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THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AS AN AFFECTIVE FILTER IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The article considers the problem of psychological barriers to second language acquisition and provides their definition and classification, in particular, regarding external and internal barriers. Particular attention is paid to internal psychological barriers or affective filters. The problem of mitigating or eliminating psychological barriers is especially acute in adult learners, as their accumulated life experience, self-awareness, and sometimes contrived barriers and negative associations with the learning process hinder mastery of a second language. There are four groups of factors that affect the acquisition of a second language according to the level of manifestation of affective filters: motivation, personal attitude to the subject and the process of its acquisition, language anxiety and self-confidence. Among these factors, foreign language anxiety stands out, being the most common phenomenon among adults learning a second language, according to the author's empirical experience. The phenomenon of foreign language anxiety can be based on a great variety of psychological characteristics of students, in particular, the most common background is perfectionism. Foreign language anxiety caused by student perfectionism has various manifestations, among which the article highlights avoiding speaking activities and preferring multiple-choice testing or writing and reading; self-criticism and self-reproach; eagerness to control each aspect of a learning process, or on the contrary, passiveness and internal dissatisfaction caused by it; aiming for and expecting to achieve native-like perfection and fluency. The article offers possible ways to overcome the above manifestations, which have been successful in accordance with the author's empirical experience. All the proposed ways are based on learning in cooperation, the mediating role of the teacher and the need to develop their empathic abilities and skills in psychology, focusing on the development of speech flexibility and associative thinking of students.

Key words: *psychological barriers, affective filters, foreign language anxiety, second language acquisition, student perfectionism.*

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ПРОБЛЕМА ІНШОМОВНОЇ ТРИВОЖНОСТІ ЯК АФЕКТИВНОГО ФІЛЬТРУ У ВИВЧЕННІ ДРУГОЇ МОВИ

У статті розглядається проблема психологічних бар'єрів у засвоєнні другої мови, наводиться їх визначення та класифікація, зокрема розглядаються зовнішні та внутрішні бар'єри. Особлива увага приділяється внутрішнім психологічним бар'єрам або афективним фільтрам. Проблема пом'якшення або усунення психологічних бар'єрів особливо гостро стоїть у дорослих учнів, оскільки їх накопичений життєвий досвід, сформована самосвідомість, а також інколи надумані переешкоди та негативні асоціації щодо процесу навчання переешкоджають оволодінню другою мовою. Виділено чотири групи факторів, які впливають на засвоєння другої мови відповідно до рівня проявленості афективних фільтрів: мотивація, особисте ставлення до предмету та процесу його засвоєння, мовна тривожність та впевненість у собі. Серед цих факторів особливо виділяється іншомовна тривожність, яка є найбільш поширеним явищем серед дорослих, які вивчають другу мову, відповідно до емпіричного досвіду автора. Феномен іншомовної тривожності може мати за основу велике розмаїття психологічних особливостей учнів, зокрема найпоширенішим підґрунтям виступає перфекціонізм. Іншомовна тривожність викликана учнівським перфекціонізмом має різні прояви, серед яких у статті особливо висвітлюються уникнення завдань з говоріння та схильність до виконання тестових завдань з множинним вибором, читання та письма; самокритика та самодокори; прагнення контролювати кожен аспект процесу навчання, або, навпаки, пасивність і викликане цим внутрішнє невдоволення; прагнення й очікування досягнення досконалості та вільного володіння мовою. У статті пропонуються можливі шляхи подолання вищевказаних проявів, які виявилися успішними згідно з емпіричним досвідом автора. Всі запропоновані шляхи базуються на навчанні у співробітництві, медіативній ролі вчителя і необхідності розвитку його емпатичних здібностей та навичок у сфері психології, приділення уваги розвитку мовленнєвої гнучкості та асоціативного мислення.

