



UDK 81'246.2

811.111'243

159.923

Original scientific paper

Received on 27 October 2008

Accepted for publication on 26 Februar 2009

Perception of Influence of Foreign Language Learning on Personality

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The argument that language exerts an important influence on the cognitive processes of an individual was first proposed by Edward Sapir, and was also adopted by the sociocultural theory of L. S. Vygotsky and his followers. Lately, the issue of language and identity has become a vibrant topic in SLA research.

Based on the responses of 186 proficient learners of English as a foreign language, this paper tries to analyze the link between language learning and the development of personality/ies in the foreign language learning context. The research shows that the issue of language and personality is important to bilinguals, regardless of whether they think that their personality does or does not change when they speak their different languages.

1. INTRODUCTION

Granger (2004: 31) notes that the research into foreign language learning "seems to neglect components of identity, or self, or self-concept [...] of the individual subject". Indeed, until recently, little work had been done in the study of the identity of language learners. However, as studies of identity and multiple identities that people assume make their way into all areas of the social sciences and other fields, e.g. art, second language acquisition research has also become very much interested in the issue (e.g. Pavlenko, 2006).





This paper investigates perception of the influence of foreign language learning on the personality of the individual learner. Granger (2004: 40) posed the question of whether acquiring a new language involved constructing, consciously or not, a new “second-language self” that alters, replaces or coexists with the ‘original one’ . The present research aims to provide answers to that question – not one answer, but many – in the voices of foreign language learners themselves, probably the most relevant speakers on the topic.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 *Personality – A Definition*

Before undertaking to tackle the mutual link between language and personality, and more specifically, the potential influence of using different languages on personality, it would be useful to define what exactly personality is. However, investigation of psychology handbooks (e.g. Kazdin 2000, Pervin, Cervone and John 2005, Pervin and John 1999, Corsini and Auerbach 1996, Corsini 1984, Reber and Reber 2001) shows a very noticeable lack of a clear definition. Reber and Reber (2001: 525) thus term personality a “classic ‘chapter heading’ word in psychology”, that is, a term which resists definition to such an extent that wise authors simply use it as the title of a chapter and avoid providing a clear-cut one-sentence definition. Most authors (e.g. Corsini and Auerbach 1996; Kazdin 2000; Corsini 1984) resort to listing and describing personality traits, personality types, personality theories, approaches to personality study, etc. so it is often left up to the reader to piece together her/his own definition. Petz (1992) gives a broad definition of personality as a relatively stable whole which includes temperament, abilities, beliefs, interests, attitudes, values and motives, and is usually (but not necessarily, as Pastuović 1997, emphasizes) reflected in the person’s behavior in the environment. This is the definition adopted in this paper. As to the origin of personality, the interactionist (Petz 1992) point of view, widely accepted in psychology today, posits that the personality of an individual is the result of the interaction of genetic predispositions and the environment which affects the extent of their development.





2.2 *Second Language Acquisition vs. Foreign Language Learning*

For the purposes of this paper, it is important to distinguish between second language acquisition and foreign language learning. Prototypically, foreign language learning is the learning of a language in a setting where no communities that speak that language as a mother tongue are present, for example learning English in Croatia. Second language acquisition, on the other hand, can be defined as the learning of a language spoken by communities with which the learner regularly has interethnic contacts. Most commonly it refers to a member of a minority group learning the official majority language, such as an immigrant from Croatia learning English in the UK.

The distinction between foreign language learning and second language acquisition is important in the context of investigating the link between languages and personality, because the majority of research studies in the field has concerned second language acquisition. In such contexts, it is often hard to distinguish between the influence of different languages on personality and the influence of different cultural or ethnic communities on it, because the two are so closely intertwined. In second language acquisition situations the development of bilingualism¹ co-occurs with socialization in two different communities and the languages often have strictly delineated contexts of usage. For example, a Spanish-English bilingual in the US will often use Spanish only in the home, with her family, while in her work she will use only English. It is obvious that the bilingual will behave differently when at home and when at work, as a monolingual would as well, and it is thus difficult to claim that the change in behavior (which potentially implies a change in personality) has anything to do with language.

