# Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition

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# Contents

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# Preface

The present issue of *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition* initiates the fifth year of publishing this journal. It was founded in 2015, at a time when not many journals in applied linguistics (and specifically those focusing on second language acquisition) were available. It was established as a forum of discussion for Polish as well as foreign scholars. Indeed since then, every consecutive issue of the journal has welcomed contributions from many renowned researchers, such as Peter MacIntyre, David Singleton, Larissa Aronin, and Jean-Marc Dewaele, to name just a few. It is the journal's ambition to demonstrate new trends in SLA research, broadly understood, both worldwide and in Poland, focusing on theoretical discussion and practical solutions to problems based upon them. It is our aim not only to publish contributions from well-known and respected authors but also from young researches presenting fresh and innovative ideas. Thus, the journal hopes to become a venue for the exchange of ideas between well-established academics and those inspired by them. The journal presents issues ranging from purely linguistic and cognitively-oriented research on language acquisition processes to psycho- and sociolinguistic studies, always trying to feature the most recent developments in terms of topic choice as well as in the methodology of research they employ. It is crucial for the development of academic research that we offer this opportunity to share ideas in an effective and disseminated manner via journal publication, especially that we publish using an open access system and where the entire production process is executed online and the final product is available to everyone. The journal's standards and quality are guaranteed by the international Editorial Board of TAPSLA composed of well-known Polish and foreign experts on a wide range of second language acquisition problems. The Editors are also proud to announce that the journal has obtained positive evaluation from SCOPUS and is now indexed in their database, as well as covered as one of Elsevier products.

This means that the present issue is the first one gaining increased visibility and discoverability of the content, as Elsevier products are used by leading research institutions, government organizations, decision-making bodies and corporate organizations around the world. Updated information on the journal is available on the University of Silesia Institute of English webpage at www.ija.us.edu.pl (via a special link) and on the journal webpage at www.journals.us.edu.pl/index.php/TAPSLA.

The present issue opens with a study of the affective aspect of figurative language in the context of learning German by native speaker of Slovene. The paper by Teodor Petrič attempts to offer a descriptive and analytic framework for capturing the psycholinguistic (especially affective) dimensions of a large set of German idioms, as perceived by Slovene learners of German, and also to relate the research results to such earlier elaborations as Citron et al. (2015). The author hopes that the results will contribute to the development of our knowledge of the role of affect in a foreign/second language setting.

Humor undoubtedly possesses a high positive affective potential, which constitutes a thematic link to the second paper published in the present issue, the study by Krystyna Warchał titled "Humour in Professional Academic Writing." The author explores the issue of apparent inherent incompatibility between humorous elements and the arguably mandatory solemnity of academic publications. She points to a number of reader-engaging strategies quite often used by authors of academic papers, which may potentially enhance the author-reader rapport and thus facilitate scholarly communication. The paper makes also an important educational contribution, in formulating a number of valuable recommendations for the ESL/EFL context, highlighting the human face of academic writing to the students of the subject.

The article "Poetry in Teaching Grammar to the Advanced Users of Polish as a FL" by Marzena S. Wysocka continues the theme of reconciling some apparently mutually exclusive factors in FLL, juxtaposing the alleged system-breaking nature of poetic language with the apparent rigidity of grammatical instruction. The subjects were learners of Polish as a foreign language at the School of Polish Language and Culture at the University of Silesia in Katowice, who responded very positively to the introduction of poetry as a kind of "grammar refresher," creating opportunities for polishing up grammatical correctness and expanding their linguistic repertoire.

One of the very visible facts of contemporary European university education is the high volume of international student exchange, especially within the Erasmus+ framework. No wonder that it inspires research interests of representatives of many disciplines. The potential L2 linguistic gain resulting from a study placement abroad is put to test in a small-scale investigation, reported in a paper by Katarzyna Ożańska-Ponikwia, Angélica Carlet, and Maria Pujol Valls. The authors came to the conclusion that although Erasmus+ mobility is a very powerful factor contributing positively to the development of L2 speaking skill and grammar proficiency, it is definitely not the guarantee of success, as many other factors, such as language engagement, overall satisfaction from the Erasmus+ experience, as well as the amount and quality of language input outside the classroom influenced in an important way the ultimate potential gain.

The paper "Foreign Language Students' Perceptions of Their Identity" by Liliana Piasecka explores the dynamic character of foreign language learning process in the context of an alternative L2 language identity construction, experienced by students of English as a foreign language. The author highlights the positive aspects of this process, enumerating such beneficial effects as increased appreciation of English as a tool of cross-cultural communication, leading to the development of more open-minded attitude and tolerance. The new language identity obtained thanks to the development of English is described as prestige-building, self-confidence raising and mind-broadening factor.

The last research paper of the issue returns to the learning environment of the third-age language students, which has already been explored in a number of papers published in previous volumes. The study by Łukasz Matusz and Anna Maria Rakowska focuses on the learning difficulties faced by senior participants of third-age university language courses organized by academic institutions in Silesia. Their past experience and awareness of own limitations guarantee reliable and valuable source of information for course developers aimed at this particular language group.

The issue concludes with two book reviews. One of them is the review of the monograph by Hadrian Lankiewicz, *Teacher Language Awareness: A Collaborative Inquiry Based on Languaging* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2015), a volume worth of interest especially for FL teacher trainers in various educational centers concerned with the professional development of teachers at different levels: both at pre-service and at the in-service stage (reviewed by Danuta Gabryś-Barker), and a slightly earlier publication by Danuta Wiśniewska, *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy: Theory and Analysis of Practice* (Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013), a work highly recommended not only for EFL teacher trainees and their instructors, but also for all teachers of English for whom constant reflection and self-development constitute indispensable ingredients of their professional career (reviewed by Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel).

This issue offers mainly new research contributions, reflecting the variability of the learning environments in which language learning and acquisition take place in the contemporary world, but in addition, point to practical applications of the findings and suggest a number of ingenious solutions, ready to be implemented in language teaching practice.

We would like to thank all the contributors to this volume and to invite other Polish and foreign academics to share their scholarly research with us by submitting their work to our journal, which is published by the prestigious Polish academic publisher, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego (University of Silesia Press).

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0626-0703 *Danuta Gabryś-Barker*
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0308-4337 *Adam Wojtaszek*

# Articles

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**Teodor Petrič**
University of Maribor, Slovenia
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4397-9365

# Ratings of Affective and Non-Affective Aspects of German Idioms in Second Language Processing

Abstract

In this paper psycholinguistic and emotional properties of 619 German idiomatic expressions are explored. The list of idiomatic expressions has been adapted from Citron et al. (2015), who have used it with German native speakers. In our study the same idioms were evaluated by Slovene learners of German as a foreign language. Our participants rated each idiom for emotional valence, emotional arousal, familiarity, concreteness, ambiguity (literality), semantic transparency, and figurativeness. They also had the task to describe the meaning of the German idioms and to rate their confidence about the attributed meaning. The aims of our study were (1) to provide descriptive norms for psycholinguistic and affective properties of a large set of idioms in German as a second language, (2) to explore the relationships between psycholinguistic and affective properties of idioms in German as a second language, and (3) to compare the ratings of the German native speakers studied in Citron et al. (2015) with the ratings of the Slovene second language learners from our study. On one hand, the results of the Slovene participants show many similarities with those of the German native speakers, on the other hand, they show a slight positivity bias and slightly shallower emotional processing of the German idioms. Our study provides data that could be useful for future studies investigating the role of affect in figurative language in a second language setting (methodology, translation science, language technology).

*Keywords*: idioms, affective properties, psycholinguistic properties, German, Slovene

## Language, Affect, and Idiom Processing

Many studies addressing the relationship between emotion and language in human communication have shown that emotional aspects of words or word combinations affect comprehension processes in native language (Jacobs, 2011; Jacobs et al., 2015) and second language use (Conrad, Recio, & Jacobs, 2011, p. 2). In everyday communication, emotional content is often conveyed with figurative (i.e., non-literal) expressions (Pollio et al., 1977). According to a number of studies (e.g., Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; Drew & Holt, 1998), figurative expressions are preferred to literal language in several discourse types, presumably to elicit empathy in the addressee and thus to sound more convincing. Emotionally laden words exhibit higher levels of brain activation and are processed faster than neutral words, non-literal sentences evoke stronger emotional responses than literal sentences (Bohrn et al., 2012; Citron & Goldberg, 2014). The question how these expressions contribute to the conveyance of affectivity still needs further investigation (Citron & Goldberg, 2014). The meaning of a (part of a) sentence is considered figurative if the language user has to construct the intended meaning of a sentence not only by retrieving conventional word meanings from the mental lexicon and joining them according to the principle of semantic compositionality, but also by applying stored knowledge about their relationships to specific types of situations. In many languages different types of figurative expressions can be distinguished (e.g., metaphors, proverbs, idioms, and oxymora). Our study focussed on idioms, which in many languages belong to the most frequent type of figurative expressions. Idioms are strings of words whose phrasal meaning cannot be derived solely from the meaning of its constituent words and appears to be fully or partially arbitrary. Although the constituent words seem to contribute to the overall formal, semantic, and pragmatic properties of an idiom, most often the phrasal meaning of an idiom has to be learned to be fully understood or used in appropriate situations. Therefore it is often argued that it has to be stored in some way in a mental lexicon or knowledge system, together with its constraining formal properties and contextual preferences.

Several models have been proposed to account for L1 idiom processing, especially for idiom comprehension (for detailed overview, see Libben & Titone, 2008; Cieślicka, 2015). According to lexical look-up models (Swinney & Cutler, 1979, Bobrow & Bell, 1973), idioms are fixed expressions listed in the mental lexicon. Linguistic processing of the string and retrieval of the idiomatic meaning proceed in parallel, with the retrieval of the idiomatic meaning being faster than the computation of its literal meaning. The idiom decomposition hypothesis (Gibbs, Nayak, & Cutting, 1989) postulates that only decomposable idioms are processed faster than novel control phrases due to the contribution of their components to the figurative meaning of the idiomatic phrase. The graded salience hypothesis assumes that the more frequent, familiar, conventional or prototypical/stereotypical the information is, the more it is salient in one’s mind (Giora, 2003, p. 28). Since salience always has processing priority, salient meanings (e.g., the figurative meaning of ambiguous familiar idioms) are predicted to be retrieved faster than their less salient meanings (e.g., the literal meaning of ambiguous familiar idioms). According to the configuration hypothesis (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988), idioms are processed word by word, until enough information has accumulated to render the sequence of words highly expected to be an idiom. At this point, the idiomatic meaning is retrieved. The superlemma model (Sprenger, Levelt, & Kempen, 2006, pp. 174, 176) claims that idioms are both unitary and compositional, but at different levels of their cognitive representation. It assumes a separate representation of the idiom on the lexical-syntactic processing level, that is, the superlemma, which is a representation of the syntactic properties of the idiomatic phrase linked to its constituent lemmas. But these lemmas are not bound exclusively to an idiomatic meaning. Idiom processing is facilitated due to reduced competition between the constituent lemmas of the superlemma. Among the above described L1 models, the configuration hypothesis (Cacciari & Tabossi, 1988) and the superlemma model (Sprenger et al., 2006) are most compatible with our view on processing German idioms (Petrič, 2014).

According to the L2 model of dual idiom representation (Abel, 2003), it is assumed that only non-decomposable and frequently occurring idioms are represented by entries on the conceptual level of the mental lexicon, whereas decomposable idioms are represented by lexical entries of their components. Storage in the mental lexicon, but also decomposability are assumed to facilitate idiom processing. In contrast to native speakers, L2 learners tend to assess the literal meaning of idioms more often (literality bias) since they do not develop as many idiom entries in their mental lexicon and have to rely more often on the literal analysis of idiom components. The literal salience model (Cieślicka, 2006; 2015) suggests that in L2 comprehension, literal meaning is generally more salient and therefore enjoys a processing advantage over the figurative meaning. The findings of Siyanova-Chanturia & Conklin (2011) confirm that native speakers process idioms faster than novel phrases, but suggest that proficient non-native participants do not process idioms faster than novel phrases. These findings, that is, figurative meanings require more re-reading than literal ones, are in line with those in Cieślicka (2006). In contrast, the study of Conklin & Schmitt (2008) does not observe any differences between figurative and literal meaning processing for either native or proficient non-native participants. The findings of Beck & Weber (2016), as well as our own research on German idioms (Petrič, 2014), suggest that proficient non-native speakers process figurative meaning in a similar manner as native speakers and do not support the idiom diffusion model of Liontas (2002) that translatability of idioms from L1 to L2 has a significant impact. For proficient L2 users, Titone et al. (2015) come to the same conclusion as Beck & Weber (2016). However, Matlock & Heredia (2002) suggest that beginning L2 learners do not follow the same routes of idiom processing as native speakers since they seem to first access the literal meaning and translate it into to their native language. When becoming more proficient, L2 learners are able to bypass those first two less efficient steps in idiom processing. Our study follows the idea that differences in L1 and L2 idiom processing are not the result of a distinct manner of processing figurative expressions but rather the result of cross-linguistic differences (cf. Beck & Weber, 2016).

## Description of the Experiment

### Aims of the Study

Several psycholinguistic properties (i.e., familiarity, meaningfulness, decomposability, semantic transparency, figurativeness, ambiguity, predictability and others) have been shown to affect idiom processing (for an overview, see Libben & Titone, 2008). Our study is based on the work of Citron, Cacciari, Kucharski, Beck, Conrad, and Jacobs (2015), which not only included several psycholinguistic variables that have been already studied in some normative studies on idiomatic expressions in native language use (e.g., English, French), but also provided descriptive norms of affective variables (arousal, valence) and concreteness for German idioms.

The aims of our study were (1) to provide descriptive norms for psycholinguistic and affective properties of a large set of idioms in German as a second language, (2) to explore the relationships between psycholinguistic and affective properties of idioms in German as a second language, and (3) to compare the ratings of the German native speakers studied in Citron et al. (2015) with the scores of the Slovene second language learners from our study. Therefore a list of 619 German idioms, previously used with German native speakers (cf. Citron et al., 2015), was presented to Slovene learners of German as a foreign language as part of a research project on German idioms in foreign language learning (cf. Jesenšek, 2014). Our study provides data that could be used for future studies investigating the role of affect in figurative language in a second language setting.

### Participants

A total number of 81 Slovene students of the German department of the University of Maribor participated in our study, but only the results of 73 (48 female and 25 male) could be included in our analysis. Our subjects were 19–22 years old and had sufficient experience in working with standard computer programs (e.g., spreadsheets). Their native language was Slovene and after consulting lecturers from the same department, their proficiency in German as a foreign language was estimated reaching at least a B1 to B2 level ("independent level") according to the European Reference Frame for Language Competence (ERFLC).

## Language Material

The language material in our study consisted of a list of 619 German idioms, previously selected by Citron et al. (2015) on the basis of several idiom lists and rated by German native speakers. Citron et al. (2015, pp. 7–8) used the following criteria of distinction between idioms and other types of figurative expressions:

- an idiom in the list should consist of a verbal phrase (VP) and one or several arguments, that is, *to spill the beans* or *to give someone a hard time* (but without distinguishing between internal and external syntactic valency of an idiom);
- the verb of an idiom should be capable of inflection (i.e., Person & Tense);
- the meaning of an idiom should be conventionalised (contrary to metaphors) and
- an idiom should not consist of an entire sentence (contrary to proverbs like *A man's home is his castle*).

The idioms in the list were presented as infinitival clauses, as it was the case in the experiment with German native speakers conducted by Citron et al. (2015). The idiomatic expressions consisted of two to nine words or nine to 43 letters.

## Procedure

Our participants received the same tasks, stimuli, and instructions as the German native speakers in the study of Citron et al. (2015, pp. 15–18). Employing a questionnaire in electronic spreadsheet form, we tried to obtain information on how our participants were rating the linguistic properties of the German idiomatic expressions on the list. After general instructions with information on the topic of the questionnaire, the participants received specific instructions on how to rate the idiomatic expressions according to several criteria and scales, three German examples and the list of 619 (unrated) German idioms. The participants of our study received the task to rate the following properties of the idiomatic expressions: familiarity, semantic transparency, figurativeness, concreteness, ambiguity, emotional valence, and emotional arousal. The participants also had the task to describe the meaning of the German idioms in their own words and subsequently to rate their confidence in the appropriateness of their description. The descriptions of the idioms written down by our participants (i.e., their knowledge of the idiomatic meaning) were assessed based on the descriptions in German idiom collections (Ephras, 2006; Udem, 2001) and rated dichotomously as “correct” [1] or “wrong” [0]. In the general instructions the participants were urged not to leave any expression unrated and to accomplish all tasks in a spontaneous fashion. In the specific instructions they were also asked to accomplish each rating task subsequently (column by column in the electronic spreadsheet): first emotional valence, then emotional arousal, followed by familiarity, semantic transparency, figurativeness, concreteness, and ambiguity, concluding with the description of the idiomatic meaning and the rating of their confidence in their own description).

## Variables in the Experiment

In the experiment our participants rated or described the German idioms by the following variables: familiarity, semantic transparency, figurativeness, concreteness, ambiguity (also known as literality or literal plausibility), emotional valence, emotional arousal, confidence into one’s own idiomatic knowledge and knowledge of idiomatic meaning. Ambiguity was also determined by the experimenters of the study Citron et al. (2015). Another variable, that is, the length of the idiomatic construction, was calculated by Citron et al. (2015). In the instructions the participants were given descriptions of the rating scales and typical examples (for a detailed view of all instructions, scales and examples, cf. Citron et al., 2015, Appendix A).

**Familiarity** refers to the subjective frequency of exposure to idioms (Titone & Connine, 1994), that is, how often one has read or heard an idiom. Familiarity may differ from objective frequency estimates of expressions occurring in written and spoken texts. The Slovene students had to rate the familiarity of the German idioms (*Familiarity.M*) according to the same seven-point Likert-scale (ranging from one to seven, that is, from very unfamiliar to very familiar) as the German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015).

**Semantic transparency** (*Sem.transp.M*) relates to the degree of how easy the idiomatic meaning of a German idiom could be derived from the (literal) meanings of its constituents. The German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015) and our Slovene participants were instructed to rate the semantic transparency of the German idioms according to a seven-point Likert-scale (ranging from one to seven, i.e., from very opaque to very transparent).

**Figurativeness** relates to the degree to which an idiomatic expression is perceived as expressing a non-literal meaning. The figurativeness of the German idioms (*Figurative.M*) was rated by the German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015) and our Slovene participants according to a seven-point Likert-scale (ranging from one to seven, i.e., from non-figurative to very figurative).

**Concreteness** (*Concrete.M*) was described as a property of a linguistic element to be experienced with one or more of the human senses. The German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015) and the Slovene second language learners in our study were instructed to rate the concreteness of the German idioms according to a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from one to seven, i.e., from very abstract to very concrete).

**Ambiguity** (also called literality or literal plausibility) refers to whether an idiom also has a semantically plausible literal meaning (Cronk, Lima, & Schweigert, 1993) if occurring in an appropriate context. In Citron et al. (2015) the German idioms were determined by the experimenters as ambiguous or not ambiguous (variable *Ambiguity.D*), but in our study the Slovene participants were instructed to determine idiom ambiguity themselves (variable *Ambiguity*).

**Emotional valence** (*Emo.val.M*) was one of the two obtained affective variables describing to which extent a stimulus was rated positive or negative (cf. Russell, 1980). The German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015) and the Slovene second language learners in our study were instructed to rate the German idioms according to a seven-point scale ranging from –3 to +3 (i.e., from very negative to very positive).

Another affective variable was included during our statistical analysis by calculating the square of emotional valence, which was called emotional valence$^2$ (*Emo.val.M^2* or *Emo.val.Msq*). This variable represents the degree of stimulus emotionality independent of its polarity and enables us to explore potential quadratic relationships between emotional valence and other variables.

**Emotional arousal** (*Arousal.M*) was the second affective variable employed in both studies and referred to the extent an event was emotionally stimulating, regardless of its polarity (Barrett & Russell, 1998). The German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015) and the Slovene participants from our study were instructed to rate the emotional arousal of a German idiom according to a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from one to seven, i.e., from not emotionally stimulating to very stimulating or intense).

**Knowledge of idiomatic meaning** refers to whether or not the correct idiomatic meaning is known. Some studies (Tabossi, Arduino, & Fanari, 2011) tested this variable by asking participants to provide a written explanation of the idiomatic meaning, whereas others measured the extent to which participants were confident about their own knowledge of the idiomatic meaning (Bonin, Méot, & Bugaiska, 2013; Libben & Titone, 2008;

Titone & Connine, 1994). Since knowledge of the idiomatic meaning and confidence can differ, we tested these two variables separately. The German participants in Citron et al. (2015) and our Slovene participants received the task to describe the meaning of the German idioms in their own words, that is, their knowledge of the idiomatic meaning (variable *Know.idiom. meaning*, measured in %). The descriptions were evaluated as "correct" or "false" by comparing them with those provided in collections of German idioms (Ephras, 2006; Udem, 2001). Due to evaluation issues concerning the Slovene participant data, this variable has not been included in the statistical analysis presented in this article.

**Confidence** (*Confidence.M*) refers to the extent to which participants are sure about their own knowledge (Bonin et al., 2013). The German native speakers in the study of Citron et al. (2015) and the Slovene participants in our study were instructed to rate their own definitions of the idiom meanings according to a seven-point Likert scale (ranging from one to seven, i.e., from poor to excellent knowledge). In contrast to the German participants, the Slovene second language learners were instructed to rate their idiomatic knowledge after they had already provided the definitions of the idioms meanings.

The **length of an idiom**, that is, the number of words [*Length.W*] or letters [*Length.L*] it consists of, was determined by the experimenters of the study Citron et al. (2015) and was included in the analysis as a psycholinguistic variable since online-studies have shown that it has substantial impact on the cognitive processing of phrases.

## Expected Relationships between the Variables

The sensitivity to emotional content in a second language is still an open issue in research. According to some researchers (Bond & Lai, 1986), second language processing would differ from first language processing by increased emotional distance (shallow encoding of emotional content, emotion words experienced in fewer contexts). Recent research rather seems to support the assumption that second language processing is not always less emotional but rather modulated by several factors such as age of acquisition, proficiency level and exposure to the second language environment (Conrad et al., 2011, p. 2). Since the proficiency of the second language learners included in our study has reached a sufficiently high level (i.e., B1 or B2 according to ERFLC), we assumed that the cognitive processing of German idiomatic expressions in our second language learners was qualitatively comparable to the processing in German native speakers. Therefore, we generally expected to replicate correlations between psycholinguistic and affective variables found in the study of Citron et al. (2015) with German native speakers.

According to our general assumption from the previous paragraph, we expected to obtain positive correlations between familiarity, knowledge, and confidence that have been found in previous normative studies on idioms in native language use (Citron et al., 2015; Bonin et al., 2013; Libben & Titone, 2008; Tabossi et al., 2011).

Since we assumed a basic preference for less cognitive complexity, we also expected positive correlations between familiarity on the one hand, and transparency and concreteness on the other, as well as a negative correlation between familiarity and idiom length: that is, it should be easier for a second language learner to become familiar with shorter, transparent and/or more concrete idioms than with longer, opaque and/or more abstract ones. Furthermore, we expected a negative relationship between familiarity and figurativeness, since constituents in figurative expressions exhibit less semantic overlap than those in literal expressions (cf. Beeman, 1998) and should be more difficult to decode.

Furthermore, we expected positive correlations between familiarity on one hand and both affective variables (valence and arousal) on the other hand, that is, it should be easier for a second language learner to become familiar with expressions of polarizing and stimulating content (high contrast between semantic levels) than with expressions of neutral content (low contrast between semantic levels).

Concreteness, semantic transparency, figurativeness, idiom length, valence, and arousal have not yet been tested for idioms in second language acquisition. Therefore we expected similar correlations as found and discussed in Citron et al. (2015) for German native speakers: positive correlations between transparency and concreteness, transparency and length, figurativeness and length, transparency and arousal, concreteness and arousal, figurativeness and arousal, and negative correlations between transparency and figurativeness and between concreteness and figurativeness. Furthermore, we expected positive correlations between knowledge and confidence on the one hand, and transparency and concreteness on the other in our second language data.

We also tested whether the properties of ambiguous and unambiguous idioms differed, and how they were correlated with the other studied variables. In line with the findings in Citron et al. (2015, pp. 12–13), we expected negative correlations between ambiguity on the one hand, and valence and arousal on the other. Furthermore, in Citron et al. (2015) ambiguous idioms were rated more concrete than unambiguous ones, possibly because it was easier to establish a link to the literal meaning of an ambiguous idiom than to imagine the meaning of unambiguous idioms, exhibiting figurative meaning only. Another difference found in Citron et al. (2015) was that unambiguous idioms were better known than ambiguous ones. Similar relationships were also expected in our second language data. Furthermore, we also expected a negative correlation between ambiguity and transparency, that is, ambiguous idioms should be rated as less transparent, and a positive correlation between ambiguity and figurativeness, that is, ambiguous idioms should be rated as more figurative.

Concerning the relationships between affective variables, we expected to replicate the results based on German idioms in native language use (Citron et al., 2015) and single words (e.g., Citron et al., 2014)—namely, a quadratic relationship between valence and arousal (i.e., the more valenced an idiom, the more arousing it is) and a negative linear relationship (i.e., negative idioms are rated as more arousing than positive idioms).

## Results of the Experiment

### Descriptive Statistics and Distribution of Variables

Table 1 displays descriptive statistic values for the variables obtained in this experiment: the number of observations for every variable (*n*), the average value (*mean*) and its standard deviation (*sd*), the central value (*median*) and its median absolute deviation (*mad*), its standard error (*Se*) and also information on the distributional characteristics of a variable, that is, its skewness (*skew*) and peakedness or tail extremity (*kurtosis*). Knowledge of the idiomatic meaning is not included in this table. The distribution of the variables was checked visually and numerically with specific tests in the statistics program *R* and found to be acceptable to the assumptions made for applying regression techniques (Pena & Slate, 2014; Ruginski, 2016; Prabhakaran, 2017); only the variable length of idiom was logarithmically transformed.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics of the obtained variables*

| Variable | n | mean | sd | median | mad | skew | kurtosis | Se |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Emotional valence | 45645 | –0.19 | 1.94 | 0 | 2.97 | 0.19 | –1.16 | 0.01 |
| Emotional arousal | 45690 | 4.00 | 1.73 | 4 | 1.48 | –0.06 | –0.83 | 0.01 |
| Familiarity | 45730 | 4.40 | 1.82 | 5 | 1.48 | –0.24 | –0.97 | 0.01 |
| Semantic transparency | 45229 | 3.91 | 1.78 | 4 | 1.48 | 0.07 | –1.04 | 0.01 |
| Figurativeness | 45727 | 4.72 | 1.63 | 5 | 1.48 | –0.44 | –0.55 | 0.01 |
| Concreteness | 45721 | 3.71 | 1.68 | 4 | 1.48 | 0.07 | –0.82 | 0.01 |
| Ambiguity | 45103 | 0.36 | 0.48 | 0 | 0 | 0.56 | –1.68 | 0 |
| Confidence | 42447 | 5.08 | 1.58 | 5 | 1.48 | –0.59 | –0.33 | 0.01 |
| Length.L | 45806 | 22.89 | 5.79 | 22 | 5.93 | 0.69 | 0.46 | 0.03 |
| Length.W | 45806 | 4.48 | 1.29 | 4 | 1.48 | 0.40 | –0.12 | 0.01 |

The mean values of the ratings of both participant groups, that is, the German native speakers (L1-German) studied in Citron et al. (2015) and the Slovene second language learners (L2-German) from our study, were statistically compared with a MANOVA (i.e., with participant groups and idioms as independent variables and all affective and psycholinguistic variables together as dependent variable). According to MANOVA the difference between the groups was significant (Pillai = 0.7985; F(8, 611) = 302.58; p < 0.001). Table 2 shows that the differences between the mean values of nearly all variables of both participant groups were significant (p < 0.05), except in the case of figurativeness with no significant mean value difference between the participant groups (4.72 vs. 4.70; p = 0.22).

Table 2

*Mean values of Slovene and German participants and F-tests in MANOVA*

| Variable | L2-German | L1-German | F-value | df | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valence | –0.19 | –0.58 | **389.41** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |
| Arousal | 4.00 | 3.82 | **90.14** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |
| Familiarity | 4.39 | 4.76 | **192.60** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |
| Transparency | 3.91 | 4.13 | **45.94** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |
| Figurativeness | 4.72 | 4.70 | 1.51 | 1, 618 | 0.22 |
| Concreteness | 3.71 | 3.34 | **172.58** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |
| Ambiguity | 0.36 | 0.47 | **47.85** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |
| Confidence | 5.06 | 6.10 | **1552.37** | 1, 618 | < 0.001 |

The mean values of nearly all scales were significantly different in the data of both participant groups, however, the correlation values show striking similarities, that is, strong correlations in the case of emotional valence (93%), emotional arousal (78%), familiarity (54%), semantic transparency (54%), figurativeness (60%), concreteness (51%), and ambiguity (67%). In the case of confidence the German and Slovene participants differed strongly, thus the correlation coefficient was very low and not significant (–3%). From our point of view, these results suggest that L1 and L2 processing of idioms by and large follow the same principles. However, MANOVA displayed quantitative differences between the participant groups, estimated to belong to different ERFLC competence levels (B1/B2 vs. C2), and most of the test results suggest deeper idiomatic knowledge of the German native speakers.

## Internal and External Validity

An internal consistency analysis shows the reliability of an implemented measure in a study. The most often used measure of the internal consistency of evaluation scales is Cronbach's alpha: the higher the α coefficient, the more the items have shared covariance and probably measure the same underlying evaluation scale or concept. According to our consistency analysis (cf. Revelle, 2018 on R-package *psych*), the evaluation data of all the scales in our experiment can be considered consistent since Cronbach's alpha reach values above the threshold (α > 0.7), which according to Kline (1999) indicates high consistency or reliability of the evaluation data.