Ключові слова: *психологічні бар'єри, афективні фільтри, іншомовна тривожність, засвоєння другої мови, учнівський перфекціонізм.*

Problem statement. Second language acquisition is a complex phenomenon and sophisticated process requiring an individual to exert cognitive and emotional efforts, to develop internal motivation and will in achieving the goals expressed in the ability to use a foreign language as a means of communication. It also implies communicative flexibility, the ability to learn, emotional stability, as well as the ability to psychologically engage in the learning process. The effectiveness of such a multifaceted process of mastering a foreign language is directly related to the psychological readiness of the learner to study and apply a foreign language both in class and in life, not be afraid to make mistakes, and not feel “embarrassed” in communication in a foreign language, therefore, be able to overcome psychological barriers (Шепеленко, 2017: 117). The problem of mitigating or eliminating psychological barriers is especially acute in adult learners as their accumulated life experience, established self-awareness, as well as sometimes contrived obstacles and negative associations concerning the learning process hinder second language acquisition. The relevance of the proposed study is the determination of basic psychological barriers and affective filters preventing adults from successful second language acquisition and revealing the ways of their mitigation or elimination based on the empirical experience and particular cases from our teaching practice.

Recent research and publications. The problem of psychological barriers as a significant obstacle to learning a foreign language has been the subject of numerous socio-psychological studies, which provide various definitions and classifications of psychological barriers to second language acquisition.

V.F. Galygin determines the psychological barrier as “an obstacle that prevents the optimal course of adaptation of the individual to new environmental factors, caused either by the peculiarities of the situation, or the peculiarities of the message, or the features of personality.” (Галыгин, 1974), and B.D. Parygin believes that the psychological barrier is “the mental mood of the individual, fixed on the already achieved result, which inhibits the further mobilization and use of human spiritual potential” (Парыгин, 1999).

There is a basic classification of psychological barriers, according to which they are divided into two groups: external and internal. External psychological barriers are objective, social obstacles that a learner encounters, independent circumstances and obstacles, created by the impossibility of an objective nature, some tension in human society, professional differences between learners, their belonging to

different social groups, and such trivial first glance reasons, as the difficulty of finding a suitable program, training courses, foreign language teacher, etc.

Internal, much more numerous, psychological barriers of a subjective nature are psychophysiological and linguistic barriers to learning a second language inherent in a particular person. They are caused by such factors as age, upbringing, ability to learn foreign languages and self-confidence, previous learning experience, the negative impact of which hinders the correct assessment of the situation, one’s style of language acquisition, communication conflict, intrinsic motivation, memory, cognitive actualization, emotional, semantic and intercultural spheres, awareness of the new linguistic reality, etc (Шепеленко, 2017: 119).

In 1977, the Arab linguists H. Dulay, M. Burt and S. Krashen put forward the theory of “affective” (emotional) filters, which influence the process of successful language acquisition. Everyone who studies a new subject has such filters, because a person in the process of learning a new subject inevitably experiences certain emotions. However, the level and degree of such emotions are different for everyone. If the “affective” filter is low, the person will not have barriers to mastering a foreign language, they will not have emotional barriers expressed in the fear of making a mistake, being criticized, constantly expecting failure, in other words, nothing can impede access to information. People with a high emotional filter, on the contrary, expect all the above fears. The person is not able to assimilate the incoming information properly, to use it in communication. People with a high emotional filter, as a rule, have a large vocabulary, know all the grammar rules, but are not able to use this knowledge due to psychological barriers and self-doubt (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982).

The purpose of the article. There are four main categories of factors that have a positive or negative impact on foreign language learning, depending on the level of the affective filter of the person: motivation, personal attitude towards the subject and the process of its mastering, language anxiety and self-confidence. In this work we will focus on the problem of language anxiety based on student perfectionism and the ways for its overcoming as we believe it to be one of the most common and complex phenomenon occurring in adult learners in our practice.

