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Positioning of Spoken Language by Erasmus Exchange Students – Positivist Perspective

Abstract

The paper presents a study based on the notion of *positioning* applied to examine Erasmus Exchange students' approach to spoken language. First, two forms of positioning are discussed as constantly co-occurring, requiring different methodologies, and being needed in the realm of education. Then, one of them, namely positivist, is selected for the study and the rationale and construction of the respective tool are outlined. It is analysed how highly the respondents' place speech in the area of beliefs, affect, actions (observable behaviours), and thinking, and how these four facets contribute to the overall approach. The results point to their limited appreciation of spoken language, to beliefs not being reflected in actions, and to different purposes of language use being placed on a similar level of recognition. The study is to be considered to present only one "side of the coin", as findings obtained with positivist means need to be complemented and interpreted through the prism of constructivist data, with the former grasping the students' approach as a scalable and gradable concept, and the latter implying such a treatment whereby spoken language is a multidimensional construct not falling subject to any pre-set classifications or closed hierarchisations.

Keywords: positivist perspective, spoken language, Erasmus Exchange, students, constructivist perspective, interaction, approach to speech.

Introduction

The study does not relate to the specific subject matter of the Erasmus Exchange programme[1], but to something that might be regarded as "soft skills" for

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[1] The name 'Erasmus' and 'Erasmus Exchange' are treated in this paper as a generic term covering both the previous Erasmus programmes as well as the current 'Erasmus+' edition, reaching beyond the European Union.

students' participation to be undoubtedly beneficial. The underlying rationale here is that if the entire programme is to be genuine and successful, there needs to be proper spoken interaction between students (as well as academics) coming from different countries and educational institutions. The notion of *positioning* helps capture their approach to spoken language, which underlies all instances of spoken interaction and which, as a consequence, could serve as an important facet indicating students' eligibility for participation and as an indicator showing a real educational change during the exchange. Conversely, how students *position* spoken language helps account for the trajectory, the success, and the personal experiencing of their Erasmus experience. The notion's scope and potential speak in favour of its inclusion in the Erasmus exchange official framework, which is additionally justified by education becoming more strongly affected by online resources, artificial intelligence, electronic gadgets (preventing students from regular "corridor exchange"), and spoken communication being more increasingly on the scrap heap.

1. Theoretical foundations

The notion of *positioning* has a twofold character in this paper (whereby it differs from its treatment by other sciences and disciplines noted below). It combines objectivity-oriented facets of a person's approach with its subjectivity-poised characteristics. In other words, *positioning* as construed in this study reflects the very human nature causing individuals to both think in terms of scales and comparisons, as well as view reality through strictly personal lenses. The former facets are more explicit (and verbalised on a daily basis) than the latter. It is no different with how people approach their own speech.

Accordingly, the eponymous notions helps capture the spoken dimension of education, which, for a number of commonsensical reasons, is the crucial one for such an international educational programme (such as currently Erasmus+) which rests heavily on spoken interaction and on the exchange of knowledge and ideas by word of mouth. How students position spoken language strongly determines their academic participation (and how actively they take part in university classes and lectures) as well as their engagement in extra-curricular activities, both on and off university premises. Recognising their positioning of spoken language can thus support classroom diagnostics, instruction, communication, and overall performance, especially if students themselves become aware of the notion in question.

Technically speaking, everyday positioning of things takes a twofold character:
— first, we all <u>place</u> various issues, facets, people, phenomena on multiple (mental) scales, which is manifested by comments about something or

someone being, for instance, more important, pleasant, etc. than other things or people (and hence quietly assuming that their importance, amicability, etc. is scalable);

and

— second, we <u>locate</u> the very same facets or persons within multidimensional spaces, without any need or possibility of specifying any extremes, recognising degrees, making linear comparisons, drawing up any kind of hierarchisations.

These two forms of positioning co-occur by definition and neither of them is more significant than the other. Their naturalness speaks in favour of their complementary treatment as people are inclined both to putting things on scales as well as to developing their own conceptual categories adding something more to gradable characteristics. In other words, positioning falls both under positivist rationale (the former option named), whereby we can speak of 'concepts' which are 'placed' on scales, and under constructivist rationale (the latter option), whereby it is more relevant to speak of 'constructs' being 'located' in spaces. (In this paper we will stick to scales- and placement-based terminology as the research discussed here followed the positivist study regime.)

