

# Skills Development from the Point of View of Attitude Theory in Foreign Language Learning

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*The article deals with the decisive role of the students' attitude in the development of skills in learning foreign languages at the Universities.*

*Great variety of practically applied language teaching methods failed to fulfill expectations as no proper attention was directed towards teaching atmosphere and personalities of language teacher and learner.*

## Introduction

One of the most important demands of nowadays is foreign language teachers' deeper knowledge of their students with their stresses, difficulties sometimes disabilities and poor perceptual skills, lack of self-confidence and motivation, uncertainty of their future, their predispositions and attitudes to the definite types of tasks and tests to achieve their foreign language learning goals successfully.

The problem of foreign language learning according to students' individual factors is very important at the moment, because for many years a human factor has been ignored or even frustrated during language classes at the universities with the help of the autocratic requirements of the teacher (if you cannot learn, don't study or you won't get a stipend, etc.) and in this way the teacher himself creates resistance on the student's part or even a whole group of

students can be incited against the teacher's personality or his subject. The students, even if they are eager to master the subject simply cannot, as they are influenced by the negative attitude. And on the contrary, if a student is encouraged by the teacher, he/she overcomes all the difficulties and inner barrier to study difficult linguistic peculiarities of a foreign language.

Fortunately, educators begin to pay more attention to the development and self-actualization of the individual in the light of new teaching methods and psychological theories of learning in development of human beings. We know that interests, motives and needs give a new impulse to an action, but they themselves without any situation do not create an attitude as a new phenomenon. Hence language learning stimulation deals not only with the interests of learners, but also with close and remote

goals of learning, success, leisure, real needs, speech situation, which form the conditions to meet the needs of the learner, to form his / her positive attitude for his future self-dependent work in a foreign language learning. Recently a lot of research findings have been found dealing within influence of attitudes towards language learning [1; 2; 3; 4].

**The AIM** of the present paper is to investigate the relationship between the student's positive attitude and the development of his / her linguistic skills during the foreign language classes at the universities.

**The OBJECT** of the research is the consideration of a positive student's attitude towards mastering foreign language skills at the universities during foreign language classes.

**The METHODS** of the research is literature analysis of pedagogical, psychological, linguistic and methodological investigations on the given problem, students' questionnaires.

Language study is a lifelong study. It consists of many stages and encompasses various aspects such as the development of communicative skills in the process of language learning / teaching. Language competence is important for every student in order to improve knowledge and become a competent specialist. Teachers should remember about it and constantly develop learning strategies that enable students to find the best way to master a foreign language.

Taking into consideration the language learning as a subject, a wide range of factors come into play. In order to acquire a foreign language successfully, first of all is needed the readiness of the learner to overcome collisions and difficulties by getting in touch with any new language.

It is clear that the favourable attitude of the students towards foreign language studies depends upon the difficulties of the language itself, on the interregulations of the languages that are taught at the university.

In pedagogical literature there are three types of reasons which cause specific difficulties while learning a foreign language:

- Objective that deal with phonetics, vocabulary and grammar peculiarities of the language;
- Age and physical capabilities of the students, their mental abilities;
- Peculiarities of the central nervous system as well as inborn abilities like attention, memory, development of linguistic reasoning, linguistic intuition;
- Deeply interrelated features of the languages the student already knows, which help or sometimes make it more difficult to master a new foreign language.

Consideration of all the difficulties that are connected with the process of learning a language is a guarantee for a better language learning.

In Table 1 we present the students' point of view of the linguistic difficulties of the English language.

The findings suggest that for 51,9 % English is a very difficult subject, a quarter of the students (25 %) did not manage to respond to the question and only 1,9 % of the students said that English is an easy subject, for 13,5 % of the students it is a very easy subject. If we put together all the answers, we shall see that 84,6 % of the students who were asked to respond to this question answered that English is a difficult subject.

