

UDC 316.28:811.111(07)

STUDENTS' "LANGUAGE BARRIER": PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS AND SOLUTIONS**O.L. Pysarchyk, N.V. Yamshynska***Kyiv, National Technical University of Ukraine "Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"*
hellen8@ukr.net, yamshinskaya@list.ru

As globalization and communications are bringing the world ever closer together, ever more urgent is the need for global citizens to be competent in other languages. However, in a language class there are situations when students feel psychological tension to perform their communication skills in a foreign language. This tension also causes fear and frustration, which are the main language barrier components. The primary objective of this article is to explore methods for increasing foreign language competence of students of non-linguistic specialties by identifying factors of communication barriers and ways to overcome them.

The paper demonstrates that recognition of barriers to effective communication and productive listening is the first step to improve communication style and is a significant condition of linguistic competence formation in students. Language barrier is a serious obstacle for establishing efficient business cooperation and human relations. The article presents a research aiming to explore psychological factors, which create language barriers in students, when they speak a foreign language. The study demonstrates the existence of different kinds of language difficulties in communication that actually negatively affect students' emotional state and cause the unwillingness to learn and use a foreign language as a way of communicating with non-native speakers. The paper offers solutions to enhance students' motivation for learning a foreign language and create favorable conditions for formation students' communication skills and understanding how foreign language learning can be beneficial for them.

Key words: psychological barrier, language competence, communication barrier, coping strategies, motivation, communication skills, language acquisition.

Introduction. To meet the needs of modern society and labor market requirements, young professionals should be goal-oriented, creative and energetic. They also bring a fresh perspective – a new look at old problems. Modern life requires from young specialists to be ready to demonstrate good communication skills. The ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language is primary important nowadays in the period of globalization. As J. Lauring noticed "increased globalization is forcing a growing number of business managers and employees to interact across linguistic boundaries" [8].

In recent years, there has been increasing demands for graduates who know English or other foreign language well enough to be ready to use it in real life communication and speak confidently. As future professionals, they acquire foreign language proficiency for effective communication and successful negotiations with a foreign partner as a key professional success. Now every person in a developing society has come to understanding how vitally important is the ability to speak a foreign language fluently.

The aim of this article is to reveal what language barriers EFL (English foreign language) learners have and indicate the ways to eliminate such barriers. The study was conducted with 20 EFL freshmen of technical specialization. The article provides a brief overview of methods and techniques, which appeared to be helpful in finding the ways of overcoming difficulties in learning, applying and practicing a foreign language by students. The study, conducted by the authors of the paper, focuses on showing the impact of language barriers on the process of foreign language studying and development of communication skills in particular. The research underlines the key role of students' psychological state and positive attitude towards the learning process for achieving positive results in foreign language learning and thereby expanding areas of interaction.

A brief overview of the "language barrier" problem. Over the last decade, problems of overcoming language barriers in teaching a foreign language and making the teaching process more effective has gained much attention. To meet the requirements of modern society, Foreign Language Curriculums in higher education institutions are increasingly focused more on the development of students' communication skills, than reading, writing or translation ones. Both EFL teachers and students must realize that targets of studying and demands of our society have slightly shifted.

However, as the practice shows, many graduates face difficulties when they are trying to communicate in a foreign language, even if they know lexis on the topic and have knowledge of verb tenses and other grammar structures. It is very hard for many students to start and participate in a conversation, understand the person and respond in English. It is like a person loses the ability to

speak. A lot of experts from European countries in the field of teaching methodology and psychology (L. Vigotskiy, G. Kitaygorodska, E. Dadayan, L. Litvinova, E. Nosenko, N. Yakovleva, C. Rogers, A. Maslow, J. and L. Soars, J. Henderson) state that the effectiveness of acquiring a foreign language significantly depends on the psychological readiness of a person to learn and use a foreign language and a person's desire to believe in his / her capabilities to speak a foreign language. If a person hesitates to speak a foreign language, it is due to "communication barriers of both psychological and linguistic origin" [2, pp.41-43]. The main objective for EFL teachers is to realize the relationship between learners, their attitude and motivation toward language learning and both sociological and psychological context in which language is learned. The realization of necessity to make changes in teaching approaches has more positive effect on developing communicative competence of students.

