# Methods of Developing Metalanguage Skills in Foreign Language Teaching

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**Abstract:** The development of metalinguistic skills plays a crucial role in foreign language learning, enabling students to analyze, reflect on, and manipulate language structures beyond basic communication. This paper explores various methods for fostering metalinguistic awareness, emphasizing pragmatic, sociolinguistic, phonological, syntactic, morphological, and semantic knowledge. The study highlights the significance of metalinguistic transfer, where learners apply their understanding of linguistic concepts from their native language to a foreign language. Additionally, the role of audiovisual materials, practical assignments, and interactive classroom strategies in enhancing students' linguistic awareness is examined. The findings suggest that integrating explicit language reflection, comparative analysis, and communicative tasks into language instruction contributes to more effective foreign language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Metalinguistic awareness, foreign language learning, linguistic transfer, pragmatic knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, language teaching methods, communicative competence, audiovisual materials, comparative analysis, linguistic reflection.

**Introduction:** In the process of learning a foreign language, students engage in linguistic and speech creativity, as well as cognitive activities. Successful communication in a non-native language requires not only theoretical knowledge but also practical and analytical skills that help understand and analyze one's speech. The use of metalanguage skills in a foreign language presents a certain difficulty for students, as the foreign language significantly differs from their native language. Therefore, the development of metalanguage skills for communication in a foreign language necessitates considering the phenomenon of

bilingualism and the method of code-switching.

Metalanguage skills refer to the ability to think about language and use it in various ways. These skills are essential for academic success, as they enable students to understand and use language in a more complex manner.

According to foreign sources, metalanguage skills consist of ten components. Considering the appropriate educational level and examining this issue in the context of foreign language learning, we have identified the following components of metalanguage skills [2].

Methods are generally categorized as active and interactive. Interactive methods include "Quick Survey," "Venn Diagram," "Categorization," "Cluster," and others. Numerous studies indicate the application of interactive methods across various fields.

N.Zh. Isakulova described the advantages and use of the "Venn Diagram" and "Quick Survey" methods. In her view, the Venn Diagram is recommended for teaching terms related to geography. This diagram has several advantages: as a graphic organizer, it develops

systematic thinking skills, comparison, contrast, and analysis. Another benefit is its time efficiency. As an interactive method, the Venn-Euler Diagram makes the learning process engaging and helps increase motivation for language learning. By using this tool, students can learn and retain material more quickly and effectively. Venn-Euler Diagrams facilitate the identification and synthesis of common features in objects, ideas, and concepts [3].

The "Quick Survey" method enables students to determine the correct sequence of actions, develop logical thinking, and consider various ideas based on the given subject matter and opinions of others. It is designed to teach them how to plan their activities and daily schedules. This method was developed based on geographical terms, specifically "Earth – a planet in the Solar System" [4].

Among the active methods, the exercise method is particularly notable. The components of metalanguage skills can be structured using the categorization method (Table 1):

## Table 1
## Categorization Method

| Linguistic Awareness | Phonemic awareness | Semantic knowledge | Syntactic knowledge |
|---|---|---|---|
| It is the ability to understand the relationship between language and thought. This skill helps recognize that words have meaning and can be used in different ways. | It is the ability to hear and distinguish individual sounds or phonemes in words. | This is the understanding of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Semantic knowledge includes the meaning of words, word compatibility, and the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts. | This is the ability to understand sentence structure. It includes knowledge of the role of each word in a sentence (noun, verb, adjective, etc.), the arrangement of words (subject-verb-object, adjective-noun, etc.), and how a sentence fits into a larger structure—such as a paragraph or text. |
| Morphological knowledge | Pragmatic knowledge | Sociolinguistic knowledge | World knowledge |
| This is the ability to recognize and understand the structure of words. It includes the ability to distinguish roots, | This is the ability to use language appropriately according to the situation. | This is the understanding of how language varies across different social groups. | This is the understanding of how the world is structured and how its different parts are interconnected. It includes |

| prefixes, suffixes, and grammatical patterns. | | | knowledge about countries, cities, languages, cultures, and people. |
|---|---|---|---|

According to our research, phonemic awareness in a foreign language can be developed through the use of tongue twisters, transcription exercises, and tasks involving homophones in lessons. In English, there are similar-sounding words that significantly hinder students' comprehension. The use of tongue twisters during foreign language pronunciation instruction helps students distinguish sounds and convey their thoughts more clearly to their interlocutors.