Next to the type of memory, the background and academic preparations, their experience some students succeed in language learning but others fail or even sometimes ignore it. Many researchers J. D. Green (1979), G. Hermann (1980), S. D. Krashen (1981), V. Šernas (1988) have noticed that one set of factors related to great achievement in the language classroom is the attitudes of those who participate in this process: both students and

*Table 1. Point of View of Vilnius University Students of the Linguistic Difficulties of the English Language*

<i>Evaluation/Faculty</i>	<i>Mathema- ticians</i>	<i>Medical students</i>	<i>Chemists</i>	<i>Biologists</i>	<i>Physicists</i>	<i>Total in 5 Faculties of Vilnius University</i>
1. Very difficult	6,0	12,9	13,3	13,8	7,7	9,7
2. Rather difficult	66,0	61,3	53,3	56,9	51,9	53,2
3. Difficult to say	18,0	9,7	20,0	18,5	25,0	17,3
4. Rather easy	10,0	9,7	10,0	9,2	13,5	10,0
5. Very easy	–	3,2	–	–	1,9	0,8

teachers. Although there are not the only factors, which account for the teaching and learning process, they direct the learning and influence on it most considerably. Thus attitudes are linked to a person's values and beliefs and reinforce or discourage the choices made in all realms of activity. Being in various situations a person keeps on his / her particular attitude. Consequently his / her feelings, thoughts, desires depend on his / her attitudes. Thus, attitudes strongly influence the behaviour of a person. It has been noticed as early as in 1966 by one of the first investigators of an attitude phenomenon D. Uznadze that the main conditions an attitude could form itself are many repeated actions and the internal participation of the person in these actions.

In our context the attitude towards foreign language learning is understood as not only conscious (attitude) but also as subconscious (set) which is a more profound, unconscious concept. Accordingly, this problem requires specific methods that can be used to change the attitude from negative to more favourable and positive.

The formation of the positive attitude in the pedagogical process is based on the concept of D. Uznadze and his school: A. Prangishvili, S. Tchartishvili, I. Imedadze set theory, laws governing the attitude and that of conscious attitude (M. Smith, D. Brunner, Ch. Osgood, P. Tannenbaum).

The formation of the positive attitude in the pedagogical process requires to form systematically the inner position of an individual, favourable inner conditions, a steady positive "syndrome of reactions" towards pedagogical and speech activities, the content and process of education, towards the teacher and his / her speciality, to assure three levels of its regulation:

- a) cognitive, that deals with the interiorized valuable goals of an individual, sensible attitude: his / her personal position, ideals, desires, needs, interests, motives;
- b) favourable emotions, affect, buoyancy (a permanent readiness for an activity, mutual trust between the students and the teacher, warm atmosphere, which leads to success, creative thought, search, a deeper perception of new knowledge, types of activity, skills and habits);
- c) conation or activity (that of creative, industrious, social, mental, learning, arts, sports) during which an individual realizes his / her goals, desires and demands. Thus the attitude exists long before the process of teaching and education and when it begins to work it changes dynamically together with the regulation and modulation of the individual's inner "syndrome of reactions" towards different instructional and educational phenomena, situations and aspects.

Mastering communicative skills is an objective law governing the subject, "a result of which is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but the subject itself is changing at the same time" [5, p. 15], ... "it is realized thanks to the speech attitude formation and specification" [6, p. 440].

For this purpose it is necessary to create such conditions which could serve as a specific background to intensify the activity of the learner and in this way to allow him / her to broaden the ability of governing his / her learning process (the mastering of the subject and new material, retaining it at the same time).

To such inner factors and conditions belongs also the learner's attitude with its three constituents: cognitive, mnemonic and communicative (to render information to other people, to persuade somebody, etc.), their memory, motives, interests, needs, making an individual acquire new and very important for him / her information, reproduce and retain it. This kind of learning when a student is striving actively to form and to educate his cognitive abilities is called education in broad sense in pedagogics.

It is basic in the formation of the positive attitude in pedagogical process and it requires *two conditions for its appearance- an urgent need and a situation* (it may be speech or a cognitive one), *which helps to meet this need*. It depends on the goals of an individual and then appropriate attitudes are formed: cognitive, mnemonic and communicative.