Many attempts have been made to understand the nature of language barrier phenomenon, as well as to explain and give a definition of it. A literature review shows the existence of different interpretations of the term "language barrier" proposed by different scientists and the usage of various criteria for its determination. S. Freud, C. Jung, A. Adler and C. Rogers researched theoretical basis of psychological barriers. Their studies were focused on investigating primary reasons of psychological barriers of different origin, which emerge in the process of communication between people. For instance, S. Freud believed, that our mind generates internal psychological barriers to protect itself from anxiety. He considered such barriers as the defence mechanism [7, p. 54].

Psychological barriers were overviewed in the context of different areas of a broad discipline as psychology. In modern psychological science there is a great number of studies and researches focused on showing individual psychological conditions of students (B. Ananiev, G. Suhobskaya, G. Vershlovsky, S. Rubinstein, A. Brushlinsky), proving the ability of successful academic activity of a person (K. Abulhanova, L. Antsyferova, L. Vygotsky, A. Bodalev, A. Maslow, C. Rogers, V. Frankl, J. Shay) and special aspects of teaching process and the process of acquiring a foreign language [6]. W. Littlewood concluded that if people feel confidence in language learning environment, a psychological barrier to language emerges and if the amount of anxiety is more than a certain level, this situation becomes a serious obstacle in language learning process [9].

O. Vetrova defines the language barrier as the "lack of understanding due to incorrect coding or misinterpretation of the transmitted messages" [1], which makes communication impossible for the recipient.

E. Symaniuk considers psychological barriers in language acquisition as a necessary condition and an important factor in professional development. According to this author psychological barriers give personal meaning to the process of studying and define person's future career development [5, p. 8].

Much research on the language barrier problem has been done by highly qualified specialists in the field of teaching methodology and psychology from different countries. It demonstrates the significance of this problem for scientists in all parts of the world. The data of such studies confirm the fact that it is of primary importance to consider psychological characteristics of students and psychological conditions in which the teaching and studying process are happening. Only knowing and taking into account all these factors teachers will be able to help their students overcome psychological barriers to effective communication. The literature overview assures how vitally important for EFL teachers to strive towards the goal to eliminate the language barriers their students have.

Methods and approaches to bridge the language barrier. Most EFL curricula include development of speaking skills and other activities – listening, writing and reading. The problems with writing activities are mostly caused by the insufficient knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. EFL students need constant practice to achieve fluency and mastery in English. The main task of teachers is to motivate and encourage learners and guide them in the right way. Teachers are responsible for training students both for exams and challenges of their future life and carrier. Teachers have to make students realize that studying English is essential for communication and carrier. There are some ways how a teacher can help students and make learning process easier: lessons may involve some fun and entertaining activities; teacher may suggest students role-plays, when they act due to the assigned roles.

Most teachers often face problems that arise in large groups of students with different levels of language skills. This is the essential reason for the teacher to select suitable approaches, learning strategies and activities to meet the individual needs and skills of students. Most students feel ashamed when they see their peers speak fluently and low-level students hesitate to speak. Such students have individual differences that cause a language barrier. Language barrier means having difficulties in communication with each other. However, not only the level of students can characterise differences, they may also appear in personal traits (a student may be too active or passive because of his/her shyness); cognitive abilities (mind set); motivation (students can have a high motivation for achieving success in learning foreign language, or are not interested and not ready); previous experience of learning foreign language; style and approach to learning and in their preferences. Teachers often face the negative reactions of students to different kinds of tasks. One of the problems is lack of confidence, when students are afraid of being criticized by their peers or teacher because of their spelling, pronunciation and grammar mistakes, poor vocabulary and students take decisions not to talk at all than being ashamed.