As indicated earlier, however, most of research on language and personality has been done in the context of second language acquisition. Studies often speak of different social identities that bilinguals have and

¹ Currently there are many existing definitions of bilingualism, ranging from a minimalist to a maximalist perspective (for an overview see Medved Krajnović 2004). However, the definition of a bilingual as a person who is communicatively competent in two or more languages has started predominating. It is the view of bilingualism adopted in this paper.





these identities are often marked by changing the language that is being used (McClure 1977, as cited in Romaine 1995). Romaine (1995) also notices an interesting use of code-switching which seems to allow speakers to achieve a balance between their opposing social identities, as symbolized by their different languages. Ochs (1993, as cited in Day 2002) points to how individuals use language (or languages) to display their membership in social groups. The question that arises, however, is whether language is merely a marker of a different social identity (that of a family member, of a friend, of an employee, of a student, etc.), or can by itself cause a change in personality, i.e. cause the speaker to play a different 'role'.

Despite the fact that the majority of research studies have been done on second language learners, there are indications in literature that foreign language learners also feel influenced by the foreign language learning process. Granger (2004) points out that the experience of a change in personality/identity is not limited to language learners starting a new life in a new ethnolinguistic community. She recounts a story of a student who reported feeling "as if a part of his identity had been removed" (Gillis 1999, personal communication, as cited in Granger 2004: 7) after withdrawing from a French immersion class. Furthermore, Mihaljević Djigunović (2002) notes that there are shy and introverted people who become more communicative in foreign language classes. Her explanation for the change is the assumption that communication in a different language allows the speakers to feel like a different person, one more open and spontaneous than their 'real self'. In a similar vein, Wilson (2008: 112) suggests 'that individuals can be emboldened and liberated by operating in a foreign language', even more, 'that foreign language learning has a key role to play in personal development', and she gives numerous examples corroborating her suggestion.

The present paper will try to make a contribution to further clarifying the intricate relationship between language and personality in foreign language learners.

2.3 Language Use as Participation

Donato (2001) outlines the debate among researchers which is related to two metaphors that reflect the researchers' conceptualization of the





second language learning process: the acquisition metaphor and the participation metaphor. The first metaphor, which has been the commonly accepted view in research on second language acquisition, implies that the learner's aim is to possess a certain body of knowledge. The newer, participation metaphor, on the other hand, envisages the learner as striving to become a participant "in a community's communicative practices" (Day 2002: 21), which are, according to sociocultural theory, symbolically mediated by language (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2001). According to Day (2002: 21), such participation leads to the acquisition of not only linguistic, but social knowledge as well, "such as values, attitudes, roles, identities, and emotional stances" – precisely what is considered the basic inventory of personality. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2001) emphasize, however, that the two metaphors should not be seen in direct opposition. Rather, they see the participation metaphor as a complement to the acquisition metaphor.

In that context, Pavlenko and Lantolf pose the question of what happens to the personality when the individual moves from being a participant in the discursive practices of one community to those of another. They also point to the need of answering another important question – that of the implications of the participation metaphor in classroom foreign language learning and their effect on subsequent participation outside the classroom. In the context of the participation metaphor, the present study asks whether simply shifting languages may be sufficient for the "relocation" from participation in one discursive community to another to occur. In other words, do speakers cross cultural borders without crossing physical ones, back and forth as they switch between languages? As if she had anticipated that question, Day (2002) expressed her personal belief as a bilingual that learning a second language involved creatively imagining oneself as being a participant of another community.

2.4 *The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis*

In addressing the issue of the relationship between language and personality, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is an unavoidable point for many authors. Sapir and Whorf both proposed the hypothesis that the way in which a speaker organized her thought depended on the structure of her





mother tongue. Edward Sapir (1929) stated that the way a person viewed the world around her was influenced by the language she spoke. Benjamin Whorf (1956) expressed the same idea by saying that the impressions a person collected from the world were organized through the language she used in her mind. While this approach has been rejected in its absolute form, the viewpoint that language, culture and the individual exert a mutual influence on one another resulted from it (Granger 2004).

Wilson (2005) points out that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis primarily concerned the influence of the first language, but nevertheless established a connection between language and personality. She concludes that, if a connection between first language and personality exists, it may be justified to assume that there may be different relationships between different languages and personality.

Following the logic of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that a person's worldview depends on the language she speaks, Granger (2004) asks whether acquiring a second language involves also adopting a second world view, and if so, whether that leads to the development of a second identity.

