



POSUDEK OPONENTA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk a literatura (dvouoborové studium)**

Název práce: **How polyglots learn languages. Methods for language acquisition by multilingual people**

Autorka práce: **Markéta Procházková**

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Stručná charakteristika práce / Short characteristics of the thesis

The thesis attempts to search for the answer to the question of how polyglots learn languages. In her first chapters, the author deals with theoretical issues, such as sociolinguistic factors, learning styles, and learning methods. In the second major part of the thesis, the author comments on a survey which had been sent to respondents/polyglots.

Celkové zhodnocení / Overall assessment

The author has chosen an interesting topic, which has the potential to bring some thought-provoking conclusions that would be relevant for other learners of foreign languages. Unfortunately, however, the thesis demonstrates a number of substantial shortcomings, and as such it fails to answer the question placed in its title.

These shortcomings can be divided into three major areas, the theoretical part, the delimitation of the sample of respondents, and the formulation of questions used in the survey.

The theoretical part makes the impression of a list of individual topics, from which it is not always clear in what way they are relevant for the main theme, namely how *polyglots* learn languages (the emphasis is intentional as the work deals with general issues of second language acquisition). To name but one example, why is it relevant to describe the types of memory (p. 17-18)? Other topics might seem relevant, but they are not reflected in any way in the review of the data (for more detailed description, see below), namely the role of age, gender, native language, motivation, etc.

Individual subchapters are delivered in a rather superficial form and are often structured on the basis of "who said what"; they rarely develop individual ideas and often do not lead to any conclusions. Contrary to academic style, the author, in a number of places, uses personal statements, such as "*Surprisingly, even the native language of the learner [...]*" (p. 17), "*Polyglots come from different countries and backgrounds, yet I personally believe that [...]*" (p. 17), "*It might seem ridiculous but watching TV [...]*" (p. 35), or "*Personally, I have never used music as a language learning method; therefore, it was truly interesting to do the research about this topic.*" (p. 50), to name just a few, or makes claims for which she does not provide evidence, such as "*Memory has an impact on language learning; however, it was not proven that polyglots would have "a better" memory than others*" (p. 18). Academic work should not be based on personal



impressions or unsubstantiated statements. Moreover, it is a question to what extent some of the cited sources are relevant for academic work, such as various blogs found on the internet.

Nevertheless, more serious are the shortcomings of the actual analysis. Most importantly, the author does not provide any kind of specification of the sample of respondents, i.e. information that seems crucial for a successful elaboration of the topic. We have no opportunity to learn how large the sample was, nor the questions in the questionnaire search for relevant sociolinguistic data, such as

- their linguistic background - do they come from monolingual or bilingual families? - has this got any effect on learning other languages?
- their mother tongue(s) - this appears important, as a contrast to the languages learnt, for the study of language interference, i.e. which languages they find easier or more difficult to learn and why - an issue dealt with at p. 17.
- their education - are they philologically educated?, cf. the statement that most polyglots come from faculties of arts (p. 12) - formal (non)education seems to be an important factor for the choice of learning strategies.
- their motivation/goal - this is relevant for the choice of learning methods - e.g. those who study for business or travels are more likely to focus on communicative skills, those interested in reading the original versions of books will rather focus on reading skills, those with an academically interest may focus on some structural issues, those whose goal is reviving almost extinct languages (see p. 41) will demonstrate a different approach, etc. Also, an individual learner may have different motivation for different languages.
- the order in which they learnt the languages - have they developed some specific learning methods over time? Did the languages already mastered provide an easier access to other languages? Which did and which did not? etc.
- other sociolinguistic data, such as age or gender - the thesis claims that age is a significant factor (p. 15), whereas gender not (p. 16) - can we prove such claims?

My last major reservation concerns the questions in the questionnaire. The thesis makes the impression that their choice was not carefully thought through (partly proved by the author herself, see p. 44 - where she states that a particular question "*was rather senseless*") as, in my opinion, they cannot lead to any meaningful results. The most important reason seems to be that there are not matched with specific languages - I may learn English at school, Chinese from my frequent visits to that country, and Hindi from books, a fact the questions do not cover - and they do not include some more specific details reflecting the sociolinguistic information mentioned above. Nor are the various learning styles put on any scale of importance.

Lastly, the conclusion, in fact, does not bring any conclusive review.

For the reasons mentioned above, the thesis does not meet the expected requirements.

In order to come to meaningful results, I suggest a repeated elaboration of the questionnaire with more detailed questions applied on a limited number of respondents - it could even be in the form of individual case studies. A resulting deeper insight into the complex issues of language learning would definitely be of high value.



If the author should decide to participate at the defence of the thesis, I propose the following:

Could you please provide some specific data about the sample of respondents?

Could you please design a new questionnaire which would better reflect the issues covered in the theoretical part, suggest the individual questions with an explanation why you find them relevant?

Práci nedoporučuji k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: nevyhověla

3.6.2020

Datum

Podpis