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The perspective of an effectual application of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language in the polyethnic educational space of the Republic of Ghana

This article is aimed at justifying the viability of the polyethnic Ghanaian audience for the implementation of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language. Applying the analytical research method in reviewing literature, dedicated to the study of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language, and literature, that describes the peculiarities of the Ghanaian contingency of students, thus the subject of this research work, the author recommends how the Russian language teacher can contribute to the effective implementation of an ethnomethodological approach to teaching the language in Ghana, regardless of the difficulties presented by the polyethnic Ghanaian landscape.

Key words: ethnomethodological approach, ethnos, Russian as a foreign language, the Republic of Ghana, polyethnic Ghanaian audience

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Перспектива эффективного применения этнометодологического подхода к обучению русскому языку в полиэтническом образовательном пространстве Республики Гана

Цель статьи – обоснование жизнеспособности полиэтничной ганской аудитории как кандидата-аудитории для реализации этнометодологического подхода к обучению русскому языку как иностранному. В статье анализируется научная литература, посвященная этнометодологическому подходу к обучению русскому языку как иностранному, а также литература, описывающая ганскую аудиторию студентов. В результате формируются рекомендации, касающиеся того, как преподаватель русского языка может способствовать эффективной реализации этнометодологического подхода к обучению русскому языку в Гане, несмотря на трудности, связанные с полиэтническим ганским ландшафтом.

Ключевые слова: этнометодологический подход, этнос, русский язык как иностранный, Республика Гана, полиэтническое ганская аудитория

ДЛЯ ЦИТИРОВАНИЯ: Тенкоранг Р. Перспектива эффективного применения этнометодологического подхода к обучению русскому языку в полиэтническом образовательном пространстве Республики Гана // Рема. Rhema. 2023. № 4. С. 77–89. DOI: 10.31862/2500-2953-2023-4-77-89

1. Introduction

Language teaching and acquisition, undoubtedly is a unique phenomenon, characterized by a range of difficulties faced by both the teacher and the learner, who respectively strive to see tangible fruits of his labor in teaching and in learning the foreign language.

Over the years, there has been several modifications made in the history of teaching foreign languages as a science, all in the quest to develop a suitable method of teaching foreign languages, bearing in mind the demands of the trending social, educational, and economic tendencies and norms.

With the increase in the demand for the individualization of the educational process, newer approaches to teaching foreign languages amongst other educational sciences have been birthed. One of such relatively novel approaches is the ethnomethodological approach to the teaching of Russian as a foreign language. In other research works, the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language is synonymously referred to as “nationally oriented method” and “ethno-oriented approach”.

One cannot help but agree with the argument that the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language is functional based on the triad of language-culture-ethnos. This triad, according to N.L. Sinyachkina, was necessitated by the increased research interest in the fields of ethnopsychology, ethnolinguistics, and ethnopsycholinguistics at the beginning of the 21st century [Sinyachkina, 2017, p. 288]. This relatively new branch of the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language, according to the opinion of researchers, was essentially framed bearing in mind the unavoidable interaction between the native and foreign languages and cultures, that actively prevails in the foreign language classroom, and the need to consider the cultural background of both languages [Kulikova, 2019, p. 53]. To add, the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language is established on the methodological basis of a complex of such basic general and other methodological approaches such as competence-based, anthropocentric, conscious-comparative, and culturological approaches to foreign language teaching [Rumyantseva, Rubtsova, 2019, p. 197]. This approach, as pointed out by researchers, includes the interaction of native or source and foreign languages, in the cultural and educational space [Rumyantseva, Rubtsova, 2019, p. 196]. E.Yu. Kulikova, in summarizing the essence of this approach, says that by applying the ethnomethodological approach, teaching Russian as a foreign language is realized “through the prism of the mentality” of the students [Kulikova, 2019, p. 58].

In the new dictionary of methodical terminologies and concepts, as authored by E.G. Azimov and A.N. Schukin, the nationally oriented method (also

known as the ethnomethodological approach) is defined as the method of language teaching that considers the peculiarities of the language and culture of native speakers of the studied (foreign) language. This method proposes a comparison of similar and contrasting linguistic phenomena in both (native and foreign) languages, when selecting and presenting educational materials. The authors of the dictionary were careful to clarify that the nationally oriented method is mainly (effectively) applied in monolingual groups [Azimov, Shchukin, 2009, p. 158].