It is the hybrid character of positioning that renders the notion highly suitable for educational purposes. Yet, contrary to numerous fields and disciplines, where it has been heavily exploited, in the realm of education it remains essentially absent. This gap can be viewed detrimental as the understanding of positioning outside the scope of education as well as applications of this term transpire as highly relevant for teaching and learning, too, and offer a potentially fruitful perspective. Popularised by two specialists of advertising, Al Ries and Jack Trout in their book entitled *Positioning: Battle for Your Mind* (2001), in the world of marketing positioning refers to placing a product or organisation in the minds of prospects or customers, which, as discussed by Michael E. Porter (2011) or Jekaterina Barakova (2010), generates a sustainable competitive advantage, beats competition by maximizing the potential benefit (Kotler & Keller 2006), and frequently becomes fundamental to how companies approach and succeed in a market (Fluhrer & Brahm, 2023). By the same token, positioning spoken language can give one a strong educational advantage.

The advantage implied by the high positioning of spoken language is particularly worth considering in the context of Erasmus Exchange programme, the specific objectives of which should be noted to rest heavily on students' oral linguistic skills, even though they are as such not explicitly stated. Promoting "cooperation, excellence, creativity and innovation" as well as "learning mobility and active participation" (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2024) can hardly be successfully carried out without strong reliance on spoken language. It is beyond any doubt that the fact that, as Serkan Dincer notes, Erasmus Exchange pro-

gramme has particularly contributed to cross-cultural education (Dincer, 2014) is largely owing to communication conducted by word of mouth, being positioned highly throughout the period of this international exchange programme's existence.

The hybrid character of the notion of positioning chimes with today's integration of mixed methods, aggregation of multiple sources of data, and application of various instruments – which jointly enable a more holistic look at phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2003). Of the three holistic approaches recognised by Adrienn Fekete as relevant to linguistic education – complex dynamic system theory (CDST), language ecology, and post-structuralism (Fekete, 2023), the second one is most concordant with positioning as construed in this paper. According to the ecological approach, the language user and their environment cannot be separated from each other forming a dynamic interacting relationship (Steffensen & Kramsch, 2017), which additionally implies that the process is strongly linked to the process of socialisation during which one conforms to all sorts of cultural and social conventions or behaviours established and required by a specific community (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017).

Our eponymous notion is indeed highly ecological, as construed above, in that not only is positioning an integral part of our daily functioning, but its both versions mentioned above consistently accompany each other and jointly underlie our natural way of interacting with our environment. Neither can we cease to put phenomena or people on our mental scales (as those which we value or like to a lower or higher extent), nor can we somehow resign from building up our own networks of constructs falling outside any measures and evading any systematic hierarchisations. Thanks to its ecological and holistic nature, positioning is both a notion with solid theoretical grounds, but also a most practical tool for examining people's approach and finding out how low/high they place particular issues and in what context/where they locate them in their individual networks of constructs. For the very same reason, any study focused on either the former (like this very paper) or the latter perspective will remain fragmentary if not complemented by a verification of the other.

The above means that *positioning* can provide grounds for a completely new educational paradigm. Lying at the heart of our human nature, this twofold epistemological process remains deeply hidden, quietly presumed or taken for granted. Positioning is frequently conducted without people's awareness – which often characterises emerging paradigms engaging various ways of seeing and researching the world, which, as Kostera notes, may prevent specialists of one discipline from cooperating with one another (Kostera, 2005). The two "branches" of positioning make up a cohesive model (which is one of the constitutive features of paradigms, as defined by Kuhn, 2001) and exist as immanent contradiction, which, as is the case with usable paradigms, justifies and legiti-

mises researchers two-lined activities (Sławecki, 2012). One branch of position-ing rests on the reality being "tameable" by objective/dual descriptors (as ex-emplified in the study discussed here), whilst its other branch presupposing rel-ative reality subject to "subjective criticality" (Guba & Lincoln, 2014, p. 285). Dis-cordant as the two versions of positioning appear, they rely on their natural in-tegration by individual people and, as such, call for a harmonious application of mixed (reflective) methods.

