

Section 3. Pedagogy Sciences

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE APTITUDE AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Abstract. The phenomenon of variation in language learning outcomes among seemingly similar learners is a prominent issue within foreign language classrooms.

Within this conference paper we propose a reevaluation of the traditional dichotomy of “strong vs weak” language learners by employing the concept of foreign language aptitude. This psychological construct encompasses the cognitive abilities that underlie the observed disparities in learners’ performance.

The Classical View of Foreign Language Aptitude, which consists of four fundamental abilities (phonetic coding, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning, and rote memory), provides a framework for both operationalizing and assessing various aptitude levels. The outcomes obtained from aptitude assessments offer instructors quantitative data that can be utilized to tailor instruction and adapt teaching methodologies according to the specific needs of individual learners.

Through the identification of deficiencies and the adjustment of instructional practices, instructors are able to optimize the learning experience and facilitate learners’ progress. The practical implications of foreign language aptitude assessment empower instructors to align learners’ abilities with appropriate instructional approaches, thereby enhancing language learning outcomes.

Keywords: progress pace variation, foreign language aptitude, instructional strategy adaptation, assessment results.

The variation in the pace of progress among language learners placed in similar educational settings represents a highly prominent (if not the most notable) phenomenon within the context of foreign language classrooms.

No complex instruments or intricate computations are necessary to perceive the aforementioned discrepancy. Merely immersing oneself in the environment of formal language education would reveal that certain individuals exhibit a superior aptitude for language learning compared to others.

Foreign language instructors commonly acknowledge the presence of “stronger” and “weaker” students in their classrooms, often without delving into a more intricate examination of the underlying reasons and contributing factors.

However, it can be contended that reevaluating the dichotomy of “strong” and “weak” language learners from the perspective of the psychological construct of foreign language aptitude could potentially facilitate the attainment of the desired outcomes for both language learners and instructors. Such a reconceptualization may prove beneficial in enhancing the learning experience and overall performance in foreign language studies.

A psychological construct is a “postulated attribute of people”¹ encompassing a number of cognitive abilities that cannot be observed or measured directly² yet underlie actually observed differences in the behavior of an individual expressed in response to external stimuli³.

Hence, the determination of which cognitive abilities should be considered as integral components of a psychological construct significantly influences both its conceptualization, involving its formal definition, and its operationalization, involving the conditions under which a behavioral response can be elicited to draw conclusions regarding the construct⁴.

Multiple approaches exist for the conceptualization and subsequent operationalization of the foreign language aptitude (FLA) construct. However, when considering the practical implementation of this construct within a standard foreign language classroom, particularly when instructors aim to align their instruction with the aptitude profiles of their language learners, the Classical view of FLA should be employed.

Esoused by the founding father of foreign language aptitude research, John Bissell Carroll, *the Classical View of FLA* suggests that foreign language aptitude comprises four basic abilities:

- ***the phonetic coding ability*** – the capacity to convert unfamiliar auditory stimuli, including individual sounds or sequences of sounds, into a form that allows

¹ Cronbach J. and Meehl P.E. “Construct Validity in Psychological Tests”. Psychol Bull.– Vol. 52. 1955.– P. 178.

² Wen Z., Biedroń A. and Skehan P. “Foreign language aptitude theory: Yesterday, today and tomorrow”. Language Teaching.– Vol. 50.– No. 1. 2017.– P. 2. Doi: 10.1017/S0261444816000276

³ Wesche M., Edwards H. and Wells W. “Foreign language aptitude and intelligence”. Appl Psycholinguist.– Vol. 3.– No. 2. 1982.– P. 128. Doi: 10.1017/S0142716400006664

⁴ Zverev I. “Uzbekistan MoD Foreign Language Aptitude Test: A Critical Evaluation”. Filologiya Masalalari.– Vol. 29.– No. 2. 2019.– P. 138–151.

their retrieval at a later time interval, i.e. the materials must be “recognized, identified and remembered over time”¹;

- **the grammatical sensitivity ability** – the ability to perceive and comprehend the diverse functions that different lexical items serve within an expression, without the need for explicit guidance or instruction.;
- **the inductive language learning ability** – the ability to deduce grammatical rules, linguistic structures, and semantic interpretations of lexical items from unfamiliar language materials independently, without reliance on an instructor or external assistance.;
- **the rote memory for foreign language materials** – the ability to memorize and retain substantial amounts of new vocabulary or grammatical structures in a foreign language.

Foreign language instructors have the option to assess each of these abilities using the various FLA operationalization instruments available online, some of which are offered free of charge. However, it is important to consider the practical applications that can be derived from these assessment results.

Within any instructional setting, language learners are required to employ specific cognitive abilities, either individually or in combination. As a result, any alteration in the instructional context necessitates corresponding adjustments in the sets of abilities utilized by students. The outcomes obtained from FLA component assessment tests can provide instructors with quantitative data that substantiates the requirement for such modifications among particular students. These results can serve as valuable evidence supporting the need to adapt instructional strategies to address the specific cognitive abilities and aptitude profiles of individual learners.

Therefore, a language instructor may conscientiously devise and deliver an inductive grammar and vocabulary presentation, anticipating enhanced student performance. However, the instructor may encounter a situation where, despite their diligent efforts, the desired outcomes are not attained.

The observed disparity may lead the instructor to speculate that the inductive presentation approach may not be optimal for their students. In order to evaluate the validity of this hypothesis, the instructor can utilize an assessment instrument to measure their students’ inductive language learning ability. If a group of students, or even an individual student, obtains a low score on such a test, it would be prudent for the instructor to contemplate eliminating elements of inductive grammar and vocabulary presentation from the lessons. This adjustment has the potential to save significant time and effort for both the language learners and the instructor.

¹ Sparks R. L. and Ganschow L. “Foreign language learning difficulties: affective or native language aptitude differences?” *Modern Language Journal*, – Vol. 75.– No. 1. 1991.– P. 6.

Additionally, low scores on any of the other tests can provide valuable insights to the instructor regarding the remedial measures that may be necessary to support a language learner or a group of language learners in their endeavors.

These scores furnish the instructor with a comprehensive understanding of the particular language learning skills that their students may be deficient in, thereby offering a range of possibilities for enhancing or addressing those skills through customized instructional approaches. This tailored instruction has the potential to yield mutual benefits for both the language learners and the instructor.

The FLA component assessment serves a dual purpose as it enables the identification of potential deficiencies in students' foreign language learning while also facilitating modifications in the instructional process to address those deficiencies. The assessment results offer foreign language instructors the opportunity to align learners' abilities with appropriate instructional approaches.

Through the assessment, instructors can diagnose potential deficiencies in foreign language learning, allowing them to pinpoint specific areas where students may encounter difficulties or require additional support. This diagnostic aspect helps identify gaps in language aptitude, such as vocabulary retention, grammar comprehension, or oral fluency, among others.

Furthermore, the FLA assessment not only aids in diagnostics but also facilitates the modification of the instructional process to provide targeted remedies for the identified deficiencies. Drawing upon the assessment results, instructors can customize their teaching strategies, materials, and approaches to align with the individual needs of the learners. This personalized approach ensures that instruction is tailored to match the learners' abilities, thereby optimizing the learning experience and promoting greater progress.

Essentially, the FLA assessment empowers instructors to refine their teaching methods by utilizing the diagnostic information to identify areas for improvement. Subsequently, they can adapt their instructional practices to offer effective remedies for learners' deficiencies. This dynamic process allows for continuous refinement of the instructional approach, leading to enhanced learning outcomes.

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