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## SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS AFFECTING THE ACQUISITION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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**Abstract.** Many students express their inability and sometimes admit their failure in learning to speak a second/foreign language. These students may be good at other skills, but when it comes to learning how to speak another language, they claim to have a "mental block" (Horwitz et al., 1986: 125). The use of modern approaches in communicative teaching in language classrooms and the widespread use of English and German have increased the demand for good communication skills. Communication is the method by which people share their ideas, information, opinions, and feelings. People who share these can greatly contribute to teamwork and work of individuals. Communication is a two-way activity between two or more persons and it can take place in many different ways, depending on the situation or place. It implies the transfer of information and knowledge from the source to the recipient and is a process by which the sender/source reaches the recipient/destination with thoughts, ideas, feelings, facts, and values. Successful communication is said to occur when the receiver not only receives the message, but also accepts, interprets, and uses it in the manner intended by the source. This paper attempts to examine the impact that writing and speaking skills have on students' communication in English and German language as foreign language by examining the results obtained from the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes 10 questions responded by a total of 40 students from the Departments of English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philology, Goce Delcev University - Stip.

**Key words:** language, acquisition, skills, writing, speaking.

### Introduction

In order to be able to communicate and write in another language that is not our mother tongue, we must first learn it. By learning it, the person's ability to understand the language develops, while not being afraid of whether they will find themselves in a situation where they cannot communicate with the environment. Adequate application of language knowledge is required, as part of the definition of speaking skill, in order to be able to create an oral message that will have meaning among the participants in the communication (Chesten, 1988). In its intention to create such an oral message, insufficient knowledge of the appropriate language increases the possibility of potential mistakes and leads to misunderstanding and creating anxiety among speakers. Feelings of anxiety and incomprehension are often expressed by those who learn to speak and write in another language. These feelings are considered harbingers of the negative and harmful effects of the language being studied on the communication itself. The application of modern teaching approaches to speaking and writing skills as well as the international communication of English and German languages in the world have increased the need to learn such skills, but

the existence of such feelings can prevent learners from achieving such a goal. Speaking skill is one of the key skills that can be used to assess knowledge of a language. The importance of this skill in terms of language communication is one of the main goals of the European reference framework for languages, and hence it stands out in modern foreign language teaching across all European countries, in terms of learning the grammar rules or the vocabulary of a language. Some scholars who briefly explain the terms related to topics in the field of the German language teaching methodology, define speaking as a process that, after the stage of voice reception, like hearing, leads to the production of meaningful voice combinations. In foreign language teaching, this skill represents one of the four main skills, besides listening, reading, and speaking, and it can be defined differently in relation to whether it is the speaking skill as a teaching or an intermediate goal, the goal students can achieve in several years. As an intermediate goal, speaking serves to check students' knowledge and correct them, while we speak of speaking as a teaching goal when speaking serves for communicative purposes (Schatz, H. 2006). 'The skill of writing is a complex activity in learning a foreign language, not easy, but simpler when we write in our mother tongue. Complexity emerges when we begin to develop, modify, and adapt our writing skills in another language. However, we are talking about two different writing systems, which have different pragmatic, social and stylistic rules of writing, both in one language and in the other. We express ourselves more easily in written form, if we know the basic principles of writing, language forms and grammatical rules', (Glück, 1988).

### **Materials and methods**

Communication skills are a prerequisite for all walks of life. For example, a professor who is able to communicate with students can teach them to learn the language through their activity in class. Or the patient who feels neglected by the doctor in the sense that he did not explain enough about his health condition asks for a second or third opinion. It can also be said that communication is the art of transferring information, ideas, and attitudes from one person to another, i.e., a process of meaningful interaction between human beings.

Communication skills are also important for salespeople because they can only convince customers to buy their product by speaking. A huge amount of research proves that we need to write, not only for teaching, but also for personal needs. We use the ability to conceptualize everything that we think on a sheet of paper in different segments of our daily life.

According to this, it can be concluded that there are a number of reasons that emphasize the importance and development of speaking and writing skills in learning a foreign language.