In order to activate the learning process and overcome all the language barriers, a teacher has to make lessons informative and effective, taking into account individual differences of students. There are different educational strategies that teacher can use to engage students and encourage class to work. R. Rosenberg's work highlights three key strategies: elicitation, gapping, and adaptation [10]. The first approach may include different types of tasks such as brainstorming, mind mapping and various vocabulary games to work on vocabulary. Brainstorming focuses on creating a number of questions with quick answers. This type of activity can successfully apply group and pair work to develop language skills to activate secondary skills (vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.), to develop nonverbal skills. Creating a series of questions in the brainstorming helps students increase motivation and interest to learning process, activate the vocabulary related to the topic, helps focus and promote critical and creative thinking. It includes such skills as analysis, organization and structuring of information and develops social and communication skills as work in a group requires cooperation, and finally to cope with the psychological challenges. Some other ways of overcoming barriers include defining the reasons, encouraging students to cope with it through the constant practice, speaking English only. Other possible ways to overcome the language barriers are speaking clubs, organized in most schools and universities; the international exchange programs.

Methods of speech activity organization are of primary importance and can relieve psychological stress as a natural reaction to the challenge posed by the teacher. The most interesting approach to this issue has been proposed by prof. R. Milrud. He pointed out that activity-related tasks for communicative-oriented foreign language teaching are based on the games and free communication with the various types of group and pair work using role-plays, case studies and projects [4].

Games have been adopted in the teaching process, expanding its principles, intruding into the areas of human thoughts. Games educate, develop, socialize, entertain and most importantly maintain student's self-confidence. Project-based learning is also one of the ways to minimize stressful situations. Case study eliminates psychological problems and generates a positive attitude towards learning. To overcome psychological barriers in foreign language learning students are engaged in role-plays that show following advantages: ability to express thoughts and feelings freely in the process of communication; ability to demonstrate language skills; each team member remains in the focus of the whole group.

Experimental research of language barriers. To explore the psychological problems and their interference with the teaching process and effectiveness of EFL learning, the study was conducted with a group of the 1st year students of Technical University studying EFL with intermediate language proficiency level.

The participants for this study were chosen due to their age (ages 17-19), as it is considered by most researches (O. Leontiev, D. Elkonin, A. Rean, J. Kroger, N. Carlson) as one of the most critical period in the personal development.

Most 17-19 year-olds intend to continue their education and enter a university. It is a new experience for all freshmen. At the university they feel themselves buffeted by the recession and stressed by the pressures of high school. This period is characterized by various fears. The new

conditions of life, from one side, lead to experience of spiritual uplift, joy and interest and, from the other side, to difficulties and barriers that cause confusion, dissatisfaction and uncertainty [3].

The responsibility for their choices and actions, real advances in this period are a huge load for young persons. The fear of starting a new stage of life can also be added to this. Young people are oriented on obtaining a higher education. It is essential for them mostly to get a well-paid job, but they wonder if there will be a good career choice after graduating a university. A new life situation requires some time to adjust to it. D. Shunk suggests, that this period of life (adolescence) is characterized by high level of self-reliance, initiative and responsibility for own actions and adequate assessment by students of their abilities [11]. Proper evaluation of both qualities and abilities leads to success in different spheres of life, including studying. However, it is a serious problem for some students to choose the manner how to interact with other people in appropriate way, feeling themselves confident and motivated to take the initiative in social contacts. Feelings of self-confidence, social and psychological adaptation affect the formation of social competence (adolescents tend to be more cooperative, they need more support from others, including their parents), which determines the ability of a young person to contact with others not suffering from a fear to be misunderstood, criticized or ashamed. Otherwise, it can give rise to psychological barriers in communication and language barrier as well.

