Personality Traits and Second Language Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper reports on recently undertaken studies on the importance of personality variables as psychological conditioning of language learners conducted in the educational discourse of applied linguistics on the basis of selected methodological treatises, instructional programs and handbooks aimed at language teachers. The research questions posed in this paper have been formulated as follows: (1) which personality traits are considered to be important from the point of view of a foreign language learner compared to those personality traits which are listed and described by psychologists, (2) what is the hierarchy of personality traits taken into account in foreign language pedagogy, and (3) which pedagogically useful conclusions concerning the personality of a language learner can be drawn from the collected investigative material.

Key words: *individual learner difference, models of personality, personality traits*

1. Introduction

The following paper deals with some postulated characteristics of a good language learner from the perspective of psychological theories devoted to personality traits which may be deduced from selected textbooks on the methodology of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT). In particular, it focuses on personality related factors which contribute to the differences among foreign language learners and which have been intensively studied by representatives of applied linguistics since the late 1970s, and into the 1980s and the 1990s. In conformity with the widely known conclusions of the works of respective representatives of FLT methodology, it holds the view, on the one hand, that personality traits may condition the linguistic performance of individuals, and that they, similarly to, for example, learning styles, usually affect the motivation of foreign language students and enhance their progress in language learning. On the other hand, this paper consequently expresses the conviction that it is difficult to discover the relationship between the particular personality traits of foreign language learners and their success in acquiring a language. As far as the methodological issues pertaining to the role of the personality of foreign language learners are concerned, practitioners working in the domain of language teaching should be aware, as will be argued, that particular personality factors cannot be treated as separate variables influencing the attitudes, knowledge and linguistic skills of those who acquire a foreign language. Since they interact with each other, and, in the case of each person, form a unique constellation of interdependent variables, this paper argues in favour of a comprehensive approach to the

personality of foreign language learners against the background of the specific differences among individuals in general.

2. The concept of personality in psychology

The desire to understand ourselves, as well as the nature of those around us, has always been natural and characteristic of human beings. The history of personality psychology dates back to the 4th century B.C. in ancient Greece and such prominent philosophers as Hippocrates (c460–c377 B.C.) and Plato (427–347 B.C.). What is more, as psychologists Liebert and Spiegler (1978: 7) underline, our daily lives are also filled with personality assessment. Human social interactions are characterized by an evaluative aspect aimed at making predictions about the interlocutor's behaviour.

2.1. On defining personality

Personality belongs to one of the concepts which are extremely difficult to define as it refers to an abstract quality of human nature. Its complexity is clearly visible when analysing the denotations of the term over the course of history. Haslam (2007: 4-9), a psychologist from Melbourne (Australia), shows this intricacy by briefly summarizing the evaluation of its meaning starting from the original Latin "mask" and finishing with contemporary and purely psychological definitions. What is more, even now there is no agreement between psychologists about which definition of personality can be accepted as universal and full. Instead of looking for a perfect definition, as Liebert and Spiegler (1978: 9) underline, each personality psychologist selects or constructs his or her own definition depending on their chosen theoretical orientation. The process of defining personality should constitute a gradual procedure of choices in various areas of our interests and beliefs.

In spite of the multiplicity of approaches to the concept of personality, as Haslam (2007: 10-12) writes, there is a common denominator characteristic of the majority of the psychological definitions of the term. Namely, personality is generally defined as a distinctive and the most individual feature of a human being, as it refers to psychological differences among people which are not related to their intellectual potential, but to ways of thinking or behaving directed by emotions or motivation characteristic of the individual. The complicated nature of our personality makes us unique and exceptional, thus it is also defined in terms of individual differences. Such a perception of the term may be found in works written by both personality psychologists (for example, Allport 1937; Santrock 2004; Pervin and John 2001; Mischel, Shoda and Ayduk 2008; Haslam 2007) and by linguists (for example, Sapir 1949).

