

Using the Shadowing Technique in Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language

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Abstract—At present, there is an active search for ways to improve and modernize the process of teaching Russian as a foreign language. Teachers need to study and implement in their practice the most efficient methods and modern innovative technology, combine traditional and innovative teaching methods, and creatively develop the accumulated theoretical and practical experience in education. The choice of teaching methods is a vital and urgent task in the contemporary methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language. The article reports research findings on the efficiency of the main prerequisites for the introduction of the shadowing technique in teaching Russian as a foreign language. In addition, the study involves a qualitative analysis of the efficiency of teaching by means of shadowing compared to traditional teaching methodology. The paper discusses various shadowing techniques, describes the basics of the technique, and offers practical recommendations on how it could be utilized in the classroom. The study proposes and experimentally tests a shadowing technique in teaching students from Kyrgyzstan. The findings reveal a positive dynamic in performance in listening among students taught Russian as a foreign language with shadowing.

Index Terms—Russian as a foreign language, shadowing, interactive teaching methods

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, indicators of international immigration have been consistently rising. Statistics show that the citizens of Kyrgyzstan are one of the largest groups of immigrants to Russia (United Nations Department of Economic

and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020). The infrastructure built for the adaptation of migrants in the host country accounts for cultural differences and language barriers. Yet a major role in adaptation in a foreign-language society is played by proficiency in communication in the local language. For this reason, the efficiency of teaching Russian as a foreign language (RFL) is of considerable importance. The main objective of methodologists and teachers of a foreign language is to select the most efficient methods of language teaching methods as a means to achieve educational goals.

An available method of mastering speaking is the technique of shadowing – a form of learning developed for enhancing simultaneous interpreting skills. Although until recently, this method has been considered a non-traditional one in foreign language learning, lately it has been gaining in popularity. Newly published teaching manuals for various levels of proficiency have this method at their core. The efficiency of the shadowing technique is not limited to simultaneous interpretation, which allows even beginners to benefit from it in mastering listening skills, i.e., understanding information communicated through speech signals (Junipisa & Aristana, 2021), the mastery and efficiency of which is vital. These skills become even more important in foreign language classes since listening as an act is a basic skill in studying any foreign language (Alilath & Widyantoro, 2019).

Being a rather intensive teaching method, in which students listen and repeat what they heard almost simultaneously, shadowing provides a smooth transition from understanding what one wants to say to the ability to truly fluently verbalize it. Thus, this technique improves abilities from intellectual understanding to practical use (Liu & Sammons, 2021). Repeated use of this method advances the student's intonation, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Furthermore, using printed text with recording the content of the dialog as a supporting material cultivates the ability to read quickly in a foreign language (Hamada, 2011).

In this light, the role of listening skills becomes truly critical in studying the Russian language in a Kyrgyz group. Therefore, the investigation of the efficiency of shadowing in teaching RFL becomes a topical objective.

Literature Review

As described by Shiki et al. (2010), shadowing refers to the listener repeating words, phrases, and sentences immediately after hearing them. Essentially, with shadowing, the listener hears the material twice, first as an auditory stimulus that they need to repeat and then as part of self-control when reproducing it (Sumarsih, 2017).

Shadowing has been utilized in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), primarily in Japan (Hamada, 2015). This attracted the attention of foreign language teachers and researchers, thus initiating numerous experiments and debates about teaching methods and the advantages of the technique (Foote & McDonough, 2017; Hsieh et al., 2013; Martinsen et al., 2017). At present, the use of shadowing is no longer exclusive to Japan. The benefits of shadowing techniques have also been discovered in experiments conducted in teaching EFL to Arabic native speakers (Al-Azzemy & Al-Jamal, 2019) and Vietnamese (Vu & Shah, 2016) and Indonesian (Ekayati, 2020) students.

In view of researchers, the answer to whether shadowing is closer to simple imitation of sound or meaningful repetition is not unequivocal. The least developed the student's skills in perceiving phonemes, the closer their reproduction to the simple imitation of sounds (Bao, 2017). With increasing proficiency in the mechanisms of direct speech processing, shadowing becomes a conscious imitation and promotes the assimilation of the structures of the second language (Ginting, 2019).

Shadowing focuses students' attention on picking up the sounds, which precede meanings. Thus, the leading role of shadowing consists in improving students' ability to perceive phonemes, which at low proficiency levels implies the use of "bottom-up" processes (phoneme perception) to a greater extent than "top-bottom" ones, which are applied later and focus on catching the meaning and not phonemes (Hamada, 2014).

