Challenges in the 1990s for College Foreign Language Programs

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Published by
Heinle & Heinle Publishers
A Division of Wadsworth, Inc. Boston, MA 02116

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Heinle & Heinle Publishers is a division of Wadsworth, Inc.

ISBN 0-8384-2548-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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Style Wars: Teacher-Student Style Conflicts in the Language Classroom

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Introduction

This article considers language learning styles—the general approaches used by language learners—and potential conflicts between learning styles and teaching styles. The purposes of this article are (a) to present key concepts and research related to language learning style, (b) to highlight the importance of teacher-student style conflicts and show two scenarios of such difficulties, and (c) to discuss management of teacher-student style mismatches, with particular attention to ways to handle these problems most effectively in single-section and multisection courses. Throughout this article, when we refer to "teacher" we are also including teaching assistants who work in university settings as well as individuals who have made language teaching their profession. In some instances, we will specifically address the particular situations encountered by teaching assistants.

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Key Concepts in Learning Style and Teaching Style

The term *language learning style* refers to the person's general approach to language learning. At least twenty dimensions of learning style have been identified in various settings (Parry, 1984; Shipman & Shipman, 1985; Oxford, 1990a, 1990c). Learning style is pervasive (Willing, 1988) and is a mixture of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989, 1990).[1] Cognitive elements include preferred or habitual patterns of mental functioning. In the affective dimension, learning style reflects patterns of attitudes and interests that influence what an individual will pay most attention to in a learning situation. From the standpoint of behavior, learning style relates to a tendency to seek situations compatible with one's own learning patterns. When left to their own devices and if not overly pressured by their environment to use a certain set of learning strategies (specific behaviors), students typically use learning strategies that reflect their basic learning styles (Ehrman, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989, 1990; Lawrence, 1984).

Individual learners have a composite of related style characteristics.[2] For example, students with a *global* learning style will usually choose holistic strategies such as guessing, searching for the main idea, engaging in social conversation without having to know all the words, and being sensitive to the social-emotional content of a given interaction. In contrast, an *analytic* student will probably prefer strategies that involve dissecting words and sentences into their component parts and analyzing the structure of the new language in detail.

A *thinking-focused* student is not readily concerned with social and emotional subtleties, except possibly as data for understanding a particular problem. If a student is *feeling-oriented*, he or she is likely to be very sensitive to the feelings of others and to the emotional climate of the environment of the classroom.

An *intuitive* learner will try to build a mental model of the target language; this kind of student deals best with the "big picture" in a nonlinear, random-access mode. Conversely, a *sensing* student may prefer language learning materials and techniques (such as flash cards and Total Physical Response) that involve combinations of movement, sound, sight, and touch and that can be applied in a sequential, linear manner.

A student with a *closure-oriented* ("judging") style is likely to plan language study sessions carefully and do lessons on time or early. To avoid the ambiguity that such a student hates, he or she will sometimes

jump to hasty conclusions about language rules, conversational intent, or cultural norms. A student whose style is more *open* ("perceiving") than closure-seeking may approach the new language as though it were an entertaining game to play. This type of student usually has a high tolerance for ambiguity, does not worry about comprehending everything, and does not feel the need to come to rapid conclusions about the way the language works. Finishing assignments on time is not a natural priority.

Notice how some of the characteristics of these different kinds of students overlap from one person to another. For instance, both the global and the intuitive student display a love of breadth, but the global student applies it directly in social functioning while the intuitive student uses it to create a grand mental design of the new language.

These brief examples illustrate the multiplicity of stylistic dimensions (and corresponding strategies) present in learners. The same varieties of style dimensions are active in teachers as well. Because students and teachers operate in the same classroom environment, conflicts between teaching styles and learning styles may create serious difficulties that may hinder or slow down learning. This article will address such conflicts between students and teachers in detail. As a prelude, we will provide some information on existing research on two major style dimensions for language learning.

Comments on the Two Most Important Style Dimensions for Language Learning

There are two style dimensions that we consider to be the most significant for language learning. The first of these dimensions, *analytic vs. global* processing, appears to be uniquely important and seems to underlie, or at least relate strongly to, a number of other dimensions.[3]

Each of the dimensions associated with analytic vs. global processing can be viewed as a continuum, rather than as a dichotomy. That is, each contains not only the extreme points (which tend to be highlighted in the research) but also a wide range of in-between points, which allows individuals to have some aspects of analytic functioning and some aspects of global functioning (though one usually predominates). Individuals may operate at different points on the continuum for each of the component dimensions, thus making detailed analysis of learning style potentially a highly complex undertaking.

The second major dimension is based on *sensory/perceptual* preference (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, or a combination of two or more of these). Because of the many aspects of this dimension, it cannot

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be viewed as a continuum in the same way that the analytic vs. global dimension can be described, although an individual may have multiple (and situationally determined) sensory/perceptual preferences.

Analytic Processing vs. Global Processing and Their Likely Correlates

The distinction between analytic and global processing seems to be the basis of many other style dimensions, such as field independence vs. field dependence and left-brain vs. right-brain hemisphericity.[4] Table 1 shows how these dimensions may be related to each other.