2. Methodology

AIMS. The study was aimed to establish by positivist means how Erasmus Exchange students (EEs) position spoken language (along four selected scales described below as comprising their overall approach to speaking). It was not intended to examine how well/much they speak or how they participate in class-room interactions , but, instead, to rely essentially on their self-assessment on the level of spoken language (whether it complies with their real use of speech or not). In short, it is the students' (not outsiders') perspective of their own speech that mattered. Although the study was not meant to result in any sweep-ing generalisations (as personal attitudes remain too individual too be directly compared), it was based on the assumption that certain overarching tendencies among students from different EU member states could be found for further more systematic studies.

PROBLEMS. The formulation of the problems rested on the distinction of four dimensions: beliefs, emotions, actions, and thoughts, which under the theory of multilateral education (Okoń, 1995) are the essence of four educational domains. Each dimension can be viewed as a scale on which speaking is placed (Figure 1).
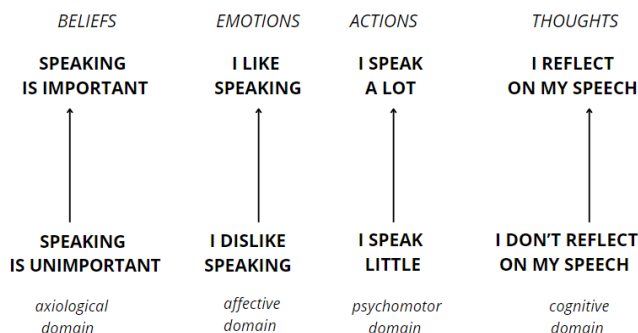
BELIEFS	EMOTIONS	ACTIONS	THOUGHTS
SPEAKING IS IMPORTANT	I LIKE SPEAKING	I SPEAK A LOT	I REFLECT ON MY SPEECH
↑	↑	↑	↑
SPEAKING IS UNIMPORTANT	I DISLIKE SPEAKING	I SPEAK LITTLE	I DON'T REFLECT ON MY SPEECH
axiological domain	*affective domain*	*psychomotor domain*	*cognitive domain*

Figure 1
Four dimensions of spoken language positioning

Any of the four components may be the cause of high positioning of spoken language (and make students more likely to become engaged and focused on the content being articulated by themselves and others. More significantly, though, "adding up" (in mind) the four arrows representing four placements of spoken language by an individual yields one joint scale built up by the four sub-scales, as the examples – of higher and lower positioning, with differing config-urations – show (Figure 2).
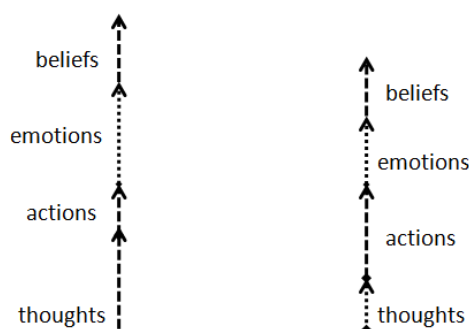

Figure 2
Examples of overall spoken language positioning

With this joint scales in mind, the general problem of how Erasmus Exchange students position spoken language was broken down into four specific research problems:

1. What is the overall **tendency** of Erasmus Exchange students as to positioning spoken language?
    (Do they place it high or low? How long are the joint (symbolic) arrows?)
2. Which **components** matter the most in Erasmus Exchange students' posi-tioning of spoken language?
    (How consistently do they position it? How similar is the length of the four (symbolic) sub-scales?)
3. How does the overall positioning of spoken language by Erasmus Exchange students relate to the **purpose** of language use?
    (How do extrinsic and intrinsic purposes contribute to their positioning?)
4. To what extent does the positioning of spoken language by Erasmus Ex-change students relate to their **self-assessment** as speakers (as to how much and how well they speak)?
    HYPOTHESES. There being no research addressing positioning construed as herein (by other researchers), I can hypothesise here basing predominantly on common sense, instructional experience and observations from classrooms in which Erasmus Exchanges students have participated – as follows:

Hypothesis 1. On the whole, EEs were hypothesised to position spoken language fairly high, but not very high (or, in other words, not high enough for all the ambitious objectives of the Erasmus programme to be secured on the level of university students). On the one hand, these students are willing to take part in the international exchange, which, rather obviously, implies spoken communication (and this favours higher positioning), but, on the other hand, their educational systems do not prioritise language as such (which, in turn, moves the positioning lower).

