

INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION AS A METHOD OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO MENTALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

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Abstract. The article is focused on the problem of intersemiotic interpretation as a method of teaching English to mentally handicapped students. It also substantiates the objective necessity that a skilled teacher should be very flexible and methodologically well-prepared for teaching English as a foreign language to such special students, using different methods tailored to their individual needs. The authors claim that working with students with special educational needs is a constant search for new forms and methods of work. It's proved that while discussing literary texts that are especially difficult for mentally handicapped students, lessons should be based on students' creative activity, which leads to positive effects and provides children with new stimuli for quick reactions and critical thinking. The authors define that in intersemiotic translation the most valuable are activities of students, which allow to translate a literary text into a special text intended for recitation, radio, television, theater, when students have to do many analytical activities: to determine the place of events, to extract heroes, to choose fragments of the narrative, to transform text fragments into dialogues, to make a cast, to match the background music and acoustic effects.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation, intellectual disability, mentally handicapped students teaching methods.

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Introduction

Teaching English to children with intellectual disabilities is not easy. The authors have been in contact with such young people for 20 years. Every student is different, every student needs individualization of work. Such children usually learn slower and to remember foreign words they require more affords and more time. Learning difficulties are also connected with specific logical thinking, concentration of attention and the possibility of information processing. Many children came from families with poor parenting skills, so the above learning difficulties are accompanied by emotional disorders that affect the student's disposition on a given day. Every day a teacher has to balance these aspects and thus reduces her demands towards the child. It is very easy for such students to be discouraged from learning. This will cause them to suffer from self-esteem, which is often already impaired for other reasons. The teacher must be able to raise the demands in such a way as not to discourage his children, but to mobilize them. He also should pay attention to bright students, but do not forget about weak ones. The article describes methodological peculiarities of using intersemiotic interpretation in teaching English to students with mild mental disability who study in a special school in Czestochowa, Poland. According to the authors' deep

consideration children with intellectual disabilities, for sure, can and should participate in foreign language lessons together with all other students.

Intersemiotic Translation: Definition

Contemporary methods of communication use much information transmission codes linked in different ways. This requires the ability to receive them and translate the characters of one code into another properly. Intersemiotic translation allows you to express thoughts and feelings related to the correct understanding a literary work. There are many definitions of this notion.

"Intersemiotic translation" in its original sense was understood as an interpretation of language signs by means of non-verbal resources. R. Jakobson distinguishes three ways of interpreting verbal signs. The first one is interlingual translation, i.e. translation into other characters of the same language. The second way is interlingual translation when you translate into another language. The last one is intersemiotic translation from one language to another, a non-verbal system of symbols. In case of R. Jakobson, intersemiotic translation concerned only language. In his work he did not discuss translation from one non-verbal semiotic system into another non-verbal semiotic system (*Jakobson 1959:138-143*).

Nowadays, civilizational changes force us to broaden the definition of R. Jakobson's intersemiotic translation, including translations from non-language semiotic resources. According to M. Kaźmierczak, Jakobson's intersemiotic transcription concerns only translation:

- word to dance, e.g. ballets whose libretto comes from the art of word, as in the case of *Anna Karenina* Rodion Szczedrin (1971);
- word to visual arts, such as Jacek Malczewski's *Death of Ellenai* (1907, *National Museum in Krakow*);
- word to music, e.g. Storm, symphonic fantasy op. 18 by Piotr Czajkowski, based on Shakespeare.

So, M. Kaźmierczak extends this scope of intersemiotic translation, including **polysemiotic works**, i.e. screen adaptations of literary works and theatrical adaptations of lyrics that were not originally intended for the stage. This group also comprises verbal and musical works, whose libretto was a transformation of verbal texts, as well as computer games based on literary material (for example, 'The Lord of the Rings'). M. Kaźmierczak also quotes other types of translations, such as: re-coding text into Morse code; translation into tactical Braille; messaging by flag system; transmitting information, prohibitions, instructions, warnings behind indirect pictograms; replacing the verbal text with graphic (punctuation) signs as a manifestation of conceptual translation (*Kaźmierczak 2017: 7-35*).

Intersemiotic Interpretation as a Method of Teaching English

According A. Dyduchowa there are other forms of social communication beside language. Therefore, in order to prepare a young person to make contact with the surrounding world, it is necessary to equip him/her with the ability to translate one sign into another. This assumption is the basis of intersemiotic translation.

Intersemiotic interpretation is a translation from one system of signs to another, for example, for plastic expression (drawing, sculpture), movement (gesture, drama) or sound.

