LANGUAGE LEARNER ERRORS AND DYSLEXIA:
A TALE OF UNLIKELY PARALLELS

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Abstract: Special needs education is usually considered to be a supplement to mainstream education; however, with inclusive education becoming increasingly widespread in schools, these two concepts need to become more mutually inclusive. The question is: how is this possible, especially since special needs education is widely regarded as a field for specialists and not for mainstream teachers. This study sets out to prove that viewing mainstream and special needs education as compatible is possible since mainstream education contains approaches and methodologies that are applicable to special needs education. To illustrate this point, language learning and learner errors, issues related to mainstream education, will be compared to dyslexia, an issue related to special needs education. The comparison is motivated by the author's observation that both dyslexia and language learner errors were first seen as deficiencies but later accepted and redefined as differences. To see how these two attitudes relate to education, two educational approaches are identified, the performance-oriented and the diversity-oriented approaches, which embody the 'deficiency' and the 'difference' views respectively. After describing the social-educational background of these two approaches, their concept of the learner, the learning process and the teacher's role are contrasted arguing that the transition from one approach to the other results in similar attitude shifts concerning dyslexia and language learner errors.

Keywords: dyslexia, foreign language learning, errors, inclusive education, special needs education

1 Introduction

Since having special educational needs (SEN) students in mainstream classrooms is becoming increasingly common in Hungarian schools, teachers have to be ready to face the challenge of teaching them. However, preparing mainstream school teachers and especially language teachers to live up to this challenge is a highly neglected area of teacher education in Hungary (Gyarmathy, 2002a; Sarkadi, Kormos & Kontra, 2010) since special needs education is still considered to be a field for specialists.

This is not only true for Hungary but more generally too that special needs education is seen as an addition to mainstream education, recognizing that some students need more attention or alternative teaching methods to master mainstream subject matter. However, with inclusion gradually becoming a reality in schools, the relationship of mainstream and special needs education should become more symbiotic and mutually inclusive, as opposed to a mere foundation-extension framework (Florian, 2008; SEN Policy Options Group, 2009).

This would require us to view mainstream and special needs education as compatible. To achieve such convergence between these two fields we have to suppose that there are elements that are common to both of them. In fact, since mainstream education has become a highly heterogeneous category encompassing many different educational philosophies, approaches and methodologies, it is likely that it contains at least some approaches and

methods that would be compatible with special needs education. Therefore, in this paper my aim is to identify those directions in mainstream education that are applicable to special needs education using two specific examples for the analysis: foreign language (FL) learner errors and dyslexia. I will examine whether dyslexia, an issue belonging to special needs education, could be interpreted within the same framework as FL learning and learner errors, an issue that traditionally belongs to mainstream education. At first sight comparing dyslexia and language learner errors may seem unrealistic since they are usually regarded as two very distinct subject areas. However, as I hope the analysis in this paper will demonstrate, comparing them is feasible since, in my view, the perceptions and attitudes relating to dyslexia and language learner errors have parallels. Towards both dyslexia and learner errors two basic attitudes can be adopted: we can either view them as deficiencies indicating a malfunction that is to be corrected, or even penalized and stigmatized, or we can view them as differences, as interesting phenomena to research and explore that could potentially lead us to a deeper understanding of learners and the learning process. To illustrate how these two attitudes translate to an educational context I will identify two educational approaches representing the 'deficiency' and the 'difference' views and examine their characteristics in terms of their social-educational background and origins, their concept of the learner, the learning process and the teacher's role. Though the description of these two approaches and the analysis of how they conceptualize FL learner errors and dyslexia, I will show how thinking in terms of the 'deficiency' and 'difference' views rather than in terms of mainstream education and special needs education can draw our attention to the similarities mainstream and special needs education share as opposed to the differences between them.

The study is a theoretical analysis to answer the following question: What elements of mainstream education are useful for special needs education? Thus, the examples used in the paper will necessarily be selective, highlighting those pieces of information that are relevant to the research question. Therefore, the study should be viewed as a comparative and selective analysis as opposed to a full history of mainstream and special needs education or as a value judgement on which educational approach is better.

As for the terminology used in this study, I will use special educational needs (SEN) student to refer to any kind of student who needs additional support in school ranging from learning difficulties to sensory impairments (SEN Policy Options Group, 2009), while dyslexia refers to a subtype of SEN students with a specific learning difficulty characterized by literacy difficulties occurring despite otherwise normal cognitive functioning (Reid, 2003).

