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## BASE FOR ELECTRONIC EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

ISSN: 2718-0107

*Base for Electronic Educational Sciences*, 4(2), 60-69; 2023

### The Effect of Foreign Language Learning on the Use of Mother Tongue<sup>1</sup>

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#### APA Citation:

Kana, F., Kaynak, U. S. & Yılmaz, C. (2023). The Effect of Foreign Language Learning on the Use of Mother Tongue. *Base for Electronic Educational Sciences*, 4(2), 60-69.

Submission Date: 17/03/2023

Acceptance Date: 14/09/2023

#### Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal the effect of foreign language learning on mother tongue use. Case study design, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in the study. In order to keep the sample large, 70 pre-service teachers were selected using simple random sampling method among the 4th year undergraduate students studying in three different foreign language education departments in 2016-2017. The research data were analysed using deductive analysis method. As a result of the research, the pre-service teachers who participated in the research think that language learning is a necessity and that individuals learn languages out of necessity. The pre-service teachers state that interest in the target language is an important condition for language learning, that if there is no interest, the language cannot be learnt, and that belonging to a common language family increases interest in the language and facilitates language learning. The desire to communicate with other individuals in the world, to improve oneself, to learn the culture of the target language and to live abroad are among the reasons for learning a foreign language. Learning the education system and sound harmony of the target language and economic concerns are among the reasons for language learning. The pre-service teachers who participated in the study stated that they had the most difficulty in learning basic language skills in foreign language learning and that they made comparisons with their mother tongue while learning a foreign language. The pre-service teachers who participated in the research stated that they pay attention to the use of the mother tongue while learning a foreign language; they pay attention to the use of the mother tongue while learning a foreign language because they benefit from the love of the mother tongue and translations.

**Keywords:** Foreign language, case study, use of mother tongue.

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<sup>1</sup> This research was presented as a summary paper at the RESSCONGRESS International Educational Sciences Social Sciences Symposium held in Bandırma.

## Introduction

Language is a natural tool that provides agreement between people, a system of secret agreements that has its own laws and that develops only within the framework of these laws, a system of secret agreements that was made when the basis of a living being was not established, is a social institution woven from sounds (Ergin, 2013). Banguoğlu (1986) defines language as a system of sound signs that people use to express their purports and intentions. According to Develi (2011) language is the qualities that gather common cultural contents and other attitudes under a single identity and make them 'us'. "When future generations learn their language, they not only learn their own language, but also learn the characteristic lifestyles of their ancestors and the unique features of the society they live in" (Göçer, 2012, p.51). "Since the main means of communication between people is inevitably and indispensably language, this medium is the jugular vein of a culture and society" (Develi, 2011, p. 23).

Language is the most concrete form of thought. Thoughts become concrete according to the patterns of the language (sentences, words, sentence order, etc.). The languages used by individuals who can think clearly and correctly are also clean and smooth (Avcı, 2012). The universe is shaped in our minds according to our mother tongue; we detect our environment with our mother tongue, we name beings and situations by always understanding and explaining it" (Aksan, 1975, p. 428).

Language and thought are inseparable parts of each other. Disruption in one will definitely spoil the other. Today, foreign language learning is necessary in the world where the borders have been removed; However, after the mother tongue's mentality is established on solid foundations, it should be taught consciously and it should be done by adopting the foreign language as a tool, not a goal. Each individual has a system of thought and their own language in which they convey their thoughts. People in the same thought system use the same language, the same words carry the same concept and meaning in their minds. Culture, on the other hand, is the rooted state of these ideas, the way of life. The sum of all these gives us the nation. In other words, common thought, common language and common culture are the basic building blocks of the nation. Each language carries the culture and thoughts of the nation it represents. While learning a foreign language, we unwittingly learn the culture and thought of the target language. It is possible that they do not like the nation, culture and way of life they live in, and adopt the thought and culture they have acquired together with a foreign language and look at their own culture with the eyes of the other and despise them.

