

Language Learning in the Light of Theory of Learning Styles and Cognitive Styles Theory

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Abstract. When teachers pay attention to individual differences, learning styles and cognitive styles of the students, all sides benefit. There is also another aspect to the way language learning is influenced by type differences.

The discussion of the learning style is an important part of this aspect. Also student learning is affected by the degree to which the student is interested in and attracted to a subject.

Type preferences are related to interest in different content areas as well as to the way the content is taught. When considering the importance of match or mismatch, it is useful to remember that certain subjects will turn on some types and turn off others.

Because students' success is also deeply influenced by application (persistence in fixing attention and assiduity in performing what is required), Myers considered application to be an important factor to keep in mind when considering the importance of individual preferences.

The author of the present paper supports the point of view of Dunn (1981:60), that most students are capable of analyzing their own learning style, what gives them chance of choice. Choice is important in language learning. It is the springboard to wise decision-making.

The more we know our students, their learning styles, their goals and needs, the more they will be successful in their language learning, and we'll be successful in our teaching.

Today Latvia is a fast changing society. The different types of educators face increasing number of students with their different abilities and possibilities, needs, goals, cultures, backgrounds, learning styles, their stresses, and sometimes with lack of self-confidence and uncertainty of their future.

Latvia is going to enter the European Union, which means increasing demands of international Labour Market, different international educational projects, business and tourism. To meet these challenges teachers must have more responsibilities for their methods of teaching, seek for higher level of professional judgements rather than the simple routine application of materials and methods applied elsewhere.

One of the most important requirements of the present time is our deeper knowledge of students, their learning differences, learning styles, difficulties and sometimes disabilities, their predispositions to the definite types of tasks and tests to achieve their learning goals successfully.

The **problem** of language learning and individual factors of the students is very important nowadays, because for many years a *human* factor has been ignored, and, fortunately, scientists and teachers begin to pay much attention to the development and self-actualization of the individual in the light of new and not so new theories of learning and the development of human beings. To the author's mind it is very interesting to retrace the influence the theories of cognitive types and learning styles on language learning and whole development of personality.

The **aim** of the present paper is to investigate the interdependence between language learning and the

influence of theories of cognitive types and learning style of secondary students' process of learning.

The **object** of research is cognitive types and learning styles theories-based language learning.

The **methods** of research is the analysis of pedagogical, linguistic, scientific, methodological, psychological and social literature.

Language learning, cognitive types and learning styles - these are the words that are closely connected in the educational process of today. Many investigations of the present problem have been made and are being made.

Teachers can increase success, positive attitude to learning and language learning, willingness to learn by responding effectively to cognitive types and learning styles of their students.

Without such knowledge of students the teacher's profession will become prey for educational hucksters who will propose expensive programs they claim to be compatible with current cognitive theory and research. Another very important problem is the problem of learning styles of the students during the process of language learning.

There are many definitions of learning style, which differ from one another in the methodological and scientific literature.

According to DeBello, Dunn, Brennan, & Murrain (1981), *learning style is defined as the conditions under which*

each person begins to concentrate, absorb, process, and retain new or difficult information and skills.

Dunn (1981) believes that each person's learning style consists of 23 elements:

- *emotional,*
- *environmental,*
- *sociological,*
- *physical,* and
- *psychological* elements.

The author of the present paper supports the point of view of Sternberg (1999), who claims that *learning style is the preference in the use of abilities.*

But according to the famous researcher Keefe (1999), *learning style is defined as the cognitive, affective and physiological trait that is relatively stable indicator of how students perceive, interact with and respond to the learning environment.*

The author of the present paper also shares the point of view of the scientist Spolsky (1990), who believes that *learning style is the identifiable individual approach to learning situations.*

Also it is interesting to know the point of view of the outstanding researcher David Kolb (1984; 1985), who points out that *learning styles are the generalized differences in learning process as measured by a self-report test, called the Learning Style Inventory.*

The scientist Skehan (1998) believes that *learning style is the characteristic manner in which an individual chooses to approach a learning task.*

It is proved by psychologists that many elements of learning style are biologically imposed and these elements are developed out of the individual life experiences (Restak & Thies, 1999).

Learning style is rather stable characteristic of any student, because, according to Dunn (1981), strong learning preferences are changed only over years as a result of high willingness, motivation and strong personal effort.

Understanding individual learning preferences and differences is an increasingly popular and useful tool, serving teachers in four ways.

First, teachers have a method to teach that is diverse and adoptive enough to meet the various learning style needs of students who are not necessarily oriented towards language learning.

Second, teachers can indicate to students that they care about the individuality and integrity of each learner.