2 From deficiency to difference

In this section I will review the origins of the 'deficiency' and 'difference' views on FL learner errors and dyslexia by discussing the changes in their scientific and educational conceptualizations in the second half of the 20th century in order to demonstrate the links between them.

2.1 Errors in foreign language learning

The perception and treatment of learner language and errors have changed considerably since the 1950s. In the 1950s attitudes towards language learning were influenced by structural linguistics and the behaviourist school of psychology. Both were

mainly concerned with the observable and describable elements of human language and behaviour and regarded speculation about what goes on in the mind as unscientific guesswork (Bermúdez, 2010). In structural linguistics, language is seen as a system of phonemic, morphological and syntactic units which can be identified and described scientifically and added up again to form the whole. Therefore, linguistic description is essentially a surface description of the outward manifestation of language and language learning involves the mastering of the basic building blocks of its units and learning how they are combined to form increasingly complex structures (Bárdos, 2005). As for the influence of behaviourism, it entailed that language learning was essentially seen as habit formation, achieved by replacing the first language, the 'bad habit' with the foreign language, the 'good habit'(Richards & Rogres, 1986). In the behaviourist view, habits can be modified through conditioning, meaning that the student receives a stimulus (e.g. a question in the FL) which triggers a response. If the response is correct (e.g. the expected answer in the FL in the correct form), the student receives positive reinforcement, which will encourage the repetition of the response in the future. If the response is not correct (e.g. in the first language or not the correct FL form), the student should receive negative reinforcement which will eventually lead to the suppression of the incorrect response (Bermúdez, 2010). In language learning this basically entailed that learner language was seen as an impoverished version of the target language (TL). Language learner errors were perceived as deviations from the TL and signs of incomplete learning that needed to be corrected immediately. Furthermore, it was believed that potential learner errors could be predicted by contrastive analysis, which entailed the identification of similarities and differences between the first language and the TL. If these predictions were taken into consideration when developing teaching materials and teaching techniques, the probability of students producing erroneous utterances could be minimized. Thus, errors were seen as harmful hindrances in the language learning process (Hendrickson, 1987).

By the 1970s the Chomskyan revolution in linguistics coupled with the increased influence of cognitive psychology on theories of learning significantly transformed the way language learning, and hence errors in language learning were viewed. While structural linguistics and behaviourism were mainly concerned with the outward manifestations of language and behaviour, both transformational-generative grammar and cognitive psychology were more interested in the hidden aspects of language and behaviour, the invisible processes that go on in the mind when producing language and acquiring new information (Bermúdez, 2010). One of the main principles of Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar postulates that a finite set of rules can be used to generate an infinite number of correct utterances. Therefore, linguistic description involves the identification of these rules and language learning involves the conscious acquisition of this finite set of rules (Bárdos, 2005; Searle, 1972).

Another influence on studying language learning was the rise of cognitive psychology. As opposed to the stimulus-response model of behaviouristic approaches, learning was seen as an elaborate meaning-making, rule-seeking process where acquisition is achieved by 'trial and error' testing of the rules formed by the learner, followed by insight into and understanding of the structure of language (Bárdos, 2005; Bermúdez, 2010). Therefore, in this framework, learner errors are perceived as an inseparable part of the language learning process (Corder, 1981). Errors were reconceptualised as 'learning steps' (Edge, 1989) and came to be seen as learners' attempts at using new structures, thus developing their language knowledge. Teachers were advised to be careful when correcting students' mistakes so as not to undermine students' confidence and discourage them from making attempts at new

structures (Hendrickson, 1987). In fact, errors were important sources of information for researchers wishing to uncover the mysteries of the language learning process and for teachers to inform their teaching as well (Corder, 1981). Thus, from harmful influences, errors were transformed into natural occurrences and valuable resources.

2.2 Perceptions of dyslexia

The perception of SEN and dyslexia has undergone substantial changes since the 1950s as well. At first, children who could not perform academically as well as their peers were seen as having a deficiency or disability, and their failure in school was usually attributed to low IQ or under-developed mental capacities. Educational legislation acts recognized the existence of SEN students by the early-mid 20th century, but their disabilities were described in medical terms and many of them were labelled as 'ineducable' or 'sub-normal'. They were advised to be educated in separate schools or hospitals (SEN Policy Options Group, 2009). Research interest in these pupils was medical rather than educational. In the case of dyslexia this meant that researchers took dyslexics' reading difficulties as their starting point and sought the core cause of the reading difficulties at a biological or neurological level. Thus, dyslexia was considered to be a dysfunction related to visual memory deficits (Hinselwood, 1917) or brain hemisphere dominance (Orton, 1928) or even a faulty guidance of seeing mechanisms (Dearborn & Leverett, 1945).

