

## A VISION OF MULTILINGUALISM BY YOUNG PEOPLE

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**Abstract.** The article is focused on the study of multilingualism concept through a questionnaire addressed to Belarusian and foreign students of P.O. Sukhoi Gomel State Technical University. The paper reveals strong and weak points of being a multilingual person. The vision of an ideal plurilingual (or a polyglot) resulting from the survey in hand is given.

**Key words:** language, multilingualism, individual, youth, use (usage), community, to communicate, skills.

## КОНЦЕПЦИЯ МНОГОЯЗЫЧИЯ МОЛОДЕЖИ

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**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена исследованию концепции многоязычия посредством анкетирования белорусских и иностранных студентов Гомельского государственного технического университета имени П.О. Сухого. В статье раскрываются сильные и слабые стороны многоязычной личности. Приводится представление об идеальном плюрилинге (или полиглоте), сложившееся в результате проведенного исследования.

**Ключевые слова:** язык, многоязычие, личность, молодежь, использование (употребление), сообщество, общаться, навыки.

Multilingualism is considered as the existence of several different languages within the speech repertoire of either an individual or a society. So, there are basically two forms of multilingualism: societal and individual [ThankGod, 2017, p. 2].

The object our research is aimed at individual multilingualism also known as plurilingualism especially in Francophone scholarship and documents of the European Union. Individual multilingualism covers the acquisition and use of several languages (two or more) by a person. It deals with his/her ability to master, and appro-

propriately use these languages and includes language-related physical abilities and neurological processes taking place in the brain [Aronin, 2019, p. 4].

The purpose of the study in hand is to reveal the attitude of young people towards the phenomenon of multilingualism. The factological material is received by means of a questionnaire requiring to indicate strong and weak points of being a multilingual person. The survey was conducted with the participation of 100 respondents aged 17-25 that study at P.O. Sukhoi Gomel State Technical University including Belarusian people (Russian-/ Belarusian-/ English-speaking) and foreigners from Congo, Ghana, Yemen, Guinea, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan mastering at least 3 languages (native language (s), English/French and Russian). As a result of research carried out we got a generalized list of advantages and disadvantages of individual multilingualism. Among the pros are mentioned:

- **cognitive benefits**, notably multitasking skills or switching between different tasks; more efficient monitoring systems; ability to learn and memorize more words, to process information quickly (a multilingual training insures better functioning of operating memory) and come up with solutions to problems;

- **language and communication competence**: good listening, speaking and writing skills; ability to analyze different aspects of a language (sounds, syntax and words); better spotting rhymes and other associations between words; developed word categorization; freedom of expression in general;

- **easy learning of a new language on the base of the known ones**, especially if they belong to the same linguistic family (the case of French, Italian and Spanish) or have much vocabulary in common (the case of French and English);

- **competence in cross-cultural communication** meaning interaction with people all over the world; easy exchange of information and experience between people representing different cultures; ability to study and appreciate other cultures' traditions and customs, forms of art, literature, etc.;

- **upgrading of professional knowledge and skills** due to work experience exchange within some internet professional community;

- **success in scientific research** regarding linguistics and interdisciplinary studies in which language can be an object, a tool or/and a form of representing the obtained results;

- **better salaries and larger career opportunities**: for example, in Belarus allowances for employees who master one foreign language and use it in practical work come up to 13 % of corporate rate, two or more languages – up to 26 % [Gbzp.by];

- **mobility** as a chance to choose any country to live in and to work there.

As responses drew on personal experience, young respondents missed an important aspect related to using several languages such as delay of cognitive damage (dementia and other cognitive degenerative diseases). According to medical statistics the onset of dementia symptoms are in multilinguals delayed significantly, approximately by 5 years, and the brains of those people who suffer from Alzheimer's disease have an improved cognitive function as compared to monolingual Alzheimer's patients [Medical Daily, 2014].