Table 1
Analytic Processing vs. Global Processing and Their Likely Correlates

ANALYTIC	GLOBAL
Field independence	Field dependence
Left-brain hemisphericity	Right-brain hemisphericity
Sharpening of detail	Leveling of detail
Reflection	Impulsivity
Thinking (MBTI)	Feeling (MBTI)
Sensing (MBTI)	Intuition (MBTI)
Introversion (MBTI)	Extraversion (MBTI)
Judging (MBTI)	Perceiving (MBTI)
Intolerance of ambiguity	Tolerance of ambiguity

Note: This table does not indicate an exact correspondence among the characteristics listed on the left side, nor an exact correspondence among the characteristics listed on the right side. However, there seems to be a degree of interrelationship among the traits listed in each column. In this table, MBTI refers to dimensions found on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

Little foreign or second language research has been conducted directly on analytic vs. global processing, but some indirect hints exist about the probable salience of this dimension. For example, one study suggests that analytic learners might have better grammatical competence than their global peers (Politzer, 1983). *Sharpening of detail in long-*

term memory—a stylistic trait that seems very analytic to us—was found by Parry (1984) to be related to language learning success in conventional language classrooms; its opposite, *leveling or blurring of detail in long-term memory*, a globalizing style, was not helpful. These findings suggest that style dissonance between global teachers and analytic students (or vice versa) might include conflicts over the grammar area, particularly in terms of dealing with specific grammatical details.

Field independence vs. field dependence has received considerable research attention in the language learning area and elsewhere, much more than the underlying analytic vs. global processing dimension which it seems to represent (Kogan, 1971).[5] On tests involving embedded figures, field independent learners easily separate key details from a complex or confusing background, while their field dependent peers who find this analytic task difficult tend to be more adept than field independent learners in social, globally oriented situations (Witkin & Berry, 1975; Witkin & Goodenough, 1977). Field independent learners show significant advantages over field dependent learners in certain discrete-point or analytic tasks in their own native language. However, results have been mixed regarding an advantage for field independent individuals in foreign language learning (see reviews by Oxford, 1990a, 1990c; Parry, 1984).[6] Style conflicts regarding field independence in the language classroom might center on the amount of linguistic detail the individual processes.

The analytic vs. global processing dimension is also tapped, if only indirectly, in studies of *brain hemisphericity*. The left hemisphere of the brain deals with language sequentially through analysis and abstraction, while the right hemisphere recognizes language as more global patterns, either auditory or visual (Willing, 1988). Learners who prefer the kind of processing conducted by the left hemisphere deal more easily with grammatical structure and contrastive analysis, while right-brain learners are more adept at learning intonation and rhythms of the target language. Hemispherically balanced (integrated) people were found in a small-sample study to perform well as learners of foreign languages in a communicatively oriented language program in which accuracy is also important (Leaver, 1986). Hemisphericity research is at a very early stage, and we should not yet rely on it completely. However, we can easily imagine the mismatch between a "right-brained" teacher and a "left-brained" student, with the first excited about the musical patterns or social context of the language and the latter trying to develop highly analytic control of syntactic items.

Reflection vs. impulsivity is also likely to relate to the analytic vs. global distinction. Reflection involves systematic, often analytic, inves-

tigation of hypotheses and is usually associated with accurate performance. Impulsivity is the quick and uncritical acceptance of initially selected hypotheses — the fast-inaccurate style. Other possibilities are fast-accurate (always preferred but not so typically achieved) and slow-inaccurate (the worst case). Reflection is desirable when there is inadequate information or insufficient experience for fast-accurate processing. In some foreign language research in conventional, grammar-based classrooms, reflective subjects (as identified by tests of matching familiar figures) perform much more effectively than impulsive subjects (Parry, 1984). This is understandable because reflection is helpful whenever accuracy rather than fluency is the main goal. An obvious conflict might arise when the teacher is reflective, carefully thinking before speaking, and the student is impulsive, blurting out inaccurate responses. The reverse problem might occur when the teacher is impulsive and expects rapid responses, even if inaccurate, and the student is more reticent due to greater reflectivity.

In a communicative setting, analysis and reflection might not provide as much advantage as in traditional classrooms. In a set of ongoing investigations involving a personality model realized by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI, Myers & McCaulley, 1985) in a long-term, communicative, intensive foreign language program (Ehrman, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989, 1990), we have found that *thinking-type* students, who showed characteristics that seem to resemble reflectivity — analyzing not just the language but also their own language performance in great detail — could be hindered by this tendency. Some of the strongly analytic, thinking-oriented students were very self-critical; their communicative language performance was harmed by over-reliance on negative reflection.[7]

On the MBTI, thinking is contrasted not with an analogue of impulsivity, but with a value-based approach to coming to conclusions, called "feeling." *Feeling-type* people, who tended to be more socially attuned than their analytically oriented colleagues, often performed better on the highly communicative tasks in their program. Conflicts between thinking teachers, who prefer analysis and tend to be critical, and feeling students, who are socially oriented and disrupted by criticism, are easy to find in the language classroom; and the reverse kinds of conflicts are also found in abundance.

In the Ehrman-Oxford studies, another MBTI dimension, *sensing vs. intuition*, also appears related to analytical vs. global processing. Sensing-type people in intensive language training showed great practical interest in facts and details, which might be viewed as analytical components of the whole language. They made choices by following a clearly definable

series of steps in a serial-processing mode. Many such learners disliked guessing strategies that involved ambiguity; the concrete, hands-on orientation of these learners is linked to a desire for unambiguous, structured stimuli. (Language learners who are less tolerant of ambiguity generally perform less well on communicative language tasks than those who are more tolerant of ambiguity; see, e.g., Chapelle, 1983; Chapelle & Roberts, 1986).

