

The Importance of Gender Intelligence in Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages

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Abstract: *The article investigates the importance of gender intelligence in education and its effective factors in language learning. As the aim of research is to define the fact that how much it affects to their learning processes there appeared some information in which male have much superiority over the members of fair sex, however, there is not enough evidence to justify that. Although in STEM subjects, females seem rather inactive, in language learning their competence is much higher. Moreover, polyglots around the world compared more women to men.*

Key words: *education, gender intelligence, teaching, methods, learning, foreign languages, learning process, male, female, comprehension*

Since the early 1990s, the theme of male and female metaphorically ‘speaking different languages’ has become very common in popular culture. According to books like Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, women love to talk, whereas men prefer action to words.

It is not a legend that gender influences on language use, but that is not simply because men and women are naturally different kinds of people. Rather, gender influences on linguistic behaviour because of its impact on other things that influence on linguistic behaviour more directly. The way people use language can be related to the social network they belong to, their daily activities, their identities as particular kinds of people and their status relative to others. Each of these things is potentially affected by gender divisions which are characteristics of our society.

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As Cameron (2000) claims, there is a complex relationship between language and gender in the academic studies of language and gender. Holmes (cited in Bergwall 1999) formulates six candidate universals regarding language and gender:

1. Women and men develop different patterns of language use
2. Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do.
3. Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men do.
4. Women tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase solidarity, while especially in formal contexts men tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase their power and status.
5. Women use more standard forms than men from the same social group in the same social context.
6. Women are stylistically more flexible than men.

On average, girls are more motivated than boys to perform well in school, at least during elementary school. By the time girls reach high school, however, some may try to down play their own academic ability in order make themselves more likeable by both sexes (Davies, 2005). Even if this occurs, though, it does not affect their grades: from kindergarten through twelfth grade, girls earn slightly higher average grades than boys (Freeman, 2004). This fact does not lead to similar achievement, however, because as youngsters move into high school, they tend to choose courses or subjects conventionally associated with their gender—math and science for boys, in particular, and literature and the arts for girls. By the end of high school, this difference in course selection makes a measurable difference in boys' and girls' academic performance in these subjects.

But again, consider my caution about stereotyping: there are individuals of both sexes whose behaviors and choices run counter to the group trends. (I have made

this point as well in “Preparing for Licensure: Interpreting Gender-Related Behavior” by deliberately concealing the gender of a student described.) Differences within each gender group generally are far larger than any differences between the groups. A good example is the “difference” in cognitive ability of boys and girls. Many studies have found none at all. A few others have found small differences, with boys slightly better at math and girls slightly better at reading and literature. Still other studies have found the differences not only are small, but have been getting smaller in recent years compared to earlier studies. Collectively the findings about cognitive abilities are virtually “non-findings,” and it is worth asking why gender differences have therefore been studied and discussed so much for so many years (Hyde, 2005). How teachers influence gender roles?

Teachers often intend to interact with both sexes equally, and frequently succeed at doing so. Research has found, though, that they do sometimes respond to boys and girls differently, perhaps without realizing it. Three kinds of differences have been noticed. The first is the overall amount of attention paid to each sex; the second is the visibility or “publicity” of conversations; and the third is the type of behavior that prompts teachers to support or criticize students.

In general, teachers interact with boys more often than with girls by a margin of 10 to 30 percent, depending on the grade level of the students and the personality of the teacher (Measor & Sykes, 1992). One possible reason for the difference is related to the greater assertiveness of boys that I already noted; if boys are speaking up more frequently in discussions or at other times, then a teacher may be “forced” to pay more attention to them. Another possibility is that some teachers may feel that boys are especially prone to getting into mischief, so they may interact with them more frequently to keep them focused on the task at hand (Erden & Wolfgang, 2004). Still another possibility is that boys, compared to

girls, may interact in a wider variety of styles and situations, so there may simply be richer opportunities to interact with them.

