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L2 ATTITUDES ACROSS SECONDARY EDUCATION: HOW (RELATIVELY) STABLE ARE THEY?

Investigation into L2 attitudes is challenging within SLA research because they are: (1) highly complex, i.e. sociocultural, cognitive, and affective by nature, and (2) deemed a good predictor of behaviour. The study explores secondary students' attitudes to learning English as a foreign language. The final sample involved N=55 participants (m=16, f=39), attending two grammar school courses (philological and general) in Serbia, with equal distribution (Phil=25, Gen=30). The participants were tested via repeated measures design on their L2 learning attitudes within a three-year period (Time 1, 2, 3). The main goals were to determine whether their attitudes change along secondary education, and whether the two main educational profile groups' attitudes differ in their intensity. The subsidiary goal was to test the validity of the EFLS-ALE scale employed in this research. The results indicate that general attitudes were positive in both groups, stable throughout secondary education (no differences were found between Time 1, 2, 3), Phil group had much more positive attitudes in every year of testing, and the EFLS-ALE scale showed a very good internal consistency (Time 1: α=.891, Time 2: α=.920, Time 3: α=.913). In conclusion, our sample attitudes have proven to be quite stable across secondary education, but we contend that it is the question of *relative stability* within one developmental period (mid-adolescence), not absolute stability. Finally, further research is needed to gain more valuable insights into the issue of L2 attitudes' stability, due to sample size and its nature.

Keywords: L2 attitudes, longitudinal study, relative stability of L2 attitudes, repeated measures design, secondary EFL students

1. INTRODUCTION

More than two decades ago, Firth and Wagner (1997) urged for a reconceptualisation of mainstream SLA theory, which primarily viewed foreign/second language (L2) learning as an individual phenomenon only, and therefore heavily relied on the cognitive element underlying L2 acquisition. This urge called for the reconsideration of the role of social, sociocultural and contextual factors that naturally accompany L2 learning (Larsen-Freeman 2007; Swain, Deters 2007). Simply put, the pivot of cognitive approaches revolves around mental structures and processes (Atkinson 2011), whereas social approaches embrace a host of social factors that go along with language acquisition. While

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the former focuses on cognitive mechanisms, the latter regards social factors as well as the context of L2 learning and/or use as crucial. Although this "cognitive-social" debate is still present, up to date these two perspectives have not been able to converge into one point of mutual interest (L2 learning). The subject matter of our study, namely the attitude construct, nonetheless, involves both the cognitive element as well as social, and thus may make way for one portion of the shared common ground.

Together with language aptitude, intelligence, motivation etc., attitudes have been subsumed under *individual differences* (IDs) in SLA, as well as psychological literature. Although there has been criticism as regards the justification of their presence in SLA research, many recent handbooks of SLA and instructed language learning include IDs (e.g. Gass et al. 2020; Ellis 2015; Loewen, Sato 2017 etc.). It is reasonable therefore to take the view that these differences *do* exist but that they should no longer be viewed as "stable and monolithic", which was their main critique (e.g. Dörnyei 2012: 180, 182). In all likelihood, they should be regarded as changing and negotiable, and more importantly *both* individual and social (Duff 2017).

Regarding ID classification, they are generally categorised as sociocultural (e.g. beliefs, attitudes), cognitive (e.g. cognitive styles, working memory) and affective (e.g. anxiety, willingness to communicate) (Pawlak 2017). In terms of their definition, Ellis (2015: 343) defines them as "differences in how learners learn an L2, in how fast they learn, and in how successful they are". Grubor (2020: 32) regards them as "individual-specific characteristics that facilitate or hinder language learning, thereby making learners more or less successful in mastering an L2". Besides being individual-specific, attitudes are also socially constructed and culturally shaped. They have always been regarded as "social products", but also as attributes of the individual (Manstead 1996: 13), which is why we contend that they are likewise sociocultural, cognitive, and affective by nature.

In a nutshell, we have set out to investigate one of the listed IDs in this paper, specifically EFL students' attitudes to learning English and their relative (un)stability across secondary education. In the next section, we will briefly address the issue of the attitude construct based on the mainstream attitudinal theory (its structure, functions, ways of measurement), after which we will present the methodology and results of a longitudinal study conducted throughout secondary education, and finally conclude with the implications for SLA research and pre- and in-service L2 language teaching. Consequently, the main research questions governing this study are as follows:

(1) How stable are the EFL students' attitudes to learning English over secondary education?

