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## COMMUNICATIVE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**Abstract.** The scientific article is devoted to a comprehensive study of the communicative and psychological aspects of foreign language acquisition in higher education. The author emphasizes that the modern stage of social development and intensive international cooperation in scientific and technical fields implies an expansion of international interaction.

Consequently, there is an increasing professional demand for specialists with a high level of foreign language proficiency, where the language is regarded both as an essential means of professional communication and as an important tool closely connected with knowledge of culture and economics.

The research examines the theoretical nature of the language barrier by analyzing the relationship between speech, language, and cognition. Drawing on the theories of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Edward Sapir, the study explores how linguistic mentality functions as a fundamental component of a nation's broader mentality. The author identifies that the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition largely depends on students' psychological readiness and their ability to overcome ineffective stereotypes and negative attitudes.

A central focus of the study is the classification of psychological barriers into semantic, emotional, cognitive, and communicative types. The author identifies critical factors such as the "apprehension" of contact and the "speaking barrier," which often manifests as a subjective inability to use existing knowledge due to a lack of self-confidence or fear of criticism. To provide constructive solutions, the article suggests practical strategies, including the implementation of communicative games, the use of grounding and visualization techniques to manage stress, and the integration of edutainment technologies.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of mastering speech patterns in order to achieve natural fluency and reduce cognitive strain. The study concludes that success depends on the creation of specific psycho-pedagogical conditions that facilitate effective cooperation and coordinated interaction between instructors and students.

**Keywords:** psychological barrier, language barrier, higher education, foreign language, communicative competence, linguistic mentality, motivation.

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## **КОМУНІКАТИВНІ ТА ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ВИВЧЕННЯ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ У ВИЩІЙ ШКОЛІ**

**Анотація.** Наукова стаття присвячена дослідженню комунікативних і психологічних аспектів засвоєння іноземної мови у закладах вищої освіти. Автор наголошує, що сучасний розвиток суспільства та активізація міжнародної співпраці в науковій, технічній і культурній сферах висувають нові вимоги до професійної підготовки фахівців. У сучасних умовах іноземна мова розглядається не лише як засіб міжособистісного спілкування, а й як важливий інструмент професійної діяльності, пов'язаний із знаннями у сфері культури, економіки та права. У роботі підкреслюється, що формування мовної компетентності майбутнього фахівця відбувається одночасно з розвитком його когнітивних здібностей, мислення та емоційного інтелекту. Особлива увага приділяється ролі мотивації у процесі вивчення іноземної мови та формуванню позитивного ставлення студентів до іншомовного спілкування. Автор також зазначає, що ефективне навчання неможливе без створення комфортної психологічної атмосфери під час освітнього процесу. Важливим чинником успішного навчання визначено розвиток навичок самостійної роботи та здатності студентів до саморефлексії. Крім того, у статті підкреслюється значення практичного застосування знань у реальних комунікативних ситуаціях.

У статті проаналізовано теоретичну сутність мовного бар'єру через взаємозв'язок мовлення, мислення та пізнання. Автор розглядає лінгвістичну ментальність як важливий складник національної свідомості та способу сприйняття світу. Доведено, що ефективність вивчення іноземної мови значною мірою залежить від психологічної готовності студентів долати когнітивні стереотипи, внутрішні установки та мовленнєву невпевненість.

Особливу увагу приділено класифікації психологічних бар'єрів на семантичні, емоційні, когнітивні та комунікативні. Визначено, що мовленнєвий бар'єр часто виникає через страх негативного оцінювання, недостатню впевненість у власних знаннях і низький рівень мотивації. Для подолання цих труднощів запропоновано використання комунікативних ігор, технік візуалізації та релаксації, а також інноваційних технологій едьютейнменту.

Автор підкреслює важливість засвоєння мовленнєвих конструкцій і філерів для підтримання природного темпу мовлення та зниження психологічного напруження під час спілкування. У дослідженні зроблено висновок, що успішне оволодіння іноземною мовою залежить від створення сприятливого психолого-педагогічного середовища, яке сприяє позитивному досвіду іншомовної комунікації.

