

# The Psychological Impact of Languages on the Human Mind- Learning Foreign Languages

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## ABSTRACT

Learning foreign languages is done for many purposes, one of the main purposes is to learn language skills effectively. The psychological impact of foreign languages on the human mind is often great. Not leaving aside people's attitudes and perceptions on the one hand and satisfaction and performance on the other, many researchers go further by saying that for many individual's motivation, interests, desires are greater despite the difficulties during speaking or pronounce in a foreign language.

Acquiring and learning a foreign language in the psychological aspect has a positive effect on many levels especially positively affect the mind, some affect psycho-social development, some intrapersonal communication and some positively affect personal development.

For many fear and uncertainty during speech and pronunciation, the fast switch between languages are among the main issues. In our country, traditional methods are often used when learning foreign languages.

The purpose of this paper is through theoretical review and qualitative research, self – reflection interview to explore and examine the psychological impact of learning foreign languages. Many scholars suggest two-way impacts and when talking about the psychological impact, the positive aspects of the acquisition of communication skills and the cognitive aspect are emphasized more, as our results from showed as well. We should not forget the factors that push a person to learn and acquire something foreign, whether it is for study interests, personal satisfaction and motivation

**Keywords:** foreign languages, psychological impact, skills development.

## INTRODUCTION

According to psychological-linguistic research, people who speak many languages tend to change their personalities in different languages. In plain language: They appear differently. This happens completely subconsciously. There are two explanations for this: On the one hand, the speaker adapts to a certain extent to the cultural area of the language by dealing with the foreign language. On the other hand, the sound of the language itself also has an influence.

Learning a foreign language benefits people in many ways. Some of them positively affect the mind, some affect psychology and some positively affect personal development. Learning any foreign language, be it

English, German or French, brings many positive changes. Language learning has its ups and downs. Sometimes we progress very quickly and then feel like we are not progressing at all. Often times we think we have it difficult to learn foreign languages. It is said that it is more difficult for adults to learn a new language than for children, whose extremely flexible brains grow and make the connections necessary to learn an additional language. To learn a foreign language, the brain uses structures that has already created them for the native language. Learning a foreign language is doubly charged with emotions, because in addition to the unfamiliarity of the subject content, there is also the lack of mastery of the target language (Coianiz, 2001). Indeed, language classes in general are often a source of emotion that disrupts performance because it involves expression in a language one only partially masters. Therefore, emotion is an important variable in the learning process (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004).

As Javor (2016), states learning a foreign language or being bilingual helps in developing cognitive benefits and these benefits as she emphasizes will lead to advantages in terms of developing social intelligence. Taking empathy as study variable, bilingualism and Theory of Mind, Javor was interested to study and explore their link. As her first hypothesis was that bilinguals have better understanding of the Theory of Mind capabilities and empathic skills, the conducted study with 240 mono and bilinguals confirmed that “bilinguals really have better empathic skills and the stories in the Theory of Mind test showed the difference in favor of the bilinguals, so he assumed a correlation between bilingualism, theory of mind and empathy “(2016: 143).

The problem of the psychological impact of languages on the human mind is important for many areas of current scientific knowledge. We should not minimize the difficulties learning a foreign language brings with, such as frustrations, anxiety, insecurity and social phobia, although we say that continuous communication helps a lot in acquiring the language. Perhaps in the psycholinguistic aspect, switching quickly from one language to another could be difficult and this would undoubtedly affect the function of the brain, the reception and processing of information and the change of language, on the other hand, such a practice for a period over a long period of time helps individuals to develop flexibility and strengthening of the process of processing data or information as a complex cognitive process.

In this regard Ziberi and Haykir (2020), on their study with international university bilingual students (101) from International Balkan University, Skopje, confirmed that students do not face significant psychological difficulties even despite the reality of language barriers and this is case with most of them 44%, while the rest are scattered to smaller percentages, who has some of psychological difficulties such as disappointment, insecurity, inability, frustration, anxiety etc. Thus, their results proved that they did not face such difficulties. From the obtained results, as they report students have a higher priority in English foreign language education respectively. In other words, 50% think that they will have better employment opportunities with this and concluding that their results are on the same line with much research that have been done regarding to the cognitive aspects.

