



Psychological Perspectives on SLA Individual Learner Difference – Aptitude

Second Language Acquisition

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Outline

- Definition
- Four components of aptitude
- Language-Learning Aptitude tests
- Application to teaching
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Definition

- “[...] a talent which is specific to language learning [...]” (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 90)
- “[...] predicts [...] success in [language learning and] L2 acquisition [in both] naturalistic contexts and formal classroom instruction.” (2017: 91)
- Oxford dictionary (2021):
 - Aptitude = “natural ability or skill at doing something”
 - Aptitude test = “one designed to show whether somebody has the natural ability for a particular job or course of education”

Aptitude

- **Four components** underlying this talent according to J.B. Carroll (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 90)
 1. Phonemic coding ability
 2. Inductive language learning ability
 3. Grammatical sensitivity
 4. Associative memory capacity

Aptitude

- Hypothesis: “[...] possessing various degrees of [...] [aptitude components] predicts correlated degrees of success in L2 acquisition.” (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 92)
- Research by Skehan (1998) concluding that individual ability may vary by factor (2017: 92)
 - talent in all factors is not a requirement for success in L2 learning (2017: 92)

1. Phonemic coding ability

- “[...] the capacity to process auditory input into segments which can be stored and retrieved.” (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 91)
- Important at early stages of learning (2017: 91)
- “[...] concerned with the extent to which the input which impinges on the learner can become input that is worth processing, as opposed to input which may simply be an auditory blur or alternatively only partially processed” (2017: 91)
 - “[...] if the hearer cannot analyse input into phonemes in order to recognize morphemes, input will not become intake.” (2017: 91)

Auditory
Processing



analyse input
into phonemes
↓
recognise
morphemes
↓
intake → output

hey



h
e
y

hey

auditory
language
output



2. Inductive language learning ability & 3. grammatical sensitivity

- Concerned with central processing → restructuring (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 92)
- “[...] processing of the segmented auditory input by the brain to infer structure, identify patterns, make generalizations, recognize the grammatical function of elements, and formulate rules.” (2017: 92)

Linguistic
analytical
ability



4. Associative memory capacity

- “[...] concerned with how linguistic items are stored, and how they are recalled and used in output.” (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 92)
- Determines appropriate selection from the stored L2 elements (2017: 92)
- Determines speaker fluency (2017: 92)

Appropriate
output

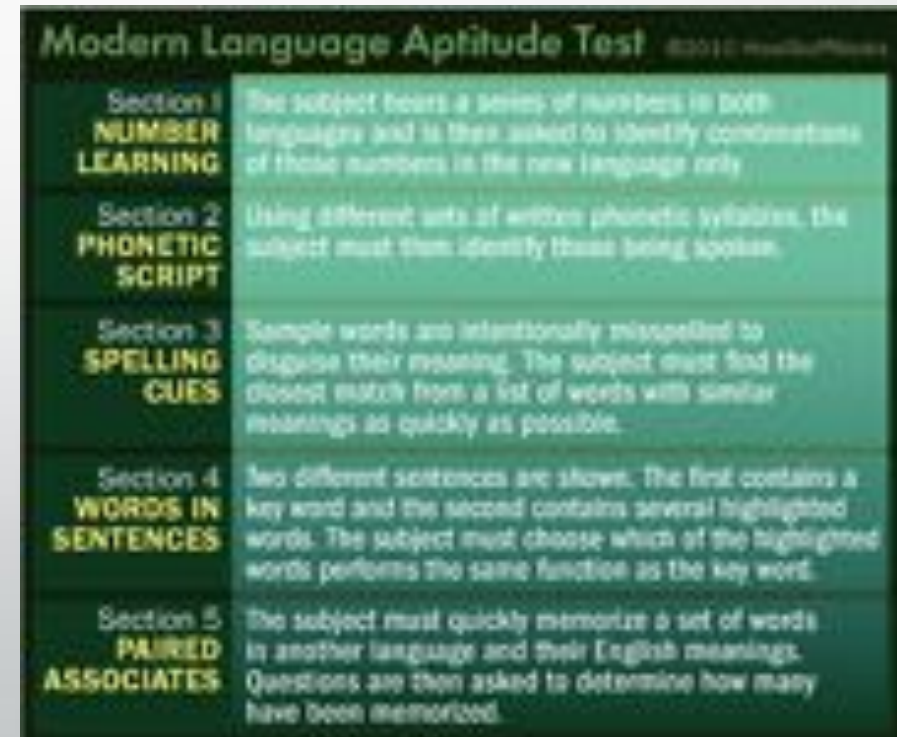


Language-Learning Aptitude tests

- Most of these tests based on four shown components by J.B. Carroll (Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 90)
 - Aptitude tests vary but many include evaluation of ability to manage sounds, grammatical structures, infer rules, and memory. (2017: 90)
- Formal aptitude tests like the MLAT by J.B. Carroll and S. Sapon try predict the degree of success the candidate will have with a new language (McGuire & Scott 2005: 96)