(2) Are there stable differences between the two educational profiles across secondary education?

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2. ATTITUDES

Attitudes have always been a focal point primarily in social psychology research. They are shaped by social context and essential for the way in which individuals interact with and evaluate other people (Gazzaniga et al. 2016), as well as situations, objects, concepts. Investigating attitudes within the field of social sciences and humanities has always had an aim to explain different forms of social phenomena (Rot 2014), as well as to predict behaviour in an individual and/or groups (Bohner, Wänke 2014; Pennington et al. 2016).

According to Rot (2014: 317), one of the earliest researchers in the field of social psychology, Gordon Allport, provides a fully comprehensive definition of attitude. He defines it as a "mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (as cited in Bordens, Horowitz 2017: 165). Having dynamic effects, attitudes "motivate and influence human behaviour" (Rot 2014: 353).[2] Plainly put, attitudes "encompass systems of various beliefs of an individual, their affective responses and behavioural intentions to perform certain behaviour" (Grubor 2020: 33).

As regards attitude structure, attitudes are deemed to include *cognitions*, i.e. beliefs, thoughts and attributes we associate with particular objects, *affective responses or states*, feelings or emotions we associate with an attitude object, and *behavioural intentions* and *behaviours*, past, present and future anticipated behaviours associated with an attitude object (Bordens, Horowitz 2017; Haddock, Maio 2012). In line with the research into the L2 attitude construct in specific, and the EFLS-ALE scale used in this study (cf. Grubor 2012), three factors were extracted via factor analysis (Grubor 2020). (1) Behavioural & emotional factor (BEF) is connected with the behavioural intentions relative to L2 learning and emotions associated with it. (2) Cognitive & instrumental factor (CIF) reflects the beliefs about the attitude object and its practical benefits. Language purism factor (LPF) subsumes nationalism, or in other words, fear of losing national identity (namely language and cultural heritage) or else its antipode liberalism (cf. Section 3.2 below).[3]

2.1 Attitude types and measurement

Prior to focusing on methods of measuring attitudes, we need to distinguish between two broad types of attitudes: *explicit* (communicative) and *implicit* (non-communicative) (Carruthers 2018). Explicit attitudes, which

2 Translation adapted from Grubor et al. (2011: 448).

3 It is reasonable to adopt the view that this factor takes on an added importance in bilingual settings, within the minority-majority language relation, since minority language speakers' identity as well as their cultural heritage may be truly endangered by dominant languages. For such language attitudes, cf. Baker (1992), since this topic is far beyond the scope of our study. In the context of foreign language learning, on the other hand, it is more plausible that language purism is more to do with foreign speakers' tolerance to changes coming from other languages on a more abstract level rather than posing the actual threat to their L1. This "abstract" plane may be indicative of the acceptance of other cultures, their members and cultural forms of expression, and thus a tell-tale sign of L2 attitudes.

people openly express in self-report or by behaviour, operate at the conscious level (Smith et al. 2015). As such, they typically exert a direct influence on behaviour. Implicit, which are connected with laboratory conditions, operate at the unconscious level, and are activated automatically without conscious deliberation (Bordens, Horowitz 2017). Our focus is on explicit attitudes since they may better predict voluntary behaviours (Fishbein, Ajzen 2011).

Broadly speaking, two methods of attitude measurement are closely connected with the two attitude types: *indirect* and *direct* (Pennington et al. 2016). Scientifically speaking, indirect attitudes are regarded as the most objective because they may not be consciously influenced (i.e. individuals are unaware of them). Direct (rating scales) are methodologically most convenient since they are "the most straightforward", valid and reliable measures of attitudes (Smith et al. 2015: 231). Accordingly, a great number of researchers use simple self-reports, predominantly Likert-type scales (Gilovich et al. 2016).[4] In this paper, we used the "semi-direct" method of determining the participants' attitude (Havelka et al. 2008), whereby "the attitude is broken down into smaller or more specific manifestations treated as its indicators, [...]. Instead of the attitude as a whole, participants report on a range of their specific reactions to the given attitude object" (*ibid*: 187).[5, 6]

In investigating and measuring attitudes, there are three basic principles that researchers must comply with: the principle of complexity, compatibility, and relevance (cf. Grubor 2015). The most important of the three is the principle of compatibility, whose non-compliance may cause failure to establish the attitude-behaviour link. In order to achieve good predictive validity, the attitude measure must be entirely compatible with the given behaviour. To put it differently, "the measure of attitude would have to evaluate performing the same action, with respect to the same target, context, and time as these elements had been defined in the behavioural criterion" (Fishbein, Ajzen 2011: 257). Due to this principle and the fact that general attitudes primarily focus on the target element, we investigate attitudes to behaviours in our study as well.