A cognitive level based on a cognitive attitude and deals with interiorized values of the individual, with a sensible attitude, personal position, ideals, goals, dreams, needs, interests, motives and so on.

Interests, motives and needs give a new impulse to an action, but they themselves without any situation do not create an attitude as a new phenomenon. Hence language learning

stimulation deals not only with the interests of learners, but also with close and remote goals of learning success, pleasure, real needs. Speech situation, which form the conditions to meet the needs of the learner, to form his / her positive attitude towards learning foreign language independently.

One of teacher's objectives in teaching English is to develop student's language skills and habits during foreign language teaching.

One of the first English language methodologists H. Palmer (1926) noticed that the forming of new and appropriate skills and the utilization of previously formed skills is a very important principle of language teaching.

We think that a student who knows a foreign language, speaks without hesitation or conscious calculation of grammatical or lexical structures of a language producing foreign language statements automatically.

According to R. Lado (1964) it is important to establish the patterns as habits through pattern practice.

To learn the language is to use the patterns of construction with appropriate vocabulary at normal speed. Understanding or even verbalizing a pattern may help students to learn it, but will never take the place of practicing the pattern through analogy, variation and transformation to establish them as habits. For this purpose a set of exercises useful for any foreign language can be used.

It is necessary to notice that to know the language is something more than use its patterns. In this connection we can distinguish knowledge, habits and skills. As a result of cognitive foreign language learning a student acquires corresponding theoretical knowledge and after some language practice learners develop corresponding habits and skills. This process must be always under the teacher's control.

First of all it is obvious that there must be created special situations for students in the

classroom in order to meet the student's needs and to make a learning process as suitable as possible.

Among the most important situations many scholars admit that student-teacher interaction is the main factor in foreign language learning in the classroom because language acquisition needs appropriate environment.

Language learning is based on speaking and listening, sending and receiving information. Both partners of such a process must see and hear and even feel each other. In such cases even seating arrangement in the classroom is very important.

So far language classroom co-operative interaction is a very important impulse for a positive attitude formation. In practice there exist different interaction patterns between the teacher and the language classroom. Some researchers present from two (group work and pair work) (Sheils J.) up to ten (PennyUr) patterns of classroom interaction [7; 8].

It is clear that different teacher-student interaction patterns should be used during language classes. Interaction is communication between people involving the use of a target language. During language classes students learn to communicate by communicating. There exist different views on the role of interaction in language studies but the main idea is the same: interaction is crucial in foreign language studies. It is an essential part of the whole pedagogical process both learning and teaching.

Furthermore, for a teacher it is important to know the factors underlying learner's participation during foreign language classes is learning and its style.

According to teaching / learning conditions, formulated in the European project CIEL (2001) prevails learner-centered pedagogies that see knowledge acquisition as a process (not just an end in itself) and stresses the im-

portance of key learning skills and strategies. Moreover, the latest educational theories focus upon learner's autonomy, freedom, active cooperation and self-directed learning. All of them stress a move towards the learner-centered approach with the main attention given to individual needs and rights. Learner autonomy is the key concept in this area.

In order to help the students to develop self-monitoring in foreign language learning it is very important to correct their mistakes and to do it in a very delicate way.

All we know that mistakes are inevitable, they may be corrected not only by the teacher but by the students as well. At this moment collaboration between students and the teacher is very important. On the basis of collaboration students together with their teacher organize language learning distributing duties, controlling the performance of each other and carrying out self-monitoring and self-correcting with the help of special language learning diaries. Such diaries are the best means to reflect successful collaboration between the students and the teacher. Here they fix and analyze their mistakes, put down their own difficulties in grammar or translation, try to find the best ways to escape them. This type of diaries allow the teachers to organize and individualize students' self-dependent work in overcoming various difficulties while mastering linguistic skills. Evaluation and error correction conducted on the basis of collaboration and respect between the teacher and the students is considered to be most effective as it involves all stages of participation self-correcting and self-monitoring. We mustn't forget that at present it has been widely discussed that the main goal of university education is to provide the students with tools that they will be able to use in their future work. In development of students' self-dependent work it is necessary to conduct control and evaluation of their work

performed. It leads to the student's greater attention to his / her own actions, while performing a certain task and helps to develop skills of self-dependent work.

