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Teaching Second Languages at Pre-School Age: The Russian Experience

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The history of foreign language teaching to the very young in Russia is interrelated with the need of society to organize a better linguistic education at school which yields people who are able to read important sources in other tongues. Formally, the declared goal is communication with foreigners as equals in their languages. In reality, very few foreigners were allowed to enter the USSR and only nominated reliable citizens of the Soviet Union crossed its borders, mostly on their way to other Socialist countries. Politics influenced the selection, the volume and the ways of teaching languages in education. In the nineteenth century, when Russia was an integrated part of Europe, the natural approach was used for the most-taught contemporary languages, to the detriment of mother-tongue teaching. Soviet rule reversed this tendency: as autarchy advanced, contacts with other countries were cut; speakers of foreign tongues became suspect. Authorities mistrusted those who could read without censorship. The interest in an early start in the teaching of foreign languages in the Soviet Union and Russia peaked in the 1960s (the period of Khrushchev’s Thaw) and the second half of the 1980s up until the mid-1990s (Perestroika and democratic development). In the 2000s, the situation changed again: the very rich sent their children abroad or invited native speakers to teach them while they were brought up in Russia; the less well-off paid for additional lessons. During Soviet times, most of the contents of the foreign-language-teaching materials referred to life in the Soviet Union; they supposed that foreigners would arrive to learn how well everything was going on there. From life abroad, only old texts could be taken, or those connected with the fight of the working classes for their rights. The specific Russian approach underlines the importance of conscious learning and the use of the mother tongue in the study of foreign languages, as well as the major role of Russian as the state language in teaching the indigenous languages to the national minorities. The role of one’s own and of others’ thought connected to language is one of the topical discussions throughout the history of foreign-language teaching.
Introduction

The image of children and their role in society has changed throughout history. Sometimes they were regarded as small adults; sometimes as abnormal creatures that had to be instructed at every stage of their development; and sometimes as innocent angels from whom adults had to learn and who would be defiled by contact with the contemporary world. Thus, the role of a foreign language and culture was considered to be either a sin or a blessing, a benefit or a danger. A foreign language could be condemned as an alien way of thinking, as an imported cultural influence or as an antagonistic picture of the world; consequently, it had to be banned. Yet it was also important to penetrate the thought of the enemy through his language. Russia is no exception.

The history of teaching a second language in Russia can be divided into (i) teaching classical languages such as Greek and Latin; (ii) teaching the language of religion (Church Slavonic, Old Church Slavonic and others); (iii) teaching modern languages like German, French and English; and (iv) teaching Russian to minorities inside Russia. Only (iii) and (iv) apply to the pre-school age. The methods of teaching influenced each other, but the ideology has differed and changed over the years. One had to decide what the reasons for selecting the languages were. Then the order, periods and intervals for introducing languages had to be discussed. The optimal order, according to tradition, is to start with German, to proceed to French, and finally to learn English, if there is enough time: German as the language of discipline and science that controls the brain and develops the variety of sounds; French as language of culture that enables one to perceive nuances; and English as the language of literature, business, style and thought. At the beginning of the twentieth century, people believed that English pronunciation could hamper the sounds in other languages, so it should be acquired after German and French (information from my interviews; see below).

Pre-school age is specific in many respects. Children acquire almost perfect pronunciation. On the one hand, small children are believed to be more receptive to foreign languages than adults; on the other hand, they can forget everything that they have learned, apart from songs and poems. Proponents of the early start have accentuated its outcome: almost all pupils who started at pre-school age spent less time studying later, had very good results and showed high cognitive development. Its opponents still consider the learning of languages to be money- and time-consuming, a hard and painful task which is not worth trying (Lomakina and Laer 2014; and numerous websites for parents).

The question of the teachers' competence arises. In the nineteenth century, teachers were native speakers of the language. After the October Revolution, in the first years of Soviet rule, almost everybody who was competent in foreign languages on a high level had left the country with the White emigration. Those who remained became teachers of languages without development: their language fossilized; their pupils never left the country and were even less competent than their teachers were. The general competence declined. A knowledge of the alien culture supposed an acquaintance with dangerous values like religious festivities that were banned from education in the USSR.
This chapter presents the views of famous Russian educators on the effects of early language education and traces the brief history of teaching methods from the end of the nineteenth century up to the present. It demonstrates the interdependence between methods for adults and those for children. There will be a special focus on ‘Russian’ approaches. The goal is to show the discrepancy between the home-made image of the culture connected with the foreign language, grammatical drill, and the uneven availability of such education depending on social class. Parallels in the ideology of the past and present of language teaching will be noted, notwithstanding new technological possibilities. I also offer an example of one teaching technique used from the nineteenth century to the present day in teaching languages to young children in Russia: lotto.