2.5 Sociocultural Theory

Another influential theory that forms the groundwork for much of the research dealing with the connection between language and personality is the sociocultural theory of mind, developed by the Soviet psychologist L. S. Vygotsky in the early twentieth century. Granger (2004) points out that Vygotsky's teachings are in line with Sapir's and Whorf's ideas of the shaping of thinking moving from the social to the individual, instead of the other way around. As Lantolf (2001) explains, Vygotsky develops his theory around the assumption that the human mind is mediated by symbolic tools, i.e. sign systems, the most important of which is language. Language thus plays an extremely important role in cognitive development, by enabling the person to organize her thoughts (Hamers and Blanc 2000). As Vygotsky claims that human mental activity is organized with the help of language, it follows that the way we think depends on the language we speak. Language thus becomes not only a





part of culture, but, more importantly, “the main tool for the internalization of culture by the individual” (Hamers and Blanc 2000: 199).

Researchers in the field of language and personality emphasize the specificity of language as not merely a body of knowledge to be adopted, but a medium as well. Granger (2004: 57) goes as far as to call it a ‘methodology’, which serves, among other things, “to create, re-create, communicate, interpret, present and represent the self, both to the world and to the self”. Riley (1991, as cited in Granger 2004) defines language as the main ‘channel’ of sociocultural knowledge.

When such claims are transferred into the realm of second language acquisition or foreign language learning, Lantolf (2001) reasons, we come to the conclusion that the learning of a second language, i.e. “the introduction of a new cultural [symbolic] tool” (Day 2002: 13) may lead to a “reformation of one’s mental system, including one’s concept of self” (Lantolf 2001: 5). Kramsch (2001) explains that foreign language learners first use the new semiotic system at their disposal to complete tasks or convey meaning, but after a certain period of use, the new system will probably begin influencing their view of the reality they are writing/talking about. He emphasizes that learning a new language is more than just ‘relabeling’ the world around us; it involves “reconfigur[ing] one’s whole classification system” (Kramsch 2001: 138), a claim closely connected to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Day (2002) explains that contemporary sociocultural theorists see language learning as a result of social processes. In other words, they do not speak of ‘language learning’ or ‘language acquisition’, but ‘language socialization’, a process through which learners acquire not only linguistic knowledge and skills but social ones (such as values, beliefs, attitudes) as well, with the aim of becoming members of a certain community of speakers. This view echoes the previously mentioned metaphor of language use as participation. Lave and Wenger (1991: 53) stress that learning a language is not just a prerequisite for becoming a member of a certain community, but is also itself “an evolving form of membership”. Language thus becomes a medium not only for the internalization of culture and development of identity, but for its transformation as well. For Norton (2000) ‘investing’ in learning a language means investing in one’s social identity as well.





2.6 Lay Perceptions and Experimental Attempts

François Grosjean is one of the rare researchers of bilingualism that dedicated an entire chapter in a book on bilingualism (*Life with Two Languages*, 1982) to tackling the issue of the change in the behavior of bilinguals when they speak different languages. This change is often noted in lay circles and, as Grosjean notes, the lay person's frequent point of view is that bilingual people have two "halves" – one for each of their languages.

Such crude explanations of the perceived changes are not restricted to lay circles, however. Advocates of bilingualism often quote examples of prejudice about bilingualism and bilingual persons. While these should be taken as not much more than bias that can easily be disproved, it is interesting to note some extreme examples that refer to the field of human personality. Adler (1977: 38) thus writes that bilinguals often "have split minds" and split standards. He continues to assert that "in short, bilingualism can lead to a split personality" (ibid.: 40). Adler seems to base his assumption on a case of an English-Afrikaans bilingual psychiatric patient who seemed to be sane in one language and insane in the other. Romaine quotes the example of Weisgerber (1966, as cited in Romaine 1995), who, apart from claiming that bilingualism could impair the intelligence of a whole ethnic group, also added that it could lead to split personalities. Romaine warns that this kind of thinking has unfortunately been common among psychologists and educators. Another case that Adler (1977) also reports is of a bilingual suffering from schizophrenia, who heard voices in her head in only one language and denied having heard them when speaking the other language. Grosjean (1982) warns that such cases need to be considered carefully, since they are reported second-hand, thus withholding from us other relevant information about the person's situation.

