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TO THE PROBLEM OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TYPES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING SETTING

Abstract. Personality is an important factor that influences how we learn and what we learn. Investigation of relationship between personality factors, language teaching and learning strategies our students use is in the focus of attention of this article. The differences in personality traits of our students will inevitably present an important variable in the language classroom, since different personality types process, take in, respond to the information, and perceive the world in generally different ways. The language instructors must construct their curriculums around this crucial factor of personality differences for one important reason: though the instructor's input could be the constant in the language training process, it is intake that will present a serious variable. This intake will be closely related to the individual personality factors of each and every one of our students. Thus, the instructors need to introduce a variety of learning strategies that will facilitate language- learning process.

The paper examines three studies that are concerned with the problem of determining who personality wise our language students are and whether there is any correlation between personality factor and particular learning strategies that our students use in language classrooms.

The results showed that the students who were going to take language classes in the future as a part of their foreign language requirement other than language majors had to be given a special approach in the classrooms. The instructors had to readjust the strategies of teaching the language, for



example: Judging students: orderly, planned activities, or Sensing students: facts and hand on experiences rather than abstractions or Extraverts who also require a lot of group activities and practical approaches. This study also showed that there is a correlation between personality traits of language students and their preferred learning strategies. By administering MBTI in our language classrooms, we raise awareness not only of the instructors, but also of the language students of their preferences and importance to adjust the curriculum to link with our students' individual needs in language learning. After all, our common goal is to succeed in the process of teaching and learning the language.

The implications for such findings are very important. The results show the language instructors what strategies they might want to introduce in their classrooms knowing what kinds of personalities they are going to have in classes. Thus, personality tests are extremely valuable in achieving success in education as they are positively correlated with academic achievement.

Keywords: Personality type ESL/EFL learning, learning strategies, Myers- Briggs Personality Type Indicator (MBTI), Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Extraversion, Introversion, Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, Feeling, Judging, Perceiving personality.

Книшевицька Лілія Володимирівна старший викладач кафедри лінгвістики та перекладу Факультету романо-германської філології, Київський університет імені Бориса Грінченка, вул. Бульварно-Кудрявська 18/2, м. Київ, 04053, тел.: (095) 105-17-33, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0173-1214>

ДО ПРОБЛЕМИ ВЗАЄМОЗВ'ЯЗКУ МІЖ ТИПАМИ ОСОБИСТОСТІ ТА СТРАТЕГІЯМИ НАВЧАННЯ В КОНТЕКСТІ ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

Анотація. Особистість є важливим фактором, який впливає на те, як ми навчаємося і що ми вивчаємо. Дослідження взаємозв'язку між особистісними факторами, викладанням мови та стратегіями навчання, які використовують наші студенти, знаходиться в центрі уваги цієї статті. Відмінності в особистісних рисах наших студентів неминуче стануть важливим фактором в мовному класі, оскільки різні типи особистості оброблятимуть, реагуватимуть на інформацію та сприйматимуть світ загалом по-різному. Викладачі мов повинні будувати свої навчальні програми на основі цього важливого фактора з однієї важливої причини: хоча внесок інструктора може бути постійним

у процесі мовної підготовки, саме засвоєння матеріалу залежить від типу особистості студентів та стратегій, які використовуються в класі. Вивчення мови напряму корелює з індивідуальними факторами особистості кожного з наших студентів. Таким чином, інструктори повинні представити різноманітні стратегії навчання, які полегшать процес вивчення мови.

У статті розглядаються дослідження, пов'язані з проблемою визначення особистості студентів в процесі вивчення мови, та встановлює існування прямої кореляції між фактором особистості та конкретними стратегіями навчання, які студенти та викладачі використовують у мовних класах.

