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THEORIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Evdokija Galovska
Faculty of Education, University „St. Kliment Ohridski", Republic of North Macedonia
evdokija.galovska@uklo.edu.mk

Abstract

When it comes to learning a foreign language, children learn it much easier compared to adults and have no obstacles in it. Before turning one year old, a child can differentiate between sounds that adults cannot. Many experts agree that learning a foreign language largely depends on the individual learning it. Because same individual is different, the application of foreign language learning theories will greatly facilitate foreign language learning in children. All theories are based on the need to study the vocabulary and grammar that will be applied in the communication between the student and the teacher, in the process of learning the foreign language.

Keywords: learning, foreign language, foreign language learning theories

INTRODUCTION

The individual who teaches a foreign language needs to possess knowledge of the mental mechanisms during learning. These are insights into memory, processes, learning outcomes, and motivation. It is necessary to understand the way student learns in order to choose the very course of the teaching process when learning the foreign language.

There is a new science that tries to combine the old and new knowledge of the related sciences of foreign language didactics and which simultaneously conducts its own research, and that is the science of foreign language learning. The basis is in the process of learning, acquiring knowledge and long-term memorization.

Not a single science can be built without knowledge of related old sciences, not even the science of learning foreign languages, so it is very useful to know the theories of learning foreign languages that have been established over a long period of time.

THEORIES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

To the present several theories have been set for the way we should study a foreign language, and the same are followed in the appendix.

- **Contrastive theory (Fries/Lado)**

The contrastive hypothesis originates from behaviorism and starts from the fact that the mother tongue systematically affects the learning of a foreign language, that is, during learning, the habits of the mother tongue are constantly transferred to the study of the foreign language. A negative transfer is possible due to the different phenomena of the two languages (native and foreign) and difficulties and mistakes occur, but also a positive transfer if the two languages have the same elements and rules.

- **Galperin's theory**

This theory is based on the human and his constant interaction with the environment because he must constantly solve tasks in the form of physical and mental activities. According to this theory, the foreign language is not learned through repetition, but through generalization of the language act and reduction of the orientation part. The learning process takes place in five stages:

- Finding an orientational basis for the type and purpose of the activity, which must be understandable and complete for the student (the help of the teacher is not excluded here).

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- The activity is organized by the teacher based on models, schemes, diagrams, etc. He controls and gives instructions when solving the tasks.
- At this stage, there is no help from the teacher and it is aimed at complete communication in the foreign language.
- Forming thoughts only in a foreign language, without speaking.
- At the end of the activity, the student presents the entire activity aloud.

- **Theory of psycholinguistic mechanisms (Krashen)**

According to this theory, each person possesses certain mental mechanisms for learning a foreign language that indirectly govern the process of learning the foreign language, even though he is not aware of it. This mechanism can be influenced very little externally. For the complete study of the foreign language, Krashen proposes the following theories:

- Identity theory – by activating the innate mental processes regardless of the native language and age, the foreign language with all its elements and rules is learned in such a way that a striking similarity with the native language is observed. The structure of the foreign language, not the native language, is decisive here.
- Monitor theory – distinguishes a strong and a weak version of the identity theory. The strong one starts from the fact that all students learn the foreign language in the same, superficial-structural order, while the weak one is that this process is the same for everyone.
- Input theory – studying the foreign language through the input (the language offer) which is slightly above the usual level of acquired competences and the student understands what he hears or reads. The teacher uses simple language, with a slow pace and paraphrases, that is, he uses the best way of teaching.
- Affective - filter theory - is based on the fact that success is mostly influenced by motivation, desire for integration, self-confidence. The learner tries to get more input and communicates with people who speak the foreign language he is learning.

- **Hypothesis of interlanguage (inter language)**

According to this theory, the student creates a specific language system during the study of the foreign language, that is, he creates an interlanguage. It is actually a learner's language, with features of both the mother tongue and the foreign language, but these features are not actually inherent in either of the two languages. Interlanguage is variable and changes in the direction of the target language, because it is influenced by the learning strategies and communication strategies of the foreign language. According to his context, the student discovers new words or according to his set rules that he has already learned, to understand the foreign language.