**Ключові слова:** психологічний бар'єр, мовний бар'єр, вища освіта, іноземна мова, комунікативна компетентність, лінгвістична ментальність, мотивація.

**Problem statement.** The modern stage of social evolution and the rapid development of international collaboration in scientific, cultural, and technical fields imply an expansion of global interaction. Consequently, there is a growing professional demand for specialists with a high level of foreign language proficiency.

A foreign language is regarded not only as a means of professional communication but also as an essential tool closely connected with knowledge of culture, economics, law, and other spheres of human activity. The functional role of a foreign language as a means of authentic and effective international communication requires appropriate professional training that meets current social demands. Therefore, mastering a foreign language involves not only acquiring linguistic knowledge but also developing practical communication skills.

The ability to use a foreign language in everyday life involves both oral and written communication. At the same time, the effectiveness of knowledge acquisition in higher education largely depends on students' psychological readiness. Furthermore, the assimilation and practical application of acquired knowledge are influenced by the ability to overcome ineffective stereotypes and maintain an adequate perception of one's own abilities.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** To comprehend the essence of the language barrier during foreign language communication, it is essential to examine the connection between speech, language, and cognition. Many researchers have observed a clear interdependence between mentality and language. One of the pioneers in this field was Wilhelm von Humboldt, who hypothesized that individuals perceive the surrounding world through the prism of the language they speak. According to his anthropological (human-centered) approach, every specific language is intertwined with the "spirit of a nation" and serves as its manifestation, rather than merely existing as a tool for conveying thoughts. Building on this, Edward Sapir introduced the concepts of linguistic determinism – which suggests that language can determine thought processes – and linguistic relativity, which posits that this influence is specific to the particular language spoken by its native speaker.

Linguistic mentality is a fundamental component of the broader concept of a nation's mentality. According to A. Bodnar and E. Makarenko [1], "linguistic mentality is a way of categorizing the world through language; it is sufficiently adequate for the existing perceptions of the world held by people". Furthermore, a significant issue exists regarding the development of the speech culture of a practicing psychologist, their level of professional training, and their ability to produce articulate and persuasive expressions of their views.

Prominent psychologists such as S. Freud, C. Jung, A. Adler, C. Rogers, and E. Berne, among others, explored the essence of psychological barriers within the

frameworks of major psychological traditions, including psychoanalytic theory, cognitive psychology, and humanistic psychology. In the works of contemporary scholars, various types of psychological barriers are examined based on their nature, essence, and analytical approaches: substantive (L. Bozhovich, M. Neymark), emotional (M. Balynska, E. Ilyin, L. Filatov), innovative (F. Vafin, L. Podymova, A. Safina), cognitive (N. Marakhovska, A. Pylypenko, N. Chernenko), and communicative (V. Galygin, G. Kish-Vajda, Z. Noliu, E. Tsukanova). Additionally, researchers have focused on barriers in communication (N. Volkova, V. Kan-Kalik, B. Parygin, N. Obozov), barriers in students' creative self-realization (K. Karamova), pedagogical barriers (I. Glazkova, A. Markova, N. Podymov), and barriers emerging specifically during the study of academic subjects (O. Barvenko, T. Verbytska, N. Gubareva).

**The aim of this study** is to substantiate the concept of communication barrier, identify the causes of their emergence, and determine the conditions for overcoming communication barriers in the process of foreign language acquisition in higher education institutions.

**Presentation of the main material.** At the current stage of higher education development, mastering a foreign language is viewed as the acquisition of communicative competence built upon the foundation of linguistic competence. Communicatively-oriented language teaching aims not only to provide students with practical knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of the target language but also to develop their understanding of how that language is used for effective communication.

In psychology, a barrier is defined as an obstacle that hinders the achievement of a specific goal, such as a communicative one. These barriers are categorized into semantic and psychological types. Semantic barriers arise from the multiplicity of meanings and their varying interpretations, whereas psychological barriers are intensified by anxiety, fear, shame, and guilt; they are also linked to an individual's character and the difficulties they encounter. Consequently, an individual may become unable to perform a set task, falling into either passivity or excessive activity.

