WHAT DO YOU SEE IN THE PICTURE
OR HAT CAN YOU DO WITH THE PICTURE

ČO VIDÍŠ NA OBRÁZKU
ALEBO ČO MÔŽEŠ UROBIŤ S OBRÁZKOM

IVANA HORVÁTHOVÁ

Abstract:

The paper deals with a picture as a multilayer and handy visual aid in methodology of teaching English language. It focuses on seven action verbs describing learner´s cognitive processes in relation to the picture. It states five ways of looking at picture from a linguistic point of view. The paper compares the differences between a ready-made and drawn picture introducing concrete advantages of the latter. It also suggests a piece of advice for teachers and learners of how to draw and prepare motivating own drawn pictures in a few minutes.

Abstrakt:

Príspevok sa zaoberá obrázkom ako viacvrstvovou a praktickou vizuálnou pomôckou v metodike vyučovania anglického jazyka. Zameriava sa na sedem aktívnych slovies, ktoré opisujú žiakove kognitívne procesy vo vzťahu k danému obrázku. Uvádza päť spôsobov ako vnímať obrázok z lingvistického hľadiska. Príspevok porovnáva rozdiely medzi prevzatým a kresleným obrázkom, pričom predkladá konkrétne výhody toho kresleného. Navrhuje učiteľom a žiakom ako si nakresliť a pripraviť vlastné motivačné obrázky v priebehu niekoľkých minút.

Keywords: picture, drawing, mind´s activity, experience, thoughtfulness.

Kľúčové slová: obrázok, kreslenie, mentálna aktivita, skúsenosť, premyslenosť.

Introduction

The wealth of visual materials which we are surrounded by has an increasing tendency along with the suggestions of their usage in a teaching process. A teacher has therefore infinite number of possibilities which should be carefully filtered based on certain criteria. The first opening paragraph indicates a picture as something to immediately attract learner´s atten-

tion accelerating his/her verbal response to it using the term "multifaceted." It explains the idea of teacher´s intentional choice of a particular illustration and it emphasizes the association between showing and making proper comment on the picture. The second paragraph is aimed at five ways of looking at picture from the point of view of language. The relation between picture and verbal communication presents the third paragraph. Firstly, it concerns with a simple communication verbal scheme with the following elements: addresser, message, addressee, context, code and contact. Secondly, it asserts six language functions determined by these elements and defined by Jakobson (1960): emotive, referential, poetic, phatic, metalingual, conative and their practical impact on the above-mentioned relation between picture and oral communication. The last two paragraphs demonstrate the differences between a ready-made and drawn picture. It encourages all teachers to create their own drawn pictures which are time-saving and tempting for learners.

Visual attractiveness of picture as a starting point?

Similarly as the reading skill is made up of psychological, physical and social elements, a picture fosters a number of mental operations in learner´s critical and logical thinking. If we say "picture", the first thing that probably comes to our mind is: "we can see it." Sight is one of our essential senses and the teacher should therefore choose the pictures which would firstly stimulate learner´s eyes. However, bright and colourful pictures are not the only key to success (nowadays, there is a strong tendency to return back to black and white pictures and photos). So the main point is not a colour (colours can possibly contribute to expansion of vocabulary), but the idea which is expressed by picture through its representation of people; their body posture, gestures and mimics; their physical appearance; position of various objects; setting; nature and other details provoking thoughtful suggestions. Albano (2013) dedicates her attention to seven verbs with reference to the complex nature of any picture (instead of the original "enact", we use the verb "evaluate"). Moreover, these verbs are easily memorable because their initial letters make the word "picture" and they are core verbs in searching for meaning in pictures themselves: *predict*, *interact*, *create*, *talk*, *understand*, *reflect*, *evaluate* (ibid, n. p.)

The teacher uses the verb to *predict* when he/she wants to elicit as many answers as possible related to that particular picture and he/she does not reject any of them. The aim of making predictions is to motivate and prepare learners for the activity which the teacher is planning to complete. The teacher often formulates the task in the following way: "Look at the

picture/pictures and tell me what happened (without reading a text)." Of course, this instruction may have several alternatives. For example, the teacher can cut the picture, divide it into groups and learners´ task is to reconstruct the whole picture and the plot or the teacher can show the picture/pictures for two seconds (really for two seconds) and learners have to imagine this picture in their mind and guess what they have seen.

When the learners start to *interact*, it means that they collaborate with somebody (pair work or group work) and with something (with picture itself). The most important is to involve all learners in the process of interaction. The teacher is always working with a mixed ability group and based on stimulation coming from the picture also weaker learners who need more time to organize their thoughts will be willing to actively participate. The learners have a support in the form of picture serving as a bridge between them and communication.

If the learners *talk*, they exchange information and in terms of pictures they *create* something original to be shown, as well. Picture is that kind of teaching aid which has a capability being transformed into many products such as poster, collage, video, map, signs, graphs, pelmanism, cartoon, comics and many others. It is a very rewarding feeling (especially for very young and young learners) to see their successful outcome. However, the performance is considered to be successful when visual and verbal elements are combined. "*The teacher has the task of creating a context within which communication that takes into account both verbal and non-verbal factors can take place*" (Wright, 1992, p. 137).

