching a foreign language to preschool children. Therefore, our research is promising.

Research and its results

Speaking about the early teaching of children a foreign language, we should mention the works of such researchers as Meshcheryakova V.N. [Мещерякова, 2006], Milrud R.P. [Мильруд, 2016], Shtayneprays M.V. [Штайнепрайс, 2007], Shishkova I.A. [Шишкова, 2020], Krizhanovskaya T.V. [Крижановская, 2015], Dooley J. [Dooley, 2009], Reiley V. [Reiley, 2005], Komarova Yu.A. [Комарова, 2016] and others.

As practice shows, a great number of preschool educational institutions use them when organizing additional education services, in particular, teaching English. Most of the preschool educational institutions of Rostov-on-Don and the Rostov region use the partial programs of Yu.A. Komarova and M.V. Shtayneprays.

All of them are based on an activity approach to teaching a foreign language: children are actively involved in the educational process through joint activities with the teacher and each other, classes are held in a playful way with the involvement of a large amount of visual material, students are constantly encouraged, the teacher creates the maximum of possible conditions for the language environment.

We fully support the authors of the above-mentioned methods, since these provisions are most consistent with the achievements of children aged 4-7, and have proven themselves in practice.

Yet, what should be also noted, the rapid development of the society and technological progress dictate their own conditions. In particular, modern preschool children independently use tablets and smartphones, have excellent Internet search skills, which, of course, in the long run will be an undoubted advantage, when at an older age they will be able to apply their skills in professional training and work, but this also creates certain difficulties for teachers who are used to working in an old-fashioned way.

It seems to us that this problem is related to the fact that children, when sending a request to the Web, receive an instant response in the form of the necessary content, they do not know how to wait, are not used to making special efforts, so they quickly lose interest in what is happening if they do not see an instant response from the teacher, as well as their own progress in mastering something new, in our case, a foreign language (which in principle is impossible, because learning a language is not a momentary matter, but a long process which requires regular practice). In addition, the virtual world is much more colorful and brighter than even beautiful, but not animated teacher's visual materials.

Therefore, modern children require modern solutions.

The system of early teaching a foreign language to children, as noted earlier is based on three pillars: play, environment and praise. Many of the teaching techniques seem to be based on the activity approach to learning in its truncated form, namely, they imply the use of a limited set of activities (for example, coloring a picture, executing a command, etc.). In other words, these methods assume a responsive or reactive behavior on the part of students when learning a foreign language. Therefore, it seems to us that these techniques often develop a limited set of speech skills, without proper support for the creative abilities of children.

We believe that by relying on the creative component of preschool children, the formation of their communicative competence in a foreign language will be more fruitful and effective. When using the method of children's authorial animation as an active method of learning, the position of children shifts towards proactive behavior: in their creative spontaneity, they begin to use speech models in a foreign language more actively and consciously. It seems to us that this happens because in such conditions the child utters a phrase in the language being studied not by the "parrot" method, without understanding why he does it, reproducing what he has heard automatically, but because he has an internal request to "revive" the created character with the help of his voice.

In this article, we would like to share our own experience of teaching English to preschool children using the method of children's authorial animation.

Before describing our research and its results, it is worth mentioning that in modern pedagogical science, two terms used are often confused: animation therapy and animation. The first implies the use of a ready-made creative product (cartoon) for certain purposes, for example, in the correction of fears [Путрепс, 2018] or verbal aggression [Самофал, 2012] of preschoolers with mental retardation, while the second is more often used as a means of correcting communication and speech disorders of preschool children with general speech underdevelopment or disabilities [Яруллина, 2020; Путрепс, 2018]. In any case, both sides of the same phenomenon of a "Cartoon" – both its creation and further watching – have a positive impact on the mental and speech development of preschool children.

To date, there is one program approved by the Federal Institute for the Development of Education (FIDE) of the Russian Federation, authored by Volosovets T.V., Markova V.A., and Averin S.A. "STEM-education of preschool and primary school children" [Волосовец, Маркова, Аверин, 2019]. This partial modular program considers animation as an end in itself, mastering of which lets children create cartoons – they come up with characters and a script, learn how to use animation equipment correctly, and post-process video content.