In the initial stage of learning language skills, a teacher goes from a picture that supports exercises to speaking and writing. Then (in older classes) a substitute speech code which is the line, timbre, shape, sound is introduced. The next step is to teach them 'coding'. The structure of didactic activities in case of analyzing, for example, a picture may take the following shape:

- observation of a work of art: discussion of its content and form with the introduction of language exercises during which children read and verify the meaning of color, shape, dynamics, texture, etc.;
- language exercises in the verbalization of sensations, emotions, evaluation of the work, etc.;
- editing the description of the work (*Dyduchowa 1988: 35-42*).

Our observations allow to sum up that translation of a literary text into plastic characters, e.g. drawing, provokes artistic expression. When describing a picture, one should go beyond what is painted and take into account the cause and time relationships that are not visible in the registered iconic characters.

By the way, one shouldn't forget, that natural activity of a child is fun, so it is worth using it in school activities and link it with foreign words. Staging events from life, playing different roles, mime games, and drama games, for sure, will improve your students' language skills. The translation method in a such form creates an opportunity to develop "creative aspects" of language at the level of its colloquial usage. In this case of intersemiotic translation, A. Dyduchowa proposes the following ways of conduct:

- 1) non-verbal activities of the student (e.g., a thematic mime game: e.g. a situation imitating a situation imagined by the pupils);
- 2) including verbal elements in the game (e.g. recognition of the scene by the audience and attempts to translate the language of gestures into the language of words, faithful description of the scene, interpretation in which elements of fantasy may appear, proposals to enrich the realizations, proposals for dialogues);
- 3) exercises improving the language layer of the game (*Dyduchowa 1988: 44-48*).

Though this method of translation creates an opportunity to develop the "creative aspects" of language, as it was already mentioned, and at the same time, it can be seen as a paradoxical phenomenon. Language, considered to be a tool of communication, often serves a means to avoid misunderstanding when a word is replaced by mimic, gestural, musical expressions, etc. An introduction of actions in the form of staging, drama or drawing is an intermediate link between a literary text and a student's statement (analytical or interpretive). In such a conceived process, the teacher should do the following:

- 1) make a student familiar with the text (by reading);
- 2) encourage individual or team efforts by students to translate the text into another sign system. This leads to a non-verbal analysis of the text. What is difficult to put into words can be expressed by gestures, facial expressions, lines, colours, acoustic effects, etc. The child can also express what is difficult to put into words;
- 3) introduce verbal exercises, thanks to which a student can talk about his or her work. In this way he/she indirectly interprets the work (pronounces the conclusions gathered during the translation activities). These are simply spontaneous statements that enable the development of creative linguistic expression and active vocabulary.

In intersemiotic translation the most valuable are activities of students, which allow to translate a literary text into a text intended for recitation, radio, television, theater, etc. During the preparation of, for example, a radio drama scenario (based on a literary text) the student

has to do many analytical activities: to determine the place of events, to extract heroes, to choose fragments of the narrative, to transform text fragments into dialogues, to make a cast, to match the background music and acoustic effects.

Working on the scenario gives a natural opportunity for language exercises (conversion of narrative into dialogue, changing dependent speech into an independent one, writing a script) and conscious reception of theatrical performances, radio programs, films. Many of the activities require students to work in groups and collective work, which positively affects their emotional, mental and social development.

In accordance with the National Programs for Language Teaching in many countries, the objective of foreign language teaching is the development of students' language skills, which allows them to communicate in different linguistic and cultural environments. The concept of alphabetization, multilingualism and multiculturalism is being actively promoted. Foreign language linguistic assistance takes part in developing students' skills in order to help them cope with reality, communication circumstances, both expected and unexpected. This is done by using a foreign language, paralinguistic or even non-linguistic forms of communication. Illustrations also help, since they facilitate the decoding of linguistic and cultural elements into intersemiotic language. Besides, the Council of Europe also stresses the importance of the contribution of non-verbal communication (practical action, paralinguistic and paratextual characteristics) to language learning. As regards specifically the relationship between text and image, Bezemer and Kress (2009: 249-262) note that *'the relationship between image and writing has remained unchanged over time in English: throughout the 20th century, most images were "subordinate" to writing'*.

Languages of other disciplines are also associated with basic concepts. Today teaching English requires an interdisciplinary approach. In other words, teaching English should be linked to other school subjects such as literature, history, mathematics, geography, etc. In this way, pupils become acquainted with the subject matter of these disciplines. In this case, students learn about these disciplines, they learn both, the language and the science under supervision.

In accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, 'language competence of a pupil/user in language communication is activated during the performance of various linguistic activities, including acceptance, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpretation or translation). Each of them should be permitted with regard to texts whether or not they are oral or written, or both. Kourdis and Zafiri (2010: 8 - 13) prove that language, as well as its teaching and learning, develops in time and space. It is both a communication code and a semiotic system and it shows similarities and differences to other linguistic and non-verbal systems with which it interacts.

The method of intersemiotic translation, regardless of its variability, allows to shape the student's speech according to the developmental course of his thought operations. It activates communication channels between the pupils and the teacher. It is not just a question a teacher asking the pupil to answer. Pupils have to communicate in order to do something together, to exchange ideas, to design something. By penetrating into the structure of the text, they activate all their senses, because the text comes alive, releases colours, smells, movement and sound. The child "sees" that the word has many meanings and looks at the text from a different perspective. All these actions are supposed to lead to the last and the most important stage, i.e. the child's free speech. And that is the expected element that determines the effectiveness of intersemiotic translation.

Teaching English to Handicapped Children Using Intersemiotic Interpretation

In Poland and Ukraine the classification of mental retardation (adopted by the World Health Organization on January 1, 1968), is based on a scale of 100 and the standard deviation 16, which divides mental retardation into four levels:

1) **mild mental retardation** which falls between two and three standard deviations, taking the intelligence quotient from 52 to 67;

2) **moderate mental retardation** which defines the area between three and four standard deviations, distinguishing persons with IQ between 36 and 51;

3) **severe mental retardation** which falls between four and five standard deviations, classifying people with an IQ between 20 and 35;

4) **profound mental retardation** is the area between five and more standard deviations, here include people with IQ from 0 to 19 (*Global Health Observatory, 2019*).

People with special educational needs (with **intellectual disability**) are children who need an individual or individualized education and therapy program, special teaching methods and techniques, support and time and place specially adapted to their abilities. In education process of these people, multi-sensory learning is particularly important, i.e. **polysensory learning** and early psychomotor rehabilitation of a child, in order to improve and harmonise the interaction between the child's motor and psyche.

Among mentally handicapped children with the same IQ there is a great diversity in the development of particular orienteering, cognitive, intellectual and executive processes. It is important to recognize that mental impairment, combined with the mismatch between the development of psychophysical functions, has a negative impact on children's schooling and social adaptation. In this situation, it is therefore necessary to apply a special methodology in teaching that:

- would develop the child's activity;
- has a stimulating effect on the development of all analyzers;
- influence the creation of movement, auditory and visual coordination;
- teach social behavior;
- has a tonic effect on the child's nervous system.

Therefore, teachers working with such pupils should be guided by the following principles:

- the individualization of interactions;
- a rule of thumb to ensure that your child feels safe;
- subjectivities;
- taking into account the non-harmonious development of the child;
- the principle of not overstrain the child;
- the principle of gradation of difficulty;
- the principle of repetition and fixation of activities;
- the principle of inducing motivation.

This methodology was implemented in the Special School in Częstochowa. The aim of the project was to use the method of intersemiotic translation as a method of teaching English how to support students with intellectual disability. We try to use this method during my English lessons once a year. The project presented in the article took place in the 2017/2018 school year. First and second classes of the Special Trade School for students with a mild

handicap participate in this project on their lessons and school English Club's activities. There were about 20 students (both boys and girls) involved in the realization of the plan.

The main aim of using the method of intersemiotic translation in English lessons was consolidation and enrichment of vocabulary of the English language skills, and thus increasing language skills among students (writing and speaking in English) and developing interests, artistic and acting skills of the students.

The specific objectives can be listed in the following way:

- increasing motivation to learn English by involving students in the preparation of the performance;
- developing creative thinking and acting skills;
- shaping students' openness and curiosity towards other nationalities and cultures;
- striving to break the so-called "language barrier" when speaking; shaping students' ability to work independently;
- contact with art through active participation in this type of performance;
- strengthening confidence in one's own strength and language skills;
- gaining freedom in dialogue and role-playing; acquiring the ability to work with the method of intersemiotic translation.

Educational goals are to be achieved by:

- sensitization to the beauty and promotion of the culture;
- preparation for a conscious reception the literature;
- creating a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language through the play;
- implementing participation in school life;
- teaching proper relations and actions for the benefit of others;
- learning how to cooperate in a group while performing acting tasks; active spending of free time.

All students of the researched classes have a mild impairment, but their individual possibilities are very diverse. Taking into account, for example, the ability to read, we found out that:

- two students read fluently and with understanding (provided that it is a short text);
- four students have a good command of reading technique, but their reading is without understanding (even if it is a short text);
- other students show difficulties already at the level of reading;
- all students have more or less difficulty in reading in English.

