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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TERMS OF TRAINING PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights a correlation between successful language acquisition and personality characteristics of learners while they are being prepared to become a professional interpreter. The author in this article gives the thorough explanation of the results of the research carried out by the help of Myers-Briggs Indicator type.

Keywords: personality, introvert, intuition, extrovert, judging, proficiency, interpreter, perceiving, competence, language learner, acquisition.

Introduction

There have been a number of studies done to try to investigate problems occurring in simultaneous interpreting. Several scientists such as L.S. Barkhudarov, A.F. Shirayayev, G.E. Berkley, O. Muminov, O. Sunnatov and D. Gile studied importance of the language skills and interpreting skills in simultaneous interpretation, and explained the reasons for the occurrence of problems. However, the problems haven't been regarded as a whole concept. And very few scientists paid attention to the role of psychology and cognition in interpreting process. In this article the personality characteristics of a good language learner is mainly focused, as preparing young interpreters requires dealing with their personality factors.

Methods

The researcher spent a considerable amount of time conducting a survey among participants, aiming to get a deep understanding of the personality characteristics perceived to be associated to successful second language acquisition. A study was carried out with 30 graduates from different Universities of Uzbekistan, 54 undergraduates at Bukhara State University whose majors were interpreting. The purpose of the study was to investigate personality differences to see if there were any identifiable relationships between these variables and the students' language proficiency which is naturally related with their interpreting skills.





The languages in which the participants achieved their high ratings included English, French, Korean, and Russian. Their median education was between the bachelor's and master's degrees. All of these language learners were adults who began the study of the languages in which they have achieved this level as children and adults. The primary independent measure in this study was the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, a questionnaire widely used by educational psychologists, counsellors, and organization development specialists (see Appendix 1a).

The personality test helped to identify four two-dimensional categories (Extrovert or Introvert, etc.), and sixteen personality combinations (INTP, ESFJ, etc.). Each of the eight preferences that goes to make up a psychological type has its assets and liabilities when it comes to language learning. (Isabel Briggs Myers, 1985)

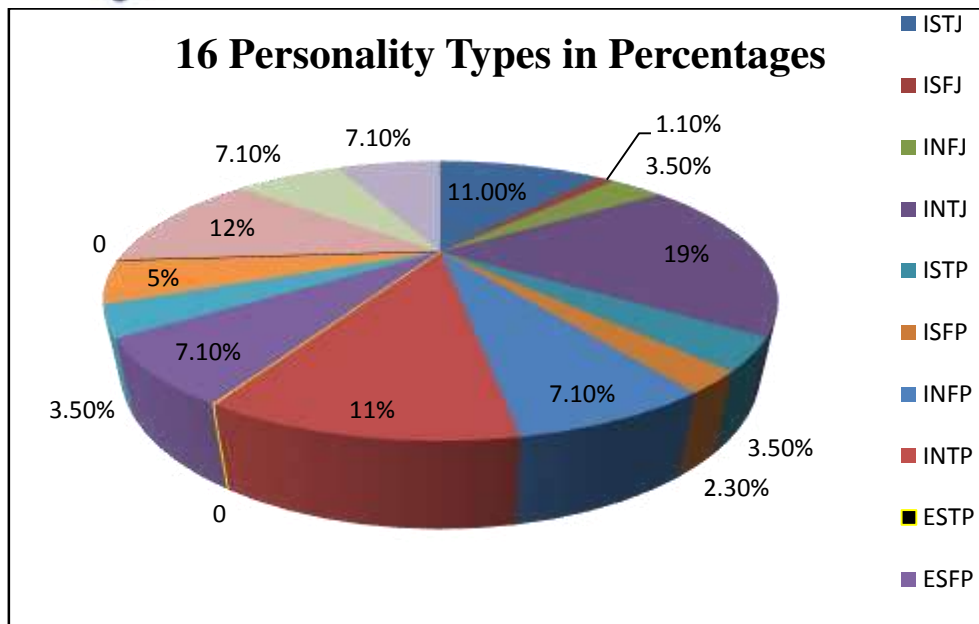
Results

A few questions in the above questionnaire produced some ambiguity for several learners. Thus, the results might not be reliable to some extent. As follows, there was need for conducting another survey with different questionnaire form. However, this inquiry form was also based on MBTI (see Appendix 1b).

This pie chart below presents the percentage of each of the 16 personality types among good language learners.

The results show that in terms of discrete personality characteristics, the most common were I (introversion), N (intuition), T (thinking), and J (judging); within the paired characteristics, intuitive-thinking types (NT) showed the highest frequency overall, whereas sensing-feeling (SF) types were lowest. Among the three-letter combinations, INT (introversion-intuition-thinking) was most frequent. The least represented combinations were EST (extraversion-sensing-thinking), and ISF (introversion-sensing-feeling) categories. All the sensing types except ESFJ (extraversion-sensing-feeling-judging) are under-represented among excellent language learners. On the other hand, all those with NT (intuition-thinking) combinations, especially, INTJ (introversion-intuition-thinking-judging) are overrepresented; (results are in Appendix 1c).