Presentation of the main material. The phenomenon of foreign language anxiety is not new to researchers, but due to its multifaceted nature and the fact that understanding its essence depends on the language being studied, learning environment, and many other factors, it remains insufficiently

studied. Foreign language teachers, psychologists, and researchers have always been aware of the relationship between anxiety and language learning; students also understand that fear and nervousness complicate their learning and further use of language in life. Researchers E. K. Horwitz, M. B. Horwitz, and J. Cope were the first to show what language anxiety consists of and how it can be measured. The phenomenon of foreign language anxiety (FLA) was defined as a special set of beliefs associated with language learning and arising from the uniqueness of this process. Anxiety implies subjective feelings, psychophysiological symptoms, and behavioral reactions: students have problems with concentration and attendance; avoid eye contact, do not perform homework; they may have a rapid heartbeat and sweating (Horwitz, Cope, 1986). Scientists have presented a quantitative scale that measures anxiety in foreign language classes (FLCAS, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety). FLCAS is a tool presented by 33 statements that reflect fear of communication, fear of testing, and fear of negative evaluation – the three types of anxiety that accompany language learning (Horwitz, Cope, 1986). Respondents rate Likert's five-point statements from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (5). The total score on the scale varies from 33 to 165, with low scores indicating a higher level of anxiety (Horwitz, Cope, 1986: 129-130). Scientists today often use the scale in research and modify it according to their goals and objectives.

Horwitz and her colleagues classify FLA as specific anxiety reactions, i.e. it is primarily related to situations where a foreign language is studied (situation-specific emotional reaction) (Horwitz, Cope, 1986). There is disagreement in the literature on the definition of the phenomenon: on the one hand, it is considered a psychological problem, on the other – as a reaction of students to the process of language learning and circumstances that prevent this process to be realized. Most scholars tend to define FLA as a socio-psychological phenomenon in connection with "the methodological components of the process of learning a foreign language" (Андрюшкина, 2020: 15).

Scholars argue that language anxiety is extremely difficult to study due to its multiple linguistic and psychological aspects, and current problems in research remain unresolved. The question of what exactly causes anxiety in students remains open, which makes work on approaches to its prevention problematic (Dewaele, 2017: 437).

The factors provoking FLA are generally divided into external and internal, the former being the

environment of foreign language studies, and the latter appearing to be extremely difficult to determine as they are related to complex psycho-emotional processes. Internal factors include age; awareness of students and teachers about the existence of FLA; beliefs and motivation of students, perfectionism; psychological and logical problems, and individual physiological characteristics of students.

Relationship between age and FLA. Many researchers argue that there is a link between anxiety and age (Gkonou, Gürsoy). S. B. Castañeda considers the problem in the context of lifelong learning: in the author's study, the age of students varies from 43 to 62 years. It is stated that these students face problems learning a foreign language due to biological limitations that arise with age: for example, problems with memory, visual acuity, or the development of fluency. Moreover, the ability of seniors to learn a foreign language contrasts with the faster and more natural way in which children and adolescents learn foreign languages. In addition, adults may experience a lack of motivation and low self-esteem, especially when they are forced to learn the language (Castañeda, 2017: 12).

FLA awareness. Perfectionism, self-esteem, and motivation of students. Physiological and psychological features. Horwitz and her colleagues pointed out that there is only an intuitive understanding of FLA among researchers and teachers. Students know about their problem, but cannot control it, while teachers do not see it as a problem. On the other hand, recognizing the importance of learning a foreign language and anxiety can make students more motivated: understanding that a foreign language is necessary for professional development forces students to work hard, but here, again, they begin to worry about possible failures in foreign language classes (Horwitz, Cope, 1986).

Student perfectionism also plays a role in problem development. J.-M. Dewaele emphasizes that perfectionist students have a high level of anxiety because it is difficult for them to achieve the high standards they set. Conversely, anxiety also affects the level of perfectionism: anxiety generates high self-criticism, which leads to the fact that very anxious students react too sharply to mistakes and are less satisfied with their achievements (Dewaele, 2017).

Further considerations are based on our empirical experience obtained during the English language course for teachers organized at KNTU. We have been studying internal affective barriers for 6 years in 6 groups of 9-12 persons each, the age of students varying from 30 to 65 years old.

