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## PSYCHOLOGICAL NATURE OF THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION TO ADULT STUDENTS

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**Abstract.** *The comparative analysis of current psychological theories and concepts that underlie modern linguodidactics and learning both impact / interaction of the first (native) language with the second (foreign) language, taking into account psychological and typological characteristics of the adult student; the basic psychological factors that influence the optimization of learning a foreign language as the second one (after the first, native); found some cognitive factors, such as verbal intelligence, phonological processing ability, long-term memory of the adult student that affect the ability to learn the second language; concluded that the majority of students primarily interested in learning basic communication knowledge of the second (foreign) language for special purposes.*

*Cognitive differences between school and university students which could account for some of the difficulties university students encounter in mastering a second language.*

*Certain cognitive factors such as verbal intelligence, phonological processing ability, and long-term memory capacity strongly influence the adult learners' ability to learn a second language.*

*The second language adult students are developing an «interlanguage» of their own that draws not only on the first language they already know and on the second language they are learning but also on other elements such as the language provided by their teachers and their own language learning strategies.*

*There are psychological variables in second language acquisition which may either help or discourage the adult learners of a foreign language; it results into the psychological difficulties that oppose the traditional «foreign language-only» approach to working with non-native speakers in the classroom.*

**Ключові слова:** *the second language acquisition, personality factors, an individual's identity, the psychological difficulties, cognitive factors: verbal intelligence, phonological processing ability and long-term memory of the adult student, individually-typological differences of adult students.*

**Statement of the problem.** The diversity of psychological researches and concepts underlying modern linguodidactics is not limited to only a few; hence, from time to time, the necessity of generalizing those that optimize learning a foreign language (as the second one) arises.

**The purpose of the article.** The purpose of this article is an overview of the main psychological theories and concepts that underlie modern didactics; learning both impact / interaction of the first (native) language with the second (foreign) language taking into consideration psychological variety of typological characteristics of an adult student.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** There have always been those with a broad interest in how adults acquire the second language [1] and why it is so difficult for adults to acquire the second language [7] and what types of classroom teaching practices can be used to promote the development of students' second language communication skills.

With the advent of academic psychology and linguistics, there came a certain amount of curiosity about the second language acquisition (SLA): some linguists kept diaries of bilingual language acquisition; others were interested in multilingualism and bilingualism. A number of scholars have often stated out that children in any culture manage to achieve communicative competence in their *first (native)* languages (unless they have a specific language processing problem or have been restricted to a developmental environment deficient in language stimuli). After years of working with the language in use within the home and community school students then become increasingly more fluent in their command of the *first (native)* tongue. Subsequent work within a school setting with the addition of written as well as oral use of language further strengthens their communicative competence.

Hence, it might seem logical that an academically well-prepared adult (university) student who makes *the second* language an object of serious study could likewise achieve proficiency in that language. But, as any educator of an adult learner of English will attest, a seamless course is rarely the pattern for second language acquisition within a university setting.

And there are many reasons explaining the phenomenon.

There are enormous cognitive differences between school and university students which could account for some of the difficulties university students encounter in mastering a second language. Some educators (Eric Lenneberg [8] and others) subscribe to the view that there is *a biological timetable for optimal language learning* which stymies the efforts of adolescents to acquire language. Some theoreticians (Judith Strozer [12]) have applied this line of reasoning to second language acquisition and would predict a more difficult course for second language acquisition in adults, as compared to school students, due to differences in brain plasticity.

An opposing group of linguists downplay the role of the biological clock (Catherine Snow [11]) and argue that adult students, if studied systematically, actually can be shown to be the fastest language learners in all language. A possible explanation is that adults can make use of their better-developed abilities for abstract logical reasoning – what Piaget would call «formal operations» – to achieve an analytical understanding of the new language being studied.

Adolescents can add a child-like willingness to experiment and play with language to this capacity for metalinguistic awareness, and so they become the speediest second language learners.

Regardless of which view of the «biological timetable» issue seems more compelling to us, it is virtually beyond dispute that *certain cognitive factors such as verbal intelligence, phonological processing ability, and long-term memory capacity strongly influence the adult learners' ability* to learn a second language.

There is no straight answer to the dispute so far as the best time for learning a foreign language depends on two important factors: *the goals and expectations of an instructional program* and *the context* in which the instruction occurs.