What is more, a great number of definitions perceive personality as a collection of stable and consistent features. However, as contemporary psychologists Roberts, Wood and Caspi (2001: 375-399) note, evidence from large-scale and long-term studies proves that personality emerges early and changes in various ways throughout the lifespan of an individual. After analysing research findings pertaining to the stability of personality traits, two other psychologists, Matthews and Deary (1998: 50-56) summarized the issue by stating that, as it is

difficult to detect patterns of systematic changes in this area over time, one may assume that major personality traits are stable during the course of typical life events, however, some radical life occurrences, for example, mental problems, may trigger changes to some traits. Finally, personality is generally perceived as a way of adapting to the world and others, and, at the same time, it also has an influence on the way in which an individual is perceived.

Among many definitions, the one proposed by a duo of psychologists, Randy Larsen and David Buss (2005), seems to include all the already listed aspects of personality, such as its unique and individual character, relative stability and adaptive function. Additionally, this definition portrays personality as a set of organized properties which determine an individual's relations with the world. The definition of personality in question is quoted in its entirety for the purposes of this article:

> Personality is the set of psychological traits and mechanisms within the individual that are organized and relatively enduring and that influence his or her interactions with, and adaptations to, the intrapsychic, physical, and social environments.
>
> (Larsen and Buss 2005: 4)

2.2. Trait models of personality

In psychology, trait theories or dispositional theories have been developed for the purpose of investigating the personality types of individuals. As the name suggests, these theories are predominantly oriented towards the description and measurement of personality traits, and may be equated with the type theories which detail the categorizations and taxonomies of people with regard to quantitative rather than qualitative differences between them (cf. Bernstein, Penner, Clarke-Stewart and Roy 2008).

The trait theories generally assume that personalities consist of traits which form a combination of perceivable qualities unique to each individual, similarly to genes, which hold information about the unique biological features of organisms. The number of possible traits is unlimited. When speaking about an individual's personality, people use specific adjectives with surprisingly similar denotations across languages. These adjectives are called trait descriptive adjectives and they denote various attributes of people. As Larsen and Buss (2010: 4) note, in English there are more than 20 000 such words, for example, *pessimistic*, *reliable*, *hard-working* and *shy*. Interestingly enough, these words may refer to such diversified aspects of personality as the specific qualities of the human mind, e.g., *thoughtful*; effects on others, e.g., *charming*; or desires to reach one's goals, e.g., *ambitious*, etc. (cf. Larsen and Buss 2010: especially 4).

Trait adjectives are often used in educational contexts to describe the qualities of students, and also in official terminology and documents. They help to specify a number of educational goals aimed at the development of independence, imagination and discipline among students. Psychology textbooks for both experienced and student teachers (for example, Child, 1991 or Gage and Berliner, 1975) often refer to the five-factor model. Its current form is the result of the detailed work of many researchers, but the ones who are responsible for the final breakthrough in this area are Goldberg, McCrae and Costa (Dörnyei

2005: 14). This model is the dominant taxonomy when it comes to contemporary personality research and has attracted more agreement than any other in the field of personality psychology, where it constitutes the most popular trait-based model. The traits in the model are called The Big Five and include: "openness", "conscientiousness", "extraversion", "agreeableness", and "neuroticism". The model (the research on which has been summarized, *inter alia*, by Digman in 1990) has proved to be universal and the most complete one, which explains its constant popularity.

3. Personality in the educational context

It is clear to everyone who has ever taught or studied a foreign language that there is a considerable variation in the rate at which people learn foreign languages, as well as in the language level which they ultimately reach. In the 1970s, a flurry of so-called 'good language learner' studies tried to specify the distinctive features of a successful learner. Although these studies are now widely perceived as simplistic, they did manage to identify a number of factors affecting the rate and effectiveness of foreign language acquisition *(*cf. "Good language learner studies", n.d.). Among these factors, students' personality has attracted a considerable amount of attention.