In the world there is a tendency towards the rapprochement and mutual enrichment of the cultures of different peoples. In recent decades, migration has reached an unprecedented level. These circumstances encourage the desire of people to master not only their mother tongue, but also the languages of the countries where they live. One of the advantages of a modern educated person is the knowledge of several foreign languages. The specification of the non-native language as a school subject on the one hand causes the need to take these factors into account and on the other hand affects the direction of learning processes. The main function of language is undoubtedly communication and in recent decades the notion of communicative competence has had an impact major in language learning (Alcon, 2000; Arnold and Fonseca, 2003).

The main purpose of language is to implement interpersonal communication in various areas of human life: political and social, professional and personal. It is also important to underline the importance of the role of

language in the thinking process. But why is it so difficult to learn a foreign language? Simply put, this is because it presents a double challenge: both psychologically and time-wise.

As Ziberi and Haykir (2020), states *“Communication between people has increased with the development of education, communication, travel, migration, economics and many other areas. In other words, if we consider this concept as a “social home institution”, it brings together individual, cultural, educational and psychological elements under its roof. In this context, we can argue that individuals who can speak two or more languages are one step ahead of community respect and job demand”* (2020: 71).

As we mentioned above, there are many skills that are developed during the learning and acquisition of a foreign language. Emphasizing the importance of the skills and opportunities that bilingualism and monolingualism bring to the life of the individual, we have summarized some of them referred to Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, 2020).

Table 1. Foreign Language and its benefits

Global Competence	Intercultural competence	Cognitive skills
Languages allow individuals to learn about other visions of the world and enable them to discover new and innovative ways of thinking and working together in a globalized world (OECD, 2020).	Language learning improves communication and is also an avenue towards understanding the diversity of human culture and languages (Fischer, 2012).	Students who learn a foreign language are more creative and better at solving complex problems (Bamford and Mizokawa, 1991).
	Through language, people can learn about and gain access to other cultures, enhance their cultural awareness and the understanding of other groups’ values, and develop an awareness of cultural complexity (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2004; Gudykunst, 2003; Marian and Shook, 2012).	Learning a foreign language can improve attention and mental alertness in adults after only one week of study (Woll and Wei, 2019; Bak et al., 2016).
		Foreign language learning can help with first language literacy (Murphy et al., 2015) and provide an opportunity to acquire skills and knowledge that can help in learning other languages (Rothman, Cabrelli and De Bot, 2013).

<https://www.oecd.org/pisa/foreign-language/opens-doors.pdf>

Regarding to this and the reviews of many researches once more it is stated that “learning foreign languages are related to various positive aspects of life beyond economic gains and better job opportunities” (Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, 2020: 9).

## **AUTONOMY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

With your native language, you not only learned words and sentences, but also developed a cultural view of

the world. Because language and culture influence each other. Learning a foreign language is a complex process that is influenced by several factors. These factors are determined linguistically and extralinguistically. Factors are understood to mean cognitive, affective and social variables that influence the acquisition process and contribute to the complexity of foreign language teaching. A prerequisite for such a view of learning is the consideration of students in their totality, namely as individual individuals who think, feel and interact with other people. Since these factors vary from person to person, learning (a foreign language) seems to be an individual matter from this point of view.

The research path presented starts from the belief that language learning is different from any other kind of disciplinary learning because it involves the use of language itself to talk about and describe the learning experience. In the context of school teaching, language learning is intensively influenced by the interplay between cognition and emotion. But for the personality traits that represent the willingness to tolerate ambiguity in foreign language situations, i.e. in situations in which cognitive behavior is strongly influenced by emotionality.

An example of this would be a situation in which the learner does not understand or know every word but is not deterred by this and is open without further noise or trying to communicate productively. Another example would be the general willingness to learn a language. It's about motivation, fun or dislike of learning. The development of language skills, in fact, cannot be clearly separated from the content of the lesson itself since learning a foreign language is in many respects different from learning mathematics, physics, history or biology. Little (2005) underlines how language constitutes at the same time the tool and the instrument through which knowledge is built, because it is precisely thanks to constant contact with those around us, through constant linguistic interactions, that we increase our knowledge. Therefore, language is closely related to autonomous learning and vice versa.

Language is also how everyone describes (mentally or otherwise) the metacognitive and metalinguistic processes that accompany their learning path.