In addition to the differences perceived by others, Grosjean quotes examples of bilinguals who report that they feel their attitudes and behaviors change as they engage in communication in their respective languages. The French-English and Greek-English bilinguals he quotes both feel that they are more aggressive and tenser when speaking French





and Greek, respectively, in comparison to when they are speaking English. The Russian-English bilingual, on the other hand, feels gentler when speaking Russian. Haugen reports on a French-born American writer who could not translate one of his books from French into English, and eventually had to write an entirely new book. The author, Julian Green, explained his experience: "It was as if, writing in English, I had become another person" (Haugen 1956: 280). Mkilifi reported on English-Swahili bilinguals in Tanzania who expressed "slightly varying views" (Mkilifi 1978: 146) on ideas such as agnosticism or democracy, depending on the language that the discussion was in.

Apart from these mostly introspective comments and observations, there have also been experiments that strived to answer the question of whether something changes in a bilingual person when using different languages. In the 1960-ies Ervin conducted experiments with TAT cards. TAT cards contain pictures of ambiguous content which the subjects are asked to describe. The descriptions are presumed to be the projections of the subjects' feelings, attitudes, motives – all that is normally considered the inventory of a personality. As an example, Ervin (1964) quoted the responses of a French woman living in the US, who spoke English with her American husband and child, as well as in her work and most of her social life. When asked to describe one specific picture in French, the woman provided a description of a married couple in the midst of an argument, probably because the woman was holding her husband back from something. When asked to describe the same picture six weeks later, this time in English, the bilingual saw a husband worried by his struggle for achievement and a wife supporting him on his way. Another experiment was conducted by Ervin-Tripp (1968) in which he gave Japanese-American women sentence completion tests. Sentences such as "When my wishes conflict with my family..." or "I will probably become..." were proposed in both English and Japanese, and the same respondents' endings differed very much depending on the language of the sentence.

The 'matched guise' test is another very well known experimental method, often used for evaluating the language attitudes of the listeners. The experiments that Romaine (1995) and Hamers and Blanc (2000) describe involve playing a tape with two discourses to the same listener.





Each discourse is in a different language, and the listener is asked to evaluate the speaker she hears on a number of scales describing what Hamers and Blanc dub “personality traits,” such as ‘intelligent-stupid’, ‘interesting-uninteresting’, ‘good-bad’. The listener is, of course, not aware that she is listening to the same person speaking, merely in different languages. The reported differences in the personality judgments of the same person speaking different languages are then “safely attributed to value judgments on the languages” (Hamers and Blanc 2000: 223).

In conclusion, Wilson (2005) reports on an analysis of data for up to five languages gathered through an online questionnaire by Dewaele and Pavlenko between 2001 and 2003 from more than 1500 adult multilinguals who were asked the question: “Do you feel like a different person sometimes when you use your different languages?” After finding that the majority of respondents said they always or sometimes felt different when using different languages, and that the responses did not depend on age, gender, educational background or profession, Wilson undertook to discover whether the responses depended on the personality traits (such as extraversion or emotional stability) of the respondents. The statistical findings of her study show that ‘feelings of difference were significantly correlated with a negative score on Extraversion, in other words, it was introverts who feel different when operating in a foreign language rather than extraverts’ (Wilson 2008: 114).

3 THE STUDY

3.1 Aim

The general aim of the present study was to provide an insight to the question: Do bilingual or multilingual Croatian speakers of English as a foreign language feel that their personality, or parts of it, changes when they communicate in their respective languages? The study also aimed to single out the most frequent explanations that the respondents gave for their responses and compare them to the theoretical claims presented in the first section of the paper. Furthermore, the responses were commented on in relation to the respondents’ level of metalinguistic awareness.





3.2 Sample

The sample of 186 respondents consisted of two groups of students at the University of Zagreb. Both groups consisted of native Croatian speakers considered to be proficient speakers of English. These bilinguals had not been raised in a bilingual environment, but had acquired English in institutional settings. In addition, the majority of them spoke at least one more foreign language.

Group 1 (N=90) included students (average age = 21) of English Language and Literature. These students had extensive background in linguistics, including sociolinguistics and were used to studying language and thinking about it from a theoretical point of view. In addition, since they had chosen English as their main area of undergraduate study, they could safely be assumed to have a positive attitude towards it. As they were near the end of their undergraduate English language course at the time the research was conducted, their competence in English could be assumed to be advanced.