The success of collaborative learning depends on student's initiative and teacher's control, which do not work in opposite directions. This means that the teacher might keep nearly 100 per cent of the control, while at the same time students experience nearly 100 per cent of the initiative. Control enables to improve student-teacher relationship during language classes if there is mutual trust between both partners of studies.

Some students have great difficulties in overcoming the so-called language barrier, cannot decide to speak a foreign language because of the fear to make a mistake.

Usually fear arises after things that are unknown or very poorly known. Students are afraid to be laughed at during foreign language classes when making mistakes and it is the teacher's task to reduce fear and to help each student to escape it. Atmosphere of understanding and empathy must prevail.

Next to trust, empathy plays a decisive role in the acquisition of a foreign language. The ability to experience your partner constitute the attitude of the educator and gives legitimacy to his / her efforts.

Humanistic atmosphere during language classes helps to create a specific environment for a student-teacher interaction based on speaking and listening, sending and receiving information. Such interaction goes in both directions with a reduced tension. The opposition between the teacher and the students has to be changed into friendly co-operation where prevail positive emotions. According to the researchers of the attitude phenomenon (D. N. Uznadze, N. Imedadze) emotions play a very important part in the formation of dynamic stereotypes. Dull, boring language

classes usually are not interesting for young people and they have no favourable emotions for language studies [9]. Without a smile, encouraging glances and intonation, which help to reach a positive contact, without respect and trust it is impossible to create humanistic atmosphere that in its turn leads to a positive attitude formation towards language studies.

Usually we language teachers start our work with a new audience from needs analysis which refer to procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design. The survey of the needs is not simply a linguistic overtaking but also different learner's behaviour and attitude, interests, motives and so on that forces the student to move ahead. Of course, teaching conditions should be taken into consideration as well.

The more we know about our students the better and it leads in its turn to a better mutual understanding between the teachers and the students to reach our common goal – to master a target language.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summarizing the results of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Language teaching/ learning, influences personality development through the development of students' communicative competence. It may be achieved through humanistic approach to foreign language studies at the universities.
- Understanding students' personalities and their attitudes towards foreign language studies is one of the basic assumptions of humanistic education where exists the personal relationship and it reveals itself through a teacher-student collaboration in overcoming linguistic difficulties of a target language.

- There exists one and perhaps the most effective method of teaching/learning – it's cooperation. Student-teacher cooperative activity can help to find the best ways to create positive student's attitude towards developing his / her language learning skills. Teachers and learners must trust each other and go together towards their common goal – language acquisition.
- Promotion and development of the language acquisition skills needed in a self-directed language learning is an essential part of the university curriculum and one of the main teachers' objectives in teaching languages at tertiary level.
- Mutual trust, positive emotions and empathy play a decisive role in the acquisition of a foreign language. Students' needs analysis that refers to procedures for gathering information (attitudes among them) about our learners we are going to work with leads to a better understanding and finding the best ways to reach the goal.

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## ĮGŪDŽIŲ UGDYMAS KALBŲ MOKYMO SI NUOSTATOS TEORIJOS POŽIŪRIU

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*S a n t r a u k a*

Straipsnyje aptariamos kai kurios teigiamos užsienio kalbų mokymosi aukštojoje mokykloje nuostatos bei pedagoginės psichologinės problemos ir būdai formuoti teigiamą studentų nuostatą mokymo procese. Tyrimai parodė, kad siekiant skatinti palankią studen-

tų nuostatą užsienio kalbų studijoms reikia sistemingai formuoti individo vidinę poziciją, kaip nuolatinį teigiamą „reakcijų sindromą“ kalbinei veiklai ir tuo remiantis ugdyti jo kalbinius gebėjimus per praktikas.

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