Often students consider themselves not very autonomous in being able to manage their learning, especially in relation to the decisions to be made about the objectives and methods of foreign language study. They are not aware of the learning that takes place outside school contexts, so how many do not realize that they use foreign languages on a daily basis, albeit in an almost exclusively receptive way; they make limited use of language transfer strategies and make almost no connections between different knowledge, both at an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary level; despite having for the most part an instrumental motivation for language learning, they remain passive when faced with the proposed teaching and assessment planning and materials, considering language study as a passive activity, with learning content that is set and managed by the teacher; on the one hand they do not have confidence in their self-regulation abilities, on the other hand they are convinced that the teacher should have a central (if not absolute) role in organizing the learning process, although they admit that it is their commitment that determines the success or failure of the language acquisition experience.

These types of attitudes towards language learning were generally found in all participating subjects, regardless of the children's age. Teachers express their belief that autonomy helps their students learn more and better and adopt teaching methods techniques to include it in their classes, through the development of (meta)cognitive and socio-affective strategies; they try to draw out the students' previous knowledge and bring the methodology closer to the children's experiential world, in some cases introducing activities that involve the use of technologies.

In addition, people often feel freer when speaking a foreign language because there are fewer socialized expectations of their native language. It can happen that you are more open and courageous to new contacts in a foreign language than in your native language. Of course, curiosity about another culture also plays a

role. Speaking a new language is a dream that all of us want to fulfill. However, learning these – well, that requires perseverance and motivation! As we all know, over time you can lose motivation to learn a language. So, what do you do then?

Remember why you started learning a language: Do you want to communicate with your partner's family in Italian? Or is your company expanding and you want to brush up on your English to pursue career advancement opportunities? No matter what reasons motivate you, one thing is certain: a concrete goal will help you stay motivated over the long term. For example, if you're learning a language because you've always wanted to speak it, your motivation to learn the language will probably fall by the wayside at some point. In this case, I recommend that you imagine a concrete successful situation. For example, imagine how amazing it will feel when you reach your goal! Imagine chatting in Italian with your future in-laws or charmingly welcoming new clients from the USA at work. This will help you in moments when you don't find motivation to learn. Sometimes we feel like we're investing time into learning, but we're not getting any better – so it's all for nothing, right? This typical feeling of frustration with an accompanying lack of motivation is usually because you have reached a so-called learning plateau.

When you start learning a language, your progress in language learning feels huge: after 15 minutes, you've already learned half a dozen sentences and phrases, for example, allowing you to order food in a restaurant. However, later, when you have already reached a better language level, half a dozen new words hardly make a difference! So, what can you do when you lose motivation? Quite simply: Be aware of this dynamic of learning plateaus, it already helps! It is also useful to document your learning success (in the app or with a pen and notepad). When you look back on the last two weeks, you will be proud of how much new you learned and repeated!

There are many scholars and research that supports the active role of the students on learning foreign language. Those, Daflizar et al. (2022), states that “language learning strategies and learner autonomy are two different terms that have always attracted notable research attention over the past few decades” (pg. 258). They also attribute the active role of students during the Pandemic period, where their role and strategies chosen to learn foreign languages were emphasized like never before, where of course referring to the same, the use of technology also gave a certain contribution during the pandemic time. From their study, they observed and confirmed positive perception among students' autonomous abilities and their engagement in activities inside and outside the classroom. Their research also showed a significant correlation between the strategies of their learning abilities and the perception of their abilities during classes as well as a correlation between the strategies used and the autonomous practice to learn and master the English language outside the classroom (2022: 257-58).

### **Motivation to learn foreign languages**

Learning foreign languages also has its advantages. To develop yourself and your personality, it is important to understand how diverse the world is. There are about 6,000 to 7,000 languages in the world. If you deal with other cultures, you will quickly notice that not everything you take for granted is clear. You will learn many new things about yourself and gain a new perspective on your thought patterns. Languages are assigned different characteristics. German is difficult and structured. Many people consider English to be the language of the business world. Romance languages such as French, Italian and Spanish are seen as musical, creative and passionate. Learning a language is not only about words, but also about body language. But the way you say it is also part of intercultural competence. Just the greeting can vary greatly depending on the country and language. If you know foreign languages in our globalized world, this is an essential competence in the job market. More and more companies are giving great importance to international relations and want to attract customers from different parts of the world. When we understand language in this context, it becomes easier for us to understand other cultures and build bridges. There is exciting anthropological research into linguistic similarities between different languages. After all, you get



rich with it. After all, using a new language also gives you the opportunity to meet people from other parts of the world.

