

# Learning Styles for Students

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**Abstract**— “Have you ever noticed how several people can witness the same event, interpret it differently, and take wide – ranging actions as a result?”

This quotation illustrates how different children respond to the same stimuli. Some reactions are based on learned behavior and biological potential. This combination of biology (heredity) and other circumstances, mainly environmental ones which are caused by the social position of a family, produces various ways that people prefer when they learn. Since I have been teaching for several years I have met many different classes, students, parents and colleagues. Every new college year new students come and it takes some time to get used to each other till we can start to work. But during a few last years I felt that it is not only the matter of getting used to each other but that there is a need for finding out what is good and effective for both sides, for students and for me as a teacher. More precisely, it is not enough to know each student in the class, its personality, abilities and knowledge. As more and more students have difficulties with learning, there is a need to identify their “learning style”. teaching process. Amazingly problems helped me but the strongest point was my own failure. I attended a seminar about the second language acquisition and during this seminar we were asked to learn some new words in Eskimo language. The first task was only listening to these words and I was in an absolutely awkward situation. It was very difficult for me and I was lost and stressed during this task. Then I realized that I need visual support for my learning. But more important thing was that I realized that it could be the same and sometimes worse for my students when they have to clear something in a way that does not suit them.

**Index Terms**— Learning, Language, Second Language, Teaching, Learning styles

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language learning styles and strategies are among the main factors that help determine how well our students learn a second or foreign language. A second language is a language studied in a setting where that language is the main vehicle of everyday communication and where abundant input exists in that language. A foreign language is a language studied in an environment where it is not the primary vehicle for daily interaction and where input in that language is restricted. Over the last twenty years, there has been growing interest in incorporating a focus on learning strategies and learning-how-to-learn into language curricula. There is a general belief that such a focus helps students become more effective learners and facilitates the activation of a learner-centered philosophy. It is also believed that learners who have developed skills in learning-how-to-learn will be better able to exploit classroom learning opportunities effectively, and will be more adequately equipped to continue with language learning outside of the classroom. Increasingly, the focus of university level instruction is on learning-how-to-learn rather than mastery of bodies of factual information.

Research into learning styles and strategies has focused on a wide variety of questions and issues. These include the relationship between learning strategy preferences and other learner characteristics such as educational level, ethnic background and first language; the issue of whether effective learners share certain style and strategy preferences; whether strategies can be explicitly taught, and, if so, whether strategy training actually makes a difference to second language acquisition; and whether effective learners share attitudes towards, and patterns of language practice and use outside of the classroom.

## 2. SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

First of all it seems to be useful to find out the best descriptions of two main terms in second language learning which are probably “language learning” and “acquisition”. Almost in each methodological or linguistics book dealing language learning you can find various definitions of these two crucial concepts. But not always you can clearly understand their meanings. I have found a good explanation in a book called *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* written by Stephen D Krashen. In his book concerning “Monitor Theory” of adult second language acquisition, Krashen hypothesizes that adults have two independent systems for developing abilities in second languages, subconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning. Krashen points out that these two systems are interrelated in a definite way. (Krashen, 2002)

“The fundamental claim of Monitor Theory is that conscious learning is available to the performer only as a Monitor. In general, utterances are initiated by the acquired system - our fluency in production is based in what we have “picked up” through active communication. Our “formal” knowledge of the second language, our conscious learning, may be used to alter the output of the acquired system, sometimes before and sometimes after the utterance is produced.” (Krashen, 2002:2).

A major point in his theory is that the second language classroom might be a very good place for second language acquisition, but his analytic data indicate the importance of the amount of intake the acquirer can get. If the informal environments are rich of intake acquisition occurs. On the other hand, in intake-poor classrooms acquisition suffers. Krashen

declares that there are several ways in which the classroom can promote language acquisition and that intake is available via meaningful and communicative activities supplied by the teacher. (Krashen, 2002)

## 2.1 Learning

What is learning? Brown considers some traditional definitions. A search in contemporary dictionaries reveals that learning is "acquiring or getting of knowledge of a subject or a skill by study, experience, or instruction" (Brown, 1987:6) We can respect an extract from Brown's main conclusions about the learning if we need to understand the meaning of the "learning":

1. Learning is acquisition or "getting."
2. Learning is retention of information or skill.
3. Retention implies storage systems, memory, cognitive organization.
4. Learning involves active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism.
5. Learning is relatively permanent, but subject to forgetting.
6. Learning involves some form of practice, perhaps reinforced practice.
7. Learning is a change in behavior. (Brown, 1987: 6)

## 3. TYPES OF LEARNING

The first general category within the processes of learning comes from the work of educational psychologist Robert Gagné<sup>5</sup> (was an American educational psychologist best known for his "Conditions of Learning") who demonstrated the importance of identifying a number of types of learning which all human beings use.