If the goal for learning a foreign language is to obtain the highest level of second language skills, the level at which a second language speaker is indistinguishable from a native speaker, there is support for the first pack of researchers and is based on the claim that biological and maturational factors constrain language learning beyond a certain age.

But, to support the opposing researchers, one can say that the goals in foreign language acquisition for university students are different as they are interested in a basic communicative ability for special purposes. In cases such as these, it may be more efficient to begin foreign language learning later.

However, there are important facilitating factors as well as roadblocks to second language learning that have little to do with cognition or capacity for conceptual understanding.

Stephen Krashen [7], the second language acquisition researcher developed the construct of an affective filter, consisting of the variables of anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence when these psychological variables may strongly enhance or inhibit second language acquisition by playing a critical mediating role between the linguistic input available in the educational setting and the student's ability to learn. In order for students to fully engage their innate capacity to acquire language, they should ideally be relaxed, motivated, and self-confident.

And, very often, this is far from typical in the case of the university students of English, who may often feel discouraged and embarrassed within the classroom setting that impedes second language learning.

Some researches focuses *on personality factors* in second language acquisition and hold that second language learning in all of its aspects demands that the individual, to a certain extent, take on a new identity. Since an individual's identity is developed within a context of communication and interaction, for example, with class peers, and since language plays a salient role in interpersonal relations, language becomes central to the sense of self.

Changing that basic sense of who you are can be difficult, to say the least, particularly where the individual's sense of self-efficacy or confidence in her/his key abilities is challenged in the process.

Competence in communicating with others is just such a key ability central to the individual's self esteem. Facing that stripping away of language competence which occurs when adult students try to communicate in a second language requires tremendous ego strength, an ability to retain a sense of self esteem even when exposing and exploring an area of real weakness. For these reasons, *bolstering the student's sense of self-esteem is the key to working with adult students* of English in the university context.

John Schumann [10], second language acquisition researcher, explores the concept of «*language shock*», a fear of appearing comical or making a fool of oneself when attempting to communicate in a second language. The student's desire to avoid injury, in combination with his/her social inhibitions and fear of criticism, may function to decrease his/her motivation to learn English as a second language and to master special courses expressed in English. Disorientation that university students from province face in entering a metropolitan culture, *so called «culture shock»* can further complicate the learning process for some students. If the lecturer notices that a student is reticent to speak up in class discussion that is somewhat terse, he/she needs to be aware of the possibility that the student is facing the frustrations of language and culture shock. From the very beginning these students need to be helped to become full participants in the educational process that is taking place in the classroom, rather than acquiesce and become passive audience members. Again, bolstering students' self-esteem by showing a willingness to work nonjudgmental to help them develop better communicative capacities in English could help increase their motivation and achievement.

And sure, in considering the range of psychological variables which may either facilitate or inhibit the efforts of university students in English, we should not overlook *the issue of power*. English may well be perceived by the some student as the language of a prosperous and powerful society, which might lead to low self esteem of a student. This perceived differential between the power and respectability of the native language and that of English could be expected to aggravate *the psychological difficulties* which interfere with language learning: anxiety, low self-esteem and motivation, identity conflict, language shock and culture shock.

As one way of easing the student's identification with the English language and culture, these issues could be explicitly addressed by incorporating them into the class activity. The opportunity to design classroom activities (such as student round-table conversations) which ad-

dress issues of sharing personal experience would seem particularly fitted to course areas like behavioural science (psychology), social science and the others.

Within this context, some scholars suggest reciprocal interaction model of education, which sees a network of meaningful oral and written communication among students and lecturers as the matrix of learning. Student-directed projects, presentations and classroom discussions supplement and even begin to supplant the traditional lecture format. In this way, validation of minority students' cultural experiences becomes a powerful tool for actively involving new speakers of English in the learning experiences happening within the classroom. This clearly implies that minority students' first language should be valued within the classroom and its development encouraged. This attitude stands in opposition to the traditional «English-only» approach to working with non-native speakers of English in the classroom.

Transmission models of pedagogy, as they explain, exclude and suppress the students' experiences from the classroom in the interest of establishing a one-way flow of information from the teacher to the students. In this too-familiar pedagogical approach, the teacher passively transmits, the students passively receive and the university authorities wield exclusive control of the learning process while minimizing the participatory involvement of students. The most basic function of language, meaningful communication, tends to get lost. Interactive or experiential pedagogy, by contrast, would seek to incorporate the students' expression of cultural and language experiences in the classroom in order to validate students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as to stimulate their active participation in classroom learning. The challenge for university educators is to find ways of inviting and structuring such participation within the learning community so that second language students achieve the fullest possible benefits.

