

Ethnic Stereotypes and English As a Foreign Language Learning

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The article investigates relations between learners' attitudes towards the native speakers of English and learner achievement in English as a foreign language. Stereotypes that Croatian teenage EFL learners have about the British and Americans are looked into and the existence and lack of differences between learners of different gender, grade placement and achievement in English are commented upon. In the conclusion it is stressed that, while attitudes towards the native speakers may be decisive for ESL (English as a second language) learners' achievement, other kinds of attitudes are more relevant in EFL contexts.

It has been commonly accepted that a learner's achievement in learning a second language is related to his motivation to learn that language which is, in turn, related to a number of his attitudinal characteristics. Gardner and Lambert (1972) claim that among them the most important type of attitudes are those the learner holds towards the second language native speakers and community. In his model of motivational characteristics developed for French but generalizable to any second language learnt in a school setting Gardner (1975:58) gives attitudes towards the native speakers a very prominent place.

The assumption that attitudes towards the group speaking the second language are related to competence in that language has been put to test in many studies, most of which were carried out in contexts where the second language was one of the official languages used in education and work. Such contexts are called second language contexts and in some aspects differ essentially from the so-called foreign language contexts, where the second language has no official status within the country in question. Such different roles imply, among other things, a major difference in the exposure to the language that is being learned and in the amount of direct contact with native speakers.

In Croatia English is considered to be a foreign language. Although our colleagues teaching French, German or Italian often claim, reproachfully, that it has a special status, it cannot be considered a second language as it has no official status in the coun-

Motivational characteristics

Group specific attitudes	Course related characteristics	Motivational indices	Generalized attitudes
Attitudes towards French Canadians	Attitudes towards learning French	Integrative orientation	Interest in foreign languages
Attitudes towards European French	Attitudes towards the French course	Motivational intensity	
	Attitudes towards the French teacher	Desire to learn French	
	Parental encouragement to learn French		
	French class anxiety		Ethnocentrism
			Authoritarianism
			Anomie
			Machiavellianism
			Need achievement

Figure 1: Gardner's model of motivational characteristics (Gardner, 1975:58)

try and is not used as a means of education, commerce and the like. However, it has a status that, in Croatia as well as in some other countries in Europe, secures its learners a significantly greater exposure than is the case with the other foreign languages taught and, even more importantly, stimulates different kinds of motivation for learning. As has already been observed (Mihaljević, 1991), English in Croatia is increasingly considered a language of international communication. In recent times most learners have been motivated to learn English in order to be able to use it with other non-native speakers of English. This shift in orientation, an important part of motivation (Gardner, 1985), calls for a re-examination of the connection between competence in English and the learner's attitudes towards its native speakers.

In this study we tried to investigate what stereotypes teenage learners of English had of the British as native speakers of the language and what connection there was between these attitudes and their competence.

Stereotypes, as operationally defined by Katz and Braly (1933), reflect the consensus among members of one ethnic group concerning attributes which characterize another ethnic group. It is assumed that because of their membership in a cultural community, which implies common sources of information, two individuals might adopt the stereotype of their community about some other cultural group.

For the purpose of investigating Croatian EFL learners' stereotypes about the British and the Americans Thurstone scales were constructed. Both instruments contained 11 statements that denote the most common beliefs about the British and the Americans among people in Croatia. The statements included positive, neutral and negative attributes.

The following attributes reflecting the existing stereotypes were used:

The British....

- have a rich tradition.
- are conservative.
- are cold.
- have a highly developed culture.
- are very polite.
- have a sense of humour.
- like hunting.
- talk about the weather.
- have no respect for other nations.
- are thrifty.
- have violent youth.

The Americans...

- have a hectic way of life.
- are good businessmen.
- are open and communicative.
- think too much about the money.
- are the most democratic nation.
- always want to lead.
- are very alienated.
- love hamburgers.
- are poorly educated.
- are the best sportsmen.
- are very hospitable.

The sample included 224 secondary school learners specializing in EFL. The subjects varied in age from 15 to 18 and in grade placement from grade one to grade four. There were 184 female and 40 male learners. All the subjects attended the same secondary school in Zagreb.