Repeated use of shadowing in class in various forms allows students to better perceive the sounds, which enables them to understand the meaning (Omar & Umehara, 2010).

However, the border between imitation and repetition is unclear, since the process of decoding information (overlying sound differentiation) predetermines the conscious and productive use of shadowing. The larger the gap between perceiving the sound and decoding the information, the more imitative the reproduction of speech when using shadowing (Shiki et al., 2010).

Sumiyoshi (2019) suggests that shadowing is a language teaching method that can be applied at different proficiency levels, as well as adjusted to the goals set to teach a specific skill. On the one hand, this technique targets students with low proficiency levels, intended to help them activate the perception and imitation of unfamiliar speech sounds, followed by the processing and eventual acquisition of simple information. On the other hand, advanced students who have already mastered a satisfactory vocabulary can focus on intonation and expressiveness when using shadowing. For more proficient foreign language learners, this method is an ideal exercise to improve their speed of speech and information processing and when used in bilingual exercises – to strengthen their translation skills (Yavari & Shafiee, 2019).

Analysis of relevant scientific sources indicates the insufficiency of the accumulated experience and shows the need for empirical studies on this issue. In this connection, we consider it necessary to explore the possibility of using shadowing in teaching RFL.

The purpose of the study is to assess the efficiency of shadowing in teaching RFL. The research objectives set to achieve this goal are formulated as follows:

- 1) to analyze the main prerequisites for the introduction of shadowing techniques;
- 2) to experimentally test the efficiency of shadowing techniques in teaching listening comprehension in RFL teaching;
- 3) to qualitatively analyze the efficiency of teaching with the use of shadowing techniques in comparison with traditional teaching methods.

II. METHODS

The efficiency of using shadowing was tested through an experiment with Kyrgyz students in Russian language courses. The total sample consisted of 28 students with 14 people in the experimental group (EG), which used shadowing in teaching RFL, and 14 people in the control group (CG), which utilized traditional RFL teaching methods.

The methods of shadowing applied in the EG included the following (Table 1).

TABLE 1
SHADOWING METHODS

No.	Method	Content
1	Close shadowing	No deeper processing, the delay between listening to a speech stimulus and its repetition is reduced from 250 to 500 ms, that is, repetition is virtually simultaneous. This implies immediate processing of the speech and its repetition almost instantly before it is transmitted in full, so the speech is not processed entirely before reproduction begins.
2	Phrase shadowing	Repetition phrase by phrase/sentence by sentence, while allowing time for the recognition of words and possibly for grammatical analysis, assuming that the stimulus signal is delivered, then processed, and spoken out loud.
3	Parallel reading	An exercise of reading the transcript aloud, along with listening. It aims to promote learners' reading comprehension and memorization of L2 texts, thereby improving reading speed and speaking fluency.

Initial and final assessment of listening skills used test tasks, which included:

- Multiple choice questions assuming selective choice of answers. Each segment of the listened text is followed by a question with three answer options, with only one of them being correct;
- Multiple matching tasks, consisting in matching the content of the heard material with statements, pictures, and tables given on paper. The answer options for matching always include one extra that does not relate to any part of the listening material;
- Filling gaps in a text, filling in tables, and adding to or completing sentences. The listener is asked to fill out a table, etc. with a limited number of words (usually no more than three). Questions are given in the same order in which the audio text proceeds;
- Choosing the correct answer from two options. Statements reflecting the content of the text need to be marked by the listener as true or false.

The indicator of the student's listening skills development was the percentage of completed tasks, which established three levels of listening skills development: low level – 0-49% of completed tasks; sufficient level – 50-74% of completed tasks; high level – 75-100% of completed tasks.

Statistical data processing was performed using Statistica 7.0 software. Changes in the level of listening skills after learning with shadowing were established by means of Fisher's angular transformation ϕ^* , which assesses the reliability of differences between the percentages of two samples.

III. RESULTS

The results of the initial and final control of listening skills are provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2
RESULTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENING SKILLS

Listening skills level	EG pre-experiment, %	CG pre-experiment, %	EG post-experiment, %	CG post-experiment, %
low	78.6%	85.7%	28.6%	57.1%
sufficient	21.4%	14.3%	71.4%	42.9%
high	-	-	-	-

In initial testing, a low level of listening skills was found in 78.6% of EG students (N = 12) and 85.7% of CG students (N = 11). A sufficient level was demonstrated by 21.4% of students in the EG (N = 2) and 14.3% in the CG (N = 3). A high level of mastery was not detected. Importantly, the levels of listening skills development in both groups were approximately the same, proving that the EG and CG belong to the same general sample.