The second language adult students are developing an «interlanguage» of their own that draws not only on the first language they already know and on the second language they are learning but also on other elements such as the language provided by their teachers and their own language learning strategies. It has unique qualities of its own rather than being a deficient version of the target language.

As an example of interlanguage was the discovery of *a basic stage of grammar common to university students* [6]. Regardless of which first and second languages are involved, the second language learners share a simple grammar with three grammatical rules, suggesting that a sentence may consist of: a Noun Phrase followed by a Verb, optionally followed by another Noun Phrase (*dad read paper...*); a Noun Phrase followed by a copula and another Noun Phrase or an adjective (*it's paper...*); a Verb followed by a Noun Phrase (*reading its...*).

So, an adult student creates an interlanguage with its own distinctive characteristics, resembling neither the target nor the first language.

So, which psychological mechanism is used to acquire the second language vocabulary/terminology? The acquisition of professional terminology/vocabulary is a difficult area to research: it is possible to describe the nature of the vocabulary that people have to learn in a first or a second language or how many words people know in a language; it is far harder to say *how adult students actually acquire them*. These ideas are developed in Cook research [2, 3]. Most psychologists assume that a word has a single distinct meaning that bridges the world and the concept in the human mind, the relationship called reference. In English a real word refers to the thing. The relationship always involves the human mind, whether wanting to talk about *a certain thing* («book») and saying *the word* («book») or hearing *the word* («book») and working out what it means.

But most words in English have more than one meaning. Many words have the number of distinct meanings. Learning a language means far more than learning one meaning per word. It

involves learning a variety of information about a word. Discrete objects in the world are only one type of word meaning. Many words refer to abstractions (*people*), to things we can't see (*stress, truth*), or to things that don't exist (*unicorns*). Nouns are only one type of word and we also need lexical words like verbs, adverbs, adjectives, as well as structure words - prepositions and articles that have primarily grammatical meanings.

For most educators the crucial thing is not the word in isolation as studied in psychology experiments but the relationships that words have with each other in the mind. *Dad* is not *Mom*, i.e. the two words reflect a categorization of objects in the world and are antonyms: words contrast with other words. *Dad* is a 'basic' level term included in the 'super ordinate' level term parent and itself including 'subordinate' level terms *grandma, grandpa / or sister, brother*, - words are structured into levels of categorization. *Dad* is associated with other words in the minds, such as *gift, order, reprimand, et cetera*.

So what happens in a second language? *Dad* connects to the second language word *papa* (Fr.) as well as to the first language word *dad*; the words link in turn to the same concept of 'dad'. De Groot [4] would call the first language and the second language words *dad* and *papa* the lexical level, the concept of '*dad*' the conceptual level. The size of vocabulary in the second language adult users is more than doubled. A great number of words with many meanings in the first language are added the vast numbers of the second language words via direct or the indirect links to the concepts. The second language adult user has to learn all the other attributes of words, some of which may be similar, some quite different.

People continue to be amazed by the sheer size and complexity of the learning task for vocabulary when the number of words that university students acquire is multiplied by the number of meanings, relationships, associations that go along with every word they know. Learning vocabulary is a baffling problem. The problem with learning how words go with things is sorting out which aspects of what we see are important, which are irrelevant.

A main approach to the second language acquisition of vocabulary in recent years has been to look at the strategies that the second language learners apply to the task. Suppose the university students at the faculty of psychology, who encountered the phrase/term *psychoanalysis* and didn't know what it meant. They will adopt the next strategies:

- *guess from the context*: obviously, analysis means that some activity toward people is involved;
- *use a dictionary*: a) method of healing mental illnesses by tracing them through interviews, to events into patient's early life, and brining those events to light; b) body of doctrine based on this method concerned with the investigation and treatment of emotional disturbances;
- *make deductions* from the word form (*analysis* means that research/investigation is exercised).

On the other hand, suppose that they want to learn *psychoanalysis* as a new word/ term, their strategies will be:

- *repetition and rote learning*: to repeat *psychoanalysis* over and over;
- *organizing words in the mind*: this involves putting *psychoanalysis* into the set of words such as *psychology, science, studies*;
- *linking to existing knowledge*: tying the word *psychoanalysis* into something else one knows; «*psycho*» in many languages means a person with mental derangement and *analysis* means method, activities, studies.