As far as their average school grades are concerned the mean for the whole sample was 4.368 (with possible grades ranging from 1 to 5, in ascending order). The mean for the English grade was 4.063. The structure of the sample in terms of the English grades was the following:

Table 1: Breakdown of subjects' English grades

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
(2)	13	5.8 %
(3)	45	20.1 %
(4)	81	36.2 %
(5)	85	37.9 %

The subjects were asked to read through the list of statements and to mark off three out of the eleven traits described in them that would best depict their own opinion about the British.

Results and discussion

The frequency of each of the 11 attributes as one of the three choices selected by the subjects is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Frequency of the attributes for the British

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
have a rich tradition	98	43.8 %
are conservative	117	52.2 %
are cold	113	50.4 %
have a highly developed culture	31	13.8 %
are very polite	61	27.2 %
have a sense of humour	42	18.8 %
like hunting	23	10.3 %
talk about the weather	77	34.4 %
have no respect for other nations	61	27.2 %
are thrifty	20	8.9 %
have violent youth	26	11.6 %

The results presented in the table show that the three most frequently chosen traits of the British are their being conservative, cold and having a rich tradition. Their ranks are 4, 3 and 10 respectively. One may assume that the overall picture our subjects had of the British was moderately positive. Similar, though a little more positive, results were obtained from a group of Croatian parents whose children were enrolled in an experimental project of learning English from grade 1 (Mihaljević, 1993).

The results show that most subjects viewed the Americans as hamburger lovers, as people who love to be leaders, as poorly educated and as open and communicative persons. The ranks for these attributes are 6, 3, 1 and 10 respectively.

In order to see whether female learners selected different traits from male learners analyses of variance were performed on the means of each item. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Frequency of the attributes for the Americans

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage
are poorly educated	95	42.4 %
are very alienated	16	7,1 %
always want to lead	102	45.5 %
think too much about the money	85	37.9 %
have a hectic way of life	54	24.1 %
love hamburgers	103	46.0 %
are very hospitable	19	8.5 %
are the best sportsmen	20	8.9 %
are good businessmen	50	22.3 %
are open & communicative	95	42.4 %
are the most democratic nation	31	13.8 %

Table 4: Analyses of variance with gender as the independent variable (British)

Attribute	Female	Male	F-ratio	Probability
(1)	.0707	.3250	22.6254	.0000**
(2)	.2446	.4000	4.0456	.0456
(3)	.5109	.4750	.1677	.6825
(4)	.5543	.4984	4.2790	.0397
(5)	.3533	.3000	.4102	.5225
(6)	.1087	.0000	4.8345	.0289
(7)	.0978	.1250	.2613	.6097
(8)	.1793	.2250	.4464	.5048
(9)	.3098	.1000	7.4754	.0068
(10)	.4402	.4250	.0306	.8612
(11)	.1196	.2250	3.0779	.0807

** $p < .01$

(1) - have violent youth; (2) - have no respect for other nations; (3) - are cold; (4) - are conservative; (5) talk about the weather; (6) - are thrifty; (7) - love hunting; (8) - have a sense of humour; (9) - are very polite; (10) - have a rich tradition; (11) - have a highly developed culture.

As can be seen from the results in Table 4, male and female teenage learners of English share most of the stereotypes about the British held by people in Croatia. The only significant difference points to the fact that significantly more male learners find British

youth violent. We may assume that this is a consequence of a more elaborate interest in football on the part of male learners who are better informed about events in international sport and were impressed greatly by violent outbursts of young British football fans.

Table 5: Analyses of variance with gender as the independent variable (Americans)

Attribute	Female	Male	F-ratio	Probability
(1)	.4185	.4500	.1326	.7161
(2)	.0598	.1250	2.1080	.1479
(3)	.4402	.5250	.9478	.3313
(4)	.3641	.4500	1.0244	.3126
(5)	.2500	.2000	.4459	.5050
(6)	.4674	.4250	.2358	.6277
(7)	.0924	.0500	.7564	.3854
(8)	.0652	.2000	7.5216	.0066**
(9)	.2500	.1000	4.3076	.0391
(10)	.4402	.3500	1.0905	.2975
(11)	.1413	.1250	.0726	.7878

** $p < .01$

(1) - are poorly educated; (2) - are very alienated; (3) - always want to lead; (4) - think too much about the money; (5) - have a hectic way of life; (6) - love hamburgers; (7) - are very hospitable; (8) - are the best sportsmen; (9) - are good businessmen; (10) - are open and communicative; (11) - are the most democratic nation.