Table 3

*Internal consistency of scales (Cronbach's alpha values)*

| Arousal | Valence | Familiarity | Transparency | Figurativeness | Concreteness | Ambiguity | Confidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.91 | 0.98 | 0.94 | 0.9 | 0.89 | 0.82 | 0.95 | 0.88 |

Inter-rater reliability indicates to which extent the ratings of different participants agree with one another. We used Krippendorff's method to analyse the inter-rater reliability of our rating data. Krippendorff's alpha calculates the probability of empirical agreements and deviations (Nordmann, Cleland, & Bull, 2014, p. 5). Our analysis with 73 raters and 619 items indicates that the ratings of the Slovene participants reached only a low level of agreement, much below Krippendorff's recommended threshold of 0.67 and therefore the ratings can be assumed to be not independent from the participants in the study. The highest agreement was found with emotional valence, followed by ambiguity and familiarity, the lowest with confidence and concreteness. These values indicate that the ratings of the idiom properties are only to a small degree independent of our participants and therefore they exhibit a low degree of replicability or external validity. Similar low values of inter-rater agreement (based on Krippendorff's alpha) have been found by Nordmann & Jambazova (2017, p. 202) in a rating study on English and Bulgarian idioms. According to Nordmann et al. (2014) the relationship between the evaluations can be consistent (i.e., the evaluation scale can be internal consistent), but this does not indicate that different participants show high agreement (i.e., high inter-rater reliability).

Table 4

*Inter-rater reliability (Krippendorff's alpha values, calculated with R package irr, cf. Gamer, Lemon & Fellows, 2012)*

| Arousal | | Valence | Familiarity | Trans-parency | Figura-tiveness | Concret-eness | Ambiguity | Confidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| items | 619 | 619 | 619 | 619 | 619 | 619 | 619 | 619 |
| raters | 73 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 73 | 73 |
| value | 0.0798 | 0.3177 | 0.1454 | 0.0631 | 0.0567 | 0.0325 | 0.1703 | 0.0278 |

## Relationships among Variables

**Statistical procedures and criteria.** In order to study the relationships among affective and non-affective variables, we mainly followed the statistical procedure described in Citron et al. (2015, p. 10). We calculated partial correlations between each variable. Significant partial correlations (with $p < 0.05$) were distinguished according to their correlation coefficient *r* as small correlations ($0 < r < \pm0.1$), moderate correlations ($\pm0.1 < r < \pm0.3$) and large correlations ($\pm0.3 < r$). In contrast to Citron et al. (2015, p. 9), who applied a distribution independent bootstrapping technique for all parametric statistical analyses, we used ordinary least squares regression and mixed effects regression modelling techniques. Since it was known from the literature (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993) that emotional valence and arousal ratings show a quadratic relationship (Figure 1), we also included squared emotional valence as predictor for arousal ratings. Suitable regression models were chosen on the basis of backward selection.

**Correlations between affective variables**. In the presented idiom list adapted from Citron et al. (2015), idioms with negative valence ($n = 422$) prevailed over such with positive valence ($n = 194$) or zero valence ($n = 3$). The Slovene participants rated 372 idioms as negative, 245 as positive and 2 as zero valenced. The data of the Slovene participants indicate a slight positivity bias compared to the ratings of the German participants. This is most apparent with average valence ratings between –0.5 and 0.5, which show a balanced ratio between negative and positive ratings in the Slovene participant data (80 vs. 76) and a stronger negative tendency in the German participant data (131 vs. 34). However, the above described overall ratio in the valence ratings of the German and Slovene participants is mirrored in the evaluation data of both participant groups: linear emotional valence was negatively correlated with emotional arousal (i.e., in the data of the Slovene participants, Pearson's correlation coefficient $r = -0.254$, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient $ro = -0.339$, $p < 0.05$, calculated with the R package *ppcor*, cf. Kim, 2015). According to Cacciari (1998) and Drew and Holt (1988), this result seems to be typical for idioms as an indirect form of communication, preferred to the more straight forward literal expressions in the case of statements with negative connotation. The non-linear (U-shaped) relationship between valence and arousal found in the data of the Slovene and German participants also corresponds to the U-shaped relationship between emotional dimensions found with single words (cf. Bradley & Lang, 1999; Citron et al., 2015, p. 11). The non-linear relationship is less pronounced in the data of the Slovene participants compared to the German participants. The following Figure 1 reports the partial correlations between emotional arousal and emotional valence in the data of both participant groups. Due to some differences in statistical methodology, the numbers for the German participants in the following table slightly differ from those in Citron et al. (2015).

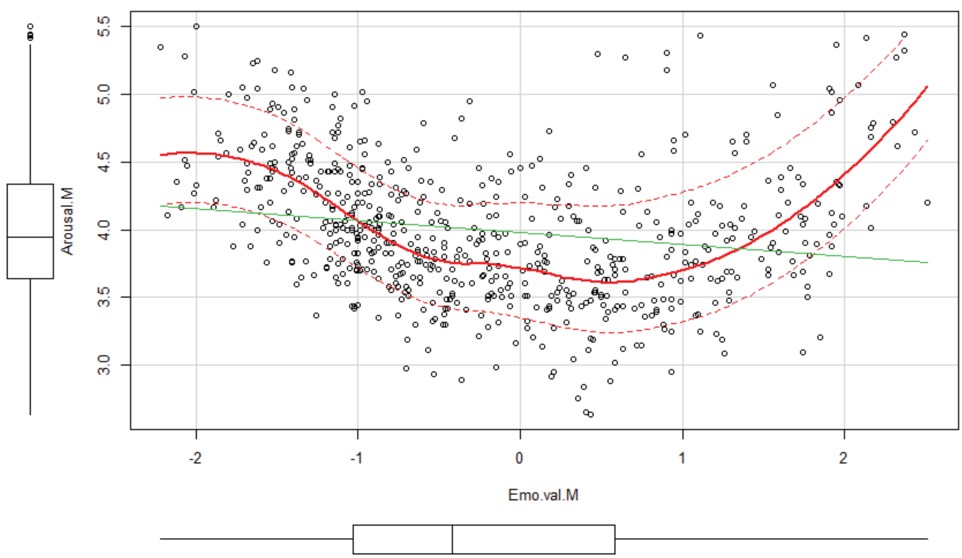


*Figure 1.* Distribution of the affective variables in the ratings of the Slovene learners of German as a foreign language (green = regression line, red = trend line).

**Correlations between affective and psycholinguistic variables.** The partial correlations between each affective variable and non-affective variables in our experiment with Slovene second language learners are summarized in Table 5, showing Pearson's partial correlation coefficients (calculated by R package *Rcmdr*, cf. Fox, 2017). Significant correlations with $p < 0.05$ are printed bold, marginally significant correlations with $0.05 < p < 0.10$ are in italics. Due to minor differences in statistic methodology, the numbers for the German participants slightly differ from those given in Citron et al. (2015).

Table 5

*Partial correlation coefficients between affective and non-affective variables in the data of the Slovene and German participants*

| Variable | Emotional Arousal | | Emotional Valence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Slovene | German | Slovene | German |
| Familiarity | **0,24** | **0,15** | **0,09** | **0,16** |
| Transparency | **0,19** | **0,25** | 0,04 | *0,07* |
| Figurativeness | **0,27** | **0,31** | **0,11** | –0,01 |
| Concreteness | –0,02 | **0,08** | 0,03 | *–0,08* |
| Confidence | 0,01 | *–0,07* | 0,01 | 0,00 |
| Length.letters | 0,05 | 0,01 | 0,00 | –0,03 |
| Length.words | –0,03 | –0,01 | 0,03 | **0,09** |

The participants from both groups associated more familiar, transparent, and figurative German idioms with higher levels of emotional arousal. These three partial correlations were moderately high, with figurativeness showing stronger correlation than familiarity and semantic transparency. The correlation between familiarity and arousal in the Slovene ratings was stronger than in the German ratings. In case of transparency we observed the opposite. In contrast to the German participant data, the correlation between arousal and concreteness was not significant in the data of the Slovene participants.

Both participant groups associated more familiar German idioms with higher levels of linear emotional valence, though more strongly in the German data. The groups differed in other cases: figurativeness was moderately correlated in the Slovene data, idiom length, measured as number of words, in the German data.

**Correlations among psycholinguistic variables.** The partial correlations between each pair of non-affective variables in our experiment with Slovene second language learners (SI) and German native speakers (D) are summarized in Table 6, showing parametric Pearson partial correlation coefficients (calculated by R package *Rcmdr*, cf. Fox, 2017). Significant correlations with $p < 0.05$ are printed bold, marginally significant correlations with $0.05 < p < 0.10$ are in italics.

We found twelve significant partial correlations between pairs of non-affective variables in the data of the Slovene participants. Four of these twelve correlations were large and eight of them moderate, nine of twelve correlations were positive, three were negative. The obtained significant partial correlations are in concord with our previously described expectations, except one (i.e., between familiarity and figurativeness).

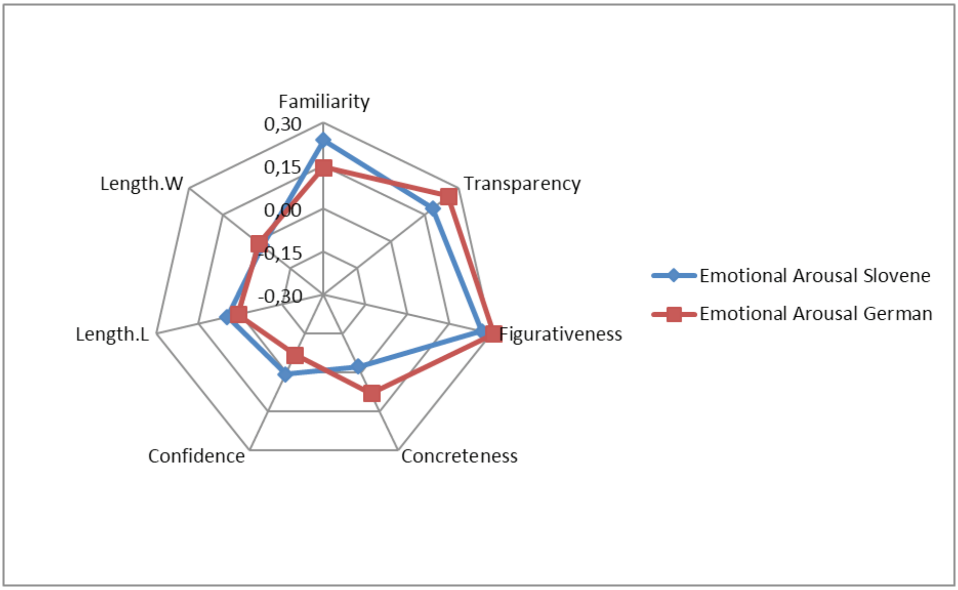


*Figure 2*. Partial correlations between emotional arousal and non-affective variables (ratings of German and Slovene participants).

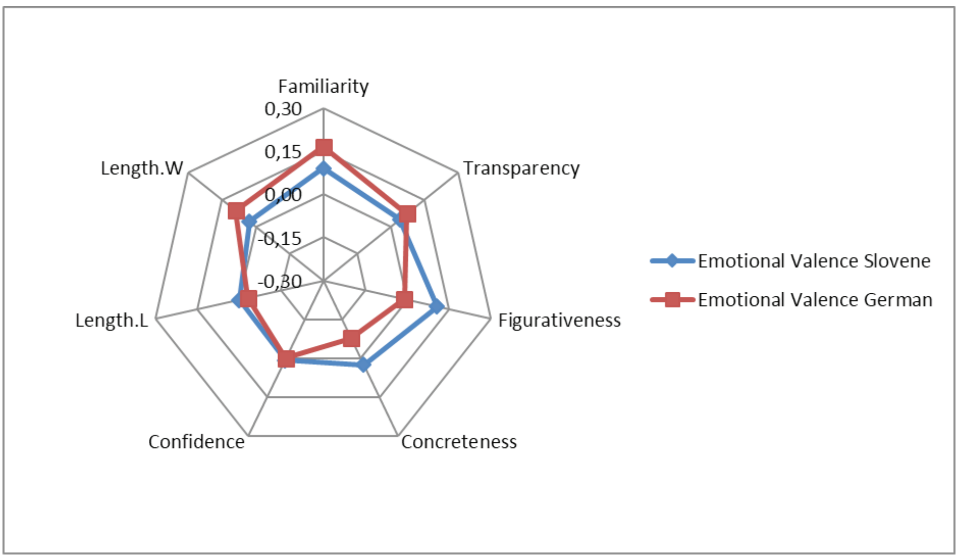


*Figure 3*. Partial correlations between emotional valence and non-affective variables (ratings of German and Slovene participants).

Table 6

*Partial correlations between non-affective variables (Slovene participants = below diagonal, German participants above diagonal)*

| **Sl / D** | Familiarity | Transparency | Figurativeness | Concreteness | Confidence | Length.L | Length.W |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Familiarity | | 0.017 | 0.020 | –0.003 | –0.054 | **–0.148** | 0.045 |
| Transparency | **0.444** | | **–0.650** | **0.152** | –0.001 | *0.078* | **0.096** |
| Figurativeness | **0.101** | **–0.481** | | **–0.190** | 0.040 | 0.053 | **0.133** |
| Concreteness | –0.014 | **0.113** | **–0.277** | | –0.042 | 0.061 | –0.007 |
| Confidence | **0.496** | **0.159** | **0.137** | *0.077* | | 0.003 | 0.048 |
| Length in letters | **–0.107** | 0.039 | –0.064 | –0.053 | 0.011 | | **0.735** |
| Length in words | 0.050 | –0.031 | **0.144** | **0.111** | 0.062 | **0.756** | |

The four large correlations obtained from the data were the positive correlations between familiarity and transparency, familiarity and confidence, and between both measures of idiom length (i.e., number of letters vs. words), and the negative correlation between transparency and figurativeness. The large positive correlation between familiarity and transparency of German idioms corresponds to experimental results obtained with single words (Montefinese, Ambrosini, Fairfield, & Mammarella, 2014). The large positive correlation between familiarity and confidence was expected from other idiom studies (Citron et al., 2015; Bonin et al., 2013; Libben & Titone, 2008; Tabossi et al., 2011). The large negative correlation between transparency and figurativeness was expected and also observed with German native speakers in the study of Citron et al. (2015, p. 12): a figurative meaning is semantically less transparent and vice versa.

The eight moderate correlations from the Slovene data were either positive correlations (i.e., between familiarity and figurativeness, transparency and concreteness, transparency and confidence, figurativeness and confidence, figurativeness and idiom length, and between concreteness and idiom length), or negative correlations (i.e., between familiarity and idiom length, and between figurativeness and concreteness). These moderate correlations (with the exception of the first mentioned) were expected due to similar, though not always significant relationships in the study of Citron et al. (2015).

From the ratings of the German participants (cf. Citron et al., 2015) eight significant partial correlations between non-affective variables were obtained: one large positive correlation (between both measures of idiom length), one large negative correlation (between transparency and figurativeness), three positive moderate correlations (between transparency and concreteness, transparency and idiom length, and between figurativeness and idiom length), and two negative moderate correlations (between familiarity and idiom length, and between figurativeness and concreteness). Confidence was not in a significant relationship with any of the other psycholinguistic variables, but knowledge of idiomatic meaning (excluded from analysis of the Slovene participant data) was highly correlated with familiarity.

In both participant groups (German and Slovene), the following significant correlations could be observed: between familiarity and idiomatic knowledge (i.e., confidence ratings of the Slovene participants vs. percentage of correct idiomatic descriptions of the German participants), familiarity and idiom length (i.e., shorter idioms were more familiar), transparency and figurativeness (i.e., the more transparent an idiom, the less figurative it was rated, and vice versa), transparency and concreteness (i.e., more transparent idioms were also rated as more concrete), figurativeness and concreteness (i.e., the more figurative an idiom was rated, the more it was rated as abstract), and between figurativeness and idiom length (i.e., idioms with a larger number of constituent words were rated as more figurative). Unsurprisingly, the high correlation between both measures of idiom length was found in the data of both participant groups.

Smaller differences between both participant groups concern the moderate correlations with idiom length. The Slovene participants associated longer idioms with higher levels of figurativeness and concreteness, but the German participants with higher levels of figurativeness and transparency. Both scales (transparency and concreteness) are positively correlated with each other and similar with respect to their hearer-friendly effect. Two more obvious differences between the participant groups concern the positive correlations between familiarity on the one hand, and transparency and figurativeness on the other, the former showing a strong correlation, the latter a moderate one. The strong correlation between familiarity and transparency was expected since it should be easier for the Slovene second language learners to become familiar with transparent idioms. The (unexpected) positive partial correlation between familiarity and figurativeness seems to be due to the moderating effect of transparency in the Slovene participant data. The simple (bivariate) correlation between familiarity and figurativeness was negative ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$) and seemed to confirm our assumption that figurative expressions are of greater cognitive complexity than transparent expressions and therefore more difficult to learn and become familiar with.

**Ambiguous compared to unambiguous idioms.** In contrast to the procedure in Citron et al. (2015) where idiom ambiguity was categorized by the researchers, the task to rate the ambiguity of the presented German idioms was accomplished by the Slovene second language learners of our study. The ratings of the Slovene participants and the German researchers of the study Citron et al. (2015) were strongly correlated ($r = 0{,}665$; $n = 619$), but nonetheless, the difference between the L1- and L2-evaluations of idiom ambiguity was significant according to a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis-test ($\chi2 = 275.03$; df = 1; $p < 0.001$). The Slovene participants assigned only about 36.4% to the group of ambiguous idioms, the German researchers of the study Citron et al. (2015) about 47.3%. It is unclear whether the Slovene participants spontaneously recognized only the figurative meaning or rather only the literal meaning of the presented ambiguous German idioms. According to Abel (2003), second language learners rely to a greater extent on the literal meaning of idiom components than native speakers. But since the participants knew the task was about German idioms, it is also very likely that the Slovene participants were biased and that plausible literal meanings came less often to their minds.

In order to compare the effect of idiom ambiguity on the ratings of the Slovene and German participants, we used the dichotomous categorization of the experimenters in Citron et al. (2015). The mean values of the Slovene and German participants according to ambiguous and unambiguous idioms are provided in Table 7 (due to our methodology the values for the German participants in some cases slightly differ from those given in Citron et al. (2015, pp. 12–13, 14). Significant differences between mean values in each participant group were subject to MANOVA (i.e., with all affective and non-affective variables as dependent variables and ambiguity determined by Citron et al. (2015) as independent variable) and are printed bold (i.e., with $p < 0.05$ as significance threshold for individual variables). The overall MANOVA results for the Slovene participants (Pillai = 0.1336; $F$ (10, 608) = 9.38; $p < 0.001$) and the German participants (Pillai = 0.2089; $F$ (11, 607) = 14.57; $p < 0.001$) were significant.

Table 7

*Mean values of variables accounting for Ambiguity (as determined by Citron et al., 2015)*

| Variable | Slovene participants | | German participants | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Ambiguous | Unambiguous | Ambiguous | Unambiguous |
| Emotional valence | –0.21 | –0.17 | –0.62 | –0.56 |
| Emotional valence$^2$ | **1.03** | **1.34** | **1.86** | **2.29** |
| Emotional arousal | **3.92** | **4.07** | **3.70** | **3.92** |
| Familiarity | 4.39 | 4.40 | 4.75 | 4.78 |
| Semantic transparency | 3.88 | 3.93 | 4.06 | 4.19 |
| Figurativeness | **4.64** | **4.79** | 4.66 | 4.73 |
| Concreteness | **3.80** | **3.62** | **3.63** | **3.08** |
| Confidence | 5.06 | 5.07 | 6.11 | 6.09 |
| Idiomatic Knowledge | ... | ... | **89.61** | **91.91** |
| Length in letters | 23 | 23 | 23 | 23 |
| Length in words | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Number of idioms | 293 | 326 | 293 | 326 |

Both participant groups rated ambiguous German idioms as less valenced (i.e., valence squared, independently of whether positively or negatively) and less stimulating, but as more concrete than the unambiguous idioms. Citron et al. (2015, p. 13) argue that the literal plausible meaning of ambiguous idioms interferes with its idiomatic meaning and reduces emotional rating values, but makes it easier to produce mental images which can be more directly associated with sensory modalities. Furthermore, the Slovene participants rated ambiguous idioms as less figurative. The German participants showed the same (but not significant) tendency. The tendency to rate ambiguous idioms as less figurative than unambiguous idioms seems to fit with data from neuro-imaging showing the stronger emotional engagement of figurative formulations over their literal counterparts (Citron & Goldberg, 2014). The idiomatic knowledge of the German participants (i.e., the percentage of correct idiomatic descriptions) reached higher levels with unambiguous idioms than with ambiguous idioms. This outcome is in line with the suggestion that the plausible literal interpretation of ambiguous idioms causes interference with the figurative interpretation and makes it more difficult to describe the meaning. This relationship has not been statistically tested yet with the Slovene data. Mean confidence levels (i.e., another way to obtain information on idiom knowledge) were not significantly different for ambiguous and unambiguous idioms in neither of the two participant groups.

## Regression models

**Regression models with familiarity as dependent variable.** The ordinary least squares regression model S1 for the estimation of idiom familiarity (*Familiarity.M*), including six significant predictors, can account for 59% of the variance in the data of the Slovene participants ($R^2 = 0.58$; $r = 0.77$; $F(6, 612) = 145.3$; $p < 0.001$):

**(S1)** *Estimated familiarity = –2.61 + 0.29*emotional arousal + 0.05*emotional valence + 0.49*semantic transparency + 0.88*confidence – 0.19*log(Length.L) + 0.28*ambiguity.*

According to Model S1, familiarity reached higher levels if the idiom was rated more stimulating, more positive, more transparent, shorter and more ambiguous (i.e., literally plausible). The model of the Slovene evaluation data resembles the model of the German participant data (G1) in several aspects. The regression line was as follows (cf. Citron et al. (2015, p. 12):

**(G1)** *Estimated familiarity = 0.19*arousal (log 10) + 0.38*knowledge – 0.23*length in letters (log 10) + 0.11*emotional valence – 0.14*emotional valence*$^2$

In the German participant data, knowledge of idiomatic meaning was the strongest predictor for idiom familiarity. This result corresponded to the strong effect of confidence in the regression analysis of the Slovene participant data. Furthermore, we could observe that higher levels of familiarity were in both participant groups attributed to shorter German idioms and to those rated more stimulating and positive. The relationship between familiarity and valence complies with the experimental results on emotional-laden words (cf. Citron et al., 2015, p. 12), which could imply that participants in normative studies prefer to declare familiarity with positive concepts and less so with negative ones. The differences between the German and Slovene familiarity estimates concern valence squared, semantic transparency and ambiguity. The regression analysis of the Slovene participant data did not confirm a quadratic relationship between familiarity and emotional valence, and the regression analysis of the German data did not show any significant effect of transparency and ambiguity (i.e., literal plausibility). These results suggest that second language processing of idioms compared to first language processing relies more strongly on transparency and literal plausibility and less strongly on emotional aspects of complex language expressions.

**Regression models with emotional arousal as dependent variable.** The ordinary least squares regression model S2 for the estimation of emotional arousal of the Slovene participants, including five significant predictors and one marginally significant variable (i.e., log (Length.L)), can account for 40% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.40$; $r = 0.64$; $F(6, 612) = 69.14$; $p < 0.001$), with ambiguity excluded 39% ($R^2 = 0.39$; $r = 0.63$; $F(5, 613) = 79.19$; $p < 0.001$); transparency, concreteness, and confidence were not significant ($p > 0.05$):

**(S2)** *Estimated emotional arousal = 1.81 – 0.12*emotional valence + 0.17*emotional valence*$^2$ *+ 0.22*familiarity + 0.16*figurativeness + 0.11*log(Length.L) – 0.30*ambiguity.*

In contrast to our regression above, the mixed effects regression model S3 also accounted for two random effects (participants and idioms) and thus resulted in seven significant main effects (AIC = 157514; $\chi^2$ (7) = 2030.2; $p < 0.001$—compared to the null model with random effects only, AIC = 159530); concreteness and idiom length were not significant ($p > 0.05$):

**(S3)** *Estimated emotional arousal = 2.59 – 0.05*emotional valence + 0.08*emotional valence*$^2$ *+ 0.08*familiarity + 0.05*transparency + 0.07*figurativeness + 0.05*confidence – 0.06*ambiguity + (1|Participants) + (1|Idioms).*

According to model S3, higher levels of familiarity, transparency, figurativeness, confidence and valence squared increased the levels of emotional arousal in the data of the Slovene participants. Negative valence was more stimulating than positive valence. Idiom ambiguity, rated by the Slovene participants, decreased emotional arousal levels.

According to both models (S2 and S3), the Slovene second language learners attributed higher levels of emotional arousal to more negatively rated, higher valenced, more familiar and more figurative German idioms than to positively rated, lower valenced, less familiar and less figurative idioms. The predictor idiom length was marginally significant in model S2, that is, idiom length had a small positive effect on arousal levels, but after also accounting for random effects in model S3, semantic transparency and confidence (i.e., referring to idiomatic knowledge) turned significant instead. In both models, concreteness was not significant. The significant impact of ambiguity on arousal levels was dealt with in the former section on partial correlations.

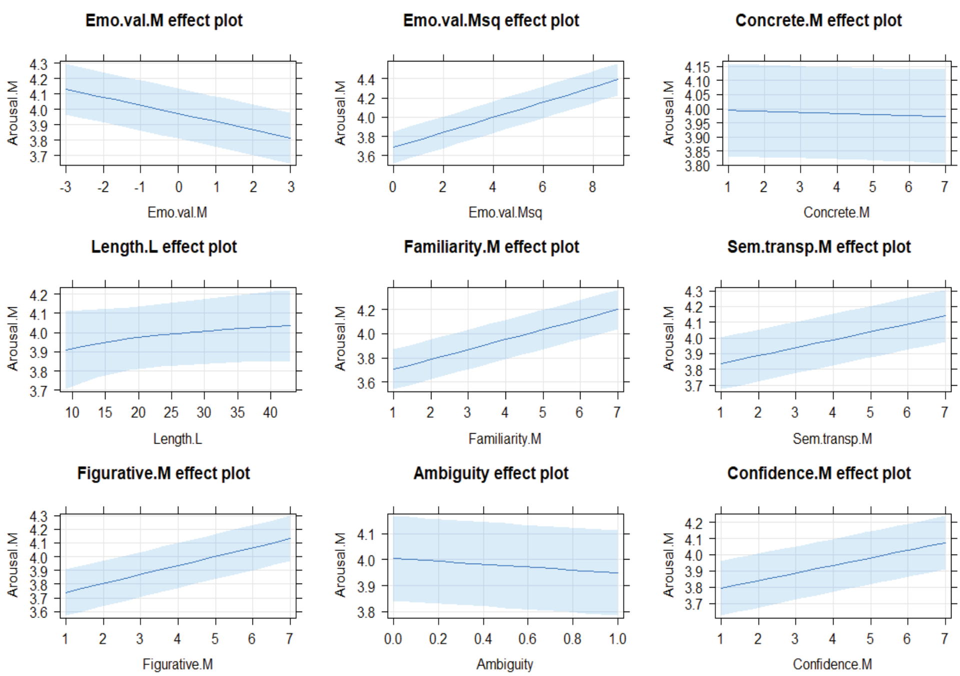


*Figure 4.* Mixed effects regression model S3.

The regression models of the Slovene evaluation data (S2 and S3) are in line with our above stated expectations and resemble the model of the German evaluation data (G2) in several aspects. The regression line was as follows (cf. Citron et al. (2015, p. 11)):

**(G2)** *Estimated emotional arousal = 0.15*familiarity + 0.13*concreteness + 0.29*figurativeness + 0.15*semantic transparency – 0.13*emotional valence + 0.48*emotional valence*$^2$.

In both participant groups, higher levels of arousal were attributed to more familiar, more figurative, emotionally less neutral and more negative German idioms. However, in the data of the German participants, concreteness was a significant predictor. Another difference worth mentioning was that familiarity in the Slovene models (S2 and S3) showed a stronger effect on higher levels of emotional arousal than figurativeness and squared emotional valence, whereas in the German participant model G2, we could observe the opposite. Furthermore, concreteness seemed to be conceptually less clear to the Slovene participants than ambiguity (i.e., literal plausibility), thus only the latter showed a significant effect on arousal levels.

## Conclusion

The aims of this study were to provide second language norms for psycholinguistic and affective properties of German idioms in second language processing, to explore the relationships between them, and to compare the ratings of Slovene second language learners (from our study) with those of German native speakers (studied in Citron et al., 2015).

In our summary, we first turn to the relationships concerning emotional variables. In both studies the participants associated more valenced idiomatic meanings with higher levels of arousal, with negative idioms leading to a higher level of arousal than positive idioms. These results may reflect the tendency that non-literal expressions are preferred over literal ones when speakers make negative statements (cf. Cacciari, 1998; Drew & Holt, 1988). However, the ratings of the Slovene participants indicated a slight positivity bias compared to those of the German participants. This result may lend some support for the view that a positivity bias is to be expected in second language processing (cf. Schumann, 1998). Furthermore, the non-linear (U-shaped) relationship between arousal and valence was less pronounced in the data of the Slovene participants than in the data of the German participants. These details may support the view of attenuated emotionality (or emotional detachment) of second language processing (cf. Harris, 2004).

The preference for non-literal expressions in emotionally less desirable situations was also indirectly supported by the tendency of both participant groups to associate more figurative idioms with higher levels of arousal, and by the tendency of the Slovene participants to associate them with higher levels of valence. According to Citron et al. (2015) these results may reflect a general feature of language since also obtained with single words (e.g., Citron et al., 2014; Võ et al., 2009).

The positive correlation of semantic transparency and arousal, observed in both participant groups, seems to support the assumption that it is easier to attribute high arousal values to idioms in which the literal meaning of the constituent words clearly contributes to the idiomatic interpretation.

In both participant groups, emotional valence and arousal had a positive linear correlation with familiarity, which supports the assumption that it is easier to attribute higher levels of valence and arousal to familiar idioms. But in contrast to the German participant group, the data of the Slovene participants did not confirm a negative quadratic relationship between valence and familiarity. The authors of the study Citron et al. (2015, p. 11) argue that the negative quadratic relationship in the German participant data could be connected with higher token frequency of positive idioms in speech.