"Mother tongue means the language that the child acquires from his family and the community he lives in" (TDK, 2011, p. 119). According to Aksan (1998), mother tongue is the language that is learned initially from the family and close family circle, and then from the related environment, goes down to the subconscious of the person and forms the strongest bonds of individuals with the society. The Turkish language is flexible, unlimited in terms of functionality, and unique in terms of the ways of generating new words. For this reason, we can liken Turkish to space because of its infinity. It has been subjected to many undermining in its thousands of years of history. Despite this, it maintains its strength. Our problem is that we do not see this power. We make the mistake of despising Turkish as it was centuries ago. It is possible to see examples of this in our history. There can be two reasons for the persecution of language. The first is the feeling of humiliation due to ignorance, and the second is the desire to prevent the formation of the belief that this nation can be self-sufficient.

As a result of the agreements made with Western states during the Ottoman Empire, Western states gained privileges in the field of economic, political and even education. Until the Tanzimat, no law was made for foreigners to open schools and no privilege was given. Schools for foreigners were allowed to be opened only for religious activities to teach their children their religion. However, after the Tanzimat, there was a significant increase in the number of schools opened by foreign states. These schools carried out missionary work within the state with the privileges they obtained. For example, graduates of American schools, which went into small settlements within the country, were active in the separation of Bulgarians, Albanians, Arabs and Armenians from the Ottoman Empire (Aksu, 2008). After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the language that has been neglected for many years has begun to be emphasized. With the establishment of the Turkish Language Institution, Turkish language took on an institutional identity. The first day of the institution's convening, September 26, as a sign of determination that the Turkish language, which has been treated as a stepchild for centuries, is embraced by the state. As a result of the Ottoman Turkish period's intellectuals' love of Arabic and Persian, our intellectuals did not bother to search for foreign words. Therefore, the intellectuals' love for mother tongue, consciousness and feeling atrophied. The results of this were drawn in Turkish (Korkmaz, 2007). After the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye, all schools were connected to the state with the law enacted in 1924. With this law, foreign schools providing special education were closed. Private schools were established for the purpose of providing foreign language education to students, and a private school named Turkish Education Association was established on January 31, 1928, in line with Atatürk's request, for teaching foreign languages such as English. The language of education in Yenişehir High School, which was opened in 1930 by this association, which was established by Atatürk in order to get rid of the problem of education in a foreign language, is Turkish. By providing 10 hours of English support training per week, foreign language teaching is provided to the students. However, this association institution, founded by Atatürk with a national spirit, collapsed economically in 1954 and was sold to foreigners. Immediately after this change, the education language of the school suddenly became English, the teaching staff changed, some of the educators were dismissed until that year, and teachers who could teach in English were brought to the duty of teaching. Unfortunately, this radical change in Yenişehir High School has been the key to the change in the language of instruction in other schools. After 1954, the number of Anatolian (!) High Schools increased, and the expansion of private schools providing education in a foreign language was allowed. In order for individuals to learn a foreign language more easily and to be more successful individuals in life, the foreign language education method chosen has been proven by studies to be harmful, not beneficial, over time. For example, Mirici et al. (2000) conducted research on students, teachers, parents, and supervisors to teach science courses in a foreign language in Anatolian high schools. As a result of this research (Mirici, Hoşgörür, Arslan and Aydın, 2000, p. 24):

Foreign language education makes it difficult for students to understand the lessons,. It is unnecessary to study other classes in a foreign language to learn that foreign language. The practice of teaching science courses in English negatively affects student success in the university exam. Teaching Science courses in a foreign language has been found not to be effective in achieving the objectives of these courses.