As can be seen from Table 5, our male and female subjects share most of the attributes constituting the stereotype of the Americans too. The one attribute where there were significant differences concerns being successful at sport: male subjects chose this attribute more often than female learners.

Another independent variable we looked into was the grade variable, which reflected the length of studying English as a foreign language. One-way analyses of variance were carried out on the means for each stereotype trait. The results are presented in Table 5.

The analyses of variance show that significant differences exist in four traits. The results point to a significantly more frequent selection of trait (2) (*have no respect for other nations*) by the fourth graders than by the second graders. The second graders were also found to believe that talking about the weather is typical of the British more frequently than the first and fourth graders. The first graders significantly more frequently saw the typical Britisher as a hunting fan than any of the three other groups of subjects. The British were described as very polite significantly more frequently by fourth graders than second graders.

Table 6: Analyses of variance with grade as the independent variable (British)

Trait	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	F-ratio	Probability
(1)	.1633	.1429	.0938	.0727	.9193	.4323
(2)	.2245	.1250	.3438	.3818	4.0322	.0081**
(3)	.4286	.6071	.5313	.4364	1.5699	.1976
(4)	.4898	.5357	.4688	.6000	.7656	.5144
(5)	.2857	.5536	.3594	.1636	7.0474	.0002**
(6)	.1020	.1429	.0781	.0364	1.3561	.2572
(7)	.2857	.0357	.0781	.0364	8.6306	.0000**
(8)	.2041	.1786	.1406	.2364	.6283	.5975
(9)	.2653	.1786	.2188	.4364	3.7480	.0118**
(10)	.4490	.3571	.4375	.5091	.8750	.4548
(11)	.1020	.1786	.1875	.0727	1.5322	.2070

** $p < .01$

(1) - have violent youth; (2) - have no respect for other nations; (3) - are cold; (4) - are conservative; (5) talk about the weather; (6) - are thrifty; (7) - love hunting; (8) - have a sense of humour; (9) - are very polite; (10) - have a rich tradition; (11) - have a highly developed culture.

Table 7: Analyses of variance with grade as the independent variable (American)

Attribute	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	F-ratio	Probability
(1)	.4694	.3393	.5313	.3455	2.1784	.0915
(2)	.0612	.0179	.1406	.0545	2.4902	.0612
(3)	.5102	.3929	.4844	.4364	.5853	.6252
(4)	.3673	.5000	.2656	.4000	2.4028	.0685
(5)	.2041	.1786	.2344	.3455	1.6241	.1847
(6)	.5714	.4643	.4219	.4000	1.2063	.3083
(7)	.1224	.0536	.0625	.1091	.8030	.4934
(8)	.1020	.1071	.0781	.0727	.1973	.8981
(9)	.2041	.2500	.2344	.2000	.1812	.9091
(10)	.2857	.6429	.2656	.5091	8.4002	.0000**
(11)	.1224	.0893	.2031	.1273	1.1786	.3181

** $p < .01$

(1) - are poorly educated; (2) - are very alienated; (3) - always want to lead; (4) - think too much about the money; (5) - have a hectic way of life; (6) - love hamburgers; (7) - are very hospitable; (8) - are the best sportsmen; (9) - are good businessmen; (10) - are open and communicative; (11) - are the most democratic nation.

With stereotypes about the Americans even fewer differences were found. Here second graders found the Americans open and communicative significantly more often than first or third graders.

It seems logical to assume that differences observed between subjects from different grades might be attributed to the teaching materials that are used in the respective grades and that put emphasis on one or the other characteristic of the Americans.

The most important area of possible differences concerns groups of EFL learners with different achievement in English. Such differences would indicate how important the learner's attitudes towards the native speakers are for his success in learning. To find out whether subjects with different grades in English selected different traits another set of analyses of variance was performed. The grades the subjects had in English ranged from 2 to 5. No one had the lowest grade (1). The results can be found in Table 5.