Foreign-Language Teaching in Russia

The growing necessity to know foreign languages can be traced back to the times of Tsar Peter the Great (r. 1682-1721), who introduced Dutch and German as the languages of his ‘teachers’. He was interested in learning new things through languages. His daughter Elisabeth, whilst on the throne (r. 1741-1762), supported French. Inspired by Peter the Great, the etiquette manual Yunosti chestnoe zerkalo [The True Mirror of Youth] (Anon: 1819 [1717]) says that those who are able, besides other talents, to speak foreign languages can become courtiers:

[T]he young lads should speak among themselves in foreign languages in order to be acquainted with them, especially in case they happen to say something secret, so that the servants and housemaids are unable to find out what it is about, and in order to distinguish them from ignorant blockheads, because every merchant praising his goods sells as he can.  

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the first ABCs and grammars of Latin, French, Italian and German were published; English came some years later and in 1773 was introduced as a compulsory subject at the Academic Gymnasium in Saint Petersburg, for example (Surina 2008).

In Russian history, there were three ways of becoming bilingual. One could be born to bilingual parents, which was rather common in a country where even today there are more than 160 indigenous languages spoken. Next, one could grow up in a family where another language was spoken or in a foreign country. Third, the family could invite a family teacher to speak to the children in his language. According to the fine literature of the nineteenth century, the last variant was common practice in well-to-do families, where teachers of French and German were invited (Rjeoutsiki and Tchoudinov 2013). French had the reputation of being the language of social encounters and the arts, whereas German was the language of education. By the end of the nineteenth century, as in the family of the Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov, English became more widely spoken (Nabokov 1989). Society copied the way of speaking in the Tsar’s family, who changed their habits according to the political situation (Zimin 2011). When a foreign language was taught at schools, it was German rather than French; in gymnasiums (grammar or upper secondary schools), Latin and Ancient Greek were taught as well.
According to Russian historians of language teaching (Rahmanov 1972; Mirolubov 2002; Gal'skova 2003; Nikshikova 2007), the methodological periods in Russia can be delineated as follows:

* 1860–1920. Direct, or natural, method: family tutors and teachers of language spoke to children. The educated strata of society introduced three languages to their children in early childhood. The manuals of mother and foreign tongues did not differ much from each other and books in original language were used to study. State schools became affordable for all and many more people gained access to education.

* 1920–50. Characterized by the search for Socialist ways of teaching (e.g., at some point Esperanto became popular), and by a lack of competent teachers. The dead languages were rejected; the teaching of German was reinforced as the language of Communist predecessors Marx and Engels, of the German proletariat. The grammar-translation method dominated. Lexis was divided into active and passive use of vocabulary. Every syllabus started with an introductory phonetic propaedeutic course, the teaching sets developed (including teachers' and pupils' textbooks and additional materials, not only the schoolbook). Only one foreign language was taught, usually German.

* 1950–90. Lowering of the age for starting foreign-language learning in schools; experiments with schools and kindergartens specializing in foreign-language teaching (in small numbers, for the elite strata of society). The English language began to dominate. Consciousness and comparison in the acquisition of language grew. Programmed and intensive methods grew. Home-made textbooks, classical and Socialist literature were used for all languages taught. A second foreign language, usually French or German, was introduced in some schools by the end of the period.

* 1990–. An increasing need to know foreign languages in view of the openness of the newly democratic Russian society. More effective and varied methods of language teaching; opportunities to travel abroad and study in other countries. Emergence of a wide group of parents who teach languages at home. The introduction of imported methods of language teaching, the use of foreign textbooks. Native speakers became teachers in nurseries and pre-schools. The implementation of computer- and internet-based methods. Language teaching started to be planned throughout the lifespan (including minority and state languages). Since 2004, English (more rarely other languages) is taught from the age of eight to nine in all schools.