In the data of the German participant group, concreteness was positively correlated with emotional arousal, supporting the assumption that concrete concepts with a direct reference to sensory modalities may be seen as more linked to physiological states (Citron et al., 2015, p. 11). This assumption was not confirmed in the data of the Slovene participants. The correlation analysis in our study indicates that concreteness, being substantially moderated by transparency and ambiguity, may be a less reliable scale in second language analysis. Many idiom meanings appear to be stored and comprehended with the support of mental images (e.g., the idiom constituent *Kater* in the opaque German idiom *einen Kater haben*, "to have a hangover," but literally "to have a male cat"). Thus, idiomatic meanings, though abstract in meaning, can be associated with high levels of imageability. A positive correlation between emotional arousal and imageability has been already observed with single words (Citron et al., 2015, p. 11; Ljubešić, Fišer, & Peti-Stantić, 2018).

Ambiguity was determined by the experimenters of Citron et al. (2015), but also by the Slovene participants. Ambiguity determined by the experimenters was included in our comparisons of the German and Slovene participants. The data of both participant groups showed negative correlations between ambiguity and both affective variables, that is, idioms without a plausible literal meaning were associated with higher levels of valence and arousal. Citron et al. (2015, p. 13) argue that the potential literal meaning of ambiguous idioms interferes with its idiomatic meaning and reduces emotional rating values, but makes it easier to produce mental images which can be more directly associated with sensory modalities.

In contrast to the German participant data, the Slovene data did not show any significant partial correlations between idiom length and valence.

We now turn to the relationships among the psycholinguistic variables (familiarity, transparency, figurativeness, concreteness, idiom length, confidence, and idiomatic knowledge). In the ratings of the German participants, familiarity (i.e., subjective frequency) was positively correlated with knowledge of the idiomatic meaning (Citron et al., 2015, p. 12), confirming previous findings exploring idiomatic knowledge or confidence (Bonin et al., 2013; Libben & Titone, 2008; Tabossi et al., 2011; Titone & Connine, 1994). Since knowledge had not been included in the analysis of the Slovene participant data, we obtained results from confidence, which was also designed to capture knowledge. In contrast to the data of the German participants, the results of the Slovene second language learners confirm a strong positive relationship of confidence with familiarity and a moderate positive correlation with transparency and figurativeness. The positive partial correlation between confidence and figurativeness resulted from the moderating effect of transparency, that is, confidence was highest if transparency reached high levels and figurativeness low levels. Citron et al. (2015) argue that confidence may not necessarily be a reliable measure of the actual knowledge of an idiomatic meaning, which is better captured by familiarity and asking participants to write the meaning down.

In the data of the Slovene second language learners, the perceived level of figurativeness of an idiom was negatively correlated with semantic transparency and concreteness and positively with familiarity. The more idiomatic a meaning was, the less semantically transparent and concrete it was rated. However, the more idiomatic a meaning was, the more familiar it was rated. The positive partial correlation seems to be a moderating effect of transparency: the familiarity ratings reached their lowest levels if idiom transparency was rated low and figurativeness high. The correlations of figurativeness with transparency and concreteness replicate the results of the German native speakers in Citron et al. (2015). The meanings of most idiomatic strings were unrelated to the literal meaning of the constituent words, and predominantly conveyed abstract contents.

According to Citron et al. (2015), the German participants perceived shorter idioms as more familiar and longer idioms as providing more semantic information than shorter idioms, facilitating their figurativeness and semantic transparency. Similar results were found in the partial correlation results of the Slovene participant group: idiom length (measured as number of words or letters) was negatively correlated with familiarity and positively with figurativeness and concreteness.

In contrast to the data of the German participants, where semantic transparency was not correlated with familiarity (in line with Tabossi et al., 2011; but see Abel, 2003) or with idiom knowledge (unlike Tabossi et al., 2011), the data of the Slovene participants showed a strong positive correlation between familiarity and semantic transparency. Citron et al. (2015) argue that the results of the German participants seem to reflect the fact that storage and retrieval of familiar idioms is of no need to detect a clear relationship between the component word meanings and the global figurative interpretation of the string (Bonin et al., 2013; Libben & Titone, 2008; Titone & Connine, 1994). In contrast, storage and retrieval in a (first or second) language acquisition setting seems to rely to a greater extent on the literal meaning of figurative expressions (cf. Abel, 2003) and their transparency, that is, to establish a post-hoc link between an idiomatic meaning and its individual components (cf. Cacciari, 2014). According to Nippold and Taylor (2002), who compared transparency judgements of children and adolescents in their native language, found that for the children the easiest idioms were more familiar and transparent than the most difficult idiomatic expressions. Our conclusion is that such a correlation may be also typical in second language judgements.

Furthermore and in contrast with the L1 German, the data of the Slovene participants showed a moderate positive correlation between transparency and concreteness. The more concrete an idiom was rated, the more it was transparent. In comparison to the German native speakers, the second language learners in our study showed a moderate tendency to refer to the meaning of individual idiom components and the accessibility of their meaning on a sensory level.

Ambiguity (i.e., potential literal plausibility of idioms) had mainly an inhibitory effect on other variables in the data of both participant groups: ambiguous idioms were less emotionally salient (i.e., rated as less valenced and arousing) and more linked to concrete, sensory-based information than were unambiguous idioms. They were less correctly defined by the German participants (not analyzed in the data of the Slovene participants), and rated less figurative by the Slovene participants than unambiguous idioms. Citron et al. (2015) argue that the literal meaning might represent a source of possible interference in ambiguous idioms, which leads to the preference of sensory-based information and lower emotional salience. In the data of the Slovene participants, ambiguity reached its highest levels if concreteness values were high and figurativeness low.

Hopefully, our descriptive and comparative study provides some insight into the relationships between figurative language and affect in second language processing and will prove to be useful for further research in this field. Much like other normative studies, it shows a lower degree of inter-rater reliability (tested with Krippendorff's alpha), but it shows high reliability—that is, internal consistency (tested with Cronbach's alpha). To our knowledge, several psycholinguistic and affective variables (such as emotional arousal and valence, concreteness, figurativeness) were not tested in previous normative studies on German idioms in second language processing, but can be taken into account in upcoming experimental settings and other applications.

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Teodor Petrič

## Bewertungen affektiver und nicht-affektiver Aspekte von Idiomen im Deutschen als Zweitsprache

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag präsentiert die Ergebnisse einer zweitsprachlichen Untersuchung psycholinguistischer und affektiver Eigenschaften von 619 deutschen idiomatischen Wortverbindungen, die zuvor von Citron et al. (2015) gesammelt und von deutschen Muttersprachlern bewertet wurden. In unserer Studie wurden dieselben Redewendungen von slowenischen Lernern des Deutschen als Fremdsprache bewertet. Unsere Probanden stuften jede Redewendung in Bezug auf emotionale Wertigkeit, emotionale Erregung, Bekanntheitsgrad, Konkretheit, Ambiguität (wörtliche Bedeutung), semantische Transparenz und Bildhaftigkeit ein.Unser Beitrag hatte die folgenden Ziele: (1) deskriptive Normwerte für psycholinguistische und affektive Eigenschaften von idiomatischen Wortverbindungen im Deutschen als Zweitsprache zu erschließen, (2) die in der Zweitsprache charakteristischen Beziehungen zwischen affektiven und nicht-affektiven Eigenschaften von Idiomen zu untersuchen und (3) die Bewertungen der in Citron et al. (2015) untersuchten deutschen Muttersprachler mit denen slowenischer DaF-Lerner zu vergleichen. [This paragraphismissing in the Englisch abstract: Zu diesem Zweck erhielten unsere slowenischen Probanden dieselbe Idiom-Liste und dieselben Aufgaben wie die von Citron et al. (2015) untersuchten deutschen Muttersprachler, und zwar jede der (ambigen oder nicht-ambigen) idiomatischen Wortverbindungen hinsichtlich emotionaler Valenz, emotionaler Intensität, Gebräuchlichkeit, Konkretheit, semantischer Durchsichtigkeit, Metaphorizität sowie hinsichtlich ihres idiomatischen Wissens (Zuversicht) zu bewerten.] Die Ergebnisse der slowenischen Probanden zeigen einerseits große Übereinstimmungen mit denen der deutschen Muttersprachler, andererseits aber auch eine leichte Neigung zu positiven Einstellung und eine etwas oberflächlichere emotionale Verarbeitung der deutschen Idiome. Die Untersuchungsergebnisse könnten in zukünftigen Studien (in den Bereichen Sprachmethodik, Translationswissenschaft, computerunterstützte Sprachgenerierung), in denen die Rolle von affektiven Eigenschaften idiomatischer Ausdrücke untersucht wird, von Nutzen sein.

*Schlüsse*lwörter: idiomatische Wortverbindungen, affektive Eigenschaften, psycholinguistische Eigenschaften, Deutsch, Slowenisch

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**Krystyna Warchał**
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8422-4911

# Humour in Professional Academic Writing (with Some Implications for Teaching)

Abstract

Professional written academic genres are not typical sites of humour, especially in their final, published forms. In this paper, it is argued that academic discourse as construed today not only does not preclude humour in written research genres but—in some text segments or in response to specific communicative needs—is perfectly compatible with it. In particular, the discussion focuses on these occurrences which engage the reader and contribute to the writer-reader rapport: humorous titles, humorous comments or asides, personal stories, and literary anecdotes. It is also suggested that making university ESL/EFL students aware of the fact that "serious" writing tasks do offer some room for humour may draw their attention to the human face of academic writing, that is, to the interactive, dialogic, and personal aspects of written academic communication.

*Keywords*: humour, English for Academic Purposes, academic writing, professional academic genres

## Humour in Academic Settings: An Introduction

Professional written academic genres are not typical sites of humour, especially in their final, published forms. Indeed, studies on humour in academic contexts have largely focused on academic speech. For example, Lee (2006) examines humour in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), Nesi (2012) analyses laughter episodes in the lecture component of the British Academic Spoken English corpus (BASE), Fernández Polo (2014) carries out a multimodal analysis of conference presentations to identify episodes of humour or non-seriousness in the talks, and Ruiz-Madrid and Fortanet-Gómez (2015) discuss the humorous potential of autobiographic references in plenary lectures. The problem of humour in academic writing is addressed by Skalicky et al. (2016), who examine the potential of certain linguistic features to act as predictors of playfulness, but their study focuses on undergraduate student writing, that is, on "school genres" (Johns & Swales, 2002, p. 14; see also Johns, 1997) rather than on professional text types. In this paper, it will be argued that academic discourse as construed today not only does not preclude humour in written research genres but—in some text segments or in response to specific communicative needs—is perfectly compatible with it. It is also suggested that making university ESL/EFL students aware of the fact that "serious" writing tasks do offer some room for humour may draw their attention to the human face of academic writing, that is, to the interactive, dialogic, and personal aspects of written academic communication. The examples quoted below come from published English-language texts by both native and non-native speakers of English: articles and monographs, all of them subject to editorial peer-review procedures.[1]

The functions of humour vary with the type of humour and the context in which it occurs. It is used to improve, to avoid face threats, and to bring relief from tension, stress, and anxiety, but also to attack, inflict harm, and destroy. As Nash puts it:

> For many of us, it is more than an amiable decoration on life; it is a complex piece of equipment for living, a mode of attack and a line of defence, a method of raising questions and criticizing arguments, a protest against the inequality of the struggle to live, a way of atonement and reconciliation, a treaty with all that is wilful, impaired, beyond our power to control. (Nash, 1985, p. 1)

In many settings, including academic contexts (see, e.g., Lee, 2006; Nesi, 2012; Fernández Polo, 2014; Ruiz-Madrid, & Fortanet-Gómez, 2015), it helps create positive atmosphere, break the ice, bring people closer together, and grab the attention of the audience. Its potential as a social lubricant and an attention-grabber has also been noticed in the school environment, in particular, in a foreign language classroom.

The use of humour in second and foreign language teaching and learning has been found to offer many benefits. For example, Minchew (2001) shows the effectiveness of playful classroom activities in exploring vocabulary and developing the awareness of style. In a recent study, Solska (2019) demonstrates that some forms of humour can be used as a powerful teaching tool in grammar instruction at advanced levels. Apart from its use as an instrument

[1] Fillmore (1967) appeared in E. Bach and R. Harms (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Texas Symposium on Language Universals*. Texas: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

in language teaching, humour has been found to build classroom rapport and to foster individual learning outcomes. In particular, it has been observed that humour "brings students and teachers together" (McMahon, 1999, p. 70), helps create positive classroom environment (Minchew, 2001, p. 59), lowers learners' anxiety, increases their motivation for learning (Heidari-Shahreza & Heydari, 2018), and, as Tuncay (2007, p. 2) points out, "makes both teaching and learning far more memorable for all concerned." Making students aware of the fact that elements of non-seriousness can be successfully used in professional written academic communication may contribute to the demystification of academic writing, which, while inevitable at virtually all stages of education, too often seems to be perceived as purposefully abstruse, depersonalised, and stilted.

Before considering academic communication as a potential site of humour, an important caveat must be made. Identification of playfulness or tongue-in-cheek comments in texts whose main purpose is not amusement of the reader is not an easy task. Firstly, unlike jokes, such episodes are, in a vast majority of cases, not self-contained but closely tied with the non-humorous co-text, which makes them more difficult to single out. Secondly, the perception of humour is subjective. What elicits humorous reaction from one individual on one occasion may not be perceived as funny or diverting by another, or even by the same person in a different set of circumstances (Chiaro, 1992, p. 5). Even if we are cautious to maintain the distinction between humour comprehension and appreciation, as advised by Dynel (2009, p. 8), identification of a passage as humorous in an essentially non-humorous text often relies on individual reaction to it, which again is dependent on the disposition, knowledge, and prior exposure to similar texts on the one hand, and on various context-dependent factors on the other, such as, for instance, the main purpose of reading or listening and the time pressure. Examples quoted below reflect my own reading.

Another potential problem is the apparently self-explanatory distinction between intended and unintended humour (Raskin, 1985, p. 27). In practice, it may often be difficult to tell whether the humorous effect produced by an utterance or passage was, from the sender's perspective, purely accidental or, conversely, strategic. Considering the type of communication discussed—written, professional, peer-reviewed, and revised—it is reasonable to assume that whenever humour appears, it is part of the author's strategy and is expected to enhance text effectiveness.

The rest of the paper is organised in the following way: The next section discusses two models of academic communication, drawing attention to those functions and features that appear compatible with humour. The section that follows focuses on elements of non-seriousness both in the titles of scholarly publications and in the (main) text: in the form of asides, personal stories, and anecdotes. The final section offers some conclusions.

## Academic Discourse

The belief that academic communication does not go with humour (Skalicky et al., 2016) draws on the traditional view of academic discourse, according to which language used for communicating scholarship serves merely as a tool—transparent, objective, and impersonal—for reporting bare facts and transmitting thus obtained knowledge to others, with the aim of obtaining a faithful representation of an objectively given reality. This view, with the writing scholar virtually absent from the text, is grounded in the classical Aristotelian distinction between three fields concerned with arguments: logic, dialectic, and rhetoric, where logic is concerned with examining the formal links between premises and conclusions of arguments, dialectic with evaluating the soundness of arguments through criticism, and rhetoric with studying their persuasive potential (Walton, 2007, p. 7). Of the three, rhetoric was treated with suspicion and reserve, and dialectic lost much of its significance in the Enlightenment, which introduced a new model of scientific reasoning, where, as Walton (2007, p. 13) puts it, "theorems were to be rigorously deduced from self-evident axioms by deductive logic." This change in thinking about science imposed the view of scholarly language as an instrument of passing information in an objective, depersonalised way, reporting rather than generating knowledge, and virtually ignored the communicative aspect of scientific pursuits and the social context of knowledge production.

In contrast to this traditional perspective, however, there is the more recent approach according to which academic activities are fundamentally interactive and interpersonal (see, e.g., Hyland, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2010), with the aims of scholars going beyond describing the small fraction of reality with which they are concerned and including such elements as taking a stance towards other texts and points of view and convincing the reader that the text is worth reading, the methodology flawless, the data reliable, and the conclusions well supported. As Swales (1990, p. 175) observes, acts of reporting on the research done are in fact "complexly distanced reconstructions of research activities, at least part of this reconstructive process deriving from a need to anticipate and discountenance negative reactions to the knowledge claims being advanced." Writing science is thus much closer to a dialogue with other scholars on the one hand, and a projected reader on the other, than to a monologue account of facts and procedures.

This dialogue with the reader and other members of the academic discourse community (Swales, 1990) is propelled by two antagonistic forces: the search for consensus and the need for disagreement. On the one hand, to have their contributions recognised as academic, scholars must work within a certain consensus, which implies not only a certain level of shared knowledge but also shared beliefs as to what is a legitimate academic problem, what counts as scientific data, and what forms of argumentation are recognised as valid and appropriate. On the other hand, to publish their findings, they must create a research space through academic criticism, by offering a new perspective, or by presenting some data so far ignored or unavailable (Swales, 1990; see also Myers, 1989; Hyland, 2000; Martín-Martín & Burgess, 2004; Hunston, 2005). In other words, to be publishable, an academic contribution should indicate some faults, discrepancies, or omissions in previous studies, which it seeks to amend, explore, or fill in. If criticism helps create a research space in which new knowledge claims are presented, then consensus provides the background against which these new claims can be received as plausible and sound.

This rhetorical perspective on academic communication makes at least some room for humour. Firstly, there is the turn to the reader, whose attention, interest, and appreciation the writer seeks. Secondly, there is awareness of important others—the authors of the works the writer refers to in order to situate his or her contribution in the research field. This involves the need to reconcile academic criticism with such values as politeness, respect for fellow academics, spirit of cooperation, and at least professed priority of the development of the discipline over personal career. In what follows, I will attempt to show how humour can serve some of those aims. In particular, the discussion will focus on these occurrences which engage the reader and contribute to the writer-reader rapport: humorous titles, humorous comments or asides, personal stories, and literary anecdotes.

## Elements of Humour in Published Research Genres

The aim of this section is to discuss elements of non-seriousness in published academic texts, drawing attention to their pragmatic functions in various text positions. The analysis is based on examples drawn from two monographs, two chapters, and four journal articles published in English throughout the past fifty years in the following disciplines: (applied) linguistics, literary theory, and translation studies. All the texts were subject to peer and editorial reviews. The material is limited, which reflects the fact that humour in academic writing is still a rare phenomenon (although, as this paper attempts to show, not at all incompatible with academic discourse) and that elements of non-seriousness in texts which are essentially non-humorous are notoriously difficult to identify using text analysers. Although some linguistic features have been demonstrated to function as predictors of humour in digitalised text corpora, Skalicky et al. (2016) point out that such analyses are usually conducted on short text samples and not necessarily prove successful with more complex forms of humour. In the present case, manual analysis seemed the only reasonable choice. As noted in the introductory section, taking into account the type of texts (academic, professional, serious, and reviewed), it is assumed that the humorous effect produced was planned and used strategically to further the writers' goals. The following subsections focus on elements of non-seriousness in titles, on humorous comments and personal stories embedded in the text, and on literary anecdotes, here used as an introductory move.

## The Title

The title provides a "situational frame" (Duszak, 1998, p. 129) for the entire text, thus setting the reader's expectations towards it and facilitating interpretation. It is also the first part of the text with which readers come into contact. It is on the basis of the title that they decide whether the article corresponds to their academic interests and whether it is likely to be interesting. As Swales and Feak (2004, p. 205) put it, authors realise that a research paper "will be known by its title" and that "a successful title will attract readers while an unsuccessful one will discourage readers." Elements of humour or wordplay are sometimes used in titles to seduce the audience, as in (1)–(5).

(1) The care and maintenance of hedges (Skelton, 1988)
(2) What 'must' and 'can' must and can mean (Kratzer, 1977)
(3) The case for case (Fillmore, 1967)
(4) Different strokes for different folks: Disciplinary variation in academic writing (Hyland, 2007)
(5) Short people got no reason to live: Reading irony (Fish, 1983)

The title in (1) introduces a relatively early article concerned not with gardening but with hedging in discourse, and arguing for more attention being devoted to teaching the use and function of qualifying expressions to non-native students writers. It is based on lexical ambiguity, with *hedge*, the ambiguity trigger, going well with *care* and *maintenance* under both interpretations. Example (2) involves a wordplay founded on the opposition between mention and use—the paper discusses the meanings of two modals, *must* and *can*, within the framework of possible worlds semantics. Wordplay based on polysemy underlies example (3), with *case* being used as part of the academic phraseme *the case for* and as a grammatical term. The two-part title in (4) plays with registers: the proverb in the first "catchy" part ('Different things appeal to different people,' *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, 2017) brings associations with folk wisdom and grandma's common sense, which are considered as extraneous to western science, if not necessarily wholly incompatible with it. The second, academic part of the title demonstrates the validity and aptness of this unconventional opening. Example (5) is structurally similar: the first part is a line from a song by Randy Newman, blatantly incompatible with academic register and, broadly speaking, academic standards in being not only colloquial but also chauvinist. The second part of the title provides justification for its beginning: Newman's song was received as an insult despite his attempts to explain that his intention was not to ridicule short people but, conversely, to reveal the absurdity of all forms of prejudice. Thus, it provides a real-life example of misread irony. In all these cases, elements of humour capture the reader's attention, provoke curiosity, and raise interest in the content of the article.

**Playful Comments and Asides**

Humorous comments and juxtapositions used in the body of text may help to keep readers focused by deautomatising reading, keep them engaged by provoking a spontaneous reaction, and provide additional gratification in the form of amusement. This reader-oriented function is illustrated in examples (6)–(9).

(6) Still others turned to psychology and explained that while Newman perhaps *thought* that he was free of prejudice, his song displayed his true feelings, feelings he had hidden even from himself. In short (<u>a phrase that should, I suppose, be used sparingly in this paper</u>), rather than providing a point of clarity and stability, Newman's explanations (not heard as explanations at all, but as rationalizations or lies) merely extended the area of interpretive dispute. (Fish, 1983, pp. 175–176)

(7) Clearly there is both real assurance and confident ease in this writing which perhaps comes with experience. I haven't been able to study diachronic changes in this corpus, but it is widely believed that the options open to established researchers are probably much wider than those available to beginning ones; <u>a phenomenon John has referred to as "Young Turk" versus "Old Fart" approaches</u> (Swales, 2002). (Hyland, 2008, p. 147)

(8) There is a time in the career of every academic when you are supposed to have authored a monograph. Although it is not an official requirement, it fits into the general "publish or perish" adage. The main problem with this, in my view, is the need to find proper balance between <u>trying to publish mediocre works that have not been devoted enough blood, sweat and tears, and aspiring to create an *opus magnum*</u>, something a scholar can genuinely be proud of as a pinnacle of his/her academic achievement. (Bartłomiejczyk, 2016, p. 7)

(9) A simple frequency count of content words throws up items which might lead us to identify John in a 'name-the-linguist' parlour game. The top eight content items are: research, genre(s), English, discourse, language, academic, writing and students. (Hyland, 2008, p. 145)

Example (6) comes from the opening paragraphs of "Short people got no reason to live: Reading irony" by Stanley Fish, an article quoted in the discussion of non-serious titles in Section The Title. The humorous parenthetical remark refers to a standard academic metatextual phraseme *in short*, which forms a pseudo-cohesive tie with *short people* and the title of the song that served as a source of inspiration for the author. The comment in (7) humorously encapsulates the idea of posited differences between discourse practices applied by novice and experienced academic writers using metaphorical (*Young Turk*) and strongly colloquial (*Old Fart*) labels. If the comments in (6) and (7) are inessential (they may be omitted from the text without major information loss), the ones in (8) and (9) are not parenthetical but form the core of the argument. In (8), the contrast between working at a low effort level on the one hand, and endless revising and polishing on the other, is boosted by the juxtaposition of the emphatic, emotional phrase *blood, sweat and tears* (itself an unlikely choice in an academic work) and the Latin expression for masterpiece—formal, marked, and suggestive of spectacular achievement, grandeur, and triumph. Example (9), drawn from a corpus analysis of John Swales's academic style, refers playfully to the possibility to use lexical frequency analysis to identify the principal research themes and, in this way, the author of the texts analysed. The humorousness of this fragment is based on the juxtaposition of two spheres of life: science on the one hand, and leisure and social life on the other.

## Personal Stories

The humorous potential of autobiographic references—or "personal anecdotal humor" (Minchew, 2001, p. 62)—in academic settings has been recognised by Minchew (2001) and Ruiz-Madrid and Fortanet-Gómez (2015), who report that they are used to keep the attention of the audience, build a sense of shared identity, and maintain a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. Examples (10) and (11) demonstrate their effectiveness in published professional academic texts.

(10) My late grandmother was particularly sensitive to the use of asymmetrical *ty* as a face threat. She made a point of never addressing others with this form, and whenever she was addressed as *ty* by someone who intended to emphasise the power distance, she pretended to construe this as an invitation to a more friendly relationship and immediately

addressed her interlocutor as *ty*, too. This was normally a very effective strategy to save her face by making the other person quickly switch to the polite form *pani*. Sometimes, the interlocutor was too embarrassed or perhaps too thick-skinned to do this, in which case the relation continued as a symmetrical one. (Bartłomiejczyk, 2016, p. 136)

(11) My own early attempt to be a full member of the [philatelic] community were not marked by success. Early on I published an article in the [philatelic] journal which used a fairly complex frequency analysis of occurrence—derived from Applied Linguistics—in order to offer an alternative explanation of a puzzle well known to members of the HKSC [Hong Kong Study Circle]. The only comments that this effort to establish credibility elicited were "too clever by half" and "Mr Swales, we won't change our minds without a chemical analysis." (Swales, 1990, p. 28)

Examples (10) and (11) recall episodes of the writer's family history and the writer's early publishing experiences, respectively. It is worth noting that apart from their humorous nature, both play an important function with respect to the content. Example (10), placed in a footnote, helps to clarify the significance of the T/V distinction in Polish and its possible effects on the perceived politeness or impoliteness of forms of address; (11), in turn, illustrates the bumpy process of earning membership in a discourse community and learning its communicative conventions. By sharing with the reader some of the author's personal experiences, they establish a certain rapport that goes beyond a scholar-to-scholar exchange, keep the problems discussed close to life, and introduce a welcome change from serious, technical exposition.

## (Literary) Anecdotes

An anecdote or a fragment of a literary text may be used as an introduction to a problem, that is, at the beginning of a text, presumably to interest the reader in the topic, promise enjoyable reading rather than a dry, technical style, and ensure that the audience is well-disposed towards the text from the outset, as shown in example (12).

(12) In one of my favourite novels, *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out of the Window and Disappeared* by Jonas Jonasson, there is an episode in which the main character, Swede Allan Karlsson . . . , ends up in Moscow, having dinner with Stalin, the boss of the Soviet security Lavrenty Beria, and the head of the Soviet nuclear programme Yury Popov. Apart from the aforementioned, at the table sits "a little,

almost invisible young man without a name and without anything either to eat or to drink"—the interpreter, and the others pretend he is not there at all, although he makes the friendly conversation possible in the first place. During the dinner, the amicable atmosphere is suddenly completely spoiled as Allan quotes an inappropriate, imperialist poet, and Stalin flies into a fury. Allan is immediately accused by his moody host of being a filthy capitalist and a long tirade results, which ends as follows:

'I've been thinking,' said Allan.
'What,' said Stalin angrily.
'Why don't you shave off that moustache?'
With that the dinner was over, because the interpreter fainted.

. . . The episode from Jonasson's amusing novel illustrates very wellthe main question I will try to answer in this study: except fainting, what can the interpreter do when s/he is required to voice a statement that may likely offend the addressee . . . and is, in fact, intended to do just this? (Bartłomiejczyk, 2016, pp. 9–10)

Example (12) comes from the introduction to a book that studies the ways in which interpreters deal with face threats in political contexts. It grabs the reader's attention, illustrates (if somewhat hyperbolically) the significance of the problem, and produces the impression that the author is presumably not only a competent scholar but also a clever writer.

## Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate that although they are not typical sites of humour, written, professional, career academic genres do introduce its elements to attract the reader and to increase the text's effectiveness. Elements of humour in titles instantly catch the readers' attention and provoke curiosity, which means that the reader is more likely to read the rest of the text. Used in the main text, they deautomatise reading and engage the reader emotionally by provoking a spontaneous reaction. Humorous autobiographical references build the writer-reader rapport and may provide a valuable, real-life exemplification of the problems discussed. Finally, a literary anecdote may function as a lead-in to the topic, signalling the main problem and promising an interesting reading. All these elements work for the ultimate success of the text, encouraging the reader to start reading and to continue, making the main point of the discussion more memorable, and leaving the reader with the impression that the text was well written and well-worth reading. Drawing students' attention to these not very frequent but very effective mechanisms may help overcome the fear of writing they often experience at the beginning of their academic lives, dismantle the detrimental stereotype of academic communication as necessarily stilted, dull, and pompous, and bring a welcome element of fun into the academic writing class.

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**Marzena S. Wysocka**
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2787-8676

# Poetry in Teaching Grammar to the Advanced Users of Polish as a FL

Abstract

The article offers an insight into problematic issues the advanced learners of Polish as a FL cope with in terms of grammar in speaking and writing. It opens with a brief insight into teaching literature, poetry including, in a FL classroom. What follows includes types of poems and their potential to be used in the teaching context, mainly when teaching grammar. Having presented the scope of linguistic problems experienced by the users of Polish as a FL, the type and frequency of grammatical problems are discussed. Polish grammar-based issues the foreigners struggle with constituted the main area of the research conducted among 146 students of the Polish Language Course attending the School of Polish Language and Culture at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. The findings come from oral and written assignments produced by the sample in question, and, most frequently, reflect grammatical mistakes that are persistent and difficult to eliminate from the linguistic repertoire. Given that, ways of using poetry as a means of a "grammar refresher" are suggested. These include a few examples of activities based on poems to be used when trying to overcome particular linguistic difficulties, together with implications for teachers raising students' language awareness and developing reflection on language per se.

*Keywords*: poetry, poems, grammar, grammar problems

In trying to show the language-literature and/or literature-language interplay, it is enough to reach any type of a literary genre. How these two coexist is best exemplified in a language and literature syllabus, but can also be a part of a general language course building on both linguistic and literary experiences aiding reflection, lengthening the span of attention and increasing learners' self-awareness.