Hypothesis 2. The dimension of actions (psychomotor domain) was presumed to contribute the most to the location assigned by EEs to spoken language. This was assumed to have been caused by their practical approach to language skills and by them regarding speaking skills as predominantly a communicative means serving different everyday needs and purposes. The dimension of thoughts (cognitive domain) was expected to contribute the least, with EEs not reflecting on language per se very much and the dominant view on language as a practical tool.

Hypothesis 3. It was hypothesised that EEs were more likely to place spoken language higher when it comes to purposes extrinsic to language (be it fulfilling a classroom task or learning subjects or disciplines), and lower when thinking of purposes of an intrinsic character (such as mastering a language as a goal in itself or developing it as a prospective attribute of a person).

Hypothesis 4. The following logic was assumed to operate here: the higher the self-assessment in terms of quantity, the higher the positioning of spoken language (as garrulous students could be assumed to demonstrate a highly positive approach to speaking). On the level of quality, though, the logic was assumed not to apply as some students assessing themselves as good speakers might be taking every opportunity to practice speaking, to cherish and reflect on their own talks, and to value all speech-focused settings, whilst others, assessing themselves equally well, might tend to treat spoken language with care, not to overuse it, or even consider insignificant in life.

METHOD. In line with the positivist rationale (constituting "one side of the coin", so to speak, in addressing the notion of an invariably hybrid character as noted earlier in the text), the study had a quantitative character and employed an attitude scale with a 5-point scale used, with the replies being marked as 'Definitely NOT', 'Rather NOT', 'Hard to say', 'Rather YES', and 'Definitely YES'. Crucially, the method retained a balance between the four subscales as well as the purposes of language use and the two sides of students' self-assessment (quantity and quantity) necessary for an objective examination of the third and fourth hypotheses.

TOOL. The study tool had a simple format and consisted of 20 items, ordered in the way considered most justified from the respondents' point of view, that

is: 2 opening items on the quantity of their use of spoken language, 16 "core" items pertaining to the four dimensions (sub-scales, domains) named, and 2 closing items on the quality self-assessed after all the facets have been considered. Hence, the self-assessment comprised of items shown by Table 1.

Table 1
Questionnaire items relating to self-assessment

1	Self-assessment	Quantity	I'm a talkative kind of person.
2			I speak in the company of all the people I meet.
19	Self-assessment	Quality	My general speaking abilities are good.
20			I find myself a person nice to listen to.

The "core" of the tool followed the sequence beliefs-emotions-actions-thoughts and each of the four components (the tool's blocks) was constructed in such a way that balanced references were made to four potential purposes of language use (as construed above), two extrinsic – speaking for the sake of fulfilling tasks or learning various subjects, and two intrinsic – speaking as a goal per se or a personal attribute, as presented by Table 2.

Table 2
Questionnaire items relating to beliefs

3	TASKS	I view speech as a way of dealing with all kinds of problems.
4	SUBJECTS	I must be able to speak about an issue if I want to say that I've learnt it.
5	VALUE	I see the ability to speak as an important educational goal.
6	ATTRIBUTE	I believe that the way I speak is an important part of my personality.

This component appeared as first owing to the fact that beliefs are often explicitly expressed, discussed and openly compared by different language users. All the items are strongly oriented on the first person singular so as to emphasise that it is the respondent's approach that matters here rather than any general view and, accordingly, that there are no good or bad answers.

Table 3
Questionnaire items relating to affect

7	TASKS	When solving a task, I feel more comfortable when I can speak about it.
8	SUBJECTS	Speaking out loud about what I know gives me pleasure.
9	VALUE	I like speaking about the things which I'm learning about.
10	ATTRIBUTE	I'm keen to develop my speaking abilities, in all the languages I know.