Although these studies concern different fields of human activity, their findings are also applicable to foreign language acquisition. A. Massanov explored psychological barriers in personal self-determination, emphasizing the problems of an individual's psychological readiness for activity. The researcher notes that internal obstacles to realization include, among others, athletes' struggles with emotional states during competitions, internal conflict, and communication issues. Similarly, A. Kaizerova states that the emergence of psychological barriers in athletes is determined by the influence of objective and subjective factors, the degree of psychological readiness for training and competition, and personal qualities.

A psychological barrier is defined as an internal obstacle of a psychological nature that hinders the successful performance of a specific activity. This concept applies to nearly all types of human activity, including the study of a foreign language. It is driven by several factors: negative attitudes, a mismatch between an individual's

interests and the demands of the situation, preconceived notions, biases, convictions, and misunderstandings. The emotional mechanism of such a barrier involves the intensification of negative emotions and attitudes – such as shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, and low self-esteem – associated with the task (for example, the fear of public speaking or stage fright).

Z. Onipko [6] also highlights the connections between psychological barriers and negative emotions, interpersonal interaction problems, and internal conflicts. “Psychological barriers are manifestations of an individual’s inadequate internal reaction to objective circumstances or situations that exist independently of them. Such a reaction cannot be explained solely by their content, as the crucial factor is how the person responds to events or situations in their life, rather than the inherent characteristics of those events,” notes Z. Onipko.

Following A. Massanov [5], we identify the following components of a psychological barrier: experiences related to the evaluation of the consequences of achieving a goal; experiences related to the motivation to reach the goal; and emotions, volitional capacities, and decision-making during the implementation of the plan. The structural elements of a psychological barrier include cognitive, motivational, and emotional components.

The concept of a 'language barrier' is used to define a psychological obstacle that prevents communication in a foreign language. O. Vysotska [2] asserts: “A language barrier manifests as an individual, subjective inability to utilize existing knowledge. It is a specific psychological speech barrier that reveals itself in the inability to express one’s thoughts and personal point of view.”

Some scholars highlight two primary strategies for overcoming psychological barriers: constructive and destructive. The constructive strategy is based on transformation through self-actualization – a process of restoring the individual’s motivational sphere, which ensures psychological resilience during learning activities.

Conversely, the destructive strategy is based on the refusal to productively resolve critical situations. In this case, objective reality is perceived in a distorted manner; however, this distortion serves as a defense mechanism that reduces emotional tension and anxiety.

A language barrier arises when a foreign language learner – in this case, a student of English – lacks self-confidence and fears making mistakes during communication. In the educational process, it is crucial to cultivate a comfortable environment for students to ensure their active engagement. The classroom atmosphere should be conducive to personal growth, self-expression, and creativity. Students must not feel under tension; rather, the focus should remain on a student-centered approach. Consequently, emotional and communicative obstacles become the main challenge for language learners.

As noted by researchers, “it emerges subtly and subjectively; often, it is not felt by the individual but is perceived by others”. The underlying causes vary and may include social, political, religious, and professional differences, leading to ambiguous

interpretations of communicative concepts. We can distinguish the following types of psychological barriers: the apprehension of contact, the “understanding” barrier, the intercultural barrier, and the “speaking barrier”.

The next cause of psychological barriers in English language acquisition is informational. This occurs when instructional materials do not align with the learner’s capabilities, or when the pace of delivery is suboptimal – either excessively fast or too slow. Another significant issue is the element of compulsion in language learning. In such cases, tasks are performed inadequately, motivation is absent, and consequently, no tangible results are achieved.

Furthermore, a misunderstanding of the material serves as a major impediment; without sufficient effort, a topic remains incomprehensible. This is closely linked to the “speaking barrier.” In this scenario, the student understands what is being said but lacks the linguistic proficiency to construct a sentence, or simply fears mockery from their interlocutor due to potential errors.

For fluency in a foreign language, it is insufficient to teach students only the means of expressing thoughts, such as lexical and grammatical structures. Although the level of communicative competence is directly linked to the mastery of linguistic aspects and word collocations, such material only enriches speech quantitatively and qualitatively.

It is also necessary to practice the methods of constructing and formulating thoughts in the foreign language. The tools and methods of forming an utterance are inextricably linked because a foreign language is not merely a form of communication, but its essence.

