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Individual Differences in Second Language Learning

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ANNOTATION

This paper offers a brief but broad overview of the field of individual differences in language learning, especially as they are reflected in learning styles, learning strategies, and affective variables, and touches on some areas for further research.

KEYWORDS: Individual differences; Learning style; Cognitive style; Learning strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Learner differences include, among others, factors classified under the following three areas:

1. learning styles;
2. learning strategies; and
3. affective variables.

These three areas are the focus of the current article. Other major areas of individual differences relate to learning aptitude, gender, culture, age, and other demographic variables, but this overview has inadequate space to deal with these.

In this article, we paint a picture of individual differences in language learning in broad-brush strokes. Our aim is to provide a general portrait of where the field is now, where it appears to be going, and where we believe it should go.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the history of domestic psychology of teaching foreign languages since the late 70s. The twentieth century began a period of productive development of a number of aspects of education. These include, in particular, the age-individual characteristics of the subjects of foreign language educational practice (Vitlin Zh.L. 1976, 1978, Witt N.V. 1975, Gegechkori L.Sh. 1975, Winter I.A. 1977, Kabardov M.K. 1983, Kasparova M. G. 1988, Miroshnik S. B. 1985, Savelyeva E. N. 1991, Savitskaya E. M. 1993, Serkov A. K. 1992, Sibiryakova V. F. 1972, Ulanova O. B. 2000, Shishkina V.Yu. 1989, Schebetenko A.I. 2001, Schebetenko A.I., Serkov A.K. 1993, Yudovina Yu.B. 2000 and others). As our own studies show [1, 2], the productive impetus of these scientific research turned out to be so powerful that, as can

be seen from the list of works, they have been going on for about 30 years, including monographic and dissertation works, as well as individual scientific publications [3, 4].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the principle of individualization in teaching a foreign language implies, according to N.V. Witt, knowledge and consideration of individual differences between students, as well as their use in the learning process. The specificity of teaching a foreign language requires constant contact between the teacher and students, constant communication, the success of which is feasible if there is a good knowledge of the individual characteristics of students. In this case, it is possible to correctly distribute tasks between them, to assist in the choice of techniques and methods of work. N.V. Witt defines the individualization of teaching a foreign language from the standpoint of taking into account the capabilities of students, organizing classes, where each student takes part in individual-group work and can cope with the proposed task. She recognizes the distribution of tasks as especially important in terms of the activity required from the student (speed, prolonged concentration of attention, change in the way of doing work), the characteristics of which depend, among other things, on the natural qualities of a person, on the individual characteristics of the manifestation of the basic properties of the nervous system. .

Taking into account individual differences depending on psychophysiological characteristics is important for determining the conditions favorable for learning a foreign language. Based on the research data of B.M. Teplova, V.D. Nebylitsyna, L.B. Ermolaeva-Tomina, E.A. Klimova, V.I. Rozhdestvenskaya and others, N.V. Witt considers the strength, balance and mobility of the nervous system. In relation to teaching a foreign language, these characteristics can ensure the optimal mode of operation and effectiveness of translation with a dictionary of a significant text, presentation of the content of the text or transformation of grammatical forms, independent compilation of sentences or a story using the indicated lexical units, memorization of complex spelling or transcription of words in the target language [ibid., p. 10]. The psychophysiological characteristics of students must be taken into account when organizing classes. So, it is useful to entrust the presentation of tasks and the implementation of control to "excitable", quickly responding students, and the execution - to "brake". This not unreasonable advice of the author is substantiated by the possibility of preventing persistent errors. At the same time, "brake" students, according to N.V. Witt, require greater algorithmization of tasks and an increase in the time for their execution [ibid., p. nineteen]. The essential remark of the author regarding the content of the individualization of teaching a foreign language should, obviously, be considered taking into account the fact that this teaching is group, which is why the sequence or simultaneity of applying different methods and methods of work with the expectation of activating all students plays an important role.

A discussion of the nature and functions of the general abilities of adults and the peculiarities of learning a foreign language in school conditions is given by Zh.L. Vitlin to the idea that the manifestation of language abilities is the result of the interaction of a complex of objective factors that form personality traits and create conditions for their manifestation, and factors of subjective, already formed psychophysiological properties of an individual that contribute to mastering the material of a new language and speech. And the total impact of all synthesized components of the adult psyche is expressed in the success of language learning. In addition, the experimentally confirmed idea that biological changes in the structure of the body in the age range of 15-16 - 35-40 years do not in themselves determine the success of learning a foreign language should be called a significant and, obviously, psychologically significant conclusion of the author's research. In other words, age, in the interpretation of Zh.L. Vitlin, is not the only factor that determines the involutionary-evolutionary ratios of the indicators of success in mastering a foreign language. Consequently, the position on the age

predetermination of the ability to master a foreign language in adults can be considered unreasonable [ibid, p. 79-80]. Of course, such a conclusion cannot but be regarded as ambiguous due to the presence of other experimental data in the domestic psychology of teaching foreign languages. However, it cannot be considered in a certain sense as a milestone, forming a certain relational field among specialists in teaching and learning foreign languages, including psychologists.

Among the factors influencing the structure of the rational method of teaching a foreign language, Zh.L. Vitlin names the psychophysiological characteristics of the contingent of students, linking them with the conditions of learning. The optimality of the used system of teaching a foreign language depends on taking into account both the general psychophysiological characteristics of adults and the characteristics of individual groups of mature students. This kind of consideration finds expression in the important role of adult motivation, which has a decisive influence on the degree of language acquisition; in a stronger will, perseverance and increased efficiency of adults, allowing them to more successfully overcome difficulties in the process of learning a language, to focus on learning activities; based on all analyzers (reading, writing and hearing); awareness of learning a new language. These meaningful definitions make it possible to trace the lines of the relationship between the psychophysiological characteristics of adults and the variability of the content, principles and methods of teaching a foreign language [ibid., p. 91-93]. However, it is the methodological orientation towards teaching a foreign language that makes the circle of the author's vision of the psychophysiological basis of mastering a foreign language linguistic experience limited, reducing it, in fact, to a projection of the psychological characteristics of the contingent of students. However, Zh.L. Vitlin concludes that at the time of his research "there is every reason to believe that the psychophysiological characteristics of literate adults ... allow them to more successfully master the material of Western European languages if, other things being equal, in the process of mastering new material, reliance is used not only on oral, but also in writing (reading)" [ibid., p. 98]. Obviously, as a broader interpretive basis, we can argue that in the psychological sense and in terms of psychological characteristics, the age contingent of adults should also be considered learning a foreign language, regardless of their individual, personal or other characteristics.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of domestic research that psychologically substantiates the age-individual characteristics of teaching foreign languages shows the specific features of the development of the psychology of mastering a foreign language in this area. Its main feature should be considered the actual predominance of generalizing conceptual works on the development of general aspects of the individualization of teaching foreign languages and taking into account age characteristics in foreign language education. In fact, the age and individual characteristics of teaching foreign languages constitute a single semantic space, on the basis of which we considered them in this context, meaning their complementary additional functions.

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