The affective component – covered by Table 3 – was next for two main reasons: first, it strengthened the initial message concerning the respondent's approach being at stake the most, and, second, it was important for this block to precede the items relating to acting and thinking so that the respondent could focus on their general emotional stance rather than on any particular linguistic behaviours or doubts.

Table 4
Questionnaire items relating to actions

11	TASKS	When facing a problem, I speak with people about it.
12	SUBJECTS	After I've learnt something new, I speak and discuss it with people.
13	VALUE	I tend to talk to people just for the sake of my speaking abilities.
14	ATTRIBUTE	I use conversations with people as a means of self-improvement.

The psychomotor component – reflected by Table 4 – related to behaviours that are observable and measurable (or, perhaps better – graspable with human senses), which in the case of spoken language refers strictly to actually uttering/verbalising content. (The fact that actions are directly accessible through senses makes them different from affect, which belongs to the so-called latent sphere of education comprising all those facets that need to be derived by what is available and largely inferred). This part comprised items (the first two) which sounded rather ordinary compared to those (the later couple) which might appear atypical and somewhat odd, especially to those who view language as predominantly a tool for communication. Thanks to the second half being more obscure, the block served as a shift and introduction to the next – most demanding – component.

Table 5
Questionnaire items relating to thinking

15	TASKS	Whatever task I'm doing, I think about how to put things into words.
16	SUBJECTS	I tend to reflect on how much I can say about different issues.
17	VALUE	I ask myself how much I can say about different things.
18	ATTRIBUTE	I tend to wonder what kind of speaker I am.

The realm of thoughts, to which Table 5 pertains, appeared last as reflecting on the very use of language seemed to be most implicit of all the four components and most advanced, too. It takes time and expertise to develop the habit of considering the points raised in the questionnaire's four items here and in the study itself the respondents had been prepared to address them after the three previous components.

Notwithstanding the tool's build-up, which perhaps might be modified and justified differently, what mattered the most is that all the four components (domains) were addressed in a balanced way and the respondents did not "jump" between them, but focused on one at a time.

SAMPLE. The study employed stratified sampling and was made with a group of 40 respondents, volunteering from a pool of larger groups taking part in courses designated for Erasmus Exchange students of different social sciences (early education, journalism, political science, psychology). Their line of studies was marked at the beginning of the questionnaire, along with their nationality, with the respondents coming from (mostly European) countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Ukraine. The respondent's majors and nationalities were of secondary importance in the study, they supported the analysis of the results obtained, and also provided initial information for a later constructivist-wise study.

3. Analysis of results

[Quantity → Quality] In order to make the reading smoother and to mark the supportive character of quantitative data, percentage indicators will be consistently converted into descriptive terms, with 20-percent ranges applied for the interpretation of the results, i.e. 1-20% very low (positioning), 21-40% low, 41-60% medium, 61-80% high, 81-100% very high. The quantifier 'extreme' will be employed here to the 5-percentage ranges on the two end of the scale (not observed in the study itself, but referred to in the discussion within comparative and hypothetical comments made.)

OVERALL TENDENCY. On the most general level, the positioning of spoken language was found as fairly high (the mean equalling 72.5%) – in accordance with Hypothesis 1, with as many as 37 students positioning it above the medium range, only 3 respondents positioning it at the medium level, and none of them as low or very low. The average percentage observed for the 16 core items was 72.5, with the average for all 20 items (i.e. also including the 4 self-assessment items) being just one percentage point lower. Nearly 60% of all the replies given with regard to the 16 items are positive, with the answer 'Rather YES' being chosen significantly more frequently (36%) than 'Definitely YES' (23,5%). What is crucial here, too, is that within this core of 16 items the answer 'Hard to say' was marked in 22% of all replies, which means that nearly 80% of respondents were clear about being either negatively or positively approached to particular statements. Additionally, it is also worth noting that considering all the students taking part in the study together, four highest positioning was shown above Spanish respondents (constituting the largest sub-group of all and scoring on average

62), that is just above the medium-high borderline. On the other hand, the lowest positioning was found with Czech and Maltese respondents, although there were too few of them for this observation to be of any major significance in this very study. This aspect, though, is worthy of further investigation.