Group 2 (N=96) consisted of first-year students (average age = 19) of Economics and Public Administration. These students were taking English as a "secondary" course, the purpose of which was to build up their competence so that they could use it in their respective fields of expertise. They were learning English for Specific Purposes, and they were presumed to have no or little access to linguistic theory. It was thus safe to assume that they possessed a low level of metalinguistic awareness. None of them expressed a negative attitude towards English, and 78% expressed a positive attitude. The majority (68%) self-evaluated their competence in English as good, only 2% as beginner's and 30% evaluated their competence as advanced.

3.3 Procedure

The method of introspection was chosen as the most suitable for the research. Petz (1992) states that some psychologists consider self-concept to be the core of personality. If this claim is taken to hold true, then introspection, which reveals how the subject perceives herself, should





be the most suitable method for research aimed at studying personality and changes in it. Since the aim of the research was to include a relatively large number of participants, interviews were ruled out as a possibility, and administering a short questionnaire with one direct, open-ended question was chosen.

Two separate, but similar questionnaires were administered. The first questionnaire was administered to Group 1 in their English Language Teaching Methodology course in April 2006. The second questionnaire was administered to Group 2 in their English for Specific Purposes course in May 2007.

Both questionnaires first elicited some short personal data used merely for controlling the profile of the respondents. Before they were asked to respond to the central question (*Do you think that language and personality are connected, in the sense that an individual's personality, or some of its parts, changes when using different languages?*), the respondents were given a definition of personality, Group 1 in oral form and Group 2 in writing. The centrality of the question was emphasized by the fact that it was given its own separate section in the questionnaire, and that the entire overleaf was provided for the response to it. The respondents were told to take their time and hand in their questionnaires when finished.

3.4 Results

McDonough and McDonough (1997) warn that responses to questionnaires (especially long ones, or those with open-ended questions) will depend on how important the topic or the researcher are to the respondents. The latter seemed to play a role in the questionnaires administered in this research, as the responses by the students in Group 1 were on average considerably lengthier than those of the students in Group 2. It may be argued that the fact that the students in Group 1 were more used to thinking about language and language use could have been the cause of them having more to say on the topic of language and personality. It seems more likely, however, that the fact that they were asked to fill out a questionnaire by their own teacher, who they had gotten to know in the course of the year, may have been crucial in comparison to the





students in Group 2, to whom the researcher was completely unknown and the whole procedure was introduced by their teacher as “yet another questionnaire.” This resulted in much briefer responses, and sometimes even failure to provide a response to the main question at all.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaires, four different general responses were found. The first three general categories were: *Yes, people’s personalities change when they speak different languages*; *No, people’s personalities do not change when they speak different languages*; and *It depends*. However, apart from these three statements, a significant number of responses (24% of the total sample) pointed to the need for a fourth general category: *Yes, learning foreign languages changes one’s personality, but through expansion, and not the development of separate personalities for different languages*. In the total score for the two groups taken together, this response had the same frequency as *Yes*. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Results for the entire sample

<i>Do you think that language and personality are connected, in the sense that an individual’s personality, or some of its parts, changes when using different languages?</i>	Total (N=186)
Yes	24%
No	48%
It depends	4%
There is only one personality, but language learning expands it.	24%

No was the predominant answer in the sample as a whole, with almost half of the respondents (48%) choosing that option. A small number of respondents (4%) stated that the answer could be both *Yes* or *No*, depending on various factors which will be discussed below.

When the results for the two groups are observed separately, however, they show significant differences (see Table 2). *No* and *It depends* show little variation between the two groups. *No* remains the predominant





answer: 47% in Group 1, and 50% in Group 2. *It depends* has a very low percentage in both groups: 5% in Group 1, and 1% in Group 2. The results for the responses *Yes* and *There is only one personality, but language learning expands it*, however, are inverted for the two groups. In Group 1, 31% of the respondents expressed the opinion that people's personalities changed when speaking different languages; 17% stated that there could only be one personality, but that language learning would certainly change it to an extent. In Group 2, on the other hand, 17% opted for changes in personality for different languages and 31% for expansion of the one and only personality.