Third, because learning style is related to teaching style, teachers can better understand their own teaching styles and strengths and weaknesses.

Fourth, teachers can gain insight into how they work together in this particular world we call school.

The author of the present paper would like to draw the reader's attention to the existence of different criteria for examination of learning styles.

- Personal Response
 - Theoretical Background.
 - Expense.
 - Complexity of Information.
 - Ability to Implement.
 - Multiple Uses
- (Mamchur, 1996:2).

One of the most famous instruments is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, developed by Isabel Myers (1962), which is based on the theories of Carl Jung (1921).

Jung made a major contribution to the ability to understand self by dividing all human behaviour into two basic categories:

- *perception,* and
- *judgement.*

His theory proves that the humans constantly choose between the *open* act of perceiving or finding out, discovering, and the *closed* act of judging, or taking action, deciding, evaluating.

A perceiver likes to spend more time in perceiving activities, a judger in judging activities.

Jung maintained that individuals prefer to perceive either through their *senses* or their *intuition*, and prefer to make judgments either through their *thinking* or *feeling* processes.

Although all four functions:

- *sensing,*
- *intuition,*
- *thinking,* and
- *feeling*

are present in every individual, one is dominant or the most favoured, one is auxiliary and ranks as the second most used function, and the third is the tertiary function, which is less often exercised and demands more energy to use.

The fourth is a person's inferior function, which sometimes is called the *shadow* function. It is the person's weak and immature function.

Only with maturity, reflection, and conscious use can the inferior function serve the individual, providing inspiration and renewed energy. This process is called *individuation*.

Jung added the final dimension of *extraversion* and *introversion* to his psychological descriptions. The author of the present paper supports the point of view of Jung that those who prefer to get energy in an extraverted way will extravert their dominant function and introvert all the other functions, those who prefer to get energy in an introverted way will introvert their dominant function and extravert all the rest.

According to McCaulley (1988), Psychological Type Theory, as further defined by Myers (1962), may be described as following:

The Eight Psychological Type Preferences

- E** The person is interested in the outer world of actions, objects, persons – *Extraversion*.
- I** The person is interested in the inner world of concepts and ideas – *Introversion*.
- S** The person prefers to perceive the immediate, real, solid facts of experience – *Sensing*.
- N** The person prefers to perceive the possibilities, meanings of experience – *Intuition*.
- T** The person prefers to make judgements or decisions objectively and impersonally, analyzing facts and ordering them, in terms of cause and effect – *Thinking*.
- F** The person prefers to make judgements or decisions subjectively and personally, weighing values for the importance of choices for oneself and others – *Feeling*.
- J** The person prefers to live in a planned, orderly way, aiming to regulate and control events – *Judgement*.
- P** The person prefers to live in a flexible, spontaneous way, aiming to understand and to adapt to events – *Perception* (McCaulley, 1988).

The author of the present paper shares the point of view of Mamchur (1996), who believes that the *extraverted* learner in the process of language learning prefers an outward focusing of energy, extraversion causes the person to seek outside influences as a source of energy, pleasure, and satisfaction, it causes the person to enjoy open, active interactions, to become absorbed in activities, to have a high tolerance for crowds, noise, and public appearances.

How could the preferences for extraversion be translated into learning preferences?

Extraverted students like to think out loud, they really don't know what they know until they have the chance to talk it out, for them talking is a clarifying process. The extraverts learn by doing. They are action-oriented and prefer hands-on experience, they like to learn together and enjoy sharing ideas and tasks. The extraverts enjoy variety, they prefer to experience a whole range of activities, focusing finally on a select few. The extraverts need feedback from the teacher and from peers.

The English teacher has to create a learning environment in which extraverts have some opportunity to talk in English, to discuss problems, to present their ideas in English, and to move. The teacher involves students in group work, practical activities, making things, putting on plays, or discussion corners, makes sure extraverts know what's expected of them and tells them how well they do something in English, incorporates positive feedback, encourages students to ask questions and give opinions.

The author of the present paper believes that we choose extraversion or introversion very early, in infancy. Extraverts feel more confident when they express a sense of genuine interest in and knowledge about their topic. They like to use aids – overheads, demonstration utensils – while they are giving their presentations at English lessons, and they need time to prepare: rehearsal time. Introverts, to

the author's mind, learn to do an extraverted task in a way most conducive to their own needs. Extroverts found silent reading, another districtwide requirement, to be the most taxing thing they had to do, they wondered if they could use alternative methods of study. Extraverts learn English by trial and error.