Peter Piper

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers

A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked

If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers

Where's the peck of pickled peppers that Peter Piper picked?

***

Fuzzy Wuzzy

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear,

Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair,

Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't very fuzzy, was he [1]?

Pronunciation in the Russian language differs significantly from that in English, where the same letter can have multiple pronunciations depending on its position. In this case, transcription exercises will help students accurately recognize sounds in both written and spoken speech.

**Exercise 1.** Write the phonetic transcription of the vowel sounds in the following words:

be, feel, we, me, see, meet

it, is, in, ill, sit, fill, live

bed, pen, ten, tell

tie, lie, my, pie, die, life

man, bad, hat, lamp, fat, cat

**Exercise 2.** Write the phonetic transcription of the consonant sounds in the following words:

think, thing, thin, thought, death, threat

sing, song, bang, long, something, going, hung, wrong

this, that, those, the, these, there, other, another [13].

To develop phonemic awareness, exercises involving the use of homophones (words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings) can be applied.

**Exercise 3.** Fill in the blanks with the appropriate homophones:

a) (sealing, ceiling)

1. We had difficulty in .... the leak,

2. The spider made its web on the ….

3. The …. of the room is high.

b) (sole, soul)

1. My old boots need new ....

2. He was the …. executor named in the will.

3. We had a nice ... for lunch.

4. He has a hard job to keep body and …. together.

5. He put his heart and …. into work.

c) (bare, bear)

1. In winter the garden looked ... .

2. The pain was almost more than he could ....

3. I can't ... that man.

4. He moved with the grace of a trained ....

5. The ice won't …. your weight [5].

Expanding semantic knowledge is crucial for developing metalinguistic skills, as it provides the foundation for understanding how language functions and how to use it effectively. In our view, the most effective ways to enhance semantic knowledge include exercises such as crosswords, categories, synonym and antonym games, and the "odd one out" task.

Crosswords are word puzzles that require solving words based on given definitions. Studies have shown that crosswords outperform other brain games in improving memory [9].

The "categories" lexical game involves searching for and grouping words based on categories (e.g., food, animals, countries, clothing, etc.). The teacher may name any letter of the alphabet, while students must find and write words that start with this letter in each category.

Synonym and antonym (opposites) exercises can be conducted both orally (through questioning) and in writing (matching tasks, dictations, or tests).

"Odd one out" exercises present several rows of words, each containing one word that does not belong to the group. The students' task is to identify the odd word and explain why it does not fit. Completing such exercises helps students expand their vocabulary while also developing logic and critical thinking skills [6] (see Table 2).

## Table 2
## Exercise: "Odd one out"

| Words | Possible answers |
|---|---|
| Thailand, Singapore, Tokyo, England, Vietnam | Tokyo - city, not country<br>England - not in Asia |
| hotel, motel, town-house, condominium, classroom | condominium - 5 syllables<br>classroom - not for residence |
| car, airplane, truck, bus, train | aeroplane - flies<br>truck - not for passengers<br>train - guided by rails |

Syntactic knowledge is one of the key components of metalinguistic skills. This is because understanding sentence structure enables us to construct grammatically correct sentences. Knowledge of syntax also helps students use language effectively to convey their ideas.

Joan Sedita, the founder of "Keys to Literacy", an organization dedicated to training teachers in literacy instruction, proposed two excellent exercises for developing syntactic awareness.

In the "sentence scrambles" exercise, teachers provide students with a sentence in which the words are in the wrong order and ask them to arrange them correctly. By properly organizing the words to create a sentence with logical meaning, students reinforce their syntactic understanding.

An additional challenge is to give students sentences that can be rearranged in more than one way and ask them to explain how different versions alter the meaning.

Example: dog to he visit brought when man his came The

Sentence 1: The man brought his dog when he came to visit.

Sentence 2: The dog brought his man when he came to visit.

The sentence expansion using "wh" questions exercise helps students understand how more complex sentence components, such as subordinate clauses and prepositional phrases, function within a sentence and contribute to its meaning.

In this exercise, students start with a simple subject, such as "a balloon." Then, they are given each of the five "wh" questions (and one "H" question) separately to expand their sentence by adding more details.

These question words include: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

By answering these questions, students learn to create more complex and informative sentences, improving their syntactic awareness and overall language proficiency.

- Simple subject?

- The balloon.