The teaching of Russian to the national minorities became obligatory before the Second World War; the generations that started school later grew up more competent in Russian than in their mother tongue. A reverse tendency of national mobilization and de-Russification started in the late 1980s and different types of bilingual kindergartens are still emerging in Russia: for example, in 2015 there were more than 160 pre-primary groups where German is taught both as a foreign language and as a minority language of the Russian Germans in eight regions of Russia, mostly near Omsk and in Altai, according to information from the Russian-German House (<http://drh-moskau.ru; www.rusdeutsch.eu>). They use the method 'Deutsch mit Schrumdi' developed in cooperation between Russian and German educators.
Teaching Languages to pre-School Children in the Past

The age for starting school varies from country to country at different epochs. In Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, children started school between eight and twelve years; after the Second World War the age was first seven and is now between six and eight years of age.

The first nurseries and pre-schools started to function in the 1860s, so organized teaching goes back to that period. There were two tendencies: kindergartens for the children of the intelligentsia or cultured people; and kindergartens for the children of workers. The first were designed for socialization and for teaching different subjects, among other things foreign languages; the latter were more to keep children safe while their parents were working and to teach them the basics of behaviour. It is necessary to add that at that time dialects were spoken in the countryside that differed in many aspects from the literary language. Indeed, it was a trilingual situation because children whose education was provided by the Russian Orthodox Church alone had to acquire Church Slavonic as the language of their literacy. The mother tongue of children differed from Russian in the national areas where a significant part of the local population had another ethnicity; and in some regions (such as the Caucasus, Tatarstan, Bashkiria, Middle Asia, Siberia) they might have a different religion, and be using a different language and a different script as well.

In the nineteenth century textbooks for children often consisted of grammar rules, texts and sometimes lists of words; they evolved with time (Miroljubov 2002: 48–63). The natural teaching of languages was based upon an understanding of the ways of speaking to children, oriented towards everyday communicative situations. Children wanted to express their thoughts in a foreign language because they had no other option.

The journals for kindergartens that were published in the nineteenth century mentioned certain topics that are still relevant to this day; for example, the natural character of teaching that can be achieved if we start early. Mrs Okorokova (1873) proposed not to translate, but to use visual aids and actions with objects, to start with words and then go on to phrases and sentences. First, children had to analyse the sound composition and afterwards the letter composition of words. Next, children had to learn to interpret. Oral language and translation should take priority. An anonymous opponent, using only the initials N. I. (1874: 317), wrote:

The teaching of foreign languages must contribute to the general intellectual development of the child, to teach them to overcome difficulties, to develop their independence, to serve, so to speak, as gymnastics for the mind. However, the teaching of languages with the sole goal of grasping how to speak will be a one-sided training of memory, leaving all other sides of the mind completely untouched.

This discussion continued over the years. Some believed that communication while teaching languages must not be conducted in the foreign language only, as it could hamper the ease and the genuineness of self-expression by the child, who is thinking in Russian anyway. An anonymous author (Anon. 1877: 414) wrote that
'the learning of foreign languages must start at an early age, when the mechanical memorizing function is simpler, when the brain is suppler and the ear is softer; but the stage for this is seven years'. At this stage, children at that time were not yet at school and had not learned their alphabet.

Some thinkers in Europe turned to patriotic ideas, romanticizing the traditional way of life and trying to form a national consciousness. The famous Russian educator Konstantin Ushinsky (1873: 11) stated that a child can learn a foreign language in a few months to a level that adults can only reach through years of hard work. He and other renowned educators — Elizaveta Vodovozova and Elizaveta Tiheeva in particular — stressed that children should speak their own language well first and that it was unpleasant to listen to children who can speak different foreign languages but stumble in their mother tongue. The national culture should precede other cultures. A foreign language must be started only once the mother tongue is deeply rooted, wrote Tiheeva (1981: 122-23); and one or two hours per day are enough. These were democratic principles because the elite should not be separated from their own people through the lack of a common language; and these ideas won after the Revolution of 1917. Unfortunately, they still influence pre-primary teaching today, even though the situation in the country has changed completely.

