

The Relation Between Students' Date of Birth and their Interest In English as a Foreign Language^()*

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Abstract

Personal characteristics and qualities play a pivotal role in determining learners' success or failure in foreign languages. The present paper attempts to shed light on the relation between the date of birth and interest in English. It sets out of three hypotheses: (1) learners whose horoscopes include characteristics and qualities that indicate more inclination to education, (2) learners born in the relaxing months and (3) learners born in the cold months, are all supposed to have more interest in English than their counterparts who do not have such characteristics and qualities or are not born in the relaxing months. To test the preceding hypotheses, records of 142 male and female students at the Department of English / College of Arts have been looked through so as to check their dates of birth.

It has been found out that (1) horoscopes do not play that

(*) 'Interest in English' in the current research paper refers to the individual's favour of the language and his/her inclination to join the formal courses represented by the Departments of English.

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crucial role in determining students' interest in English, (2) students born in the relaxing months, namely April and October do not necessarily have more interest in English, and (3) a noticeable percentage of the sample, almost 46% was found to be born in the cold months in comparison to just (38%) who were born in the hot months, a finding that tallies with other researchers' findings stated in the section on the "Review of Related Literature" of the present paper. .

1. Introduction:

Learning a foreign language (Henceforth FL) is a complex process that involves a seemingly infinite number of variables. Of the latter, a learner's personal characteristics, represented by questions like the following: "Who is the learner? How old is he?, What is his intellectual capacity?, What sort of personality does he have?, etc...." form decisive factors that can bring about a great deal of variation in the interest to learn in general, and duly determine one's approach to or avoidance of learning an FL in particular. This is so because interest is of much practical value in the domain of education and has been proved to be a factor of central role in motivating people to join language courses, formal or informal, and to be enthusiastically engaged in its relevant varied activities. Accordingly, teachers of FLs are perceived to have won half of the battle if they succeed in instilling in their learners the interest to learn since a basic aspect of effective teaching involves identifying

learners' interest and using it to achieve a high degree of involvement in the FL activities (Callahan, 1971: 252). Wilson (1974: 43) adds that "to feel interested in anything is to feel attracted to it, to feel inclined to give attention to it". In other words, interest involves feeling disinclined to attend to other things, and feeling vexed and uncomfortable, when prevented from giving attention to the thing being interested in. Hence, learners of limited intellectual ability, uninterested and unprepared to be engaged in the task of learning the FL have constantly demonstrated frustration and less interest to learn.

2. The Problem to be Investigated:

Iraqi educational institutes at all levels witness noticeable numbers of failures and dropouts due to learners' unsuccessful achievement in English. Such a phenomenon is usually attributed to loss of confidence coped with reciprocal accusations among the parties involved in the process of teaching and learning English. Although different factors of negative repercussions have often been pinpointed as responsible for such a deteriorated situation, "in recent years there has been an increasing awareness of the necessity in second language research and teaching to examine human personality in order to find out solutions to perplexing problems"(Brown, 1980: 100), at a time when the influence of learners' date of birth on their educational progress has recently been studied more closely (Johns, 1962; Jackson, 1964; Williams 1964),

especially if we know that 'careful, systematic study of the role of personality in second language acquisition has already led to a greater understanding of the language learning process and to improving language teaching methods (ibid.: 101). Since, within the Iraqi context, the remedial procedures have always fallen short of bringing about the required solutions, the current study endeavours to touch upon a virgin field of study within the Iraqi context, that is date of birth, which, if proved influential, may pave the way to put forward some suggestions that can minimize people's dislike of FLs and duly make the process of FL teaching and learning more appealing and fruitful.

3. Aims of the Study:

A general aim of the current study is to highlight the relationship between the date of birth and interest in FLs in general and English in particular. A second aim of the present study is to pinpoint the influence of personal qualities and characteristics, as indicated by one's horoscope (See Appendix I), on interest in English as an FL. A further aim of the current study is to highlight the relationship, if any, between a student's date of birth, whether in the relaxing months, April and October as far as Ninevah Governorate is concerned, or the non-relaxing months, represented by the cold and the hot months of the year other than April and October, and his/her interest in English.

4. Hypotheses:

The present research generally hypothesizes that:

1. Students whose horoscopes, according to their dates of birth, subsume certain qualities and characteristics that highlight inclination to education have more interest in English as an FL than their counterparts whose horoscopes do not subsume such qualities and characteristics.
2. Students born in the relaxing months, namely April and October which are characterized by moderate rates of temperature and humidity, are more inclined to join Departments of English than their counterparts born in the non-relaxing months which are either cold or hot, i.e. are characterized by low or high rates of temperature and high rates of humidity.
3. Students born in the cold months are more interested in English than their counterparts born in the hot months.

5. Definition of Basic Terms:

Interest: Individual's inclination to be engaged in the appealing activities. It is, as Evans (1965: 92) points out, more specific and is directed towards a particular object or activity. It is the response of liking, i.e. the outcome of an individual's likes and dislikes to a variety of activities. Wilson (1974: 49) further states that "'feeling of interest' is not a set of sensations, nor a mood or emotion, nor an inclination to get or repeat pleasure, nor an impulse or habit. It is by

contrast an inclination to notice something, to pay continuing attention to it and to try to enter into some active relationship with it which seems appropriate to its interesting features.