One of the notable changes in scientific approaches during the 1960s and 1970s was that the cognitive approach gained ground in several academic fields including psychology, anthropology and linguistics, eclipsing behaviourism (see 2.1) (Bermúdez, 2010). This meant that research on SEN and dyslexia also focused on the cognitive causes of dyslexia alongside biological ones. Researchers, based on research into the cognitive sub-processes involved in reading, attempted to locate the dysfunctional cognitive module or process which was responsible for the reading problems of dyslexics (see Reid, 2001 for a concise review). The cognitive approach allowed for a more sophisticated categorization of SEN students as opposed to the low IQ approach described above. For example, while mental disability was categorized as a more severe difficulty which affects all areas of cognition, dyslexia was defined as a specific learning difficulty where reading difficulties occur despite otherwise normal cognitive functioning (Reid, 2003).

Apart from changes in research approaches, in the 1960s and 1970s educational perspectives on SEN pupils began to transform as well, partly due to the above described changes in SEN research and partly due to changes in society, especially the strengthening of the human rights agenda (see section 3.1. for more detail on the societal aspect). As a result, the deficiency/disability view of SEN students was gradually abandoned and inclusive practices urged schools and teachers to make efforts to provide additional support for SEN pupils (SEN Policy Options Group, 2009). The first legislative acts towards inclusive education appeared in the 1970s and 1980s both on national and international levels in Western Europe and the USA (SEN Policy Options Group, 2009). SEN students were defined not in terms of their medical condition, but as students who had trouble mastering the mainstream subject-material and were categorized according to the degree of their difficulties.

During and after the cognitive shift in SEN research, research interest in these students steadily increased, which led to the diversification of the fields engaged in their study including neurology, linguistics, psychology, neuropsychology, neurolinguistics, psychiatry,

pedagogy, speech therapy, and remedial pedagogy. In dyslexia research this meant that by the end of the 20th century each field had its own conceptualization of dyslexia and therefore a multitude of theories were created as to what caused the condition and how it should be remedied. While some gained more support than others, reducing dyslexia to a few core factors had not been entirely conclusive; there are still several alternative, competing or complementary theories and models of dyslexia (Reid, 2001).

While there are several different explanations as to why there are so many theories of dyslexia and how these theories might be related, some professionals argue that instead of attempting to identify one core cause of dyslexia from a neurological or cognitive aspect, it should be conceptualized as a more complex condition, from an educational and environmental viewpoint (Gyarmathy, 2007). Examining dyslexia from an educational/ environmental stance is necessary since dyslexia is increasingly viewed not as a static condition, but a developmental one, meaning that it is affected by environmental causes such as the native language of the dyslexic individual, the school, the wider educational environment and the home environment (Gyarmathy, 2007). Therefore, theoreticians tried to implement a more holistic view of SEN and dyslexia. According to this view, dyslexia is identified not as a disorder or a difficulty at the level of reading and spelling, but rather a difference in information processing, involving both strengths and weaknesses, and reading difficulties are seen as accompanying symptoms rather than the core of the condition (Ranaldi, 2003). In this view, dyslexia is seen as a dynamic condition that may cause the student to thrive in certain educational environments and fail in others (Gyarmathy, 2007; Ranaldi, 2003).

2.3 Parallels – from deficiency to difference

The changes in perceptions of learner errors in FL learning and dyslexia have parallels, since both of them started out as non-conformities and the initial reaction to them was to label them as deficiencies as exhibited by the behaviouristic approach to errors and the idea of educating SEN students in separate institutions. Subsequently, however, they were recognized as part of a larger and more complicated picture. Errors were viewed as part of the language learning process and dyslexia was accepted as a type of learner profile. Consequently, both errors and dyslexia were explored and examined with new interest and are now considered to be central to foreign language acquisition research.

To better illustrate the parallels between the shift in attitudes towards dyslexia and language learner errors, a comparative timeline is used to summarize the transition between the key approaches in linguistics and psychology (see 2.1) and the corresponding changes in perspective on dyslexia and learner errors (see 2.1 and 2.2) in Figure 1 below. While section 2 of this paper identified parallels between the changes in the perceptions of dyslexia and language learner errors in the second half of the 20th century, it has to be emphasized here that these observations are not the result of a rigorous, historical analysis of all the notable discoveries and studies in the fields mentioned. This study is a selective analysis carried out in order to fulfil a specific research aim; namely, to identify those elements in mainstream education that can benefit special needs education (see 1). Therefore, the information in Figure 1 should not be viewed as a historically accurate timeline that lists scientific approaches in a chronological order. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the parallels between the main trends which are relevant to the study and which exert their influence on educational theory and practice in varying degrees up to this very day.