On the other hand, intuitives in the Ehrman-Oxford studies were much more global, searching for general patterns and broad meanings rather than attending to small details. They preferred a random-access, parallel-processing mode of learning as though they owned the entire "language territory" from the start and did not have to inch their way along. They liked guessing strategies and were not upset by ambiguity. The conflict between sensing teachers and intuitive learners—or the reverse—is likely to focus on issues such as sequencing of lessons and tolerance for ambiguity. Conflicts in the degree of ambiguity tolerance are also highlighted in the results for *judging vs. perceiving* individuals in the Ehrman-Oxford studies; the judgers needed rapid closure and sometimes performed worse in language learning, while the perceivers needed more openness and tended to perform better. Research by Budner (1962) cited in Myers and McCaulley (1985) links MBTI perceiving and tolerance of ambiguity.[8]

Sensory/Perceptual Preferences

Sensory/perceptual preference refers to the sensory modality with which the learner is most comfortable and through which most perception is channeled for that individual. Little research has been done on language students' sensory/perceptual preferences (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, or a combination of senses), although every teacher has probably heard students describe a preference for seeing or hearing material. Disparities between an individual student's sensory/perceptual preference and that of his or her teacher are very easy to find in the language classroom, e.g., a highly auditory teacher might deny a very visual learner the use of written input when introducing new material. The difficulties mount when learners in the classroom have different sensory/perceptual preferences from each other as well as from the teacher.

Reid (1987) studied sensory preferences of ESL learners and found that those preferences were strongly influenced by national origin; for instance, Koreans were the most visual in their preferences. ESL students' choice of academic and career specialization was also related to their sensory preferences. In a different discussion, Semple (1982) suggests

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that children might progress from the kinesthetic sense to the visual, with auditory preference constituting a possible later development.

Sensory/perceptual preference may even be related to analytic vs. global style and its correlates, according to recent research using an expanded version of the MBTI and a fine-grained analysis of its structure. This research has uncovered a relationship between introversion (which was possibly related to analysis) and the preference for visual input, and a parallel relationship between extraversion (which may be tied to globality) and the preference for auditory input (Saunders, 1987).

Particularly in the language learning area, sensory/perceptual preference is tremendously important. Battles over teaching methods are often strongly related to the issue of sensory/perceptual preference. For instance, proponents of grammar-translation are often those who prefer visual learning; advocates of audiolingualism stress the primacy of aural/oral learning; and the Communicative Approach fosters multisensory learning. However, some proponents of each method seem to be unaware of this important sensory/perceptual basis of their pedagogical skirmishes.

The publishing industry is beginning to address the notion that language learners have different learning styles based on sensory preferences. Therefore, publishers are now developing beautiful, multimedia packages. We urge researchers to provide more data on what students actually need based on a comprehensive assessment of their sensory/perceptual preferences. Those who train teachers and teaching assistants need to make varied materials available and show how those materials can be used to best effect.

Different Styles for Different Settings and Purposes

We are fairly certain that one particular style may be more functional in one setting than in another. For instance, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) and Nyikos and Oxford (submitted for publication) found that analytically prone students were more prevalent, and therefore probably more comfortable, in a higher education setting where memorizing and grammatical analysis were the norm. The Ehrman-Oxford studies (Ehrman, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1988) discovered advantages for socially oriented, feeling-type adult learners compared to analytical, thinking-type learners in an intensive, communicative language instruction program.

In view of these findings, it is possible that communicatively oriented activities advocated by current methodologies may be difficult for some

learners. For these students, school experiences have been dominated by the more traditional analytic approach and have allowed only limited exposure to the global mode. Such students, no matter what their initial style preferences, may experience "cognitive dissonance" when placed in a communicative situation that demands a global style. Similarly, many who proclaim their inability to learn foreign languages may have strong global preferences that put them at a great disadvantage in traditional high school or college classrooms. In other learning settings, they might have bloomed.

In order to address more evenly the varied learning styles illuminated by research, it is important to balance the excellent communicative and globally oriented activities which many texts now suggest, and activities that accommodate the needs of more analytic or field independent learners (e.g., tasks which require logic and serial processing). These latter activities need not be dull and could include story rebuilding (which requires logic and serial processing) or word searches (which accommodate field independence). Non-closure-seekers and intuitives, who can cope with ambiguity and do not need to feel completely in control, may be more likely than closure-seekers to adapt well to naturalistic learning settings. Such learners often do not require a step-by-step, linear progression in learning but can be comfortable with the more haphazard progression that characterizes immersion programs, living in the country of the target language, or any other communicative experience. (See also Ehrman, 1990b, for more discussion of this theme.) Traditional language training should consider their learning style, just as communicative approaches must meet the needs of the analytic learner.

Certainly much more research needs to be conducted on which learning styles operate most effectively in different settings and for different language learning purposes. Additional research is essential to determine just how much individual learners can adapt their styles to fit the materials, methods, and intensity of a given instructional program, and to what degree the program (which generally reflects the policies and priorities of its sponsoring institution) should try to adapt to the stylistic preferences of individual learners.