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Analysis

In spite of the finding that INTJ (introversion-intuition-thinking-judging) personalities are significantly over-represented among the top language learners, teachers should remember that statistics do not predict individual achievement: they only suggest probabilities and directions for assisting those who may not have natural preferences that promote high level language learning. These results suggest that teachers might, for instance, help their learners by not insisting on participation in extraverted activities such as group work against students' natural inclinations, and by providing variety and alternatives in classroom activities to suit students' different personalities. Teachers might help their students to develop intuition by encouraging guessing and extracting meaning from context, to develop thinking by means of





analysing linguistic information, and to develop judging by bringing order into study activities (scheduling, for example).

Discussion

In language learning the concept of “a good language learner” is one of the most studied areas. The idea that those who do well in second language courses might be more than simply students of higher diligence than their classmates, that they might employ particular strategies and even be a particular kind of person.

Today most language methodologists have their own ideas about good language learners. Brown gives the following attributes as the characteristics of a good language learner (Brown, 2000):

- a) Capable of finding her own way, taking charge of her learning;
- b) Able to organize information about language;
- c) Creative, developing a "feel" for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words;
- d) Able to make his own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom;
- e) Capable of learning to live with uncertainty by not getting flustered and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word;
- f) Uses mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned;
- g) Makes errors work for her and not against her;
- h) Able to use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of his first language, in learning a second language;
- i) Uses contextual cues to help her in comprehension;
- j) Able to make intelligent guesses;
- k) Learns chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help him perform "beyond his competence";
- l) Learns certain tricks that help to keep conversations going;
- m) Learns different styles of speech and writing and learns to vary the language according to the formality of the situation;
- n) Able to learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in his or her own competence;

Since we already know the role of affect in language learning a question arises: What is the combination of personality characteristics to which excellent second language learners attribute their success in acquiring a high level of English proficiency? Extroverts: the extroverted learner learns more effectively through concrete experiences, contacts with the outside world, and relationships with others. They





value group interaction and class work done together with other students. They are willing to take conversational risks, but are dependent on outside stimulation and interaction.

Introverts: the introverted learner learns more effectively in individual, independent situations that are more involved with ideas and concepts. Their strengths are their ability to concentrate on the task in hand as well as their self-sufficiency; however, they need to process ideas before speaking which sometimes leads to avoidance of linguistic risk-taking in conversation.

Sensing (or concrete-sequential) types: the sensing learner learns more effectively from reports of observable facts and happenings; prefers physical, sense-based input. Their great assets are their willingness to work hard in a systematic way, and their attention to details; however, they will be hindered should there be a lack of clear sequence, goals or structure in the language or language course.

Intuitive types: the intuitive learner learns more effectively from flashes of insight, using their imagination, and grasping the general concepts rather than all the details. Their strengths are their ability to guess from the context, structuring their own training, conceptualizing and model-building. However, they can be hindered by inaccuracy and missing important details.

Thinking types: the thinking learner learns more effectively from impersonal circumstances and logical consequences. Their strengths are in their ability to analyse and their self-discipline. However, they can suffer from performance anxiety because their self-esteem is attached to achievement.

Feeling types: the feeling learner learns more effectively from personalized circumstances and social values. They have the advantage of their strong desire to bond with the teacher, resulting in good relations which lead to high self-esteem. However, they can become discouraged if not appreciated, and disrupted by lack of interpersonal harmony.

Judging (or closure-oriented) types: the judging learner learns more effectively by reflection, analysis, and processes that involve closure. They have the advantage of systematically working through a task, and wanting to get the job done. However, they suffer from rigidity and intolerance of ambiguity.

Perceiving (or open-ended) types: the perceiving learner learns more effectively through negotiation, feeling, and inductive processes that postpone closure. Their strong points are their openness, flexibility and adaptability to change and new experiences. However, they may suffer from laziness and inconsistent pacing over the long haul.





Conclusion

In general, we should not be too quick to conclude that psychological type can predict successful and unsuccessful learning. The most important task is to raise learners' awareness of what strengths they possess. Successful learners know their preferences, their strengths, and their weaknesses, and effectively utilize strengths and compensate for weaknesses regardless of their "natural" preferences.

This seems to be a very fertile time for sorting out the issues that relate to how individuals learn languages, how and why they undertake and succeed in mastering interpreting skills, and how one person differs from another in their personalities, and motivations, among other attributes, yet succeeds in his or her own way. What is universal and what is individual is, indeed, a challenging mystery to solve.