The use of linguistic units must align with their internal meaning; students should understand the internal laws of the foreign reality and the semantic world of the language. The teacher’s task is to help the student incorporate this new semantic world into their individual consciousness. It is crucial to maintain the learner's interest so they can independently improve their knowledge by understanding the internal functioning of the language.

Language learning must be a conscious process that addresses the cognitive consciousness of a nation. In the modern system of higher education, the culture and literature of the target countries are essential components of the curriculum. The focus of teaching is shifting toward a cognitive orientation, moving the emphasis from simple communication to intercultural communication. Oral communicative competence involves the ability to listen, understand, and speak. While this competence is the ultimate goal and result of learning, it becomes achievable only through established linguistic competence and high student motivation.

The principle of communicative orientation determines the content of training, including the selection and organization of linguistic material and the specification of communication spheres and situations. It requires teachers to organize the educational process accordingly, utilizing various organizational forms that facilitate communication and enhance student motivation.

Developing the ability to think and communicate in a foreign language involves more than just the sequential replacement of native language elements with foreign ones; it requires acquiring the capacity to switch one's thinking from one language to another. The concept of thinking in a foreign language, often considered the ideal goal of instruction, is essentially the direct involvement of inner speech in the mechanism of foreign language production. Achieving this state depends on several interdependent yet fundamentally different factors: lexical inventory, knowledge of rules, linguistic intuition (language feel), and the ability to communicate effectively despite a deficit in foreign language knowledge [7].

Given the minimal number of hours allocated for foreign language study in higher education institutions, classroom activities must primarily focus on selected grammatical and lexical material.

This prioritizes the formation of linguistic competence and the teaching of professional reading. Developing sufficient oral communicative competence is particularly challenging in non-linguistic universities, especially since the proficiency level of first-year students is typically very low.

Since the ultimate criterion for language mastery is fluency in oral and written speech, poor command of the language generates a specific type of anxiety. This anxiety arises from the students' awareness that their knowledge is insufficient to express their thoughts, coupled with the fear of negative evaluation from listeners. This serves as a significant test of self-esteem stability. Ultimately, such anxiety can undermine one's level of ambition and reduce self-confidence, leading to the disorganization of learning activities: the higher the anxiety, the more the activity is disrupted, which in turn further increases anxiety. Consequently, many learners develop a kind of internal resistance to the language.

Communicative games are an effective method for overcoming language barriers in foreign language learning [8]. They create realistic communicative situations, encourage active interaction, and help students develop speaking skills in a relaxed atmosphere. Such activities reduce fear of making mistakes, lower anxiety levels, and increase learners' self-confidence during communication. In addition, games enhance student motivation and sustain interest in the educational process by combining language practice with emotional engagement. Their use also improves the psychological climate within the group, promotes creativity, and provides learners with opportunities to apply grammatical and lexical knowledge in authentic speech situations.

How can one overcome the feeling of anxiety? This question is particularly relevant in the current Ukrainian reality. We suggest several practical exercises, such as breathing techniques. Since individuals tend to breathe more intensely under stress, it is essential to intentionally slow down the respiratory rhythm. To do this, one should sit in a comfortable position in a quiet place, placing one hand on the abdomen and the other on the chest. With proper deep breathing (diaphragmatic breathing), the abdomen should move more than the chest.

The next exercise focuses on visualization. The task involves sitting in a cozy place and creating a mental image of a setting where the individual feels calm. One should consider the smallest details – scents, objects, the season, and so forth. The person imagines themselves in this location while maintaining steady breathing.

Another exercise involves muscle relaxation, which helps reduce anxiety levels. To perform this, one should sit in a comfortable spot, close their eyes, and listen to their breathing, slowly inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. Next, the person clenches their hand into a fist and holds it for five seconds, followed by a sensation of relaxation upon release. Additionally, a counting exercise can help overcome feelings of anxiety. The individual should move to a quiet place, close their eyes, and count to ten, ensuring they continue to breathe steadily. The count can be increased as needed.