In the context of SLA, in specific, learners may express attitudes to L2, L2 speakers, L2 culture, the social value of learning L2, specific uses of L2, themselves as members of their own culture (Ellis 1994: 198), learning L2 (Baker 1992; Grubor 2015), their own L2 identities and so on. When it comes to attitude measures, attitudinal scales measuring L2 attitudes *solely*, independently of L2 motivation, are a rarity (Grubor 2015).[7] Since attitudes are regarded as predictors of behaviour (Bohner, Wänke 2014), it is important to devise adequate measures to test their predictive power in a given context and/or under given circumstances. The predictive value, as said, is typically associated with

4 A Likert-type scale is a numerical scale that includes differing values along the extremes, on which participants express their level of (dis)agreement with the stated items.

5 These authors use the term "indirect method" differently from Pennington et al. (2016), and in their terminology, it refers to survey questioning whose items seemingly have nothing to do with the attitude object.

6 Translated by the author.

7 In the Serbian context, cf. Grubor (2018, 2020) and Hornjak (2017).

specific attitudes (attitudes towards behaviour, e.g. L2 learning), in comparison to general attitudes (e.g. attitudes to L2), which are typically not expected to produce such an effect according to the mentioned principle of compatibility (cf. Fishbein, Ajzen 2011).

2.2 The function, formation of attitudes, and their (relative) stability

Attitudes serve different functions, out of which we will name the most prominent ones. Firstly, they perform the *knowledge function* by directing us towards the significant qualities of an attitude object and giving us an outline of its benefits and drawbacks (Smith et al. 2015). Secondly, they fulfil the *instrumental function* by guiding us towards or away from things with an end to reach our goals or avoid harmful things (Ennis, Zanna 2000). Thirdly, attitudes have a *social identity function* (Smith et al. 2015) in the sense that they enable us to define ourselves, who we are, which group(s) we belong to etc. Fourthly, attitudes carry out the *impression management function* by enabling individuals to further connect with their environment by "smoothing interactions and relationships" (Smith et al. 2015: 235).

In a word, the main purpose of an attitude is to help people make sense of the world they live in and understand decisions they or other people make, so consequently attitudes guide and direct people's behaviour (Bordens, Horowitz 2017). Expressing an attitude involves an overall evaluation of an attitude object, a tendency to respond to a particular entity with some degree of favourableness or unfavourableness, or simply put likes and dislikes (Kalat 2016). As a general rule of thumb, we remember the contents we are interested in more easily. Typically, this liking is accompanied by being good at something, which increases our self-confidence and, consequently, proficiency. In other words, we evaluate an attitude object based on our previous knowledge (knowledge structures) that we have about it and experiences that we have had with it, both in terms of the emotions associated with it, and specific courses of actions that we have taken in order to materialise some liking or disliking.

Speaking of attitude formation and its relative stability, attitudes formed through direct experience, strong and personally-relevant, have been shown to be more predictive of behaviour (Gazzaniga et al. 2016), hence more stable. In addition, the stability of attitudes is reliant upon their accessibility: easily activated attitudes are more stable and resistant to change (Arsonson et al. 2016).[8] It is also vital to highlight the fact that the level of attitude specificity determines its predictability: the more specific the attitude, the more predictive it is (*ibid.*). This brings us to the conclusion that *specific attitudes*, or more precisely *attitudes towards behaviours* (herein: learning an L2), are more relevant to explore in terms of their influence on achievement or, in our context, their relative stability.