Therefore, future research requires larger samples and more comprehensive measures of personality factors and their relationship, so that precise statistical evidence can be found that will shed light on the intuitive belief held by interpreter trainers and educators of the importance of these issues in learning.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1a: Personality Test based on Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Personality test (MBTI)
Please, read carefully before choosing 'a' or 'b'. There is no correct answer; we need your own opinion about your learning preferences.
1. Do you prefer a) group classes (which include student interaction), or b) 1 teacher - 1 student classes?
2. Do you prefer a) oral tests, or b) written tests?
3. Do you prefer a) practical application, or b) dealing with concepts?
4. Do you prefer a) being given an example first, or b) being given the rule first?
5. Do you prefer a) social interaction, or b) working by yourself?
6. Do you prefer a) being given the rule plus its many variations, or b) being given lots of examples so that you can deduce the rule for yourself?
7. Do you prefer a) memorizing lots of facts and details, or b) just grasping the general concepts?
8. Do you prefer a) the real, concrete and tangible, or b) meanings, symbols and abstractions?
9. Do you prefer a) observing specifics, or b) having flashes of insight?
10. With new material, do you prefer a) going step-by-step (according to the textbook or manual), or b) finding your own way?
11. Do you tend to be a) generally more sceptical (suspicious) , or b) generally more trusting?
12. Do you a) more value firm-mindedness, or b) more value harmony between people?
13. Are you a) more objective, or b) more subjective?
14. Do you a) prize more highly logical order, or b) warmth in friendships?
15. When coming to a decision, do you more a) use objective and impersonal criteria, or b) weigh human values and motives (my own and others)?
16. Do you a) work in a steady, orderly way, or b) work in a flexible, more impulsive way?
17. Do you prefer a) working on clearly laid out tasks, or b) working on discovery-type tasks?
18. When completing a task, is it important to you a) to finish it on time, or b) to remain open longer pending further detail?
19. Do you prefer a) formal, structured tasks, or b) informal, problem-solving tasks?
20. Are you a) a more goal-oriented type of person, or b) a more open-ended, play-it-by-ear, go-with-the-flow type of person?



Appendix 1b: Myers-Briggs personality test

Myers-Briggs personality test

For each question choose one type of character (for example, Q1 - Extraverted OR Introverted). Then write the first letter; at the end you will have ESFJ or INTP or ESTP or etc.

Q1. Which is your most natural energy orientation?

Extraverted Characteristics (E)

- Act first, think/reflect later
- Feel deprived when cut off from interaction with the outside world
- Usually open to and motivated by outside world of people and things
- Enjoy wide variety and change in people relationships

Introverted Characteristics (I)

- Think/reflect first, and then Act
- Regularly require an amount of "private time" to recharge batteries
- Motivated internally, mind is sometimes so active it is "closed" to outside world
- Prefer one-to-one communication and relationships

Q2. Which way of Perceiving or understanding is most "automatic" or natural?

Sensing Characteristics (S)

- Mentally live in the Now, attending to present opportunities
- Using common sense and creating practical solutions is automatic-instinctual
- Memory recall is rich in detail of facts and past events
- Best improvise from past experience
- Like clear and concrete information; dislike guessing when facts are "fuzzy"

Intuitive Characteristics (N)

- Mentally live in the Future, attending to future possibilities
- Using imagination and creating/inventing new possibilities is automatic-instinctual
- Memory recall emphasizes patterns, contexts, and connections
- Best improvise from theoretical understanding
- Comfortable with ambiguous, fuzzy data and with guessing its meaning.

Q3. Which way of forming Judgments and making choices is most natural?

Thinking Characteristics (T)

- Instinctively search for facts and logic in a decision situation.
- Naturally notices tasks and work to be accomplished.

- Easily able to provide an objective and critical analysis.
- Accept conflict as a natural, normal part of relationships with people.

Feeling Characteristics (F)





- Instinctively employ personal feelings and impact on people in decision situations
- Naturally sensitive to people needs and reactions.

- Naturally seek consensus and popular opinions.
- Unsettled by conflict; have almost a toxic reaction to disharmony.

Q4. What is your "action orientation" towards the outside world?

Judging Characteristics (J)

- Plan many of the details in advance before moving into action.
- Focus on task-related action; complete meaningful segments before moving on.
- Work best and avoid stress when able to keep ahead of deadlines.
- Naturally use targets, dates and standard routines to manage life.

Perceiving Characteristics (P)

- Comfortable moving into action without a plan; plan on-the-go.
- Like to multitask, have variety, mix work and play.
- Naturally tolerant of time pressure; work best close to the deadlines.
- Instinctively avoid commitments which interfere with flexibility, freedom and variety

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