The results of post-experimental testing demonstrated an improvement in listening skills in both groups. In the final assessment, only 28.6% of listeners in the EG (N = 4) and over half of the CG (57.1%; N = 6) demonstrated a low level of listening skills. A sufficient level was recorded in 71.4% of EG listeners (N = 10) and 42.9% of CG students (N = 8). A high level was still not observed. However, the level of listening skills in the EG, which was taught with shadowing, was higher than in the CG. Therefore, it can be concluded that shadowing was more efficient in RFL teaching compared to traditional teaching.

Changes in the level of development of listening skills after the experimental training were identified with Fisher’s angular transformation ϕ^* , which tests the reliability of differences between the percentages of two samples. A table of empirical frequencies was built for two values: "presence of effect" and "absence of effect" (Table 3). In this case, we considered the effect to be the attainment of a sufficient level of listening skills by the listeners.

TABLE 3
TABLE FOR CALCULATING THE Φ^* CRITERION WHEN COMPARING THE RESULTS OF THE INITIAL AND CONTROL TESTING IN THE EG AND CG

Group	Section	Presence of effect		Absence of effect	
		Number of listeners	%	Number of listeners	%
CG	Pre-exp.	2	14.3%	12	85.7%
	Post-exp.	6	42.9%	8	57.1%
Total		8		20	
EG	Pre-exp.	3	21.4%	11	78.6%
	Post-exp.	10	71.4%	4	28.6%
Total		13		15	

The null and alternative hypotheses are formulated for both groups.

H0: the share of listeners proficient in listening skills at a sufficient level according to final testing does not exceed the share of students at this level at the start of the experiment.

H1: the share of listeners proficient in listening skills at a sufficient level according to final testing is higher than the share of students at this level at the start of the experiment.

The calculations show that $\phi^*_{emp}(CG) = 1.74$; $\phi^*_{emp}(EG) = 2.85$.

Critical values of ϕ^* : 1.64 ($p < 0.05$); 2.31 ($p < 0.01$).

The empirical values of ϕ^* for both the EG ($p < 0.01$) and CG ($p < 0.05$) fall in the zone of significance, which refutes H0 and confirms H1. Thus, both the experimental and traditional methods are efficient, but shadowing proves more efficient, as the empirical value of ϕ^* for the EG is higher than in the CG.

IV. DISCUSSION

Shadowing was employed in this study in EFL classes for students from Kyrgyzstan. This approach to audio stimulation was used throughout one year of Russian language training for approximately one-quarter of the class time. Audio recordings, students' own speech or speech in unison repeated after the initial spoken passage, were all considered as sources of auditory verbal stimuli. Students were expected to learn new vocabulary from the regular textbook at home during independent study, with regard to their pronunciation and the meaning of the words. Shadowing was then applied in the classroom, with a special emphasis on loud and the most accurate pronunciation.

In the first stage of learning, shadowing was more focused on imitating the sound and speech, with a gradual improvement of sound recognition and imitation to distinguish small information units, i.e., words, word combinations, and short sentences.

While bottom-up processing is evident (Hamada, 2014), the second stage of training allowed the students to shift to more complex phrases and sentences to practice deciphering information and speaking with comprehension. When shadowing was applied using complete conversational phrases at a relatively low proficiency level, both bottom-up and top-down processing took place. However, these processing types were used to varying degrees, depending on the complexity of the verbal material compared to the already learned components. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Bao (2017).

By listening to individual students and observing them and their speech actions, the teacher can intervene when support is needed. The mastery of phrases recognized in complex utterances seems to be an additional benefit of shadowing, beyond the development of attentive listening or the improvement of listening comprehension and pronunciation skills, as confirmed by the final testing. The use of shadowing in accordance with the above-mentioned procedures yields the mastery of sound reproduction by Kyrgyz learners of Russian, as evidenced by the assessments of perception by native speakers of Russian.

It should be emphasized here that adults who do not speak Russian experience significant difficulties while studying RFL. In this context, shadowing appears to be a highly helpful method.

Combining words into phrases and word combinations into sentences using shadowing exercises the skills of distinguishing sounds. Thus, students learn not only to recognize phonemes in Russian but also to recognize correlating linguistic signals as patterns in the syntactic order of words in Russian. Thus, in addition to the mechanism of converting sound into meaning, learners detect syntactic categories in an utterance, thereby deriving behavioral and cognitive benefits from the use of shadowing (Foote & McDonough, 2017).