Результати показали, що до студентів, які збиралися відвідувати курси іноземної мови окрім мовних спеціальностей, потрібно було застосовувати особливий підхід у класах. Викладачам довелося змінити стратегії викладання мови, наприклад: для студентів з критичним мисленням – упорядковані, заплановані дії або для відчуття-орієнтованих студентів – факти та практичний досвід, а не абстракції, або для екстравертів – багато групової діяльності та практичних підходів. Це дослідження також показало, що існує кореляція між особистісними рисами студентів, які вивчають мову, та їхніми стратегіями навчання, яким вони віддають перевагу. Проводячи МВТІ у наших мовних класах, ми підвищуємо обізнаність не лише викладачів, але й студентів-мовників про їхні вподобання та важливість адаптації навчальної програми до індивідуальних потреб наших студентів у вивченні мови. Адже наша спільна мета – досягти успіху в процесі навчання та вивчення мови.

Наслідки таких висновків дуже важливі. Результати показують інструкторам мови, які стратегії вони могли б запровадити у своїх класах, знаючи, які особистості вони матимуть на уроках. Таким чином, особистісні тести є надзвичайно цінними для досягнення успіху в освіті, оскільки вони позитивно корелюють з академічними досягненнями.

Ключові слова: вивчення мови, типи особистості, стратегії навчання, індикатор типу особистості Майерс-Бріггс (МВТІ), стратегії вивчення мови (SILL), екстраверсія, інтроверсія, відчуття, інтуїція, сприйняття особистості.

Introduction. Personality is an important factor that influences how we learn and what we learn. Investigation of relationship between personality factors and language teaching and learning strategies has an extensive body of research that encompasses numerous empirical studies, describes different



approaches and schools of language teaching from structuralism, through Roger's humanistic psychology to most popular now eclectic approach. The process has in its base various and numerous generations of teachers and learners with different beliefs, expectations and experiences about personality factors and language learning, who were trying to determine the connection between the way we learn and the way we are.

Review of literature. The current research in learning strategies in ESL and EFL settings has focused on cross-cultural aspects of using and teaching second language learning strategies (Levine, Reves & Leaver, 1996; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996) [1; 2], considered the influence of gender and motivation on strategy use (Kaylani, 1996) [3] and discussed methods of teaching strategies in EFL settings (Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins, 1996) [4; 5].

Among these topics, the issue of teaching specific academic-related language strategies with relation to individual student personality factor in university and college settings (Chamot & O' Malley, 1996) plays a very important role in order for the students to succeed [6]. Moody (1988) believes that it is crucial for the instructors to be aware of the fact that "much of the personality traits are genetically determined" [7]. The differences in personality traits of our students will inevitably present an important variable in the language classroom, since different personality types will process, take in, respond to the information, and perceive the world in generally different ways. The language instructors must construct their curriculums around this crucial factor of personality differences of his/ her students for one important reason: though the instructor's input could be the constant in the language training process, it is the intake that will present a serious variable. This intake will be closely related to the individual personality factors of each and every one of our students. For this reason, it is futile to expect our students to adjust completely to the instructors' style, as particular teaching and learning strategies might not work very well with particular personalities. Instead, it is the instructor who needs to introduce a variety of learning strategies that will facilitate language-learning process.

Research question. The three studies that I will be examining closely in this paper are concerned with the problem of determining who personality wise our language students are and whether there is any correlation if at all between personality factor and particular learning strategies that our students use in language classrooms.

Method. To be consistent methodology wise, I selected three studies that use MBTI (Myers- Briggs Personality Type Indicator) as a primary measure of personality assessment. SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language



Learning) and Rebecca Oxford's strategy classification inventory described below will be the instruments for learning strategies assessment.

Study I. Moody [7] investigates relationship between personality factor and language learning. He is reporting about the policy that the University of Hawaii introduced as a part of their mandatory requirement for all academic programs of study in this university: a requirement of at least one foreign language study during the first year at the university and two foreign languages later on. The study is the preliminary analysis of data that is aimed at determining what kinds of students would be studying language as a result of this requirement and what is the relationship between personalities of the future students and learning strategies that will be used in language classrooms. In order to do this, the researcher studied two groups of students: language students majoring in French, German and Spanish and students majoring in science, business and engineering who were about to enroll in required language classes. The study describes personality types and personality differences in each group and discusses kinds of language problems the instructors might anticipate as a result of individual personality factors in a second group. The study provides an empirical evidence for the language instructors to adjust their teaching strategies to fit new students' personalities that would facilitate transition to the new program and satisfy the language requirement.