Table 2: Comparison of the results for the two groups

Do you think that language and personality are connected, in the sense that an individual's personality, or some of its parts, changes when using different languages?	Group 1 (N=90)	Group 2 (N=96)
Yes	31%	17%
No	47%	50%
It depends	5%	1%
There is only one personality, but language learning changes it.	17%	31%

3.5 Discussion

What follows is a qualitative discussion of the results which focuses on the explanations respondents gave for their responses. As expected, many of them based their opinion, explicitly or implicitly, on their own personal experiences or their perceptions of the behavior of other bilinguals they had encountered. Thus they would often give their opinion, followed by an anecdote offered as evidence of the truth of their statement.

It is interesting to note the small percentage of respondents who expressed the opinion that bilinguals' personalities may, but need not, change when using different languages. Group 1, which is characterized by a high level of metalinguistic awareness, showed slightly more caution





than Group 2 (5% and 1%, respectively), but the result is still very low in comparison to other responses. This may indicate that the topic was important to the respondents, who were asked to examine their experience of being bilingual speakers, and wanted to use the opportunity to have their voice heard. Indeed, some of the respondents provided very categorical responses, not even allowing for the possibility that the opposite may be true in someone else's experience. One respondent from Group 2 wrote that the answer to the question was obviously *No, because everybody thinks in their mother tongue even if they are speaking Turkish*. This is in line with Granger's (2004) assertion that one's sense of self is constructed through internal monologue, but our respondent did not allow for the fact that the language in which the internal monologue is conducted could change. Another respondent from the same group ascertained that it was *stupid to link personality and different languages*, but added that the definition of personality provided was *great*, possibly to appease the researcher or to establish his own credibility.

Some Group 1 respondents believed that the realization of the potential influence of language on personality depended on the psychological profile of the student, the context of acquisition, and the context of usage, primarily meaning the interlocutor. The latter referred to the different behaviors that bilinguals exhibited in conversation with native and non-native speakers of the language concerned.

The respondents who expressed the opinion that people's personalities changed when they spoke different languages (i.e. who responded with *Yes*) listed a number of explanations. The first of the two most frequent explanations was simply the observation that the speaker would become more or less confident depending on the language she spoke. It is important to note that these respondents explicitly stated that they thought such behavior marked a change in personality, and were thus counted as *Yes*. On the other hand, there were respondents who noted the increased insecurity speakers demonstrated when speaking a foreign language, and did not consider that to be a change in personality, but a normal reaction to an anxiety-provoking situation such as speaking a language one has not completely mastered. Such responses were counted as *No*.

Another very frequent response suggested that foreign language learners strived to imitate native speakers as much as possible, and in





the process unconsciously adopted a part of their culture, which caused a change in their personality when speaking that language. One respondent wrote: *I think that through imitation, unconsciously it seems, we adopt more than language itself from the speakers of foreign languages. By speaking a foreign language we seem to change ourselves as well, not just the language by which we communicate; we become other people.* Such a phenomenon was described theoretically by Litowitz. Day (2002) explains that Litowitz (1997, as cited in Day, 2002) places the issue of identification at the heart of learning. For her, identification is a “psychological process whereby the person assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides” (Litowitz 1997: 19, as cited in Day 2002). It seems that awareness of the differences between the self and the other does not prevent the change from occurring. One bilingual wrote: *When I speak in a foreign language, I have the cultural differences in mind. Then I practically behave like I am part of the culture of the language I speak. I am capable of “forgetting” that I belong to this culture.* The narrative here starts with a conscious observation of cultural differences, but ends in an unconscious event of “forgetting” which culture the speaker belongs to.

A number of respondents noted that they became more or less extroverted in the foreign language they spoke. One female respondent reported the fact that she used swear words *often, very often* in Italian, and *never* in Croatian. Her choice of adverbs and their repetition might imply that she did not like the change that came about when she spoke Italian, but could not do anything about it because it was an instinctive response. This case could also be explained by Mihaljević Djigunović's (2002) reasoning that speaking in a foreign language allows speakers to feel like a different person, someone different from their ‘real self’. Such a new persona may allow the speakers to express certain things that they would find difficult to talk about in their mother tongue, because it allows them to distance themselves from what is being said. Several respondents stressed that for them it was much easier to express some of their thoughts and feelings in a foreign language, because they seemed less real then. One respondent even described a conscious transition to another language because of the desire to ‘be someone else’: *When I speak*





in a foreign language, I feel different and I can be someone else. When my friend and I pretend that we're someone else, we just begin speaking differently or switch to a different language.