Relaxing months: Months which are characterized by nice climate with moderate temperature and low humidity. In the city of Mosul, only two months, namely April and October are relaxing months. Opposite to them are the ***non-relaxing months*** which are characterized by high or low temperature and high humidity. They are divided into the cold months, namely November, December, January, February, and March, and the hot months, namely May, June, July, August and September.

6. The Procedure:

A two-fold procedure has been adopted for carrying out the present study. First, there has been theoretical statement of all the points of relevance represented, in the main, by the presentation of the viewpoints that are either in favour of or against the relationship between 'the Date of Birth' and engagement or achievement in the various educational activities. Secondly, a survey has been made of the records of (150) randomly-selected students, who are born in the city of Mosul, at the Dept. of English/ College of Arts/ University of Mosul in order to check their dates of birth, and if such dates, whether in terms of the horoscopes or the nature of months, i.e. relaxing or non-relaxing, verify or refute the set hypotheses.

To make the procedures adopted for carrying out the current study and duly its outcomes reliable, the present researcher has done the following:

By means of a certain geographical equation (See Al-Shalash, 1986), months of the year have been divided into two groups in terms of being relaxing or non-relaxing. The first group, i.e. relaxing, subsumes only two months, namely April and October as the climate, in both months, is said to be ideal in terms of temperature, humidity, wind speed, etc., and hence they make a human being feel relaxed and does not resort to the use of the heating or cooling apparatuses. The second group includes either the cold months, namely November, December, January, February, and March, or the hot months which include May, June, July, August, and September when a human being feels tired, exhausted, unrelaxed, and unable to work due to the high temperature accompanied by high humidity or very low temperature accompanied by fast wind (Al-Shalash, 1986: 156).

7. Review of Literature:

Although the column headed 'Date of Birth' appears somewhere in every school register and although it is one of the items which has to be filled in by the school administration due to its crucial role in the process of follow-up that the school must have for each single student, the related literature to be stated in this section

may not necessarily tackle "The influence of the date of birth on interest in English" in a direct manner, it may rather account for the influence of the date of birth on varied phenomena within the educational domain, as it is outlined in the following paragraphs. Likewise, since the related literature on this point is very lacking especially in terms of the educational characteristics and qualities outlined by individuals' horoscopes, and since the available material tackles the topic under discussion via the statement of time units or expressions, namely months and seasons, which do not refer precisely to the horoscopes, reference will be made to the seasons and months, and not necessarily to the horoscopes; a procedure that goes with what other researchers in the field have done.

At the outset, educational progress and intellectual performance, measured by tests of ability or achievement, which vary according to the season of birth had been heeded and their influence on educational progress had been attended to very closely. For instance, Pinter (1931) and Pinter and Forlano (1933) got abundant evidence with large samples of children. They concluded that learners born in the warmer months obtained slightly higher scores than those born in the colder months. On his part, Fitt (1941) found that the intelligence of the Autumn born children was more often found to be higher, and the safest procedure was to regard the summer-autumn as the high level period, while Jones (1954) concluded that the

season of birth with the highest level of I.Q. was either the spring or summer. Williams (1959) showed that summer birthdays were significantly more often with a group of educationally backward children. Jenkins (1962) arrived at the conclusion that while the date of birth had not the same marked effect upon future academic performance, it nevertheless had significance. John (1962) reported significantly more retarded readers with summer birthdays than with autumn ones. Orme (1962), working with mental subnormals (I.Q. 40-49) patients in hospitals, confirmed the advantages of being born in summer and autumn. Jackson (1964) stated that the number of streams increased (i.e. in larger schools), so the difference between summer and winter born children increased. Jinks (1964) stated that the summer born children were also at a disadvantage in streamed schools. Finally, Freyman (1965) concluded that summer-born children obtained low or average marks than high marks in the yearly examinations.

A close look at what has been so far stated shows that the focal point of departure in the above-mentioned researches has been the "effect of the date of birth on learners' achievement in the domain of education at large"; a point that is beyond the scope of the present study which focuses on individuals' interest in English at large, and in our case, 'interest to join the Department of English', in the light of two important variables, namely (1) the qualities and characteristics

of students' horoscopes and (2) students' birth in either the relaxing or the non-relaxing months.