From the 1920s until the 1930s the general teaching of a second language besides Russian as the state language started rather late. The intelligentsia and the new bourgeoisie during the times of the New Economic Policy continued to teach foreign languages at pre-school age in private, for groups of children or individually. I have collected personal testimonies (through personal interviews with old people from the 1970s to 1990s, all of whom could remember learning a foreign language in their childhood) that German, French and English were all taught; and it was not a rare practice, but rather a must in educated society. In the 1930s a certain Emma Fjodorovna and Magda Arturovna (of German origin; their names were adapted to Russian tradition through patronyms) used to gather children to take them on a group stroll to learn some songs and poems, which was quite normal practice at the time. For women of the former higher social stratum, teaching modern languages was a question of earning money. The methods described were reading and discussing books, doing exercises, playing games, singing songs.

Olga Tolstaya-Voeikova (2005; 2012) describes her practice with her grandchildren, who spoke three foreign languages (besides Russian) — French, German, English — alternating between them; she tried to organize play sessions with their peers to make them communicate in the language acquired (Jobert 2013). The same books were re-read many times until all the vocabulary could be understood; all the grammatical forms remembered; all the expressions learned by heart; and until all the conversations ran smoothly. The old books by the Comtesse de Ségur, née Rostopchine, were still very popular. Regularity of lessons had to be observed. The ability to dance, as a social accomplishment.
Not everyone knows that Lev Vygotsky formulated most of his pedagogical ideas while teaching foreign languages to children. In 1928 he wrote that there are no general rules to judge bilingualism as a propitious or a hampering factor under any possible circumstances, always and everywhere, independently of the concrete conditions under which this development happens and of the regularities of this development, which change at each age level. The solution to this question, according to Vygotsky, is very difficult and depends on the age of the children, on the character of the encounter of both languages, and on the pedagogical impact on the development of one’s own and others’ speech (Vygotsky 1982: 334).

Under the autarchy of the Soviet Union, new books, new teaching methods and new native speakers were difficult to come by. Those who could speak foreign languages at a native-like level were simply dying out or in exile. Still, a thin stratum of intelligentsia continued to employ people who could teach any foreign tongues to their children. According to my interviews, English began to predominate in the 1960s as the language of science and fine literature. One of the teachers famous in Moscow was Ida Moiseyevna, half Jewish and half Afro-American, who came to the USSR in the 1930s in search of her Communist husband, who perished in the GULAG; she did not learn Russian but taught a group of children English, giving them an American accent, which some considered insulting (Protassova and Rodina 2011: 77–78). A certain Maria Teodorovna taught English too; Maria Grigorievna (in the 1960s) and Madam Agnes (in the 1980s) taught French. They gathered groups of children with whom they repeated the same phrases, made pictures and learned new words, poems, songs and dialogues. Parents were involved too: they had to rehearse the phrases etc. at home with their children.

During the Thaw period after the Stalin’s death, the Communist Party issued a resolution that the teaching of foreign languages had to be improved, e.g. through an earlier start. Experts immediately started to publish programmes for the teaching of languages. Most of them contained phrases; thematically organized lexicology; question–answer situations; songs and poems for children. Besides using original folklore, the authors composed texts themselves, but there were no native speakers to check the quality of the language, just as there are not enough competent proofreaders even now. In the 1960s Bekker, Braginskiy, Carapkina and others published materials for young learners (e.g. Chistiakova et al. 1964). Another source was the manuals imported from other Socialist countries, such as Malo Mozayka, a magazine from Poland for those who studied foreign languages, and the monthly children’s magazine Bummi from the German Democratic Republic, as well as imports of English-language children’s books from China and later from India.

The practice of teaching foreign languages in kindergarten had demonstrated that every child aged four or five could learn a foreign language. To be communicative meant to be able to construct phrases, to ask questions, to issue commands, to describe pictures and situations, to understand short stories told by the teacher. All these phrases could be put together into a longer utterance. The model played an important role. The contents had to be familiar to the child, while the environment should be distinct from that connected with other activities, so that the child
would concentrate upon the foreign language and not confound it with the mother tongue. The early start had a positive influence on school studies. Sometimes one could believe that it is a question of enthusiasm, but it was much more a question of motivation and quantity of input.