8 Naturally, as is the case with all other constructs, attitudes are subject to change during one's lifetime.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current research was conducted in three consecutive years, with the same participants and the same research instruments. The attitudinal scale *EFL students' attitudes to learning English* (EFLS-ALE) was administered at the end of Year 2, 3, and 4 of secondary education. Accordingly, we used repeated measures design, which involved multiple measures of the participants' attitudes over three years to assess their potential change over time. The main goals of the study were to determine the participants' attitudes in each year so as to check whether their attitudes change along secondary education, and whether the two main profile groups, namely philological (Phil) and general (Gen) course students' attitudes differ in their intensity. The subsidiary goal was to test the validity of the EFLS-ALE scale employed in this study.

3.1 Sample

In this longitudinal study, the data were collected in a three-year period (2017–19) from the participants attending different classes of two courses of Second Grammar School of Kragujevac, Serbia (Phil and Gen), aged from 16 to 19. It is important to note that every class involved in this study had the same English teachers throughout the stated time span. In the first year of research, the participants had to make up a code and remember it in order to keep research anonymity. However, as is the case with such a research design, one of the problems that the researcher encountered was sample attrition. Since dropping out of participants from studies is a common source of missing data (Little, Rubin 2020), this was not different in our study either. The reasons were various: some participants changed schools, some forgot their code, some were not present at the time of testing, some did not want to take part in it in subsequent stages etc. Thus, the initial sample recruited had N=84 (Time 1, i.e. Year 1 of research), the mid-sample (Time 2) involved N=69, and the end-sample included N=55 participants (Time 3).[9] The final sample whose data were taken for analysis had unequal distribution according to the sex criterion (m=16, f=39), but quite equal distribution by the educational profile criterion (Phil=25, Gen=30).

Phil group had five classes per week in all three years of study, and they were at an intermediate (Year 2 of secondary school), upper-intermediate (Year 3), and advanced language level (Year 4). Gen group, on the other hand, had two (Year 2), four (Year 3) and three (Year 4) classes weekly, and were at a pre-to-intermediate (Year 2), intermediate (Year 3), and upper-intermediate level (Year 4). Finally, two different educational profiles were chosen for two reasons. (1) Phil group is expected to have more positive attitudes on the assumption that they voluntarily chose to learn the L2, while Gen group have English as one out of many school subjects. (2) Phil group is expected to have more stable attitudes since the attitude object is in all likelihood more relevant to them.

9 The final sample included the participants involved in all three years of investigation, that is, all three phases of research (Time 1, 2, 3).

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3.2 Instruments and procedures

For the purposes of collecting data, we employed a *sociodemographic questionnaire* to determine the basic data on the participants (age, sex, educational profile, year of study etc.), and the EFLS-ALE scale with the aim of determining the participants' attitudes to learning English as a foreign language.[10] The EFLS-ALE scale, a seven-point Likert scale with participants' responses ranging from 1 – *completely disagree* to 7 – *completely agree*, displayed good internal consistency (cf. Results).[11] Furthermore, the additional data on the structure of English classes per year of study were obtained upon close inspection into official school documents.

The attitude construct measured in this study was taken based on its structure obtained in previous research (Grubor 2020), comprising 15 items (out of original 18) which reflect the three attitude dimensions as obtained via factor analysis (BEF, CIF, LPF). By way of illustration, an instance of the BEF is the original Item 12 (IT12: *I don't find it difficult to make time to learn English*) representing the behavioural dimension, and original Item 10 (IT10 *I enjoy learning English*) representing the emotional dimension. An example of the CIF is the original Item 1 (IT1 *I believe a person is more educated when they speak English*) for the cognitive, and original Item 9 (IT9 *I think the knowledge of English can help me in life*) for the instrumental dimension. The LPF subsumes nationalism or its antipode liberalism, the example of which can be seen in the original Item 18 (IT18: *I think that using a foreign language (e.g. English) steadily and undoubtedly corrupts our language*). Upon entering the data, negatively-keyed items were reverse coded (e.g. IT17 *I find learning English boring*).

Finally, gathered data were analysed in the statistical program *IBM SPSS 21* via descriptive statistics, scale reliability tests, one-way repeated measures ANOVA (RM ANOVA), independent-samples *t*-test, with effect size reported (partial eta squared, Cohen's *d*). Due to the limitations of space, we will only present the data relevant to the research questions/goals.

4. RESULTS

Prior to presenting the results relative to the repeated measures of the participants' attitudes (differences within and between groups), we will first address the question of reliability of the administered research instrument. With this regard, the EFLS-ALE scale showed very good internal consistency in every year of research, with α=.891, α=.920, α=.913 (Time 1, 2, 3 respectively).