It is likely to happen that learners will refuse to verbalize their visual products. In this case, it is more appropriate when teacher holds the product in his/her hands pointing to concrete contextual elements such as people´s actions or objects in the picture. Learners explain, describe and at the same time *understand* visual concepts based on their primary dictionary meaning but they still can do more. According to Bloom´s taxonomy, learners should *evaluate*, *reflect* on their work and search for new connections among thoughts applying them in new situations, so perception of pictures will be holistic. Ferlazzo (2012) offers six simple questions based on Bloom´s taxonomy of educational objectives. It is a useful guide for teachers of how to use implicit language potential of pictures:

- Knowledge: What items or people can you name with the vocabulary you know?
- Comprehension: What is happening in the picture?
- Application: What one sentence about people in the picture would you write?
- Analysis: Where do you think people are?

- Synthesis: What might they be thinking?
- Evaluation: Are they too young to do some activity? Why or why not? (ibid, n. p.)

Except the above-stated procedure leading the teacher from surface to depth (from knowledge to evaluation), it is important to emphasize that the teacher has to listen to his/her learners, react to their responses. The teacher becomes the intended listener and he/she is engaged in the message coming from the picture. It is a mutual checking of communication channel (not only learners are supposed to listen to the teacher but also the teacher should be careful towards learners). The exchange of information during this process significantly influences the learner´s word stock and it creates a solid basis for further speaking and writing. All learners are competent but they need to perform it and produce something in a meaningful context.

Picture as a grammar-communication tool in five chain steps

On one hand, pictures are static because they capture a certain moment. On the other hand, they are dynamic because they enable to activate *vocabulary*, *structures*, *functions*, *situations* and *skills*. When the teacher distributes the picture, the learners´ first task is to name as many people and objects as possible using *vocabulary* they are familiar with. "*The use of suitable pictures in the introduction of language can speed the process by which students assimilate meaning*" (Wright, 1992, p. 138). These initial minimal verbal responses (to name people and things) are followed by making grammatical *structures*. Each structure must have its *function* and correspond with the scene. Due to many stimuli in the picture, it is recommended to use a system of WH-questions "who, what, when, where, why, how." Concrete and specific questions should be prepared by the teacher in advance to support the relation between description of the picture and experience with it (see above in Ferlazzo, 2012). During the description itself, it is crucial to put emphasis on occurrence of present continuous tense as the one used with picture description, for instance "She is driving." In order to demonstrate other grammatical tenses (if it is the objective of the lesson), it is more appropriate to use separate versions of pictures. For example, the utterances "She is going to drive" and "She has driven" cannot be represented by one picture. The reason is that sentences differ in their form (structure), meaning, use, and function. The first statement illustrates the intention to drive (picture: a person is not in the car but he/she is planning to do) and the second one expresses that even though the action is finished, it can be repeated more than once (picture: a person leaves the space where the car is but he/she still can return back and drive). In the light

of these model sentences, it is clear that pictures are used for teaching grammatical tenses and not only vocabulary (Wright, 2004). Now the learners are prepared to absorb the structures in *situations*. The teacher may add some clues letting learners work on their situations or mini-dialogues more precisely. Consequently, the teacher proposes different kinds of activities for listening, speaking, reading and writing *skills* with respect to scene in the picture. Wright (1992) adapts language skills choosing one authentic situation of the picture- "street scene". It is a car incident with the boy running across the street. As for the first language skill, the author suggests to listen to several statements of witnesses of the incident and decide which are false based on the picture. Then, learners´ task is to read and compare two articles and list differences of emphasis. Learners are now prepared to write a brief report through the eyes of a witness. Finally, the picture of street scene is hidden and learners have to recall the situation from their memory to find out if they would be reliable witnesses describing the situation (ibid, p. 5-6). It is very similar to the activity in the first paragraph where the learner sees the picture for two seconds. In situations like the car incident, one is also the witness of a very short fragment. He/she has to think deeply to refresh his/her memories and convey their ideas in words.

Elements of verbal communication and their functions referring to picture as a non-verbal teaching aid

Each communication requires the addresser, the addressee and the message. In a school environment the role of *addresser* stands for teacher (sender), the *addressee* is the learner (receiver) and the *message* indicates something "behind the picture" (not the picture itself). However, the role of sender and receiver may change with regard to situation (see metalingual function). If the teacher wants to work with the picture, he/she should contextualize it searching for the *code*, i.e. suitable way of expressing to transmit the message towards the learner. As a consequence, it enables the teacher to be in *contact* (in touch) with learners- to start and stay in communication. Jakobson (1960) defines six functions of language organized into different levels as the picture does.

