

**LANGUAGE LEARNING APTITUDE:
THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE
CLASSROOM**

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Annotation. This conference paper advocates for the reintegration of foreign language aptitude (FLA) as a fundamental element in modern foreign language classrooms. It explores the Classical View of FLA, emphasizing its importance in tailoring teaching methods to individual students' abilities. The paper challenges the notion of egalitarianism in language education, asserting that acknowledging inherent differences in students' aptitude is essential for effective instruction. It highlights the need for data-driven teaching approaches and suggests developing FLA assessment instruments to enhance the teaching and learning experience in foreign language classrooms.

Key words: foreign language aptitude (FLA), classical view, language learning abilities, egalitarianism, teacher training, cognitive traits, data-driven instruction.

Аннотация. Эта конференция выступает за реинтеграцию способности иностранного языка (FLA) как фундаментальный элемент в современных классах иностранных языков. Он исследует классический взгляд на FLA, подчеркивая его важность в адаптации методов обучения к способностям отдельных студентов. В документе рассматривается понятие эгалитаризма в языковом образовании, утверждая, что признание присущих врожденных способностей учащихся необходимо для эффективного обучения. В нем подчеркивается необходимость в подходах к обучению, основанным на данных,

и предлагает разработку инструментов оценки FLA для улучшения опыта преподавания и обучения в классах иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: способность иностранного языка (FLA), классический взгляд, способности к изучению языка, эгалитаризм, подготовка учителей, когнитивные признаки, обучение на основе данных.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada chet tillarini o‘qitishning zamonaviy tendensiyalari ko‘rib chiqilgan. Chet tilini o‘qitishning zamonaviy yondashuvlaridan biri sifatida FLA keng tahlil qilingan.

Kalit so'zlar: xorijiy tilini o‘rganish qobiliyati, klassik yondashuv, til, egalitarizm, o‘qituvchilar malakasini oshirish, kognitiv xususiyatlar, ma'lumotlarni o‘zlashtirish qobiliyati.

The term “modern foreign language classroom” evokes a wide array of associations, with “foreign language aptitude” often conspicuously absent among them. However, we firmly believe that this neglected or overlooked element should be considered one of the cornerstones of foreign language instruction.

In the context of this conference paper, we aim to substantiate the abovementioned claim by examining the fundamental premises of the Classical View of foreign language aptitude (a term we introduced in Zverev, 2019). We will provide an explanation for why it has been marginalized in contemporary language classrooms and suggest methods for reintegrating it into foreign language teaching, although we strongly recommend discontinuing the use of this particular term (as suggested in Zverev, 2022).

Foreign language aptitude (FLA) is “a componential psychological construct [that is] not subject to immediate observation or measurement ... encompassing a number of cognitive abilities that underlie certain observed differences in a person’s behavior in response to an external stimulus” (Zverev, 2019, 2021, 2023).

The most prevalent and influential approach to FLA conceptualization, which dominated the field for over half a century, was initially formulated by John Bissell Carroll, the pioneer of FLA research. Carroll posited that while anyone could

eventually learn any foreign language, certain individuals possessed specialized talents (Carroll, 1962, p. 89) that conferred upon them a higher initial readiness (Carroll, 1981, p. 81) for formalized language instruction. In essence, some students excel in foreign language learning due to their inherent capabilities.

Carroll identified four basic FLA abilities: *phonetic coding ability*, *grammatical sensitivity*, *inductive language learning ability*, and *rote memory for foreign language materials*. Importantly, Carroll considered these abilities, like FLA itself, as stable traits impervious to change through instruction; one cannot alter what students bring into the classroom, but it may be leveraged to advantage.

While researchers may disagree on the precise cognitive abilities conducive to foreign language learning, there is a consensus that these abilities exist and can be corroborated through methods such as brain function and anatomy analyses (e.g., Hu et al., 2013; Reiterer, 2018; Reiterer et al., 2005, 2013; Reiterer, Hu, et al., 2011; Reiterer, Pereda, et al., 2011).

So why is FLA rarely, if ever, discussed in teacher training courses and often overlooked by educators responsible for current and future teacher development? The answer lies in egalitarianism. We have been conditioned to believe that all students possess equal talent and that with sufficient effort, anyone can attain outstanding academic results. FLA challenges this notion. It's time we acknowledge that some students are inherently more capable than others in academic performance. Often, these differences cannot be offset by excessive effort demanded of those lagging behind. If we accept the existence of FLA, evident in the neural structures of our students' brains (with proper neuroimaging), we must also accept *the fallacy of egalitarianism*. Language learners are not equal.

Some students will consistently require less time for tasks, while others will need more. There is no such thing as an "average" language learner, yet most textbooks are crafted for this hypothetical average learner. Recognizing and measuring these differences is crucial to ensuring that language classrooms are genuinely innovative.

Assessing foreign language aptitude results empowers instructors to tailor their teaching to students' abilities effectively. Embracing a specific approach to conceptualizing foreign language aptitude, such as the Classical view, enables data-driven decisions about the most suitable tasks for learners. It makes no sense, for example, to force an individual to learn 20 words in 5 minutes if they are incapable of doing so (especially when supported by a clear-cut test result). Such tasks should not be incorporated into the lesson plan.

FLA should unquestionably be a factor to consider when teaching a foreign language class. We should not sweep it under the rug merely because it challenges long-held beliefs. Foreign language instruction should progressively become a data-driven process, and developing a basic FLA assessment instrument can be a significant step towards enhancing both teaching and student learning.

In this conference paper, we have elucidated the concept of language aptitude, explored why it has been marginalized in foreign language instruction for an extended period, and proposed its hypothetical utility in making informed decisions within the framework of teaching processes.

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