Other arguments for saying that different languages corresponded with different personalities included the observed changes of extra-linguistic behavior such as gesticulation or the tone of one's voice. Here, just as in the case of observed changes in the level of confidence, some respondents considered the outward changes to signify a change in personality, while others pointed out that a change in behavior did not necessarily mean a change in personality. One respondent who subscribed to the latter opinion even noted that she had found she had different handwritings when writing Croatian, English and Italian. This demonstrates that handwriting can also be considered a manifestation of extra-linguistic behavior.

It is important to note that some respondents invoked the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. However, these were mostly respondents from Group 1, who had been familiar with the hypothesis for some time, which could have been significant, as they seemed to take on the voice of a linguist, rather than a bilingual person speaking from her own experience. One respondent, however, speaking from her highly individual experience, commented: *English frees up something in me, it gives everything some sort of ludic element.* She seemed to imply that speaking English brought into the foreground a part of her personality that remained suppressed in her mother tongue.

While these personal testimonies of bilinguals to the differences they felt in their personalities when they spoke different languages are impressive, it is not to be disregarded that the majority of respondents in both groups stated that people's personalities did not change when speaking different languages (i.e. responded with *No*). An overwhelmingly large share of the respondents who took this position emphasized that personality was simply expressed better in the mother tongue because of reduced communicative competence in the foreign language. Respondents argued that the degree to which one knew the foreign language limited her in the adequate expression of beliefs and attitudes. They emphasized that the inability to use different registers in the foreign language severely impeded communication and could lead to the speaker being perceived as different.





The second most used argument was that the question on the relationship between language and personality had been put wrongly. Respondents emphasized that it was personality that influenced the individual's motivation to learn languages, the languages she chose and the methods of learning them, not the other way around. One respondent explained: *A more carefree person will make mistakes with more ease, and speak the language more freely, while someone less self-confident will approach the foreign language with more caution and thus appear more introverted.* One other respondent emphasized that an individual could have different attitudes towards different languages, which could lead to different moods when using each of them, which could then be perceived by others as a change in personality. This respondent commented that speaking English was *torture* for her, and when she was forced to speak it (e.g. in class), she would be in a bad mood.

Respondents also asserted that personality was above language, that it was universal: *I am I, no matter what language I am speaking.* They argued that personality was above *language barriers* and functioned at a *meta-level*. In line with that, other respondents emphasized that language was just a means for the expression of personality. As mentioned earlier, one respondent asserted that everyone's thoughts were in their mother tongue regardless of what language they were speaking at the moment. In a very similar vein, another respondent wrote: *Language, that is speech, does not change the person's personality; it does not influence her thinking.* The respondent here identifies language with *speech*, which fits in with what some call the communicative view of language, which makes a clear distinction between thinking and speaking as completely separate processes, whereby speaking is only a means of expressing thoughts formed outside of language (Lantolf, 2001). Such a point of view was reflected in another respondent's claim: *Just like feathers don't make the bird, language doesn't make personality.* Sociocultural theory, on the other hand, while allowing that thinking and speaking are separate phenomena, argues that they are tightly interconnected (Lantolf, 2001). It is interesting to note that one respondent asserted, in view of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, that personality was connected to the mother tongue, but added that subsequently learned languages could not change that personality.





Despite the fact that these respondents did not believe in a link between language and different personalities, they did not disregard the changes in behavior they perceived in the use of different languages. There were two explanations for that. The first was contextual, just like in Grosjean (1982). One respondent commented: *When I travel, I am normally much braver and much more extroverted than usual.* The other explanation was that if differences in personality indeed existed, they had been caused by the culture which is interwoven in our minds with the language, and not by language itself.