Nowadays the importance of personality has been rediscovered and the issue has been addressed many times in various documents. For example, in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001), one may read:

> The communicative activity of users/learners is affected not only by their knowledge, understanding and skills, but also by selfhood factors connected with their individual personalities, characterised by the attitudes, motivations, values, beliefs, cognitive styles and personality types which contribute to their personal identity.

> (Council of Europe 2001: 105)

3.1. The European Union on the issue of personality management in the language teaching process

The policy of the Council of Europe is to promote the idea of multilingual societies. The CEFR, which was designed to "provide a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency" (Council of Europe n.d.), strongly underlines the need for a teaching process which, on the one hand, accounts for various personality traits manifested by individuals, and, on the other hand, creates a classroom environment allowing personality development and growth. What is more, the CEFR tries to encompass all aspects of language learning by introducing a taxonomy of competences which interact with each other, influencing the development of each unique personality. This document promotes an intercultural approach to teaching languages as it

calls for the development of the learner's whole personality together with the development of a sense of identity characteristic of the citizens of Europe and the world. The task is so elaborate and difficult that "it must be left to teachers and the learners themselves to reintegrate the many parts into a healthily developing whole" (Council of Europe 2001: 1). Still, some desired general competences which are enumerated and specified along with one existential competence encompass, among others, such personality traits and factors, as: (1) loquacity and/or taciturnity, (2) enterprise and/or timidity, (3) optimism and/or pessimism, (4) introversion and/or extroversion, (5) proactivity and/or reactivity, intropunitive and/or extrapunitive and/or impunitive personality (guilt), (6) (freedom from) fear or embarrassment, (7) rigidity and/or flexibility, (8) open-mindedness and/or closed-mindedness, (9) spontaneity and/or self-monitoring, (10) intelligence, (11) meticulousness and/or carelessness, (12) memorizing ability, (13) industry and/or laziness, (14) ambition and/or (lack of) ambition, (15) (lack of) self-awareness, (16) (lack of) self-reliance, (17) (lack of) self-confidence, (18) (lack of) self-esteem (Council of Europe 2001: 105-106).

The role of these factors is highlighted by stating that they not only influence students' behaviour in communication acts, but they also affect general learning abilities. Thus, keeping in mind such a correlation, a language teacher should promote and allow the development of students' personalities, and at the same time, not forget about the ethical and pedagogic issues involved. The issues which should be considered by language educators include:

- the extent to which personality development can be an explicit educational objective;
- how cultural relativism is to be reconciled with ethical and moral integrity;
- which personality factors a) facilitate b) impede foreign or second language learning and acquisition;
- how learners can be helped to exploit strengths and overcome weaknesses;
- how the diversity of personalities can be reconciled with the constraints imposed on and by educational systems.

(Council of Europe 2001: 106)

Generally speaking, in the CEFR, language learning is seen as one of the ways to develop an individual's personality (e.g., stronger self-confidence). The document promotes a general sensitivity to and acceptance of the cultural and personality differences among students.

3.2. The role of personality in the process of second language acquisition

When taking into consideration the biological foundations of language learning, second language acquisition is seen as a process which relies on a number of conscious and subconscious mental processes which are affected by an array of individual-related factors. These factors may facilitate or hinder the process of learning. In the teaching context, personality traits are enumerated among these variables and belong to the category of individual learner differences. It is generally believed, as Trawiński (2005: 40), an applied linguist, writes, that personality, alongside such factors as age, general intelligence, language aptitude and cognitive style, belongs to unmodifiable learner differences, i.e., it is not affected by the teacher or the environment. What is more, Trawiński (2005: 40) also underlines that

personality does not determine individuals' linguistic abilities. However, it may influence other individual learner differences, for example, motivation.