Let's have a look to the *introverted* learner at the English lessons. Introversion is an inward focusing of energy, it causes the student to look inward for sources of energy, satisfaction, and safety. The introverts enjoy intense, focused relationships and events. Cautious, considerate, thoughtful, the introvert prefers a well-ordered classroom in which students work quietly on one task at a time.

The author of the present paper would like to draw the reader's attention to the link between introversion and learning style.

First, introverted students need to think everything through, inside their heads, before they risk responding in front of others, they are often the quiet, thoughtful members of a classroom. They prefer to volunteer answer to questions, rather than to be asked a question directly.

Second, introverted students are private beings. Their deep sense of privacy extends to the learning space. They need a sense of place and a feeling of ownership over that space. They prefer quiet, uninterrupted work where concentrated energy focuses on one thing at a time.

Introverted students are self-motivated. They deeply resent anyone "looking their shoulder" as they learn. They want clear instructions to follow and the opportunity to explore ideas without supervision. If they need help, they prefer to watch an expert, read a resource, or watch video.

The English teacher has to design a classroom that allows introverts time and space to think and learn.

To the author's mind, it is very useful to use questioning methods that allow introverts time to reflect and rehearse before answering. Introverts often enjoy working with a peer whom they trust. The teacher may write questions on the board before questioning begins, and to give the possibility to the students to write down their answers to questions before giving them orally, because introverts need time to reflect before answering. And as a result, because extraverts generally don't need as much wait time, they usually tend to dominate the question-answer phase of learning.

The next is the *sensing* learner. Sensation is the perceiving function that seeks immediately relevant and accessible experience through the senses. It causes the person to pay careful attention to each detail in his immediate environment in a practical, focused way. Sensation causes the person to enjoy traditional surroundings and to deal with the world in a realistic, down-to-earth manner.

The author of the present paper would like to identify the connections between the preference for *sensation* and learning style of the student.

First, *sensing* students move cautiously into new learning, prefer a set procedure, and usually learn one step at a time.

They like to stick to skills and knowledge they already possess and learn best by building on those in a developmental learning mode.

Second, sensing students dislike abstract theory and tend to skip over theory when it is presented to them. Theory must be presented in small pieces, as it relates to the immediate learning task, and only when absolutely necessary. Sensing types need to see a practical reason and immediate payoff for learning English.

Third, sensing students absorb information through all senses. They want to see, hear, and touch as they learn. Often, they can learn by observing and mimicking behaviours. These students learn language very quickly when they can look over a step-by-step procedure, see it performed, then try it themselves. Essay questions, formal test situations, and aptitude tests put sensing students at a disadvantage, and often they do not perform well in these situations.

The sensible English teacher, to the author's mind, has to design the program by breaking it down into the component parts, allows students time for observation and practice, provides opportunity for hands-on, practical, nontheoretical language learning. Any theory must be relevant and serve a practical purpose.

The author of the present paper would like to introduce the *intuitive* learner. Intuition is the perceiving function that makes sense of the world by creating patterns and inventing hypotheses. Intuition causes the person to scan situations and data in order to see relationships between things in a way that is self-inspiring and inventive. The students of this type like to go through learning experience with changes and adventures.

The connections between learning style and the preference for intuition, for the author's mind, are the following:

First, intuitive learners are inventive students who like to make up possible hypotheses and explanations. They enjoy to add their own original touch or idea to any given situation and like to take risks.

Second, intuitive students seek variety in what they learn, they don't like repetition and resent it deeply when the teacher forces them into a review situation.

Third, intuitive students work unevenly and grow in spurts and starts, they often forget unimportant details. They like to teach their peers.

The English teacher has to give these students opportunity to invent, guess, teach, and work independently.

The *thinking* learner is the next type the author wants to introduce to the reader. Thinking is the judgement function that values objective, analytical ways to make decisions and evaluate situations. Thinking causes the person to stand back, to think logically, rationally, critically and honestly. Thinking causes the person to value an objective, fair world that runs on logical principles.

Let's have a look to the connections between the preference for thinking and learning style of the students.

First, thinking students value honesty and fair play. They believe rules should be followed to the letter.

Second, thinking students can be competitive, driven, independent learners-demanding to themselves and others. They like to win and always are confident.

Third, thinking students need well-organized, logically developed courses of study language. They value, respect, and expect expert knowledge.

The English teacher to be successful in his/her teaching has to have well-organized programs with cause-and-effect sequences clearly evident, protects thinkers from failure. Thinkers recognize their excellence.