The beginning stage of learning a language always starts from the identification of phonemes, i.e., bottom-up processing. Later, however, processing becomes top-down in nature once it is supported by a certain understanding of phonetics (both auditory and articulatory rules) and self-monitoring that enhances auditory attention. Auditory and articulatory abilities belong to the basic language skills and condition spoken communication. For non-traditional users learning RFL, shadowing becomes the key to understanding the acoustic features of the speech signal in practice, i.e., sound perception and the identification and differentiation of tonal phonemes, which is challenging but extremely

important at the A1 and A2 proficiency levels (Ekayati, 2020). The use of shadowing initially promotes attentive listening and sound recognition before the imitation of speech, but later also fosters conscious repetition and production of speech.

Recognition of speech sounds and articulation appears to be the starting point of listening comprehension and speech production. Practical exercises that improve the phonological awareness of students are indispensable for effective learning of RFL. It is vital for students to be able to recognize syllable structure, distinctive consonants and pitch, and the contours and timing of pronunciation (Sumarsih, 2017).

Undoubtedly, shadowing methods cannot replace other methods of teaching foreign languages to adults. Training in listening must be a part of an eclectic approach, along with other tools that foster cognitive learning. It should be stressed that shadowing is also very demanding for instructors. They need to be familiar with phonetics, know how to adapt audio stimuli and exercises to the intended goals, and be able to evaluate individual people at each stage of training (Al-Azzemy & Al-Jamal, 2019). As for students, the use of shadowing requires not only their engagement and effort in processing sounds but their attention in class and preparation at home (Hamada, 2015). Thus, as a rather intensive teaching method, shadowing does not fit all categories of students equally.

Shadowing as a method of teaching listening can be modified for classroom practice depending on the curriculum, course objectives, students' proficiency level, etc. It is important to define partial objectives for a given stage of learning and to keep in mind that the technique is an outcome that promotes stimulation. Then a well-designed classroom procedure will be tailored to the needs of a particular group of learners.

In the realm of second language learning, where direct interactions with native speakers may be limited, shadowing emerges as an accessible and effective technique to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language application. This practice empowers learners to actively engage in refining their spoken skills, culminating in a comprehensive language proficiency. Given that contemporary students dedicate substantial time to navigating social networks (Ramazanova et al., 2022), it becomes crucial to redirect their focus towards recognizing the potential of these platforms in furnishing valuable shadowing resources and prospects. In this context, maintaining a multifaceted language learning approach remains of utmost importance.

Moreover, the use of shadowing techniques in the case of complete conversational phrases can be useful to the teacher as an indicator of the learner's level of comprehension, where it is expected that speech reproduction will add to the current level of language proficiency (Liu & Sammons, 2021). However, it is also important to remember that the level of complexity has to be maintained. Otherwise, a large cognitive distance between sound perception and decoding of information will make shadowing a cognitive load, rather than a result that contributes to stimulation (Al-Azzemy & Al-Jamal, 2019).

Instruction from the teacher during class time serves a variety of functions. In particular, they draw the student's attention to acoustic features, support individual work on articulation skills, or help focus on ways to approach verbal material and control their own top-down processing. Additionally, careful observation of students' performance is crucial, as it uncovers their difficulties with speech sound perception and processing.

Furthermore, repeated reproduction of the pronounced fragment becomes an exercise that, performed both individually and in unison, offers a way to overcome the mental block that usually prevents students from listening to their own voices. Thus, the use of shadowing induces the development of students' own speech activity.

The shadowing method is also appropriate as an independent learning method. By devoting attention to it once or twice during the classroom session, the teacher can guide students to use it independently. Since further selection of the material to be taught will be based on the individual interests of the students, it will also increase their motivation.

V. CONCLUSION

The current study presents shadowing as an efficient method that can be successfully applied in teaching RFL. Furthermore, this method appears to be the most relevant for teaching the Russian language to adults. Thus, shadowing can be highly useful for improving the phonological awareness of adult learners, thereby assisting them in perfecting not only their listening skills in Russian but also, as a consequence, their reproduction of the sounds and structures of the Russian language.

With regard to teaching the Russian language to Kyrgyz students, the use of shadowing in language classes in Russia is still limited. Nevertheless, recognition of its efficiency is growing.

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