## Teaching Literature in a FL Classroom

Undeniably, it is the language-based approach that is the most common approach to literature in the FL classroom. Following Carter and Long (1991), the exposure to literature can increase learners' vocabulary and linguistic structures, as well as a more creative aspect of the language consisting in metaphor, symbolism and imagery. A wide range of techniques commonly used with literary texts in a FL environment include close testing, matching synonyms, rephrasing, and jumbled lines, to name a few, and serve certain linguistic goals. It is most often to think about the meaning of the text. By approaching the text in this deconstructionist way and breaking it down into a series of its parts, the learners are given a chance to focus more on grammar structures. Following Hanauer (2001), what the classroom participants notice in this way involves the form (over 90% of learners), with 84% of unusual usage and only 9.87% paying attention to literary meaning.

The very numbers of noticing differ when it comes to the Personal Growth Model and its emotion-based nature. Here, the learners are encouraged to express personal opinions on a text, and relate any intellectual or emotional response to their own experiences. This technique follows the commonly held theory of reading which lays emphasis on the interaction of the reader with the text (Cadorath & Harris, 1998).

In this regard poetry seems to be dominating over prose, and sounds very attractive for its readers as it is well-known for completeness and brevity of the text, and the encapsulation of the powerful thought or emotion. Though, the choice of the texts needs great care. A linguistically complex poem with new structures and sophisticated vocabulary is likely to be inaccessible to many FL learners, and result in a „switching off" rather than a desired effect, that is, emotional engagement in the text. The same seems to be true of poems requiring background knowledge of the social or historical milieu, and/or based on some factual information to be introduced beforehand by the teacher. Yet, even such difficult texts can be successful when provide direction for learners to construct meaning from their own experience.

## Poetry in a FL Classroom

Following Szczęśniak (2009) poetry in teaching a FL is generally treated as an innovative potential aimed at developing students' linguistic and cognitive competences. In the former case, a well-prepared material, in the form of a text, is to influence lexis, grammar, and morphology, as well as become the basis of enhancing students' listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. The latter, on the other hand, giving social, cultural, and historical background, allows for acting, thinking, and feeling in a FL, including openness to other languages, cultures, and communities. Kozłowski (1991) goes even further and compares using poetry in a classroom to a multidimensional experience and a powerful effect on learners' literary, emotional, creative, aesthetic or critical competences, to name a few.

The more "attractive" the poem, the bigger influence on its receivers can be observed. What constitutes this text attractiveness is elaborated on by Burzyńska and Markowski (2006), according to whom it is composed of directiveness, clarity, or, paradoxically, the lack of both, as well as thought-provoking and innovative ideas, or a metaphorical nature of the language itself.

More specifically, it is distinctive features of poetic texts, such as for example rhythms, rhymes, onomatopoeic expressions, assonances, and alliterations that enrich the way the message is conveyed and the language in general is portrayed at the same time.

Working on a poetic text, as Szczęśniak (2009) has it, can start from just underlining given words, for example, vowels or consonants to pay learners' attention to word spelling. Looking for prefixes or suffixes, diminutives and/or augmentatives, analogically, is to rise students' awareness of word formation and morphology. In the same vein, when asked to concentrate on certain parts of speech, such as verbs, nouns or adjectives and adverbs, the learners may develop their understanding of word order, as well as how these co-exist and form a larger unit referred to as a sentence structure.

The next step can be to read a poem and work on substituting given words or phrases, transforming parts and/or whole sentences, as well as coming up with new units. Practically, it may cover practicing plurals/singulars, inflections, tenses, and so on. And, finally, the students may be asked to reflect on word or sentence relations, ponder over their double/metaphorical meaning, as well as go for writing their own lines according to suggested patterns, or just get involved into free writing as such. Being so diversified, poetry seems to be a part of not only a very interesting text-based task to implement during regular classes, but also a series of remedy classes when something goes wrong.

## Types of Poems

Taking all the above-mentioned into account, it is worth emphasizing that different poems serve different purposes, and can be used differently to promote language acquisition. The most common poem forms are picture poems and pattern poems.

## Picture Poems

According to Finch (2003), picture poems offer a visual perspective on the arrangement of words, and are, therefore, an effective means of encouraging learners to interact with the target vocabulary (Table 1).

Table 1.
*An example of a picture poem (adapted from Hadfield & Hadfield, 1991, p. 9)*

| | |
|---|---|
| One, two,<br>thump thump,<br>my heart beats for you<br>across the room and we<br>come closer together<br>in the space<br>between<br>us | A<br>house<br>can be tall,<br>short, wide or thin,<br>with many rooms, or only<br>a few. It can be<br>home for all the<br>family or simply<br>me and my pets. |

Here the poems look like the object they describe. The structure is the shape of the object, and task completion comes from arranging words to match that shape.

To name an example of a task in Polish, the students can be asked to come up with a word, for example noodles (as in Figure 1), and "draw" its shape:

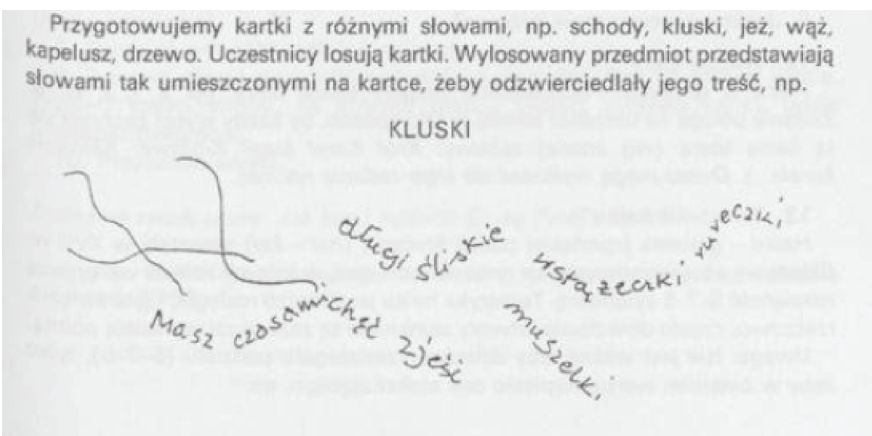
Przygotowujemy kartki z różnymi słowami, np. schody, kluski, jeż, wąż, kapelusz, drzewo. Uczestnicy losują kartki. Wylosowany przedmiot przedstawiają słowami tak umieszczonymi na kartce, żeby odzwierciedlały jego treść, np.

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*Figure 1.* An example of a task in Polish: a picture poem (Mrożek, 1999, p. 125)

Another type of a picture poem is the one in which the words outline the object being described. Again, these words can be sentences or collections of word-associations, and, thus, encourage the learners to interact and experiment with the language (Figure 2).

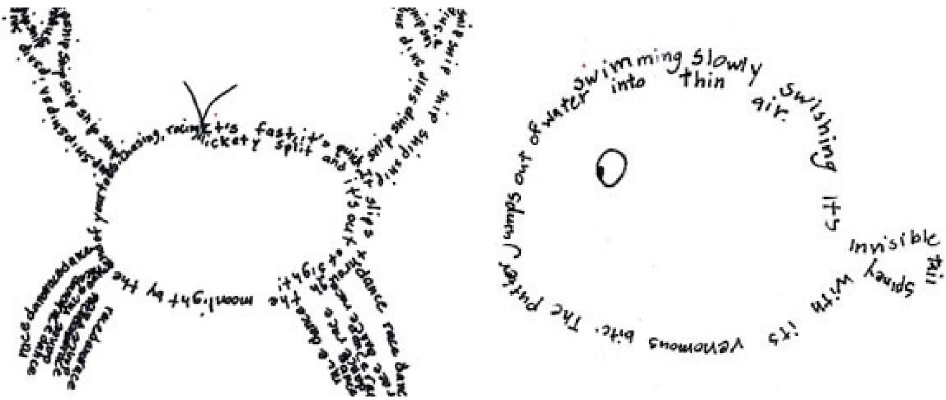



*Figure 2.* An example of a picture poem (adapted from Hadfield & Hadfield, 1997, p. 16).

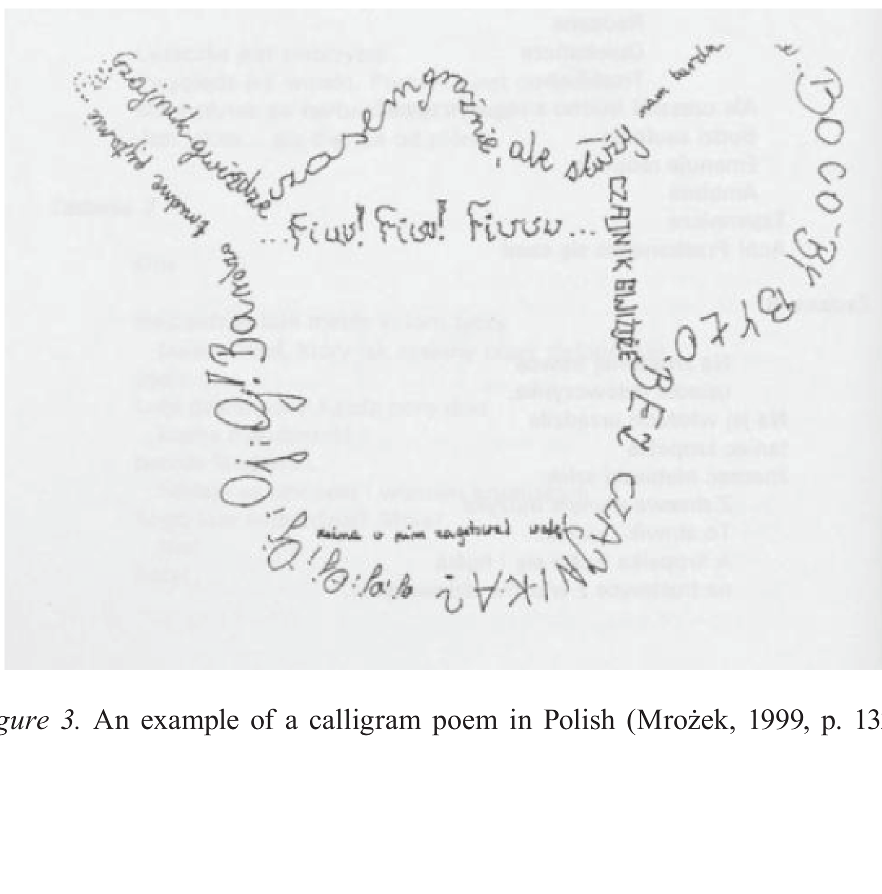



*Figure 3.* An example of a calligram poem in Polish (Mrożek, 1999, p. 132)

Mrożek (1999) refers to the text visually arranged in a way that it forms contours associated with the text's content as a calligram poem. Practically speaking, it means that in order to create it the students may be asked to think of a given word, and present the line that appears to bound a given object, as in Figure 3.

## Pattern Poems

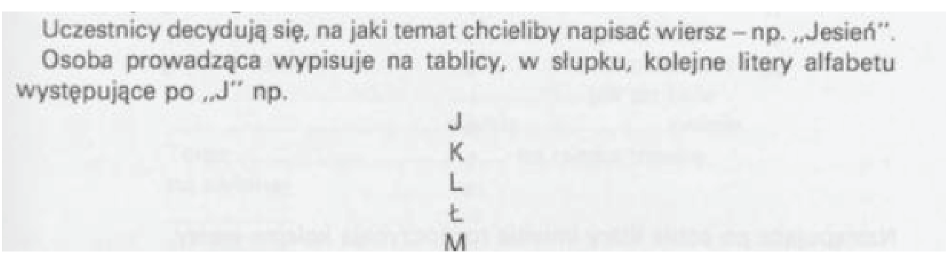
Pattern poems, on the other hand, are believed to be especially successful in the FL classroom as they can be adopted to teaching grammar and sentence structure. Following Finch (2003), *patterns* in such poems usually consist of grammatical items (adjectives, adverbs, verbs, etc.,) metrical frameworks, phrases, or sentence structures, though they can also include acronyms:

Table 2

*An example of a pattern poem (adapted from Holmes & Moulton, 2001, p. 15)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **F**urry face<br>**R**ed hair<br>**I**ntelligent eyes<br>**E**ars that hear everything<br>**N**ose that sniffs<br>**D**og of my dreams | **F**unny<br>**R**eal<br>**I**nteresting<br>**E**njoyable<br>**N**ice<br>**D**elightful | **F**ew people are<br>**R**eal friends<br>**I**n my life. I<br>**E**njoy seeing true, not<br>**N**ew friends every<br>**D**ay |

The very example presents an acrostic poem based on the word friend. The central acronym uses single word-association to describe the concept of *friend,* while the acronym to its left uses an *adj + noun* structure. The third acronym in this figure constructs two complete sentences, in which the required letters appear at the front of every three or four words. To give an example of a Polish-context pattern poetry, it is worth looking at acronyms mentioned before or alphabetical sequencing giving rise to a number of texts and tasks for students suggested by Mrożek (1999):


Uczestnicy decydują się, na jaki temat chcieliby napisać wiersz – np. „Jesień”. Osoba prowadząca wypisuje na tablicy, w słupku, kolejne litery alfabetu występujące po „J” np.

J
K
L
Ł
M

*Figure 4.* An example of a task for students in Polish (Mrożek, 1999, p. 123)

Through patterns, the learners can rehearse correct spelling, discover new as well as use familiar vocabulary, practice specific language structures such as phrases, word order, and verb tense, to name a few examples. These can be done by means of interactive and rewarding drills focusing on a particular aspect of grammar or syntax developing students' awareness of structure and phrase at the same time. This is particularly important as the two constitute a real hardship for FL learners, Polish grammar patterns being considered especially difficult.

## Language Problems Experienced by Users of Polish as a FL

The most frequent language difficulties non-native speakers of Polish suffer from are morpho-syntactic in character, and Wysocka (2007) classifies them into the following:

- prepositions, for example, **Kupię na pani kawę*, **Idę do poczty.*
- pronouns, for example, **Tamte mężczyźni, *Widzę się z ją*.
- case, for example, **Ona ma duży pies*, **Potrzebuję krzesło.*
- word order, for example, **Bardzo podoba się mi*, **To jest kot gruby.*
- tense, for example, **Tomek wczoraj ogląda film*.
- aspect, for example, **Będę napisać*, **Jutro ona będzie kupić książkę.*
- verb inflections, for example, **bylimy*, **jestemy.*
- verb conjugation, for example, **kupowuje,*gotowywać*.
- adjective comparison, for example, **bardziej lepszy*, **bliżejszy*, **zdrowiejszy.*
- plural forms, for example, **człowieki*, **dziecka*, **studenty*, **profesory.*
- collocations, for example, **robić sport*, **wziąć zdjęcie*, **mieć prysznic*.
- prefixes, for example, **przyprać pranie*.
- suffixes, for example, **inteligentność*.
- spelling, for example, lack of discrimination between the words *kość* and *kosić*.

In trying to find the reasons for a high frequency the above-enumerated are characterised by in the case of the Polish language, Wysocka (2007) claims that it is L1–L2 distance and disparities that give rise to language problems of that kind. For example, Chinese learners divide words into syllables in accordance with their L1 tones, or form interrogatives placing question words at the end of utterances, it being a Chinese rule of question formation. L1 habits are also visible in linguistic behaviours of English- or German-speaking students in terms of prepositions, pronouns or word order, due to ambiguities their mother tongues are allowed in the case of the first two, and a more fixed nature of the third one in comparison to Polish. The situations in which the motherese is devoid of the category of case (e.g., Norwegian), tense or verb inflections (e.g., Chinese), translate into inaccuracies in all these language spheres. Problems with aspect are typical of Germans learning Polish and result from the lack of equivalents to the German pluperfect in Polish. The lack of Polish correspondences is also true of verb conjugation and plurality in Japanese. The former takes on the shape of a consonant and vowel form non-existing for Poles, whereas the latter as such does not exist in Japanese at all. Difficulties with pre- and suffixation are numerous in the case of English speakers of Polish and can be boiled down to a variety of means of word formation in Polish. In final, problems with collocating words or spelling reflect circumstances under which L1-specific features influence TL performance and result in Polish forms based on and built of non-existent features regardless of L1.

More recently, Krawczuk (2008), Dilna (2008) or Dąbrowska and Pasieka (2008) add to the above-mentioned:

- government,
- grammatically-oriented phraseology, as well as
- semantic and syntactic combinability.

To start with, problems with government most often derive from L1 interferences and range from Germanic and Romanian to Slavonic languages. To name a few examples, native speakers of English would say **spędzamy* mniej swojego czasu *na*, Czechs **byłem z niej nie tylko rozczarowany* and Ukrainians **tolerancja do kogoś* or **Mieszkam blisko od uniwersytetu* on account of apparently close, though incorrect solutions the languages suggest (Krawczuk, 2008). When it comes to phraseology, what the students struggle with is modifications of the original constructs (e.g., *owijać w bawełnę* changed into *owijanie*) which, as Dilna (2008) claims, unable their recognition, or, to quote Dąbrowska and Pasieka (2008) are responsible for failures at realization of phrasal verbs *per se* (e.g., **To był prezent zapierający dech ludziom* or **z wyrażeniami szacunku*). Finally, problems with word and sentence relations stem from inappropriate accommodation (Markiewicz-Pławecka, 2008). This consists in wrong combinations of modifiers and words or phrases modified, resulting in such expressions as *Po świętach połowa narodu *otrzyma* trudności z trawieniem or *Brno jest *drugie* największe *miasto.* Surprisingly, it is Slavic learners of Polish, Bulgarians in particular, who experience difficulties with modification most frequently.

Not only do inaccurate language forms constitute frequent language problems, but also disfluencies occur in large numbers and are wide in scope. Wysocka (2007) groups them as follows:

- filled pauses, for example, *Eeeee...*, *Aaaaa...*,
- unfilled pauses,
- incorrect fixed expressions, for example, *dzień dobry* instead of *dobry wieczór* and vice versa,

- L1 use, for example, **Bardzo sympatyczny animal*, **Ten Nachtklub,*
- reformulations, for example, *To jest… to są…*,
- correctly formed fixed expressions, for example, *Według mnie…*,
- reliance on English, for example, *let's say…*, *I think…*, *right…*,
- problems with register and style, for example, **Czy Pani idziesz do sklepu?*

The first four types of behaviours seem to be equally L1-induced. To start with filled pauses the learners of Polish use, *Eeee* is typical of Chinese learners and users whereas *Aaaa* illustrative of English influences. The interchangeability of greetings under discussion is symptomatic of the French misguided by an adjective taking an initial position in *bon jour*. In a similar vein, the inclusion of English words is a tendency the English learners and users of Polish indicate, while German linguistic features constitute what Germans usually relate to. The remaining categories are common to all non-native speakers of Polish as a FL, irrespective of language background and source language they operate on. Paraphrasing, or an overuse of certain routine formulas, is observed whenever the learners come across obstacles in expressing themselves. Such difficulties are also resolved by means of referring to English which, being a lingua franca, serves the role of a "walking stick," regardless of other languages acquired and/or learned. Discourse problems, to build on Dąbrowska and Pasieka (2008) are frequently the result of syllepsis, namely, a combination of semantically distant words (e.g., *odczuwają potrzebę *w jedzeniu, opieki i miłości*) or a mixed register accounted for differences in the realization of Polish polite forms in the Slovak or Ukrainian language, to name a few (Nowakowska, 2008).

Language behaviours resulting from the reverse situation, notably, Polish playing a role of the TL, seem to be influenced by the same mechanisms influenced mostly by grammatical and morphological interferences, and reflect the following (Wysocka, 2009):

- case,
- subject-verb agreement, and
- inflection.

Providing examples from the literature, problems with case stem from fixed rules of a noun declension system in Polish and previously-mentioned non-existence and/or its different realization in the first language as in English or Russian where the former operates on the genitive only whereas the latter relies on six when contrasted with seven in Polish (Wysocka, 2007). The resultative forms range from **Nie słuchaliśmy muzykę* or **Oddaj to Adam* (Korol, 2008). Likewise, subject-verb agreement tends to be troublesome for foreign learners of Polish because of a fixed verb conjugation only partially realized in for example English verb system. The case of inflection, on the other hand, imposes on Korean speakers the linguistic behaviours they cannot translate from their mother tongue. As a result, they produce such inaccuracies as **Czas bardzo szybko minęła* or **Zjadłam dużo czekoladów* (Mielczarek & Lisowski, 2008).

## The Research Proper: Problems with Grammar

What grammatical (in)accuracies and (dis)fluencies reappear while using Polish (in speaking and writing) has been the core objective of the study conducted among the advanced users of Polish as a FL.

### The Sample

The sample constituted 146 students of the Polish Language Course attending the School of Polish Language and Culture at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. Eight different nationalities and languages the sample represented allowed for presenting them under the label of three different branches of the Indo-European language family, namely Germanic, Slavonic, and Romance. The first group (A) comprised 13 German (G), 16 Scandinavian (S), and 13 English (E) students of Polish as a FL, it being 46 altogether. The second (B) was composed of 24 Ukrainians (U) and 25 Slovaks (Sl.), which makes 49 in total, whereas the third group (C) consisted of 14 Italian (I), 18 Spanish (Sp.), and 19 French (F) course participants, that is 51 as a whole. As far as gender and age distribution are concerned, group A was made up of 17 female and 29 male students aged 21–45, group B contained 21 females and 28 males between 24 and 49 years of age, while in group C the number of female representatives came to 25 and male ones to 26 between the ages of 20 and 31. In terms of qualifications, groups A and B seemed homogeneous and included similar proportions of BA and MA degree holders, that is, 25 vs. 21 and 25 vs. 24 respondents respectively. Groups C, being younger in general, predominated in BA students (27), it being 10 more than MA students (17), as well as 7 subjects with no diplomas whatsoever. When it comes to their language experience, it was not limited to studying Polish as 100% of the German, English, Italian, Spanish, and French respondents admitted working as lecturers and/or teachers of their native language in language schools in Poland; 9, 10, 4, 7, and 10 of them respectively having their BA in language and culture (teaching).

### Tools

Text samples, which constituted the main source of the language material produced by the sample selected (146 respondents altogether), were divided into oral and written assignments. In both cases, the tasks the questioned subjects were confronted with covered a topic for discussion randomly chosen from a list of 100 quotations singled out for the purposes of the study.To give an example, the very list contained the following:

Co my wiemy, to tylko kropelka. Czego nie wiemy, to cały ocean.
Isaac Newton

Twórczość to umiejętność nowego spojrzenia na starą wiedzę.
Anonim

Drzewa i kamienie nauczą cię rzeczy, których nie usłyszysz z ust żadnego nauczyciela.
Św. Bernard z Clairvaux

Być inteligentnym to bardzo męczące.
Henri Bergson

To, co szkodzi, uczy.
Fedrus

Nauka jest sprawą wielkich. Maluczkim dostają się nauczki.
Stanisław Jerzy Lec

As regards oral assignments, they focused on students' oral performance and were designed to record samples of the language output produced by the informants in the course of speaking. More specifically, the respondents were required to comment on one of the statements drawn from the list of quotations given. Each time, the responses recorded were intended to mirror the students' 3-minute spontaneous reactions to the topic.

As opposed to oral assignments, written tasks were focused upon examining a written discourse produced by the group under investigation. This time, each of the questioned students was asked to pick a slip of paper containing a topic for discussion. Having selected one of the quotations at a time, they were requested to remark on the issues in focus in writing, given a 30-minute time-limit.

What was looked for in students' spoken and written text samples in terms of grammar inaccuracies ranged from single words (e.g., parts of speech such as verbs, adjectives, pronouns, etc.) to phrases, clauses and sentences, including the way they are combined, positioned as well as realized in the overall language system.

## The Results

When it comes to speaking, the students' performance violated rules of grammar mainly as a result of unfortunate choice and usage of language within the scope of previously-mentioned grammar patterns, structures and orientations ranging from a dozen to even a few hundred examples of a given violation (Table 3):

Table 3.
*Problems with grammar (speaking)*

| Grammar problem | Frequency of occurrence | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G | S | E | U | Sl. | I | Sp. | F |
| Subject overuse | 92 | 100 | 125 | 72 | 88 | 99 | 108 | 100 |
| Lack of subject-verb agreement | 97 | 108 | 95 | 95 | 95 | 100 | 95 | 95 |
| Problems with case | 77 | 69 | 76 | 67 | 71 | 71 | 72 | 68 |
| Wrong prepositions | 69 | 69 | 71 | 67 | 71 | 71 | 72 | 68 |
| Problems with comparison | 62 | 63 | 65 | 63 | 64 | 64 | 67 | 63 |
| Misuse of pronouns | 51 | 50 | 48 | 45 | 43 | 61 | 58 | 56 |
| Problems with relative pronouns | 37 | 31 | 38 | 31 | 34 | 35 | 31 | 30 |
| Verb omission | 11 | 14 | 19 | 19 | 21 | 21 | 14 | 12 |

Qualitatively speaking, on the other hand, what the students arrived at covered the following utterances:

**Ja* myślę, że *ja* wygram ten mecz,
**Dzieci byli* z nami na zawsze,
*On kupuje jego *samochody*,
*Ja się cieszę *do* ich przyjazdu,
*Byłoby *bardzo przyjemniej* tam być,
*Chcę *ciebie* powiedzieć*,*
*To jest droga*, na którą* poznasz kilka ciekawych ludzi,
*To nie podniecające
**Zapytam jemu, zapytam jemu, czy jest chętny...*
*To jest tak, *bo* dziewczyny byli, dziewczyny byli….

All in all, the grammatical symptoms as such testified to insignificant differences between the sample, the most significant of which appeared in line with the subject overuse occurrences. What should be paid attention to, however, is the type of influences determining the form of behaviours in question. Here, the most invasive seemed English and German impact, especially when it comes to the use of wrong pronouns, relative pronouns included.

Apart from that, the students' utterances reflected a number of disfluencies. These, by definition, are caused by pauses, all-purpose words, repetitions, reformulations, unfinished utterances, over-reliance on certain structures, redundant categories or meaningless expressions, and, depending on the language feature produced, can be either erroneous or non-erroneous.

Language disfluency that accompanied grammar inaccuracy while speaking covered four different categories (Table 4):

Table 4.
*Language disfluency (speaking)*

| Language disfluency | Frequency of occurrence | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G | S | E | U | Sl. | I | Sp. | F |
| Pauses | 177 | 113 | 200 | 300 | 180 | 60 | 70 | 70 |
| Repetitions | 110 | 150 | 170 | 301 | 149 | 192 | 183 | 115 |
| Overuse of grammatically-based fixed expressions | 66 | 104 | 190 | 201 | 179 | 159 | 102 | 109 |
| Unfinished words/phrases | 34 | 46 | 70 | 91 | 99 | 100 | 49 | 31 |

As the numbers show, Ukrainians were the least fluent among the participants in question, pausing, hesitating, and repeating themselves almost ad infinitum. Second "best" appeared the English-speaking students over-relying on pauses and fixed language strings, slightly taking over the Slavs and Italians who turned out to be too repetitive and linguistically fixed, as well as overused fixed expressions, and often did not care to finish their sentence.

The students' writing samples, in comparison to speaking, were more diversified and broader in scope in terms of language areas misused and/or misfitted (Table 5):

Table 5.
*Problems with grammar (writing)*

| Grammar problem | Frequency of occurrence | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G | S | E | U | Sl. | I | Sp. | F |
| Subject overuse | 90 | 96 | 114 | 69 | 81 | 96 | 105 | 99 |
| Lack of subject-verb agreement | 90 | 96 | 95 | 80 | 89 | 90 | 93 | 87 |
| Problems with case | 75 | 70 | 75 | 66 | 65 | 70 | 70 | 70 |
| Wrong prepositions | 60 | 76 | 73 | 66 | 70 | 69 | 72 | 69 |
| Wrong pronouns | 32 | 39 | 59 | 31 | 59 | 49 | 40 | 41 |
| Problems with relative pronouns | 21 | 26 | 30 | 19 | 21 | 31 | 29 | 28 |
| Problems with comparison | 19 | 24 | 31 | 19 | 18 | 28 | 29 | 21 |

The numbers translated into the quality of expression, giving rise to the following utterances:

**Ja* wiem, że ja…
*To jest dzień który *ja* lubię.
**One byli* gorsze,
*Często jest tak *z* takich sytuacjach,

*To jest *nich* inicjatywa,
*Mój sąsiad, *które* ja gram szachy,
*Ja jestem *bardzo lepszy* z gramatyki
*Ja *siedzę na publiczności,*
*Ja *mam czuć*, że Polska wygra.

Following the "grammatical numbers," Ukrainian and Slovak students seemed to be the least fossilized representatives of the sample, having the biggest problems with the subject-verb concord. The weakest, on the other hand, were English- and Spanish-speaking subjects, facing all types of grammatical problems.

What was observed in line with grammatically-incorrect sentences reflected overuse of grammatically-based fixed expressions making the written text incoherent (Table 6):

Table 6.
*Text incoherence (writing)*

| Text-incoherence | Frequency of occurrence | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | G | S | E | U | Sl. | I | Sp. | F |
| Overuse of grammatically-based fixed expressions | 19 | 27 | 59 | 71 | 45 | 99 | 76 | 40 |

As seen from the table, these ranged from several to almost one hundred of occurrences. Irrespective of observable frequency, though, the language produced was deprived of its factual quality most frequently in the case of Italians or Spaniards who seemed to celebrate the very fact of just expressing themselves, and writing as such, rather than conveying the message. The representatives of the remaining nationalities produced shorter text samples so a lower number of fixed expressions reappearing while writing may be the result of such a situation.

## Ways of Overcoming Problems

In trying to avoid and/or overcome at least some of the above-listed difficulties, one should neither understate nor undermine the power and benefits of language practice, be it the classroom or (home) work.

## Using Poetry

The examples of assignments presented below, though cater for only some problems listed above, differ from the tasks included in traditional course books as they are based on poetry. They are believed to not only broaden the perspective of problem recovery, but also language mastery, developing linguistic competence and reflection on language at the same time irrespective of the course or study attended. The poems in question are written by the author of the article, and offer a remedial work on a language, in the form of a recognition/production task (see Table 7).

