



DEVELOPING ORAL SPEECH SKILLS ACCORDING TO THE POLYGLOT GATHERING 2018 DATA

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Abstract. *This paper examines the main approaches to mastering the skills of oral speech as presented in the talks of the Polyglot Gathering 2018 in Bratislava. The purpose of the study was to analyze polyglots' practical observations on the subject available in the video recordings of their presentations at the Gathering. It is demonstrated that many polyglots emphasize the importance of spoken skills and suggest the principles of natural acquisition, positive emotions and consistency as study guidelines.*

Keywords: *polyglot, polyglottery, language learning, oral speech, spoken skills*

For citation: Makarov, A. (2021). Developing Oral Speech Skills According to the Polyglot Gathering 2018 Data. *Linguistics & Polyglot Studies*, 7(4), pp. 57–60. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2410-2423-2021-4-28-57-60>

The materials of the Polyglot Gatherings and Conferences published on the Internet are a new source of information that is not yet sufficiently described or made use of in the scientific community and therefore are of particular interest to researchers of the polyglottery phenomenon [2, p. 8294]. This paper is devoted to the analysis of the materials of the Polyglot Gathering 2018 in Bratislava on the subject of developing oral language skills when learning foreign languages and cultures. On the topic under study, nine presentations were selected and examined.

The talk by Kyle Kuzman “Language is in the ear, not the eye: why learning to read too soon ruins your accent” is devoted to phonetic difficulties in learning a foreign language. The rules of the English pronunciation appear to be illogical and often very confusing. Kuzman believes that it is impossible to learn pronunciation by reading words. From his point of view, one should start with listening, repeating the words after the native speaker. Being a teacher of English and German, he realized that the difficulty lies in the discrepancy between written and oral speech. For example, in English there are a lot of words with mute consonants (“silent letters”), for example, *knee, half, salmon, business, muscle, yacht, listen, island*. Therefore, the speaker says, “learn to listen and pronounce words, just as little children learn to speak their own language” (they learn the basics of reading much later). In conclusion, the author recommends: “Train your ears and mouth, not your eyes” [6].

In his second presentation, **“Music language learning”**, **Kyle Kuzman** describes his method of learning foreign languages through music. He believes that it is entertaining and effective and is a good way to learn to speak the language more naturally. In addition, listening and learning songs can improve one’s pronunciation, speaking and listening skills. His method is as follows: (1) find a song that you like, (2) pay special attention to sounds, (3) find the lyrics and start singing. Kuzman suggests using “the Mimic Method” and names three important components of language learning through music: “rhythm, repetition, rhymes”. He believes that meaningful listening to a song with the text is a good way to learn to speak fluently: “singing well – speaking well” [7].

In her talk **“Hand off, headphones on: don’t miss out on language podcasts”**, **Kerstin Cable** pays much attention to audio files, or podcasts. She is convinced that they can become a very important component in learning a foreign language. You only need to download audio files to your phone. This way you will be able to develop your listening and speaking skills at any convenient time and anywhere: in a gym, on the way to work or while doing homework. Cable particularly recommends this technique to those who start learning a new language [10, p. 44].

In her presentation **“Fast track language learning”**, **Judith Meyer** considers the question whether it is possible to learn languages quickly. For quality study, it is not effective but for specific purposes (a tourist trip, preparation for study abroad, etc.), it is possible. According to the author, to learn most European languages one needs 40–60 hours over 6 weeks, or 3 months. Oriental languages will take much more time. Language study can last from 30 minutes to one hour a day. Meyer believes that the choice of material depends on the goal: “different tools for different goals”. For speaking, she recommends using the website Subs2Srs for serials with subtitles, as well as online lessons. TV series are good because they repeat the same material. The speaker also advises one to use any opportunity for study and practice: “Don’t forget your goal! Achieve it and choose another” [8].