In line with the first goal, the results of descriptive statistics conducted within an RM ANOVA analysis given in Table 1 indicate that the sample overall express positive attitudes to L2 learning. If we take the said Likert-type scale (i.e. its 7 points) as a frame of reference, the means reported in Table

10 The Serbian version of all original 18 items (Grubor 2012) has been provided in Appendix I.

11 For details of the employed scale with excluded items, see Grubor (2020), where Cronbach's alpha was also good (α=.815).

1 would approximate to rather positive attitudes.[12] In specific, in all testing phases (Time 1, 2, 3), Phil groups reported very positive attitudes, whereas Gen group reported mildly positive (Time 1 & 2) and positive attitudes (Time 3). What we may also notice from Table 1 is that the means for every year of testing in each group seem stable. Interestingly, Phil group had lower standard deviation values, from which follows that their attitudes are more homogeneous since differences between this group members' responses are smaller, and thus rather clustered than spread out as is the case with Gen group.

Time	Educational profile	N	M	StD
1	Philological	25	93.64	6.12
	General	30	74.60	13.96
2	Philological	25	94.24	4.59
	General	30	74.73	16.74
3	Philological	25	94.92	6.02
	General	30	77.67	15.63

Max=105

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (Time 1, 2, 3)

In order to determine the effect of Time of testing on general attitude to learning L2 in secondary school students, we conducted an RM ANOVA. The results show that there is no significant effect of time of testing (Year 1, 2, 3) on the participants' general attitude, Wilks' λ=.930, F(2, 52)=1.968, p=.150 (cf. Table 2).

Multivariate Tests[a]									
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared	Noncent. parameter	Observed power[c]
Time_ Attitudes	Pillai's Trace	.70	1.968[b]	2.000	52.000	.150	.070	3.936	.389
	Wilks' Lambda	**.930**	**1.968[b]**	**2.000**	**52.000**	**.150**	.070	3.936	.389
Attitudes* Profile	Pillai's Trace	.019	.504[b]	2.000	52.000	.607	.019	1.008	.128
	Wilks' Lambda	.981	.504[b]	2.000	52.000	.607	.019	1.008	.128

a. Design: Intercept + Profile
Within Subjects Design: Time Attitudes
b. Exact statistics
c. Computed using alpha =.05

Table 2. Multivariate tests

Following on Larson-Hall (2010), we performed Tests of within-subjects effects using Type II model. As presented in Table 3, we can notice that there are no differences between Times and the participants' general attitude to learning English.

12 *1* very negative (scores from 1 to 15), *2* negative (16–30), *3* mildly negative (31–45), *4* neutral (46–60), *5* mildly positive (61–75), *6* positive (76–90), *7* very positive (91–105) attitudes.

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects Measure: Measure_1									
Source		**Type II Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial eta squared**	**Noncent. parameter**	**Observed power[a]**
Attitudes	Sphericity assumed	162.194	2	81.097	1.443	.241	.026	2.885	.303
	Greenhouse-Geisser	162.194	1.800	90.101	1.443	.242	.026	2.597	.287
	Huynh-Feldt	162.194	1.895	85.605	1.443	.241	.026	2.733	.294
	Lower-bound	162.194	1.000	162.194	1.443	.235	.026	1.443	.218
Attitudes* Profile	Sphericity assumed	38.579	2	19.290	.343	.710	.006	.686	.104
	Greenhouse-Geisser	38.579	1.800	21.431	.343	.688	.006	.618	.101
	Huynh-Feldt	38.579	**1.895**	20.362	**.343**	**.699**	**.006**	.650	**.102**
	Lower-bound	38.579	1.000	38.579	.343	.561	.006	.343	.089

a. Computed using alpha =.05

Table 3. Tests of within-subjects effects

With a view to testing the second aim, we ran Tests of between-subjects effects (Type II sum of squares). As seen from the table (cf. Table 3), the analysis shows a statistically significant difference between groups, with very large effect size (F(1)=43.660, p=.000; η^2_p=.452).[13]