Table 7.
*TASK 1 (Poem taken from Wysocka, 2010, p. 49)*

| |
|---|
| **TASK 1**. Przeczytaj wiersz, wypisz wszystkie rzeczowniki w mianowniku, a następnie od każdego z nich utwórz formę odpowiadającą na niżej sformułowane pytania.<br><br>W PORCIE<br>Najpierw przypłynęły<br>zapach i oddech sztormu<br>głębokie jak Ocean Spokojny<br>i niespokojne jak Morze Czerwone<br>a gdy tylko przybiłeś do portu<br>zalały mnie ciepłe fale twoich myśli<br>i po raz pierwszy<br>żałowałam, że umiem pływać<br>……………………………………………………………………<br>……………………………………………………………………<br>……………………………………………………………………<br><br>Z kim? Z czym?<br>……………………………………………………………………<br>Kogo? Czego?<br>……………………………………………………………………<br>O kim? O czym?<br>…………………………………………………………………… |

Here, it is the case of nouns that the learners are confronted with. First, they are asked to write down all the nouns in the nominative case, and then proceed to answering a few questions, each reflecting a different case in Polish.

A more demanding exercise, on the other hand, is threefold. It opens with a part devoted to all the adjectives presented in the text. What follows concerns the way the very adjectives should be matched with nouns given leaving the original forms unchanged. And, finally, sentences are to be created on the basis of previously-coined adjective + noun combinations (see Table 8).

Table 8.
*TASK 2 (Poem taken from Wysocka, 2010, p.28)*

**TASK 2.** Przeczytaj wiersz, wypisz przymiotniki znajdujące się w tekście, połącz je odpowiednio z podanymi niżej rzeczownikami, nie zmieniając istniejących form, i utwórz po jednym zdaniu z każdym utworzonym połączeniem (przymiotnik + rzeczownik).

***

Chciałabym zamknąć
Oczy i uszy, usta i nos
I wyłączyć myślenie
A pilot z czerwonym
Guzikiem „włącz"
Schować gdzieś głęboko
Żebyś nie mógł
Mnie uruchomić
Przez parę ładnych,
Brzydkich dni.

**nocy, liści, kolorem, znakiem, słów, paskiem**
Przymiotniki:
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Przymiotniki z rzeczownikami:
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Zdania:
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………

## Conclusions

The suggestion is to use poetry-based exercises for any language area(s) the students have problems with or are not confident about, and, thus, influence their language awareness; its attention, noticing and understanding components.

Irrespective of the type of a poetic text, using poetry in a FL classroom is believed to help understand relationships in meaning between words, while a stylistic analysis of poems is likely to improve learners' understanding of discourse, an emphasis being put on developing inference-making skills.

The future research could further explore the students' linguistic competence, be it lexis, morphology, phonology, spelling and/or punctuation. Having investigated the students' problems within a given language area, a series of poetic texts could be implemented depending on the group and its needs. Ideally, they could serve as a remedy for something that still goes wrong or as a positive reinforcement to encourage and reward proper linguistic behaviours.

Secondly, the research may be additionally equipped with a questionnaire aimed at collecting learners' opinions on using poetry as a way of polishing the language in the classroom context.

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**Katarzyna Ożańska-Ponikwia**
University of Bielsko-Biala, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4896-0521
**Angélica Carlet**
Universitat International de Catalunya, Spain
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8411-4731
**Maria Pujol Valls**
Universitat International de Catalunya, Spain
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6314-4675

# L2 Gain or L2 Pain? A Comparative Case Study of the Target Language Development among Erasmus+ Mobility Students and At-Home Students*

Abstract

The Erasmus+ exchange program has become very popular, with the numbers of student sojourners growing each year. However, it has previously been observed that not all students benefit equally from the study abroad (SA) experience (cf. Kinginger, 2008, 2009; Marijuan & Sanz, 2018; Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura & McManus, 2017; Regan, Howard & Lemée, 2009). Consequently, the main aim of the present study was to investigate various factors that might contribute to the development of the target language among two small groups of students, one of which self-selected themselves to undertake their language teaching practicum abroad, as a part of the Erasmus+ mobility program (*n* = 6), and the other at local schools in the country of their residence (*n* = 5). Both groups were examined prior their departure and after their return with a battery of tests that included: Oxford Placement test, Self-reported proficiency questionnaire, Oral proficiency test based on Cambridge Advanced exam, Language Engagement Questionnaire, Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ), Big Five Personality Questionnaire, and Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). Our findings demonstrated that the majority of the Erasmus+ mobility program students examined in this study showed some greater linguistic progress in grammar and speaking in comparison to the at-home students. However, there were two cases that failed to progress after the stay abroad experience. Further analyses and interviews showed that some other factors such as attitudes, language engagement, and

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satisfaction with the Erasmus experience might in fact influence and shape target language development while abroad. At the same time, it could be speculated that, in the case of researched informants, their progress in grammar and speaking could be assigned mostly to the amount and quality of the language input outside of the classroom setting.

*Keywords*: L2 gains, stay abroad, Erasmus+ mobility, personality, attitudes, satisfaction

## L2 Gains in the Study Abroad Context

The general assumption that study abroad (SA) leads to solid linguistic gains continues to generate vigorous debate (DeKeyser, 2010; Grey, Cox, Serafini, & Sanz, 2015). Research on linguistic development among sojourners has continued to note considerable variability in learning outcomes, and some researchers have sought to explain this variability with reference to individual differences such as initial L2 proficiency level, working memory and other cognitive factors, though without clear success (Mitchell, Tracy-Ventura, & McManus, 2017, p. 8). Consequently, a commonly held assumption that a study abroad setting is the ideal environment in which to learn a second language was questioned. Bryfonski and Mackey (2018) noted that even though sojourners might have wider access to interactions with native speakers than they do in their home contexts, the link between language gains and the amount and frequency of that contact while abroad has not yet been firmly established (e.g., Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004, p. 374). It was also observed that the immersion experience does not always lead to language development and growth (Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008; Freed, 1995; Sanz, 2014; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), highlighting the fact that the process is more complex, dynamic, and nuanced. As Isabelli-García (2006) rightly stated:

> studies that examine learners' attitude, motivation and behaviour in the host environment and link these factors directly to linguistic development can show that learners may not magically become fluent speakers simply by being surrounded by the target language. (Isabelli-García, 2006, p. 231)

Gardner (2012) noted that language is a defining characteristic of an individual who is involved in thoughts, self-communication, social interaction, and perception of the world. Language is an important part of one's identity, and the extent to which one can incorporate another language successfully is related to a variety of attitudinal variables that are influenced by the cultural milieu in which language learning takes place (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985, p. 16). Pavlenko (2002, pp. 280–281) noted that "attitudes, motivation or language learning beliefs have clear social origins and are shaped and reshaped by the contexts in which the learners find themselves." What is more, they are never static as they depend on the interplay of many social, political, and linguistic circumstances (Pavlenko, 2005). Thus, it could be stated that foreign language learning (FLL) is part of the mental and emotional development of learners taking place in the multidimensional context of a society (Shabitha & Mekala, 2013). Consequently, since the FLL process is dynamic and depends on various social, psychological, and linguistic factors, it could be postulated that the interplay of the above-mentioned variables might explain the wide variation in learners' success in acquiring and using a foreign language in a study aboard context. Therefore, this investigation aims to examine how different psychological (personality traits, emotional intelligence) and socio-psychological factors (attitudes, language engagement, satisfaction) are related to the development of the L2 grammar and oral communication skills during a short stay abroad period.

## Literature Review

As noted by Hessel (2017), study abroad research has shown that the linguistic gains made by study abroad participants are often subtle and subject to substantial individual differences (Collentine, 2009; Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2015; Sanz, 2014). As a consequence, there has been considerable research interest in identifying factors that can account for differential linguistic progress during study abroad to understand why some students make substantially greater gains than others. Baker-Smemoe et al. (2014) addressed a number of variables potentially related to L2 gain while abroad among more than 100 native English speakers participating in study abroad in Mexico, Spain, France, Egypt, Russia, and China. Informants' language gains were correlated with several predictors such as personality, social networks (size, dispersion, density, etc.), intercultural sensitivity, amount of second language use, gender, and age. The results demonstrated that pre-program competence variables (pre-program proficiency and intercultural sensitivity) and social/contextual variables (social network development) were greater predictors of language gains than were learner attribute variables (age, gender, or personality). In fact, results suggested that the development of social networks as well as the pre-departure level of cultural sensitivity were the variables that predicted most of the variance between gainers and non-gainers in the researched sample. Previous studies have already shown that developing social networks with native speakers while abroad via volunteer work, part-time employment, club membership, etc. can facilitate language acquisition (Isabelli-García, 2006; Whitworth, 2006). Isabelli-García (2006, p. 232), in a small-scale case study exploring how differences in motivation and attitude can affect L2 oral communication skills development, provided evidence of a four-way connection between SLA during the SA experience, motivation, intercultural adjustment and significant target language interaction with native speakers. These factors, according to the author, might explain the variation among individual learner's progress while abroad and illustrate:

> the complex relationship between motivation, acculturation and the development of social networks that ultimately provide opportunities for exposure to the target language and extended interactions that might be the driving force behind language acquisition in the SA context. (Isabelli-García, 2006, p. 257)

Some other research studies suggested that cultural adjustment is, in fact, a very important factor that might influence both the development of the target language while abroad, as well as satisfaction with the SA experience. Basow and Gaugler (2017) reported that intercultural adjustment over the course of the study abroad semester was best predicted by a combination of individual and social factors. In particular, those who had less difficulty with cultural adjustment had stronger language skills initially, as well as higher levels of social interactions with locals during their sojourn. A higher level of social interactions, in turn, mediated the effects of higher levels of open-mindedness and more positive home-stay experiences. In some other studies (Harrison & Voelker, 2008; Savicki et al., 2004) personality and emotional intelligence traits were also reported to influence intercultural adjustment. Savicki et al. (2004) investigated contrasts, changes, and correlates among study abroad students and found that clusters of personality traits (e.g., anxiety, extraversion, openness, and agreeableness) and coping strategies (e.g., active, planning, denial, and behavioural disengagement) related to intercultural adjustment. Similarly, Harrison and Voelker (2008) investigated the cross-cultural adjustment of study abroad students. The results of their study indicated that three sub-dimensions of EI were strongly related to a general adjustment to a host culture. Individuals with higher self-emotional appraisal, higher others' emotional appraisal and higher use of emotion exhibited stronger general adjustment than those who scored lower in these dimensions. When it comes to the role of personality dimensions and their relation to the amount of target language use and self-perceived progress in speaking, a very interesting study by Arvidsson et al. (2018) showed that an increase in cultural empathy correlated with both self-perceived progress in speaking and the amount of target language use. At the same time, an increase in open-mindedness was reported to correlate with the amount of target language use. The authors concluded that the mentioned personality traits are not only important for the ability to understand and interpret other cultures, but it is also possible that creating social bonds with the target language community reinforces those personality dimensions (Arvidsson et al., 2018, p. 158). Therefore, it could be speculated that even though personality was not always directly linked to the SA students' L2 gains, it could have a direct influence on socialization in the host culture and frequency of L2 use in the immersive context, as well as development of social networks. Consequently, it could be suggested that its influence on L2 gains while abroad might be indirect.

Along the same lines, studies focusing on the immigrant setting also found personality and emotional intelligence to play an important role in explaining cross-cultural adjustment and expatriate employee success (Gabel et al., 2005; Huang, Chi & Lawler, 2005; Jassawalla, Truglia, & Garvey, 2004) but also L2 proficiency and frequency of L2 use (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2015; Ożańska-Ponikwia & Dewaele, 2012). Ożańska-Ponikwia (2015) reported that immersion in the L2 culture influenced self-perceived L2 proficiency and the degree of L2 use among Polish immigrants in the UK and Ireland. It was noted that the longer the participants in the study were immersed in the foreign culture, the more frequently they reported using L2 on an everyday basis. This could be explained by engagement in social interactions and building up new social networks in the L2, which, on the other hand, could be linked to higher and lower order personality traits (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013). Informants in her study also noticed that only by immersion and socialization in the L2 culture were they able to understand social, linguistic, and cultural aspects of L2 communication patterns, which influenced their self-perceptions as far as the degree and frequency of L2 use was concerned (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2015). When it comes to personality traits and L2 use in the immigrant context, some previous studies (Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2013; Ożańska-Ponikwia & Dewaele, 2012) confirmed that an immigrant's personality profile was significantly linked to L2 use and self-perceived proficiency in the L2, with agreeableness, openness and the EI trait of empathy influencing self-perceived L2 proficiency, and self-esteem, stress management, adaptability, wellbeing and the global trait of EI being related to L2 use. It was also suggested that openness and self-esteem are the personality traits that best predict the use and development of English L2 by Polish immigrants living in the UK or Ireland (Ożańska-Ponikwia & Dewaele, 2012). Consequently, it could be speculated that personality characteristics that aid both adaptation, as well as intercultural communication, could also be considered important factors affecting L2 gains while abroad.

When it comes to the SA outcomes, Dewaele (2009, p. 636) noted that research on immersion education and study abroad showed that increased contact with L2 typically boosts the acquisition of different areas of L2, including sociolinguistic competence (Mougeon, Rehner, & Nadasdi, 2004; Regan, 2005), socio-pragmatic competence (Kinginger, 2004), and grammatical competence

(Howard, 2005; Howard & Schwieter, 2018; Nadasdi, Mougeon, & Rehner, 2003). However, it needs to be remembered that when it comes to sojourners' grammatical and lexical development, reported findings are inconclusive. There were noted both some positive effects on grammatical and lexical development during SA (e.g., Grey et al., 2015; Faretta-Stutenberg & Morgan-Short, 2017) as well no effects on grammatical development during SA (e.g., Isabelli-García, 2010).

When it comes to speaking proficiency, Di Silvo, Donovan, and Malone (2015, p. 77) noted that numerous studies have also compared oral proficiency outcomes of students studying abroad with control groups at their home universities and found that groups abroad are more likely to make greater gains than those studying at home (Freed, 1995; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009). At the same time, we have to highlight the fact that findings from studies using the Language Contact Profile (LCP) have not been consistent in supporting the common assumption that increased contact leads to greater improvement in speaking performance (Di Silvo, Donovan & Malone, 2015, p. 77). However, what might play a role when it comes to language gains and social network development is the quality and not the quantity of the interactions. This was reflected in the study by Baker-Smemoe et al. (2014) where no significant differences in the amount of the L2 use between high and no language gainers were reported but the differences were in the type of a social network developed by the informants of their study. Consequently, those students who were able to establish a close relationship with target language speakers were reported to be high language gainers. A study by Dewey, Belnap, and Hilstrom (2013) investigated the relationship between social network development and perceived gains in oral proficiency by learners of Arabic in a semester program. Predictors of gains included greater intensity of friendships, more time spent speaking with people outside of established social circles, and higher levels of English language proficiency of Arab friends. Another study that showed that establishing a close relationship with the target language speakers might lead to substantial linguistic gains was the one by Dewey (2008). He found that vocabulary development by learners of Japanese in semester study abroad program was more highly correlated with time spent speaking with friends than speaking with host families which could suggest that interactions in the target language with significant others might influence target language proficiency development. Therefore, it could be speculated that high-quality interaction in the target language leading to establishing bonds might trigger L2 oral proficiency and consequently result in higher L2 speaking gains.

The overview of the literature presented above showed that various psychological (personality traits), and socio-psychological factors (attitudes, motivation) are often intertwined in influencing different aspects of the SA program, such as the development of the target language proficiency, cultural adaptation and satisfaction with the SA experience. At the same time, with reported considerable variability in learning outcomes among SA students, it is still not clear what factors may trigger L2 proficiency while abroad. Therefore, the current study was designed to assess the possible role of different psychological and socio-psychological variables in the development of the target language proficiency in different contexts of the L2 use (immersive and non-immersive).

## Method

### Research Questions

The present study is to address the following research questions:

1. Is there any difference in self-perceived L2 proficiency development between students doing their practicum abroad and those doing it at the local schools in the country of their residence?
2. Is there any difference in L2 grammar and speaking proficiency development between students doing their practicum abroad and those doing it at the local schools in the country of their residence?
3. Is there any link between personality traits, language engagement and attitudes/satisfaction and L2 grammar and oral proficiency development?

### Participants

The participants of this study were 11 Spanish/Catalan learners of English as their L2. They were all 21-year-old females and majored their fourth year of an Education degree at a private university in Barcelona. The informants of the study self-selected themselves to undertake their three-month language teaching practicum abroad, as a part of the Erasmus+ mobility program ($n$ = 6), or at local schools in Barcelona ($n$ = 5). Among the Erasmus+ mobility recipients, four went to London and two to Finland.

### Instruments

In the present study, a battery of tests was applied. Two of them measured personality traits (Big Five Personality Questionnaire; Multicultural Personality Questionnaire). One measured emotional intelligence (Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire) and four other tests were used to measure English (L2) proficiency (Oxford Placement Test; Self-reported Proficiency Questionnaire; Speaking test based on the Cambridge Advanced Exam) as well as frequency of the L1 and L2 use (Language Engagement Questionnaire). Below we provide a detailed description of all enumerated questionnaires.

**The Big-Five Personality Test.** The Big-Five broad domains personality test (Goldberg, 1992), obtained from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), measured personality traits such as Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability/Neuroticism, and Openness. Subjects responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale. The scale indicating; "never or almost never true of me," "usually not true of me," "somewhat true of me," "usually true of me," "always or almost always true of me." These categories were assigned values of 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively. The correlation of the IPIP Big-Five broad domains Personality Test with the Costa and McCrae (1992) Big-Five factor structure ranged from .66 to .90 with an overall correlation reported as .81 (Goldberg, 1992). The Cronbach's α for the Big-Five broad domains personality test was .84.

**Multicultural Personality Questionnaire.** The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) by Van Der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) is a personality assessment questionnaire that was constructed specifically to describe behavior when one is interacting with people from different cultures. The MPQ consisted of 40 Likert type items measuring such factors as cultural empathy, flexibility, social initiative, emotional sociability, and open-mindedness. The Cronbach's α for the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire was .86.

**Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue).** Petrides and Furnham's (2003) TEIQue used in the present study comprised 30 items rated on seven-point Likert scale providing scores on four factors of broad relevance: Wellbeing, Self-control, Emotionality, and Sociability. TEIQue required participants to use the rating scale from "completely disagree" to "completely agree" with a mid-point of "neither agree nor disagree." The TEIQue Cronbach's α for the whole questionnaire was .88.

**Language Engagement Questionnaire.** The Language Engagement Questionnaire (LEQ) by McManus et al. (2014) was used to document participants' language engagement (L1, L2) for a range of different activities. Participants begin by indicating which languages they use on a regular basis (English, French, Spanish, other). For each language selected, participants are provided with a list of 26 activities and are asked to indicate how often they do each activity in that language on a 5-point scale, which gives a maximum score of 130 points, choosing from: every day, several times a week, a few times a week, rarely, never. Even though the questionnaire was originally designed for the SA students we have decided to introduce it also to the at-home group to be able to trace potential similarities/differences in L1/L2 use among those at-home students who undertook their practicum in bilingual schools in Barcelona and the stay abroad group.

**Oxford Placement Test.** An adapted version of the Oxford Placement Test was administered twice to the participants, the first time prior to their departure and the second time after finishing their practicum. The test was completed online and it contained 100 questions addressing English grammar and vocabulary. Each correct answer was attributed two points, which gives a maximum score of 200 points. Immediately after the test, participants were given their score, feedback, and an explanation of their approximate level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL).

**Self-reported Proficiency Questionnaire.** The Self-reported Proficiency Questionnaire was introduced in order to gather data concerning participants' opinions regarding their overall L2 proficiency as well as L2 proficiency in four micro skills of speaking, writing, listening, and reading. It comprised 5 Likert type items: How would you rate your overall proficiency in English? How would you rate your L2 speaking proficiency? How would you rate your L2 writing proficiency? How would you rate your L2 listening proficiency? How would you rate your L2 reading proficiency?

**Speaking test based on Cambridge Advanced Exam.** The speaking test followed the guidelines of part 2 of a Cambridge advanced speaking exam (CAE). Participants were given a set of three pictures and were instructed to select and talk about two of the three pictures individually for one minute. Testing took place in a quiet room and participant's individual output was recorded so it could further be analyzed. Three Cambridge-trained evaluators rated learners' speaking abilities on the basis of five different skills: pronunciation, vocabulary, accuracy, communication, and fluency assigning 10 points to each skill (maximum score for the proficiency test was 50 points). A 4-point-scale rubric was used for evaluation and a reliability analysis using an intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC) with a level of "absolute agreement" was conducted on the rating scores. The Cronbach's α reliability coefficient for each speaking skill ranged from .84 to .87, indicating strong inter-rater reliability.

### Procedure

All participants were tested in a private university in Barcelona before and after (T1 and T2) their three-month teaching placement. Moreover, all participants also completed a "during practicum" questionnaire addressing their L1 and L2 language usage. T1 and T2 involved a battery of tests, namely the Big Five Personality Questionnaire; the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, the Oxford Placement Test; Self-reported Proficiency Questionnaire and a Speaking test based on the Cambridge Advanced Exam. More details on each instrument can be seen in section 2.2. The tests were administered online in a computer room and students were called out individually into a separate quiet room to perform the speaking test. After completion of the study, participants were given course credit.

## Data Analysis

The first research question concerned possible difference in self-perceived L2 proficiency development between students undertaking their practicum abroad and those undertaking it at local schools in the country of their residence. In order to be able to answer this question we have calculated mean scores for each language skill measured before and after the practicum. Detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
*Self-perceived L2 proficiency—at-home vs. stay abroad group*

| L2 proficiency | At-home T1 | At-home T2 | Stay abroad T1 | Stay abroad T2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall L2 proficiency | 3.80 | 3.80 | 3.80 | 3.80 |
| L2 speaking proficiency | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 |
| L2 writing proficiency | 4.00 | 4.00 | 4.00 | 3.70 |
| L2 reading proficiency | 4.20 | 4.40 | 3.80 | 3.80 |
| L2 listening proficiency | 4.40 | 4.60 | 3.70 | 4.00 |
| Mean (L2 skills) | 4.15 | 4.25 | 3.87 | 3.87 |

The results presented above show that both groups of students rated their overall L2 proficiency identically both prior and after the practicum. The reported score was 3.8 on a five-point Likert scale which means that in the majority of cases they perceived themselves as upper-intermediate/advanced users of L2 English. What was interesting to note was the fact that in both groups this rating did not change after the practicum. Consequently, it could be speculated that from the SA students' perspective, their stay abroad experience had no influence on their self-perceived L2 proficiency ratings. What is more, after calculating mean scores for all the L2 skills, we could note that the at-home group ranked their L2 proficiency, in all four mentioned skills, higher than the stay abroad group both before and after their practicum. Additionally, even though their overall L2 proficiency score did not change after the practicum, the mean score from all the L2 skills was higher than that reported overall. Regarding the stay abroad group, the mean score was only slightly higher (3.87) and did not change after the practicum. From the results, it is observed that in self-perceived L2 proficiency, both groups reported the same score before and after their three-month practicum at schools. However, the home-stay group ranked their proficiency in all four L2 skills slightly higher than the stay abroad group. This was also reflected in their post-practicum scores, whereas the scores of the stay abroad group remained identical after their SA experience.

The second research question concerned possible differences in L2 grammar and speaking proficiency development among students undertaking their practicum abroad and those undertaking it at the local schools in Barcelona. Detailed results of the analyses are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2.
*L2 grammar development—at-home vs. stay abroad group*

| L2 proficiency | At-home T1 | At-home T2 | Stay abroad T1 | Stay abroad T2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar test score | 142.4 | 144.2 | 142.0 | 161.0 |

As can be observed in Table 2, the initial grammar test scores in both groups were almost identical. The mean score in the home stay group was 142.4 out of 200 and in the stay abroad group, 142. However, after the practicum, the stay broad group scored higher than the at-home group, receiving a mean score of 161. In regards to the comparison of scores, it may be noted that the at-home group made almost no progress. The difference in the mean scores between T1 and T2 was 2.2, whereas the stay abroad participants progressed substantially with 19 points difference in the mean scores.

As for L2 speaking development, the results presented in Table 3 clearly show that both groups received similar scores during the first data collection phase, just before the beginning of their practicum. However, after the practicum, the at-home group received lower scores (the difference in scores was 3.5 points) and the stay abroad group scored higher (the difference in scores was 5 points). Further analyses showed that the at-home group scored the same or lower in the measured aspects, whereas the stay abroad group got better scores in accuracy, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation. Interestingly, the greatest progress in L2 speaking development among sojourners was noted in accuracy (2.9 points difference).

Table 3.
*L2 speaking development—at-home vs. stay abroad group*

| L2 proficiency | At-home T1 | At-home T2 | Stay abroad T1 | Stay abroad T2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall L2 speaking score | 36.0 | 32.5 | 36.4 | 41.4 |
| Accuracy | 7.0 | 5.5 | 6.6 | 9.5 |
| Vocabulary | 7.0 | 5.5 | 6.6 | 7.9 |
| Communication | 8.0 | 7.5 | 8.3 | 8.3 |
| Fluency | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8.7 | 9.1 |
| Pronunciation | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6.2 | 6.6 |

The third research question concerned the possible influence of personality traits, language engagement, attitudes and satisfaction on L2 grammar and oral proficiency development. In order to answer this question, an analysis of the individual responses of all participants will be presented by focusing on high- and low-gainers in both groups under question. Importantly, there was only one student that failed to progress in the stay abroad group, and one that made some progress only as far as grammar is concerned. Thus, they were both assigned to the low-gainers category. All remaining students made some substantial progress in both L2 grammar and speaking. On the other hand, in the at-home group, there were no high-gainers that could be included in the analysis. The highest gain among participants of this group was 4 points in the grammar test and no gain in the speaking test was observed. Consequently, analysis of the stay abroad sample focused on both high and low-gainers, whereas the analysis of the at-home sample focused solely on low-gainers. Detailed results of the analyses are presented below in Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Table 4.
*High and low-gainers in the stay abroad group-test scores*

| Type of learner | Grammar test score (T1 & T2) | CEFRL level (T1 & T2) | Difference in points | Speaking test (T1 & T2) | Difference in points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High-gainer 1 | 156 & 196 | C1 & C2 | 40 | 47.5 & 50 | 2.5 |
| High-gainer 2 | 112 & 146 | B1 & B2 | 34 | 30 & 35 | 5 |
| Low-gainer 1 | 158 & 150 | C1 & C1 | –8 | 30 & 22.5 | –7.5 |
| Low-gainer 2 | 138 & 148 | B1 & C1 | 11 | 22.5 & 22.5 | 0 |

As can be noted from Table 4, there is no clear pattern in the level of proficiency among high and low-gainers in the stay abroad group. It can be seen that there is a student (high-gainer 1) whose L2 proficiency at onset is already high (C1), and still shows, despite the ceiling effect, the greatest progress among all participants. Even though her progress in the speaking test is not remarkable, she achieved the highest of all scores at T2. On the other hand, the second high-gainer's level of L2 proficiency was initially quite low (B1) but she managed to improve greatly in both L2 grammar and speaking. At the same time, among the low-gainers, there is a student whose initial L2 proficiency is quite high (C1) but fails to progress while abroad. The second low-gainer managed to improve slightly in grammar test but no such improvement was observed during the speaking test. Since these results are inconclusive, other aspects that could have an impact on L2 proficiency development while abroad were analyzed. Results of these analyses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.

*High and low-gainers in the stay abroad group—students profiles*

| Type of learner | Cultural empathy | Open-midedness | Emotional Intelligence | L1 engagement | L2 engagement | Attitudes and satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Max score | 40 | 40 | 210 | 130 | 130 | 5 |
| High-gainer 1 | 39 | 39 | 191 | 83 | 103 | 5 |
| High-gainer 2 | 39 | 38 | 188 | 100 | 112 | 5 |
| Low-gainer 1 | 35 | 37 | 168 | 105 | 68 | 2 |
| Low-gainer 2 | 37 | 33 | 163 | 104 | 98 | 1 |

From the personality profiles of both high and low-gainers in the study abroad group, it may be noted that the high gainers obtained somewhat higher scores on cultural empathy and open-mindedness variables and significantly higher ones on emotional intelligence. However, what differed in both groups was language engagement, attitudes towards their stay abroad as well as satisfaction towards their teaching practicum. As can be seen in Table 5, high gainers used their L2 to a greater extent in comparison to their L1 and had a positive attitude concerning their stay abroad and teaching practicum. On the contrary, the low-gainers used their L1 more often than their L2 and were not happy with their stay abroad and teaching practicum. After some further analyses and interviews, we found out that both students who were assigned to the low-gainer category lived together and did not socialize much with the target language users. They have also complained about their teaching practicum, suggesting that it did not meet their expectations. When it comes to the high-gainers, they were very happy with their stay abroad experience and reported using their L2 to a large degree, especially while engaging in long casual conversations and participating in organised social activities (clubs, sports, etc.).

As already noted, because of the fact that in the at-home group there were no high-gainers, we have decided to focus only on low-gainers. Consequently, Table 6 and Table 7 provide a detailed presentation of the scores as well as personality profiles of the low-gainers in this group.

Table 6.
*Low-gainers in the at-home group—test scores results*

| Type of learner | Grammar test score (1 & 2) | CEFRL level (1 & 2) | Difference in points | Speaking test (1 & 2) | Difference in points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Low-gainer 1 | 122 & 122 | B1 & B1 | 0 | 30 & 22.5 | –7.5 |
| Low-gainer 2 | 134 & 136 | B2 & B2 | 2 | 35 & 27.5 | –7.5 |

As may be noted, the at-home low-gainers had lower L2 proficiency levels in comparison to the low-gainers and high-gainers in the stay abroad group. At the same time, at-home students failed to make any progress or made a little progress in L2 grammar and regressed significantly on the L2 speaking test. While analyzing their personality profiles (Table 7), it can be observed that they obtained lower scores on cultural empathy and open-mindedness in comparison to participants in the stay abroad group. Moreover, their scores on emotional intelligence did not differ dramatically from the low-gainers in the stay abroad group. Another variable that was quite similar in both low-scorers' groups was language engagement. In all reported cases, low-scorers' L1 was used more frequently than the L2. However, in the stay abroad group, self-reported frequency of the L2 use was much higher. Interestingly, none of the low-gainers in either group reported engaging in long casual conversations or participating in organised social activities as did the high-gainers. On contrary, they have mentioned receptive skills, such as watching TV and/or listening to music.