As a primary instrument for this study the researcher used Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) that is designed to measure personality differences on four bi-polar scales listed further:

✓ ***Extraversion :: Introversion***

Extraverts (E) are more outgoing, focus their attention on the outward world, people and objects, like working in groups, like to be in the center of attention. *Introverts* (I) are reserved, focus mainly on the inner world of concepts and ideas, don't like working in groups, need quiet time to think and process information, learn by thinking, not talking.

✓ ***Sensing :: Intuition***

Sensing (S) personalities prefer to perceive the world through five senses, paying attention to concrete solid real facts of experience. Like structured and deductive style of learning the language. *Intuitive* (N) learners focus on abstract possibilities, meanings, relationships, intuition, they like an inductive approach to learning the language.

✓ ***Thinking :: Feeling***

Thinking learners (T) make decisions and judgments about the information they require objectively, impartially, impersonally relying on logic. *Feeling* (F) learner relies on subjective and personal weighing of values, on the importance of the choice for himself/ herself and others.



✓ *Judging* :: *Perceiving*

Judgers (J) like a planned, orderly way of learning, seek regularity and control of events and activities. *Perceivers* (P) like to be flexible, improvise, do activities that require spontaneous decisions, games, and simulation, they adopt to changes easily and like diversity of approaches.

The hypothesis for the study was that “since language involves the manipulation of words, symbols and abstractions, we would expect language study to attract more *Intuitive* types than *Sensing* types. To the extent that language learning involves abstract rules and logical analysis, one is more likely to find more *Thinking* types than *Feeling* types populating language classrooms” [p.391,7]. As for *Extraversion*::*Introversion* or *Judging*::*Perceiving* types, the researcher expected no significant differences.

Results. The results of the study showed that personality has a substantial impact on achievement. The study of the personalities of the language students compared to the general college population showed that language students favored *Introversion*, as opposed to the college population that favored *Extraversion*, more language students were *Thinking* than *Feeling*, and *Intuitive* rather than *Sensing*, compared to the general college population. Finally, language students favored *Perception* over *Judgment* compared to the general population. Language students liked to focus on words and abstractions in the complex ways, follow logical processes of reasoning. As compared with other than language majors, it was found that for example science majoring students preferred the following formula: I N T J. They are much more introverted than any other majors, and prefer a judging way to approach facts and information in a sequential, logical and orderly manner, they also favored *Intuition* and *Thinking* even more than language students. The business majors were predominantly *Extraverts* and preferred *Sensing* way of taking in information (facts and down to earth ideas and concrete tasks). With the engineering majors many more students were sensing and judging types than in language and science majors.

These findings show that the students who were going to take language classes in the future as a part of their foreign language requirement other than language majors had to be given a special approach in the classrooms. The instructors had to readjust the strategies of teaching the language for example: *Judging* students: orderly, planned activities, or *Sensing* students: facts and hand on experiences rather than abstractions or *Extraverts* who also require a lot of group activities and practical approaches.

I believe that the implications for such a study are very important. It shows the language instructors what strategies they might want to introduce in their classrooms knowing what kinds of personalities they are going to

have in classes. Thus, personality tests are extremely valuable in achieving success in education as they are positively correlated with academic achievement.