Timeline	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s ⟶
Linguistics and psychology	Structural linguistics Behaviourism				
			Transformational-generative grammar Cognitive psychology		
Language learner errors	Error as language deficit → immediate correction				
			Error as learning step → accepted as part of the learning		
Dyslexia	Dyslexia as a learning disability → segregation				
				Dyslexia as a learning difficulty → Inclusive education	
					↑ Dyslexia as a learning difference → accepted as learner profile

Figure 1. Comparative timeline depicting the shift in attitudes towards language learner errors, dyslexia and the corresponding approaches in linguistics and psychology

3 Reasons behind the change in perspective from deficiency to difference

In this section I will review some of the possible reasons causing the transformation described in section 2.3 and illustrate the parallels between dyslexia and errors in FL learning by interpreting them not in terms of mainstream and special needs education, but by using two educational approaches which embody the two possible attitudes towards dyslexia and FL errors: the 'deficiency' and 'difference' views (see Introduction, 2.1 and 2.2). The 'deficiency' view sees both errors and dyslexia as glitches in the learning process that need to be corrected or even prevented. The educational approach built on this idea is the performance-oriented approach. The performance-oriented approach is mainly concerned with the students' achievements. Achievements are considered to be the end-product of the learning process and students are evaluated and compared to one another based on the quality of their output. In the case of the diversity-oriented approach, the emphasis is on the learning process, the different paths students can take during the learning process and ways of accommodating their diverse needs in order to make learning more effective for them.

The reason for coining new terms to describe these approaches rather than using already existing terminology is that the increased presence of SEN students in mainstream educational environments creates a new situation in the classroom; therefore, we need to view our existing knowledge of learners and the learning process in a new context. This also entails that the analysis that follows should not be viewed as the description of the 'old' and the 'new' educational approach, but rather as regrouping and reorganizing existing knowledge in the light of a new situation.

I will begin by outlining the social-educational background to these two approaches, this will be followed by the description of how the learners, the learning process and teacher roles are viewed in the two approaches and how the differences between them are reflected in the perception of dyslexia and language learner errors.

It is important to note here that the two approaches in this study are conceptual generalizations, analytical tools used for identifying patterns and interpreting phenomena. They are not meant to be accurate portrayals of reality; in real life, educational approaches are seldom so clearly and clinically separated. Nowadays influences of both can be observed in educational institutions and practices simultaneously.

3.1 Changes in society and educational policy

The reasons behind the transformation from deficiency to difference in the case of errors and dyslexia can be viewed in the wider context of changes in Western society and educational philosophy and policy. The Western-European society of the mid 20th century was based on enterprise and materialistic achievement. Consequently, people were also valued in terms of how 'useful' they were to the community they lived in, but this usefulness was understood in economic terms. The individual was seen as the building block of a productive society, where each person is entitled to as much provision as they contributed to the community's welfare (Beck & Cowan, 1996 cited in SEN Policy Options Group, 2009). Thus, education was also highly performance-centred and competitive. Schools were primarily seen as institutions that would educate children to become productive members of society (Nahalka, 2003).

The second half of the 20th century was marked by the strengthening of the human rights agenda of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities for all. Welfare and happiness were seen less and less as something a person had to earn than a basic right that everyone is entitled to (Beck & Cowan, 1996 cited in SEN Policy Options Group, 2009). Instead of seeing the individual as a cog in the machine, the uniqueness of each person was emphasized in the belief that for a society to be productive each and every individual should have the chance to realize their true potential. Thus, education became focused on individual needs and bringing out the best in all children and young people (Nahalka, 2003).

Thus, the social paradigm shift described above has also led to changes in education. The two educational approaches used in this study, the performance-oriented and the diversity-oriented approach, can be linked to the two social paradigms described above. While the competition- and achievement-centeredness of the performance-oriented approach is rooted in the social and educational traditions of the mid-20th century, the inclusion- and process-centeredness of the diversity-oriented approach stems from the social and educational climate of the second half of the 20th century.