The first function focused on the addressee is *conative*. This function helps the teacher in terms of instructions using vocative and imperative sentences to attract learner´s attention. To be successful, the teacher has to be persuaded that the picture and its message which he/she is going to present are remarkable and meaningful. *Emotive or expressive* function is oriented towards the addresser. It means that information and knowledge cannot be transmitted without adding emotional colouring, teacher´s personal

attitudes, feelings and opinions about the picture. From the linguistic point of view, the teacher uses interjections of pleasure, surprise or annoyance which differ in their sound. The message is represented by *poetic* function. If we realise it or not, we all use figurative language with a connotative meaning on a daily basis so this function is not exclusively related to poetry as a genre and teacher´s duty to choose famous artwork, painting or world-known portrait. All pictures, photos and images are a part of a broader context which has *referential* function, i.e. denotative or cognitive. The function that checks if the learner and teacher share the same code is called *metalingual* by using questions such as "*I can´t follow you- what do you mean?*" (by using this and that word). The last function called *phatic* is interconnected with the first one. Whereas the aim of conative function is to persuade learners and draw their attention to the picture, phatic function is used to maintain this contact using ritualised formulas such as "*Are you listening?*", "*Look at this!*" or "*Is a red car, isn´t it?*" to be sure that both sides (teacher and learners) are on the same wavelength. All in all, pictures serve as a support along with these well-known phrases in order to encourage the interaction between the learner and teacher (Jakobson, 1960, In Miššíková, 2003).

Is it worth putting an effort in own drawn pictures when the teacher can download them?

"*This course book contains a lot of colourful pictures connected to the topic*", "*It is very easy- do one click and you can choose whatever picture you want*", "*Do not worry! All pictures will be sent to you in one set and if you want, we can send you much more.*" These extracts briefly demonstrate the fact that ready-made pictures are offered as the only possibility for the teacher and they support the idea that everything is immediately accessible. But they are more appealing ways of obtaining a picture.

The first one are own sources. In comparison with the pictures which are either additional material to course book or they can be downloaded from the Internet, own pictures hide a story, a number of situations and experiences, thus the teacher´s task is to only specify vocabulary and grammatical structures. Wright (1992) lists twenty-two sources of pictures: newspapers, magazines, advertisements and publicity, holiday brochures, business brochures, catalogues, calendars, greetings cards, postcards, reproductions of art, posters, wallcharts, instructions, old books, comics and cartoon strips, family photographs and slides, stamps, playing cards, wrapping paper, course book, the teacher´s and students´ own drawings, photocopying (ibid, 182 – 187). The teacher should identify with the picture,

photo reminding his/her feelings which will be given to learners. As a result, learners remember vocabulary, grammar and its function much better because visual teaching aids are authentic and not artificial. Downloaded pictures do not allow us to do so because they are chosen randomly according to their surface (visual attractiveness) and not deep level (feelings, message behind it).

The third way of creating pictures is home-made indicating drawn pictures. Many teachers believe that they have to be artists to draw professional pictures of a high quality. However, they should firstly take into consideration that there is one general representation of a person, animal or thing seen in the picture and it is modified by the learners based on their stored knowledge and own experiences. If the teacher wants to draw people in action, he/she can use stick figures drawing thin and linear lines for the legs and arms and a circle of the head. In this way, the teacher can draw (at home or on the board) people playing tennis, people who are dancing or people doing some domestic chores. Concerning animals, the easiest way of how to draw them is to use geometric shapes (the main shape is rectangular). Moreover, it serves as the inspiration for learners to make animals of paper. The difference between drawn animals and things consists in a variety of shapes, for instance round shape for a ring, rectangular shape representing a book, triangular is a sandwich, and square can be butter. If it is a person, animal or thing, the drawing has to be big enough with respect to class arrangement. A size of picture which is studied in pairs or groups can be smaller but not the smallest. The picture and its details should be still easily recognisable by learners. When the teacher is planning to work with the whole class, he/she must definitely prepare a picture clearly seen from the back of a classroom. It is recommended to use a black highlighter and check the appropriateness of picture size from at least one metre before distributing it to the learners. All pictures must be simple, comprehensible for learners at a first glance (ibid). This economic way of creating pictures encourages not only teachers themselves but also learners to discover, collaborate and ask questions.

Conclusion

As the teacher is asking himself/herself before and during preparation of a lesson plan "what" and "how", the same WH- questions may be applied to pictures. After explaining the aspect of visual attractiveness and multilayer nature of picture, it is clear that a vital determinant is the message (behind the picture) which needs to be explored. Our paper proofs that it is not enough to grab whatever picture for learning new vocabulary. It is

indispensable to think in advance about its purpose, practical impact on learners inserting grammatical constructions with understandable and memorable functions. Pictures are unique teaching aids by means of which each learner is equally involved in teaching-learning process. We find appropriate to conclude the paper with the quotation of the author and illustrator of simple drawings Andrew Wright: "*However, the potential of pictures is so great that only a taste of their full potential can be given* (1992, p.6)."

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Kontakt:
Mgr. Ivana Horváthová
Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa
Filozofická fakulta
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky
Štefánikova 67, 949 74 Nitra
Slovenská republika
Email: ivana.horvathova@ukf.sk