Many scientists have discovered that girls are better than boys in language learning. And here below, I am going to give some examples and proofs from global search. As far as the variables Attitudes towards TL speakers and countries and Stereotypes of TL speakers are concerned it can legitimately be asked to what extent these young children, who in all likelihood have had extremely little or no contact with TL speakers, have developed relevant attitudes or stereotypes of TL speakers and to what extent these are relevant for their motivation. The issue of the importance of language attitudes in foreign language (FL) learning settings where learners are likely to have little or no contact with the TL community has been debated at some length in motivation research. Several studies in FL settings have demonstrated, however, that language attitudes are relevant in FL settings. Furthermore, there seems to be consensus in stereotype research that stereotypes do not depend on contact with or knowledge of the stereotyped group. Stereotypes are no doubt often formed through observation of and direct contact with members of the target group. However, stereotypes are also often acquired through social learning. That is they are learned through indirect sources, such as parents, peers, teachers, school materials or the mass. Another question that needs to be considered is whether 9-year old children can already have developed stereotypes of and attitudes towards certain out groups. Stereotype research has demonstrated that the cognitive processes underlying stereotype formation, such as categorizing, classifying and making biased attributions, emerge very early in childhood. It illustrates that even very young children of 3 to 6 years are able to discriminate linguistically and to make attitudinal judgments which reflect adult beliefs present in the speech community. These findings seem to lend support to the idea that primary school children may already have developed attitudes and stereotypes

about certain out groups. Apart from the above-mentioned scales, the following single items probing into the pupils' beliefs about language learning were assessed:

- belief that it is easier for children to learn languages than for adults;
- belief that knowing English facilitates learning French later on;
- belief that a language can be learnt well within three years;
- belief that girls are better at language learning than boys;
- belief that being good at maths implies not being good at language learning.

These beliefs could not be combined into a reliable scale which might be due to the rather diverse nature of the different beliefs assessed. Furthermore, the following demographic variables were assessed: gender, age, nationality, number of languages spoken at home, literacy of the household (number of books at home), and parental help with homework.

Of the demographic variables only gender turned out to make a unique significant contribution to the explanation of the children's language learning motivation. Given the relatively unimportant role that demographic variables seem to play in the explanation of pupils' motivation to learn English, all but gender were excluded from further analysis and a stepwise multiple hierarchical regression analysis controlling for the effect of gender was conducted with the remaining variables. Based on previous correlational analyses, four scales and several single items were assumed to play a direct role in predicting student motivation: pupils' self-concept, their attitudes towards English as a language, their attitudes towards TL speakers and countries, their attitudes towards a globalized world, and their beliefs about language learning. As it is clearly stated above, many scientists proved girls' superiority in language learning, especially in foreign language learning process. Nevertheless, in the following chapters, I am going to give some reports about my research conducted in the school. After investigating several sources, I have decided to apply for a conclusion that the theory about girls

are better in language learning than boys seemed unfair. In my practical period I have come across some boys who acquired language aspects more efficiently than their female ones. Here talk is not about talent or any other abstract things, it is all about effort and hard work.

Gender differences also occur in the field of classroom behavior. Teachers tend to praise girls for “good” behavior, regardless of its relevance to content or to the lesson at hand, and tend to criticize boys for “bad” or inappropriate behavior. This difference can also be stated in terms of what teachers overlook: with female learners, they tend to overlook behavior that is not appropriate, but with male learners they tend to overlook behavior that is appropriate. The net result in this case is to make females’ seem more good than they may really be, and also to make their “goodness” seem more important than their academic competence. For the same reason, the teacher’s patterns of response imply that male students are more “bad” than they may really be.

To conclude, the gender differences in interaction can seem discouraging and critical of teachers because they imply that teachers as a group are biased about gender. But this conclusion is too simplistic for a couple of reasons. One is that like all differences between groups, interaction patterns are trends, and as such they hide a lot of variation within them. The other is that the trends suggest what often tends in fact to happen, not what can in fact happen if a teacher consciously sets about to avoid interaction patterns like the ones we have described. Fortunately for us all, teaching does not need to be unthinking; we have choices that we can make, even during a busy class!

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