In the quest to achieve the aim of this research paper, the authors of this work set out to accomplish the following research tasks:

1) describing the peculiarities of the Ghanaian educational space and Ghanaian students;

2) studying the theoretical basis of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language, and identifying the roles of the Russian language teacher in the realization of this approach in the polyethnic Ghanaian educational space.

2. Research question, discussion, and findings

In the quest to define the core essence of the ethnomethodological approach, as far as the teaching of Russian as a foreign language is concerned, T.A. Krotova describes it as the approach to structuring the educational process, founded on the understanding of “ethnos” as a group of people, knitted by genetic, kinship and historical ties of origin, a common language and territory, stable intergenerational continuity, community of culture and traditions, common self-consciousness, having an original stereotype of behavior, that differentiates them from other groups of people [Krotova, 2014, p. 22]. Having studied the rendition of ethnomethodology as explained above, we sought to embark on a sociological study, analyzing what the term “ethnos” implied, and we realized that a common criterion, thus, the existence of a common language recurred in the multiple renditions of the term. Analyzing the various definitions births, the question of this research paper, which is: Could the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language as a foreign language be realized in the Republic of Ghana?

The begetting of this question stems from the fact that, as a polyethnic nation, the Ghanaian people cannot be linguistically categorized as an “ethnos” per the definition rendered by T.A. Krotova and other researchers [Pugachev, 2011, p. 42–44], as well as the multiple sociological renditions of this term, considering there are over 70 individual ethnic groups in the Republic of Ghana, who have their unique historical origin, kinship system and cultural practices, and to add, the Ghanaian people have over 80 indigenous languages.

Hence, if we are to use the definition rendered by T.A. Krotova as the criteria, then one could easily say that the polyethnic Ghanaian audience does not ideally tick all the metaphorical boxes, and hence does not qualify as a viable audience for the effective realization of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching them the Russian language.

However, I.A. Pugachev, in the quest to sum up the essence of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language to representatives of various ethnological backgrounds states that at the basis of this approach is the need to identify and consider the cultural, religious, and educational priorities of the students, as well as their unique mentality, national character and behavioral stereotypes [Pugachev, 2011, p. 40]. To corroborate this, I. Shabaiti and L. Gao in their research article pointed out that considering students' unique national traits and mentality (notice the various authors did not accentuate the need to consider students' linguistic peculiarities), while teaching them Russian as a foreign language, increases the effectiveness of the educational process, by reducing the challenges that both students and teachers are faced with [Shabaaiti, Gao, 2021, p. 445].

We realize in this summative analysis of the essence of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language, the various authors did neither accentuate nor deny the need to consider the linguistic peculiarities of the students, as a determining factor in determining the effectiveness of realizing the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language. I.A. Pugachev, the renowned Russian author and researcher, citing the Swedish people as an example, contradicts the definition provided by T.A. Krotova above, as he pointed out that as a matter of geographical and historical reality, there is not always a parallelism between ethnic and linguistic commonness, as not all ethnic groups share a single common native language [Pugachev, 2011, p. 42–43].

Without being oblivious of the various sociological definitions of “ethnos” as a phenomenon yet relying mainly on the rendition of the essence of the ethnomethodological approach, as postulated by I.A. Pugachev, we proceed to attain the purpose of this research work, discussing and recommending ways through which a tailored ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language in the polylingual Ghanaian educational environment could be effectively implemented.

In his monography about the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language, I.A. Pugachev was careful to clarify that the realization of this approach, requires an acknowledgement of the ethnocultural and ethnopsychological traits of the students, which influence the pedagogical process in entirety [Ibid, p. 41], hence the first factor, which we consider pivotal in proving the polyethnic Ghanaian

audience as a viable candidate-audience in partaking in the metaphorical cake of the benefits of applying the ethnomethodological approach is the fact that, the Ghanaian audience, regardless of their linguistic and intricate cultural differences, share some nationally common psychological traits and moral norms, that are worth considering in tailoring an educational model for the purpose of teaching them the Russian language. Examples of such common psychological traits include their group-mentality, communicable nature when interacting with their peers, yet passive attitude during lessons, due to the indoctrinated hierarchical mentality, which makes the average Ghanaian student shy away from speaking to the teacher, unless the latter initiates the interaction, as well as their lack of time-consciousness.