The social paradigm shift outlined in this section is directly applicable to the changes in how SEN students (including dyslexics) were viewed. The belief that every student has the right to the same education comes from the philosophy of equal opportunities and inclusion. Also, diversity came to be seen as something that would enrich society rather than an opportunity to categorize people and assign values to them.

In case of error perception in language learning, the connection is perhaps less direct. However, as mentioned above, the changes in society also meant changes in educational philosophies, approaches and methodologies. For example, the audio-lingual method (ALM) which was very popular during the 1960s, can be linked to structuralism in linguistics and behaviourism in psychology (Bárdos, 2005) (see 2.1). The ALM views language as product,

and language learning as habit formation. Habit formation is achieved through memorisation and repetition of increasingly complex FL structures mainly in the form of pattern drills presented in uniform, repetitive teaching sequences and reproduced by students in a strictly controlled manner. It emphasizes form over meaning; the main aim is for the student to produce correct utterances (Bárdos, 2005). As a result, errors are seen as deficiencies in learner language, as harmful hindrances in learning, which should be corrected or even prevented (see 2.1) (Hendrickson, 1978). The emphasis on drills and controlled output also results in a strictly controlled classroom environment more akin to the educational climate of the first half of the 20th century and a teaching philosophy related to the performance-oriented approach with its focus on output and accuracy.

During the 1970s the changes in science (see 2.1 and 2.2), education and society (see above) engendered different responses to the ALM. Although every country has its own unique language pedagogy history, as a generalization we can say that the ALM was succeeded on the one hand by ALM-based methods such as the Audio-Visual Method or the Situational Method in Britain, and alternative methods on the other such as Cognitive Code Learning (CCL) or the Humanistic approaches (Bárdos, 2005). CCL was a minor movement in language pedagogy, a response to the theoretical underpinnings of the ALM, employing the tenets of cognitive psychology and transformational-generative linguistics (see 2.1). Therefore, errors were accepted as part of the learning process or even seen as useful learning steps. The Humanistic approaches on the other hand reacted to the strict teacher- and curriculum/method-centeredness of the ALM by attempting to create a student-centred, stress-free learning environment, even though they lacked any solid theoretical-linguistic basis to underpin their approaches (Bárdos, 2005). Hence, mistakes were not corrected at all or only very mildly so as not to stress or frighten the students, thereby discouraging them from learning (Richard & Rogers, 1982). Thus, both the CCL and the Humanistic approaches took a softer approach towards learner errors than the ALM, even though they did so for different reasons. However, both methods stem from the changes affecting linguistic theories, society and education in the second half of the 20th century, and they exhibit elements like process-oriented-ness and learner–centred-ness that are characteristic of the diversity-oriented approach.

Furthermore, the second half of the 20th century also saw the gradual transition from the 'one method' approach to a plurality of language teaching methods, a development which is very favourable for the diversity-oriented approach since a plurality of methods allows for a better differentiation between students. While there were attempts at comparing different methods scientifically in order to prove that one of them was superior to the other even into the 60s and 70s, gradually such attempts faded out since it was recognized that no one method fits all teachers, students and purposes (Bárdos, 2005; Brown, 1994). In the second half of the 20th century, methods accumulated and in retrospect it is clear that all of them have their merits and uses. Thus, in modern language pedagogy methods are seen less as the right or wrong way of teaching, but rather as options available to the teacher who makes enlightened choices based on their teaching context and purposes (Bárdos, 2005; Brown, 1994). In case of errors in language learning this means that we have arrived at a plurality of error handling and correction methods. Again, the teacher can choose how to deal with errors based on the context, the learner and the aim of task among other factors (Solé & Truman, 2005).

3.2 Reconceptualising learners and learner groups

The shift in how individuals were viewed in society and education also engendered changes in how learners and learner groups were conceptualised. In a performance-oriented learning environment students are categorized according to their abilities (Nahalka, 2003). These abilities are seen as fixed and measurable, which pre-determine students' success in learning. The performance-oriented approach is also characterized by the belief that there is one generic ability underlying student performance. A good example is the IQ, which is often interpreted as the overall measure that underpins students' abilities in all skill and subject areas, while in other interpretations it is seen as only after one aspect of the human ability spectrum (Gyarmathy, 2002). A related notion is that high achievers should excel in all subject areas equally (Roeders & Gefferth, 2007; Stanovich, 1999 cited in Sparks, 2009). The idea of using one, aggregated measure to describe performance is also reflected in the traditional Hungarian grading system. The student receives a grade on a 1-5 scale in a subject at the end of the year, which is often viewed as an all-encompassing measure of the student's abilities, effort or even personality (Golnhofer, 2003). Furthermore, if abilities are describable in one-dimensional terms, it follows that there are generic student profiles that describe 'good' students and 'bad' students (Rubin, 1975).

