

Synergetic Potential of Learning Foreign Languages

‘Synergy’ in Greek means ‘work together’. The theory of synergy was suggested at the dawn of Christianity to signify the collaboration of man and God in common efforts to overcome man’s misconduct. Today, synergy is the word used to describe what happens when two or more people or organizations come together to produce a result that is greater than they could do alone. To reach this effect, they have to communicate efficiently, i.e. to make a proper use of the language.

Therefore, in terms of synergy, language serves as one of the most powerful means of bringing all subjects of the synergetic process together and of making their collaborative efforts productive.

From a global social perspective, efficient language teaching and learning is perceived today as a valuable tool of facilitating communication and interaction among users of different mother tongues in order to support their mutual understanding and collaboration in building constructive global citizenship. Ability to communicate, exchange ideas and values in a multilingual setting and for intercultural understanding has become a key competence of the 21st century. It frames both the content and the form of contemporary language education.

Another aspect of the synergetic effect of language learning is the synergetic correlation of languages that form a person’s language repertoire. In a modern multilingual world, for communication to work, it is important to promote individual plurilingualism as an individual person’s skill and experience through creating possibilities for the learning of other languages. The idea of diversifying and intensifying language learning has become the overall aim of the present Council of Europe language policy in a pan-European context. As it is stressed in the conceptual document of the Council of Europe under the title “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages”, “[...] he or she does not keep these languages and cultures in strictly separated mental compartments, but rather builds up a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (CEFL, p.6).

It means that in situations of communication with speakers of other languages, a person should be able to use different parts of the communicative competence to deliver effectively his/her message to a particular interlocutor, to employ the whole of their both linguistic equipment, and to use different communicative strategies: switch from one language to another, appeal to words from a common international store, simplify the language, paraphrase what he or she wants to say, 'foreignise' words from their first language, use mime, gesture or facial expression, etc.

So, the outcome of language education is no longer seen in today's world as simply achieving a mastery in one or two, or even more languages, each kept in mind in isolation. Instead, the synergetic cumulative effect of a plurilingual frame of mind on the speaker acquainted with more than one language and culture leads to appearance of new competences. The few of them are:

- cognitive attitudes, such as interest in discovering other languages and cultures, readiness to explore one's native language and culture, willingness to compare communicative and cultural practices in one's own and in other countries;
- different communicative strategies enabling a person to achieve mutual understanding in a cross-cultural interaction;
- ability to use transferable skills in language learning to make another language acquisition easier;
- interpreting skills that would allow a person to elicit significance and connotations in another language discourse;
- skills to identify similar and different features in the processes of verbal and non-verbal interaction in one's own and other languages;
- ability of critical thinking and evaluation of practices, products, behaviour patterns in one's own and other cultures and countries.

The third aspect of synergetic potential of learning foreign languages deals with the cumulative effect of teaching language and culture of the target language users. Learning languages through intercultural dialogue between one's own culture and cultures of other speakers of the target language helps:

- to orientate in different cultures and civilizations;
- to organize a socio-culture search in unknown cultural societies;

- to develop the habits of systematization and interpretation of different cultural facts;
- to protect themselves from cultural stereotyping, cultural barbarism and discrimination;
- to choose culturally acceptable forms of cooperation with people in modern intercultural communication
- to develop the ability to describe one's native culture so that all members of intercultural communication could understand it.