Brown (1987) differentiates several types of learning that vary according to the context and subject matter to be learned. Brown (1987:79) identifies eight types of learning :

1. Signal learning. The individual learns to make a general diffuse response to a signal.
2. Stimulus-response learning. The learner acquires a precise response to a discriminated stimulus.
3. Chaining. What is acquired is a chain of two or more stimulus-response connections.
4. Verbal association. Verbal association is the learning of chains that are verbal. Basically, the conditions resemble those for other (motor) chains. However, the presence of language in the human being makes this a special type because internal links may be selected from the individual's previously learned repertoire of language.
5. Concept learning. The learner acquires the ability to make a common response to a class of stimuli even though the individual members of that class may differ widely from each other. The learner is able to make a response that identifies an entire class of objects or events.
6. Principle learning. In simplest terms, a principle is a chain of two or more concepts. It functions to organize behavior and

experience.

7. Problem solving. Problem solving is a kind of learning that requires the internal events usually referred to as "thinking." Previously acquired concepts and principles are combined in a conscious focus on an unresolved or ambiguous set of events.

## 4. LEARNING STYLES

According to J. Mareš (1998, s. 65 "...a learning style is not registered in a particular step but it is recognizable from a wider range, it is perceptible in many repetitive activities during the various learning strategies, and it is noticeable in longer period in various social and context learning." (translated by Šabatová J.)

### 4.1 The Myers-Briggs type indicator (MBTI)

This model classifies students according to their preferences on scales derived from psychologist Carl Jung's theory of psychological types. Felder and Henriques (1995) address that Jung (1971) introduced sensation and intuition as two ways in which people tend to perceive the world. The different ways in which sensors and intuitors approach learning have been characterized in MBTI. Students may be: extraverts (try things out, focus on the outer world of people) or introverts (think things through, focus on the inner world of ideas) sensors (practical, detail-oriented, focus on facts and procedures) or intuitors (imaginative, concept-oriented, focus on meanings and possibilities) thinkers (skeptical, tend to make decisions based on logic and rules) or feelers (appreciative, tend to make decisions based on personal and humanistic considerations)judgers (set and follow agendas, seek closure even with incomplete data) or perceivers (adapt to changing circumstances, resist closure to obtain more data) The MBTI type preferences can be combined to form 16 different learning style types. For example, one student may be an ESTJ (extravert, sensor, thinker, perceiver) and another may be an INFJ (introvert, intuiitor, feeler, judger). This model is being mentioned in the research study in practical part. It is presented by the theory of extraversion and introversion. During the early 1900s, Carl Jung established a field identifying distinct personality patterns. Many theorists have since broken these patterns into categories attempting to make them easier to understand. Carl Jung was a contemporary of Sigmund Freud and a leading exponent of Gestalt personality theory. Jung developed a ground-breaking personality theory that introduced two attitudes - extraversion and introversion (1933a). It is the first pair of psychological preferences. These terms used by C.G.Jung explain different attitudes people use to direct their energy.

Social interaction looks at likely attitudes, habits, and strategies learners will take toward their work and how they engage with their peers when they learn. Some learners are independent, dependent, collaborative, competitive, participant, and avoidant.

## 4.2 Kolb's Learning Style Model

According to Kolb (1984, 41), "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it." Kolb (1984) points out that the complex mental process by which perceived information is converted into knowledge can be grouped into two categories: active experimentation and reflective observation. Kolb's learning theory sets out four distinct learning styles, which are based on a four-stage learning cycle. In this respect, Kolb's model differs from others since it offers both a way to understand individual learning styles, which he named the "Learning Styles Inventory" (LSI), and also an explanation of a cycle of "experiential learning" that applies to all learners.