For this purpose, we carried out research which included a group of 40 students, 20 from the Departments of English Language and Literature and 20 from the department of German Language and Literature. Referring to gender they are 15 female students and 5 male students from the department of English language and literature, and 20 female students from the department of the German language and literature. They responded to two questionnaires. The first questionnaire is a background questionnaire which is meant to help students understand their learning of English and German background and also to help teachers to plan their course in English or German. The second questionnaire by the Institute for Pedagogy and Didactics at the University of Gothenburg was carried out online on our platform Microsoft Teams, and students should have answered according to their knowledge of the language they were studying and their previous experience.

## Results and discussion

The forty students that we covered in our paper are part of the Departments of English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature. The students gave similar answers to the six questions in the first questionnaire related to their previous experience and the conclusion is that all of them have been studying the language of their studies for more than 14 years and all of them have Macedonian as their mother tongue. For the remaining eleven questions of the second questionnaire, the students gave the same or similar answers.

Regarding the first and second questions, 100% of the students gave an affirmative answer and gave similar explanations about whether they do something in their free time that helps them learn the language they are studying and why they think it is important to study that language. The explanations go in the direction that they watch series, movies, read newspapers, listen to the radio, correspond with people in the language they are studying, and that studying languages leads to more opportunities for their employment, studying abroad, living abroad and similar.

Regarding the third question, which skill is the most important skill, 100% of the students unanimously answered that it is the skill of speaking, the easiest skill is reading, and the most difficult skill is writing. Regarding the fourth question, in which skill do students think they are best, their answer 100% is that it is the skill of speaking. The fifth question about which skill they need to improve the most, 95% of students we received the answer that it is the speaking skill in the grammar section. Only 5% of them answered that they need to improve their writing skills.

To the sixth question, the 95% of students answered that they like to speak English and German in lectures and that they do not mind it, and only 5% of them answered that they do not like to speak in class. To the seventh question regarding their anxiety when speaking and writing English and German, students gave different answers: English students are 100% very anxious, while German students are divided between being very anxious, 60%, a little anxious, 30% and not anxious at all, 10%. Regarding the ninth question what the students do when they face problems in writing and speaking, their most common answer, or 100% of them answered that they use a dictionary or another phrase or expression in the appropriate language. The tenth question, which refers to what the students do when they do not understand something written or said in English or German, 100% of them answered that they look up the word in the dictionary for the skill of writing and ask the interlocutor to repeat what he said. To the last eleventh question regarding whether they are used to having someone evaluate their speaking and writing skills, 100% of the students answered that they are most used to being evaluated by their teacher/professor, and the least by their colleagues or classmates.

To all questions except the question number seven, students from both departments gave similar or the same answers, which means that speaking and writing are one of the main threads when learning a language.

## Conclusion

As the results of our survey suggest, students from both departments gave similar or same answers about the speaking and writing skills, except question number seven regarding the level of anxiety, which means that they technically represent significant strain in learning a language. Regardless of whether it is writing or reading, it is necessary to listen to the interlocutor and read what is written correctly, and this is achieved through adequate study of the language and mastering it in order to overcome all obstacles to its improvement and remove anxiety. Visual learning also helps a lot here, lectures, media, interviews, meetings, which are a quick source of information and are also very effective in mastering these skills.

There are several opportunities that help to acquire the skill of speaking. The teacher plays a major role in acquiring this skill. However, in this context, it should be noted that the teacher's efforts are not the only thing that helps in teaching, but also the motivation and cooperation of students during lessons. When these two prerequisites are met, the teacher's role is to create the right conditions for learning or speaking. This includes motivating students, creating a positive and pleasant working atmosphere, building self-confidence among students, choosing appropriate activities, methods and means for improving speaking skills. From the point of view of overcoming the problems that can hinder the development of students' writing skills, different types of techniques and strategies should be applied, which will contribute to the implementation of various types of exercises, including communicative and creative ones, in which the language itself would be adopted in a more successful and natural way. Another aspect that the teacher should consider is the difference between open and closed types of language acquisition. Here, the teacher should remove the artificial elements that occur in foreign language teaching (that is, this refers to the controlled acquisition of the language and as much as possible to bring the lessons to real life communication).