The diversity-oriented approach on the other hand, perceives abilities as modular, amenable and continuous (Florian, 2008). A student's performance is underpinned by several abilities, all of which are seen as continua, with no cut-off points that would make a learner pre-determined for failure. A student might be situated differently on each ability continuum, forming individual patterns of strengths and weaknesses. Thus, students will have differential success in different tasks (Gyarmathy, 2007). This also means that there are no generic profiles for 'good' and 'bad' learners, but each student has their own paths and methods towards successful learning (Gyarmathy, 2007).

The recognition of individual differences also led to the realization that no group can ever be completely homogeneous. The practice of educating SEN students in separate institutions or classes partly came from the idea that students can learn most effectively in a group with homogeneous abilities. However, according to the diversity-oriented approach, creating such a group is impossible as there will always be aspects in which some learners are different from others (Roeders & Gefferth, 2007).

The changes in the perspective on the learner outlined above were instrumental in reconceptualising dyslexia as a learner profile as opposed to a deficient learner. In FL learning, as we saw in the section above, changes in the way errors were conceptualized by researchers were important in pointing out that individual learners might exhibit different skill and consequently different error patterns (James, 1998). In addition, individual differences became one of the most widely accepted and researched explanations for differential success among language learners (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

3.3 Different views of the learning process

The recognition of individual differences between learners brought about changes in how the learning process was viewed. The performance-oriented approach is mainly product-oriented where the learning process is seen as a straight line between input and output (Hendrickson, 1978). At the beginning of the learning process learners are viewed as ignorant

of the subject matter that they are about to be taught, and they are 'filled' with the new information during the learning process. This also implies that students are passive during learning, accepting what is presented to them (O'Dwyer, 2006).

The diversity-oriented approach is more focused on the mechanisms the learner uses to internalize knowledge. First of all, the learner is not seen as an empty vessel. The fact that learners bring their own knowledge, experiences, attitudes and beliefs to the classroom is more readily recognized (O'Dwyer, 2006). Learning is considered to take place mainly through interaction with others as well as through the integration of new knowledge into a framework already developed by the learner (Solé & Truman, 2005). This also entails that since learners bring different 'packages' to the classroom, each learner can take a different path of integrating new information into their already existing system of skills and knowledge.

The shift between the two approaches outlined above contributed considerably to dyslexia becoming accepted as a valid path of learning and development. The recognition of the unique pattern of strengths and difficulties of each student (see 3.2) has led to the realisation that dyslexic students should be regarded as learners with a certain type of a learning profile that needs to be explored and accommodated in the classroom rather than ignored or even excluded. However, such an integration-oriented approach towards dyslexia only became feasible once the idea that learning outcomes might be reached in several different ways had been accepted.

Regarding errors in FL learning, they came to be recognized as signs of the learners integrating new information into their language knowledge. While behaviouristic approaches viewed learner language (LL) as a deficient version of the TL (see 2.1), subsequent theories based on cognitive approaches to learning, such as interlanguage (IL) theory, viewed LL as a system in its own right (Selinker, 1972). This system was seen as consistent and rule-governed at any given point in time, as evidenced by the fact that learners made errors in a systematic manner. As learners' IL developed, they constantly modified and adapted their IL system, a process marked by making errors (Selinker, 1972). Therefore, the error was not seen as something to be condemned and eradicated anymore but as a natural part of the learning process, as learners' attempts at using new structures and incorporating them into their already existing language systems (Edge, 1989).

3.4 Teacher roles and the teacher – learner interaction

Shifting the focus of education towards the learner and the learning process meant a considerable change in teacher roles and teacher-learner interaction as well. In the performance-oriented approach the teacher controls all aspects of the teaching-learning process. The teacher is the authority who selects and specifies the material and transmits knowledge to the learners. Choosing the best method for conveying knowledge to the students is also the teacher's responsibility (O'Dwyer, 2006). The material and the teaching methods are chosen with 'most learners' in mind, i.e. what is thought to be attainable by most students. Students are expected to conform to the teacher's choices (Florian, 2008). In this approach, the students' performance is viewed as the end-product rather than part of the learning process, and the teacher selects the criteria for measuring and evaluating student performance. The teacher also regulates the time-frame within which the student is required to master the material, and since the material is structured hierarchically (Gyarmathy, 2007), if the student

is not successful, there is a danger of falling behind (Nahalka, 2003). As in the case of the material, student performance is expected to be uniform, and the benchmark is perfection. If the learning process does not yield the ideal results, it tends to be attributed to the learners' abilities, unwillingness or lack of diligence. Consequently, it is rather the learner who is expected to make an extra effort to enhance their performance (Gyarmathy, 2007). Thus, in the performance-oriented approach information flows one way (from the teacher to the student) and at the end of the process the student is evaluated to see how successful the information intake was.