Table 7.
*Low-gainers in the at-home group—students profiles*

| Type of learner | Cultural empathy | Open-mindedness | Emotional Intelligence | L1 engagement | L2 engagement | Attitudes and satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Max score | 40 | 40 | 210 | 130 | 130 | 5 |
| Low-gainer 1 | 30 | 31 | 170 | 89 | 55 | 5 |
| Low-gainer 2 | 36 | 30 | 167 | 102 | 45 | 5 |

## Discussion

The present study addressed three research questions. The first two questions considered possible differences in self-reported overall L2 proficiency, L2 proficiency in all four language skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening) as well as L2 grammar and speaking test results among stay abroad and at-home students. The results showed that the stay abroad group perceived both their overall L2 proficiency and their L2 proficiency in all mentioned language skills identically prior and after their sojourn. On the contrary, the at-home group reported higher self-perceived L2 proficiency during the second phase of the data collection (i.e., after completing their practicum) but only when it came to separate L2 skills. What is even more surprising is the fact that objective L2 grammar and speaking test results showed something quite contradictory. According to mentioned results, almost all members of the stay abroad group made substantial progress in both L2 grammar and speaking development. Conversely, the at-home students showed some regress in their scores and there were no high-gainers in that group (the only reported gain was 4 points in a grammar test and no gain in the speaking test). It is very difficult to explain these results, however, it could be speculated that the stay abroad group did not report any progress in their self-perceived L2 proficiency after their sojourn due to having faced some difficulties in communication in the foreign language while abroad. The very act of undertaking their practicum at schools where their students were native speakers of English could also be somewhat intimidating at first and consequently influence their self-reports. On the contrary, the at-home group was not confronted with the need to communicate in their L2 on an everyday basis and during their practicum they would most typically teach English to L1 speakers of Spanish and not to students whose L1 is English. These factors might also pertain to the perceptions of higher L2 proficiency development reflected in their self-reports.

The results of our study also showed that the stay abroad group made greater L2 gains than students doing their practicum at home, which is in line with some previous studies (Freed, 1995; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Vande Berg et al., 2009). It could be speculated that the lack of university classes as well as constant contact with learners at low proficiency level might be somewhat detrimental to the participants' proficiency level. At the same time, it is important to note that there are some discrepancies between self-reports and more objective test results.

Addressing the last research question, which concerned a possible link between personality traits, language engagement, attitudes/satisfaction and L2 grammar and oral proficiency development, data analyses showed that the variables that clearly differentiated high-gainers from no-gainers or low-gainers were language engagement factor, satisfaction and attitudes. The participants who were assigned to the high-gainers group reported more frequent use of their L2 than their L1 as well as establishing a larger social network that consisted of target language users. They also reported engaging in long casual conversations and participating in organized social activities, which was never the case among low-gainers. We can speculate that negative attitudes and dissatisfaction with the practicum experience influenced their choice in refraining from any extra contact with target language users and communicating mostly in their L1, which was also reflected in their very limited L2 progress. These results are in line with previous studies that showed that students who were able to establish a close relationship with target language speakers were reported to be high language gainers (Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014; Dewey, 2008; Dewey, Belnap, & Hilstrom, 2013).

In the case of the personality profiles of the high and low-gainers in our study it could be noted that their scores differed minimally in cultural-empathy and open-mindedness but the discrepancies in their scores on emotional intelligence were much larger. At the same time, scores of the low-gainers in the at-home group were much lower than the ones of the low-gainer sojourners. Therefore, it could be speculated that personality might be a mediating variable influencing both cultural adjustment, development of the social network and intensity of the L2 use while abroad. Some previous studies (Arvidsson et al., 2018; Basow & Gaugler, 2017; Harrison & Voelker, 2008; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2015; Ożańska-Ponikwia & Dewaele, 2012; Savicki et al., 2004) have already shown that personality and emotional intelligence might play a role when it comes to adaptation in the host culture as well as frequency of the L2 use. Consequently, we might speculate that it underpins the frequency of the L2 use while abroad, which leads to establishing larger social networks, higher cultural adaptation and greater satisfaction from the SA experience as well as higher L2 gains.

## Limitations of the Study

This paper reports a small-scale study, and as such, it had its limitations. First of all, only 11 students participated in this first stage of the research, since the group of students available was reduced. Further research should be conducted with a larger number of participants, so that more robust claims can be made. Another limitation is connected with the short amount of time that participants spent abroad (i.e., 3 months). Ideally, longer periods of SA should be investigated. Moreover, while some students sojourned in an English speaking country, others spent their time abroad in Finland, a country where English is widely used, but as a Foreign Language.

## Conclusions

The present contribution focused on various factors that might contribute to the development of the L2 grammar and speaking proficiency in different context of the L2 use (i.e., immersive and non-immersive setting). While the results of this small scale case study showed that indeed the stay abroad group was the only one that showed improvement in both measured aspects, it also highlighted the fact that some students within that group failed to make any progress. It could be speculated that in the case of the researched informants, their progress in L2 grammar and speaking could be assigned mostly to the amount and quality of the language input outside of the classroom setting. Moreover, some further analyses showed that the relationship between attitude, language engagement, and development of social networks might be of crucial importance, as it influences exposure to the target language and consequently L2 proficiency development while abroad. At the same time, it is important to mention that the personality profiles of the informants might also play an important role. They may act as the variable moderating the whole process and possibly influencing social network development, frequency of the L2 use, cultural adaptation, and satisfaction with the sojourn.

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**Liliana Piasecka**
Opole University, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3474-3235

# Foreign Language Students' Perceptions of Their Identity

*Learning another language is like becoming another person.*
Haruki Murakami

Abstract

Foreign language learning involves cognitive, affective, and social functioning of the persons involved in this experience. As a social practice, it is also related to the learners' perceptions of their identity, specifically to their language identity which refers to the relationship between one's sense of self and the language used to communicate. This implies that using a system of communication, the speaker develops a new sense of self that remains in a dynamic relation with other senses of self, based on (an)other language(s) the person knows.

Language learners' identity is no longer defined as fixed and stable but as "complex, contradictory and multifaceted" (Norton, 1997, p. 419). It is dynamic because learners enter into various discourses and negotiate their position within different communities of practice. Language both shapes and is shaped by identity of its users.

This article discusses how students of English as a foreign language perceive the role of this language in their construction of selves/identity. First, postmodern conceptualisations of identity and identity categories are presented along with their relevance to the field of Second Language Acquisition. Second, selected empirical studies pertaining to adult immigrant contexts, foreign language contexts, and study abroad contexts are briefly reported. Then the results of an empirical study on the students' of English ($n$ = 83) perceptions of their identity in the context of foreign language learning are introduced. The study revealed that most of the participants realise complex relations between language learning and their identity and are aware of the effects that studying English (as well as other foreign languages) has on them. English gave them new possibilities in life, allowed them to communicate with people worldwide and make friends with them. They have new and interesting prospects for the future. It affected their personality by making them more open-minded and tolerant of otherness. The knowledge of English gives the students power, prestige, and opportunities to live and work in a changing world of complex social relations.

*Keywords*: foreign language learning, postmodern identity, investment, study abroad

## Introduction

Interest in identity in the context of second language learning and teaching has been gathering momentum since Firth and Wagner (1997) observed that second language acquisition (SLA) research should focus not only on cognitive language processes but it should also view language in a social and contextual perspective, thus broadening the traditional approach to SLA. They were sceptical about perceiving language users as native or non-native speakers, and made a point that native and non-native speakers have many identities, which is "a nonissue in SLA" (p. 292). Responding to their dissatisfaction with the dominant perspectives in SLA, Gass (1998) argued that the relevance of identity for language learning needs to be documented. Indeed, this has been done. First, research on identity puts the language learner in a broad social context. Second, power relations in this context have an impact on language learners' variable contact with target language communities. Third, there is a mutual relationship between the construction of individual identity, social practices, and resources which all may positively affect language learning. Fourth, what drives individuals to learn a language is not only motivation but also commitment to learning that has been termed investment. And finally, learners may imagine or desire communities to which they would like to belong so they have a more varied range of identities in the future (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2013, Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Block (2007b) observes that the interest in identity and SLA resulted from the realisation that focusing on language and cognition was not sufficient to understand complex relations between second language learning and social ramifications in which it was anchored. This, in turn, has been connected with teaching language for communication, which requires interaction, and interaction itself requires participation in various social exchanges embedded in diverse sociocultural contexts. Moreover, growth in global mobility due to economic upheavals towards the 1980s made individuals change places and styles of living, which inevitably lead to questions concerning their identity. The development in information technology made multimodal communication possible, easy, and cheap, and, what is more, it also allows the individuals to assume virtual identities that may depart from their real life identities (Kramsch, 2013). Such sociopolitical and socioeconomic phenomena as globalization, consumerism, reconstruction of postcolonial and postcommunist national identities, or transnational migrations caused by wars, among others, imply complex relations between languages and identities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004).

Research on identity and SLA has bloomed since the 1990s and interesting relationships between identity and language learning processes have been identified (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

The paper focuses on the current understanding of identity that is founded on postmodernist thinking and has been accepted by many language and identity researchers. Then major research areas pertaining to identity issues are discussed. Finally, an empirical study on identity in the context of foreign language learning and use is presented and discussed.

## Identity in SLA Research

Current approaches to language and identity in SLA are deeply rooted in poststructuralist theories of identity and associated with the work of Bakhtin, Bourdieu, Foucault, and Weedon. Christine Weedon (1997), for example, sees the value of language practices in positions associated with individual and group identity. Concerned with subjectivity, Weedon observes that language is the site where it is constructed. She understands subjectivity as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relations to the world" (1997, p. 28). The relations to the world are crucial because they shape individuals and are shaped by them (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Individuals are allowed (or not allowed) to participate in discourse, in dialogic encounters with others in which they create their meanings in a specific social context although they may be limited by the fact of using language as a tool that had been used before (Bakhtin, 1981). Participation in activities involving language use conditions the emergence of dynamic language knowledge or competence (Hall et al., 2006).

Bourdieu (1977) argues that language symbolically represents the relationship between identity and power since language users are placed in a larger social network, and the perception of their utterances depends on their place in this network, in the social context as "speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it" (p. 652). The speakers' position in the social context may empower or marginalize them but since they need "not only to be understood, but to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (Norton, 2006, p. 503), they have to struggle for the right to speak. In addition, the language user's perception of the world and their activity in it are shaped by what they have lived through so far. Since they have experienced the world based on inequality and dominance, different power relations will be reflected in their interpersonal interactions with others (Menard-Warwick, 2005).

Relevant to the present discussion is Bourdieu's (1991) concept of cultural and symbolic capital. Cultural capital refers to "knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications," while symbolic capital refers to "prestige or honor" (1991, p. 14). These are complemented by linguistic capital that involves language varieties valued by a given society. These forms of capital are unequally distributed in a society and therefore tensions arise in the situation when one variety, for example the standard language which is the language of education, competes with the learnes' language used locally. Linguistic capital, that is the knowledge of the standard or official language, may be insufficient to let the language users (e.g., immigrants) access the cultural and symbolic capital and thus to build power relations in the community, to have the voice, the right to speak, to hear, and to be heard. Also Foucault's (1984) concern with social relations that are regulated mostly by language—the power itself—has been included into theories focused on language and identity (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Taking the tenets of postructuralism into consideration, identity in SLA context may be defined as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 4). Norton emphasises that future is "central to the lives of many language learners, and is integral to an understanding of both identity and investment" (Norton, 2013, p. 4).

The idea of "investment" derives from Bourdieu's writing and refers to the learner's desire or the lack thereof, to engage in social practices of the target language community to get access to symbolic capital that will increase their cultural capital and social power. In other words, commitment to learning the target language is necessary if the learner is to engage in the practices of the largest language community and thus to develop their linguistic capital (Norton, 2013).

## Identity Categories

Postmodern theories have placed identity within a broad sociocultural and sociohistoric context. While modern conceptions of identity defined it as fixed and homogeneous, from the postmodern perspective it is fragmented, contested, complex, multifaceted, and dynamic (Norton 1997; Block 2007a), "fluid, context-dependent and context-producing, in particular historical and cultural circumstances" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 419). Identity is complex because it operates in many dimensions of human life such as ethnicity, race, nationality, migrant status, gender, social class, and language.

Ethnic identity is characteristic of cultural groups with a common history, descent, beliefs, and practices, language, and religious beliefs. It is "a form of collective identity" (Puri, 2004, p. 174) based on cultural ties. Similarly, national identity is also based on shared history, descent, belief system, practices, language, and religion. However, these are associated with a nation state, and not with a cultural group. Racial identity, in turn, refers to biological or genetic make-up, that is, racial phenotype.

Migrant identity refers to the identity of people who left their home countries and moved to other countries where they settled. It includes classical immigrants who settled in the new country and never considered returning to their old country, but also expatriates who voluntarily decide to live abroad, however, they may return to their home country whenever they want. There are also transmigrants who share ethnic, religious, or national identities or geographical places of origin, and who have settled in a new country but decided to keep economic and cultural ties with their homeland, creating formal and informal networks that create "transnational social spaces" (Block, 2007a, p. 33). In contrast to classical immigrants, transmigrants' cultural and personal loyalties are not bound with the new country. Thus, migrant identity refers to whether migrants decide to live in a new country as classical migrants, expatriates, or transmigrants.

Gender identity is no longer conceived of as biologically determined and stable, but as socially constructed and dynamic (e.g., Bulter's idea of gender as performativity, 1999). Gender identity, then, is based on the "nature of conformity to socially constructed notions of feminities and masculinities, as well as orientations to sexuality and social activity" (Block, 2007a, p. 43).

The concept of social class identity has also been revised due to changing conditions of life. It was traditionally associated with "wealth, occupation, education and symbolic behaviour (e.g., language, clothing, pastimes)" (Block, 2007a, p. 37). It is now represented by economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital, the concepts deriving from Bourdieu's theories. In addition, social classes were traditionally divided into upper, middle, and working class (the division based on occupation). However, changes in economy at the end of the twentieth century have altered working conditions both for manual workers and for university professors. According to Reich (1991), three new classes related to occupation can be identified, that is, in-person servers, routine producers, and symbolic analysts. The division is based on the type of work and the presence of consumers of this work. Thus, in-person servers, for example teachers, secretaries, bus drivers, or hairdressers, perform repetitive tasks in the presence of the consumers of their work. Routine producers, that is, blue- and white-collar workers, are also involved in repetitive tasks, but they perform them in the absence of the consumers of their work. Symbolic analysts control the other two classes, they identify and solve problems. They are highly skilled and very well educated and they become more and more a part of an international "socioeconomic and intellectual elite" (Block, 2007a, p. 39).

Eventually, there is language identity. It is defined as "the assumed and/or attributed relationship between one's sense of self and a means of communication which might be known as language (e.g., English) a dialect (Geordie) or a sociolect (e.g., football-speak)" (Block, 2007a, p. 40). This relationship may take three forms, that is, language expertise, language affiliation, and language inheritance (Rampton, 1990, in Block, 2007a). Expertise concerns proficiency in the use of a means of communication that allows the speaker to be accepted by other speakers of this variety of language. Affiliation is related to attitudes and feelings about a given form of communication whereas inheritance is about being born into a family or a community that uses a given form of communication.

In addition, language identity may also be interpreted as "acts of identity," which means that all utterances simultaneously point to the speaker's identity and to its ethnic, national, gender, and social class dimensions. In other words, producing an utterance, the speakers disclose other aspects of their identity.

Language identity is about relationship to language and speech communities as well. Language communities adhere to standard and normative forms whereas speech communities are characterized by the actual use of language. It involves communication that is not limited to linguistic means such as accent, pronunciation, morphological, syntactic, and lexical choices. Verbal communication is supported by other multisensory non-verbal elements, for example by hairstyle, clothes that one is wearing, or facial expressions (Block 2007a).

Identity is also related to audibility, both in the first and in the second language. It derives from the right accent and social and cultural capital that allow the speaker to be accepted as a member of a community of practice. This aspect of language identity is particularly relevant to second language acquisition contexts that characterize immigrant populations around the world (Piasecka, 2012).

The above considerations do imply that identity is complex and operates on many levels that interact dynamically. As far as language identity is concerned, it indicates other dimensions of identity. When people use or learn to use more than one language, other identities are performed. Although some aspects of their identity remain stable, for example: race, gender (though this may be contested) or social class, others, for example, language or migrant identities change as a result of using another language. To reiterate, language identity is about the relationship between one's sense of self and the language used to communicate. This implies that using a system of communication, the speaker develops a new sense of self that remains in a dynamic relation with other senses of self, based on (an)other language(s) the person knows. And this is one of the reasons for using the quotation opening this article.

# Second Language Identities

Second language identities can be analysed in three contexts, that is, adult immigrant contexts, foreign language contexts, and study abroad contexts (Block, 2007a). Selected empirical studies pertaining to these three contexts are briefly reported in the following sections.

## Adult Immigrant Contexts

As far as adult immigrant language learners are concerned, large scale studies were conducted in Europe, the U.S., and Canada. European Science Foundation carried out a longitudinal study that aimed to analyse fossilized interlanguages along with processes and factors involved in second language acquisition. The study was carried out in five countries over the period of five years, and included five target languages, six mother tongues and ten interlanguages (Perdue, 1984, in Norton, 2013). The researchers also wanted to find out how immigrants interact with target language speakers in a broader sociopolitical context. This issue is particularly relevant to the present discussion as interaction is indispensable for the development of communicative competence. Successful communication between native and non-native speakers of the language depends on the negotiation of meaning which brings about mutual understanding and supports language learning. The findings show that adult immigrants are often discriminated and therefore they have a limited access to social interaction. When they interact, they struggle to understand native speakers though native speakers are not concerned whether the learners understand. Immigrants learn to communicate in difficult sociocultural contexts, with limited L2 proficiency and assymetrical power relations (Bremer et al, 1993, 1996, in Norton, 2013).

Hispanic immigrant women from Rockhill's study (1987a, 1987b) on literacy were very ashamed about not knowing English and not being able to communicate in this language efficiently. They blamed themselves for not making enough progress although they lived in difficult social and material conditions and they were primarily concerned about making the lives of their children and husbands successful. Their needs such as education and literacy in English were of secondary importance. Norton (2013) argues that their learning, exposure to, and opportunities to practice English were shaped mostly by their identities as women.

Norton (2013) carried out a case study of five immigrant women in Canada to "develop an enhanced understanding of the relationship between identity and language learning" (p. 86). The women were good language learners as evidenced by the fact that they participated in a diary study. Yet, they felt marginalized because they were immigrants and this marginalization was a cause of problems and difficulties when they were communicating with target language speakers. One of women wrote "I feel comfortable using English with people I know and have confidence with" (Norton, 2013, p. 95). Moreover, these women had problems with finding jobs matching their qualifications, which made their access to the cultural, symbolic, and linguistic resources of the target community more difficult.

The selected studies briefly discussed above show that adult immigrants invest and are motivated to learn the target language but their learning is shaped and shapes complex social, professional, and cultural relations. Living in a new country entails challenges to their identity constructed by their native languages. Often, the new socio-economic context changes class membership so in the new country the immigrants enter a social class that is lower when compared to their native country social class. In addition, some immigrants working in a new social context have to cope with the duties imposed by the fact that they are responsible for maintaining home and family life, which—along with a low level of education—limits their participation in L2 courses (Goldstein, 1996) and thus has an impact on their emerging new subject positions.

**Study Abroad Contexts**

American colleges and universities offer students of foreign languages an opportunity to study abroad for a semester or a year. Although study abroad is challenging in terms of language knowledge and cultural differences, it allows the students to practise their language skills in real life conditions and thus to develop their communicative competence. However, many other issues emerge with respect to this form of study. Kinginger (2009) points to the learner's identities, desires, and motives along with a wide range of encounters which involve communication and thus provide opportunities for language learning. Two studies reported below show how these encounters may differ.

Analysing the diaries of American students studying Russian in Russia, and the scores they received on Oral Proficiency Interview, Polanyi (1995) found gender differences in listening and speaking skills scores. Young males improved more than young females after the study abroad period. The researcher explains this difference by the behaviours of Russian males who expect some kind of sexual favours from their foreign female interlocutors, which discourages the latter from interacting with them and makes them feel uneasy about the sexual overtones in the interactions.

The purpose of Kinginger's (2004) study was to present the history of a foreign language learner and to show how foreign language learning experience reconstructs identity. She describes Alice, an American learner of French, who went to France to study the language and culture to become more refined. For her, France was romantic, full of monuments of the past, inhabited by refined and elegant people. The France she encountered was far from her idealised picture and she had to revise her image of the country. She also invested a lot of time and energy to establish informal interpersonal relations with French students and, due to her persistence, not only did she develop her knowledge of French, but she became more goal-oriented, she built social relations, and became more interested in "sophisticated topics" (e.g., politics) and, having completed college education, she changed her social class.

In Europe, the international student exchange program called Erasmus+ allows many young people to study abroad to improve language skills, to gain self-confidence and independence, and to discover and learn about a new culture (http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/students_en). *The Erasmus impact study* (2014) demonstrates that studying abroad has positive effects on employment opportunities of the program participants due to, among others, soft skills developed during their time abroad. It also refers to Europeanisation and internationalisation of students' identity. Sigalas (2010) wanted to find out whether study abroad within the Erasmus program and interpersonal contacts established during the stay promote a European identity. It appeared that although program participants socialized with other Europeans, their contacts with host country students were limited and their European identity was not strengthened. On the other hand, increased socializing with Europeans had a positive average influence on European identity.

American students feel uneasy about heterosexual relations abroad, but this is not a problem for Erasmus students abroad. They are more experienced travellers who are more aware of what they may expect when studying. They do not exhibit an enhanced national identity, which was observed in American students abroad. Block (2007a) explains that the difference may stem from the fact that European students have more experience traveling and staying abroad, whereas Americans are "relatively unseasoned and even naïve travelers on their first—and quite likely last-ever—extensive sojourn outside the US" (p. 180).

## Foreign Language Learning Contexts

Studies concerning identity and foreign language learning are less numerous than the ones addressing adult immigrant and study abroad contexts and they focus rather on subject positions related to formal educational settings (Block, 2007b). Lantolf and Genung's (2003) study, for example, reports the foreign language learning experience of a person (actually, it was Genung, PG) who enrolled in the course of Mandarin and was not satisfied with the manner in which the langauge was taught, nor with the way the teachers reprimanded the students for not being properly prepared for class, thus humiliating them and creating a hostile classroom atmosphere. What mattered in the course were good grades but not learning how to use the language, so PG, though frustrated, worked to achieve this goal, which was in contrast to her understanding of what is involved in language learning.

McMahill (1997) reports how Japanese women participating in "grassroots feminist English classes" (p. 612) worked on their subject positions. The course was focused both on language development and discussions of such problems as discrimination on the job market, women rights, ethnic identity, and personal histories of the participants. By talking about these problems through the medium of English, the women moved from the position of language learners to the position of those who are concerned about the important issues in their lives.

Piasecka (2012) designed a study to find out whether Polish students of English at the tertiary level realise the possible influence of this language on their sense of self and on their construction of identity. The study involved 39 participants, eight from a foreign languages teacher training college, 19 undergraduate second year university students of English and 12 graduate university students of English. They wrote how learning and studying English at tertiary education institutions influenced who they are. The results show that studying English affects the participants' identity by enhancing their self-confidence, broadening their minds and providing them with greater job opportunities. Cross-cultural communication allows them to know other people, to develop knowledge of languages and of other cultures, which results in a greater openness to otherness and supports tolerance. They realise they can stay and work abroad, finding an alternative to what they can do in their home country. Because of the knowledge of a foreign language, they also have access to various sources of information, which makes them more informed and critical about various opinions and viewpoints. Their language identity appeared dynamic and multifaceted. The knowledge of English gives the students power, prestige, and opportunities to live and work in the globalized world.

A similar study, which may be regarded as an extension of the 2012 study, was carried out in 2018 with a purpose to investigate identity issues in the context of studying English. It is reported in the following section.

## How Foreign Language Students Perceive Their Identity—The Study

The aim of the study was to find out how students of English perceive the role of this language in their construction of selves/identity. Since increasing numbers of international students decide to study at Polish universities, there was an opportunity to include them in the study and collect their opinions and ideas about the impact of foreign language learning on their sense of self. Therefore, the research questions formulated for the purpose of the study are:

Research Question 1: Does learning English (and other foreign languages) influence the learners' identity?

Research Question 2: If it does, what is this influence?

Altogether, 83 students participated in the study. There were 60 undergraduate (BA) university students of English Philology (46 females, including three Ukraininan students, and 14 males). The youngest student in this group was 17, the oldest—21. They knew from two to six languages. Eight graduate university students of English Philology (seven females, one male) were between 22 and 25 years old (mean 23.25 years) and they knew from two to four foreign languages. Ten Erasmus students, undergraduate and graduate level, English Philology (seven females, three males) came from Turkey, Greece, and Spain, they were between 19 and 22 years old and they knew two or three languages. Five doctoral students were enrolled in the English Philology Applied Linguistics program (four females, one male), and their age varied (from 24 to over 40). Thus, second language identities involved two contexts, that is, study abroad contexts (Erasmus+ students and Ukrainian students) and foreign language contexts (Polish students of English Philology; cf. Block, 2007a). It has to be taken in account, however, that for all the participants English was a foreign language.

The participants were asked to answer the following questions in writing: *How has the knowledge of English (and other foreign languages) influenced the sense of who you are? Your identity? Your style of living? Your activities in the present? Your prospects for the future?* They wrote the answers to the question during classes held by the researcher. Polish students could write in the language they felt most confident with (Polish or English) but foreign students did not have the choice—they had to write in English because the researcher did not know their native languages. They were advised to use between 150–200 words. When the texts were collected, it appeared that all were written in English.

The texts were then analysed to identify the effects of L2 learning on the students' selves. The researcher read all the papers, paying attention to lexical phrases used to decribe the influences (or the lack thereof), made a list of the influences described by the participants and counted the frequency of individual occurrences. This allowed the researcher to create thematic categories. For example, when the answers were “Thanks to English I’m learning about other cultures” (1), or “Knowledge of English affects us in a good way, we understand other people better, and also their culture” (2), or “ I’m open-minded to other cultures” (3), they were assigned to the category “Developing knowledge and understanding of other cultures,” except example (2) which also shows the positive impact of the knowledge of a foreign language on one’s identity. Eventually, the participants’ opinions were grouped into nine categories and rank ordered. In addition, the results were analysed according to the level of studies and by the students’ country of origin (Erasmus+ students). Also, the most representative opinions related to the participants’ perceptions of self were selected and they are presented in the results section.

## Results

Fourteen participants (16.9 per cent) declared that learning English had no effect on their sense of self although they noted positive effects of learning English on many aspects of their life. Sixty-nine participants wrote that learning English gave them new possibilities in life, allowed them to communicate with people worldwide and make friends with them. It also gave them new and interesting prospects for the future.

The effects of learning English on the participants’ perceptions of their identity (categories) are listed below. The numbers in the parentheses show the frequency of the views for each category, found in the data:

– Ability to communicate with speakers of other languages, both at home and abroad (40).
– Greater job opportunities and finding a way of life (becoming a teacher/ interpreter/ translator or any other profession involving the proficient use of English; possibility to live and work abroad) (35).
– Entertainment—watching films, listening to songs, playing online games—also an opportunity to learn and understand the language (21).
– Enhanced self-confidence, especially underscored by females (21).
– Travel (15).
– Making friends with foreigners because of the ability to communicate in English (12).
– Developing knowledge and understanding of other cultures (11).
– Choice of studies (9).
– Openness to otherness (5).

In the majority of cases the participants showed awareness about the effects that studying English (as well as other foreign languages) has on them. Excerpts from some texts are given in what follows. The texts appear as they were written by the participants. The first section presents texts that highlight connections between language and identity (A), whereas the second section focuses on texts that do not find any connection between language and identity (B). All the opinions have been presented in the original.

A. English has influenced my identity.
*The knowledge of English influenced me a lot. Thanks to English I've become more confident and open to people ... I don't have language barriers any more. ... It shapes me.... I feel clever and intelligent* (a 20-years-old undergraduate female student).

*It helped me understand the complexity of the world, that I am a part of the global society. Also, that people living far away are not so distant if you know their language. ... I don't want to stop developing my language abilities, I've started learning Spanish but in the future I want to learn French and Japanese. ... So the knowledge of foreign languages has had a great impact on my life and my identity* (a 19-years-old undergraduate male student).

*In my opinion, every experience affects us in a good way and the knowledge of English too. It is said that every language means one human being so how many languages we learn we can develop our characteristics. ... We can understand other people better, ... their culture. ... We can be more developed and open-minded* (a 22-years-old Erasmus+ female student from Turkey).

*The knowledge of English opened me a lot of doors to work and learn* (a 21-years-old Erasmus+ female student from Spain).

*I believe the knowledge of English influenced me to a great extent in many areas of my life. ... English shaped my identity as I believe that by learning a language you become more open to other cultures and beliefs* (a 19-years-old Erasmus+ male student from Greece).

*The knowledge of English allowed me to interact with people from different countries and with different backgrounds. This connection made me understand and experience things I wouldn't be able to do if I didn't know the language. For example, the integration with other students during my Erasmus+ experience* (a 24-years-old graduate female student).

*Learning English has influenced my identity immensely. My life has been revolving around the English language since my adolescence. ... I must admit that without learning English I would not do what I am doing now* *and I would not be the person that I am now. When abroad I do not feel ashamed or confused as I know I have no problems in communication with the locals. ... The fact that I have two Englishmen in my closest family also forced me to improve my English* (a PhD female student).

B. No connection between English and identity.
*I think that knowledge of English didn't influence me that much. Maybe only in that I can watch films in English, I can communicate with people who know English and that it helped me in chosing the thing I want to study* (a 19-years-old undergraduate female student).

*There wasn't much influence in the sense of my life just because I know English. I didn't change my style of living or activities. It may influence my prospects for the future because I hope and I want to make money from it* (a 19-years-old undergraduate male student).

*Having the knowledge of English affects my life in positive way. Actually I am happy while I am speaking because speaking English was my dream and I am living this dream. ... To be honest, it doesn't change my identity because my daily life is nearly same. When I saw people who need help, I was helping* (a 22-years-old Erasmus+ male student from Turkey).

*The knowledge of English and other languages does not influence the sense of who I am. However, it allows me to read English texts so I don't have to look for translations* (a 23-years-old graduate male student).