In his lecture **“Principles of accelerated language learning”**, **Grigory Kazakov** gives tips on how one can master a new language in 6 months, from the initial stage up to an intermediate level. He suggests several basic principles [1]:

1. The natural principle means the priority of oral speech (hear, pronounce, read, write) as well as the priority of dialogue. Learning a language begins with oral comprehension: listening to the whole recording (no text seen), imitation and reproduction, practicing together with the text, and only later, writing. Dialogue speech should prevail over monologues.
2. The principle of positive emotions (fear is destructive, therefore a friendly psychological climate is needed for study).
3. The principle of concentration, which includes consistency and continuity. The material should be studied a little at a time but often (30–60 min per day). Learning a language should become a habit.

Ruslan Kokorin made a presentation on the topic of **“How polyglots learn languages. An overview of different methods”** [5]. He believes that there are as many methods of study as there are polyglots. He mentioned the approaches and learning materials used by polyglots, such as Michael Thomas, Assimil, Language Boost, Glossika, and others. In conclusion, the speaker singled out the following principles of language study: (1) the principle of “a lot of language” (frequent lessons help overcome fear), (2) the principle of pleasure, and (3) the principle of consistency.

The lecture by **Santiago Muñoz “Journey through the history of language learning”** is devoted to the topic of how our ancestors learned languages in the 19th and 20th centuries and how polyglots do it today. The speaker identified three disciplines that influenced the development of the language learning methodology: linguistics, psychology and anthropology, and spoke in detail about the three main methods: traditional, structural, and communicative. The traditional method (18th – second half of the 20th century) implied the study of a language through grammar rules and translation. Speaking was not the purpose of learning. The structural method (1940s–1970s) was based on the idea that languages are structures and can be learned through a large number of drilling exercises. It aimed at memorizing speech patterns and did not imply a creative approach. In the communicative method, the main task is to teach speaking. Therefore, a variety of techniques can be used: role-playing, open exercises, and others. Muñoz concludes: “Anything can be used as long as it helps students” [9].

In his presentation **“How many languages do you speak or know?”**, Timothy Keeley raised the question of the number of languages that can be learned. He discusses two groups of polyglots. Polyglot A speaks 32 languages while polyglot B, 22 languages. In both cases, they have at least an intermediate active speaking ability in all the languages as well as a higher passive ability in listening comprehension. They have good accents and pronunciation and can read in all of their languages. The author wonders why the polyglots have a different number of languages. This is due to the general difficulty in learning languages. Languages of one group have similar vocabulary, grammar and culture, so the more languages of this group you know, the faster you master the next one. As for the phonetic aspect, the speaker claims that languages with a larger number of diphthongs are more difficult to study [3].

In his second lecture, **“The importance of affects (emotions) when functioning in foreign languages and cultures”**, Timothy Keeley states that emotions, mood and attitudes are very important in the study process since “all learning is emotional”. There are three vital factors affecting language learning: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. Motivation can be instrumental (for getting a job) or integrative (for studying culture and society). Individuals having self-confidence and a positive self-image tend to do better in foreign language acquisition. The lower the level of anxiety, the more favourable the process of language learning is. Keeley concludes: “Learning a foreign language does not happen just in the mind of the learner; rather it takes place in the interaction between the mind of the learner and the social context” [4].

Having analyzed the above presentations, one comes to the following conclusions:

1. Almost all the speakers emphasized oral speech and listening, as they consider these skills as the main ones in the study of languages. The polyglots advise learners to begin with listening, repeating the words after a native speaker. They recommend a variety of techniques: listening to songs, watching television series with subtitles, online lessons, working with audio files or podcasts, as well as such methods as Michael Thomas, Assimil, Language Boost, Glossika, and others.

2. Many polyglots put forward similar principles:

- The natural principle: the priority of oral speech (hear, say, read, write), much like when a small child acquires his native language.
- The principle of positive emotions or pleasure: anxiety and fear are psychologically destructive, and a friendly atmosphere is necessary.
- The principle of consistency: step by step but every day. The authors of all the presentations recommend studying languages from 30 minutes to one hour per day. It should be an everyday pleasant activity. The main point is to have motivation and turn this activity into your favourite hobby.

Conducting similar studies by reference to the presentations of other Polyglot Gatherings and Conferences seems to be a promising research perspective that should provide further insights into various aspects of language acquisition.

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