The next step in the development of the methodology was taken by Mateckaya (1971) who introduced activity in the foreign language in congruence with other children's activities. It was similar to the theory of total physical response popular at that time. For her, children acquired different speech qualities for their character while speaking during dramatization (such as tempo, intonation, voice, individual characteristics, etc.). The culture of speaking consisted of the ability to listen, to pronounce the endings of words and phrases, and to gain a better command of the mother tongue by comparing it with the foreign language. Klimentenko (1976) conducted experiments with six-year-old children. She highlighted the importance of imprinting, imitation, concrete objects and actions, and learning whole set phrases, arranged thematically. Semantization was based on images and translations. She also wanted children to switch their attention from external control to internal control. Testing was based on translation. Futerman (1984) and Natal’ina (1982) worked along the same lines.

In the 1980s the most popular method was formulated by Negnevickaya (1986), a structural linguist who based her theory on the typological differences between languages on all levels (differences in phonetics, grammar, semantics, syntax became motivated through play and games: the child wished something in play, therefore a certain grammatical or lexical unit should be used). The research was based upon the psychological theories of Vygotsky (especially his zone of proximal development); Leontiev's motivation of each language action; Slobin's and Shahnarovich's theories of child language development from word to utterance; and Bakhtin's theory of the addressee of every speech act. Negnevickaya motivated each part of the sentence by play and games, which she considered the most appropriate way for a child to acquire something. The basis of her most influential approach is: understanding before acting; learning language together with action; the need to formulate any part of the sentence or text according to the goal; the combination of verbal actions and step-by-step growth of utterances in all domains of human speech activity (Negnevickaya and Shahnarovich 1981). Each construction started with imperatives; going on to differences between singular and plural, third and later first and then second person; adding nouns and prepositions; and everything was accompanied with the handling of real objects. Parents played an important role in teaching because they were present during the lessons and practised the words and constructions with the children at home. After three years of visiting lessons twice a week, children could produce orally, read and write small texts in English (Negnevickaya 1986).

Negnevickaya worked mostly with English and Russian. Androchikhova (1988) and others expanded these principles to French, German and Spanish. A group of educators and researchers in the Soviet national republics transferred this system to the teaching of Russian as a second language. I personally took part in all these
developments and report here what was happening. In 1987, the Collegium of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federal Republic started experiments in teaching foreign languages to children aged four in kindergartens and six at primary schools. These large-scale experiments were conducted in Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and Ukraine; their purpose was to prove that foreign languages could be included in the general programmes of pre-primary and primary education. Tens of thousands of children and hundreds of school and pre-school teachers participated in them throughout the country and made Negnevickaya's methods very popular. The pre-schools organized lessons twice a week with a group of twenty children who proved to have good memory skills and to be able to imitate sounds very well. At the same time, the practice found that the children shouted loudly, they soon became tired and could not listen to each other. For such children, a special tradition of rituals was necessary: when they heard the same phrases at the beginning, they were happy. Some movement and etiquette rules were also set at the beginning. Extrapolation to the national republics often led to a situation where about fifty children in a group with only one teacher and using several minority languages were expected to learn the Russian language by immersion.

I made protocols of such encounters at that time and keep these records. The typical lesson in a pre-primary was as follows: children sat on chairs in a circle or at a table; the teacher used many visual aids and alternated activities; no parents were present; combining words with movements was a widely used technique. In a couple of years children learned the seasons and the times of the day; could ask and speak about domestic and wild animals; about what they liked and did not like; about the colours of their toys; about themselves; their families; their clothing; their house; toys; colours; what they could and could not do. They learned many poems; could count; organized gymnastics; sang songs. The crucial part of the method was to start by naming actions and carry them out in reality: go, run, jump, sit, stand, count, see, sleep, sing, dance, fly, swim, climb, wash, play, etc. (from 'Tigers, swim!' to 'Tigers, swim two times across the river!' to 'Six yellow tigers and three black monkeys are swimming across the big blue river'). Imagination was used even in the teaching of grammar rules. Phonetic exercises were explained in a playful manner; the games were based on contrasts between sounds. Children repeated English phrases and inserted English words into their Russian phrases in their free play. They counted in English for all their games outside the classroom.