In our activities, our goal is not to teach children to make cartoons – we do not raise future animators, directors, camera operators and screenwriters, we only use the opportunities of modern technologies when teaching a foreign language.

Thus, in the pilot mode, the method of teaching English using children's authorial animation was tested in 2019 in municipal budget preschool educational institution No. 116 (Rostov-on-Don) as an additional means of teaching preschoolers a foreign language within the framework of the additional education program "English and preschool child" authored by M.V. Shtayneprays [Штайнепрайс, 2007]. A group of students, consisting of 45 people, was divided into age groups: children aged 4-5, children aged 5-6, and children aged 6-7. In each of the groups in which the animation method was used, there were 10 people (3 control groups of different ages); another 15 people were taught English according to the M.V. Shtayneprays program without attracting funds from the author's animation. Running ahead, we would like to inform you that in 2020, the preparatory group (children of 6-7) finished studying in kindergarten and went to school, thus, out of 45 children, 20 remained, who in the 2020-2021 academic year continued their education under the second-year program; also, an additional group of 10 children were recruited to the third control group. Now, all groups of students were trained according to the M.V. Shtayneprays's program, but with the involvement of the method of children's authorial animation.

As practice shows, children who were taught English under the main program with the application of the animation method showed better results in the keen learning of the English language than those who were trained only under the main program without the animation method applied. Besides, there were no quantitative losses during the two years of study among preschoolers, which indicates a high internal motivation of children to continue studying English.

Classes in groups were held twice a week, the duration varied depending on the age of the children – from 20 to 30 minutes.

Each lesson was based on three points: each lesson includes all kinds of games in a foreign language, acting out scenes, role-playing games, outdoor games, etc., teachable to children of 4-7 years; children were necessarily immersed into the language environment by the teacher's own efforts and with the inclusion in the educational process of foreign-language authentic material – different songs, fairy tales, counting rhymes, etc. both in audio format and in the form of video; mandatory praise for children at the end of each lesson, as well as during the lesson itself, thus supporting the external motivation of students (this includes all kinds of encouragement in the form of stickers – suns, hearts, cats, etc., as well as traditional, one can say, ritual "high five" and hugs at the end of the lesson).

Since the classes, on the one hand, are relatively autonomous, and on the other hand, they are united thematically, in fact, the first 4 classes (there were 8 of them per month) were devoted to the elaboration of the language (grammatical and lexical) material and its development in a playful form, thus anticipating the further animation creativity of children.

We should dwell on this in more detail. Teaching children a foreign language, we, like many teachers, came to the conclusion that children are very creative individuals who like to create something new, and most importantly

THEIR OWN. And given the knowledge and, most importantly, the desire of modern children to master devices and technology, as well as their interest in cartoons (is there a child who does not like cartoons?), we tried to combine these two elements, thus exploiting the natural curiosity of children in solving practical problems of teaching them a foreign language.

It is also very important to note that, firstly, shooting a cartoon in English does not replace or cancel the learning of the language itself, and secondly, preliminary preparation consists in working out the necessary lexical and grammatical material, which is valuable in itself, and will also be used in voicing the cartoon.

In addition, the artistic activity of creating a cartoon is not only the organization of the mechanical process of producing characters and depicting their movements in the shot, but also a full-scale preliminary preparation and post-processing of the resulting product.

Returning directly to the method: during the preparatory period, classes with children are based on their physical and mental capabilities, again, in a playful way, thus implementing an activity approach to learning, and with maximum immersion in the language environment. Of course, the Russian language is present at the beginning of the training, it duplicates the English, but gradually reduces to zero. When children acquire the necessary language material, we lead them to the idea of creating their own cartoons. This suggestion was always met with great enthusiasm by the children.