The nation, which is reborn with each generation, conveys the character traits to the next generations through the natural codes hidden in the language. Language exists with the nation. "An Englishman exists because he is English. An Armenian exists because he is Armenian. Today, it is impossible to talk about the existence of a

Sumerian because Sumerian is not spoken or written” (Yapıcı and Demir, 2007, p. 178). Based on this, it is concluded that it would be a great mistake to see mother tongue teaching as only language teaching. Mother tongue teaching is the key to our continuation as a nation. “The main purpose of mother tongue teaching is; It is the development of comprehension power, the acquisition of expression skills and habits, the formation of listening and reading habits and pleasure, the enrichment of personal active and passive vocabulary, the teaching of basic grammar rules, and the creation of language awareness and love” (Kavcar, Oğuzkan, & Sever, 1995; cited in Yapıcı). and Demir, 2007)

Foreign language teaching in Turkey was taught through supplementary courses as supplementary education until the early 1995s. With the legal regulations, the number of schools providing foreign language education has increased. These schools include middle schools, high schools and universities. In 1988-1989, a layered system was introduced for secondary schools. According to this system, students took the foreign language as a compulsory class in the first year, but it was optional in the following years and did not affect passing the class. This method was used once, but then it was abolished and the compulsory foreign language course was introduced again (Akyüz, 1993; Çelebi, 2006).

According to the regulation published in the official newspaper numbered 18868 on 14/09/1985, optional courses can be opened in the 4th and 5th grades of primary education, but compulsory language courses will be taught from the 6th grade. In fact, if the institutions providing education in a foreign language cannot find a teacher to teach a course in a foreign language, they have to get permission from the Ministry to teach the course in Turkish. The permission of the Ministry was adhered to in order to teach students in their mother tongue. However, this was taken a little further by the Foreign Language Teaching regulation published in the official newspaper numbered 26184 on 31/05/2006, making foreign language teaching a compulsory course from the 4th grade onward. In addition, schools would be able to offer courses to support foreign language learning if they wished so. With the amendment made in the Ministry of National Education Pre-School Education and Primary Education Institutions Regulations in 2014, English education began to be provided in primary schools as well. However, these courses had to be given by the language teachers. When such language teachers were not available, the primary school teacher could teach these foreign language classes (Official newspaper, 1985; 2006; 2014).

Research on foreign language teaching is important. The opinions of pre-service teachers studying in foreign language education about foreign language education are important in terms of determining the effect of foreign language learning on mother tongue. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of foreign language learning on individuals' use of mother tongue.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The case study design, one of the qualitative research designs was used in the research. A case study is a research method that allows an in-depth study of a subject with questions such as why, how and when (Kaleli Yılmaz, 2014).

### **Working Group**

The study group of the research consists of 70 4th grade students studying in the Department of English Language Teaching, German Language Teaching and Japanese Language Teaching at a state university in the west of Turkey.

## Data Analysis

To analyze the data obtained in the research, the deductive analysis method was used. In this analysis method, the themes are summarized and interpreted based on the research question and sub-questions (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021, p. 244).

## Data Collection Tool

In this study, data were collected through a semi-structured interview form. The data were obtained by using an interview form consisting of five (5) questions. First of all, an interview form was prepared by the researchers by consulting with three experts and revising it in line with their opinions.

## RESULTS

In this part, the findings obtained from the research were analyzed.

Table 1

The reason for learning a foreign language according to pre-service teachers

Code	English Language Education	German Language Education	Japanese Language Education	Total
A common language	8	-	-	8
Interest in target language	3	2	10	15
Economic anxiety	2	-	-	2
Necessity	11	3	3	17
Making communication	3	2	-	5
Self development	7	-	-	7
Learning the culture of the target language	1	2	4	7
Desire to live abroad	1	5	-	6
Learning the education system of the target language	-	-	2	2
The tone of the target language	-	-	1	1