## Discussion

The students' perceptions of their identity vis á vis foreign language learning and use can be discussed from the social point of view, from the point of view of cultural knowledge as well as from the point of view of personal growth. Most of the participants are aware of the mutual relationship between language and identity and of the crucial role of language with respect to the positions they can assume in various spheres of life (Research Question 1). These relations vary and affect many aspects of the participants' life and functioning (Research Question 2). The participants value social bonds, which is why they underscore the importance of communication with foreigners both at home and abroad. They also want to make friends with foreigners. The ability to communicate in a foreign language empowers them—they can have an interesting job at home but they can also work abroad. By communicating, they develop interpersonal relations with speakers of other languages, thus increasing their cultural capital which allows them to understand their relationship to the world.

They decided to study English at the university because they know English. Therefore they write that their future is also related to English—they realize their employment opportunities both at home and abroad increase due to the fact that they know this language. In the light of the postmodern theories of identity it may be observed that they develop their subjectivity understood as participation in a variety of activities that allow them to interact with other users of the language (Norton, 2013). This participation is possible since they have accumulated linguistic capital that gives them access to symbolic and cultural capital. The knowledge of English allows access to different ways of entertainment which is also a way to knowledge because both language use and language growth are involved.

The participants also refer to experiencing culture(s) connected with foreign languages they learn. This has an impact not only on their knowledge but also on their personality. They declare that by learning a foreign language and experiencing its culture/s, they become more open and tolerant to otherness and difference, they feel clever and intelligent. They are not ashamed or confused about not being able to communicate with foreigners. Communicating in a foreign language builds their self-confidence. In consequence, they can cope with new and challenging situations. Interestingly, the enhanced understanding and contact with (an)other language(s) and its/their cultures is more frequently voiced by Erasmus and Ukrainian students than by Poles. The metaphor of doors used by one of the foreign students implies that learning a foreign language opens new possibilities and gives learners access to knowledge and other non-material resources.

The case of students who declare that learning and using English has had no impact on their sense of self is quite intriguing. As the excerpts from their texts show, they realise that the knowledge of English lets them perform many activities that would not be possible if they had not known the language. They can watch films in English, communicate in English, be a student of English, they can read texts in English and have good job prospects in the future. Yet, they do not feel their identity has been influenced by the knowledge of English. Such reasoning may have resulted from their idea of identity as the core, the essence of who they are, probably static and impervious to changes. This may be a kind of ego, a kind of "me" which makes a person unique regardless of languages they speak. But it is only a speculation.

Gender differences were found in the data. Females were more concerned about their personality and thus pointed to the openness, tolerance, and the increase of self-confidence as the effects of using a foreign language. Males, on the other hand, did not seem to care that much about these influences. Instead, they focused more on job prospects.

During the analysis it also appeared that perceptions of self are related to age, nationality, and student status. Undergraduate first year Polish students, young and enthusiastic, are more communicatively oriented, which suggests that social relations are important for them. This should not be surprising when the social context is taken into account. At the time of data collection they had been students for half a year and in the process of understanding what is involved in this position. They were constructing their student identity on the basis of their own beliefs and attitude to life, but they also relied on observations, conversations, and discussions with others.

Graduate students, older, more experienced and aware of their social positioning as students, realise that communication is important but they are also concerned about their future careers and self-confidence. In near future they will graduate from the university and enter the job market where skills and self-confidence are valued assets.

Erasmus+ students are interested mostly in discovering and understanding other cultures. They usually keep the company of their compatriots and other Erasmus+ students (cf. Sigalas, 2010) but they rely on their Polish contacts when such problems as an appointment with a doctor or administrative matters have to be handled.

Doctoral students—older than the other groups, most experienced, qualified and employed in various places—are more reflective. Few remember the communist days in Poland when there was a shortage of goods and a very limited access to sources of information other than the communist media. All acknowledge that English influenced them immensely—it allowed them to perceive life from different perspectives and let them find a place in the society.

Certain changes may be identified when the results of this study are compared with Piasecka's 2012 study. Both studies were carried out in the university context, both addressed identity issues of foreign language students but—which is self-evident—the participants were different. In both studies the participants highlight the importance of knowing a foreign language for relations with others (communication, getting to know others, being a student) and personality development (enhanced self-confidence, openness, tolerance of otherness, job opportunities). However, there are differences with respect to knowledge. In the current study the participants point to the knowledge of other cultures but do not imply that the knowledge of a foreign language allows them to better understand their own culture and language. Neither do they write about access to information but they point out to sources of entertainment. Such a change may be due to the omnipresence of the Internet along with easy access to it through mobile devices, for example. The participants might have become so used to this manner of obtaining information that they perceive it as something natural and self-evident.

Definitely, the context in which this study was conducted differs from the studies on immigrant adult identities in that the participants do not experience social unequality, marginalization or loss of social position because of the insufficient knowledge of the language though they may experience these but for other reasons, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Erasmus+ and other foreign students seem to enjoy studying abroad. They stay abroad for a semester or two, and then they return to their home universities to complete their education. Although they may have problems concerning accommodation, health care or insufficient understanding of local traditions, they can always rely on the help and assistance of local students.

According to Norton (2013), identity is about how people understand their relationship to the world along with their possibilities for the future. Identity is also about constructing these relations. The participants of the study are aware of what is involved in being a foreign language student, what they can gain and what they can do in the future. As proficient foreign language users, they have a wide range of possibilities concerning their present activities and future employment. Through interactions with others by the medium of English they construct their identities of open-mindedness, tolerance, and understanding of other cultures.

## Conclusion

Most research on identity and language learning takes place in adult immigrant contexts (e.g., Norton, 2013; Perdue, 1984; Rockhill, 1987a, 1987b) but some researchers are also concerned about study abroad contexts (e.g., Kingringer, 2004; Polanyi, 1995; Sigalas, 2010). Although foreign language learning has not been a hot issue in identity research, nevertheless, it also has effects on learners' perceptions of their identity. Foreign language learning usually takes place in formal educational settings in which foreign languages have the status of compulsory school subjects and the languages learned are not the means of communication of the society. Yet, they may be used to communicate with foreigners met in the streets or in the social media. Moreover, schools are the sites where the negotiation of identity occurs daily, especially in adolescence.

Any language a person speaks has some effects on their identity. Learning a new language at school is like accumulating cultural and symbolic capital that is necessary in developing one's understanding of the world and oneself. It is an investment into one's present and future (Norton, 2013). The participants of the study reported in this paper realise that the knowledge of English gives them power, prestige, and opportunities to live and work in a changing world of complex social relations. To understand others, they need to be open-minded and tolerant. The participants indicated that their open-mindedness and tolerance increased as a consequence of learning English. Thus, their identity is dynamic and shaped by what they do.

As regards the participants who claim that their identity was not affected by learning a foreign language, the perception of their language identity is in contrast to the activities they perform through the medium of English. Possibly, for them identity is fixed, coherent, and stable, unaffected by what they do, that is, their performativity.

Postmodern identity is deeply rooted in a range of social practices of individuals. Since these practices vary, the individuals take different roles in these practices, they use language in various interactions, they occupy different positions in discourse. On the one hand, their language identities are dynamic and multilayered, on the other, they also include fixed, essential elements relating to cultural and biological characteristics (Bucholtz, 2003).

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**Łukasz Matusz**
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2810-5798
**Anna Maria Rakowska**
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3237-1781

# Self-reported Difficulties in Learning English as a Second Language for Third-age Students in Poland

Abstract

The problem of teaching English to third-age students is among the issues in ELT which have gained increasing attention and interest in recent years. The aim of this paper is to identify difficulties in learning English as a foreign language reported by students taking part in language courses at the Universities of the Third Age in Poland. The research is based on the questionnaire distributed among the group of 70 third-age students of English. The results show that the problems the learners report are cantered around their age- and health-related conditions, as well as their general attitudes concerning foreign language learning. It is hoped that the present study will constitute a minor contribution to the study of learning needs and expectations of senior students in Poland.

*Keywords*: ELT, language acquisition, third-age students, learning difficulties

## Introduction

The problem of teaching English to third-age students is among the issues in ELT which have gained increasing attention and interest in recent years. Until quite recently, senior students in many respects were at a considerable disadvantage with regards to developing their language skills. Foreign language schools and other educational institutions did not use to offer a lot of classes for older students. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing number of foreign language courses organized for this group of learnars by different institutions, including the Universities of the Third Age in Poland. This appears to come as a response to the growing demand from third-age students themselves.

Senior residents in Poland prove to be an increasingly self-conscious group of citizens, taking up on different activities and hobbies. Many of them have got families abroad, which urges them to be able to communicate with their children, their children's spouses, and their grandchildren. What is more, in contemporary Poland sufficient command of English is increasingly useful even in such mundane activities as everyday communication, reading names of products, services, and brands. Many third-age students seem to expect to keep up with the times also in this respect.

Although nowadays third-age students constitute an increasingly important group of English learners, for a long time their learning needs, learning styles, as well as ELT methodology concerning this group of students has been considerably underrepresented in the field of language learning studies. Researchers have tended to either focus more on other age groups of learners, or to discuss language teaching methodologies in general, without explicitly stating the needs and difficulties of older learners. There were also tendencies to describe senior students in a rather negative light.

Lenneberg (1967), for instance, claimed that third-age students were less able to learn a foreign language. Nowadays, other researchers have begun to question such claims and have noted that the abilities of third-age students to learn a foreign language are as good as those of younger learners.

According to Winitz (1981), it is crucial how teachers work with senior students and what methods and techniques are implemented in the process of teaching. According to Jaroszewska (2013, pp. 274–275), third-age students during foreign languages courses prefer note making, discussions that help them make the speaking skill more fluent, explanation of problems during each class, as well as individual work. Senior learners are also reported to appreciate learning through techniques showing the cultural and social aspect of language, as it helps them express their opinions and make use of their vast life experience in class. Moreover, the most interesting and effective courses for third-age students seem to be those ones which implement materials connected with students' everyday lives and which let them express their own opinions. Third-age students are more experienced and, thereby, often more able to clearly express their feelings than younger learners.

However, it is crucial to remember that third-age students may have different kind of motivation to learn a foreign language than children and working adults. Most seniors have already finished their professional lives; they frequently have no need to learn a foreign language for employment reasons. Their motivations for learning a foreign language often include travelling, being able to communicate with relatives or friends living abroad, proving themselves that they can learn no matter how old they are, etc. Third-age learners have got more time due to their retirement and they frequently intend to fulfill their time as beneficially as possible. It seems, therefore, significant to be able to assure them that language courses are not just for young learners who need to communicate fluently in the modern world.

The recent years have brought an increasing interest in the field of teaching senior persons. Niżegorodcew (2016) discusses third-age students' strengths and weaknesses in learning English as a foreign language. She describes how motivation and teacher's reflection on the course influences students' learning process. Niżegorodcew (2016, p. 89) claims that both affective and cognitive needs in the process of learning a foreign language are significant for senior students. They tend to use their memory and overcome the limitations connected with their age. Affective needs appear to be significantly important for this group of learners. Students commonly expect patience, understanding, and support from the teacher. What may make the teacher's work challenging is how to motivate senior students.

Mikołajczyk (2011) suggests that senior students may be afraid of new experiences as they do not know what to expect and do not experience sufficient emotional stability. This may lead them to being mistrustful toward the teacher and other members of the course. Since many seniors reveal a certain learning inferiority complex, a crucial aspect is to show them they are still able to learn a foreign language regardless of their age.

Grotek and Kiliańska-Przybyło (2012, p. 112) also describe the importance of emotions during language learning of seniors. Third-age students tend to pay more attention to affective factors than physical activities. They typically display high levels of emotional intelligence. Grotek and Kiliańska-Przybyło (2012) pay attention to the fact that most senior students are very sensitive people who need a lot of support during learning a language. Moreover, they like sharing their feelings with the teacher and other students. What differentiates senior students from younger learners is how they perceive failures in learning a foreign language. They are focused on their age and, thereby, they tend to take their failures quite personally and emotionally. Older learners also require more time during in-class speaking activities. Lack of fluency in speaking is strictly connected with searching for proper words or phrases and they may consider this a failure (Grotek & Kiliańska-Przybyło, 2012, p. 122). Engaging in a foreign language classroom has been reported to have a beneficial effect in the well-being of senior learners. Grzanka-Tykwińska and Kędziora-Kornatowska (2010, p. 30) maintain that being active makes third-age students feel healthier and improve their mental capacity. Nevertheless, although they have possibilities to learn a language, fear of failure sometimes is the reason they are not sure whether it is a good idea to start such activity at their particular age.

For the reasons described above, another important issue in teaching third-age students is the awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in the process of learning English. Niżegorodcew (2016, p. 90) believes that these two aspects depend not only on students' age but also on the aims of foreign language learning and the strategies they use. The clue is that students who learn a foreign language for pleasure and to affiliate with other people can be more satisfied with the learning than students who are focused on achievement and success. It can be observed, for instance, that third-age students are not afraid of tests as a factor in their professional development. They are more frequently afraid of them as a possible demonstration of their personal failure. They commonly fear that they are not as effective in the learning process as they would like to be. Therefore, it becomes important for the teacher to observe what strengths senior students possess and focus students' attention on these features in order to improve their self-esteem.

The teacher must take into consideration all the facts influencing third-age students and choose proper methods to implement and appropriate roles to fulfill during the course. According to Harmer (2000, p. 57), it is crucial for the teacher to make a proper decision. Working with senior students requires the teacher to be particularly supportive, as third-age students' self-confidence is frequently on a lower level compared to younger learners. Another important factor which the teacher must take into consideration is older learners' participation in discussions. Senior students do not like being assessed and instructed in a strict way, but they predominantly enjoy being part of modern society. Older persons who enroll for third-age language courses do that of their own will. They predominantly look forward to the aspects of their learning which are connected to socializing with other people and maintaining their social activity.

Nonetheless, language courses for senior students come with certain considerable difficulties. It has been reported that such learners have problems with their self-esteem and that the objective problems connected with their age may interfere with the process of learning. The main purpose of this article is to identify the focal areas of self-reported difficulties in learning English as a second language which such students experience. The research is based on the questionnaire survey distributed among students of group courses of English in the context of Polish learners. Our sincere thanks must go here to those course leaders in different academic institutions who have kindly agreed to allow us to carry out this study with their groups. In particular, we are greatly indebted to Monika Grotek (The University of the Third Age at the University of Silesia in Katowice), who has greatly facilitated our research. It is hoped that the information gathered through the questionnaire analysis will prove to be helpful as a minor step towards a better understanding of the learning needs and difficulties for this particular group of students.

## Research Aims and Methodology

The aim of the questionnaire survey was to identify the most common self-reported difficulties in learning English as a second language for third-age students in the context of the surveyed group of Polish learners and to provide additional relevant information about the participants of the study. The research tool was a questionnaire distributed between the months of January and March 2017 among the students of English courses organised by different third-age universities in the region of Silesia in Poland. The questionnaire was distributed in two complementary formats: paper form and electronic version. Both versions were identical in the questions asked and their phrasing. The questionnaire was distributed in Polish in order to facilitate feedback from students of different levels of English. It consists of the total of 11 questions, including eight closed multiple-choice questions and three open questions. The original paper version of the questionnaire is presented in Appendix 1. What follows below is a short explanation of the questions in the study.

In Question 1 of the questionnaire the subjects are asked to identify their sex: male (*Mężczyzna*) or female (*Kobieta*). The aim of Question 2 is to identify the age of the respondents as belonging to one of the four groups (50–55, 56–60, 61–65, 65 and above). Question 3 refers to how long the participants have been learning English as a second language. The four available options include: shorter than one year, 1–3 years, 4–6 years, 7–9 years, 10 years and more. In Question 4 the subjects are asked to identify the reasons for learning English. They are instructed to choose one or more than one option ranging from the purposes of work, travelling, self-satisfaction, social goals, and others.

Question 5 serves as the main research question of the questionnaire. The participants are asked to mark one of the options referring to the extent to which they agree with 11 language-learning related sentences. The sentences in their English translation are as follows:

1. English is a difficult language to learn.
2. In certain age it is impossible to learn a foreign language well.
3. Younger learners are able to learn to communicate faster than older ones.
4. Older persons can understand language problems better than younger ones.
5. I lack patience in learning English as a foreign language.
6. I need a lot of support from the teacher in learning a foreign language.
7. Older persons are usually more conscientious about their learning than younger ones.

8. It is easier for older persons to understand different language issues due to their life experience.
9. It is easier for me to learn if I have grammar explained to me step-by-step.
10. Regular language revisions are important for me.

For each of the above questions the participant is required to mark one of the following options:
- I fully agree
- I generally agree
- I don't have an opinion
- I generally disagree
- I strongly disagree

Question 6 is a supplementary question for Question 5. It is aimed at finding out if the participants have experienced different age-related difficulties or illnesses in connection with their learning. If the answer is in the affirmative, the respondents are requested to specify what types of age related-problems they typically encounter in the process of learning English as a foreign language. Questions 7 and 8 are related as the participants are asked to decide which language skills are the most important for them (Question 7) and which ones are the most problematic in the learning process (Question 8). Both questions have the same range of available answer options:
- Speaking/communication skills
- Listening skills
- Reading skills
- Vocabulary practice
- Grammar practice
- Others (Please specify: ...............)

Finally, Questions 9–11 serve as three optional open questions in the questionnaire. In Question 9 the participants are asked to identify other, previously unspecified, difficulties they encounter in the process of learning English as a foreign language. Question 10 is aimed at finding out if the respondents feel discomfort during classes and—if yes—in what situations it typically occurs. Finally, in Question 11 the subjects are requested to provide 3–4 features which in their opinion characterise a good teacher. The three non-obligatory questions at the end of the questionnaire are meant to provide extra information relevant for the discussion of language learning-related difficulties. The results of the survey and their analysis are presented below.

## Results of the Survey

In total, between the months of January and March 2017 a sample of 70 respondents took part in the questionnaire. All of the participants were students of stationary English courses organized by third-age universities in the region of Silesia in Poland. There were sixty-four female (91%) and six male (9%) respondents. The participants were all in the broad category of third-age learners: at the age of 50 years old or above: fourteen subjects (20%) between 50 and 55, nine subjects (13%) between 56 and 60, twenty-two subjects (31%) between 61 and 65, and twenty-five subjects (36%) above the age of 66. The reasons for learning English among those persons proved to be quite varied. Only six participants (9%) cited the purposes of work, nine subjects (13%) reported social reasons. The majority of the respondents, though, provided the purposes of travelling (45 subjects, 64%) and self-satisfaction (57 subjects, 81%). Other reasons for learning a foreign language were cited by five senior students. Their answers oscillated around the reasons of socialising (e.g., *I like the lessons with our teacher*), family matters (*I have a family in England*), and practical applications of learning (*Being able to read shop signs, product names, being able to use new technologies, etc.*). Since the participants were allowed to choose more than one answer, the percentages in question 4 do not add up to 100. What these findings might suggest is that many third-age students in the Polish context treat their learning as a social and self-motivating undertaking, most of them being past their professional life, they no longer need to learn for the purposes of work. Instead, in their courses they commonly seek elements of socialising, meeting new people, cultivating friendships, and staying active to the old age. These tendencies seem to be even more prominent among the older participants of the study: the six respondents who reported learning English for the purposes of work were all between the ages of 50 and 60. On the other hand, 91% of persons between 61 and 66 and 80% of the participants over the age of 66 reported their own satisfaction as a reason to take up the courses, as opposed to 71% and 78% in the age groups of 50–55 and 56–60 respectively. The motivation connected with students' self-satisfaction may be connected with increasing self-consciousness of the older generation in Poland. As Grzanka-Tykwińska and Kędziora-Kornatowska (2010, p. 30) imply, senior students may be aware that learning a foreign language can serve as a factor in slowing down the processes of mental ageing and improving their mental capacities.

The results of Question 5, the main research question in the study, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
*Question 5: analysis*

| Survey Questions | I fully agree. | I generally agree. | I don't have an opinion. | I generally disagree. | I strongly disagree. | Total: |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English is a difficult language to learn. | 9 (13%) | 27 (39%) | 14 (20%) | 15 (21%) | 5 (7%) | 70 |
| In certain age it is impossible to learn a foreign language well. | 8 (12%) | 24 (34%) | 9 (13%) | 17 (24%) | 12 (17%) | 70 |
| Younger learners are able to learn to communicate faster than older ones. | 67 (57%) | 17 (24%) | 2 (3%) | 3 (4%) | 1 (1%) | 70 |
| Older persons can understand language problems better than younger ones. | 4 (6%) | 20 (29%) | 27 (39%) | 14 (20%) | 5 (6%) | 70 |
| I lack patience in learning English as a foreign language. | 8 (11%) | 17 (24%) | 13 (19%) | 20 (29%) | 12 (17%) | 70 |
| I need a lot of support from the teacher in learning a foreign language. | 20 (29%) | 33 (47%) | 6 (9%) | 9 (13%) | 2 (2%) | 70 |
| Older persons are usually more conscientious about their learning than younger ones. | 16 (23%) | 25 (36%) | 20 (29%) | 6 (9%) | 3 (3%) | 70 |
| It is easier for older persons to understand different language issues due to their life experience. | 7 (10%) | 15 (21%) | 16 (23%) | 23 (33%) | 9 (13%) | 70 |
| It is easier for me to learn if I have grammar explained to me step-by-step. | 32 (46%) | 30 (43%) | 5 (7%) | 3 (4%) | 0 (0%) | 70 |
| Regular language revisions are important for me. | 48 (69%) | 19 (27%) | 2 (3%) | 1 (1%) | 0 (0%) | 70 |

What follows from the results is that a lot of difficulties reported by third-age students in the surveyed group originated from their self-consciousness and their attitudes and anxieties concerning foreign language learning. Senior learners generally agreed that English was a difficult language to learn. The combined 52% of the respondents either fully or generally identified with this statement. Third-age students, however, were not predominantly pessimistic concerning their ability to learn a foreign language. As many as 46% of the participants agreed that at a certain age it is impossible to learn a foreign language well, as opposed to 41% of subjects who disagree with Statement 2. Only 13% of the respondents said that they had no opinion on this matter. On the other hand, senior students were aware of the language-learning limitations connected with their age. The majority of the subjects (67%) fully agreed that younger learners were able to learn to communicate better than older ones. Twenty-four percent of senior students responded “I generally agree” to this statement. Thus, the combined percentage of the respondents who agreed with Statement 3 reaches 91%. This stands in vivid contrast to the combined 8% of the respondents who had no opinion on the matter or disagreed with the statement. The respondents also did not tend to consider their age as an asset for their ability to understand language problems better than younger learners. Thirty-five percent of the subjects agreed with Statement 4 with 26% disagreeing and 39% undecided. Reportedly, the life experience they possess was not felt to be an advantage either, as demonstrated by 43% of the subjects disagreeing with Statement 8. What follows is that third-age students tended to be aware of their limitations and problems in the process of learning a foreign language. They revealed certain level of insecurity concerning their learning abilities and tended to think of themselves as subordinate to their younger colleagues when it comes to their foreign language acquisition faculties. Perhaps due to these limitations, the subjects also felt that they needed a lot of support from the teacher in the process of learning, as demonstrated by the combined 76% of the respondents agreeing with Statement 6. Also, the majority of older students appear to find it easier to learn if they have grammar explained to them step-by-step. The combined 89% either fully or generally agreed with this claim, as opposed to the combined 11% who either disagreed or voiced no opinion on the matter (Statement 9). What is also important is that regular revisions of the learning material are important for the vast majority of the participants (96%). This suggests that third-age students are also aware of their learning difficulties connected with memory, memorising and retrieving words, expressions and grammatical constructions. On the positive side, however, many of the respondents were of the opinion that older persons were usually more conscientious than younger learners (the combined 59% with only 13% disagreeing as a response to Statement 7). Also, a significant percentage of senior students (46%) did not think of themselves as lacking patience in learning a foreign language, as opposed to the 34% of the participants who responded in the affirmative to Statement 5.

As a response to Question 6 in the questionnaire, 38 participants (54%) reported experiencing difficulties with learning a foreign language which were related to their age-specific illnesses or conditions, with 32 subjects (46%) answering in the negative. Among those who responded in the affirmative, the types of age-related difficulties were significantly consistent: 30 (79%) respondents reported different problems related to memory and concentration (e.g., short memory, problems with memorising language material, concentration difficulties). The categories of hearing difficulties, general health problems and other conditions were each reported by three students (8%). This pertains to the fact that the respondents are aware of the problems of their age, especially the fact that their memory does not work as efficiently as is the case of younger students.

The analysis of answers in Questions 7 and 8 provides information about the language skills which are important and problematic for the respondents. In response to Question 7 as many as 66 participants (94%) reported speaking and communication as the most important language skills. A similarly high percentage (70%, 49 students) was associated with listening skills. Reading skills were reported as important by 33 students (47%), while vocabulary and grammar practice were given respectively 17% and 14% (12 and 10 students).

The language skills which are most important for third-age students appear to be largely congruent with those which are reported to be particularly problematic. Speaking and communication appears to be a problem for 37 participants (53%). An even higher percentage of the respondents (67%, 47 persons) reported listening as a particularly problematic language skill. The following problematic language ability appears to be grammar practice (18 students, 26%) and writing (15 respondents, 21%). The least problematic language skills among those cited by the respondents were vocabulary practice (13 students, 19%) and reading skills (eight respondents, 11%). What follows is that the language skills which are most important for the third-age students taking part in the survey are largely consistent with those which prove to be most problematic for them. Interestingly, listening skills were more frequently reported as problematic than speaking and communication skills, which may be due to certain age-related conditions, including hearing deficiencies, in some of the participants.

Another set of data which is important to analyse here is the participants' answers to Question 9. The question is aimed at identifying other, previously unspecified, areas of difficulties reported by third-age students taking part in the questionnaire. Thirty-nine students (54%) reported experiencing such difficulties in the process of learning English, as opposed to 31 participants (46%) who responded in the negative. Those who answered in the affirmative often focused on different problems related to memory (e.g., *problems with memorising*, *when I forget important words*), problems with pronunciation (e.g., *I am not sure if I pronounce something correctly*), problems with speaking and communication (e.g., *I have problems to communicate in English*, *I am stressed when I speak in class*), and difficulties with listening skills (e.g., *I have hearing problems*, *I find it difficult to understand dialogues from the CD*). The summary of the problems reported is provided in Table 2. Since in Questions 7–9 the participants were allowed to choose more than one answer, the percentage values in Table 2 do not add up to 100%.

Table 2.
*Question 9: analysis*

| Other learning-related problems reported by third-age students (Question 11) | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Problems with memory | 9 | 23 |
| Problems with pronunciation | 8 | 21 |
| Problems with speaking | 7 | 18 |
| Problems with listening | 6 | 15 |
| Problems with concentration | 5 | 13 |
| Problems with grammatical tenses | 5 | 13 |
| Problems with sentence forming | 2 | 5 |
| Lack of time for studying | 2 | 5 |
| Short duration of classes | 2 | 5 |
| Others | 3 | 8 |
| **Total** | **39** | **100** |

The analysis of the results in response to Question 9 appears to corroborate the earlier findings of the study. In particular, the language learning difficulties for third-age students surveyed in the questionnaire tend to be connected with their memory/concentration problems, as well as with difficulties with speaking/pronunciation and listening. This may reflect the objective limitations connected with the age-related conditions these students experience.

As a response to Question 10, wherein the respondents were asked if they felt discomfort during classes, 26 participants (37%) responded in the affirmative. The analysis of their feedback points to the aforementioned difficulties connected with students' problems concerning speaking/communication, difficulties with memory and memorisation and problems connected with pronunciation. The detailed results are provided in Table 3.

What the analysis of the answers to Question 10 shows is that the main sources of discomfort among the researched group of students were connected with the problem areas which the respondents reported in other questions, especially in connection to speaking/conversation and listening tasks.

Finally, the analysis of self-reported difficulties in learning English as a foreign language among the surveyed group of third-age students is complemented by Question 11, wherein the students were asked to identify 3–4 features of a good teacher. Among the leading characteristics the participants provided were: patience (forty-four students, 61%), ability to pass on knowledge (sixteen students, 22%), leniency/empathy (fifteen students, 21%), communicativeness (twelve students, 17%), kindness (eight students, 11%), professionalism (nine students, 12.5%), positive attitude (six students, 8%), knowledge (six students, 8%), systematicity (five students, 7%), openness (five students, 7%), ability to motivate students (five students, 7%), humour (five students, 7%), good pronunciation (five students, 7%). Other characteristics of a good teacher provided by students included the expectations that the teacher be competent (three students), involved in lessons (three students), well-organised (three students), well-mannered (three students) able to match the pace of classes with students' capabilities (three students), consequent (two students), creative (two students), calm (two students), flexible (one student), able to use different sources of learning materials (one student), able to create good atmosphere for learning (one student), experienced (one student), demanding (one student), willing to speak exclusively in English (one student), competent in audio-video equipment (one student), able to explain grammar well (one student), focused on building students' self-confidence (one student), respectful of students' subjectivity (one student).

Table 3.
*Question 10: analysis*

| Other sources of in-class discomfort experienced by students (Question 12) | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Speaking/conversation | 8 | 31 |
| Listening | 5 | 19 |
| Memory problems | 3 | 12 |
| Vocabulary practice | 2 | 8 |
| Fast pace of classes | 2 | 8 |
| Grammar exercise | 1 | 4 |
| Pronunciation | 1 | 4 |
| My being unprepared | 1 | 4 |
| When other students speak better English | 1 | 4 |
| Different level of English in group | 1 | 4 |
| I'm not sure if I am able to manage to learn English. | 1 | 4 |
| **Total** | **26** | **100** |

What follows, therefore, is that third-age students taking part in the survey predominantly expected patience and leniency in their teacher, followed by the ability to pass on knowledge and communicativeness. This reveals the picture of many of these students being dependable in their learning, looking for a lot of support and not willing the teacher to be excessively demanding or strict. This, again, may be the result of third-age students in then research group revealing a comparatively lower level of self-esteem and self-confidence when it comes to learning English as a foreign language.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the survey conducted among a group of Polish third-age students of English shows that the self-reported difficulties of the research group fall into two main categories. Firstly, there are objective, often health- and age-related problems that such students experience. Most frequently, the subjects tended to complain about the efficiency of their memory, frequent forgetting of words and constructions, problems with memorising and retrieving language material which they had already learnt. As a result, they considered regular revisions of learning material to be of utmost importance. Senior students were convinced that they were less able to focus on the lesson than younger students and that they generally required more time to acquire the learning material. Another frequent condition reported by this group of learners is the hearing problems. As a result, senior students found activities such as classroom audio listening stressful and difficult. The third-age students also found it problematic to speak in full sentences and use complex language constructions in front of the group. They were unsure of their ability to pronounce words and expressions properly. For many of them, the inability to pick up the appropriate accent was a significant difficulty.