We start with simple things. Next, we will give an example of one of the English language classes using the animation program. However, first, we should tell you about the tools we use in our work. Today, there are many paid and free programs and applications for personal computers and smartphones that are available to a wide range of consumers. We chose several such programs. The criterion for our choice is simple: the program should be as easy to use as possible, so that a child of 4-7 can master it. In our arsenal, of course, there are also advanced animation and video processing programs, but with children, we work in programs and applications that are accessible to their understanding.

Therefore, our main tools are the *Stop Motion Studio* smartphone application and the *HUE-animation* program. Both of them have both free and paid functionality. The first one in the framework of classes with children is quite enough.

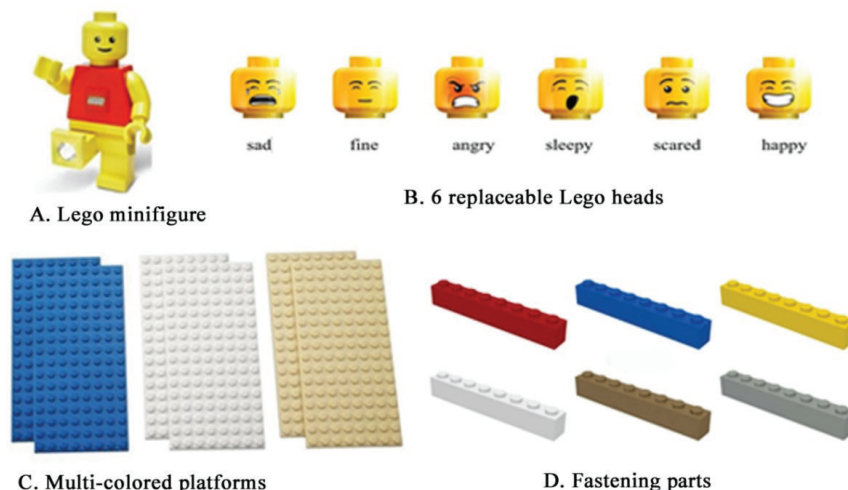
As for the characters for the cartoon, we should immediately make a reservation that the purpose of using the author's animation tools in English classes, which we set for ourselves, is not to create a cartoon as an end in itself, but to apply the acquired language skills in practice. Animation is just a means to an end, and the goal is to get children into speech. Therefore, ready-to-use materials are most often used.

Below is a fragment of the English lesson ("Emotions. Verbs of movement") using the animation method.

I. Preparation

Before children begin to shoot a sketch, it is necessary to carry out preliminary work to activate fine motor skills, attention, as well as children's interest in what is happening. At the preparatory stage, the necessary vocabulary is updated.

Children sit at tables, in front of them are small sets of the constructor, namely (pic. 1).



Pic. 1. Lego Construction Kit

II. Lesson logic

What do we need heads for? To remember different emotional states of a person. By changing the heads (facial expressions) of the Lego minifigure, we change its attitude to what is happening. We think about what situations the hero may find himself in to experience the appropriate emotion.

Next, we move the Lego minifigure, giving it different poses: it sits, lies, stands, runs, moving along the platform.

In parallel, we recall the verbs of movement, and then connect them with the emotional state in short phrases, for example, "I'm scared. I run".

Children get tired quickly, so it is necessary to make sure to pause in activity, make physical activity breaks.

After the break, we continue to work with the Lego minifigure, inventing a story for it. So, the children prepared by preliminary work offer to make a video about how the "little man" participated in competitions. The final can be any: minifigure wins, loses, gets injured, etc. Most often, children select the first option.

III. Results

At the end of the lesson, we have:

1. Revision and consolidation of previously learned words and grammatical constructions, worked out in a real situation (playing with a Lego minifigure);

2. Ready-made cartoon sketch, which may be the first in the cycle of adventures of the hero (pic. 2). Optionally and upon request of the children there is a whole series of sports adventures of a Lego hero can be shot: preparing for competitions, participating in them, awarding, etc.



