Lang. Teach. (2013), **46.1**, 130 © Cambridge University Press 2012
doi:10.1017/S0261444812000444

A Passage in Time

In 1975 (Vol. 8, 1, 5–25), in her state-of-the-art review, *Factors affecting foreign language learning: A consideration of recent research findings*, **Clare Burstall** considered evidence for gender differences from the recently completed National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) review of French in primary (aged 5–11) schools:

> It was notable, for example, throughout the period of the NFER study, that the attitudes of the girls towards foreign-language learning were consistently more favourable than those of the boys. For instance, significantly more girls than boys agreed that they would like to speak many languages, go to France and meet French people, and continue their study of French in future years. Significantly more girls than boys also thought that all children should start to learn French in the primary school and that French would be useful to them in their future life. In addition, the girls were more confident than the boys of their parents' support and encouragement. The boys' attitudes towards foreign language learning tended to be comparatively unfavourable. Significantly more boys than girls felt that learning French was a waste of time and that there were more important subjects on which they should be concentrating their effort. Unlike the girls, the boys did not believe that a knowledge of French would be useful to them after they had left school. Evidence from other studies suggests that the more positive attitudes expressed by the girls represent, in the main, a response to social and cultural pressures. Robinson (1971) has suggested that being 'good at language' may be seen as admirable for girls, but unmanly for boys. The view that foreign-language learning is a more suitable accomplishment for girls than for boys is undoubtedly still current in our society, reinforced by the fact that a knowledge of foreign languages has a direct and obvious application to the future employment possibilities open to girls, but is less clearly relevant to those available to boys. Adolescent pupils of both sexes have been reported as viewing the enhancement of vocational success as the primary function of education and, in consequence, to place a high value on school subjects, such as Mathematics and English, which have an obvious relevance to their future employment prospects. Girls and their parents are also reported as accepting the vocational value of foreign-language learning, but boys and their parents are reported as not doing so (Schools Council 1968; Summer & Warburton 1972).

References

Robinson, W. P. (1971). Social factors and language development in primary school children. In R. Huxley & E. Ingram (eds.), *Language acquisition: Models and methods*. London and New York: Academic Press, 49–66.
Schools Council (1968). *Young school leavers*. Enquiry 1. London: HMSO.
Summer, R. & F. W. Warburton (1972). *Achievement in secondary school*. Slough: NFER.

The digitised archive of *Language Teaching*, from Volume 1 to the present day, can be consulted by subscribers at http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=LTA

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444812000444 Published online by Cambridge University Press