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Annex 1 – Background questionnaire in English

**Student Background Questionnaire**

*This questionnaire is meant to help you understand your English learning background and in that way help you to learn even better. It can also help you and your teacher to plan your course in English.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have studied English for \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) in \_\_\_\_\_  
*(country/countries)*

My first language\* is \_\_\_\_\_  
*\* the language I speak at home; my native language*

Apart from English, I have also studied/I also speak (some)...

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I have lived in/visited a country where I had to speak English:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, for _____ day(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, for _____ week(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, for _____ month(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes, for _____ year(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	No, never

Other experiences:

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Annex 2 – Speaking and writing skills questionnaire from the Institute for Pedagogy and Didactics at the University of Gothenburg

1. What things do you do in your spare time where you use English?

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2. Why could it be important to learn English?

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3. When learning English, what language skill do you think is...

a) the most important? \_\_\_\_\_

b) the easiest? \_\_\_\_\_

c) the most difficult? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What are you good at in English?

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5. What do you think you need to work more on to improve your English?

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6. When you are expected to speak English during lessons, how do you feel?

<input type="checkbox"/>	I like doing it
<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't mind doing it

<input type="checkbox"/>	I prefer not to do it
<input type="checkbox"/>	I dislike doing it

and/but...

<input type="checkbox"/>	I always do it
<input type="checkbox"/>	I usually do it

<input type="checkbox"/>	I usually avoid it
<input type="checkbox"/>	I always avoid it

because...

7. Do you feel comfortable...

- a) when you speak English?  Yes  It's OK  No  
 a) when you write English?  Yes  It's OK  No

8. What strategies do you use if you get stuck...

a) when you write English?

(Mark as many boxes as you need to. If you wish to add something, use the empty line.)

- I use another English word/phrase  I use a dictionary/grammar book  
 I use my own or another language  I use the Internet  
 I ask a friend/teacher  \_\_\_\_\_

b) when you speak English?

(Mark as many boxes as you need to. If you wish to add something, use the empty line.)

- I use body language  I use my own or another language  
 I use another English word/phrase  I ask the person I am speaking with to help me  
 I use the Internet  \_\_\_\_\_

9. What strategies do you use when you do not understand...

a) something written in English?

(Mark as many boxes as you need to. If you wish to add something, use the empty line.)

- I ask a friend/teacher  I read it again and try to understand the context  
 I look it up in a dictionary or grammar book  I use the Internet  
 \_\_\_\_\_

b) something spoken in English?

(Mark as many boxes as you need to. If you wish to add something, use the empty line.)

- I pretend that I have understood  I use the Internet  
 I ask the person to repeat  I try to guess  
 I ask the person to say it in another way or explain  \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are you used to having your English assessed\* by...

Yes, often   Sometimes   No, never

- a) your teacher?     
 b) your classmates?     
 c) you yourself?

### Annex 3 – Background questionnaire in German

#### Hintergrundinformation zum Fragebogen über der/die Student/in

**Das Ziel dieser Fragebogen ist Ihren Deutschlernhintergrund zu erfassen und Ihnen so helfen, besser zu lernen. Es kann Ihnen und Ihrem Lehrer auch helfen, Ihren Deutsch Kurs zu planen.**

Name: ..... Datum: .....

Ich studierte Deutsch für..... Jahr(en) in .....  
(Land)

Meine Muttersprache\* ist .....

Außer Deutsch, studierte ich / spreche ich .....

Ich habe in einem fremden Land gelebt / habe ein fremdes Land besucht wo ich Deutsch sprechen musste:

- Ja, für ..... Tag(e)
- Ja, für..... Woche(n)
- Ja, für ..... Monat(e)
- Ja, für ..... Jahr(e)  Nein, nie

Ich habe in einem deutschsprachigen Land gelebt / habe ein deutschsprachiges Land besucht:

- Ja, für ..... Tag(e)
- Ja, für..... Woche(n)
- Ja, für ..... Monat(e)
- Ja, für ..... Jahr(e)  Nein, nie

Sonstige Erfahrungen .....