Table 8: Analyses of variance with English grades as the independent variable (British)

Trait	English grade: 2	English grade: 3	English grade: 4	English grade: 5	F-ratio	Probability
(1)	.1538	.2000	.1235	.0588	2.0282	.1109
(2)	.0769	.2667	.2716	.3059	.9939	.3965
(3)	.4615	.4889	.5309	.4941	.1318	.9411
(4)	.3077	.5778	.5802	.4706	1.6592	.1768
(5)	.4615	.4222	.3704	.2588	1.6743	.1734
(6)	.1538	.1333	.0494	.0941	1.1136	.3444
(7)	.1538	.0889	.1358	.0706	.7865	.5026
(8)	.0000	.1333	.1605	.2706	2.7535	.0434
(9)	.4615	.1111	.2716	.3294	3.3010	.0212
(10)	.6154	.3778	.3580	.5176	2.2338	.0852
(11)	.1538	.2000	.1481	.0941	.9687	.4083

(1) - have violent youth; (2) - have no respect for other nations; (3) - are cold; (4) - are conservative; (5) talk about the weather; (6) - are thrifty; (7) - love hunting; (8) - have a sense of humour; (9) - are very polite; (10) - have a rich tradition; (11) - have a highly developed culture.

The results presented in Tables 8 and 9 indicate an interesting phenomenon: there are no significant differences in the stereotypes about the British and the Americans among learners of different achievement in English. This contradicts findings elsewhere. Since in most other studies English was being learned as a second language one may assume that the attitudes an ESL learner has towards the native speakers of the language he is learning would be decisive in determining his motivation and, consequently, his achievement. But, when English is being learned as a foreign language this type of attitudes are less important. In the EFL settings, like the Croatian context, English is

Table 9: Analyses of variance with English grades as the independent variable (Americans)

Attribute	English grade: 2	English grade: 3	English grade: 4	English grade: 5	F-ratio	Probability
(1)	.3077	.5778	.3827	.4000	1.9640	.1203
(2)	.0000	.0222	.0494	.1294	2.5561	.0562
(3)	.5385	.4000	.4321	.4941	.5308	.6616
(4)	.4615	.4000	.3827	.3529	.2332	.8732
(5)	.2308	.1556	.3086	.2235	1.3234	.2676
(6)	.6923	.4889	.5185	.3529	2.7212	.0453
(7)	.1538	.0889	.0988	.0588	.5776	.6303
(8)	.0769	.1333	.0617	.0941	.6204	.6025
(9)	.2308	.1556	.2222	.2588	.5989	.6164
(10)	.2308	.4444	.4321	.4353	.7042	.5504
(11)	.0769	.1333	.1358	.1529	.1894	.9035

(1) - are poorly educated; (2) - are very alienated; (3) - always want to lead; (4) - think too much about the money; (5) - have a hectic way of life; (6) - love hamburgers; (7) - are very hospitable; (8) - are the best sportsmen; (9) - are good businessmen; (10) - are open and communicative; (11) - are the most democratic nation.

perceived as a language of international communication which does not necessarily belong to any specific national and cultural group. It is primarily perceived as a language used by non-native speakers. This downplays the impact of the learner's attitudes towards the British as the native speakers of the English language.

We may conclude that motivation for learning English as a language of international communication is maintained by some other sets of attitudes. Among these an important role is probably played by attitudes towards foreign language learning in general and English in particular as well as towards the self as a language learner, the teacher and the teaching strategies.

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ETNIČKI STEREOTIPI I UČENJE ENGLESKOGA KAO STRANOG JEZIKA

U članku se ispituje povezanost učeničkih stavova prema izvornim govornicima engleskog jezika i uspjeha u učenju engleskoga kao stranog jezika. Razmatraju se stereotipi hrvatskih adolescentnih učenika o Britancima i Americancima te se komentiraju razlike u stereotipima koje posjeduju učenici različitog spola, razreda i uspjeha. U zaključku se naglašava da, za razliku od konteksta u kojem je engleski drugi jezik, pri učenju engleskoga kao stranog jezika stavovi prema izvornim govornicima nisu odlučujući za uspjeh u učenju. U takvom kontekstu postaju relevantne neke druge vrste stavova.