According to my notes, parents supported the learning of languages as they thought that their children would develop special intellectual characteristics and acquire communicative initiative. They stated that the children looked forward to the lessons and were not tired. They played the same games at home with their toys. Parents received instructions from the teacher, to ask their children what the lesson was about, what was learned there; they also received a copy-book with all the words and phrases so that the children could study at home as well. They were invited to festivities in English. Books in English were recommended. However, not all of the children joined in the games; some were too shy to speak.
Audio and television materials were also created for the three most popular foreign languages: German, French and English. Teachers emphasized the role of foreign languages for the general development of the child: memory, attention, stability, linguistic conjecture, edification, discipline, activity, collectivism, intellectual curiosity. Artistic and dramatic, cognitive and aesthetic abilities were formed. The special capabilities of talented children can be found even at that age; but all the children were found to be much better prepared for school through lessons in a second language (Leont’ev 1986; Negnevickaya 1987; Gal’skova and Nikitenko 2004; Utehina 2013). In 1989 to 1992, the TV program *Detskiy chas [Children’s Hour]* showed its own lessons of English, German and French for children and included fragments of the BBC series *Muzzy in Gondoland* (1986) and *Muzzy Comes Back* (1989), directed by Richard Taylor, from 1990 onwards.

The Current State

The relevance of the pre-school age for teaching foreign or second languages has long been a subject of discussion. The usual themes discussed are the Critical Period Hypothesis and the optimal age to start (e.g., Krashen et al. 1982; Johnson and Newport 1989; Birdson 1999; Flege et al. 1999; del Pilar García Mayo and Lecumberri 2003; DeKeyser 2013); the relationship between value and quality; the scope of the possible achievement targets; the evident advantages of different approaches; the stability and the duration of results (Marinova-Todd et al. 2000; Murad 2006; Nikolov 2009; Rich 2014; Salzmann 2014). Other related questions are: who can be a teacher for the very young (a native speaker only?); what his/her professional qualification should be (pre-school teacher, school teacher, foreign-language, mother-tongue teacher?); how the group should be organized; what additional materials can be used (specially prepared; authentic for mother-tongue or second-language learners?); what the size and the composition of the group must be (all ability or matched levels/ages/backgrounds?); how beneficial or injurious this can be for children with a language impairment or other special needs; in which areas specific benefits can be found; what the age-appropriate and fruitful methods of teaching are (Brumfit et al. 1991; Vale and Feunteun 1995; Rixon 1999; Cameron 2001). The increase in the various methods of foreign-language teaching to the very young has produced a large amount of interdisciplinary research data and a number of recommendations (Edelenbos et al. 2006; Enever et al. 2009; Mourão and Lourenço 2013). Nevertheless, not everyone gives a definition of what a young learner is; there are some difficulties with restricting language teaching to classroom use only; therefore, it is sometimes difficult to compare the learning environments of learners and their families’ influence. All the above-mentioned subjects and concerns are discussed by Russian educationalists as well.

Several hundred publications and dissertations concerning foreign-language teaching at pre-school age in Russia appeared in the years between 1992 and 2015, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For this particular analysis we have chosen only some of the most representative. Theoretical questions interest, for example,
Sulin 2000; Gorlova 2003; Markosian 2004; and Nikolaeva 2011. Questions reflecting particular Russian concerns that differ from prevailing Western views include the following: how detrimental is the learning of foreign languages to the national identity of the Russian citizen? To what extent must a foreign language be learned so that it cannot harm the first language, Russian? Should foreigners, who have other values, be allowed to teach our children? It is still widely believed that a foreign language takes up some place in the mind to the detriment of one’s own language, consciousness and picture of the world, so the theoreticians have to fight for the very idea of the early language teaching.

Many researchers also discuss what should be taught as culture related to the language (Mahneva 2001; Danilova 2009); what kind of personality is formed ideologically; and what the teacher’s attitude towards the foreign culture should be (Kartasheva 2002). In many cases where authentic materials cannot be found, the decision is to teach the local culture decoded into a foreign language (everything can be said in a foreign language). The contents of the teaching (Logunova 1997), the visual stimuli (Voroncova 1999), integration with other activities and the development of the first language (Yacenko 1994; Bahtalina 1998) and the development of cognitive and linguistic abilities (Yudovina 2000; Zhigaleva 2009) are also discussed. The musical (Achkasova 1997; Nevezhina 2000), symbolic (Bludova 1997), playful and fairy-tale (Ponomatko 1991; Snegova 1994) methods are underlined as suitable for pre-schoolers; however, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the materials applied. Studying a foreign language is still regarded as a special activity among other educational activities (Shaverneva 2003; Spiridonova 2010). The geography of investigations is very large; these processes are studied all over Russia.