\*Die Sprache, auf die ich zu Hause spreche

Annex 4 - Speaking and writing skills questionnaire from the Institute for Pedagogy and Didactics at the University of Gothenburg in German

#### 1. Tun Sie in Ihrer Freizeit etwas, das Ihnen hilft, Deutsch zu lernen?

- Ja, ich.....
- Nein

#### 2. Ist es wichtig Deutsch zu lernen? Was meinen Sie?

- Ja, weil.....
- Nein, weil.....

#### 3. Wenn Sie Deutsch lernen, welche Sprachfähigkeit ist

- die wichtigste? .....
- die einfachste? .....



die schwierigste? .....

**4. Was meinen Sie, welche Sprachfähigkeiten können Sie gut?**

.....

**5. Was meinen Sie, welche Sprachfähigkeiten sollen bearbeitet werden, um Ihr Deutsch zu verbessern?**

.....

**6. Was halten Sie von Deutsch Sprechen in das Klassenzimmer?**

Es gefällt mir  Ich habe nichts dagegen  Ich tue das lieber nicht  Es gefällt mir nicht und / aber

Ich versuche es immer  Ich versuche es immer zu vermeiden weil.

**7. Haben Sie Angst vor Fehlern...**

**a) wenn Sie Deutsch sprechen?**

ja, sehr  ein bisschen  gar nicht

**b) wenn Sie Deutsch schreiben?**

ja, sehr  ein bisschen  gar nicht

**8. Was für Fehlern machen Sie am meistens?**

.....

**9. Welche Strategien verwenden Sie im Fall dass Sie mit etwas nicht weiterkommen können**

**a) beim Schreiben?**

(Markieren Sie lieber mehrere Felder. Wenn Sie etwas hinzufügen möchten, steht Ihnen die gepunktete Linie zur Verfügung.)

Ich mache nichts  Ich schreibe ein anderes Wort/andere Phrase

Ich frage ein Freund/Lehrer

Ich suche in dem Wörterbuch/Grammatikbuch

Ich verwende meine Muttersprache oder eine andere

.....

**b) beim Sprechen?**

(Markieren Sie lieber mehrere Felder. Wenn Sie etwas hinzufügen möchten, steht Ihnen die gepunktete Linie zur Verfügung.)

Ich mache nichts  Ich verwende ein anderes Wort/andere Phrase

Ich benutze die Körpersprache

Ich bitte mein Gesprächspartner um Hilfe

Ich verwende meine Muttersprache oder eine andere

.....

**10. Welche Strategien verwenden Sie im Fall dass Sie etwas nicht verstehen**

**a) etwas geschriebenes**

(Markieren Sie lieber mehrere Felder. Wenn Sie etwas hinzufügen möchten, steht Ihnen die gepunktete Linie zur Verfügung.)

- Ich mache nichts
- Ich frage ein Freund/Lehrer
- Ich suche in dem Wörtetbuch/Grammatikbuch
- Ich lese es nochmals und versuche aus dem Kontex zu vertehen
- .....

**b) etwas gesprochenes**

(Markieren Sie lieber mehrere Felder. Wenn Sie etwas hinzufügen möchten, steht Ihnen die gepunktete Linie zur Verfügung.)

- Ich mache nichts                       Ich gebe vor, als ich verstanden hätte
- Ich bitte mein Gesprächspartner um Wiederholen
- Ich bitte mein Gesprächspartner um Umformulieren oder Erklären
- Ich versuche zu erraten    .....

**11. Sind Sie daran gewöhnt, dass Ihr Deutsch von a); b); C) bewertet wird?**

	<input type="checkbox"/> Ja, immer	<input type="checkbox"/> Ja,	<input type="checkbox"/> Ja, oft	<input type="checkbox"/> Nein, manchmal	<input type="checkbox"/> Nie
a) Ihrem Lehrer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
b) Ihre Mitschüler?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
c) von Ihnen selbst?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	