These ethnopsychological traits shared by the Ghanaian audience need to be factored in, when tailoring an ethnomethodological model that could make the Russian language learning process an effective one. For example, we recommend the active use of the technique of peer-to-peer learning, whereby the teacher could effectively implore the help of “stronger” students in explaining materials to the “weaker” ones, who are having a challenging time in comprehending the presented material. When implementing the peer-to-peer approach, we recommend that the teacher controls the quality of the explanation and assistance rendered by the “stronger” students, immediately making corrections, when necessary, to abate the further confusion of the “weaker” students.

To add, the tendency to be actively communicable when interacting with their peers could be adequately exploited by applying group-work as an approach during practical speaking lessons, where the class could be split in two groups (or more, if necessary), for example, in discussing their viewpoints on debates or some cultural moments. This common psychological trait of active group-thinking shared by Ghanaian students, is enshrined in the common moral value of unity as a vital virtue shared by Ghanaians, regardless of the ethnic group they individually belong to. As the popular Akan adage goes, *praye, so woyi baako a na ebu: wokabomu a emmu*. This adage is translated as ‘when you take out on broomstick, it breaks, but when you put them together, they do not break’. Hence, students tend to be more confident and comfortable when working in groups as compared to working individually. So, having them practice speaking and other communication skills initially in groups and subsequently individually, in our opinion, is an effective way of pulling down the psychological barrier of timidity, which if not managed adequately, could mar the effectiveness of the learning process.

Just as other Africans, Ghanaians are a musical people, because music has always been a part of the culture, being present at every event in the lives

of the people, basically accompanying every stage of one's life, from birth to death. And with folklore being a prominent part of the history of Ghanaian civilization, the element of music (songs) has been used in narrating and passing down history from a generation to another. So, Ghanaians, regardless of the ethnic group they may individually belong to, are a musical people with a prevailing auditory memory. Thus, unlike their Chinese counterparts who have prevailing visual and visual-motoric memory types [Zhao, 2007, p. 115], Ghanaian students tend to absorb information, presented rhythmically and this unique learning and memorization skill, in our opinion is also thanks to the fact that right from the kindergarten, teaching materials in the Ghanaian educational system, especially in the English language have been presented to pupils using rhymes and songs (the ABC song, the body parts song, the phonemic rhyme et cetera). Hence, we advocate for the active use of music and rhymes, where applicable, as well as tongue twisters in the Ghanaian Russian language classroom, as these would aid students in committing materials to memory, while simultaneously sharpening their Russian phonetic skills.

However, we do not negate, but rather advocate for the need to realize the didactic principle of visualization, especially in the presentation of lexical materials, most especially, typical Russian cultural realia that may be abstract and incomprehensible to the Ghanaian student without visual aids.

Furthermore, we are of the opinion that inasmuch as the polyethnic nature of the Ghanaian audience could make the application of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language seem complicated, we would like to state that it is not exactly an inhibiting factor to the realization of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language, but rather a factor that could be appropriately exploited in the realization of an important principle and condition of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language, thus the condition of the need to engage in cultural dialogues, resulting in the coexistence and cooperating of various cultural traditions [Anopochkina, 2018, p. 1365]. Thus, the communication (especially speaking) skills of Ghanaian students could be adequately sharpened by having students, having listened to, or read about a particular element of the Russian culture, prepare and present short presentations on that particular cultural element through the lens of their respective cultures, either individually or in groups in the Russian language. This could result not only in the realization of the previously mentioned principle, but also develop students' analytical and critical thinking skills in the Russian language, while motivating students to be more active at lessons, as they analyze, speak, and discuss about peculiarities of their respective cultural norms. The comparative analysis of cultures,

suggested above, also facilitates overcoming “cross-cultural interference” which if not dealt with, may result in the strengthening of mental blocks that inhibit the teaching and learning process, thereby obstructing the realization of intercultural communication [Khamzaev et al., 2021, p. 5155]. Afterall, we need not forget that teaching and learning a foreign language is meant to enable the students to not just know about the foreign culture, and ‘forget’ about his native culture, but rather to be able to understand and speak about his native culture with the help of the foreign language.

Due to the complex linguistic and cultural nature of the Ghanaian educational space, we admit that the criteria of having a common native language, per the definition rendered by T.A. Krotova, could not be met. However, as a remedy, the English language, although not exactly native to the Ghanaian people, could and should be considered as that common language that intermediates the teaching and learning process of the Russian language in Ghana. We are not oblivious of the fact that the Russian language teacher would have a difficult time in identifying and dealing with all the possible linguistics interferences (from the parts of both the indigenous and English languages) in the Ghanaian Russian language classroom, and hence as a compensation, we suggest focusing on and dealing with the prevailing interferences that occur from the part of the English language, as in our opinion, that would be much easier for the teacher, than attempting to identify and deal with all the possible interferences that could occur from the part of the multiple indigenous Ghanaian languages.