Several respondents reaffirmed the findings of the 'matched-guise' experiments described by Romaine (1995) and Hamers and Blanc (2000), explaining that the environment could perceive the person as different because of the associations it had for the given language, such as "German is strict" or "Italian is soft." And one respondent expressed her disbelief with the proposed argument of a link between language and personality with the following words: *How many personalities or differences in personality would a person who spoke numerous languages have and how would he or she even cope with those differences???*

Finally, as mentioned earlier, a significant number of respondents expressed the view that there could only be one personality, but that language learning changed, expanded and enriched it. If starting off from Wilson's (2005) question of whether another language presented 'another soul', based on the subjects' responses we could conclude that another language implied a 'richer soul'. Some respondents attributed this simply to the fact that culture is often included in foreign language teaching and is thus adopted together with language. They emphasized that a person who spoke foreign languages was more tolerant to other nations, and felt *like a citizen of the world*. This idea of participation to a large group of people seemed very valuable to some respondents, and was particularly pronounced in the case of English, which is considered the lingua franca of the world. A significant number of respondents quoted the Croatian proverb *You are worth as many men as the number of languages you speak*, emphasizing that knowing foreign languages gave them a feeling of greater worth and boosted their confidence in general.

Several respondents also emphasized that through learning foreign languages they gained access to new concepts and perspectives, which





enriched them. One respondent explained: *More foreign languages implies greater cultural awareness, possessing a wider range of concepts, adopting a "foreign perspective." If the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is true, language shapes the way we think. Thus more languages give us more universality of thought.* This respondent seemed to be answering Granger's (2004) question if acquiring another language meant also adopting a second worldview. Such a view was also expressed by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), who asserted that the acquisition of a second language necessarily brought about a re-evaluation of one's image of the world and the self and the integration of new ideas. With that in mind, it seems only appropriate to end with the following thought, expressed by one of the study subjects: *Every time I learn a new language, my image of the world and myself changes. For the better.*

4. CONCLUSION

Our findings suggest that the predominant opinion among proficient learners of English as a foreign language, who had learned English in institutional settings, was that foreign language learning could not influence personality in such a way that the speaker developed different personalities, or personality traits, for the different languages she spoke. This opinion was widely accepted among learners with varying levels of metalinguistic awareness.

Only a small number of respondents chose not to form a strong attitude on the question of a link between language and personality, which could indicate that, regardless of their opinion, the topic was nevertheless important to the majority of bilingual speakers in our corpus.

The fact that a quarter of the respondents reported a strong feeling of a change in personality when using different languages, however, should not be disregarded. Beebe (1983, as cited in Granger, 2004) suggested that one of the perceived risks in language learning may be the fear of losing one's identity. While this is not necessarily an experience shared by all, it should be taken in consideration as one of the possible reasons for increased language anxiety in foreign language classes.

The research also brought about another important insight – a quarter of the respondents put special emphasis on foreign language learning as a





possibility for developing and enriching one's personality and worldview. This is perhaps not quite surprising, given the emphasis put on foreign languages in Croatian education, but it is certainly encouraging to witness such a positive attitude towards foreign language learning.

Finally, a few words on the possible follow-up research. In the present study the questionnaire included only one general question on the link between language and personality. A follow-up study could be conducted with a larger cohort, and with more direct questions which would encourage the respondents to think about the various aspects of their personal experiences more attentively. Alternatively, the method of semi-structured interviews may be the best approach to the issue, but would, of course, require more time and effort. Considering the intricacy of the relationship between personality and language(s) and the increase in the number of bilingual / multilingual speakers in our country, it would be time and effort worth taking.

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PERCEPCIJA UTJECAJA UČENJA STRANOGA JEZIKA NA OSOBNOST

Tvrđnju da jezik vrši velik utjecaj na kognitivne procese pojedinca prvi je iznio Edward Sapir, a kasnije ju je usvojila sociokulturalna teorija L. S. Vygotskog i njegovih sljedbenika. U posljednje vrijeme, pitanje odnosa jezika i identiteta postalo je prilično izraženo u okviru istraživanja procesa ovladavanja inim jezikom.





U ovome su radu predstavljeni rezultati istraživanja provedenog na 186 naprednih učenika engleskog kao stranoga jezika. Analizira se predodžba veze između učenja stranog jezika i razvoja osobnosti (jedne ili više njih). Istraživanje je pokazalo da je pitanje jezika i osobnosti važno dvojezičnim osobama, iako je većina ispitanika izvijestila da ne osjećaju promjene u svojoj osobnosti pri korištenju različitih jezika.

Key words: bilingualism, personality, foreign language learning, second language acquisition, qualitative analysis

Ključne riječi: dvojezičnost, osobnost, učenje stranog jezika, istraživanje procesa ovladavanja inim jezikom, kvalitativna analiza

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