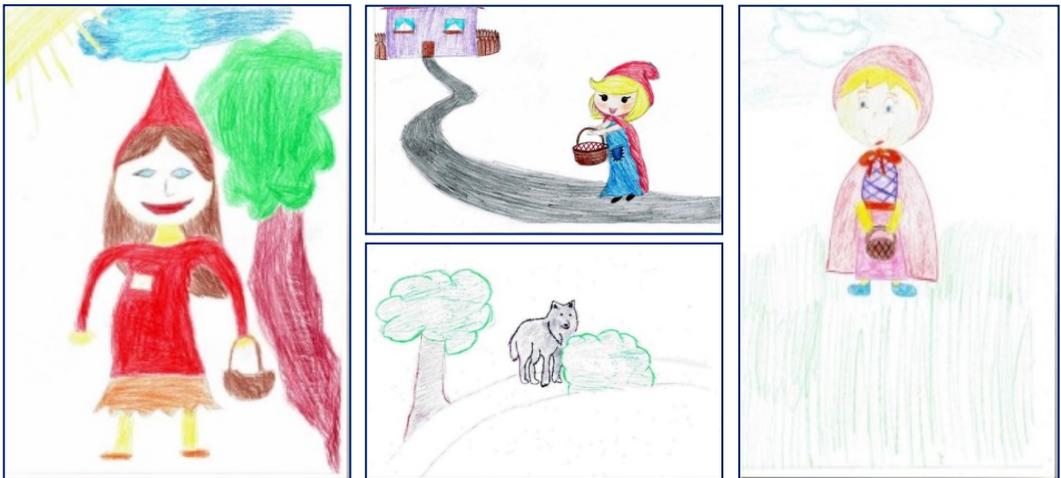
As a result, almost all literary texts are difficult to perceive for these pupils. While working on "The Little Red Riding Hood", we chose reading and analyzing the simplified version of the text, both in Polish and English.

In the first script, in accordance with the rules of intersemiotic translation, we encouraged students to present a fragment of the tale they had read in the form of a picture story. Our proposal was met with great approval among the students, as they like to do various kinds of artwork. Analyzing the students' creative pictures, we were able to assess how they perceived and understood a literary text they had read. It was also a great opportunity to develop their language skills, because the students had to express their opinions on their works, both verbally and in writing. As a rule, they do not like to express their opinions on the text they read, but in this case, through the use of intersemiotic translation, they were eager to talk about what they had drowned.



While characterizing the main characters of the work, I consciously chose this fairy tale and these characters. It is known to students. The characters of the Wolf and the Hood are built by the authors on the basis of contrast. I used this fact to practice the ability to create words of opposite meaning. I used drawing again. When children create artwork, they open up and often "think loudly". Then they freely express their feelings and reflections, which is difficult to achieve by asking questions like the teacher asks - the student answers. When they started the work, the pupils themselves chose the character they would draw.

These are some exemplary works of the students. The pictures show a positive heroine - Hood, and the Wolf, a negative character.



The biggest difficulty for my students was to write the characteristics of one of the characters in English (homework). Here the following problems occurred: lack of consistency of the text, poor vocabulary, numerous mistakes, incompetent use of translators.

The students were most impressed by the preparation of the play for a funny English performance. They showed great discipline and concentration of attention, with which they usually have huge problems. Thanks to the fact that we recorded their performance and then reviewed them, students were aware of their mistakes. Therefore, they tried to speak loudly, clearly, modulate their voices, be aware of punctuation marks. This exercise turned out to be a great form of speech therapy. There were no more problems with discussing the effects of working together. The children were very eager to express themselves, they said what they thought could work out better, what they liked the most.

They immediately expressed their readiness to prepare next performance or the radio audience. There are some photographs of students' performance: Little Red Riding Hood. The actors are students from Special School in Czestochowa.



Conclusions and suggestions

The method of intersemiotic translation allows a teacher to achieve great effects in teaching English as a foreign language working with handicapped children. Among them are: it activates imagination and creative activity of such students, develops their focus of attention, inspires the spontaneity of the students' statements, develops auditory analysis and synthesis, improves students' visual and motor coordination, develops literacy, allows a teacher to assimilate a literary text, integrates the classroom team.

So, to sum it up, intersemiotic translation is an effective way "to unlock" students with deficits. Thanks to the concretization of a literary text, it supports the didactic process. It also prevents monotony in the classroom and involves all students in solving the problem. This method also strengthens self-esteem and teaches self-reliance. Its inclusion to the teaching process and educational work requires the teacher's involvement and knowledge of the abilities of such special pupils. However, it is worthwhile to put this effort into enjoying the overall development of the students.

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