These are all conscious ways of tackling new words. Undoubtedly, as in the first language acquisition most the second language words are picked up unconsciously as adults use the language.

**The main results of the study.** Many researches indeed argue that it is possible to switch the first (native) language off while you use the second one (foreign); for example, some research tested people's eye-movements as they processed pictures of objects, showing they never switched off either language. There are psychological variables in second language acquisition which may either help or discourage the adult learners of a foreign language; it results into the psychological difficulties that oppose the traditional «foreign language-only» approach to working with non-native speakers in the classroom.

**Conclusions.** Hence, it is possible to state that achieving native-like mastery of a foreign language is not a goal for university students of non-special faculties in all contexts. In fact, most second language students are primarily interested in obtaining a basic communicative ability in the foreign language *for special purposes* because their native language will remain the primary language.

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## ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ЧИННИКИ, ЩО ВПЛИВАЮТЬ НА ОПТИМІЗАЦІЮ ВИВЧЕННЯ ДРУГОЇ МОВИ СТУДЕНТАМИ

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**Анотація.** Зроблено порівняльний аналіз сучасних психологічних теорій й концепцій, що лежать в основі сучасної лінгводидактики, а також огляд досліджень впливу/взаємодії першої (рідної) мови з другою (іноземною) мовою з урахуванням психолого-типоло-

гічних особливостей дорослого студента; вивчено основні психологічні чинники, що впливають на оптимізацію вивчення іноземної мови як другої після першої (рідної); озвучено проблему щодо необхідності узагальнення сучасних теорій, які оптимізують вивчення іноземної мови (як другої); виявлено певні когнітивні чинники, такі як вербальний інтелект, фонологічні здатності обробки, довгостроковий об'єм пам'яті дорослого студента, що впливають на здатність вивчати другу мову; зроблено висновок, що успіхи студентів, в першу чергу, залежать від мотивації і цілей навчання, – є зацікавленість в отриманні базових комунікативних знань з іноземної мови для спеціальних/фахових цілей.

Студентський вік є найбільш плідним для удосконалення психічних функцій людини. Відбувається перебудова внутрішніх функціональних й міжфункціональних структур, що приводить до зміни показників, які характеризують розвиток психічних функцій.

Дослідження процесу оволодіння студентами іноземної мови як другої свідчить про наявність істотних відмінностей у розвитку іноземної контекстної та ситуативної мовної діяльності: розвиток контекстної мови випереджає розвиток ситуативної мови – граматичні структури й словниковий запас є обмежені та елементарні. В контекстній мові граматичні структури не поступаються за складністю рідній мові.

Поняттєва (суб'єктивна) сторона мислення іноземною мовою набуває специфічних особливостей, в той час як формально-динамічні особливості мислення і його об'єктивний зміст не змінюються.

**Ключові слова:** оволодіння другою (іноземною) мовою, особистісні характеристики, психологічні труднощі, ідентичність індивіда, когнітивні чинники, психолого-типологічні особливості/відмінності дорослих студентів, когнітивні чинники: вербальний інтелект, фонологічні здатності обробки, довгостроковий об'єм пам'яті.

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## ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ФАКТОРЫ, ВЛИЯЮЩИЕ НА ОПТИМИЗАЦИЮ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ВТОРОГО ЯЗЫКА

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**Аннотация.** *Сделан сравнительный анализ современных психологических теорий и концепций, лежащих в основе современной лингводидактики, а также обзор исследований по влиянию / взаимодействию первого (родного) языка со вторым (иностранном) языком с учетом психолого-типологических особенностей взрослого студента; изучены основные психологические факторы, влияющие на оптимизацию овладения вторым (иностранном) языком после первого (родного); озвучено проблему о необходимости обобщения современных теорий, которые оптимизируют изучение иностранного языка (как второго); обозначены определенные когнитивные факторы, такие как вербальный интеллект, фонологические способности обработки, долгосрочный объем памяти взрослого студента, влияющие на способность изучать второй язык; сделан вывод, что большинство студентов, в первую очередь, заинтересованы в получении базовых коммуникативных знаний по второму (иностранному) языку для специальных (профессиональных) целей.*

**Ключевые слова:** *овладение вторым (иностранном) языком, личностные факторы, идентичность индивида, психологические трудности, когнитивные факторы, вербальный интеллект, фонологические способности обработки, долгосрочный объем памяти взрослого студента, индивидуально-типологические различия взрослых студентов.*