- **Theory of competition (Felix)**

This theory starts from the mental mechanisms for learning a foreign language, where the two innate congitive mechanisms of language processing are taken into account. Just like with the mother tongue, natural processes work.

- **Theory of supplementation-model of complementation (Nold/Diness)**

This theory offers a new model of foreign language learning due to the shortcomings of previous theories. Due to genetic conditions, a specific mechanism of processing first comes to the fore, under the influence of which phonology, syntax and morphology are learned.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subject of the research is which theories teachers apply in the process of learning foreign languages. The research includes certain analyzes and presentation of the data obtained from them. Special emphasis is placed on teachers in primary schools in the Southwest region of the Republic of North Macedonia.

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As a problem of this research I emphasize the denial of the benefits of using these theories. All educational environments in the country face this problem. It is investigated whether and how much it is necessary to apply some of the theories, one or a combination of more, depending on the competencies of the teaching staff.

The purpose of the research is that every teacher should determine the need to apply the theories for learning foreign languages.

Based on the subject of the research, the methodology used during the research is determined, and the methods will be combined depending on the content, i.e. the element under investigation.

According to the nature of the research, it is developmental, in order to determine whether the teachers apply the theories for the study of foreign languages.

According to the content, this research is social, because it treats a phenomenon that is happening at the same time in the Southwest region of the Republic of North Macedonia.

According to the time duration of the monitoring of the research phenomenon, this research is transferable, because it will be realized in a short period of time, in different workplaces, in different conditions.

Primary and secondary researches are used for the preparation of the paper. Secondary sources refer to professional literature, scientific works in the field of curricula for learning foreign languages, in theory and in practice.

The general scientific methods used in data processing are:

Analytical-synthetic method - analysis of certain phenomena, breakdown to the ultimate basic parts, their grouping according to common characteristics and based on that drawing and presenting new concrete conclusions.

Inductive-deductive method - determination of general conclusions, through individual specific attitudes and observations, and vice versa, arriving at new specific conclusions through general attitudes.

Method of description - as a procedure for describing or presenting the object of scientific research with scientific interpretation and explanation. During the description, a large number of scientific and professional literature and specific researches from prominent experts from the country and abroad were used.

Statistical method - collected data were processed statistically, they were interpreted and then analyzed on the basis of which appropriate conclusions will be drawn for the researched phenomenon. The statistical method and its application will enable sorting and organizing the previously collected data according to various criteria, all of which will be supported by statistical tables and graphic displays in order to more easily and clearly determine the relations of conditioning of this phenomenon.

For the needs of this paper, the analysis was used as a procedure, which, with the help of a survey questionnaire, allowed to collect data for the research of teachers in the Southwest region of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The obtained data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

- Methods of scientific knowledge

The interpretation of the obtained data is based on several methods of scientific inference, and:

a. basic procedure of scientific inference

• analysis;

b. auxiliary procedures of scientific inference:

• comparative analysis;

• synthesis.

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Personnel plan: The teachers were randomly selected.