Taking into consideration all above mentioned about the period of adolescence and to become more familiar with causes of poor language learning in particular, fear, a lack of confidence in students, when speaking to or listening to other individuals the study was arranged. 20 students were offered a survey which consisted of 5 questions before and after the study. The experiment lasted 1 semester and then students responded to the same survey questions again.

When students answered to the survey questions before the beginning of the experiment, EFL teachers started implementing different methods and approaches listed above as means to improve language knowledge of students and increase their confidence at the lessons that will help them overcome existing language barriers. Teachers adopted few approaches (brainstorming, mind mapping, role-plays) in the language classes. Brainstorming with mind mapping was introduced at the beginning of lessons as lead-up activities to activate primary skills. For these activities, students were divided into several groups according to language proficiency level and created a list of questions on the theme of the lesson. Creating a series of questions helped students increase their motivation, activate the vocabulary related to the topic, develop creative thinking, as it includes such skills as analysis, organization and structuring of information. Then students answer questions as quick as possible and associate responses into map. Other type of activity teachers adapted was role-plays with brainstorming. A role-play is an excellent activity as it is a good way to increase students' confidence in performing communicative tasks. The first step of a role-play is to divide students into groups to introduce the topic of the role-play using brainstorming activities. Teachers can expand information and share interesting facts and ideas necessary for full understanding of the role-play. Then teachers gave handouts with useful vocabulary and guides and explained them if necessary. Before the role-play students studied their roles and practiced inside the group. Then students performed the role-play according to assigned roles.

The findings of the study have shown that at the beginning of the experiment 60% of students were feeling themselves unconfident and unsociable. It proved the statement of psychologists that the problem in communication is common for freshmen. However, when new teaching methods were applied the number of such students reduced on 25%. Therefore, it can be suggested that self-confidence of students needs to be developed using various methods and shows what teachers can do to overcome fear and build self-confidence of their students. It will have positive effects both for teachers and students as the last are becoming more eager to develop communicative skills in EFL.

It has been found that among the reasons, which cause unsatisfactory psychological conditions at language classes, most students named the fear of making mistakes in the presence of the teacher (26%) and speaking with errors before the group of students (33%). This indicates the dependence between the low level of self-esteem and the fear to be criticized by other people that may act as a barrier to communication. The lack of knowledge plays an important role in

overcoming students' fear of making mistakes. The new techniques used at the lessons allowed boosting students' knowledge and increasing their motivation in language studying. The results of student's answers to survey question 2 after the experiment showed that less students (17%) were afraid of a teacher and a group of students (25%). The aim to improve and acquire higher language level started to play a significant, if not dominant, role for students. They are not scared if they make mistakes; they want to learn better and eliminate them.

The question 3 of the survey was addressed to estimate a number of students, who are willing to communicate and do not feel any problems in giving a speech in English and compare it with a number of those, who suffer difficulties in delivering a speech especially before an unfamiliar audience. The data showed that 13% of students are ready for communication even if it is in the form of presentation and 29% would choose not to give a speech at all. These data determined the necessity of changes in teaching approaches and activities applied by the teachers to encourage students in giving speeches. During the experiment role-plays, project works and other methods were implemented with this aim. The analysis of answers on the same question after the experiment has proved the chosen approaches to be correct. The number of students, who have a desire to give a speech increased on 2% in compare with the results obtained at the beginning of the experiment.

The ability to listen together with other language skills makes our graduates productive members of the modern society. Answers on the question 4 were intended to examine reasons that cause the greatest psychological difficulty for students while listening and expressing the main idea of the information they heard. For most students (29%) lack of experience in performing such tasks appeared to be one of the essential problems. However, the data changed after more suitable methods for developing skills in listening (watching scientific films in English, listening science news) had been applied. The experience in listening was found to change the view of students on this issue. The data shows that the percentage of students, who indicated at the beginning of the experiment lack of experience in listening as the major reason that cause difficulties in listening has decreased by 6%.