Pic. 2. Freeze frame from the children's authorial cartoon "Sports Competition"

In addition, in the classes themselves, the program and application in which we work allow us to produce instant voice-over of the video, i.e. at the time of shooting, the children say the worked-out phrases that are appropriate in the cartoon.

At the same time, post-processing of the resulting video is also important – older children (6-7 years old) can additionally voice individual fragments, they can work on video content, changing shots, increasing them or reducing them in time, adding additional animation or effects, or subtitles.

Moreover, children love to look at the fruits of their labor, so when home they repeatedly view their cartoon, showing it to their parents and relatives, and thus unobtrusively, in background mode will constantly repeat the studied material.

Answering the question why the Lego constructor was chosen as the working material, we note that within the framework of a 20-30-minute lesson, the use of the constructor allows us to solve as quickly as possible the two main tasks of teaching a foreign language that we set for ourselves: 1) teach children the language, trying to bring them into speech, practicing speech models in action (so they are better memorized), and 2) create a finished product of children's creativity, so that children do not see the result in the long term, but immediately see the result, so that they do not lose interest in what is happening and are proud of the work done.

However, it is also worth noting that with older children, you can create cartoons with characters from other materials, such as modeling clay (pic. 3).



Conclusions

As a conclusion, we would like to note that the animation method, as a modern and sufficiently technological one, should not become a substitute for classical foreign language teaching when teaching English. As with the traditional approach, teaching with the inclusion of children's authorial animation in the process of practical language learning takes place in a playful way, students are maximally immersed in the language environment; there is no negative assessment of students' achievements – only praise as an external motivation.

Thus, over the two-year period of using this method, we came to the conclusion that producing a creative product on their own within the framework of learning a foreign language becomes an excellent motivation for preschoolers, allowing them to learn English with great interest.

In addition, it is worth noting the improvement of children's performance in the aspects of foreign language listening comprehension and the reproduction of mastered language structures, i.e. in the context of listening and speaking. As is well known, in preschool educational institutions, foreign language training is conducted only in spoken mode, i.e. preschoolers are not taught to read and write because of the peculiarities of achievements of their age and the psychophysiological unpreparedness to master these skills not only in a foreign language, but also in their native language. Therefore, we rely on their listening and speaking skills as criteria for testing the digestion of the material.

So, in the first year of training, children had to memorize 50 lexical units and 10 speech models (each year of training contains the same number of LU and speech models, thus, in total by the end of three-year training, preschoolers expand their vocabulary to 150 LU and 30 speech models). According to the analysis of diagnostic testing, children from the control group who studied English using the author's animation method showed better results in memorizing speech patterns compared to children who did not use the animation method.

Table 1 Quantitative indicators of material digestion by children in the first year of learning (2019-2020)

Group / number of children	Listening, % (units)		Speaking, % (units)	
	LU	Speech patterns	LU	Speech patterns
1 (+) 10	95 (48 un.)	100 (10 un.)	90 (45 un.)	90 (9 un.)
2 (+) 10	80 (40 un.)	90 (9 un.)	75 (35 un.)	85 (8-9 un.)
3 (+) 10	90 (45 un.)	90 (9 un.)	85 (40-45 un.)	80 (8 un.)
4 (-) 15	80 (40 un.)	75 (7-8 un.)	75 (35 un.)	70 (7 un.)

As can be seen from the table (table 1) the indicators of children from the control groups (1-3), in which the method of children's authorial animation was used, are higher, especially in terms of listening comprehension and reproduction of speech models. We believe that this effect was achieved through the additional repetition of these language structures when creating educational cartoon sketches (preliminary preparation and activation of structures and vocabulary in the game playing, voicing the speech of characters, etc.). Unfortunately, not all the children share new knowledge with their parents or other family members (a recognized word, a speech turnover), and the successful acquisition of the foreign language consists, among other things, in the multiple repetition and brushing up of language units. Therefore, the modern game format of the child's interaction with the animation activities (in a truncated form, of course) contribute to better memorization of foreign language words and constructions, since with this approach they are in the background and unobtrusively interwoven into the educational process.