Motivation plays a crucial role when learning a new language. Positive motivations can be interest in the culture of that language, personal relationships, professional opportunities or the pursuit of personal development. Clear motivation helps us stick with it and keep going even in difficult stages of the learning process. From many studies in psychological literature, the importance of motivation is emphasized as important process and factor in learning and acquiring foreign language. In this direction Zoltán Dörnyei (1999), on his review explores and explains that motivation “is indeed a multifaceted rather than a uniform factor” and according to him “no available theory has yet managed to represent it in its total complexity” (1999: 136).

On the other hand, Hromova (2019), considers two important factors in the effectiveness of foreign language learning. On the one hand is the motivation and ability of the students and on the other hand the professional and personal qualities of the teachers.

As she argues later, she assumes that educational psychologists and specialists in language acquisition emphasize the importance of students’ personal characteristics and attitudes towards language learning, students’ perceptions of themselves in relation to their educational activities, resilience and motivation that affect their performance (2019: 76).

It can take several months or even years, depending on the difficulty of the language and the time invested. From psychology we know that there are two types of motivation. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside: You learn because you want to get good grades in the exam or avoid professional disadvantages. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from within: you learn out of enthusiasm or personal interest, for example because you fell in love during your semester abroad and now want to polish your language skills before you finally emigrate. Your chances of sticking with learning over the long term are much better if you are intrinsically motivated. But don’t worry – even if your motivation for learning a language is of a pragmatic nature (i.e. extrinsic), you can draw intrinsic motivation from it. How? Very easy! Combine language learning with something you enjoy. If your boss suggests that you acquire basic knowledge of German for company expansion (extrinsic motivation), you think about what connects you to the German language (intrinsic motivation). Do you like watching German crime novels? Then you might be motivated by the prospect of being able to see it in the original language soon! The problem with learning a language is often that your motivation wanes before you have even halfway mastered the language. The question of whether a motivational style construct is useful for language teaching research has not yet been sufficiently discussed. Williams/Burden (1997: 130f.), for example, describe one Mastery orientation, i.e. the orientation towards one’s own learning growth and an individual reference norm or also learned helplessness (see e.g. Heckhausen 1989, 477ff.) as a motivational style. There still seems to be a wide and interesting field opening here. Possibly one could describe rather stable individual dispositions, which would also include self-concepts, perhaps even the achievement motive as a relatively stable personal trait (cf. Dörnyei 1994: 277) as a motivational style.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective and purpose of the interview was to see and understand the problems and experiences of the students in learning foreign language Albanian Language, at language Center Vizioni in Tetovo, North Macedonia. During courses with duration 3 months and in direct communication with them at the end of the course we conducted oral survey and self-reflection interview mainly focused in two aspects:

1. Problems that arise during learning of foreign languages
2. Experiences from students who learned foreign language

## 1. Problems that arise during the learning of foreign languages

In the following part we present the problems shared by students regarding their experiences during learning foreign language, conducted by survey and self-reflection interview after completing the course.

**I understand, but I have trouble speaking for myself.** This is a problem that often occurs with language learners who have been studying at school or in a language course for years. But it can also happen if we have a lot of contact with the language, but we don't speak much ourselves. The reason for this is that there are many students in the school and in the courses.

**Even though I can speak, I don't understand anything when native speakers speak.** This problem is a natural development because formulating an idea in a foreign language is easier than understanding a native speaker. It is much more difficult to understand all the possible combinations of words and phrases that native speakers use. In addition, they speak quickly and swallow one or another sound.

**I forget words all the time.** The more words you learn, the harder it will be to remember them all. You have this problem especially if you don't use the words often or at least don't repeat them regularly. Speak the language and use lots of different words, especially new ones. Write down the words that are important to you, but that you often forget.

**I have a hard time understanding words I know when a native speaker uses them.** Have you learned a lot of new words, but do not understand when you speak in a foreign language? When you ask what a word means, do you realize it's a word you've known for a long time? You just don't know the word when it was said? This is perfectly normal when learning new words. Native speakers often swallow the individual tones of words in sentences. This makes it difficult to identify them. So first you need to hear the word several times from a native speaker.

### **The accent is very strong and heavy**

Do you feel like your accent is too strong or that other people don't understand you? This may be because a language was only learned at a later stage in life. This means that less emphasis is placed on language learning in childhood and adolescence.