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects Measure: Measure_1								
Source	**Type II Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial eta squared**	**Noncent. parameter**	**Observed power[a]**
Intercept	1167602.424	1	1167602.424	3601.893	.000	.985	3601.893	1.000
Profile	14152.909	1	14152.909	**43.660**	**.000**	**.452**	43.660	1.000
Error	17180.667	53	324.164					

a. Computed using alpha =.05

Table 4. Tests of between-subjects effects

Finally, for the sake of simplicity and a clear-cut illustration of differences year by year, we employed an independent-samples *t*-test to determine the differences between groups in every year of testing. As shown in Table 5, there were statistically significant differences of very large effect size between the two educational profiles in every individual year of testing: Time 1 (*t*(39.28)=6.798, p=.000, d=1.78), Time 2 (*t*(31.21)=5.781, p=.000, d=1.55), Time 3 (*t*(36.89)=5.413, p=.000, d=1.43).[14]

13 Partial eta squared range: η^2_p=.01 (small), η^2_p=.06 (medium), η^2_p=.14 (large) (Larson-Hall 2010: 119).

14 Cohen's d range: d=.2 (small), d=.5 (medium), d=.8 (large) (Larson-Hall 2010: 119).

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Time 1	Equal variances assumed	15.698	.000	6.354	53	.000	19.473	3.065	13.326	25.620
	Equal variances not assumed			**6.798**	**39.282**	**.000**	19.473	2.865	13.680	25.267
Time 2	Equal variances assumed	33.172	.000	5.499	51	.000	19.633	3.571	12.465	26.801
	Equal variances not assumed			**5.781**	**31.215**	**.000**	19.633	3.396	12.709	26.557
Time 3	Equal variances assumed	18.440	.000	5.115	52	.000	17.265	3.375	10.492	24.038
	Equal variances not assumed			**5.413**	**36.890**	**.000**	17.265	3.190	10.801	23.729

Table 5. Independent-Samples T-Test (Time 1, 2, 3: Phil vs Gen)

To sum up, our sample displayed stable attitudes in the three-year time span. In every year of testing, Phil group had significantly more positive attitudes than Gen. This trend, therefore, remained stable across secondary education, together with the participants' attitudes in general.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section, we will briefly comment on and summarise the main findings of the study in line with the set goals.

As a reminder, the first goal of the study was to determine whether there are differences in the participants' attitudes across the testing period (Time 1, 2, 3), or in other words, whether their attitudes can be regarded as stable or changeable. To start with, the results show that the sample overall express positive attitudes to L2 learning, which is expected. English has long been regarded as one of the most appealing school subjects, together with Computer Studies, due to their overall applicability and employability, not only in terms of being the key requirement for future jobs, but also in terms of being omnipresent in everyday life of modern times (Grubor 2018, 2020). With regard to attitude consistency, general attitudes seem quite stable in our sample, since there were no significant differences between the years of testing. Interestingly, this stability was detected in both educational profiles, not only in Phil group. This result may speak in favour of the fact that the attitude object (L2 learning) is important for our participants, their attitudes are most likely based on a sufficient amount of information; thus, there are no oscillations in their general attitudes across secondary education. Bearing in mind the fact that English and digital competence are the main requirements for any job, and that being computer literate and being able to communicate in international communities are vital

for almost every profession in modern times, this may be true for our sample, as well.[15] As already stated, attitudes formed through direct experience, strong and personally-relevant, have been shown to be more predictive of behaviour (Gazzaniga et al. 2016), and thus are more stable. Since the stability of attitudes is reliant upon their accessibility, because easily activated attitudes are more stable and resistant to change (Arsonson et al. 2016), we may suspect this to be the case with our sample, as well.

The second goal was to test whether the differences in attitudes between Phil and Gen groups, as previously reported in different studies investigating a broader concept of L2 attitudes (e.g. Grubor 2020, *forthcoming*), are a constant in every year of investigation. The main finding is that the difference between the educational profiles is also stable. Namely, it was present, significant and of great effect size in every year of testing. Besides this constant difference, we also noted that Phil group differences among themselves were not so large judging from StD (lower) values, or in other words, their attitudes were more uniform. Differently put, they hold quite similar attitudes and their responses are not dispersed but rather clustered. Although our study detected no differences in the participants' attitudes regardless of the educational profile, we may suspect that Phil group would have more stable attitudes in the long run, since they are more intense and skewed towards higher values.