8. Analysis of Results:

Table (1) shows the distribution of students' dates of birth according to the horoscope of each student in the sample:

Table (1)

Horoscope	Date of Birth	No. of Students	Perecentage
Aries	March 21- April 20	12	8.45%
Taurus	April 20- May 21	14	9.85%
Gemini	May 22- June 21	3	2.11%
Cancer	June 22- July 23	16	11.26%
Leo	July 24- Aug. 23	4	2.81%
Virgo	Aug. 24- Sep. 23	15	10.56%
Libra	Sep. 24- Oct. 23	9	6.34%
Scorpio	Oct. 24- Nov. 22	10	7.04%
Sagittarius	Nov. 23- Dec. 21	16	11.30%
Capricon	Dec. 22- Jan. 20	28	19.72%
Aquarius	Jan. 21- Feb. 19	10	7.04%
Pices	Feb. 20-March20	5	3.52%

It is evident from table (1) that no horoscope in particular highlights a frequency count or a percentage of significance. Hence, the hypothesis that *individuals whose horoscopes subsume personal qualities and characteristics have interest in English is rejected.*

As for the second hypothesis which states *that individuals born in the relaxing months have more interest in English than their counterparts born in the non-relaxing, i.e. hot and cold, months*, table (2) shows the results arrived at in this respect:

Table (2)

Type of Month	Months	No. of Students	Percentages
Relaxing	April	14	23 (16.19%)
	October	9	
Non-Relaxing Cold	November	14	65 (45.77%)
	December	13	
	January	27	
	February	2	
	March	9	
Non-Relaxing hot	May	14	54 (38.04%)
	June	5	
	July	16	
	August	9	
	September	10	

It is evident from table (2) that relaxing months, April and October, do not play a role in determining students' interest in English due to their normal percentage, namely 16.19%, which does not differ significantly from other months. This does not suffice to accept the

hypothesis that students born in the relaxing months have interest to join departments of English than their counterparts who are born in the non-relaxing months. Accordingly, the hypothesis set in this respect is also rejected.

Finally, on comparing students born in the cold months with those born in the hot months, one can claim that the cold months have subsumed more births, (45.77%) of the total number of students, than the hot months which subsumed (38.04%) of the total number. Hence, the third hypothesis which claims that people born in the cold months are more interested in English than their counterparts born in the hot months is accepted.

9. Conclusion:

We have so far stated the relationship between the "Date of Birth" and interest in English. Our approach to the topic has been via the presentation of the related theoretical literature side by side with a precise analysis of the subjects' dates of birth in terms of the horoscopes and the division of the months of the year into relaxing and non-relaxing ones so as to see whether the hypotheses set in this respect are validated or not. Unfortunately, nothing of significance has come to the forefront except that individuals born in the cold months are more inclined and interested to join departments of English than their counterparts who are born in the hot months.

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APPENDIX 1

Personal and career characteristics according to the horoscopes as stated by Moore (1984: 5-84):

1. Aries: (March 21-April 20)

Personal: Aggressive, decisive, energetic, ambitious, enthusiastic, brash, generous, sympathetic, impatient, optimistic, and combative.

Career: Enjoy exciting professions, a good explorer, research scientist.

2. Taurus; (April 21-May 21)

Personal: Strong, determined, stubborn, generous, deliberate, superb, obese, stingy.

Career: Practical person believing in solid foundations and security.

Involved in the field of education.

3. Gemini (May 22- June 21)

Personal: Competitive, best at everything he does, works quickly and well, restless: looking for new and exciting things.

Career: Best profession: Communications. Excels as journalist, lecturer, teacher, author, able to communicate.

4. Cancer (June 22-July 23)

Personal: Sensitive, impulsive, melancholy.

Career: Serious and hardworking, excels in business.

5. Leo (July 24-August 23)

Personal: Egotistical, thinking only of himself.

Career: Leadership abilities lead him into fields like education.

6. Virgo (August 24-September 23)

Personal: Perfectionist: hates mistakes as does his work carefully and in an exact manner. Anxious about things and worries a lot. Never forgives weakness in himself.

Career: Successful in the fields that demand intelligence and efficiency.

7. Libra (September 24-October 23)

Personal: Well-balanced, seeks harmony in life. Logical thinker: solves problems by looking at the facts. **Known for his clear thinking.**

Career: Sensible person. Capable of making intelligent decisions.

8. Scorpio (October 24- November 23)

Personal: Courageous not afraid of anything. Self-sufficient. Strong emotions. Believes capable of accomplishing whatever he sets out to do.

Works hard to get ahead.

Career: His superior intelligence allows him to function well in many fields. He's very intelligent.

9. Sagittarius (November 23- December 21)

Personal: Loves to talk to everyone. Never pessimistic about life.

Loves excitement. Boring activities are not for him. Fearless: nothing that he is afraid to do. **Clever, imaginative mind. Intelligent: often comes up with new ideas.**

Career: Love to be surrounded by excitement. Often found in fields such as teaching.

10. Capricorn (December 22- January 20)

Personal: Constantly climbing upward. Very serious about life.

Thinks and plan for future carefully. Very ambitious. Works long, hard hours.

ملخص

العلاقة بين تاريخ ميلاد الطلبة ورغبتهم في

د. حسين علي احمد (*)

تلعب الميزات الشخصية دوراً أساسياً في تحديد نجاح المتعلم في اللغات الأجنبية

فوجد الباحث أن (1) الأبراج لا تلعب دوراً مهماً في تحديد رغبة الطلبة في تعلم

(*) قسم اللغة الانكليزية - كلية الاداب / جامعة الموصل.