As seen in the answers given to the question "What are the reasons why you want to learn a foreign language?" in Table 1, people's attitudes towards foreign languages and the reasons for learning a foreign language were coded in 10 categories. English Language Teaching students stated the reasons for learning a foreign language as necessity, common language and self-development; German Language Teaching students stated interest in the target language, necessity, communication and desire to live abroad; Japanese Language Teaching students stated interest in the target language, learning the culture of the target language and necessity. The opinions of the students on the subject are as follows:

*At first, I thought I had the aptitude, and then I started to learn Japanese in order to comprehend the Japanese education system (P39).*

*I admire Japanese culture (P28).*

*English is the world language and must be learnt (P27).*

*Foreign languages have become compulsory rather than a necessity for communication, and I started to learn foreign languages at the age of 10 because it could affect my professional life (P3).*

*I like learning languages and I want to live abroad in the future, so I think I should learn their cultures and languages (P8).*

*I have relatives in Germany and I want to join them and spend my life with them in Germany (P15).*

Table 2

The most difficult subjects in foreign language learning

Code	English Language Education	German Language Education	Japanese Language Education	Total
Basic skills	21	7	9	37
Grammar	10	4	6	20
Frequency of use	12	6	-	18
Learning the culture of the language	-	-	2	2
Understanding the thought system of language	-	-	2	2

In Table 2, the answers to the question "What are the most difficult issues in foreign language learning?" are mainly focused on basic skills, frequency of use and grammar. When the data are analysed, it is seen that there are problems with speaking skill, which is one of the basic skills. English Language Teaching students expressed the most difficulties in foreign language learning as basic skills, grammar, frequency of use; German Language Teaching students as basic skills, grammar, frequency of use; Japanese Language Teaching students as basic skills, grammar, learning the culture of the language, understanding the thought system of the language.

Table 3

Thoughts on whether they have a good command of the grammar rules of Turkish

Code	English Language Education	German Language Education	Japanese Language Education	Total
No	8	7	8	23
Yes	22	5	9	36
Partially	6	2	3	11

According to Table 3, 61% of English Language Teaching students, 35.7% of German Language Teaching students and 45% of Japanese Language Teaching students stated that they had a good command of Turkish grammar rules. The opinions of the students on the subject are as follows:

*When there are spelling mistakes or expression disorders in the texts I read, I feel the need to notice and correct them (P 28).*

*Although I do not pay attention in spoken language, I try to use it carefully in written language (P 29).*

*Yes, I have loved grammar since I was little. I love my country, history and nation and I think I have a good command of them (P 30).*

Table 4

Opinions about whether they make comparisons with their mother tongue while learning a foreign language

Yes f(43)	English Language Education	German Language Education	Japanese Language Education	Total
Making learning easier	16	4	6	26
Learning the target culture	4	6	3	13
Mother tongue love	2	1	1	4
No f(27)	14	3	10	27

According to Table 4, most of the pre-service teachers who participated in the study stated that they made comparisons with their mother tongue while learning a foreign language. The opinions of the students on the subject are as follows:

*Yes, because the sentence structures of English seem ridiculous (P10).*

*Yes, I got help from my mother tongue while learning a foreign language because I always think and speak Turkish in my head (P12).*

*Yes, it is useful to start from what we know while learning something new (P18).*

*In the 3rd grade, I only did it in the comparative grammar lesson (P 21).*

*I did it to see their similarities and differences (P26).*

*Yes, I like Turkish more (P19).*

*The rules of each language are a whole in itself, you cannot learn them by making comparisons (P22).*

*I do not do it because it causes confusion (P23).*

Table 5

Whether or not to pay attention to the use of the mother tongue while learning a foreign language

Yes	English Language Education (26)	German Language Education (4)	Japanese Language Education (6)
Making use of translations	13	3	5
mother tongue love	10	1	1
No	English Language Education (10)	German Language Education (6)	Japanese Language Education (9)
Learning the target language better	6	3	-
Be interested in foreign languages	2	1	1
Lack of knowledge of mother tongue	1	2	2
Dislike your mother tongue	1		6
Partially	3	2	4