The subsidiary aim was to test the reliability of the scale, that is, the stability of L2 attitude measure. If we discard the general problem of self-reports for a moment (cf. below under limitations), and take rating scales to be "the most straightforward measures of attitudes", valid and reliable (Smith et al. 2015: 231), the EFLS-ALE scale has shown to be a valid and reliable measure of EFL students' attitudes to L2 learning in secondary education. In all three years of testing, as well as in the previous research where the sample was significantly larger (cf. Grubor 2020), the scale showed very good internal consistency, giving rise to the idea that it measures the contents it intended to measure.

Finally, we need to point to the *limitations* of the conducted study. Firstly, there is the issue of sample size, which was mainly caused by sample attrition, as it normally occurs in longitudinal study designs. Secondly, the balance between male and female participants was not equal overall. However, Phil groups included only girls, as is typically the case, whereas the distribution according to the sex criterion was quite balanced in Gen group (m=16, f=14). Thirdly, the nature of self-reports and the issue of giving socially desirable answers is a limitation, somewhat ameliorated by the repeated measures research design as well as involving different items of the same factor on the scale. Finally, the conditions of testing may be limiting, but also a strong point at the same time. In other words, the fact that each class had the same teacher throughout the testing period can be viewed both positively and negatively. On the positive side, the testing conditions were stable in that the teacher may be

15 Cf. constructs such as *English as an international* (*auxiliary*) *language* (e.g. Smith 1976, 1983), English *as a global language* (e.g. Crystal 2003), *English as a lingua franca* (e.g. Jenkins 2007) etc.

an important variable that can affect the participant's attitude to L2 learning. On the negative side, this advantage is at the same time a limitation because L2 attitudes may be influenced by the teacher and their teaching methods.

6. CONCLUSION

We started off this paper with the concept of individual differences in the learning process of L2 specifically. Although the taxonomy by Pawlak (2017), whereby attitudes are categorised under the sociocultural category, is precise and empirically founded, we advocate the idea that they are rather an example of an in-between category. Although attitudes were regarded as both cognitive and affective in the past, dimensional rather than bipolar (cf. Baker 1988), we maintain that they are much more complex. Namely, they are attributes of the individual but they are also social (Manstead 1996: 13), shaped primarily by the immediate social environment, which is part of a culture that has its values, systems, beliefs etc. entrenched in it. What is more, they are closely connected with affect, that is, emotions that people associate with the attitude object. Accordingly, the attitude construct is exceedingly complex, being sociocultural, cognitive, and affective. Lastly, it also includes the behavioural dimension, the intensity of which is deemed a good predictor of behaviour.[16]

The greatest challenge, nonetheless, is the fact that no construct is fixed or monolithic, but subject to change during one's lifetime. The results of our study, however, show that the two educational profile groups (Phil and Gen) both hold positive attitudes to learning English as a foreign language, which comes as no surprise in the 21st century. This means that teachers are in a good position to work towards fostering positive attitudes with the aim of not only making their classes more enjoyable but also towards better mastery of the L2. More interestingly, the participants' attitudes were shown to be stable across secondary education, regardless of the educational profile. This finding may be interpreted in the light of focusing on one developmental period, specifically mid-adolescence in this case, thereby making this group's attitudes consistent. If this may be true, teachers need to do their best to keep their students' attitudes up to the set level and possibly higher. Nevertheless, this reported stability is no guarantee that these attitudes will remain stable after that period, in both groups or in either, for that matter. We, therefore, do not claim that attitudes are fixed, perfectly stable, since the analyses only revealed that there were no statistically significant differences. Alternatively, it is more realistic to talk about their *relative stability* in secondary education, in our sample in particular. In a word, we do not take the view that attitudes, as one of the ID construct, "refer to dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ", as Dörnyei and Ryan (2015: 2) put in their critique of the classic standpoint. It is more reasonable to assume that the issue of attitude relative stability is closely related to the intrinsic properties of the attitude object itself (attitude content),

16 In the SLA context, cf. Grubor (2012).

the attitude holder's familiarity with its content (the amount of available information about it), the nature of attitude (general or specific), its relevance to the attitude holder (important or not). Keeping this in mind, we may say that attitudes to L2 learning appear to be relatively stable for these secondary school students within the tested period. Given the attitude formation theoretical postulates and empirical findings, their attitudes' relative stability may be grounded in the fact that these attitudes were personally-relevant, most likely easily accessible, formed through direct experience and on the basis of a sufficient amount of information, and thus more stable and resistant to change within this developmental period. Naturally, due to the sample size and its nature, the results may not be generally accepted, but further research involving a representative sample ought to be conducted to arrive at some more definite conclusions.