COMPONENTS. The highest positioning was observed with the items relating to beliefs and actually classified as very high here (more than 85%), whilst the lowest with the items to do with actions – which is strongly opposite to what had been anticipated under Hypothesis 2, whereby actions had been expected to appear on the other end of the scale as positioned the highest. Within the two other domains, i.e. affective and cognitive, fairly high positioning was observed – 74.5% and 68% respectively. In order to interpret these scores with more understanding, it is worth noting that the average correlation between all the four components (domains) equalled only 0.26, with the highest correlation noted between affect and actions (0.44) and the lowest (practically non-existent) between the components concerning beliefs and thoughts (0.09).

Considering the outcome observed for single items (in the core group of 16), they all fell within a rather wide range, i.e. from 54% to 91% (with the average – as observed earlier – equalling 72.5%; the average score was exactly the same for odd- and even-numbered items, which adds to its reliability – often verified with a test juxtaposing scores for two halves, which here would not have been adequate owing to the halves including items pertaining to different educational domains).

PURPOSES OF SPOKEN LANGUAGE. There was hardly any difference in scoring between the foursomes of items relating to the purposes distinguished (i.e. fulfilling tasks, learning subjects, improving language per se, developing a personal attribute), also across the first two (extrinsic) and the next two (intrinsic) purposes – which disproves Hypothesis 3. Yet, there were significant differences between separate items, especially in the case of those relating to the third and fourth purpose: it is within these two sub-groups that both the lowest positioning and the highest positioning was observed as if the respondents were most uncertain as to the decisions – we will return to this issue later in the text. Yet, these sub-groups of items correlated higher than those relating to the four main components, with the average correlation being more or less twice as high as earlier (0.51), the highest between the two latter (extrinsic) purposes – 0.74, and the lowest between the first and the fourth purpose named – 0.31.

SELF-ASSESSMENT. The correlation between the 4 (opening and closing) self-assessment items and the core 16 (domains-oriented) items is nearly identical with regard to quantity and quality – which disproves Hypothesis 4. Yet, it can be said that this negative verification of the hypothesis provides positive information as the respondents' self-assessment seems to be more consistent and partially reflective of their approach to spoken language – even if this reflection is not too exact, with the correlation obtained equalling only 0.35 (for the open-

ing two – quantity-oriented – items) and 0.33 (for the closing two – quality – ori-ented items). At the same time, the scoring obtained in the items concerning the quantity of speech (65%) was lower than that relating to quality (71%).

4. Discussion and conclusions

Considering the primary role of spoken language in education, the respond-ents' positioning of it remains far from ideal, as the overall score obtained im-plies that on average they remain **sceptical about more or less every fourth item included in the questionnaire**. The statements included in it are by no means radical and the entire set of 16 items can be viewed as the desired ap-proach to spoken language across four components and four purposes of lan-guage use. (The tool might be radicalised by the inclusion of statements such as *Putting my thoughts into speech can help solve all my problems* or *The way a person speaks is one of the most important traits of a human being*.) This scep-ticism was revealed in different components by different respondents, which clearly shows that boosting their positioning of speech would require a highly individualised didactic treatment.

In the sphere of spoken language positioning, the say that 'actions speak louder than words' appears to apply: the respondents' claims falling into the realm of beliefs do not prove to be confirmed – even at the level of their decla-rations – by what they actually do. The gap between the two sub-scores which exceeds 20% (85% for beliefs and 62% for actions) can be interpreted as indica-tive of a clear discrepancy (so as not to use the word 'hypocrisy') between what the respondents think of (the beneficial and developmental side of) spoken lan-guage and how they act with it. The fact that the score pertaining to actions is even (6 percentage points) lower than that relating to thoughts (contrary to Hy-pothesis 2) only justifies the conclusion that the high positioning of spoken lan-guage and somewhat lofty claims as to its benefits and reflections on it need putting into practice.

The study of correlations between the four components imply that if any one of them is supposed to **boost** some other one(s), it is **most likely to happen between affect and actions**. In other words (although this will not sound very innovative), a positive attitude to spoken language tends to be accompanied by actual spoken performance, and, at a slightly lower level, by reflections on speech. Yet, the generally very low level of all correlations between the four components can be viewed to imply that the positioning of spoken language, or the role or func-tion of speech, is not given sufficient explicit coverage across different European educational systems, which leaves students to themselves as to what to think of it, how to feel about it, or, more generally, how it all works in life.