Kolb follows four main types of learning:

- ▶ concrete experience based on a question "What is it?"
- ▶ reflective observation with a typical question "What does it mean?"
- ▶ abstract conceptualization and the typical question "What follows on?"
- ▶ active experimentation with typical questions "What.....if...?" "How does it function?" (Kolb, 1984)

## 4.3 Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model

In 1988, Richard Felder and Linda Silverman formulated a learning style model designed to capture the most important learning style differences among engineering students and provide a good basis for engineering instructors to formulate a teaching approach that addresses the learning needs of all students" (Felder & Spurlin 2005:103)

This model classifies students in these four dimensions: sensing learners (concrete, practical, oriented toward facts and procedures) or intuitive learners (conceptual, innovative, oriented toward theories and meanings) visual learners (prefer visual representations of presented material—pictures, diagrams, flow charts) or verbal learners (prefer written and spoken explanations) active learners (learn by trying things out, working with others) or reflective learners (learn by thinking things through, working alone) sequential learners (linear, orderly, learn in small incremental steps) or global learners (holistic, systems thinkers, learn in large leaps) Felder & Spurlin explain that each of these dimensions has parallels in other learning style models: the active/reflective dimension is analogous to the learning style of Kolb and the active and reflective learner is respectively related to extrovert and introvert of the MBTI. The sensing/intuitive dimension is taken directly from the MBTI and may have a counterpart in the concrete/abstract dimension of Kolb's model. The active/reflective and visual/verbal dimensions have some analogues in visual-auditory-kinesthetic formulation of modality and neurolinguistic programming and visual/verbal is also rooted in cognitive studies. The

sequential/global dimension has many analogues. This dimension could also be named left/right brain dominant, atomistic/holistic, analytic/hierarchical and auditory-sequential/visual-spatial. (Felder & Spurlin 2005)

## 4.4 Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic

There are various instruments used to determine a student's learning style. We could start with neuro-linguistic programming (NLP)18. It was begun in the mid-seventies by a linguist (Grinder) and a mathematician (Bandler) who had strong interests in (a) successful people, (b) psychology, (c) language and (d) computer programming. NLP claims to help people change by teaching them to program their brains. NLP claims that each of us has a Primary Representational System (PRS), a tendency to think in specific modes: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory or gustatory.

"I think the more you want to become more and more creative you have to not only elicit other peoples' strategies and replicate them yourself, but also modify others' strategies and have a strategy that creates new creativity strategies based on as many wonderful states as you can design for yourself. Therefore, in a way, the entire field of NLP™ is a creative tool, because I wanted to create something new." (Richard Bandler)

## 4.5. Deductive and inductive learning

This model or concept is more about the learning process than learning style. But I have found it useful for my research. Thus it is described here theoretically. The effectiveness of deductive and inductive learning will be investigated in the practical part. Hence, let me introduce it. Deductive learning is an approach to language teaching in which learners are taught rules and given specific information about a language. Then, they apply these rules when they use the language. This may be contrasted with inductive learning in which learners are not taught rules directly, but are left to discover - or induce - rules from their experience of using the language (Richards et al, 1985). Harmer (1989) ascertains that these two techniques encourage learners to compensate for the gap in their second language knowledge by using a variety of communication strategies. A number of research studies, likewise, has reported that successful learners often adopt certain learning strategies such as seeking out practice opportunities or mouthing the questions put to other learners (Peck, 1988). Inductive and deductive models offer this chance to learners because these two models foster a cooperative atmosphere among students. According to Celce-Murcia (1997), the communicative classroom provides a better environment for second language learning than classrooms dominated by formal instruction.

## 4.6. The Dunn and Dunn model

One of the most widely used and well researched models is the Dunn and Dunn model (Dunn, Dunn and Price 1975, 1992, 1993). Given and Reid (1999) merged several approaches to personality and learning styles into one comprehensive model for teaching and learning. The model utilizes Dunn and Dunn's (1993) five learning style domains for the structural framework.

The Dunn and Dunn model contains five learning style domains and twenty one elements of learning style - these are shown below: environmental (sound, light, temperature, de-

sign); emotional (motivation, persistence, responsibility, structure); sociological (learning by self, pairs, peers, team, with an adult), physiological (perceptual preference, food and drink intake, time of day, mobility), and psychological (global or analytic preferences, impulsive and reflective).

Reid and Given (1999) developed an interactive/observational framework to obtain information on the students style and potential areas of difficulty. Summary of the Interactive Observational Style Identification (IOSI) (Reid 2005) is shown below: motivation, persistence, structure, social interaction, communication, modality preference, sequential and simultaneous learning, impulsive and reflective, physical mobility, food intake, time of a day, sound, light, temperature, furniture design, meta cognition, prediction, feedback.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate possible language learning styles, learning strategies and patterns of language use by more effective and less effective learners of English as a foreign language. L2 teachers should consider various ways to prepare to conduct strategy instruction in their classes. Helpful preparatory steps include taking teacher development courses, finding relevant information in print or on the Internet, and making contacts with specialists

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