Teaching Styles and Their Possible Conflict with Learning Styles

The importance of teaching style has been highlighted by recent research and theory. Teaching styles can be described in the same terms we have used for learning styles, such as analytic vs. global; the MBTI dimensions

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of thinking vs. feeling, sensing vs. intuition, judging vs. perceiving, and introversion vs. extraversion (see Myers & McCaulley, 1985, pp. 133-36); intolerant vs. tolerant of ambiguity; constricted vs. flexible in thinking; and visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, or some combination.[9] Earlier in this article we have briefly speculated on a number of possible conflicts between teacher's style and learner's style.

Teachers tend to mirror their own learning preferences in the teaching approaches they bring to the language classroom, unless these are overridden by the way they themselves were taught. This is particularly true for teaching assistants, if they receive little formal training in methods before they start to teach.

Choices of more general instructional methodologies are affected by teachers' learning styles. For example, an intuitive-perceiver (global) teacher is likely to be drawn to a seemingly unstructured approach like Community Language Learning, which is based on Counseling-Learning principles. A sensing-judger (relatively analytic) may be repelled by the apparent lack of structure in this approach.

Similarly, instructional techniques are influenced by teacher style. For example, the teacher who has a global learning style may favor such activities as open-ended, oral role-plays or jigsaw listening, frown on the use of the blackboard, and enjoy a classroom characterized by "organized chaos." In contrast, the analytical instructor may enjoy the systematic presentation of difficult points and patterns, follow a detailed plan for classroom practice involving incremental steps, and use analytic error correction.

Little friction exists as long as students share their teacher's style preference. However, problems may arise when the teacher's style differs from an individual student's style, or from the stylistic tendency of a group of students. Learners who exhibit a style preference different from the teacher's may be plagued by constant anxiety and react negatively to the teacher, the environment, and the subject matter. (For research on language learning anxiety, see Ehrman, 1989, 1990a; Horwitz & Young, 1991; and Young, submitted for publication.) Academic success in a particular course is also likely to be linked to the style match or mismatch: students whose learning style matches the teacher's style are more likely to achieve good grades than those whose styles are in opposition to the instructor. (Studies to this effect are cited for the MBTI in Myers & McCaulley, 1985).

There are many parallels between the teacher-learner conflict mentioned above and the problems likely to plague supervisors (or course directors) of teaching assistants, on the one hand, and teaching assistants on the other hand. For instance, those teaching assistants who

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share the supervisor's style preference will feel comfortable in their working relationship with their supervisor. It is probable that these teaching assistants will enjoy open and supportive communication with their supervisor, participate actively in the program, implement the activities suggested by the supervisor, successfully use the materials provided, and have the confidence to give free rein to their own creativity. In contrast, when teaching assistants and supervisors do not share style preferences, their relationship will probably be plagued by negative feelings. This scene is all too common: teaching assistants cannot understand their supervisor's methods; they feel alienated, complain of lack of support and tolerance, and find it difficult to follow the suggested program. The supervisor, in turn, feels frustrated at the teaching assistants' unwillingness to use the materials provided and to complete any necessary assignments.

Such a conflict could also have far-reaching impact on the evaluation process. Teaching assistants who share the supervisor's style, and therefore teach in a manner similar to the supervisor, might receive better evaluations than those instructors whose methods are dissimilar. Although such actions are undoubtedly unintentional, supervisors must be sensitized to potential style conflicts. They must reevaluate their criteria to ensure that ratings—both excellent and poor—are truly based on the performance of the individual teaching assistant, and not rooted in their own unconscious expectations, which reflect their personal learning and teaching style.

It is worth noting that the opposite can also occur. Supervisors and teachers can make constructive use of their differences to mutual benefit. Such a situation is documented for intuitive supervisors and sensing-type teachers in Ehrman (1990b).

Two Scenarios of Teacher-Student Style Mismatches

We now present two prototypical scenarios of possible conflicts: first, a global teacher in conflict with analytic, sensing, and closure-seeking students; second, an analytic teacher mismatched with global, open, and intuitive students. We have chosen to focus on these style disparities because they seem to be the most common and probably the most important. Keep in mind that we are presenting the hypothetical extremes of the continua for purposes of contrast, rather than the less dramatic "gray areas." (Unfortunately, the extremes can and do occur rather frequently in language classrooms.) We have also tried to include some problematic aspects related to sensory/perceptual preferences, because,

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as discussed earlier, these preferences may be related to the analytic vs. global dimension.

This semester the Language Department has two sections of Language 101. The students register by computer and are unaware of which teacher will teach any particular section. Therefore it is very likely that in any given class there will be some gross teaching-learning style mismatches and some clear style congruities. We will now examine how the students might react when placed in each of the two representative sections of Language 101.

Section 1: Global Teacher

Section 1 is taught by an extremely global teacher, known here as "Instructor G." She (gender is hypothetical here) is an extraverted and feeling-type individual, socially aware and attuned to the feelings and opinions of others. She is a perceiver and therefore enjoys exploring various options for all tasks, without requiring a high degree of classroom structure. In her view, cooperation both in and out of the classroom is more productive and desirable than competition.