In the diversity-oriented approach the teacher remains the one who sets the goals for learning (Widdowson, 1990), though usually these goals are less specified than in case of the performance-oriented approach to ensure that they can be attained in different ways by different learners (Florian, 2008). Thus, it is the teacher who sets up the learning situation, but during the learning process he/she moves to the 'sidelines' and acts mainly as facilitator leaving space and time for students to take an active part in it (O'Dwyer, 2006). The teacher offers support and guidance as and when necessary. It is not the students who are expected to adjust to a generic material and generic methodology, but it is the teacher who has to recognize and accept differences between the learners and diversify their methodology or re-structure the material to cater for individual needs (Roeders & Gefferth, 2007). Learning outcomes are seen as stages in a larger process in this approach rather than end products (Báthory, 2000), which also entails that the time constraints for mastering certain stages of the material are not as strict and binding as in the other framework. If the learning process does not yield the ideal results, the teacher has to re-examine and reflect upon the process and experiment with new approaches and methodologies (Roeders & Gefferth, 2007). Adopting such self-reflective practices requires the teacher to attribute unsatisfactory learning outcomes not solely to the student's features or efforts, but to factors outside the student, like the teaching methodology or the material (Brady & Woolfson, 2008). Since students are not expected to have the exact same learning outcomes (see 3.3), evaluation is replaced by assessment and is seen as a method of diagnosing problematic areas and facilitating learning (Hendrickson, 1987). Therefore, in this approach information flows in a circular fashion; the data coming from the students' learning outcomes feed back into the teaching process.

Thus, the main discrepancy between the two approaches from the teachers' aspect is how they react to differences between the students, and this reaction in turn influences the whole teaching/learning process. In the performance-oriented approach, teachers identify students' problems/errors, but use them for differentiating between students, evaluating and ranking them (Figure 2). If data on the students' performance accumulates, it can be used to categorize students into low and high achievers (Golnhofer, 2003), and the category they fall into is also seen as indicative of their intelligence (see 3.2). This approach works well in educational settings where students are competitive and are motivated to keep enhancing their performance until they become high achievers.

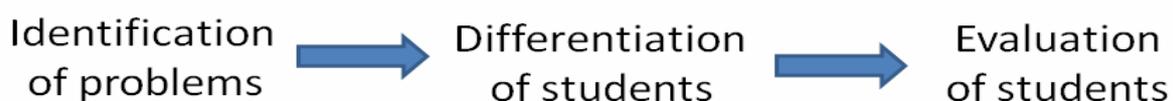Identification of problems → Differentiation of students → Evaluation of students

Figure 2. Reaction to non-conformities in the performance-centred framework

In the diversity-oriented approach, the identification of problems/errors is followed by their examination, then redefinition as differences or learning steps that need to be

accommodated or even used as feedback and inspiration by the teacher. They are integrated into teaching with the necessary accommodations and observed again to see how successful the integration was. Should any further problems arise, the cycle begins again (Figure 3). Thus, it is not only the teacher who regulates the teaching/learning cycle, but the students are an integral part of the process as well. Therefore, in this interactive pattern errors and differences can potentially enhance learning for all students. This approach works well in educational settings where students' confidence in their academic ability is shaken and/or they have extremely diverse needs, problems and abilities. Therefore, they are motivated by the teacher responding to their needs and problems and by being allowed to make use of their abilities rather than by being expected to perform at a certain level in a certain way.