Some scholars study how children learn foreign languages ‘artificially’: in families where no one speaks these languages as a native speaker, still one of the parents chooses to speak English to the child and the child succeeds in acquiring it (Chernichkina 2007; Chirsheva 2012). Most of the research is dedicated to English-language learning (Tarasiuk 1999; Vronskaya 2015), but some papers concern German, French or Spanish (Hlybova 2000; Tkachuk 2001). Sometimes international experience is taken into account (Gainutdinova 2003). Protassova and Rodina (2009; 2010) combine the two approaches, namely, organized activities and immersion: they build the inclusion of play into the motivation scheme while teaching a second language during specially organized lessons; other activities throughout the day can be accompanied by the second language. Kantelinen et al. (2008) observe that a commodification of foreign languages has occurred in the last decades. There are special programmes at many universities all over Russia that prepare teachers of foreign languages for kindergartens. The Federal Standard does not prescribe the language of education, but takes into account the ethno-cultural situation of the child’s development. Some programmes propose teaching a second language for children as a component of the core curriculum. Teaching foreign languages takes place on a fee-paying basis in pre-primary institutions, each lesson lasting between fifteen and twenty-five to thirty minutes.
(b) Language lotto, reproduced from an old set from nineteenth century.
Example from the reverse side of a small card:
Пробочник, Der Korkzieher, Le tire-bouchon.
Starimoe loto. 2002 (Moscow: Museum of Moscow)
In multilingual Russia and in the states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union a foreign language is often not a second but already a third language for young learners (Ilinov 1991; Sidorova 1992; Fomin 1998). The national republics and regions within Russia have started programmes for the revitalization of the indigenous languages from pre-school on, attempting to reverse the language shift.

A Teaching Technique across the Decades: Lotto

Lotto in four languages (Russian, French, English and German, in this order) was one of the main materials for teaching for many years (see Figures 14.1–4). It is like bingo, although bingo itself was never popular. In lotto sets, a large card has a big picture in the middle (called subject or plot picture in Russian pedagogy). On three or four sides around it (on the margins) are smaller pictures representing objects to be found in the main picture (called object pictures in Russian pedagogy). Inscriptions in four languages are on the reverse side of the picture (the Russian tradition is to put an article before the noun). Small cards double the pictures put on the sides of the big picture.

There are several ways of playing lotto. The leading player may put small cards in
front of the players and ask them 'What is this?'. If s/he answers successfully, s/he may keep the card; if not, the leader places it under the pack. The next player takes his or her turn. The winner is the one who has collected more cards than the other players. Or, if the big cards are distributed, the players fill the slots by matching the small cards and the winner is the person who covers all the slots first. In another variant, players must ask the leader for the small cards by naming the objects represented upon them. The most difficult variants are based upon discussing parts of the big picture. It is widely held that lotto contributes to enlargement of vocabulary, knowledge of the game rules (a person who can follow the rules is seen as an organized person who can pay attention to many things at the same time), and acquisition of elementary discussion skills.

The usual themes for lotto sets were the family, meals, transport, fruit and vegetables, the countryside, the seashore, children's occupations, wild and domestic animals. Lotto has been widely used in foreign-language teaching for young learners from the nineteenth century to the present day. Changes to the contents and layout have coincided with peaks of interest in the early start of foreign-language learning. The earliest set I have found dates from the nineteenth century (Figure 14.1a); the characters and circumstances are, to my mind, typical of any middle-class European family of that time. Another set from the nineteenth century, recently reproduced, has no big pictures and only three languages (Figure 14.1b).

The earliest lotto set from the Soviet period that I have found dates from 1956, the latest from 1977. The author of all Soviet language sets (Figures 14.2, 14.3a, 14.3b) was Anna I. Kreshchanovskaya (who also developed materials for teaching German). The first set was published in Moscow by Bumagoodelechnaja fabrika Uporovlenija poligraficheskoy promyshlenosti i kul'ttovarov. Later, Moskovskiy kombinat igrushek and the publishing house Malish also issued sets.