What would be interesting for further research is to replicate the study including other samples, especially those having L2 other than English in order to test whether the reported trend is relevant only to English due to its "special" status and use in the modern world. Moreover, it would also be challenging to test the hypothesis whether the stated relative stability of attitudes may be operative within every single developmental stage, and therefore test attitude stability in later years of primary school, in secondary and tertiary education, but also between these "aggregate" periods. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate L2 attitudes and their relation with the development of either L2 identity, or rather globalised identity, due to the omnipresence of English, which we will discuss elsewhere.

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Appendix I: Unabridged Serbian version of the EFLS-ALE items[17]

1. Мислим да је особа образованија уколико зна енглески језик.
2. Решен/решена сам да што боље овладам енглеским језиком.
3. *Мислим да учење енгlеског̄ језика није лако.*
4. Немам ништа против да се у свакодневном језику користе стране речи, нпр. из енглеског језика.
5. Спреман/Спремна сам да жртвујем учење неког другог предмета да бих учио/учила енглески.
6. *Неп̄от̄ребно је п̄ознават̄и енгlески језик.*
7. Занимљиво ми је да учим енглески језик.
8. Спреман/Спремна сам да посветим своје време учењу енглеског језика.

17 To use the EFLS-ALE scale, contact the author *via* bram.english@yahoo.co.uk

9. Мислим да знање енглеског може да ми помогне у животу.
10. Уживам у учењу енглеског језика.
11. Енглески језик је важан за мене.
12. Није ми тешко да одвојим време за учење енглеског језика.
13. Мислим да је учење енглеског важно јер је енглески интернационални језик.
14. Мислим да је познавање енглеског језика корисно.
15. Верујем да су људи више цењени уколико знају енглески.
16. *Мислим да енглески језик није неопходан за мене.*
17. Сматрам да је учење енглеског језика досадно.
18. Мислим да коришћење страног језика, нпр. енглеског, полако али сигурно уништава наш језик.

Јелена В. Грубор

Л2 СТАВОВИ ТОКОМ СРЕДЊОШКОЛСКОГ ОБРАЗОВАЊА: КОЛИКО СУ СТАВОВИ (РЕЛАТИВНО) СТАБИЛНИ?

Резиме

Испитивање Л2 ставова је изазов за истраживања из области усвајања другог/страног језика зато што су ставови: (1) крајње сложени, односно социокултурни, когнитивни и афективни по природи, и (2) сматрају се добрим предикторима понашања. Истраживање се бави испитивањем ставова средњошколаца према учењу енглеског као страног језика. Коначан узорак чинило је 55 испитаника (м = 16, ж = 39), гимназијалаца филолошког и општег смера из Србије, једнаке дистрибуције по образовном профилу (ФС = 25, ОС = 30). Л2 ставови узорка су испитивани у оквиру дизајна поновљених мерења у току три године (Тестирање 1, 2, 3). Главни циљеви су да се утврди да ли се ставови испитаника мењају током средњошколског образовања, и да ли се ставови двају образовних профила разликују у интензитету. Помоћни циљ је да се испита валидност мерног инструмента коришћеног у истраживању, тј. УЕСЈ–СУЕ скале. Резултати показују да су генерални ставови обеју група позитивни, стабилни током средњошколског образовања (нису пронађене разлике између Тестирања 1, 2, 3), филолошка група има значајније позитивније ставове у свакој години тестирања, УЕСЈ–СУЕ скала је показала добру интерну конзистентност (Тестирање 1: α = .891, Тестирање 2: α = .920, Тестирање 3: α = .913). Да закључимо, ставови нашег узорка су се показали стабилним током средњошколског образовања, али сматрамо да је у питању *релативна стабилност* током једног развојног периода (средње адолесценције), а не апсолутна стабилност. Најзад, додатна истраживања су неопходна како би се у значајнијој мери сагледало питање стабилности Л2 ставова с обзиром на величину нашег узорка и његову природу.

Кључне речи: дизајн поновљених мерења, енглески као страни језик, лонгитудинална студија, Л2 ставови, релативна стабилност Л2 ставова, средњошколци

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