Study II. Ehrman & Oxford [8] investigate relationship between MBTI psychological types and students' preferences in learning strategies and performance in an FSI (Foreign Service Institute) intensive language program. Thus, the authors consider a variety of strategies and investigate their relationship to sixteen aspects of psychological type instrument by Myers-Briggs. The following strategies were considered:

Rebecca Oxford (1990) learning styles inventory

1 Memory strategies

- ✓ Creating mental linkages
- ✓ Applying images and sounds
- ✓ Reviewing well
- ✓ Employing action

2 Cognitive strategies

- ✓ Practical
- ✓ Receiving and sending messages
- ✓ Analyzing and Reasoning
- ✓ Creating structure for input and output

3. Comprehensive strategies

- ✓ Guessing intelligently
- ✓ Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing

4. Metacognitive strategies

- ✓ Centering your learning
- ✓ Arranging and planning your learning
- ✓ Evaluation your learning

5. Affective strategies:

- ✓ Lowering your anxiety
- ✓ Encouraging yourself
- ✓ Taking your emotional temperature

6. Social strategies:

- ✓ Asking questions
- ✓ Cooperating with others
- ✓ Empathizing with others

The students took SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) and MBTI tests.

The results show clear correlation of the learning strategies with the MBTI psychological types.

Results. Extraverts :: Introverts



Thus, *Extraverts* and *Introverts* were opposite in use of social strategies. *Extraverts* used these strategies consistently and easily (cooperation and integration), they also reported that solitary study was very difficult. *Introverts* consistently rejected social strategies and instead preferred metacognitive strategies, self-evaluation, attention, concentration and reflection and cognitive strategies: reasoning deductively, analyzing contrastively, recombining already known material into new sentences and using resources such as dictionaries. They also used MBTI to find out more about themselves analytically. *Introverts* wanted to know what is coming in the program and disliked surprises, *Extraverts* in contrast liked surprises. Well-planned homework was a preferred way for *Introverts* and disliked way of *Extraverts*. *Extraverts* liked risk taking, *Introverts* disliked it and preferred safe environment of the material they already know.

Sensing :: Intuitive

Sensing students reported strong preference for memory strategies and they were the only type that reported this preference. They also showed certain preferences for cognitive strategies: recombining vocabulary to create new sentences, repeating aloud or silently (drill like exercises), practicing sounds, reasoning deductively. They also preferred metacognitive strategies: to organize their work, work systematically, set clear goals and preferred small portions of material at a time, rejecting more global training materials, they liked a step by step approach to language teaching.

Intuitive students in contrast, used global processing, liked to make their own learning design, conceptualized, and searched for the “big picture”. They were more tolerant of ambiguity, liked to guess from context, did not need a complete picture of the material, learned language non-rationally, sub-consciously. Some *Intuitive* learners preferred to use affective strategies, did not like drills and repetitions of the same material. The comparison of these two personality domains lead the researchers to think that intuitive students in general will benefit from naturalistic language input, not sequential preferred by sensing students.

Thinking :: Feeling

Thinkers and *Feelers* according to this study have the most dramatic complementarity out of all psychological types. *Thinkers* exhibited a clear preference for cognitive strategies: analysis, while all *Feelers* rejected cognitive strategies, especially analysis. *Thinkers* also report the preference for metacognitive strategies that are rejected by *Feelers*. *Thinkers* in their turn rejected social strategies favored by *Feelers*. *Thinkers* had a high level of anxiety and had problems with self-esteem including loss of professional identity, loss of control, and high self-expectations. *Thinkers* had a problem



of social detachment, needed books rather than peers and teachers. *Feelers* showed a strong social tendency for interpersonal communication, they felt at ease with such topics as family and social relationships.

Judging :: Perceiving

Finally, *Judgers* strongly preferred metacognitive (tactical) strategies in organizing their work, while perceivers rejected these strategies. *Judgers* rejected compensation strategies, while *Perceivers* preferred them. *Perceivers* were open to ambiguity and were ready to improvise, preferred cognitive strategies, while *Judgers* liked structured and systematic way of presenting and processing learning material and emphasized metacognitive strategies. *Perceivers* were bored with repetitions and rote exercises and used humor as affective strategy. They preferred working in spurts of energy, while *Judgers* preferred systematicity and organization.