Much as the affect-and-actions link appears unsurprising, it was definitely unexpected in the study to see the **four different purposes of spoken language contributing to its positioning at a nearly the same level**. In the light of the dominance of practical approaches to language use observed today, it seems that the respondents proved to address the set of four purposes intuitively and commonsensically, treating spoken language as equally vital for classroom tasks, learning things, developing it as a means it itself or as a personal attribute. The highest correlation between the intrinsic purposes and the lowest correlation between speaking for the sake of classroom tasks and for the benefit of speech as an integral part of one's personality (with both these findings being accordant with the premises of the study and the construction of the questionnaire) spoke in favour of the harmonious treatment of all the four purposes and their explicit discussion with students. The fact that the correlations observed here exceeded those observed across the four domains imply that the **positioning of spoken language is somehow more effectively boosted on the level of what functions, roles, or purposes languages serve than on the level of how spoken language relates to beliefs, emotions, feelings, actions, or cognition, which seems to remain out of classroom talks**.

Two couples of items pertaining to we have referred here as intrinsic purposes of spoken language merit a more detailed discussion here as the results obtained prove the most extreme. Specifically, whilst on the level of BELIEFS the two statements – (Item 5) *I see the ability to speak as an important educational goal* and (Item 6) *I believe that the way I speak is an important part of my personality* – yielded the highest scores, on the level of ACTIONS with the two (also *I*-oriented) statements – (Item 13) *I tend to talk to people just for the sake of my speaking abilities* and (Item 14) *I use conversations with people as a means of self-improvement* – the lowest scores were obtained. This can be interpreted as the respondents being most **at a loss when requested to address items reaching beyond extrinsic purposes of spoken language**. The outcome obtained with the latter component is tantamount to admitting that one finds it 'Hard to say' (as worded in the questionnaire) whether one talks to people so as to improve speaking (in Item 13) or whether one views conversations as a way to develop one's personality altogether. This shortage of awareness here constitutes a major obstacle to higher positioning of spoken language and it calls for a prompt didactic intervention.

Yet, this is not the only area in which the study shows self-awareness to be required: the results noted with the four items "surrounding" the core section of the questionnaire, the respondents' self-assessment with regard to spoken language proves markedly higher for quality than for quantity. This is to say that **their view of *how much* they speak is excelled by their perspective on *how well* they do so**. In other words, a respondent's self-assessment reads along lines

"Although I do not speak too much, I speak pretty well". At the same time, the two respective sub-scores (65% vs 71%) are not too high, which makes these replies not too convincing, especially the former one, which is not far from the borderline with uncertainty. The lack of being convinced on the level of both quantity and quantity is additionally confirmed by the fact that within the four self-assessment items the most frequently chosen one was 'Hard to say' (36%) (whilst the two positive options were marked nearly three times as often as the negative replies – 48% vs (less than) 17%, respectively). "Connecting dots" here, we can infer that the respondents speak pretty high of their spoken language *despite* its amount not being too large, which may imply that their true speaking skills and habits are not being sincerely disclosed.

Finally, just a few more remarks on the issue of decisiveness and positivity: (1) Whilst there was no single item where negative agreement was observed among more than half the respondents, there were six items in which positive agreement was found. The top one on the negative end was item 13, in which every second student denied talking to people just for the sake of speaking abilities. On the other hand, nearly all the respondents admitted (in items 5 and 6) seeing the ability to speak as an important educational goal and viewing it as an important part of their personality (38 and 36 respondents, respectively). (2) On the whole, there was more indecisiveness on the positive end than the negative one (if we look at the two options with the quantifier 'rather' included), which can be interpreted as an indicator of replies being given somewhat intuitively along the lines 'I agree that there is some value in spoken language, but I am not certain what exactly it is'. (3) In as many as eight items (out of 16, hence in exactly half of the core) there was not a single respondent definitely denying the item's claim and in the entire sample the highest negativity reached only a group of three students. (4) The facets which attracted negativity the most occurred in items relating to actions, where the respondents denied (strongly or mildly) actually talking to people for the sake of speaking abilities (item 13 – exactly half the sample) and using conversations with people as a means of self-improvement (items 14 – 40% of the respondents).