The set in Figure 14.2 reflects the typical Russian/Soviet culture of the time, idealizing family, food, transport etc. As in the schoolbooks, everyone lived in the USSR and had to describe his or her life in different languages. The set was revised again only in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Figure 14.3); the same pictures were updated, but lost their charm. Today, those who learned languages through this aid cherish the pictures as a monument to the epoch. In the 2000s, when everybody had access to internet photos and Photoshop, the old idea was redesigned once again, with gaudy colours and no style; the scales of the images do not correspond to each other; the composition is poor; some pictures are unrecognizable; and there is a mistake on the cover (Figure 14.4). There may well have been millions of these lotto sets: on the cover of my copy, reference is made to an edition of 100,000 copies.

In parallel, other lotto sets in four languages, renewed periodically, covered themes of animals (Zoological Lotto) and plants (Botanical Lotto). In 2013 a lotto set with inscriptions in the Russian, English, Arab (with transcription) and Tatar languages was published, treating the usual themes (i.e. how people are dressed, what their usual meals and occupations are), but from the point of view of Islam.
Fig. 14.3. (a) Language lotto in 1986. Painter V. Riabchikov
(b) Language lotto in 1991. Painter M. Trubkovich
Conclusion

The objectives of foreign-language teaching have changed from that of providing an unquestioned marker of belonging to the pan-European culture and society among elite members in the past, to teaching a common language for the working classes all over the world in the twentieth century, to supplying an accessible instrument for gaining economic profits today. Characterizing the development of pre-school teaching methods, Lukina (1999) traces its steps as the imitation of adults' speech in the 1950s to the mid-1960s; psychological and educational research in the late 1960s and 1970s; the conscious formation of practice in the 1980s to the mid-1990s; interest in authentic materials, foreign civilization and adequate language; the integration of language studies with all sorts of physical activities from the mid-1990s to the present.

Today, lessons revolve around certain themes (the lesson is like a play with a plot, a fairy tale in development, changing under the children's eyes); they rely on the flexible use of the children's mother tongue for explanations; and use various visual and sensory aids. Rhymes, songs and dramatizations are still used, but teachers are conscious of employing different activities, play and games. The teaching methods differ from the ways in which language is taught at school, especially because there are no manuals; nonetheless, it is expected that parents will help their children to
make progress, otherwise they do not advance. The pragmatism of modern people is oriented towards communication and the practical use of language, so that less grammar is taught consciously. The problem of transition from pre-primary to school still remains: how continuity between pre-school and school teaching should be ensured; whether to start to study a second language in the second year and not in the first; how to take into account the knowledge already acquired and to manage multilevel classrooms. Pre-primary teachers discussed these questions at their meetings where I was present in 2015 to 2016.

The world is growing smaller and needs more speakers who are proficient in different languages. The opportunities to study or work abroad have opened up to Russian citizens in recent times and offered new horizons, in contrast to the Soviet times when all foreign-language teaching was restricted to the reading of books and some Communist newspapers and journals (see, e.g., Shelestiuk 2013). Parents who missed out on early support in learning foreign languages and who, therefore, suffer from insufficient knowledge are longing to put their children into a pre-school providing foreign-language teaching in order to ensure a challenging linguistic environment for their offspring (the same idea and tendencies are relevant, for example, for Turkey: cf. Deneme et al. 2011; Kocaman and Kocaman 2012). In Russia, where the glamour of Tsarist times has been revived in the last decades, everyone imagines himself or herself as being part of the well-educated aristocracy, which means foreign language skills. Russian classical literature of the nineteenth century (Pushkin, Tolstoy, etc.), which is an obligatory subject at school, provides enough evidence of the advantages of employing a governess or an au pair to speak to the child in a foreign language.

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Notes to Chapter 14


2. All English translations are by the author.


4. The author was again Anna I. Kreschchanovskaya; different painters, e.g. V. Trofimov for the Zoologicheskoe loto "V mire zhivotnyh" (1989), N. Kulaz'kova for Botanicheskoe loto 'Zelenyj drug' (1981); Russian-French—German—English order of inscriptions; the same publishing houses and thirty years of publication. One version holds inscriptions in five languages (Spanish was added).

5. Authors A. Abdrakhmanov and Y. Zamaletdinova, Lotto dlia detei i vzрослых [Lotto for Children and Adults], Detskaya yazykovaya laboratoriya (without place of publication).