If an individual is haunted by childhood traumas – such as those related to negative grading – we join other scholars in recommending professional psychological counseling. This often involves so-called “flashbacks”. In such cases, several practices can be effective. An individual should repeat a self-affirming phrase, acknowledging that these are merely memories and do not exist in the present.

Focusing on the present moment and living in the here and now is a strategy frequently emphasized by psychologists. Grounding techniques are also highly effective; these involve naming nearby objects while maintaining deep breathing. After experiencing a flashback, it is beneficial for the individual to offer themselves praise, allow for rest, and prioritize self-care.

Motivation and an individual’s desire to integrate into society play a crucial role in English language acquisition. This is particularly relevant during wartime. It is essential to define the purpose of learning the foreign language – whether it is to communicate fluently while traveling, expand one's social circle, integrate into a new community, or find employment abroad.

We recommend a practical exercise: divide a sheet of paper into two columns. In the first column, list all the benefits of mastering the English language; in the second, list the opportunities lost if the language is not acquired. This exercise serves as a powerful tool for self-determination and sustained motivation.

To overcome the language barrier and improve proficiency in English, we recommend engaging with authentic content: watching films and series in English with Ukrainian subtitles (and vice-versa), listening to podcasts, switching device settings to English, following English-speaking influencers, reading books, and listening to music. It is more effective for study sessions to be brief but frequent. This approach is based on the fact that neural pathways are strengthened through consistent repetition [8].

Practical experience with students at non-linguistic universities has helped identify specific criteria for selecting games that increase motivation and promote speech development. These include:

- 1) novelty;

- 2) dynamism (as a slow-paced game dulls the sharpness of reaction);
- 3) relevance to professional needs;
- 4) communicative orientation;
- 5) the presence of a competitive element.

When organizing communicative tasks, the following factors should be taken into account:

- The appropriate selection of the level of control over student actions/activities – whether full, partial, or minimal;
- The provision of necessary supports (scaffolding) for task completion – these can be specially designed aids that help construct an utterance from a linguistic perspective, or natural supports such as maps, charts, and numerical data;
- The selection of the optimal organizational method for a given exercise – simultaneous pair and group work significantly increases the time students spend actively participating in verbal communication.

Having analyzed the factors that contribute to the improvement of students' linguistic and communicative indicators, the following can be identified:

- A significant change in psychological characteristics, specifically the elimination of psychological barriers;
- A very high level of motivation due to increased interest in the learning process itself;
- Shifts in the structure of the lessons, characterized by the absence of stereotypes and rigid patterns.

Communicative games also facilitate the transition from training exercises to authentic communicative interaction.

Alongside psychological barriers, linguistic difficulties also significantly influence communicative performance. The grammatical aspect is the most challenging component of foreign language acquisition, yet it remains the most vital, as effective communication is impossible without a solid grammatical foundation. However, contemporary communicative-oriented syllabi in technical higher education institutions (HEIs) often do not provide for an exhaustive study of grammar. Furthermore, practice indicates that students frequently master grammatical rules and perform exercises accurately, yet remain unable to apply this knowledge in authentic communicative situations.

In our view, the selection of grammatical material in technical HEIs should emphasize an active, productive grammatical minimum. Regarding vocabulary acquisition, it is appropriate to guide students toward learning new words and expressions within context. Under these conditions, the instructor's task is to equip students with the most effective memorization techniques by engaging all types of memory: visual, auditory, motor, and logical (e.g., the method of mnemonic associations, the use of antonyms and synonyms, etc.).

Learning cliched expressions and speech formulas is an effective technique for developing speaking skills, as they help alleviate linguistic tension and make speech

sound more natural. For instance, English pause fillers such as “well,” “you know,” “it is a sort of,” “I mean,” “I see,” “you see,” “so,” and “actually/in fact” allow speakers to maintain confidence during a conversation. These markers enable students to achieve the desired communicative effect while providing essential thinking time to formulate their next thought. In addition to using speech formulas, it is important to teach students compensation strategies – for example, paraphrasing or using synonyms when a specific term is forgotten. Developing such flexibility allows for maintaining the continuity of communication even with a limited vocabulary, which significantly reduces the level of situational anxiety.