Some theories relate personality to attitude and motivation, which are inseparably interwoven into the process of second language acquisition. Such claims were postulated by Rivers (1964), who was an Australian professor writing extensively on the topic of language teaching, and by a professor of linguistics and educational researcher, Krashen (1981). Krashen's Monitor Model, first published in 1977, constitutes a group of five hypotheses striving to explain the mechanisms governing the process of second language acquisition. One of these hypotheses, namely the affective filter hypothesis, introduces the notion of the affective filter, which refers to emotional factors blocking the learner from receiving linguistic input. What is more, in his works, Krashen underlines that traits reflecting self-confidence (e.g. high self-esteem, a low level of anxiety and an outgoing personality) seem to influence L2 acquisition (cf. Lalonde and Gardner 1984).

Another well-known model, which partially accounts for the role of personality-related variables, was proposed by a psychologist, Gardner (1985). This model highlights the influence of learners' attitudes towards the learning process and the language being learnt, as well as the role of individual learner differences in the process of language acquisition. Unfortunately, the model only draws our attention to the existence of a relationship between different social factors and learning, but it does not explain how and why this relation occurs (cf. Trawiński, 2005: 81-82).

Finally, an applied linguist, Schumann (1978) proposed a model which tried to account for social and psychological factors in second language acquisition. Schumann (1978) centered his Acculturation Model around the process of language learning in a natural environment. He underlined the role of the process of acculturation i.e. adaptation to a new culture, which, as Brown (2000) highlights, involves a change in the way of feeling and thinking.

Numerous studies have proved the existence of the mutual correspondence between personal and situational characteristics (cf. Matthews and Deary 1998). Matthews and Deary (1998) point out that this relation determines both a person's behaviour in a given situation and subsequent changes in personality traits. Therefore, in the classroom environment, one may only speak about an aspect of somebody's personality which functions in these circumstances – a given student may manifest completely different personality traits at home, at work or even when being taught by a different teacher.

Apart from affecting the process of acquisition, personality factors very often influence students' performance and thus they can determine the process of evaluation and its results. What is more, as Child (1991) highlights, a teacher who has acquired some basic psychological knowledge may easily recognize some personality-related disturbances among his/her students. Such knowledge enables educators to intervene in cases when special guidance and help is required.

Once the role of personality in the process of second language acquisition has been briefly discussed, the most important research on the role of personality factors in the process of language acquisition will be outlined.

3.3. Research on personality traits in second language learning

An American psychologist, Braden (1995: 621-622), enumerates three applications of personality research. First of all, normal personality variation among students and its influence on learning outcomes may be studied. In contrast, other researchers scrutinize different abnormalities, including both dysfunctional and unusually gifted individuals. Finally, some research aims at facilitating teachers' management of personality differences among their students. This paper focuses mostly on the first and third area of interest.

When it comes to the research concerning personality variables in learning, as Dörnyei (2005: 21) underlines, the overall picture emerging from it is rather mixed and in some cases even contradictory. The majority of research has been based on the Big Five traits with extraversion-introversion as the most popular among those analysing this area of language studies. Still, even here the results have been inconclusive. Dörnyei (2005) explains the situation giving a few reasons. First of all, personality factors correlate with a large number of situational variables which influence the results. For example, Wankowski (1973) proved that extraversion and introversion affect learning achievement differently before and after puberty. Before puberty extraverts have an advantage over introverts, but later the situation is reversed. Such results clearly suggest that there are too many obscuring factors which have to be taken into account during the research and it makes the task extremely laborious. Another issue is related to the construction of the Big Five Model itself. It consists of 5 main supertraits and each of them encompasses 30 primary ones. As psychologists Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2003) have shown, people with identical superfactor scores may have completely different primary trait factor scores. It refers us back to the definition of personality with the aspect of a combination of traits and the metaphor of a culinary recipe – often one ingredient can change the taste of a whole dish. What is more, there are also some methodological problems involved, such as using various criteria for academic success; the choice of a sample or the duration of the research. Additionally, in the area of language use, there is a clash between a global psychological approach and detailed linguistic methods.

A number of personality-related factors have been suggested as those likely to influence second language acquisition. Still, as has already been stated, it is not easy to demonstrate their effects in empirical studies. Now the most popular assumptions will be presented.