The disadvantages of plurilingualism defined by the respondents are as follows:

- **language fluency delay:** since an individual is trying to learn several languages, he or she (especially children) may take a longer time being fluent in these languages;

- **languages mixing and even creating a translanguage** (like “Denglish” /Deutsch-English/ or “Spanglish” /Spanish-English/): it is a case when people fail in finding an appropriate term to use in a language, so they simply fill it up with words from another language, or else they apply a grammatical rule from one language to another;

- **the dominance of one language over the other:** bi- or multilingual individuals sometimes prefer to speak one language more than the other, especially if they are immigrants and their mother tongue is less popular within their new community;

- **speaking rather than reading and writing:** for youth speaking is preferable, while reading and writing is not since it requires much effort, so often a multilingual might not be able to read or write in the minor language;

- **being receptively multilingual** that suppose speaking a particular language and understanding the others without being able to communicate in them;

- **being special:** possessing an accent can identify immigrants and contribute to their image of strangers;

- **danger of biases (cultural, religious):** interpreting a situation from our own cultural perspective can cause cultural disagreements, confusion, and offense. For example in Azerbaijan talking in public about dieting is a bad tone or else talking badly about close relatives, in particular discussing husbands, or simply gossiping is unacceptable;

- **shifted focus:** for students balancing studies and learning another language can be very difficult because they don't really have 100% focus tending to put more energy into the language than their studies;

- **translation burden:** multilinguals are often expected or asked to translate (interpret) for those who don't speak their languages which can be a stressful and tedious task, especially if a multilingual person is not qualified as a translator (interpreter).

The distribution of responses given by Belarusian and foreign survey participants is represented in the table below.

Multilingualism	Belarusian students responses	Foreign students responses
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- multitasking skills</li> <li>- high learning ability</li> <li>- knowledge of international words</li> <li>- reading books and watching films in the original</li> <li>- profession and life experience exchange</li> <li>- chance to travel all over the world</li> <li>- better salary and career success</li> <li>- opportunity to succeed in scientific research related to linguistics, culturology, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- freedom of expression</li> <li>- developed communication competence</li> <li>- opportunity to study, live and work in other countries</li> <li>- experience in the field of culture</li> <li>- better memorizing</li> <li>- developed ability of studying new languages</li> <li>- prospects for new discoveries, acquaintances, options</li> </ul>
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- taking long time and much efforts</li> <li>- unequal mastering of languages / different language aspects (simply understanding or speaking rather than writing and reading)</li> <li>- risk of cultural or religious misunderstandings / offenses</li> <li>- necessity of being well-concentrated and attentive when communicating with foreigners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- problem of being fluent</li> <li>- languages mixing</li> <li>- focus shifted from studies to learning a new language</li> <li>- requiring diligence and time</li> <li>- dominance of some language over the others</li> <li>- feeling a stranger due to an accent</li> <li>- being an interpreter for others</li> </ul>

When asked a more generalized question "Is it worth learning a foreign language? " students find more approving arguments than disapproving ones, the most often mentioned negative reaction concerning time and labour-consuming reasons. The latter can be explained by their desire to receive all at once, off the shelf and with no efforts. But the very fact that contemporary young people master more than one language speaks well for the phenomenon of plurilingualism and proves their positive attitude to it.

As part of our study, students were also asked to suggest some ideas on the matter: "What can help in learning a foreign language?" The following tips, providing a deeper immersion in the language environment, are obtained:

- changing the language in the phone and on the computer;
- adding music in the learning language to the playlist;
- watching films and cartoons with subtitles in the target language;
- subscribing to foreign speakers in social networks in order to communicate with them;
- selecting a language learning application, which meets your personal needs (*Memrise* is suitable for vocabulary replenishment, *Duolingo* for gamified language learning, *HelloTalk* for language exchange, *FluentU* for video learning, *Rosetta Stone* for immersion learning, *Beelinguapp* for reading lovers, *Urban Dictionary* for studying modern slang, constantly updated by users, *Tongo* for learning English with a personal tutor and others).

To conclude we can state that multilingualism occurs all around the world, at all ages and at all levels of society. Individual multilingualism is influenced by socie-

tal one because forming and developing personal language and communication skills largely depends on social environment.

Young people perceive plurilingualism as a phenomenon that opens up great opportunities and prospects. Through the study done the concept of an ideal plurilingual (or a polyglot) appears as a personable not only to communicate in three or more languages, but also to effectively use these languages as a problem-solving tool in everyday and professional life, competent in history, culture and society matters, capable to conduct research with high performance and, what is most sought after by youth, having a large variety of additional options in life.

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