The other category of difficulties that the participants reported was connected with third-age students' attitudes towards teaching and learning a foreign language. Senior students in the questionnaire were generally aware of their limitations and drawbacks, including those which resulted from their advanced age and health conditions. They were convinced that younger students were able to learn a foreign language faster and better than persons of their age. Also, they felt that they needed a lot of support from the teacher. It was, reportedly, easier for them to learn if they had grammar explained step-by-step and in an accessible way. Many senior students required constant reassuring, positive class atmosphere, as they were not confident that they may be able to learn a foreign language at an appropriate level. Thus, a constant challenge for the teacher working with such a group was to motivate them, show them the constant progress they were making and creating comfortable and learning-conducive environment.

The data emerging from the study of self-reported difficulties among third-age students appears to confirm earlier observations of Niżegorodcew (2016), Grzanka-Tykwińska and Kędziora-Kornatowska (2010), and Grotek and Kiliańska-Przybyło (2012). The learning needs of third-age students are often centred on creating and maintaining positive language learning environment for them. Consequently, in working with such groups, among the most important qualities of a language teacher are those soft competence skills which are aimed at supporting and helping. The social skill which was most welcome by the students in the survey was patience. This might be connected with those students' knowledge and consciousness of their limitations and inadequacies. Senior students often learn foreign languages for the purposes of socialising, travelling, contacting their family abroad and for their own satisfaction. The most important language skills which the respondents reported in the study included speaking/communication and listening skills. Interestingly, these language skills were also reported as being among the most problematic ones. The research shows significant congruity in answers given by the participants of the study. Third-age students in the Polish context appear to treat their learning as a social and self-motivating endeavour, as they enjoy the elements of socialising, which Grotek and Kiliańska-Przybyło (2012) discuss. Many of those students focus on the positive group-building attitudes and communication-enhancing emotions. From the teacher they expect patience, ability to transfer knowledge, leniency, empathy and good communication skills. At the same time, they are not usually looking for demanding and strict language learning instructors. This is also congruent with Niżegorodcew (2016), who suggests that older students often learn a foreign language for pleasure and in order to socialize with their peers. Having—on the whole—finished their professional lives, they are not pressed by the demands of their employers or the prospects of promotion. Instead, in their courses they search for elements of spending time in a group, meeting new people, the possibilities for cultivating friendships and family ties. At the same time, the growing social consciousness concerning health and well-being of senior citizens in Poland allows for the possibility that this group of students are themselves aware of what Grzanka-Tykwińska and Kędziora-Kornatowska (2010) suggest, namely that regular language courses constitute a factor in slowing down the processes of mental ageing and improving third-age students' mental capacities and social well-being.

On the positive side, the image of third-age students which emerges from the study is of individuals who are positive towards their learning, as they have willingly opted to take the courses which they participate in. They have positive reasons for learning English, that is, socialising, mental exercise, communicating with their families etc. Third-age students appear to be respectful towards their teachers, searching for and emphasizing their positive qualities. They are students who are self-conscious and aware of their limitations and drawbacks. As a result, they tend to be realistic towards their learning prospects and learning process.

On the other hand, the research shows a picture of students who are largely dependent on the teacher, persons who are not sure about their ability to learn a foreign language and individuals who expect a significant degree of support and frequent motivation from the teacher. They are persons who reveal a high level of anxiety towards their learning. They feel comfortable with considerable amount of guidance from the teacher and expect a lot of support and reassurance. What appears to be seen in other studies is to what extent this kind of attitude is the result of the objective difficulties of such students experience in the process of learning English and to what extent this is the effect of their earlier learning and schooling experience. Those students in the course of their lives have received formal education, and the attitudes they have acquired in the course of their learning may have influenced their current attitudes.

What seems to be rather clear and significant is the fact that there is a need for more research into the learning needs of senior learners. The interest in this age group and their methodology, although by all means worthwhile and important, currently appears to be insufficient and not representative of the number of third-age students undertaking courses in different institutions in Poland. With the growing life expectancy, the growing self-consciousness of third-age students and the increasing number of courses for them, there is a need for more vivid interest in the learning needs, difficulties, and expectations held by older learners. It remains to be seen, therefore, what direction further enquiries into the learning needs and difficulties of senior learners in Poland will take.

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Appendix 1

Badanie trudności w nauce języka angielskiego u osób w wieku 50+

Szanowni Państwo,
Bardzo dziękujemy za zgodę na wypełnienie poniższej ankiety.
Ankieta dotyczy trudności w nauce języka angielskiego wśród osób po 50. roku życia. Składa się ona z 11 pytań. Jej wypełnienie zajmie Państwu ok. 5–10 minut. Badania przeprowadzane są w ramach projektu badawczego prowadzonego w Instytucie Języka Angielskiego Uniwersytetu Śląskiego. Ankieta jest całkowicie anonimowa. Zebrane dane zostaną wykorzystane wyłącznie do celów naukowych.

**1. Proszę zakreślić swoją płeć.**
- Mężczyzna
- Kobieta

**2. Ile ma Pan(i) lat?**
- 50–55
- 56–60
- 61–65
- Powyżej 65

**3. Od jak dawna uczy się Pan(i) języka angielskiego?**
- Krócej niż 1 rok
- Od 1–3 lat
- Od 4–6 lat
- Od 7–9 lat
- 10 lat i więcej

**4. W jakim celu uczy się Pan(i) języka angielskiego? (Można zaznaczyć więcej niż jedną odpowiedź)**
- Dla celów związanych z pracą
- Dla celów związanych z podróżowaniem
- Dla własnej satysfakcji
- Dla celów towarzyskich
- Inne (jakie?) ……………………………………………………………………….

**5. Proszę zaznaczyć, w jakim stopniu zgadza się Pan(i) z następującymi zdaniami. (Proszę zaznaczyć znak X w odpowiednim polu).**

| Pytania ankietowe | Zgadzam się w zupełności | Generalnie się zgadzam | Nie mam zdania | Generalnie się nie zgadzam | Nie zgadzam się w zupełności |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Język angielski jest językiem trudnym w nauce. | | | | | |
| 2. W pewnym wieku nie można się już języka angielskiego dobrze nauczyć. | | | | | |
| 3. Osoby młodsze potrafią nauczyć się komunikować w języku obcym szybciej niż osoby starsze. | | | | | |
| 4. Osoby starsze potrafią zrozumieć problemy językowe lepiej niż osoby młodsze. | | | | | |
| 5. Brakuje mi cierpliwości w nauce języka angielskiego. | | | | | |
| 6. Potrzebuję sporo wsparcia ze strony lektora podczas nauki. | | | | | |
| 7. Osoby starsze zwykle bardziej przykładają się do nauki niż osoby młodsze. | | | | | |
| 8. Osobom dojrzałym łatwiej jest zrozumieć różne kwestie językowe z powodu większego doświadczenia życiowego. | | | | | |
| 9. Łatwiej jest mi się uczyć kiedy mam wytłumaczoną gramatykę krok po kroku. | | | | | |
| 10. Ważne są dla mnie regularne powtórki językowe. | | | | | |

**6. Czy odczuwa Pan(i) trudności w nauce języka angielskiego związane z dolegliwościami swojego wieku?**

- Nie
- Tak (jakiego rodzaju?) …………………………………………………………......

**7. Jakie umiejętności językowe są dla Pana/Pani ważne? (Można zaznaczyć więcej niż jedną odpowiedź).**

- Umiejętność komunikacji/porozumiewania się
- Umiejętność rozumienia ze słuchu
- Umiejętność czytania
- Umiejętność pisania
- Ćwiczenie słownictwa

- Ćwiczenie gramatyki
- Inne (jakie?): ..............................................................................................................

**8. Nauka jakich umiejętności językowych sprawia Panu/Pani najwięcej problemów? (Można zaznaczyć więcej niż jedną odpowiedź).**

- Umiejętność komunikacji/porozumiewania się
- Umiejętność rozumienia ze słuchu
- Umiejętność czytania
- Umiejętność pisania
- Ćwiczenie słownictwa

€ Ćwiczenie gramatyki
€ Inne (jakie?): ..................................................................................................................................

**9. Jakie inne trudności odczuwa Pan(i) podczas nauki języka angielskiego?**
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………….

**10. Czy odczuwa Pan(i) dyskomfort podczas nauki? Jeśli tak, to w jakich sytuacjach?**
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

**11. Jakie cechy według Pana/Pani cechują dobrego nauczyciela? (3–4 cechy)**
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

# Reviews

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# Hadrian Lankiewicz, *Teacher Language Awareness: A Collaborative Inquiry Based on Languaging*. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2015, ISBN 978-7865-624-1, 368 pages

The book by Hadrian Lankiewicz entitled *Teacher Language Awareness: A Collaborative Inquiry Based on Languaging* is a very ambitious and passionate publication, not only demonstrating the Author's excellent orientation in literature on the subject, but also the ability to apply it to his main concern as an academic teacher, which is the teacher-training of prospective EFL teachers. The monograph consists of 368 pages, embracing four chapters, a very extensive bibliography of over 650 sources and a set of appendices, which consists of research instruments, tasks, and materials used in the empirical study itself. The Author decided—for a good reason—to offer an extensive theoretical background to his study (179 pages), compared to a much smaller empirical part (116 pages). It shows the Author's concern for a strong theoretical grounding of his study, as well as a useful promotion of ideas not very well known or popular in glottodidactic research.

The work presents precise definitions of the basis for the study, constructs used and their evolution, advocating the most recent approaches. It refers for example to the concept of language awareness (Andrews, 2007) emphasising the relationship between language and ideology, in which appropriacy of discourse in a given context should be of major concern to the language user, but also to any language educator (teacher). The Author rightly assumes the need to develop critical teacher language awareness, which should already have been initiated at the pre-service stage, that is, during teacher training at the university or college. The most substantial part of the theory (chapters 1–3) is a presentation of the ecological perspective, not only in glottodidactic research but also in its evolution in linguistics up to the postmodernist era. This thorough overview of the main assumptions of the ecological approach constitutes a good resource text for researchers in multilingualism (see van Lier, 2004). The text is not very easy to read, as the reader needs to dig through a dense set of references to names, unfortunately, not always connected directly to the field, for example, Gramsci, Bakhtin, Bourdieu or even to Marx, but whom the Author considers the fathers of the ecological thinking. It seems a bit too far-fetched to me and an unnecessarily ideologized position. Fortunately, these references are balanced by numerous recourse to language context, and works by T. van Lier, D. Larsen-Freeman, or C. Kramsch. At the same time, however, Lankiewicz does not seem to be aware of works by L. Aronin, M. O'Laoire, D. Singleton or P. Herdina and U. Jessner on language awareness from an ecological perspective. Especially, he should include Herdina and Jessner, who are known for their Dynamic Model of Multilingualism, which presents generally accepted theory in studying multilingualism, as well as Aronin and O'Laoire, with their ecological approach. The former authors have not been commented on here in much depth and the latter are not mentioned at all.

In chapter 2 the Author presents the ecological perspective in eco-pedagogy, which stands against the normative approach and introduces a holistic approach to language understood here as a mediator in communication, which promotes a variable norm. Lankiewicz believes, correctly in my view, that discourse analysis should take the form of critical discourse analysis, in which language awareness and learner/teacher autonomy become the basic concepts. It would be hard to disagree with such a point of view, as all the evidence demonstrates that the normative approach did not succeed in developing teacher/learner autonomy, as was initially expected.

Chapter 3 of the book is devoted to the discussion of language awareness as a concept and teacher language awareness in particular, focusing on the need for developing teacher critical awareness. The Author's strong belief in the above led him to coin a new term, *TCELA—teacher critical ecological awareness*, which of course draws upon an ecological perspective. Despite an extensive discussion, Lankiewicz seems to totally ignore previous conceptual work on teacher reflectivity, which is paramount to language awareness development, for example the research of Loughran (1996), Farrell (2007) or also that of Gabryś-Barker (2012), just to mention of few of a large bulk of studies on reflectivity. Also, the Author's position seems too radical in relation to the need for creating a post-modern/post-national approach to language, which eliminates awareness of one's mother tongue as a factor in foreign language acquisition/learning.

Once the reader manages to get through the reference-dense text of the first three chapters of the theoretical discussion, the most interesting part is awaiting in chapter 4. It presents in detail the empirical study carried out by the Author which, as he himself states, derives from his own personal need and reflection when working with trainee EFL teachers, who are university students, in respect of autonomous teacher/learner development and its virtual impossibility in the present-day conditions teachers work in. The ecological approach seems to be a possible remedy. A triangulated mixed-method longitudinal study has been carried out and aimed to demonstrate the development of trainees' reflectivity in the period of writing their B.A. thesis in TEFL. This research has to be treated as a case study in its main qualitative part, as the sample consisted of eight students (members of a B.A seminar). In its quantitative part, Lankiewicz extended the number of subjects, as he used three samples of pilot, control, and target groups. The most interesting fragment of the study is its qualitative section. It demonstrates in its well-designed stages of data collection, trainees' development of reflection and thus of *TCELA* (teacher critical ecological awareness). It is a typical example of fairly rigorous action research, in which the teacher (the Author) is the researcher and the motivation is contextually-grounded and, as a consequence, used pragmatically in the teacher's own didactic practice and his/her professional development. The Author assumes that this form of research is not very popular among Polish educational centres, which unfortunately, demonstrates little knowledge of other teacher training institutions and (published) research carried out there, precisely in a form of action research projects (arguably this leads us to the sad conclusion that there is little cooperation between academic centres training future FL teachers). Action research is being incorporated in various academic institutions, just to mention two significant ones, the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań (e.g., Wiśniowska, 2013) and the University of Silesia in Katowice (e.g., Gabryś-Barker, 2012). One of interesting, inspiring, and attractive features is the introduction of think aloud technique by the Author, a form of introspection, diaries and oral narration (presentations of the subjects). This fairly innovative methodology made participation in the study motivating for the student-subjects and allowed the researcher to elicit rich data for his analysis. This data is supplemented by self-constructed questionnaires, verified by means of statistical measures as to their reliability, which is not always the case in proposed research projects. Apart from being thorough, the analysis of the collected data is also interesting, leading the Author to conclusions that can constitute valuable guidelines for teacher trainers to be implemented in the course of professional development of future teachers of EFL, or any other foreign language. The intervention proposed by Lankiewicz in his project is an excellent illustration of how to sensitize trainees to the issues of reflectivity in general and in critical reflection on language awareness in particular. It has been tested and successfully carried out and completed by the Author in his own teaching context. I see its value mostly in demonstrating that such an intervention not only develops the critical awareness of teachers in its ecological dimension, but it also becomes a motivating factor and a challenge, compared by the Author to "a responsible adventure" for both the trainer and trainee. To sum up, in its empirical part, the book is an excellent example of constructivist thinking in education, whereas in its theoretical part it seems a little overloaded with ideology.

The book is written in coherent and cohesive academic language, though its references to numerous scholars and their research overwhelms, making it not very reader-friendly on the one hand. On the other, it can be used as a valuable reference source. One minor drawback which could be mentioned is the lack of index of names and index of subjects in his book.

I believe that this interesting and innovative publication should be of interest to, first of all, FL teacher trainers in various educational centres concerned with the professional development of teachers at different levels: both at pre-service and at the in-service stage.

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https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0626-0703

*Danuta Gabryś-Barker*
*University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland*

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# Danuta Wiśniewska, *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy: Theory and Analysis of Practice.* Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013, ISBN: 9788323226123, 414 pages

Broadly understood as a process of inquiry, action research is firmly grounded in current social needs, connecting theory with practice, encouraging and stimulating reflection and researcher engagement, and enhancing multidisciplinary research. It transpires, then, that *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy: Theory and Analysis of Practice* by Danuta Wiśniewska may constitute an important contribution to the development and understanding of studies on groups, structures, and organizations, especially in relation to the context of teaching English as a foreign language. With its multitude (636 entries) of source texts and 128 papers collected for the needs of analysis, it appears to be the first monograph that incorporates such an in-depth analysis of action research, both from the theoretical and empirical perspectives. As the title suggests, the book can be treated as a solid theoretical reference source devoted to action research in the context of foreign language teaching and teacher training. However, it also centers on the analysis of practical aspects of the research carried out by teachers. The focus of the monograph is deeply grounded in academic research, though it is not only limited to the professional education of the teacher. It comprises a vaster perspective, from education management and political economy, to pragmatic philosophy and social development. The extensive tome comprises 414 pages, 362 of which constitute a consolidated text that is divided into theoretical and empirical parts that reflect on the research carried out for the purpose of understanding the research design in question.

Chapter One includes a discussion of the concept of action research presented from the point of view of its historical development, typology, and main methodological aspects. This part of the volume allows the reader to understand fully the specificity of the concept under scrutiny, presented against the background of related terminology. The Author then studies origins of action research from a historical perspective, as built upon the works of Lewin. The examination of the role of social sciences in legitimizing the application of this research method allows for comprehending its real value, which consists in taking action in order to produce desired effects (research through intervention). This is clearly visible in the earliest developments in this field, limited to the research carried out in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland. The next part of the chapter focuses on theoretical aspects, starting from the typology of action research that elaborates on various approaches to action research. It moves on to its methodology, where the process, models, and methods are presented. Naturally, action research has its drawbacks, among which validity can be placed. Hence, this aspect of action research was reliably addressed, scrutinizing the dissemination of action research, viewed as its central component warranting transparency in research procedures.

Having discussed the theoretical background of action research, in Chapter Two the Author describes the main research context, that is, the EFL teacher pedagogy. Among the selected issues, teacher knowledge and reflection are presented. Although the discussion of reflection appears slightly limited, the Author certainly manages to conjoin the areas of knowledge, practice, and research. Yet, the prominent place in the chapter is rightfully taken by the discussion of teacher research competence. Departing from defining the concept of teacher research, the Author, aware of its constraints, skillfully stresses the importance of contextuality of educational practice for adequate research. The ways in which teachers engage in research are also commented upon, which leads to the culminating point in the chapter: a discussion of the approaches to teacher research. Here, aside from reflection on the most common studies carried out by teachers, self-study of teaching and teacher education as a reasonably new approach is highlighted, discussing studies done by teacher-educators on their own teaching and research.

Chapter Three presents the theoretical considerations on action research in EFL pedagogy as a logical consequence of the material included in the previous two chapters. It describes the way action research is implemented in EFL pedagogy "as a means of teacher development and a tool for solving problems concerning the teaching and learning of English" (p. 109). The first focus is on the theoretical aspects of the issue, including its definitions, typology, and approaches and functions of action research in this field. It is made clear that the social sciences are regarded an important source of this valuable research tradition, which is continued by practitioners in the EFL classroom and beyond.

Obviously, there are problems reporting the findings from action research due to the marginalization of this research method. Nevertheless, the benefits connected with disseminating its findings are numerous; hence, there is a need to follow a rigorous procedure in order to validate its results. The final part of this chapter is devoted to a review of EFL action research from the perspective of themes and methods.

Part Two of the monograph includes the results of the practice of action research performed by teachers, based on a corpus of 128 studies published in academic and teacher journals worldwide. The purpose of Chapter Four, which can be viewed as introductory, is to elaborate on the rationale of this part of the volume because, as the Author rightfully suggests, knowledge about action research in the EFL field is biased and has not been systematized. However, due to an increased interest in studying scientific research practice, action research has been gaining popularity despite its complex, confusing, and frequently challenging character. Aside from a description of the main methods that the Author has chosen for the analysis of the selected action research practice, there is a concise description of the corpus. It is unfortunately unclear how the journals have been selected. The most relevant part of the chapter is devoted to an examination of the scope and nature of action research in the EFL field. It concentrates on its three interrelated features: teaching, researching, and reporting. As they correspond to the main stages of the research process, the analysis of action research publications can be divided into three larger stages: pre-empirical, empirical, and post-empirical, which are included in the three consecutive chapters.

Chapter Five is strictly devoted to the analysis of the pre-empirical phase presented in the discussed studies. Here, the Author's primary focus is directed to the exposition of the role of basic background issues involved in action research at this stage. Thus, the primary aspect to be taken into consideration is the teaching/research context, a crucial criterion in conducting and reporting action research. The next factor of paramount importance in this phase is the description of research participants, especially the relationship of the researcher to the partakers. Aside from the role the participants play as sources of knowledge, it is the researcher's position in the research that requires explication. Next, the reasons for carrying the study need to be described, whether internally or externally. The outline of research aims is another important issue because it determines the type and conduct of the research. As the Author suggests, the identification of purposes should reveal the real aims pursued by EFL teachers in their teaching practice. Finally, there are research areas and topics that render information on teachers' professional interests and problems. Following this theoretical background, the next part of the chapter analyzes these key pieces of information (following the sequence presented above) in the journal publications outlined in the previous chapter. It turns out that for the most part the participants were mere subjects of the study, even when the researcher was part of the context. The research areas and topics were primary related to the teachers'/researchers' context, and mostly stemmed from the teachers' position and institutions' curricula.

The analysis of the empirical stage is undertaken in Chapter Six. As in the previous chapter, there is a clear theoretical overview of the categories that are analyzed followed by a presentation of the findings from the above-mentioned papers. The primary construct under consideration is the method and description of units of the analysis. Here, the description of researchers' conceptualization of action research is considered. EFL practitioners may depend on theory, empirical observation and life experience. In the next step, the focus shifts to the rationales for using action research as a research method. Research design used in action research usually centers on actual components, instead of prescribed ones, with a research question organizing the design. The question that instigates the research may arise from different sources, theoretical, professional or private. The data collected in action research may be of qualitative or quantitative nature and may need to be examined from the perspective of its types, functions, sources, and roles. As far as usefulness of action research is concerned, it is important to identify which usefulness aspects are most significant to researchers. The last factor included in the analysis is utilization of results. It was the Author's intention to find out if the research results had any consequences for practice. As the most important outcomes of the extensive analysis of the empirical stage of action research presented in the selected publication have shown, action researchers are teachers who constructed their knowledge of this research design from literature. The most frequent design implemented in the studied publications was a single cycle of action research, which was most probably affected by time constraints and resource limits. Finally, conducting action research turned out to produce more elaborate consequences, exceeding simple solutions to classroom problems.

Chapter Seven focuses on the final, post-empirical stage of the action research process. As in the previous chapters, it opens with theoretical considerations of the researched issues. The main point of interest here is how the structures of the analyzed articles provide information about the reported action research. The specific topics include article sections and their headings, their macro-structure, and moves representing action research and its procedures. It appears that, similarly to other research papers, most action research publications include all the necessary components. Moreover, many teacher researchers were revealed to locate their practical problems in the existing state of knowledge, despite the presumed practical nature of action research. A considerable variety in the action research papers in EFL pedagogy is identified, which may be attributed to journal diversity, authorship, and readership.

The focal point of Chapter Eight is the analysis of training programs in action research in the EFL field, among which there is a description of the Author's own three-year study of teaching action research on foreign language teacher trainees. First, there is a description of the few written accounts of action research courses performed in Poland and abroad. Their usual approach was to include a theoretical overview of action research, encouraging students to conduct their own action research projects in genuine EFL classrooms either on a regular basis or as part of their teaching practice. Yet, the greatest part of the chapter was devoted to a description of the Author's project, whose role was to design and evaluate action research training that might be included in an EFL methodology course. The participants were three consecutive groups of third year students of regular EFL methodology classes. The results of the study proved that the students gained basic knowledge of action research and its procedures, which enabled them to understand teaching and their learners better. What is more, they considered using action research for the purpose of their bachelor's thesis. In future, they might also take advantage of this research design to boost their creativity and curiosity. Unfortunately, the description of the study and its implications appears sketchy, despite the Author's adherence to her own model. Sadly, this part of the volume, unlike its other sections, leaves the reader unsatisfied due to its brevity.

The final chapter provides a general discussion, concluding remarks, and further directions of action research. The Author, aware of the possible drawbacks of this research design, argues in favor of the research design as a valuable instrument in teacher training, improvement, and life-long learning. The comments on the practical application of action research in EFL pedagogy are neatly organized into the three-phase division of stages of action research. The critical analysis of basic trends is accompanied with suggestions and recommendations. As far as further directions are concerned, it is made clear that additional inquiry into action research is needed to place it within broader philosophical frames. The volume is concluded with a bibliography of more than 600 entries, followed by a list of the articles analyzed, appendices with journal sources, two questionnaires used in the Author's own empirical research, a list of tables and figures, and a two-page abstract in Polish.

The book, as the Author suggests, derives from humanistic psychology and constructivism, which can clearly be seen in the ways the results of her own study are interpreted, the selection of research aims, criteria of analysis, and their explanation. Also, the application of the qualitative research method allows for the examination of deductive categories deriving from the research questions, as well as inductive ones connected with the individual, idiosyncratic characteristics of the research sample and the study context. Among the most important advantages of the work is its subject matter. It constitutes a relatively new research area that is necessary to contemporary education with its focus on reflectivity, autonomy and life-long learning. The Author demonstrates unsurpassed knowledge of the theoretical issues connected with action research, discussed against the broad background of social and second language acquisition studies. With its bibliography, the book is not only an appropriate reflection of the theoretical investigation connected with action research, but also a rich corpus of empirical texts presenting diverse contexts and research aims. Moreover, the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Author's original program of teaching action research in EFL methodology courses deserve praise because they enable teacher trainees to be more reflective, stimulated, and creative in their future work. Finally, the Author has shown great ability in organizing and systematizing knowledge of theoretical and empirical models and considerations and conclusions in neat tables and diagrams that make difficult material easy to follow.

Aside from its strengths, *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy* suffers from several drawbacks in content, structure, and editing. The Author's own empirical study is greatly condensed, undermining the real importance of her research, which has significant consequences for teacher trainees. The scope of the volume gives room to a multitude of strands, but some get out of control. For the sake of clarity, it would be better to focus on the most important, hierarchically organized themes. Also, the selection of action research publications appears unorganized, which detracts from the depiction of research results. As to the volume's structural disadvantages, it appears that the empirical part of the tome is not homogenous. The inclusion of the analysis of publications implementing action research and programs of teaching, together with the Author's original research, greatly impedes the formulation of a clear conclusion The reader cannot always easily decipher or follow the Author's intentions. The editing of the volume, on the other hand, seems careful and elaborate, though saves a few grammatical and stylistic mistakes accompanied by several bibliographical errors. However, such typos are inevitable in such a large book, hence their presence can easily be ignored.

Overall, *Action Research in EFL Pedagogy* is a very good work. The Author has managed "to contribute to the state of the art regarding action research in EFL pedagogy and to raise awareness of these aspects of action research which require further examination" (pp. 12–12?). Additionally, her meticulous craftsmanship, eye for detail, and genuine interest in student-teacher progress make the book a valuable acquisition for anyone with an inquisitive mind. The book is highly recommended not only for EFL teacher trainees and their instructors, but also for all teachers of English who help others excel. By applying action research, teachers have a greater chance making a different future.

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6690-231X

*Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel*
*University of Opole, Poland*

# STYLE GUIDE FOR THE AUTHORS

Authors are requested to submit manuscripts formatted in APA style (*American Psychological Association*, 6th ed.).

All manuscripts must include an abstract in English (maximum of 250 words). After the abstract please provide keywords.

Main text: 12 Times New Roman
Long citations (more than 40 words): 10 Times New Roman, indent by 1 tab either side, one empty line above and below, no quotation marks.

1.5 spacing

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## In-text citations (examples):

**Author's name and date in brackets:**
The experience of critical incidents and effective reflection upon them allows teachers to control their classroom actions more consciously and create critical events (CE's), which were described earlier as intended, planned and controlled (Woods, 1993).
Woods (1993) believes that critical events are structured and occur in well-defined staged of conceptualization . . .

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(Ballantyne & Packer, 1995)
As Ballantyne and Packer (1995) demonstrate …

**Three authors:**
(Barker, Callahan, & Ferreira, 2009)

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**Six authors or more:**
Lorenz et al. (1998) argued…
(Lorenz et al., 1998)

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(D. Francis, 1985; H. Francis, 2004)

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("Primary Teachers Talking," 2007)
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Smith (as cited in Maxx & Meyer, 2000) noted that "there is . . . ."

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As Smithson and Stones (1999) demonstrated. . .
. . . as has been shown (Smithson & Stones, 1999) . . .

## References

**Selected examples (for more consult APA manual):**

**Book, one author:**
Goldberg, A. (2006). *Constructions at work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Book, two authors and more:**
Jarvis, S., & Pavlenko, A. (2008). *Crosslinguistic influence in language cognition.* London: Routledge.

**Translated book:**
Freud, S. (1960). *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. (J. Strachey, Trans.). London, England: Routledge & K. Paul. (Original work published 1905).

**Edited book:**
Flowerdew, J., Brock, M., & Hsia, S. (Eds.). (1992). *Second language teacher education.* Hong Kong: City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.

**Chapter in an edited book:**
Goldberg, A., & Casenhiser, D. (2008). Construction learning and second language acquisition. In Robinson, P., & Ellis, N. C. (Eds.), *Handbook of cognitive linguistics and second language* acquisition (pp. 197–215). New York and London: Routledge.

**Article in a journal:**
Hammarberg, B. (2010). The languages of the multilingual. Some conceptual and terminological issues. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 48*, 91–104.

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Tully, K., & Bolshakov, V. Y. (2010). Emotional enhancement of memory: How norepinephrine enables synaptic plasticity. *Molecular Brain,* 13 May. Retrieved from: http://www.molecularbrain.com/content/

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Miller, G. (2014, September 4). Cinematic cuts exploit how your brain edits what you see. *Wired.* Retrieved from: http://wired.com/

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Souleles, N., & Pillar, C. (Eds.). (2014). Proceedings from the *First International Conference on the Use of iPads in Higher Education*. Paphos: Cyprus University of Technology.

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Reachel, L. H. (2001). *Native languages and toponyms: Origins, meaning, and use* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest dissertation and theses database. (Document ID 1964749161).

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