First of all, an online public domain providing access to various means of personality measurement called the International Personality Item Pool suggests that extroverted learners willingly start conversations with a number of different people. Arabski (1996) notices, from the viewpoint of applied linguistics, that due to their sociability, extroverts have more opportunities to communicate and as a result, they receive a bigger amount of language input. Obviously, such encounters with a foreign language positively influence students' fluency.

Secondly, the trait of conscientiousness seems to be generally related to the process of learning, including language acquisition. People with high levels of conscientiousness are always prepared and well-organized. What is more, they pay attention to detail and this tendency may be extremely helpful when learning grammar, for example.

Risk-taking constitutes another feature related to the Big Five taxonomy by its direct correspondence to the trait of openness to experience, which can be characterised as the

willingness to face new, sometimes even hazardous, life events. In turn, risk-taking, as the name suggests, is defined as a readiness to take risks, to guess and, in language areas, as a readiness to communicate in spite of errors (cf. Trawiński 2005: 43). Research in the area has shown that this personality feature makes our language learning more efficient and quicker as risk-takers experiment with language and thus make more hypotheses which are immediately verified. They also get more language input. However, excessive risk-taking may lead to the production and internalization of a number of incorrect language samples resulting in error fossilization (cf. Trawiński 2005).

Apart from the Big Five taxonomy, there are also some other personality-related factors which are traditionally believed to indirectly influence language acquisition. Out of many features, anxiety has attracted considerable attention in second language acquisition research. *The Gale Encyclopaedia of Psychology* (Strickland 2000: 42) defines anxiety as "an unpleasant emotion triggered by anticipation of future events, memories of past events, or ruminations about the self." Anxiety may be triggered by real and imaginary situations, or may be a permanent personality trait. Feelings of stress and uneasiness experienced in new and stressful situations affect all people, regardless of their age, gender, social background or race. Mentally healthy and balanced individuals react appropriately in such situations and eventually adapt (cf. Strickland 2000), still it seems logical to assume that anxiety levels correlate with academic success, including foreign language learning, according to the simple rule: the higher anxiety level, the lower the level of educational success. However, the relation is not as obvious as it seems because anxiety may influence the learning process in two completely different ways. So far two kinds of anxiety have been distinguished, the so-called *debilitating anxiety* and the *facilitating* one (cf. Ellis 1985). The second one gives a student motivation to work harder and to be more competitive and therefore enhances the learning process.

Anxiety is related to yet another personality feature influencing language acquisition, namely self-esteem, which refers to the concepts of self-confidence and self-acceptance. In the learning context, self-esteem may be seen as "a sense of competence and mastery in performing tasks and solving problems independently" (Strickland 2000: 570-571). As Trawiński (2005: 41-43) notices, self-esteem might influence the rate of language acquisition by affecting the levels of both anxiety and inhibition. Inhibition constitutes yet another feature related to the shape of our personality. It may be defined as a mental state in which a person's behaviour becomes restricted in order to defend one's ego *(ibid)*. Trawiński (2005) underlines that second language acquisition may be seen as a process of new *ego* creation and that is why inhibition may slow it down. Inhibition increases with age – adults with a well-established ego are afraid of losing face and that is why they avoid using language which is new to them. This negative influence of inhibition has been proved, for example, in research conducted by the psychologist, linguist and psychiatrist Guiora (1972, in Lightbown and Spada 1993), who analysed the influence of small doses of alcohol on adult learners' pronunciation. Still, these procedures for lowering the levels of inhibition are not recommended for classroom language learners for obvious reasons.

The last feature to discuss is the tolerance of ambiguity, which is the ability to deal with unclear incoming information. A tolerance of ambiguity facilitates learning as it allows learners to make use of a greater amount of incoming linguistic information. Students who

are intolerant in this respect simply reject new language as they do not understand everything, for example, some vocabulary items in a new text (cf. Trawiński 2005: 44). As Wieder, a contributor to *The Gale Encyclopaedia of Psychology* (in Strickland 2000: 160) highlights, a tolerance of ambiguity is a trait that is necessary for success in creative endeavours, such as foreign language learning.