The last survey question helped to understand which factor contributes to students' productive perception of a foreign language and remove psychological difficulties. The table shows that before the experiment more students (33%) considered vocabulary expansion and grammar studying, availability of books and films in English as the sources for eliminating psychological barriers. This can be explained by the fact that it does not require any type of communication resulting in fear and anxiety in students. When students obtained some experience in communication due to the above mentioned methods, the results have been changed in favour of activities, which suggest interaction with other people, such as discussion of interesting topics and life situations (26%) and communication with native speakers (19%). These findings determine that proposed teaching methods are an effective way to improve communicative skills of students and overcome language barriers.

Conclusions. The study has investigated what psychological factors (lack of experience, fear of making mistakes) have the primary importance for students while learning EFL and how these factors affect the level of foreign language perception and as a result the process of foreign language acquisition. Taking into account the results of the students' responses, we may conclude that difficulties in communication appear, when students hesitate to apply knowledge in a real conversation. If teachers consider factors such as psychological fear and external factors which greatly affect learning process, it will facilitate the learning of the target language by the students. The importance of solving existing problems obliges teachers to motivate and encourage students implementing communicative activities to warm up their interest as much as possible to overcome their fear of face-to-face communication, have a positive thinking and be positive communicators, giving them more opportunities to develop themselves as independent, motivated and confident persons. Overcoming language barriers makes students capable of achieving significant background and forming necessary language skills for further productive professional activity.

REFERENCES

1. Ветрова О.Г. Лингвистические проблемы межкультурной англоязычной коммуникации в крэш-курсе культурного погружения (crash-course of overseas cultural immersion) // Преподавание иностранных языков и культур: проблемы, поиски, решения (Лемпертовские чтения VII) : материалы Междунар. науч.-метод. симпозиума (Пятигорск, 19-20 мая 2005 г.). – Пятигорск, 2005. – С. 54-55.
2. Дадаян Э.Г. Коммуникативный барьер и некоторые причины его происхождения // Преподавание иностранных языков и культур: проблемы, поиски, решения : материалы Междунар. науч.-метод. симпозиума

(Пятигорск, 19-20 мая 2005 г.). – Пятигорск, 2005.

3. Левченко Е.С. Социальная адаптация студентов вуза средствами физической культуры: автореф. дис. канд. психол. наук / Е.С. Левченко. – М., 2007. – 20 с.

4. Мильруд Р.П., Максимова И.Р. Современные концептуальные принципы коммуникативного обучения иностранным языкам / Р.П. Мильруд, И.Р. Максимова // Иностранные языки в школе. – 2000. – №4. – С. 9-15.

5. Сыманюк Э.Э. Психологические барьеры профессионального развития личности / Э.Э.Сыманюк. – М.: Московский психолого-социальный институт. – 252 с.

6. Чаплина Е.И. Стратегии преодоления психологических барьеров у студентов при изучении иностранного языка: автореф. дис. канд. психол. наук / Е.И. Чаплина. – Курск, 2006. – 21 с.

7. Bartee J.W. Defences, Psychological / J.W. Bartee // Encyclopedia of counseling. – 2008. – Volume 1. – pp.554–556.

8. Luring J. Rethinking social identity theory in international encounters: language use as a negotiated object for identity making / J. Luring // International Journal of Cross Cultural Management. – 2008. – Vol. 8. – pp. 343.

9. Littlewood W. Foreign and Second Language Learning / W. Littlewood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. – 1984. – 122p.

10. Rosenberg, R. Tools for activating materials and tasks in the English language classroom. English Teaching Forum. – 2009. – Vol. 47(4), pp. 2-11, 27. Retrieved from: http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/09-47-4-b.pdf

11. Shunk D. Self-efficacy and academic motivation / D. Shunk // Educational Psychologist. – 1991. – V.54. – P.117-133.

REFERENCES

1. Vetrova, O.G. (2005). Linguistics problems of intercultural English communication in crash-course of cultural immersion. Proceedings of the international scientific symposia “The teaching of foreign languages and cultures : problems, searches , solutions, (pp.54-55). Pyatigorsk [in Russian].