By recommending the reference to the English language as the intermediary (native) language in teaching the Russian language in Ghana, we are not denying that the indigenous Ghanaian languages could also be consulted in explaining certain language materials. For example, the grammatical concept of double negation, which, when used in the English language may grammatically convey the opposite meaning, is actively present in the Russian and languages of the Kwa family (the language family to which a number of popular indigenous Ghanaian languages belong to). For example, the sentence *I **did not** call anyone*, is translated in Russian as *Я **никому** не звонила* (*Ya nikamu ni zvanila*), and in the Akan (Twi) language, it is translated as *M'anfr3 obiaa*. So, the Russian language teacher (who may either be a native Ghanaian or just knowledgeable in any of the Ghanaian languages that belong to the Kwa language family) could refer to the native Ghanaian language in explaining similar language materials.

To add, having clarified that referring to the English language as the intermediary language in the Ghanaian Russian language classroom does not equate to a suggestion of ignoring the indigenous Ghanaian languages' influence on Russian language acquisition, we would like to briefly point

out a few unique interferences that can be observed in the Ghanaian Russian language classroom.

Students from the Akan ethnic group (the largest Ghanaian ethnic group) for example have a peculiar phonetic problem of interchanging *r* and *l* in reading and speaking words because in the Akan language, these two letters are in free variation and hence using them interchangeably does not influence the meaning of the word nor sentence for that matter. For example, in referring to ‘a young lady’ in the Akan language, one could say either *awuraba* or *awulaba*, however, in the English and Russian languages, these letters are minimal pairs and cannot be interchanged without altering the meaning of the word, thus, making a phonetic and lexical mistake. For example, in the English language, *red* is a color, whereas *led* is the past tense form of the verb *lead*, and in the Russian language, *красный* (*krasnyi*) – ‘red’ and *класный* (*klasnyi*), which means ‘cool or awesome’ are two different words, which if interchanged could imply both a rude phonetic mistake and a break in communication.

Native Ga (the local language of the indigenes of the Greater Accra region) speakers, on the other hand tend to make the *h* sound at the beginning of words silent, thereby pronouncing *_eat* instead of *heat* for example. Hence in saying *хорошо* (*harasho*) ‘good’, or *хочу* (*hachu*) ‘want’ for example, a representative of this ethnic group has the tendency to read those words as *опошо* (*arasho*) or *очу* (*achu*) respectively, which of course is not the right pronunciation of these words, and lexically have no meaning in the Russian language.

Therefore, even though we advocate for the reference to the English language as the intermediary (native) language in teaching Russian to the poly-ethnic Ghanaian audience, and in tailoring an ethnomethodological model for this audience of students, we propose that the teacher looks out for and comments on some prevailing linguistic interferences from the part of the indigenous Ghanaian languages, as they occur.

Inasmuch as the Ghanaian people do not have a common native language, thereby making the realization of the principle of considering the native language of students – a vital methodological principle, complicated, we are of the opinion that this does not necessarily negate the perspective of applying the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language in Ghana. It is important to state that, in explaining grammatical topics, special attention should be dedicated to phenomena that differ from and or are absent in the English language, since those phenomena such as verbs of motion, declension of nouns and adjectives, differing verb forms (1 and 2 conjugations) and grammatical cases present a deal of difficulties in the Ghanaian classroom, as proven by practical experience [Dzyadyk, 2017].

However, in working on phonetic skills, keen attention, in our opinion, ought to be paid to the interferences that sneak up on the Russian language from the part of the indigenous Ghanaian languages. Moreover, although Ghana is considered as an anglophone African country, the Ghanaian English accent is different from that of originally native English language speakers such as the Americans and the British people for example, and this is because of the prevailing influence of the various indigenous Ghanaian languages on the English language.