3.4. Personality of a good language learner

The majority of early studies concerning the features of good language learners have focused on the learning strategies used by such students. However, in the mid to late 70s, in the 80s and the 90s, interest shifted more in the direction of socio/cultural influences and individual differences *(*cf. "Good language learner studies", n.d.). Since then, the role of personality has been noticed and acknowledged among researchers dealing with the model of a perfect language student, for example, an experienced teacher and scholar from the field of language learning strategies, Griffiths (2008), devotes an entire chapter of her book to the issue. She describes research aimed at discovering the qualities of personality of highly successful language learners.

In Griffiths' study introverted intuition is over-represented among proficient language users. As she explains, it is probably related to pattern recognition and analysis, receptivity to direct and indirect input, interferences, tolerance of ambiguity, orientation toward meaning, and sensitivity to universal aspects to language (Griffiths 2008: 69). Students whose thinking processes are linked with intuition seem to be gifted language learners. Intuitive thinking seems to contribute to the precision of language use. In this research, the most frequent personality type among the top language learners may be described as introversion-intuition-thinking-judging. As Griffiths concludes, the study suggests that the best language learners tend to have introverted personalities and these findings are contrary not only to much of the literature, also mentioned in this paper, but also to pedagogic intuition. The study perfectly underlines the fact that there are high-level language learners in a wide variety of personality categories and it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to discover any patterns due to the number of possible variables.

Another important point was raised by two linguists, Politzer and MacGroarty (1985) in relation to their research which showed that learning and teaching processes are also culturally determined. When analysing the results of their study, one may assume that the strategies, styles and traits which facilitate the process of acquisition in Western societies may be completely different from those favoured by other cultures.

4. Concluding remarks on the classroom management of personality variation

Scholars who aim at developing models of a good language learner urge further investigation in this respect upon future researchers. Still, they draw general conclusions which must be taken into account and accepted by language educators.

Thus, personality traits, such as extroversion and introversion, are regarded as highly influential when it comes to the classroom environment. Brown (1973, in Kezwer 1978) has pointed out that extraversion was generally perceived as a positive feature in Western culture. He firmly maintained that teachers should be very careful in order not to favour the outgoing personalities in their classrooms. Littlewood (1983), for example, whose pedagogical reflections have been discussed by Kezwer (1978), has warned that one should avoid a too aggressive and forced animation of a shy pupil, as there are some limits to the extent to which introverts may be encouraged or prompted to verbalize their needs, thoughts or expectations (cf. Kezwer 1978: especially 55). Unquestionably, when planning foreign language lessons, it is extremely important to take into consideration the internal motivations of students and their different personalities. Namely, some foreign language learners are particularly oriented toward interacting with their classmates and they clearly demonstrate enthusiasm for any communicative activities performed during the lesson, while others, who are quiet and reserved, but, at the same time balanced and self-reliant, may prefer working separately. Undoubtedly, extroverts as such are usually expected to work in groups and engage in oral activities more willingly than introverts who favour individual work, including, for example, written assignments. What is of particular importance for teachers is that introverts, believed to be more accurate, usually enjoy grammar exercises. It should be added here that Brown (1973, in Kezwer 1978), discussing personality differences between students, highlighted the need to implement various testing methods not only with regard to oral production but also for other language skills, such as reading, listening and writing.