2. Dadyan, E.G. (2005). Communicative barrier and some causes of its origin. Proceedings of the international scientific symposia “The teaching of foreign languages and cultures : problems, searches , solutions, (pp.41-43). Pyatigorsk [in Russian].

3. Levchenko, E.S. (2007). Social adaptation of high school students by physical training means. Extended abstract of candidate’s thesis. Moscow [in Russian].

4. Mylrud, R.P., Maximov & Y.R. (2000). Modern conceptual principles of foreign language communicative teaching. Inostrannye yazyki v shkole, 4, 9-15.

5. Symanyuk, E.E. (2005) Psychological barriers in professional personality development. Moscow, Russia: Moscow Institute of Social Psychology [in Russian].

6. Chaplina, E.I. (2006). Strategies of overcoming psychological barriers at students while studying a foreign language. Extended abstract of candidate’s thesis. Kursk [in Russian].

7. Bartee J.W. (2008). Defences, Psychological. Encyclopedia of counselling, 1,554–556.

8. Luring, J. (2008). Rethinking social identity theory in international encounters: language use as a negotiated object for identity making. International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, 8, 343.

9. Littlewood, W. (1984). Foreign and Second Language Learning. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10. Rosenberg, R. (2009). Tools for activating materials and tasks in the English language classroom. English Teaching Forum, 47(4), 2-11, 27. Retrieved from: http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/09-47-4-b.pdf

11. Shunk, D. (1991). Self-efficacy and academic motivation. Educational Psychologist, 54, 117-133.

О.Л. Писарчик, Н.В. Ямшинська. Психологічні чинники явища “мовний бар’єр” та шляхи його усунення. У статті розглядається важливість вирішення проблеми усунення мовного бар’єру як умови формування комунікативної компетентності майбутнього фахівця в сучасних умовах. Розглядаються причини виникнення та способи усунення комунікативних бар’єрів у процесі вивчення іноземної мови у вищих навчальних закладах. У студентів, як у майбутніх фахівців, через наявність мовних бар’єрів можуть виникати проблеми щодо встановлення та підтримки соціальних контактів. Дані проведеного дослідження показують, що наявність різного роду мовних труднощів у спілкуванні викликають негативний емоційний стан та небажання вивчати і в подальшому застосовувати іноземну мову як засіб комунікації. Завданнями, що стоять перед викладачами, є підвищення мотивації студентів до вивчення іноземної мови та створення сприятливих умов для формування соціальної та комунікативної компетентності на заняттях з іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: психологічний бар’єр, комунікативна компетентність, причини виникнення комунікативних бар’єрів, стратегії подолання, мотивація, принцип комунікативності, комунікаційні навички, вивчення мови.

Е.Л. Писарчик, Н.В. Ямшинская. Психологические факторы явления “языковой барьер” и способы его устранения. В статье рассматривается важность решения проблемы устранения языкового барьера, как условия формирования языковой компетентности будущего специалиста в современных условиях. Рассматриваются причины возникновения и способы устранения коммуникативных барьеров в процессе изучения иностранного языка в высших учебных заведениях. У студентов, как у будущих специалистов, из-за наличия языковых барьеров могут возникать проблемы в установлении и поддержании социальных контактов. Данные проведенного исследования показывают, что наличие различного рода языковых трудностей в общении вызывают негативное эмоциональное состояние и нежелание изучать и в дальнейшем применять иностранный язык как средство коммуникации. Перед преподавателями стоят следующие задачи: повысить мотивацию студентов к изучению иностранного языка и создать благоприятные условия на занятии для формирования коммуникативных навыков и умения свободно общаться на иностранном языке.

Ключевые слова: психологический барьер, коммуникативная компетентность, коммуникативный барьер, стратегии преодоления, мотивация, коммуникационные навыки, изучение языка.