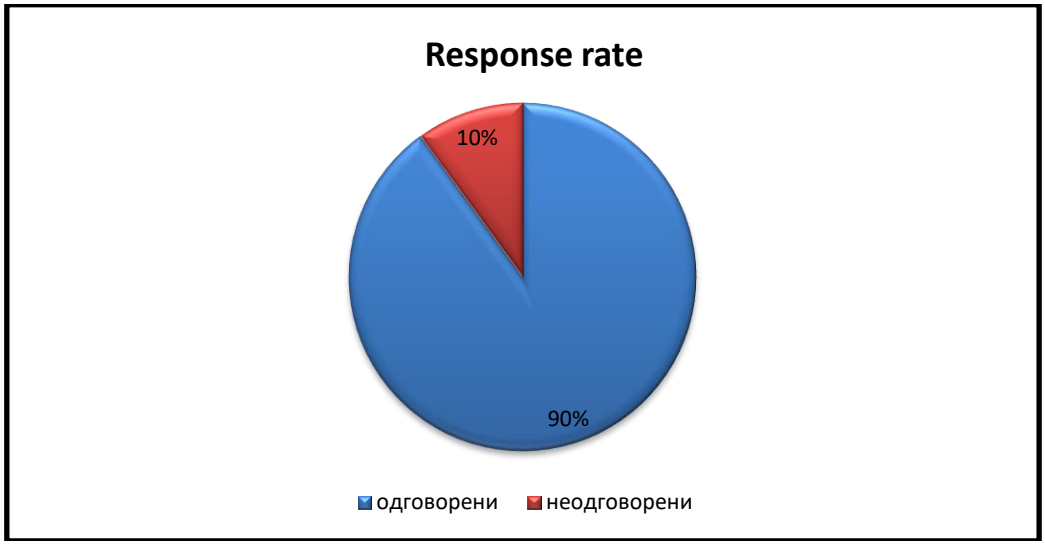
Time plan: The research was conducted in the period from January 2024 to May 2024 according to the following course:

1. Technical preparation of survey questionnaires;
2. Survey questionnaires were delivered and answered by randomly selected respondents.
3. Collection and classification of survey questionnaires.

The results of the research will be useful for teachers who teach foreign languages, but also for the entire social community.

RESEARCH RESULTS

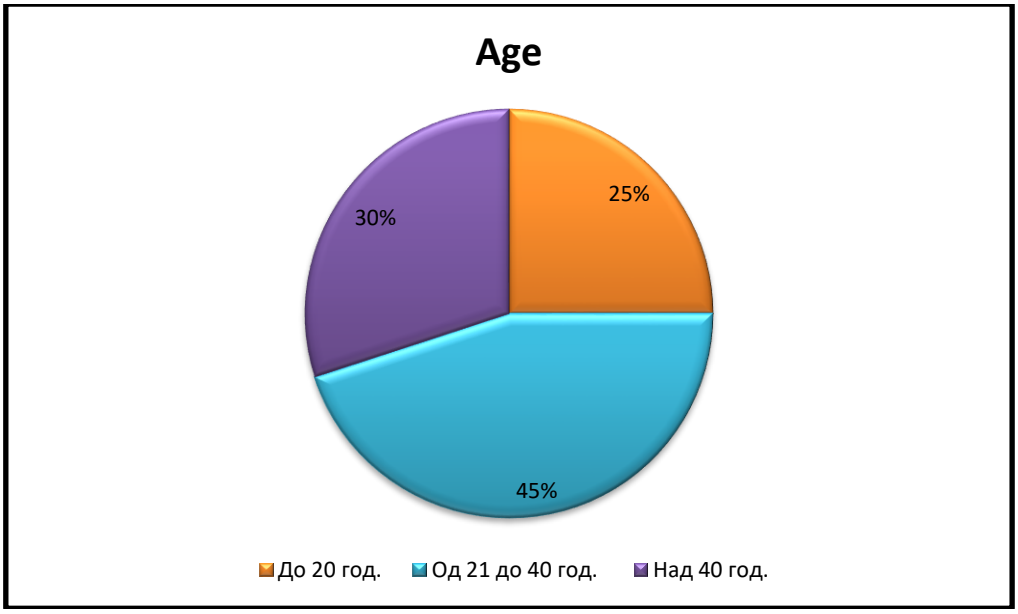
The survey included 150 randomly selected respondents. Survey questionnaires were sent to them electronically. The first part is with demographic data for the respondents. The second part of the survey questionnaire contains survey findings with offered answers, to which respondents had to decide according to their opinion. The third part is the evaluation of the offered survey findings by the respondents. I will show only a part of the graphs in the attachment.