Anxiety is yet another personality variable taken into consideration by theoreticians and practitioners of foreign language teaching. As one could assume, almost all users of foreign languages would be certainly willing to admit that they feel anxious or nervous when speaking in front of others. Some suggestions of how to deal with these feelings have been proposed by Hashemi and Abbasi (2013), researchers from Iran, who based their advice about anxiety among students on earlier investigations conducted by Hauck and Hurd (2005). In the opinion of Hashemi and Abbasi (2013: 643), teachers should have at least a basic knowledge of psychology, which will allow them to recognise the existence of anxiety among students and, if necessary, to implement useful strategies. They believe that the choice of an appropriate strategy repertoire is only possible when the cause of anxiety or its sources, different in the case of each student at a particular moment, are specified (e.g., a lack of self-confidence, insufficient language level, cultural issues). According to Hashemi and Abbasi, whose article is of great practical value for teachers in general, it stands to reason that preventing students from feeling stressed and anxious oftentimes requires an understanding of the biological aspects of human sensation and emotions. In stressful situations, it may be advisable to help students realize that the feeling of anxiety is biologically conditioned and natural, for example, by stimulating a discussion about the problem, encouraging students to scrutinize how their bodies react in difficult circumstances and to explain how they can cope with unwanted, negative feelings. Teachers should also know intuitively when to implement some relaxation techniques, for example, taking a deep breath. Hashemi and Abbasi express the conviction that the teaching process should take place in a friendly atmosphere of cooperation among students regardless of their personalities. Error correction methods are

also important; teachers, whenever it is possible, should underline the achievements of students and help them to realize that making mistakes is a natural part of any type of learning and the development of an individual. Additionally, the teaching process should be focused more on rewarding instead of penalizing. Finally, when preparing exercises, one should avoid ones which cause early frustration and choose those which take students step by step to success, because, as educational psychologists, Nathaniel Gage and Berliner (1975: 412-413) underline, in unstructured learning environments, the results of anxious students are generally poor.

As far as openness as a personality trait is concerned, the positive correlation between high levels of ambiguity tolerance and language learning has been proved. According to Brown (2000: 119-120), it might be stated that, when working with those who tend to be intolerant with respect to acquiring new knowledge (which very often occurs in the case of adults), it is advisable to explain why they have to be able to deal with language input that is not completely clear.

The previous discussion pertaining to personality factors in the process of foreign language teaching covered just a small fraction of a very large repertoire. Moreover, an awareness of mutual correlations and influences between personality variables seems to obscure the picture of a foreign language learner. As Kezwer (1978: 56) noted, due to numerous factors, e.g., language level, class size, which have to be taken into consideration, it is almost impossible, when forming language classes or groups, to stream students according to, for example, their extravert or introvert nature. Still, a number of psychologists, including Gage and Berliner (1975: 397-398), argue that it is the environment that shapes and is responsible for developing and maintaining many personality traits. The personality traits of an individual predominantly reflect the environment in which he or she functions. Teachers may only learn how to modify the personalities of their students or help them to make full use of the psychological conditioning which they already possess. The modification of personality variables is possible by manipulating the classroom environment in such a way that it supports a given trait manifestation in a given environment.

5. Summary

Modern approaches to language teaching, such as intercultural communicative language teaching (advocated by i.a. Candlin and Widdowson in Richards and Rogers 2002) recognize the need for the holistic development of the learner in order to promote empathy and an understanding of other cultures. In recent publications in the field of foreign language didactics (cf. Dörnyei 2005; Moyer 2004; Rubio 2007), the personality trait of self-confidence is promoted as it facilitates the appreciation of both one's own and other cultures. This new vision of communicative processes contributes to promoting human diversity and individuality.

In view of the achievements of personality psychologists and applied linguists dealing with the personality traits of foreign language learners, the efforts of teachers should be shifted towards the deployment of teaching practices which do not discriminate against language learners of any personality type. Practically speaking, individual personality traits may

influence the preference for some procedures, for example, in the case of testing, the types of exercises, the ways of presenting new information, homework choice etc. When the teacher understands the behaviour of students with different personalities, he or she can adjust the structure and flow of the lesson, thus helping them to achieve success.

As has already been stated in this paper, the language teaching policy postulated by the European Union promotes an acceptance and an appreciation of cultural diversity and individual learner differences. Therefore, future research conducted by applied linguists interested in the area of personality variables in the language classroom should be focused on efforts to create and implement effective teaching methods and techniques which would promote such differences among students and at the same time would positively influence the process of second language acquisition.

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