This study showed that there is a correlation between personality traits of our language students and their preferred learning strategies. By administering MBTI in our language classrooms, we raise awareness not only of the instructors, but also of the language students of their preferences and importance to adjust the curriculum to link with our students' individual needs in language learning. After all, our common goal is to succeed in the process of teaching and learning the language.

Study III. Another study by Ehrman & Oxford [9] is a comprehensive quantitative research that examines the relationship of a wide number of individual differences of language learners such as cognitive aptitude, learning strategies, learning styles, personality, motivation and anxiety to end-of-training proficiency ratings in speaking and reading for a large sample of adult language learners (855 people) in a variety of languages in the FSI institute. Out of all mentioned above variables, I'll specifically discuss correlations between learning strategies and personality factors and end-of-training language proficiency. The correlation study used a variety of instruments, among which are SILL (Strategies Inventory for Language Learning), MBTI (The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) and TDI (Type Differentiating Indicator).

Results. Correlations with MBTI- TDI

The researchers report that personality wise the sample "as a whole tended to be slightly *introverted*, fairly *intuitive* and *thinking* oriented, and quite clearly *judging*. Descriptive statistics for the subscales on the TDI version of the MBTI (N= 792) showed tendencies in this sample toward self-description as intimate (*introversion*); abstract, imaginative, intellectual, theoretical, and original (*intuition*); accepting and tender (*feeling*); questioning, reasoning, and logical (*thinking*); and scheduled, planful, and methodical (*judging*) [p.75, 9]. The general formula: INFJ.



The correlations with personality factors on MBTI –TDI and proficiency ratings most significant was in *sensing-intuition* domain. It is not surprising since these personality variables directly describe the way people take in information that is learning. Thus, *intuitives* showed better results in direct measures of learning success and on “relatively strong correlates of success” such as MLAT, SILL and TDI with cognitive strategies. These findings are concurrent with the previous study by Ehrman & Oxford (1990, Autumn) of personality factor and learning strategies [8]. Just as in the earlier study, in the present one *Intuitive* students were consistently better in proficiency than sensory ones, were better educated, more intellectual and “had thinner ego boundary” [p.80, 9]. It is rather peculiar that *Extraversion–Introversion*, and *Thinking–Feeling* personality domains showed no significant correlation with the end-of–training proficiency. The authors of the article hypothesized that extraverted students might feel more comfortable learning outside of the formal classroom environment, but this fact was not reflected in the proficiency scores.

Correlation with the learning strategies

As for the learning strategies, the study showed the following hierarchy of preferences that correlates with the end-of–the–program proficiency. The most frequently used were compensatory strategies (guessing, paraphrasing, circumlocution), these were immediately followed by social strategies. The next most frequently used were cognitive and metacognitive ones followed by memory and finally affective learning strategies.

Conclusion. Though, these three studies unquestionably are valuable for the language teaching process since they raise awareness of the instructors and students about a very important role that our personalities play in language learning, there is one quite serious, I am afraid, drawback in personality tests such as MBTI and strategy inventories such as SILL. It is their self-assessing character. I believe self-assessment syndrome is a huge problem that methodologies of all these studies have. The students are supposed to answer a series of questions about their preferences, and the personality typing and strategy preferences are based on these answers. Unfortunately, there are certain variables such as cultural interference or socially acceptable or unacceptable models that might significantly influence the answers to the questions both on the strategy inventories and personality inventories. Thus, if some students (especially from different education settings) believe that in a particular specific educational setting the instructors value particular strategies such as for example role plays, group work, interactive activities, the students to gain approval of the teacher might



want to emphasize these strategies rather than the ones they really favor. Similarly, if the acceptable norm of behavior and the role models especially display particular personality traits there is a large possibility that the students might want to emphasize personality features that are socially favored and accepted rather than the ones they really have. Objectivity is a huge problem and is very hard to be gained in such situations since no learning and teaching process is completely free of cultural and social biases. Though there are ways to try to diminish the role of a subjective factor in language and personality studies, researchers cannot completely discard the possibility of a Trojan horse in the midst of their nicely structured and well-organized arguments.

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