Based on these preferences, it is not surprising that Instructor G favors a global approach to learning and teaching that is evident in many aspects of the class. For instance, she sees the development of language proficiency as the primary classroom goal, and to this end she consistently uses open-ended, communicative activities such as oral role-plays, games, and story creation. She conducts her class in a lively manner and expects students to participate actively. Lesson plans are changed to meet changing circumstances, rather than being established and adhered to. Instructor G constantly tries to show the "big picture" of the language by integrating the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in classroom activities. For example, she asks students to listen for and check off main words mentioned in a listening passage about a family from the native country of the target language. She then requests that students orally recreate the central idea by using the main words as focal points. This task is followed by a vocabulary-building activity using problematic words from the listening passage. Students are then asked to carry out a small-group task to write a story about an imaginary family somewhat different from the one presented in the passage and to design a family tree for this new family. The small groups exchange and correct each other's written stories before they are acted out in role-plays. All four language skills are integrated in this cluster of interrelated activities. Instructor G is flexible and has a high tolerance for ambiguity. She encourages students to take conversational risks and express themselves in the target language most or all of the

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time. She corrects errors only when they hinder communication and makes a special effort to praise even the weakest students for their attempts to communicate. She enjoys activities which challenge students to express their creativity and which have no single correct answers, e.g., writing a wish list of possible birthday presents and reacting to a video depicting mimed vignettes.

Her favorite media are auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic; she is not as interested in visual learning, and she uses it only insofar as it supports the other senses. She employs videos when they have a lot of oral speech, but more often she uses songs, oral word games, jazz chants, and other kinds of auditory activities. She encourages the use of Total Physical Response activities and tasks which require students to move around the room. She also enjoys integrating other sensory tasks into the classroom whenever possible: guessing games involving different senses and audiomotor tasks.[10]

She rarely uses the blackboard, because she dislikes turning away from students and losing eye contact with them. To get the point across, she prefers to use real objects or overhead transparencies, along with extensive, simultaneous oral/aural input.

Instructor G chooses materials that reflect her global style. She selects readings that present general rather than detailed information, or give various viewpoints rather than offering an in-depth examination of only one perspective. Her tests allow for several correct answers and require students to express their own personal ideas (e.g., completing a partial conversation, choosing an appropriate title, summarizing a story).[11]

The students react to the class in different ways based on their learning style preferences. The global, intuitive, and open students really like Instructor G's style and feel very comfortable in the class, because the teacher's style fits closely with elements of their own learning preferences. The sensing student is enthusiastic about the multimedia approach but thinks the teacher is not doing her job well, because she does not sequence her points but instead moves in and out in a random-access way.

A number of the analytic and closure-seeking students are distraught in Instructor G's class, which they find confusing and nonproductive. They both long for a more traditional, more structured classroom and believe in the mottoes, "No pain, no gain" and "If you're having fun, you must not be learning." Role-plays and "free production" activities are anxiety-laden for them. If introverted, they would do better if they had time at home to prepare some of their communications rather than being expected to deliver everything spontaneously and quickly. Many would like highly structured activities, e.g. pattern drills, directed dialogues,

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slash sentences, and reading for precise information.

The analytic student complains that the teacher's rapid-fire oral questions and answers deal with generalizations and do not address issues systematically or seriously. This student wants a more defined focus and more opportunity to use logic. To this learner, Instructor G's grammar presentations seem chaotic and are not didactic enough. Moreover, in other classes this learner relies heavily on the blackboard and the printed text for logical and organized input. There is simply not enough visual input of *any* kind to meet the analytic student's needs.

For the closure-seeker, the high level of ambiguity and flexibility characterizing Instructor G's lessons (especially in creating commercials spontaneously, giving advice, and expressing opinions) creates mental confusion and does not allow sufficient closure.

Even Instructor G's efforts to address their emotional concerns clash with analytic and closure-seeking styles. The teacher often conducts group awareness activities or asks that students share information from their language learning diaries or emotional checklists,[12] all activities that these students may consider personally invasive.

In short, analytic and closure-seeking students are very unhappy in Instructor G's section of Language 101, and their grades in this class are not up to par with their excellent performance in their major-subject classes, in which their learning styles are more compatible with both the subject and the teacher's style.

Unless the brewing conflict in this classroom is addressed, Section 1 of Language 101 is likely to end in failure, mediocre performance, or discouragement for perhaps half of the class, plus disappointment for the teacher.

Further conflict would be probable if Instructor G were a teaching assistant under the supervision of an inflexibly analytically oriented course director. Not only would the course materials be largely based on analysis, but the supervisor would be likely to judge Instructor G's teaching performance based on analytic instructional criteria that do not relate to the instructor's own global objectives or style.

Section 2: Analytic Teacher

"Instructor A," the extremely analytic teacher, teaches Section 2 of Language 101. He (again, gender is hypothetical) is a rather quiet man who shies away from many social situations; his actions characterize him as a thinker and as a reflective person. He has a love of detail, and all his work is thorough, well-organized, and carefully documented. The depth of his knowledge often astonishes his colleagues.

In many ways he typifies the analytical processor. Like his global

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colleague described earlier, Instructor A's learning and teaching style is reflected in the classroom environment he creates. In agreement with Instructor G, Instructor A believes that communicative competence is the primary goal, although he sees it as much farther off than she does. In contrast with Instructor G, he also believes that an in-depth understanding of the complexities of the language is valuable in and of itself.

