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## NOTES ON GRATITUDE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN MEXICO

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**Abstract:** During the pandemic, many educational paradigms were put to the test, others were modified and, in this new stage of knowledge, the training of university students has required new strategies. Emotional needs suddenly appear to limit and/or hinder the learning dynamics, behavior during classes can sometimes even indicate a learning simulation. Due to different circumstances, teachers have to resort to different areas of knowledge to integrate them into everyday activities so that learning a second language is no longer a challenge, and transforms that challenge into brief, simple, everyday activities and possible from there.

In this investigation, it was possible to demonstrate the work carried out by students at `` Universidad Veracruz `` who take English courses. Recording the progress of these students in the linguistic process could be easy, however, the factor was incorporated into this: Gratitude and through writing a diary we can show a) their linguistic advances and b) the increase in their inputs and the maturation of their writings.

**keywords:** Gratitude, Language Teaching, Positive Psychology, Learning, Science

## INTRODUCTION

“To highlight the reality of scientific production in Psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi published a special issue of *American Psychologist* in January 2000, in which they emphasized that Psychology did not produce enough knowledge about the virtuous aspects and personal strengths that all human beings possess. In this important publication, they pointed out the gaps present in psychological investigations and highlighted the need for research on positive aspects such as, for example, hope, creativity, courage, wisdom, spirituality, happiness.” The main objective of Positive Psychology is to know the resources and strengths of people

through scientific investigation, in order to be able to increase and/or enhance, and even discover these strengths and human talents.

In antiquity, Plato and Socrates expressed their interest in achieving happiness in their writings, and some authors such as Carl Rogers (1961), with his concept of optimal functioning of the personality; Abraham Maslow (1954), with the term self-realization, or Erik Erikson (1987), known for his work on identity and youth, among the most outstanding.

Currently, psychological well-being has been recognized worldwide as an important topic in the health area. In the General Assembly of the United Nations (2015) the objective of guaranteeing a healthy life was indicated, promoting the well-being of the population at all ages and it is proposed to promote mental health and well-being. Health, (2015) also set out to urge governments around the world to implement actions to protect and promote mental health at all stages of life.

Positive psychology aims to build and catalyze positive qualities. It is therefore directly related to important subjective experiences such as well-being, contentment and satisfaction with the past; hope and optimism for the future; and happiness and flow in the present (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This current of psychology thus focuses on the healthy and pleasant aspects of life by studying emotions and positive human experiences (Emmons, 2009), as opposed to pathologies and weaknesses (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to Seligman (2008) the results that positive psychology seeks to achieve are happiness and well-being. