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■ ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: ROLE OF ETHNOCENTRISM AND ANOMIE

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U ovom radu ispituju se veze između stavova koje učenici imaju prema kulturi i zajednici govornika izvornog, odnosno ciljnog jezika i uspeha koji postižu u učenju jezika. Teorijsku pozadinu rada čine socio-psihološke teorije etničkog identiteta, koje operišu konceptima etnocentrizma i anomije, kako bi objasnile mehanizme društvene identifikacije i kontraidentifikacije kod pojedinaca. Cilj istraživanja bila je provera održivosti sledećih hipoteza: (1) između etnocentrizma i uspeha u učenju postoji negativna povezanost, (2) veza između jezičkog etnocentrizma i uspeha u učenju je takođe negativna i (3) između anomije i uspeha u učenju postoji pozitivno orijentisana veza. Uzorak u istraživanju činilo je 112 studenata Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu koji su pohađali kurs iz engleskog jezika kao izbornog predmeta. Podaci su prikupljeni tokom redovnih časova nastave putem upitnika, koji je merio varijable etnocentrizma, jezičkog etnocentrizma i anomije. Rezultati su dali delimičnu potvrdu početnih hipoteza, te sugerišu da stavovi prema kulturi i društvu, posebno oni stavovi koje učenici imaju prema sopstvenoj kulturi, mogu da imaju uticaja na učenje jezika.

Ključne reči: stavovi, etnocentrizam, anomija, socio-kulturološki faktori, izvorna zajednica, ciljna zajednica, učenici.

INTRODUCTION

“Theory and research on second language acquisition (SLA) have long acknowledged the significant influence of learner identities – that is, how learners see themselves and are seen by others in relation to the target language and culture” (Harklau 2007: 639). The importance of social factors in language learning has been a matter of extensive

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research (Ellis 1994). An investigation into social context considers the relative size, status, and power of the learner's community and the target language community and the general domains of use of the mother tongue and target language. Learners are subject to pressures both from within, from their own language community and the socio-cultural reality they are a part of, and from without, from the target language input they receive.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The most obvious difference between the learners' community and the target language community which is affecting foreign language learning is the question of ethnic identity. It is an integral part of a learner identity, as defined by Harklau (2007), and as such, is an important variable in the outcome of learning. However, as Ellis (1994) points out, ethnicity is a slippery construct – there are contradictions in its objective and subjective definitions. While essentialist studies, on the one hand, emphasize external categories in the identification of ethnicity which can be inherited and which are, thus, biological, subjective definitions, on the other hand, take into account labels which individuals use to identify themselves in communication with others, and which are, thus, constructed, rather than biological. Even though subjective, constructivist definitions are now generally favoured in research, since ethnic demarcation lines are by no means primordial, Zagefka (2009) suggests that a myth of common descent is, nevertheless, an integral part of people's social realities. "[...] ethnic groups often – but not always – adhere to beliefs about a common culture and myth of common descent. There often – but not always – exists a geographic territory important for the group's self-definition, and there are often other characteristics that coincide with the same group delineations, e.g. language and/or religion. Ethnicity necessarily presupposes that members self-ascribe to the ethnic group, [...] and this self-ascription can – but need not always – instigate powerful behavioural consequences" (Zagefka 2008: 232). Harklau (2007) remarks that the formation of an ethnic identity is a dynamic process – it represents both what is given and what is achieved, and it changes over time. According to Phinney's (1990) acculturation model, which is based on psychoanalytic theories of identity, individuals begin adolescence with a given ethnic identity. They begin exploring it as a consequence of a significant experience with another ethnic group, which brings about a new examined or achieved ethnic identity (Harklau 2007).

Similarly to ethnicity, ethnocentrism is also analyzed with regards to individual's attitudes towards and relationship with the respective in-group and out-groups. In research studies (Campbell/Levine 1961; Adorno *et al.* 1982), there is an understanding that ethnocentrism implies an association between favourable attitudes towards the in-group and unfavourable attitudes towards the out-group. The unfavourable attitudes are evident in the stereotypical interpretations of the characteristics of out-groups. Levine and Campbell (1972) note that the characteristics of the out-group are always perceived stereotypically if there is a great cleavage in the standards and customs between the out-group and one's own group. If such cultural differences exist, they are

more likely to be noted the larger the difference and negatively evaluated by both of the groups in question – both groups will have reciprocal sets of mutual stereotypes. In this regard, Campbell and Levine (1961) propose the following evaluative matrix predicted by ethnocentrism:

Descriptions by	Descriptions of	
	Group A	Group B
Group A	Good	Bad
Group B	Bad	Good

Table 1: Ethnocentric inter-group perceptions (adapted from Campbell/Levine 1961: 86)

In order to account for the formation of stereotypical attitudes in individuals Scheepers, Felling and Peters (1990) use notions of social identification and social contra-identification. By means of social identification on the one hand, individuals will selectively perceive mainly favourable characteristics of their in-group, and, by means of social contra-identification on the other hand, they will selectively perceive mainly unfavourable characteristics of the out-groups in order to fulfill a permanent need for a positive social identity.

In the study of foreign language learning, much of the research on ethnicity and ethnocentrism is under the influence of socio-psychology and the extensive research done by Gardner and Lambert (for example, Gardner/Lambert 1972; Gardner/MacIntyre 1991). According to this view, generalized social attitudes towards the target language community and culture will exert a strong influence on the target language proficiency. This approach operates with the concepts of integrativeness and instrumentality to account for the learner's overall orientation towards learning the target language. The classic finding of the socio-psychological approach is that learners with positive attitudes towards the target language and culture, and a desire to integrate with the target language community (integrative orientation), as well as those learners who have practical reasons for studying the target language, such as a passing grade or a financial reward (instrumental orientation), will reach a higher level of proficiency. However, as Ellis (1994) points out, learners' perception of their own group's ethnolinguistic vitality might also influence their target language proficiency, since language learning takes place in the socio-cultural, political, economic etc. context of the learner's own community. Ethnolinguistic vitality refers to "that [which] makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup relations" (Giles 1977: 308). It is demonstrated by individuals' perception of their own group's status (economic, socio-historical and language status), its demographics (number of group members and their distribution throughout the territory), and the institutional support (the extent to which a language group is formally and informally represented in education, religion, industry, government services, culture and mass media). Its influence on the learning outcome can be twofold – "in situations where people emphasize solidarity with their own in-group, linguistic divergence from the out-group is likely, whereas

in situations where they are more concerned with status and are person-centred, convergence is likely” (Ellis 1994: 210). Attempting to link the social environment with learning outcomes, Lambert (1974) similarly makes a distinction between subtractive and additive bilingualism (Table 2).

	Attitudes towards	
	Native culture	Target culture
Additive bilingualism	+	+
Subtractive bilingualism	-	+

Key: + = positive attitudes
- = negative attitudes

Table 2: Attitudes and target language learning (adapted from Ellis 1994: 208)

In the case of additive bilingualism, learners add the target language to their repertoire of skills at no cost to their source language proficiency. In the case of subtractive bilingualism, learners replace their source language with the target language; they do not reach full proficiency in their mother tongue, and can even, in some cases, lose already acquired competence. Scheepers, Felling and Peters (1990) use the concepts of status-frustration and status-anxiety to explain the mechanism of the creation of negative attitudes towards the in-group in individuals. Status-frustration arises when individuals fail to achieve means by which they subjectively derive a status, whereas status-anxiety arises from the uncertainty of future achievement of such means. Both status-frustration and status-anxiety cause a discrepancy between what is desired and the means of fulfilling that which is desired. This discrepancy can be associated with the concept of anomie (Stern 1990) – the loss of an unconscious acceptance of society as a result of which individuals feel unsatisfied with their role in society. “The anomic individual, because of his critical attitude to his own society, is open to the demands of a different language and culture; therefore, anomie is a positive predictor of language achievement” (Stern 1990: 380).

With regards to foreign language learning, it is possible to discern a subtype of ethnocentrism that is concerned with ethnocentric attitudes towards either mother tongue or target language and towards the use of those languages and with attitudes about individuals’ beliefs in their language learning abilities. This subtype of ethnocentrism, called language ethnocentrism (Hinenoya/Gatbonton 2000), is also likely to exert influence on the attainment of the mastery of a foreign language. It is believed that learners who have negative attitudes towards the target language and at the same time have strong positive attitudes towards their own language (for instance, a belief that a foreigner could never learn our language is considered a strong positive attitude towards one’s mother tongue) will have difficulty acquiring the target language.

The goal of the reported research was to test the following hypotheses:

- a. ethnocentrism is negatively correlated with successful language learning;
- b. language ethnocentrism is negatively correlated with successful language learning;
- c. anomie (status-frustration and status-anxiety) is positively correlated with successful language learning.

2. METHOD

2.1. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 112 university students ($n = 112$, mean age = 19.64) participated in the survey, 84 females and 28 males. They were all enrolled in an English course for the purpose of fulfilling faculty requirements. This sampling of students provided a more or less homogenous group which was exposed to the same input with regards to the course book, and which was studying within a relatively homogenous curricular and organizational framework.

2.2. INSTRUMENT

The questionnaire which was given to participants consisted of 36 items. Other than 5 open-ended items at the beginning of the questionnaire about the biographical data (age, place of birth, foreign language learning background, contact with target language speakers), all items used Likert scales (five-point rating scales). The items in the questionnaire represented an adapted version of items from two sources of established attitude and motivation questionnaires (Dörnyei 2001; Tennant/Gardner 2004). The main variable groups in the questionnaire were as follows:

- Items concerning attitudes towards the language communities
 - the in-group (8 items, which included statements such as: "Nowadays when so many different kinds of people move around and mix together so much, individuals have to protect themselves especially carefully against catching an infection or disease from them");
 - the out-group (7 items, with statements such as: "The Americans are very naive");
- Items concerning attitudes towards the language
 - the mother tongue (5 items, which included statements such as: "The Serbian language is so complex and intricate that no one but the Serbian people can truly learn it");
 - the target language (6 items, which included statements such as: "The English language is cold and harsh");
- Items concerning status-frustration and status-anxiety (5 items, which included statements such as: "The state of the world being what it is, it is very difficult for students to plan their career").

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to analyze the data, a bivariate correlational analysis was performed. In this analysis, five variables were examined: three predictor variables (the respondents' levels of general ethnocentrism, language ethnocentrism and anomie) and two dependent variables (the respondents' scores on the written test and on the oral presentation).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

	Written test	Oral presentation
General ethnocentrism	0.02	0.05
Language ethnocentrism	-.21*	-.24*
Anomie	.51**	.55**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Results of the data analysis

Table 4 summarizes the correlational analysis performed in order to discover relations between social attitudes and language performance scores. The first prediction made in the research was that the higher the respondents' levels of general ethnocentrism, the lower the scores on the proficiency measures. The second hypothesis predicted that the higher the students' levels of language ethnocentrism, the lower the scores would be on both proficiency measures. Finally, it was hypothesized that the higher the respondents' score on anomie, the higher the scores would be on their proficiency measures.

From Table 4 it is clear that no significant correlations were found between the respondents' general ethnocentrism and their language performance scores. A weak negative correlation ($r > -.21$ and $r > -.24$) was obtained between the respondents' language ethnocentrism and their scores on proficiency measures, indicating that the lower the students' language ethnocentrism scores were, the higher their language performance scores. Finally, a strong correlation ($r > .51$ and $r > .55$) was obtained between the respondents' anomie and their scores on proficiency measures, which means that the higher the students' anomie scores were, the higher their language performance scores.

From theoretical ideas put forth by a number of socio-psychological researchers, the main expectation of this research was to find a link between the students' attitudes towards the target language community and their own community, on the one hand, and their success in language learning, on the other hand. This link was not found between general ethnocentrism and language mastery. This finding suggests that ethnocentrism perhaps does not affect proficiency in the target language, at least with regards to the sample of respondents who took part in this research, which exclusively included university students.

There was, however, a weak negative correlation between students' language ethnocentrism scores and their scores on both proficiency measures. The negative correlation in this case indicates that the students who had lower scores on language ethnocentrism variable had higher performance scores. Thus, the correlation was found between low language ethnocentrism and high language ability, and not between high language ethnocentrism and low language ability, as was predicted in the hypothesis. Again, it is possible that the correlation obtained was due to sampling, as ethnocentric attitudes are likely to be decreased by university education.

The only strong correlation in the research was found between high scores on anomie and high performance scores. The students who felt dissatisfied with the society in general and who expressed frustration and anxiety about their present and future roles in society overall had higher scores on proficiency measures. This finding substantiates the claim that anomie is a positive predictor of language achievement, as it is related to subtractive bilingualism and integrative orientation in learning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research yields interesting findings relating to assumptions about the learners' identity and attitudes. Foreign language learning in Serbia typically takes place in the context of a classroom which can never be isolated from socio-cultural, economic, political, religious and other factors affecting both the in-group and the out-group. The research shows that the most successful learners are those who, on the one hand, have high scores on the anomie variable and are, thus, open to new language norms and norms of social behaviour, and, on the other hand, who have low levels of language ethnocentrism, possibly mediated by effects of university education.

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SUMMARY

ATTITUDINAL VARIABLES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: ROLE OF ETHNOCENTRISM AND ANOMIE

The paper gives a report on a research study conducted in an attempt to identify potential barriers in achieving higher target language proficiency. The research investigated learners' levels of ethnocentrism and anomie; for that purpose, 112 students studying at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, enrolled in an English course for the purpose of fulfilling faculty requirements, were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements expressing views about Serbian and English/American cultures, societies and languages. The statements tested the students' levels of: general ethnocentrism, language ethnocentrism and anomie. The participants' responses to the statements were correlated with their levels of English proficiency as measured by a written test, which tested their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and by an interview, which tested their speaking skills. The hypothesis that there would be a significant correlation between the variables measured and the students' score on proficiency measures was investigated.

KEYWORDS: attitude, ethnocentrism, anomie, socio-cultural factors, in-group, out-group, learners.

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