Although the sample was too small to allow for any far-reaching generalisations, the study does point to several noteworthy aspects concerning Erasmus Exchange students, on the one hand, and the positioning-oriented research, on the other. As for the respondents, there appears to be a fairly consistent approach characterised by appreciation of spoken language, which is not quite intense or ubiquitous, but rather moderate and limited, without too much strictly speech-oriented focus. This form of limited appreciation proved equally scattered across different purpose of language use, which is to say that spoken language was not assigned by the respondents a primary role when it comes to either classroom tasks, learning issues, superior educational goals, or personal

development. What is more (and worse – for the success of education and Erasmus Exchange itself), a strongly positive attitude to speaking on the level of beliefs is not matched in the sphere of the respondents' approach to actions, affect, and reflections. **A more balanced approach would no doubt be highly conducive to language performance on and outside university premises**.

The consistency of the results speaks in favour of the tool having been applied as well as to the existence of some degree of the respondents' common denominator when it comes to how they approach spoken language. It has led to two hypotheses being unequivocally disproved and one more being partially confounded. Although the quantitative measures used under the positivist methodological regime serve only a secondary function and the exactness of numerical data does not really matter in the case of spoken language, grasping the level of positioning speech does indicate how much room there is for boosting it and in which of the four dimensions applied there is most work to be done in this respect. As a notion which – largely thanks to its popularity in the world of computers and Internet websites – is readily graspable (despite having solid theoretical grounds at the same time), positioning has the potential of moving education further, especially when it is applied to as crucial a concept as spoken language, with regard to which university students' stance should be well known, particularly when it comes to a spoken-interaction-based international exchange.

There are two chief recommendations that follow from the study's results: first, boost the students' positioning of speech by referring it to its four dimensions mentioned; relating speech only to such issues as roles, functions, and purposes (which appear highly practical) does not secure the most desirable level of positioning – which *can* be developed by orienting students – when they speak – towards their beliefs, affect, actions, and thinking. The second conclusion applies to the Erasmus programme itself, under which the positioning of spoken language might be adapted as one of the criteria of students' eligibility for participation (as noted earlier); the students' (developmental) profit from partaking in the international exchange is bound to be enhanced when the appropriate positioning of spoken language is addressed, improved, and consistently fostered.

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Pozycjonowanie języka mówionego przez studentów programu wymiany Erasmus – perspektywa pozytywistyczna

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono badanie oparte na koncepcji *pozycjonowania* zastosowanej do zbadania podejścia studentów programu wymiany Erasmus do języka mówionego. Najpierw omówione zostały dwie formy pozycjonowania, które stale ze sobą współwystępują, wymagają różnych metodologii i są niezbędne w obszarze edukacji. Następnie wybrano jedną z nich – mianowicie pozytywistyczną, przedstawiono jej uzasadnienie oraz konstrukcję narzędzia. Analiza dotyczy tego, w jakim stopniu respondenci przypisują wypowiedziom aspekty z obszaru przekonań, uczuć, działań i myślenia, oraz w jaki sposób te cztery aspekty przyczyniają się do ogólnego podejścia. Wyniki wskazują na ograniczone docenianie języka mówionego, brak odzwierciedlenia przekonań w działaniach oraz podobny poziom rozpoznawalności różnych celów używania języka. Należy uznać, że badanie prezentuje tylko jedną „stronę medalu", ponieważ ustalenia uzyskane za pomocą metod pozytywistycznych należy uzupełnić i zinterpretować przez pryzmat danych konstruktywistycznych. Pierwsze z nich ujmują podejście studentów jako pojęcie skalowalne i stopniowalne, drugie zaś zakładają takie podejście, w którym język mówiony jest wielowymiarową konstrukcją, niepodlegającą żadnym ustalonym klasyfikacjom ani zamkniętym hierarchiom.

Słowa kluczowe: perspektywa pozytywistyczna, język mówiony, wymiana Erasmus, studenci, perspektywa konstruktywistyczna, interakcja.