Structure of the respondents according to the response rate of the survey questionnaire

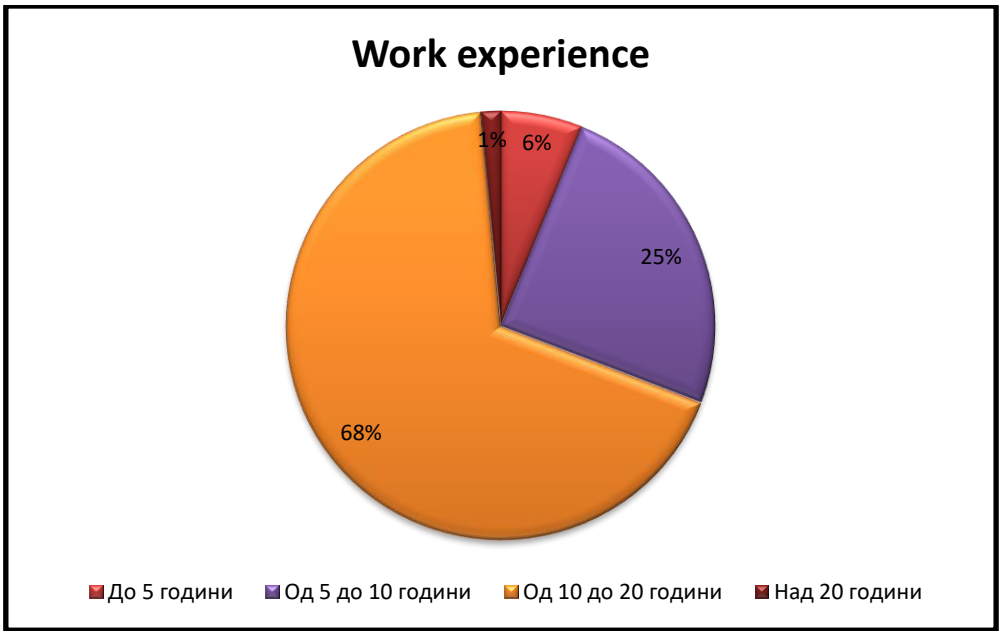
From the survey questionnaires sent to the respondents, I received a response of 90%, in my opinion it is a satisfactory percentage and I think that the topic met with interest among them.

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Structure of respondents according to age

The graph represents the structure of respondents by age. 25% of the total number of respondents were under the age of 20. From 21 to 40 years were the largest part or 45%, and the remaining 30% are over 40 years old.



Structure of respondents according to work experience

The graph contains the structure of respondents according to work experience. The largest percentage of the total number of respondents, 68%, have work experience of 10 to 20 years. A smaller part ie 25% have 5 to 10 years of experience, 6% have up to 5 years of work experience, and the smallest part ie 1% have more than 20 years of experience. These results interact with the age structure of the respondents.

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Application of the theories

The graph above represents the result of the research on the application of the theories by the teachers who were the subject of the research on the study of foreign languages. As can be seen, the majority or 58% of the total number of teachers who were the subject of the research, are based on the input theory, 32% are based on the interlanguage theory, and the smallest part or 10% on Galperin's theory.

CONCLUSION

Knowledge of the processes for learning a foreign language, about the positive and negative factors that influence them, are very small, so it is difficult to make certain conclusions about teaching a foreign language. The results of the research and the data obtained, if compared, contradict each other. Each of the theories uses one-sided research and neglects other aspects. A common conclusion that can be drawn is that there is no age limit when learning a foreign language, both children and young people and the elderly can learn. With age comes a decrease in the ability to imitate, spontaneity, speed of learning and the ability to maintain attention, but it is compensated by increased activity in the process of learning a foreign language.

As the results of the conducted research showed, we can conclude that more than half of the total number of examinees apply the imputation theory. My recommendation is that every teacher who teaches a foreign language should make an independent decision, which theory for learning foreign languages, he will apply in his work. Which theory will be their basis during the process of learning the foreign language among their students, in my opinion, depends to a certain extent on the abilities and skills of the teacher himself.

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