Although both instructors want their students to learn to communicate, the methods they use, consistent with their predominant styles, are very different. Instructor A favors a detailed and logical presentation of material. He likes to emphasize contrastive elements and the development of grammatical competence. He distrusts open-ended activities such as simulations or spontaneous creation of original summaries without sufficient groundwork laid in advance. Instructor A does not feel the desire for constant social interaction and limits the use of paired and group activities. He tries to address all the language skills in his class, but sequentially rather than in integrated exercises. In addition, Instructor A frequently uses materials such as word finds or hidden pictures that field independent learners like.

Instructor A always plans a definite sequence of activities well in advance and stays with his plan. For example, a typical class would include a detailed explanation of a particular grammar point, with appropriate examples on the blackboard written in a clear and legible hand, displaying an orderly sense of space. The presentation would be followed by several activities from the text, moving slowly from discrete-point items to personalized practice (e.g., substitutions, cloze passages, and slash sentences). The sequence is carefully designed in a linear fashion, leading students from a highly controlled to a less controlled use of the language.

In contrast to the global Instructor G, Instructor A's thinking patterns are very focused. He likes his students to speak correctly and always provides ample time for them to reflect and formulate answers. He is not apt to stop an activity in midstream to relate the exercise to the students' personal experience. Instead, he is likely to finish the assignment and only then extrapolate. Similarly, he rarely does an activity without completing it; if an exercise is not successful, he still tends to persevere until closure is reached, carefully noting how to modify the task for future use.

While Instructor G uses a multisensory approach, Instructor A focuses mainly on visual input and rarely exploits the other senses. He wonders if methods and tasks requiring motion (e.g., Total Physical Response, language games, autograph tasks, and certain role plays) are too chaotic to be effective.

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His tests and assignments also reflect his general style: he favors discrete-point test items and tries to avoid more global types of testing. He is concerned that tests of communicative competence are altogether too subjective, and he believes that existing proficiency guidelines are neither objective nor analytic enough to be easily and meaningfully implemented in the classroom. He especially likes multiple-choice and completion items that have only one correct answer because of his great regard for the truth as he sees it: unambiguous. He is careful and precise in grading tests and compositions, and he almost always returns assignments quickly.

As we know, the analytic, closure-seeking, and sensing students were very unhappy in Instructor G's section of Language 101. Exactly the opposite is true of such students when they are in Instructor A's section. Sharing various elements of Instructor A's style, these students find the logic, organization, incremental progression, and closure they need for successful language learning. Everything is clear and methodical, and the step-by-step approach is what they desire. Unlike their fellows in Instructor G's class, these students do not feel bombarded with confusing, spontaneous, and constant stimuli. The sensing students might like more of a multisensory approach, but other than that they find Instructor A to be far more allied to their own styles than Instructor G.

Instructor A creates a predictable, secure, and stable environment that is essential for many of his students. Because they know exactly what is expected of them, some of Instructor A's students are freed from the necessity of "psyching" him out and can focus on the learning task more readily.

In Instructor A's class, it is now the global, intuitive, and open students who are frustrated and upset about their language learning progress. These learners find themselves in direct opposition to most elements of their teacher's style. Without the openness, the spontaneity, the social interaction, and the multiple perspectives characteristic of their learning styles, these students feel deprived of stimulation. The picture is clear: global, intuitive, and open learners—representing roughly half the class—are now at risk emotionally and academically. They are just as disadvantaged in Instructor A's class as were the analytic, closure-seeking, and sensing students in Instructor G's section.

However, Instructor A is likely to encounter less direct resistance from these students than Instructor G faced from his stylistic opposites. Most students, even those who find Instructor A's style very uncomfortable, have been conditioned by their previous learning experiences to expect an analytic, sequential teaching style.

If Instructor A were a teaching assistant under a globally oriented

supervisor, he would have severe conflicts with the supervisor in terms of approach, materials, and evaluation of performance. These difficulties might taint the professional relationship unless their stylistic roots were recognized and handled effectively.

Comments on Teacher-Student Style Mismatch

The scenarios above have been somewhat simplified by examples that represent the extremes on certain style continua, because we needed to make a clear and unambiguous point about teacher-student style conflict. Many real-life classrooms may not be too different from what we have portrayed above, although numbers and types of students may differ somewhat. Most people have heard of actual instances of the "divided class," in which half the class seems to know exactly what is going on, and the other half is lost.

Individuals, whether they are teachers or students or both, can be placed in continual conflict regarding style. Such conflicts can appear in disagreements about many things: optimal educational environment; preferred types of activities, resources, and material; techniques for dealing with affective concerns, grading criteria, and testing methods; and difficulties with supervisors and teaching assistants in multisection language courses. Consequences might include student apathy and teacher negativism, among others.[13]

Managing Teacher-Student Style Conflicts

What can be done when such a mismatch occurs between teacher-student style? How can the teacher or supervisor effectively address the potential problems caused by such a mismatch? The following are some possibilities:

1. Changes in the Curriculum. As suggested by Mosston and Ashworth (1990), in the face of teacher-student style conflicts, *lessons can be organized as a series of episodes, each of which has a different objective and a different style*, with the teaching style (or, more accurately, the teaching-learning style) chosen that best matches the objective. As part of the training of teachers and teaching assistants, supervisors could not only instruct them in how to create such modules, but also work with them to identify the dominant style of numerous language tasks. For example, in the language learning classroom a grammar task might require an analytical style, but a listening task might use a global style. Teachers can help learners use different styles associated with diverse objectives.

2. Changes in the Teacher. Teachers can do more than merely orient teaching styles to the demands of different tasks; *they can actively adapt teaching styles to the existing, favored styles of their learners*. This

adaptation targets the needs of groups of students, each group having a different predominant style. It is true that teachers, like students, tend to operate based on the style that is most comfortable for them. However, teachers can learn to become more flexible and teach some parts of every lesson employing the opposite style, so as to meet the needs of students whose style is very different from theirs.

Supervisors of teaching assistants can facilitate this process by first helping the assistants to identify their individual styles and to use simple instruments or observations to assess the dominant styles of their own students. During training courses, teaching assistants could be provided with opportunities to experiment with lessons designed and implemented according to their particular teaching preferences (and in conflict with their preferences). A further step would be for the supervisor to work with instructors to develop alternative models for specific areas of difficulty. For teaching assistants, especially those who are inexperienced, simply identifying students' styles is not enough; hands-on experience is essential to facilitate the transition from a single perspective to a multifaceted approach.

In addition, new teachers or teaching assistants, often struggling with the problems of maintaining discipline and gaining respect in the multisection classroom, must be made aware that flexibility does not mean lack of backbone: most people function best when they know clearly what their style preferences are; this gives them a solid base from which to experiment with new behaviors and approaches.[14] Thus, for example, teachers who know that they prefer a sequential approach can ensure that their curriculum plans provide for adequate structure, while at the same time incorporating some free-form elements to meet the needs of the more global students.

3. Changes in Classroom Management. The teacher can go so far as to *totally individualize the instruction, in order to provide the kind of learning most favorable to every student's particular style.* This is an extremely ambitious undertaking, involving the preparation of fifteen, twenty, thirty, or more individual "prescriptions" or "lessons" for individual students. Generally, this much teacher adaptation to idiosyncratic student needs is unwarranted, because, as noted earlier, there may be just a few major, underlying dimensions of language learning styles. Furthermore, students need to use learning strategies associated with less preferred style dimensions for maximum learning success (see Ehrman, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Ehrman & Oxford, 1988, 1989, 1990; also point 4 below).

While total individualization is probably not cost and time-effective in most cases,[15] modules—some for student self-study use—might be

amassed and made available to teachers and teaching assistants. For example, specific areas of difficulty or interest could be identified by the course supervisor. In conjunction with a methods course or supervisory training, instructors could then generate a series of lessons tailored to different learning styles. These could be compiled and shared among the teachers of a particular level, or among all instructors. An alternative would be the development of a variety of content-free models for activities compatible with global, analytic, and sensory learning styles. These models could then serve as points of departure for the teacher or the TA who wants to provide instruction for diverse learning styles.

4. Changes in the Student. *The student(s) can adapt, being taught new stylistic modes so as to cope with any language learning task or situation, and obviate the style conflict.* For instance, a student who hates the audiolingual "mim-mem" (mimicry-memorization) methodology that a given teacher uses can nevertheless pick out some aspect of that methodology that might be useful—such as designing his or her own mental drill-like activities in the midst of real conversation. (See Stevick's (1989) real-life portrayal of the expert learner, "Gwen," doing just this.) A global learner who dislikes analyzing words and phrases and prefers broad inferencing in order to guess meanings might nevertheless learn to use contrastive analysis with success and enjoyment. These possibilities demonstrate that learners can, with effort, stretch their personal capacities and move out of what we might call their "stylistic comfort zone" for the sake of greater versatility in learning.

5. Changes in the Teacher-Student Grouping. *Learners and teachers can be matched by style,* so that, for example, global learners have global teachers, and analytic learners have analytic teachers. The advantage in this is that style conflicts will not arise in the first place and that learning may occur far more efficiently. However, implementation of teacher-student style matching would be a logistical and practical nightmare in most schools and school systems. It also poses certain disadvantages for both learners and teachers. For example, students who are constantly placed with teachers who share their own style will not be able to cope later on with the work world, in which people are put into jobs regardless of style and in which one is expected to deal closely with a variety of people; and they may be unable to deal easily with the different styles found in the target country. In addition, teachers who are accustomed to situations where all learners reflect their personal style will be similarly unprepared to teach in diverse settings with a varied student population. (See also Dunn & Dunn, 1972.)

6. Changes in the Way Style Differences Are Viewed. *Learners and teachers can be helped to use style conflicts as a way to increase their repertoire*

of approaches. Sometimes, but not always, a little stylistic friction is exactly what a student or a group of students—or the teacher—needs in order to grow. It is essential to discuss possible and actual style conflicts in order for them to become a growth experience instead of a barrier to learning. It is up to the teacher to judge and calibrate the timing and amount of such "healthy" conflict.

It is essential that teachers experience firsthand how such conflict can be employed for a positive and advantageous end. Supervisors of teaching assistants can provide this kind of experience by structuring multisectioned courses so that teaching assistants are required to interact with peers who may not share their learning style preferences. Forming task forces to work cooperatively on different instructional tasks (e.g., creating tests, or developing or evaluating materials) is one effective method of creating controlled environments where conflicts are likely to arise and where the supervisor can help participants solve those conflicts. This has been done at the University of Maryland with good results.

7. Changes in Assessment. All of the above options require that *teachers at least, and preferably also students, must be fully aware of their major style preferences; and this necessitates some type of style assessment* (see Oxford, 1990a). Such assessment need not be complicated; teachers and teaching assistants could be assessed during initial training programs. They could also be shown how to determine the styles of their own students.