The author of the present paper would like to draw the reader's attention to the *feeling* learner. Feeling is the judging function that values subjective analysis and empathetic understanding as a means of decision-making and evaluation. Feeling causes the person to seek a personal relationship with the environment, relying on a deep sense of personal values to guide behaviour and judge the behaviour of others. Feeling causes the person to orient herself towards relationships, to relate with others in an attempt to create harmony in the world around this person.

What are the links between the preference for feeling and learning style?

To the author's mind, they are the following:

First, feeling students need a harmonious learning environment. They take everything personally. The teacher has to avoid criticism. Feeling students prefer the respectful style of teaching English.

Second, feeling students value cooperation, consideration, and consensus. They rarely appreciate competition because they believe that nobody should be made to lose or feel second best.

Feeling students like to please and are motivated by this desire in the English class.

Third, feeling students want to learn English to help them to grow in a personal way. Learning peaks for them when values are a motivating factor. Feeling students also learn best from an instructor whom they like as a person.

The teacher has to create the pleasant and harmonious learning environment, must be constantly aware that feeling students respond in a personal way to everything that happens at the English lesson.

Now the author would like to continue with the *judging* learner. Judgement according to the Jungian theory is the preference to deal with the world by decisively acting to create order. Judgement is inclined to use more energies in controlling than in understanding events. Judging causes the person to want to create an ordered world in which things can happen on time according to a predetermined purpose. The preference for judgment is connected with learning style in such a way.

First, judging students like to plan and schedule and need exact dates regarding course progress, and exams. They want to see, in advance, a definite structure.

Second, judging students want to complete every task started. They crave a sense of closure.

Third, judging students expect a lot of feedback on assignments. They want everything to count and to be evaluated.

The English teacher has to predict the judging students where, when, and why things may change, he avoids surprises. The knowledge what might happen allows the judging type to relax, feel safe, and go along with the potential changes.

The last type of learner the author would like to describe is the *perceiving* learner.

According to Jungian theory perception is the preference to deal with the world by following one's curiosity and seeking understanding. The person is inclined to put off decision-making until it is a chance to investigate all the kinds of information. The *perceiver* may start more tasks than he finishes. The perceiver may drop something that no longer seems interesting for him. This person, curious and adaptive, enjoys a flexible, pleasurable lifestyle.

The perceiving aspect of type causes the person to resist structure and to favour changing circumstances in the quest for spontaneity and surprise. How does the preference for perception translate into learning style?

First, the perceiving student enjoys the process of discovering new ideas, but without a lot of pressure. They not always complete everything. Testing, to the author's mind, should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Second, because perceiving students tend to avoid schedules, they may need encouragement in a very structured course. The teacher has to help them to stay on task and on time. Perceiving students need degrees of freedom and appreciate any form of flexibility and spontaneity the English teacher can provide.

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Kalbos mokymasis mokymosi stilių ir pažinimo stilių teorijos aspektu

Santrauka

Studentų mokymosi ir pažinimo stiliai yra lemiamas veiksnys, kai kreipiamas dėmesys į individualius skirtumus. Mokantis kalbos taip pat svarbūs ir tipų skirtumai, todėl mokymosi stiliaus aptarimas yra reikšmingas. Studento susidomėjimo dalyku laipsnis taip pat įtakoja jo mokymąsi.

Susidomėjimas įvairiomis turinio sritimis bei turinio mokymo būdu priklauso nuo tipo. Kalbant apie suderinimo ar nesuderinimo svarbą verta prisiminti, kad tam tikri dalykai (temos) sudomins vieno tipo studentus ir bus nuobodūs kitiems.

Kadangi studentų išmokimo sėkmei didelės įtakos turi pritaikymas (dėmesio išlaikymas ir stropus užduočių atlikimas), Myres mano, kad svarbu atsižvelgti į pritaikymo faktorių kalbant apie asmeninių prioritetų svarbą.

Straipsnyje pritariama Dunn (1981:60) nuomonei, jog dauguma studentų sugeba analizuoti savo mokymosi stilius ir tai suteikia jiems pasirinkimo galimybę. Pasirinkimas yra labai svarbus mokantis kalbos, tai tramplinas išmintingiems sprendimams.

Kuo geriau suvoksime savo studentų mokymosi stilius, tikslus ir poreikius, tuo geriau jiems seksis mokytis kalbos ir juos mokyti.

Third, perceiving students are quite relaxed and open to a variety of styles and ideas, they find pleasure in most situations, provided the structure is not so rigid that they feel all chances for fun have been destroyed.

Perceiving students can rarely be bullied into compliance, if they are pressured, they will silently give up.

The English teacher must provide plenty of opportunities for perceiving students to discover and explore, to play with the new ideas. Perceiving students respond well to alternatives that allow them to appraise their own work.

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