## 2. Experiences from students who learned foreign languages

Many students are already multilingual at a young age, before they start school. A foreign student shares the experience he had when learning the Albanian language:

*"Albanian is a difficult language, especially compared to other languages. It is true that the difficulty of a language is subjective and depends on various factors such as your linguistic background and our learning experiences. Albanian is a special language within the Indo-European language family and has several features that distinguish it from many other languages. other European ones. Therefore, for someone who, for example, has English or German as their mother tongue, it can be a bit more challenging to learn Albanian grammar and vocabulary at first".*

However, there are also similarities with other languages that can make learning easier, such as the use of the Latin alphabet.

*"When I started learning the Albanian language, I had problems because I used to say v for the letter dh. I had a psychological impact because I thought if I could learn it. It was difficult. Ultimately, the difficulty of learning Albanian depends on our personal attitude and commitment. With the right approach and the right*

*learning methods, we can successfully master this language. I learned it with a lot of work, and I had a very good Albanian language professor. The ideal time to set aside each day to learn Albanian depends on our individual goals, schedule and motivation. In general, the more time I invested, the faster I progressed. In psychological studies on the problems of learning a second language, it is emphasized that this process is accompanied by certain emotional experiences”.*

The source of these experiences may depend on the learning situation, mediated by the mental characteristics of students. At the same time, a positive emotional tone helps increase students' language activity and stimulates their intellectual development. Emotional tension, the feeling of fear (of mistakes) reduces the effectiveness of communication activities. An example is exam stress, which is very harmful when assessing skills and abilities to express yourself in a foreign language. In scientific literature, we can find these signs of vocal activity because of stress: in speech, students increase irrelevant repetitions, stereotypes, errors in matching words. The mentioned negative phenomena are characteristic in the case of language skills not yet developed by students. As a result, it is difficult for the teacher to determine what caused the mistakes in the conversation: stress or the elementary inability to express their thoughts in a foreign language. Language and creativity are closely related. The areas of the brain that are responsible for creativity are also responsible for language. In addition, by learning a foreign language you also promote your emotional intelligence.

When you speak another language, you unconsciously develop a feeling for the basic structures of the language, which influence people of other cultures and at the same time reflect them. Are you demotivated because you feel like you're only learning unimportant things? Then take your learning into your own hands by choosing what is relevant to you. If you want to live and work on an Argentine estancia (“cattle farm”) for a few weeks, you don't need to complete a business Spanish course. In this scenario, it makes sense for you to familiarize yourself with Spanish vocabulary related to animals and agriculture.

In addition to the right learning content, the learning method must also meet your needs. Of course, you don't really want to constantly memorize vocabulary lists with flashcards. Luckily, you can choose from a variety of methods: Just try out a few learning methods and see what you enjoy and how you learn well. If you have read and written a lot so far, I recommend watching films in the original language, listening to podcasts or turning on the radio. You will quickly notice that your senses are being challenged in new ways and at the same time you are more interested in learning!

## CONCLUSION

The most important thing, like anything else, is not to give up and to continue learning the foreign language. The truth is that it is necessary for teachers to be a support for their students. We must believe in our ability to solve problems – no matter how bad they seem to us at that moment. The need is and remains an essential motive, understood as the need to know how to use a language in international contexts of education, work or tourism, as well as the need to acquire some aspects of language without which one cannot communicate.

People who speak two or more languages often think quickly, can multitask and respond quickly. All this stems from the positive contribution of language learning to the cognitive development of the brain. Learning a foreign language gives people the ability to multitask, which has become a highly sought-after trait today. Because learning a different language gives the brain the ability to think in two different languages. Unfortunately, there is no magic pill that will help you learn a language quickly and in little time. However, there are effective strategies and techniques with which you can learn a foreign language much faster than at school or in a language course. This means that a person can perform more than one task at the same time.

One of the benefits of learning a foreign language for the brain is that it improves the brain's listening skills.



You won't be cramming your foreign language with enthusiasm every day – and sometimes your life will cause distractions or interruptions. That's why it's important that you don't let frustrations derail you. It helps if you set yourself realistic goals, choose the right learning content for yourself, reward yourself for learning successes and provide variety and challenges.

While learning a language, people try to hear, select and understand foreign sounds. For more, trying to hear sounds that are different from the native language tires the brain. This enables the brain's hearing ability to improve. In other words, the more the brain is challenged, the more it develops. Learning foreign languages improves your memory skills. You learn vocabulary and memorize sentences and situations in which you apply what you've learned. This type of training for your brain helps you in other areas of your life as well.

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