All available assessment information should then be taken into account in considering class placement, grouping, materials, activities, testing, and other aspects of classroom work. Teacher style will almost certainly influence the specific way the style-mismatch issues are handled. For example, a closure-oriented teacher may wish to formally build different approaches into the curriculum. A more open teacher may prefer to "wing it," improvising to meet the needs of each class without any formal curriculum adaptation. No matter how style disparities are handled, formally or informally, they must indeed be handled and must not be allowed to lurk unattended, causing difficulties for teachers and students.

Conclusions

This article has discussed important research on language learning styles and has presented examples of conflicts in style between the teacher and the learner. The research and practical implications offered here are important for all teachers and learners of foreign and second languages. If our speculations are correct about the two major dimensions named above—analytic vs. global processing, and sensory/per-

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ceptual preferences—being the most important for language learning, it is possible to narrow down the range of individual stylistic differences about which teachers need to be concerned initially. This makes it much easier to educate teachers to use style differences constructively.

Notes

1. Language experts sometimes make a distinction between formal, classroom-based "learning" and informal, out-of-class "acquisition" of nonnative language skills. However, the term *language learning style* is applied with great frequency in discussions of second language acquisition. To avoid the double terminology of "language learning and/or acquisition styles," we will use the simpler term "language learning style" in a rather broad way to refer to an individual's general mode of developing target language skills in either a formal or informal setting.

2. Some style characteristics shown in these sketches are based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI (Myers & McCaulley, 1985); these include introversion vs. extraversion, sensing vs. intuition, thinking vs. feeling, and judging vs. perceiving. Other style characteristics treated in this article are founded in various different style models that have gained popularity in cognitive and social psychology.

3. Mainstream psychology is making considerable use of a similar dichotomy. A recent article (Vitz, 1990) compares the work of several authors to treat right-hemisphere processing, analogue cognition, Tucker's syncretic cognition, and narrative thinking in one group (related to global thinking) in contrast with a more analytic-sequential group: left-hemisphere processing, digital cognition, Tucker's analytic cognition, and propositional thinking.

4. Our own ideas about the centrality of analytic vs. global processing are supported by Schmeck's important work (1988), which synthesizes the research on learning styles. Schmeck describes a general learning style continuum (without particular reference to second or foreign language learning). At one pole of the continuum, according to Schmeck and others in that volume, are analytic (focused/detailed) processing, field independence, reflection, narrow categorization, serial-processing, and left-brain dominance—and we would suggest thinking-based decision making, sensing, introversion, intolerance of ambiguity, judging, and constricted thinking. At the other pole, according to Schmeck and his colleagues, are global processing, field dependence, impulsivity, broad categorization, parallel processing, and right-brain dominance, to which we would recommend adding feeling-based decision making, intuition, extraversion, tolerance for ambiguity, perceiving, and flexible thinking.

5. The main instruments related to the field independence vs. dependence dimension actually measure only field independence, with field dependence inferred and operationally defined by the lack of field independence (Brown,

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1987; Ehrman, 1989), a negative definition which may reveal a bias in researchers' value systems. "Field sensitivity" is a more balanced term, though it is rarely used.

6. The field independence vs. field dependence dimension has been marked by a significant sex difference, with males tending toward independence and females toward dependence or "sensitivity" (Shipman & Shipman, 1985). This sex difference may be culture-bound (Witkin & Berry, 1975).

7. For more on this topic, see Ehrman & Oxford (1988, 1989, 1990).

8. Aspects of another MBTI scale, *introversion vs. extraversion*, suggest a connection with the analytic vs. global distinction as well. Introverts tend toward reflection; they like time to process before acting and may tune out distractions, especially of an interpersonal nature. On the other hand, extraverts are frequently impulsive, unanalytic, and nonreflective in their style of action. In the Ehrman-Oxford studies, introverts had some advantage, but this finding represents language learning in an intensive, communicative, classroom-based program.

9. Teaching styles have also been classified as directive, authoritative/friendly, cooperative/tolerant, repressive, businesslike, uncertain/drudging, aggressive/uncertain, tolerant/uncertain, and friendly/tolerant by a Dutch research team (Wubbels, Brekelmans, Creton & Hooymayers, 1988); and as command, practice, reciprocal, self-check, inclusion, guided-discovery, convergent-discovery, divergent, learner-designed individualized, learner-initiated, and self-teaching, according to two researchers in the U.S. (Mosston & Ashworth, 1990).

10. See, e.g., Cooper, Kalivoda & Morain (1990).

11. See Omaggio (1986) for a discussion of characteristics of test items and item types.

12. Oxford (1990b) explains in detail these affective techniques.

13. Student-student style conflicts are equally important and are addressed in a separate paper (Lavine, Oxford & Ehrman, forthcoming).

14. MBTI practitioners in particular encourage this view of learning style.

15. In addition to what we consider the crucial style dimensions, which we have examined in this paper, other models of style have affected curriculum planning and classroom management. For instance, the 4MAT curriculum design model (McCarthy, 1980), based on Kolb's four-quadrant learning style model, suggests that teachers orient instruction to all four of Kolb's categories of learning style present in the classroom plus brain hemisphericity. Though we find Kolb's style categories somewhat abstract, nevertheless the idea of providing instructional options for a limited number of major style groups is highly appealing.

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