MLAT (Carroll & Sapon 2002)

- Modern language aptitude test (MLAT)
 - May show “[...] how easily an individual may learn a foreign language [...] [and] [...] determine which individuals will experience the most difficulty in language learning.” (LLTF 2021)
- **Use of MLAT (LLTF 2021):**
 - Selection
 - Placement
 - Diagnosis of Learning abilities
 - Security



Modern Language Aptitude Test	
Section 1 NUMBER LEARNING	The subject hears a series of numbers in both languages and is then asked to identify combinations of those numbers in the new language only.
Section 2 PHONETIC SCRIPT	Using different sets of written phonetic syllables, the subject must then identify those being spoken.
Section 3 SPELLING CUES	Sample words are intentionally misspelled to disguise their meaning. The subject must find the closest match from a list of words with similar meanings as quickly as possible.
Section 4 WORDS IN SENTENCES	Two different sentences are shown. The first contains a key word and the second contains several highlighted words. The subject must choose which of the highlighted words performs the same function as the key word.
Section 5 PAIRED ASSOCIATES	The subject must quickly memorize a set of words in another language and their English meanings. Questions are then asked to determine how many have been memorized.

Language Aptitude Test		Oxford college of preference
Time allowed: 30 minutes		
UCAS Personal ID	Surname & first name(s)	Date of birth
I am applying for a course involving (please tick) Beginners:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Czech (with Slovak) <input type="checkbox"/> German <input type="checkbox"/> Italian <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Greek <input type="checkbox"/> Portuguese <input type="checkbox"/> Russian		
Candidate number	L	

The following questions are based on Sobot, an artificial language. Like English, Sobot has a fixed word order; unlike English, however, it does not distinguish simple from progressive tenses ('goes' = 'is going'). Work out the meanings of the following sentences, individual words, and their components by reading carefully and paying attention to the differences between similar forms. Hint: keep an eye on the grammatical gender of words, as in ram (masculine) vs ewe (feminine) vs sheep (undetermined). The exercises are built up gradually, so it is best to do them in order.

- (a)
- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| suneeli a'follif. | The hens run. |
| luseki pessit. | A postwoman laughs. |
| suleefa porris. | Billy goats sleep. |
| durega a'mettir. | The waiter is gardening. |
| suneehwi. | We (women) are running. |
| suleefsa. | You (man) are sleeping. |
| fuber a'pesat. | The post office is burning. |
| ruseefi a'mottir perris. | The waitresses see a goat. |
| kureedi porris melam. | Nanny goats drink water. |
| tukebwa tekab. | I (man) am writing a letter. |
| rusefa pessit a'follif. | A postman sees the chicken. |


Give the meaning of
fuber tekab. _____ [3]

suleefi a'possit. _____ [3]


Translate into Sobot
You (men) see a chicken. _____ [3]

A waiter is running. _____ [3]

MLAT (University of Oxford 2021)



Modern Languages at Oxford


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MODERN LANGUAGES ADMISSIONS TESTS

November 2020

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

This booklet contains the following Modern Languages, Linguistics, Language Aptitude and Philosophy tests. Please tick which test(s) you are sitting:

1	Czech		6	Portuguese	
2	French		7	Russian	
3	German		8	Spanish	
4	Italian		9	Language Aptitude Test (LAT)	
5	Modern Greek		10	Philosophy	

Application to teaching

- Role of aptitude in our future classrooms
 - Help students identify their preferences for learning - learner styles (British Council 2021)
 - Develop learner autonomy by teaching how to study effectively - learner strategies (British Council 2021)
 - Individual diagnosis
 - Learning aptitude tests can be used in conjunction with other forms of evidence (McGuire & Scott 2005: 100-104)
 - Diagnosis of Learning Abilities (Carroll 1959: 158)
 - Individual scores on different parts indicate learning styles
- Opportunity to adjust didactical method (Oxford 2003: 6)

Conclusion

„Learners differ in capacity to discriminate and process auditory input, to identify patterns and make generalizations, and to store linguistic elements in memory. We may conclude that aptitude is an important predictor of differential success in L2 learning, but it is not completely deterministic.“
(Saville-Troike & Barto 2017: 188).

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