Analyzing the diagnostic tests of preschoolers who studied English in the 2020-2021 academic year, it is worth noting that only 20 of them were enrolled in the second-year program, 10 children started learning English for the first time. Also note that this time, children from all groups were engaged in the program "The English language and a preschool child" using the method of children's authorial animation. And more interesting were the results obtained, because not all preschoolers of the second year of study were familiar with the method of author's animation.

As can be seen from the table (table 2), the first group (1) showed very good results in both listening and speaking. It seems to us that this is primarily due to the fact that this group included children who were already familiar with the method of author's animation in the first year of study under the program. Thus, they improved their performance. The second group was mixed: some children were familiar with the animation method, some were not. Therefore, it seems to us that the results in this group are significant, improved if compared to a year earlier, especially among those preschoolers to whom the author's animation method was not applied.

Table 2 Quantitative indicators of material digestion by children in the first and second years of learning (2020-2021)

Group / number of children	Listening, % (units)		Speaking, % (units)	
	LU	Speech patterns	LU	Speech patterns
1 (+) 10	100 (50 un.)	100 (10 un.)	95 (48 un.)	95 (9-10 un.)
2 (+) 10	95 (48 un.)	95 (9-10 un.)	85 (40-45 un.)	90 (9 un.)
3 (+) 10	90 (45 un.)	90 (9 un.)	90 (45 un.)	85 (8-9 un.)

But the most obvious progress is in group 3, because this group consists of preschoolers of the first year of education, with whom the method of children's authorial animation was used. Compared to the results of group 4 (academic year 2019-2020), the progress in this group is quite evident. We can explain this by several factors: first, the age of children in this group was 4-5 years, and at this age children are more plastic in psychological and mental terms, it is more pleasant to work with them, it is easier to interest them; second, teaching English in the language of cartoons at this age is an accurate hit on the target, because children, again due to their age, are open to everything new and are not overloaded with the preparation for school, which inevitably overtakes all children when they are 6 years old. Third, we have already gained some experience in the practical organization of the English language teaching using the method of author's animation.

Summing up, it should be noted that, as it seems to us, the use of the method of children's authorial animation as a means of teaching a foreign language has sufficiently justified itself, which is expressed in the personal interest of students, their desire to learn English, not by studying it, but by playing the language, and is well supported by the data obtained from the diagnostic tests over the past two academic years: the results have increased, especially in the aspect of listening. As for the speaking skills, which have undoubtedly improved, we will continue to develop them. Thus, this confirms our assumption that the use of children's authorial animation as a means of teaching preschoolers a foreign language can significantly contribute to improving the communicative competencies of theirs. We believe that the third year of training will bring us many surprises, and will reveal the potential of using the method in teaching English to preschool children largely.

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Irina A. Gordienko (Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation)

Teaching English to Preschool Children by Means of Children's Authorial Animation: Experience of Application

The article considers the method of children's authorial animation as a modern means of teaching preschool children a foreign language. The purpose of the study is to determine the educational opportunities of using this method in teaching English to preschool children. Special attention is paid to the practical aspect of using animation tools in combination with traditional methods of teaching preschoolers a foreign language within the framework of the activity approach in the conditions of modern preschool education, as well as the results achieved over the two-year period of using this method.

Key words: *preschoolers, teaching English, authorial animation.*

Сведения об авторе / Information about the author

Гордиенко Ирина Алексеевна – канд. филол. наук, доцент кафедры научно-технического перевода и профессиональной коммуникации, Донской государственный технический университет; педагог дополнительного образования (преподаватель английского языка), МБДОУ № 116, г. Ростов-на-Дону, Россия. Тел.: +7-918-599-40-63, e-mail: i.gordienko2017@yandex.ru

Irina A. Gordienko – Ph.D. of Philology, assistant professor, Don State Technical University; additional education teacher, Municipal Budgetary Preschool Educational Institution (MBPEI) No. 116, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation. E-mail: i.gordienko2017@yandex.ru

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