- What about it?

- The balloon floated away.

- What color was it?

- The yellow balloon floated away.

- Why did it float away?

- The yellow balloon floated away because it was let go.

- Who let it go?

- The yellow balloon floated away because the little girl let it go.

- Where was this?

- The yellow balloon floated away in the park because the little girl let it go.

- When did it happen?

- This morning, the yellow balloon floated away in the park because the little girl let it go [10].

To this set of syntactic exercises, we propose an exercise on identifying the functions of sentence components, which helps students understand and analyze sentence structure.

**Exercise: Define the syntactic function of each part of the sentence.**

1.      I saw the men two hours ago.

2.      I have never seen a better house.

Possible answers:

1. I - subject, saw - predicate, the men - object, two hours ago - adverbial modifier.

2. I - subject, have seen - predicate, better - attribute, house - object.

**Morphological Knowledge and Word Structure**

Morphological knowledge, or the ability to understand word structure, can help learners grasp word meanings, improve spelling, and enhance their ability to use words correctly in sentences. To develop this skill, we propose using exercises in English lessons that focus on word part differentiation and word formation from given morphemes.

**Exercise 1:** Add the following prefixes to make the opposites of the words.

Complete the following words with the correct prefix to form their opposites:

Prefixes: il-, un-, dis-, im-, in-, ir-.

Words: literate, relevant, polite, obedient, correct, rational, kind, mortal.

**Exercise 2.** Make a morphological analysis of words: Unreliability, undeniable, specify, agreement, strengthen, careless, attention, majority, weakness, darkness, clarify.

For the successful application of metalinguistic skills in learning a foreign language, students need to expand their pragmatic knowledge, which is crucial for effective communication. Knowledge of language pragmatics includes understanding how and when to use different language forms (formal and informal), as well as knowing how to use language in various social contexts. Pragmatic thinking will help students quickly determine the speaker's communicative intent and even infer hidden messages. The task provided below is based on identifying hidden messages in the text.

Turner almost wished that he hadn't listened to the radio. He went to the closet and grabbed his umbrella. He would feel silly carrying it to the bus stop on such a sunny morning.

1. Which probably happened?

a. Turner realized that he had an unnatural fear of falling radio parts.

b. Turner had promised himself to do something silly that morning.

c. Turner had heard a weather forecast that predicted rain.

d. Turner planned to trade his umbrella for a bus ride.

"Larry, as your boss, I must say it's been very interesting working with you," Miss Valdez said. "However, it seems that our company's needs and your performance style are not well matched. Therefore, it makes me very sad to have to ask you to resign your position effective today".

2. What was Miss Valdez telling Larry?

a. She would feel really bad if he decided to quit.

b. He was being fired.

c. He was getting a raise in pay.

d. She really enjoyed having him in the office [7].

Sociolinguistic knowledge is also essential for metalinguistic awareness, as it helps students understand how a foreign language is used in different social contexts. To acquire sociolinguistic knowledge, students can engage in various practical activities. For example, they can research how the English language is used in relatively unfamiliar situations:

**1. Formal and professional settings**: attending a court session;

**2. Religious contexts**: how a clergy member expresses themselves during a religious service, observing the same phenomenon in different religious traditions;

**3. Academic settings**: how lecturers express themselves, how students communicate in various situations (e.g., presentations);

**4. Political discourse**: political speeches, manifestos, etc. [8].

World knowledge enables students to understand the connection between language and the surrounding world. In this regard, foreign language teachers can utilize various audiovisual materials to enhance students' interest in current events and phenomena and their possible relationship with the language being studied.

Researchers in foreign language teaching methodology, such as E. B. Bystray, L. A. Belova, A. V. Slabysheva, and T. V. Shtykova, argue that fostering and developing interest in foreign languages is a complex process. Therefore, in foreign language lessons, special attention should be paid to technologies that stimulate speech communication and encourage students' desire to learn a foreign language [11].

V. Unarova, considering the complexity of speech formation in both the native and foreign languages, proposed the method of metalinguistic transfer. This method involves the transfer of cross-linguistic metalinguistic concepts, notions, and skills formed through the study of two or more languages [12].

Thus, the formation of metalinguistic skills in a foreign language among students is a rather complex process that requires expanding knowledge in various linguistic

and non-linguistic areas, including phonemic, semantic, syntactic, morphological, pragmatic, sociolinguistic awareness, and world knowledge.

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