Our observations confirmed the close connection of student perfectionism with FLA. Further, we

present basic manifestations of FLA caused by student perfectionism and propose the possible ways for their minimization or elimination.

Avoiding speaking activities and preferring multiple-choice testing or writing and reading. Speaking, especially unprepared or spontaneous, may provoke strong FLA. Perfectionist students generally have a strong fear of making mistakes therefore they try to avoid the slightest possibility to be involved in real communication. In our practice, it was successfully overcome by discussions in problem mini-groups. Speaking itself here turns into a mere means of communication, a tool for finding a solution or performing some team activities. Teachers are not involved in the discussions in mini-groups. They act as external observers, consultants, and mediators. Their task is to help mini-group members to come to a common conclusion, solve a specific problem, coordinating the common efforts if necessary.

Students with FLA should not be forced to perform public speaking, individual spontaneous monologues in front of the class if they do not want to. The practical experience shows that the desire to perform individual speaking requires some time to grow and students under the conditions of a friendly and creative environment will inevitably develop the willingness of that kind. Language games can produce a positive effect in this regard. At first, adult learners are almost always unwilling to play any games, as they feel they need to maintain an image of a respectful grown-up person, a specialist in one's field, etc. However, in a friendly environment captured by the spirit of competition, they gradually get used to gaming activities, quizzes, and even theatricals and break their artificial adult-like barriers.

Self-criticism and self-reproach. This is the most common manifestation of FLA. Mistakes, slow understanding, knowledge gaps, negative testing results, or embarrassing situations connected with the use of a foreign language in real life may cause severe FLA symptoms and even prevent students from further efforts in language acquisition. One of the successful methods for overcoming these negative effects is, surprisingly, a sense of humor employed by the teacher. The teacher should have funny stories to tell where he or she forgot a necessary word, misused grammar patterns, or appeared in an embarrassing situation due to a mistake while speaking a foreign language. It appeared that such stories and a personal example of the teacher or other people cause

smoothing effect on the anxiety symptoms, making students more relaxed and open.

Eagerness to control each aspect of a learning process, or on the contrary, passiveness and internal dissatisfaction caused by it. These two mutually exclusive manifestations are just different sides of one coin – perfectionism. The desire to control everything, imposing one's vision on how the educational process should be organized is a common FLA feature occurring much more frequently than passiveness and unwillingness to be involved in the process. Nevertheless, these two FLA embodiments can be overcome by applying the principle of learning in cooperation. This principle implies a consensus between the student and the teacher on the issues of what to learn, how to learn, and what are the learning targets and timelines. This is achieved by ongoing dialogue, monitoring, and corrections made by the two parties. The ideal situation is a partnership of peers, where no party plays the main role but all the decisions on the learning process must be mutually beneficial.

Aiming for and expecting to achieve native-like perfection and fluency. Perfectionists tend to do something perfectly or not to do anything at all. For instance, they can be silent if they can't formulate a perfect sentence in their mind or are unsure how a particular word is pronounced. In our practice, this can be minimized by language flexibility development. It includes activities based on paraphrasing, exercises on synonyms and antonyms, colloquial phrases, substitution, and stylistic games.

Conclusion. Perfectionist students suffer from FLA more often than students without this peculiarity. FLA symptoms in adult learners can be minimized only by an emphatic and psychologically skilled teacher. It is never enough to keep saying to the students that no one is perfect, emotional support must be real and constant. The learning process must be based on cooperation and the primary task of a teacher is to create a friendly and warm atmosphere in class. Methods and techniques applied may be various, but they should be grounded on creativity, openmindedness, mutual understanding, cooperation, and trust. The above-mentioned ways for overcoming FLA manifestations in adult learners proved to be effective and fruitful based on our empirical experience. Further research is required to elaborate strategies and applied techniques for developing the emotional stability of students in second language acquisition including those based on gestalt therapy principles.

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