According to Table 5, the university students who participated in the research stated that they pay attention to the use of mother tongue while learning a foreign language. The opinions of the students on the subject are as follows:

*No, the target language distorts the mother tongue (P20)*

*Involuntary deterioration of the mother tongue (P23)*

*Using English syntax or vocabulary in the first language (P 36)*

*Interruption of English words while speaking in the mother tongue (P 44)*

*Mixing two languages together (P57)*

*I do, because when I don't pay attention, very ridiculous things come out: "god demn it made me so angry" (P69)*

*No, no. Because I do not like my mother tongue (P66)*

*No, I paid attention to think and speak in the target language in order to learn the target language well (P 45)*

*Yes, I was careful because I did not want the target language to spoil my mother tongue (P 48)*

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As a result of the research, the pre-service teachers who participated in the research think that language learning is a necessity and that individuals learn languages out of necessity. Pılandı (2015) and the foreword of the dictionary preparer of Külliyyât-ı Mükâleme-i Elsinî (Şişman, 2023: 226) emphasise that language learning is a necessity, similar to this research.

The pre-service teachers think that interest in the target language is an important condition for language learning and that the language cannot be learnt if there is no interest. In his study, Karşı (2022) stated that the use of materials facilitates learning and increases the interest in the target language and the desire to learn. Hamurcu and Ekinçi (2020) stated in their research that the main objective of the 5th grade English curriculum is to increase students' interest and attitudes towards the target language. Supporting the texts in the textbook with visuals increases the interest in the target language.

Pre-service teachers state that being a member of a common language family increases interest in the language and facilitates language learning. The desire to communicate with other individuals in the world, to improve oneself, to learn the culture of the target language and to live abroad are among the reasons for learning a foreign language. Learning the education system and sound harmony of the target language and economic concerns are among the reasons for language learning. The most important reason for language learning is seen as necessity by the students of the Department of English Language Teaching, the desire to live abroad by the students of the Department of German Language Teaching, and the interest in the target language by the students of the Department of Japanese Language Teaching. The reasons for language learning vary according to the main discipline of education.

The pre-service teachers who participated in the research stated that they had the most difficulty in learning basic language skills in foreign language learning. Sheta, Jdaitawi and Essa (2020) stated in their research that difficulties in learning basic language skills such as speaking, reading, spelling and writing can be expressed as learning difficulties. In addition to basic language skills, pre-service teachers stated that they had difficulties in grammar and frequency of use. The students of the Department of Japanese Language Teaching stated that learning the culture of the



language and comprehending the thought system of the language were also difficulties in learning a foreign language. Although pre-service teachers in the department of foreign language education stated that they have a good command of Turkish grammar, there are also pre-service teachers who think that they have a partial command of Turkish grammar or who think that they do not have a good command of Turkish grammar.

The pre-service teachers who participated in the research stated that they made comparisons with their mother tongue while learning a foreign language. Tosun (2005) stated that the classification of words and word types according to their constructional and formal appearances would benefit linguistics, foreign language teachers and students in terms of getting to know the language in question, approaches, methods and comparisons with other and their mother tongues, and realising conscious learning and teaching by identifying similarities and dissimilarities. Pre-service teachers stated the reasons for making comparisons with their mother tongue while learning a foreign language as facilitating learning, learning the target culture and love of mother tongue. The students of the Department of Japanese Language Teaching were undecided about their views on making comparisons with their mother tongue while learning a foreign language.

The pre-service teachers who participated in the research stated that they pay attention to the use of mother tongue while learning a foreign language. The pre-service teachers stated that they pay attention to the use of mother tongue while learning a foreign language because of their love of mother tongue and because they benefit from it in translations. The pre-service teachers who stated that they pay attention to the use of mother tongue while learning a foreign language stated the reasons for this as learning the target language better, being interested in the foreign language and not liking the mother tongue.

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