Bearing in mind the linguistically complex nature of the Republic of Ghana, and the big class sizes, we do not expect of the Russian language teacher to know of and foresee all the possible linguistic interferences from the part of the individual native languages of the individual students and hence, the Russian language teacher is expected to be observant in identifying and dealing with the most obvious interferences and prevailing mistakes that dominate at the class level, correcting them as immediately as the available teaching condition would permit. It is important to add that, a peculiarity of the Ghanaian tertiary educational space, which is the functioning presence and participation of teaching assistants in the educational process, needs to be adequately exploited in the application of the ethnomethodological approach. The teaching assistants in comparison with their senior colleagues, thus the lecturers, work with students in smaller groups, and therefore can work better in identifying and dealing with linguistic mistakes that have an ethnically individual nature. Hence, in applying the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language in Ghana, it is important for the teachers to work actively in tandem with their teaching assistants, who work in a much closer proximity with students, and hence can much effectively individually identify and correct the prevailing linguistic mistakes of Ghanaian students.

Furthermore, in consideration of the fact that the average Ghanaian student tends to shy away from any form of direct interactions with their teachers, and those in authority, we encourage the Russian language teacher, in clarifying whether or not students comprehended the material he or she just explained, to ask open-ended questions that provoke reflective reflexes in students, such as *What was the easiest / most complicated part of today's topic?* or *What aspect of today's topic would you want me to briefly repeat?* instead of the popular format of *Do you all understand?* or *Are there any questions?*. Provoking students' reflection on the material they just studied, by asking such questions as mentioned above could motivate students to speak up more. Also, we recommend the teacher consciously encourages students to interact with him actively and directly, by reassuring them that they do not need to be shy, and that, it is normal to not understand or completely agree with the teacher. Moreso, like the representatives of the Chinese culture,

Ghanaian students, being conscious of their group and their opinion, tend to shy away from speaking up if they are not completely sure of their answers, or the accuracy of what they intend to say. Hence, we recommend the teacher actively and constantly encourages students to not fear to make mistakes in class, whereas laying the ground rule “No laughing at others’ mistakes”, thereby creating a safe and conducive atmosphere for the students to speak up, because according to the principle of activity, which is enshrined in modern cognitive psychology, the more a student actively participates in the learning process, the more successful he is at mastering the foreign language.

The official time zone of Ghana, the GMT (Greenwich Meridian Time) has acquired a new informal interpretation as the Ghana Man Time, due to the average Ghanaian’s lack of time-consciousness. And in dealing with this issue, the Russian language teacher, is recommended to not practice the liberal and democratic form of discipline as characterized by the Russian educational system, but rather, he is recommended to be strict in issuing rules and deadlines, clearly stating what he expects of his students, as this would enable students to become more disciplined as far as time-management is concerned, thus overcoming the Ghana-man-time syndrome. Moreso, the strict system needs to be extended to the checking of homework and other tasks, as the teachers’ refusal to check such tasks and give feedbacks could result in the students’ lackadaisical attitude towards their studies, which would subsequently mar the effectiveness of the entire pedagogical process.

3. Conclusion

In summary, we are not oblivious of the fact that implementing the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language in the Republic of Ghana, is characterized by a range of difficulties due to the polylingual nature of the class and big class size, thereby making the literal realization of the core principle of considering students’ native language, an almost impossible task. Regardless of the recognized difficulty, as discussed above, applying groupwork as an approach towards the realization of the other core principle of dialogues of culture, whiles working in collaboration with their respective teaching assistants, the Russian language teacher in the Republic of Ghana can effectively implement a tailored ethnomethodological approach to the teaching of the Russian language in the polycultural space of the Republic of Ghana.

Bearing in mind the complex linguistic nature of the Ghanaian educational space, we admit that structuring and implementing an ethnooriented Russian language textbook that embodies the intricacies of all the various indigenous languages is a seemingly infeasible task. However, we suggest that a teaching model that factors in the unique culture and mentality of the Ghanaian

people could be designed, applying elements of the comparative approach in teaching especially the country studies aspect of the Russian language.

Moreover, though language and culture are two intertwined phenomena, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that these two phenomena being intertwined does not necessarily imply that culture is limited to language, because culture in comparison with language, is a much wider concept. Therefore, despite the complex linguistic nature of the polyethnic Ghanaian educational space, the ethnomethodological approach to teaching the Russian language in the Republic of Ghana, can effectively be realized, taking into consideration the recommendations made above.

In a nutshell, we need to realize that the effective realization of the ethnomethodological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language is broader than just considering the linguistic peculiarities of the group of students, but rather their psychological make-up as a group, cultural norms, and educational system, which if ignored, would defect the effective realization of the ethnomethodological approach to the teaching of Russian as a foreign language.

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