Identification of problems

Examination of problems

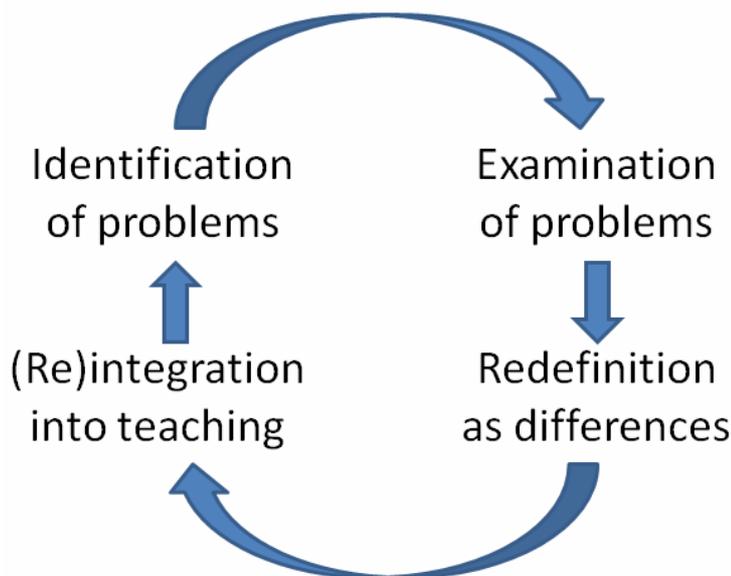(Re)integration into teaching

Redefinition as differences

Figure 3. Reaction to non-conformities in the diversity-oriented approach

The strictly controlled and uniform material, teaching methods, and evaluation criteria that characterize the performance-oriented approach can be highly unfavourable for dyslexic students due to their atypical pattern of strengths and weaknesses. For example, in a traditional classroom setting the students are required to do a great deal of verbal rote memorization. Furthermore, in such a setting the material is usually hierarchically structured and presented in a fixed order with emphasis on the parts rather than the whole, which requires a sequential/analytical thinking and information processing style (Gyarmathy, 2007). However, dyslexic students perform better if they are allowed to make use of their visual/aural/kinaesthetic memory and holistic learning style. Otherwise, using the selective evaluation procedures of the performance-oriented approach, dyslexics will almost invariably fall into the low-achieving category as they cannot perform as well as most of their peers on standard measures (Gyarmathy, 2007). In the performance-oriented approach there is no room to recognize dyslexic learners' strengths and accommodate their needs. Furthermore, falling repeatedly into the low-achieving category lowers their motivation, which can lead to further decline in their performance (Csizér, 2010; Gyarmathy, 2007). In the diversity-oriented approach on the other hand, the teacher has the opportunity to respond to dyslexic learners' needs, which can potentially benefit other students as well. Even if students are not dyslexic, they still have learning style preferences; thus, if the teacher responds to dyslexic learners' needs, and classroom learning is enriched by multisensory (engaging more than one sense at the same time) and holistic methods apart from the usual verbal and analytic-sequential

methods, it follows that non-dyslexic students with alternate learning style preferences can also benefit (Gyarmathy, 2007; Sarkadi, 2005).

As for errors in FL learning, in the performance-oriented approach the teacher has the power to categorize students according to the number of errors they make. If a student makes many errors, he or she is categorised as a low-achiever, and in case of a few or no errors, the student is acknowledged as a high-achiever. In the diversity-oriented approach, there is more emphasis on the diagnostic nature of errors (see 2.1). The teacher can use the learners' errors as feedback on the development of the students' language competence. Errors can indicate how successfully learners have managed to incorporate a new structure, for example (Corder, 1981). Then, the teacher can modify the material or teaching methods accordingly. A good example of the teacher accepting students' errors as part of the language learning process is teaching communication strategies (CS). CS are devices the learners can employ to communicate successfully despite gaps in their FL knowledge such as circumlocution (describing or exemplifying the unknown target word), restructuring the message or even miming and gestures (Dörnyei & Scott, 1997). If the teacher recognizes and accepts that students have problems communicating in the FL, by using the diversity-oriented approach he or she has the opportunity to react to these problems by teaching CS (Dörnyei, 1995). In this way the teacher can help the students communicate with more ease despite their gaps and difficulties as opposed to pushing them to perform perfectly at all times and evaluating them on the basis of the number of mistakes they make.

4 Conclusion

In this paper I set out to demonstrate that certain directions in mainstream education are compatible with special needs education, using dyslexia and foreign language learner errors as specific examples. As the analysis using the performance-oriented and the diversity-oriented approaches showed, the changes in the perception of dyslexia and language learner errors are driven by similar social and educational changes; namely, the shift from a focus on performance and uniformity to the learning process and diversity. The transition from one approach to another results in similar attitude shifts when conceptualizing learners, the learning process, and teacher roles both in the case of dyslexia and language learner errors. Which approach is chosen by the teacher depends on the educational climate, purpose and context; however, based on the analysis we can assume that the diversity-oriented approach is more favourable for special needs education.

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