From a psycholinguistic perspective [3; 4], speech formulas accelerate the cognitive processing of information. The human brain naturally seeks to minimize analytical resource expenditure; if forced to rely solely on a complex system of rules, it experiences additional strain due to the need to mobilize all available linguistic resources. For example, the brain requires significantly less time to process and respond to the phrase “How are you?” than to “What is the nature of your current well-being?”, even though both questions elicit the same information.

In addition to the aforementioned methods for overcoming linguistic difficulties, we emphasize the importance of aligning classroom communication as closely as possible with real-life scenarios [9;10]. This involves the instructor organizing group, pair, and individual student work by planning a maximum number of communicative situations and encouraging active participation in them.

One of the most effective methodologies for alleviating the language barrier is edutainment (education + entertainment) – a pedagogical technology that integrates modern technical and didactic tools based on the concept of 'learning through fun.' The essence of edutainment lies in the premise that knowledge should be conveyed in an accessible, straightforward, and engaging manner, within a comfortable environment for the student.

The specificity of this technology involves an emphasis on engagement (where interest becomes a catalyst for knowledge accumulation) and motivation through entertainment (where the enjoyment derived from the learning process helps the student open up and fosters a sustained interest in education). The practical application of modern edutainment tools – such as comics, cartoons, films, educational games, digital textbooks and simulators, television programs, online museum exhibitions, and workshops – has confirmed their positive impact on overcoming language barriers among students [11].

The effectiveness of overcoming psychological barriers largely depends on the instructor's personality and their ability to act as a facilitator rather than merely a knowledge controller. The traditional authoritarian teaching model often creates “external tension”, which exacerbates the fear of making mistakes. Conversely, a humanistic approach involves creating an atmosphere of trust, where errors are viewed not as a reason for negative evaluation but as a natural stage of the cognitive process [12]. In the context of non-linguistic universities, where students' proficiency levels are often heterogeneous, the instructor should employ individual support strategies:

- Differentiation of Control: It is essential to flexibly choose the level of intervention – ranging from full support in the initial stages to minimal control during free discussions to stimulate student autonomy.

- Scaffolding: Providing speech clichés, visual diagrams, or charts allows students to rely on ready-made structures, reducing cognitive load and the risk of "language stupor".

- Positive Reinforcement: Focusing on successes, even minor ones, helps stabilize a student's self-esteem and strengthens their belief in their own capabilities.

Special attention should be paid to group dynamics. Utilizing pair and group work allows for the “distribution” of responsibility for the outcome, reducing individual anxiety before public speaking. In such interactions, there is not only an exchange of information but also a “value exchange”, which promotes the student's social integration and increases their motivation to learn. Thus, transforming the educational environment from a purely instructional one to a communicative-developmental one is a key condition for overcoming “internal resistance to the language” and forming a holistic linguistic personality.

**Conclusions.** In the process of human communication, a unique value exchange occurs. Its psychological essence lies in the fact that individuals value characteristics (significant personality traits, skills, and experience), realized during interpersonal interaction, are exchanged for authority and recognition – the key components of group status and vital human values. High appraisal from others, combined with authority and recognition, fosters self-esteem and self-affirmation. This, in turn, serves as a powerful source of individual activity and the development of personal potential. The fundamental premise that unites various methodological trends and teaching traditions is the concept of approaching a foreign language from the very beginning as a medium of instruction, as well as the idea of communication itself as a means of learning. Consequently, the contemporary process of foreign language acquisition is understood as a specially organized form of communication or as a distinct type of communicative interaction.

The process of foreign language acquisition is effective only under the condition of coordinated joint activity (interaction) between participants. The primary goal and essence of this process lie in the practice of solving interactional tasks, where motivated communicative assignments of varying complexity serve as the principal means of achieving these objectives. The success of language learning depends not only on the synchronization of joint activities between the instructor and students – aimed at developing linguistic skills and abilities – but also on the creation of specific psychopedagogical conditions. In such an environment, the learner is fully immersed in foreign language activity and derives satisfaction from what they can accomplish through the medium of the target language. Prospects for further research lie in a detailed study of the influence of students' individual psychological characteristics on the choice of specific relaxation techniques and game methodologies, which will allow for the implementation of a personalized approach in foreign language teaching.

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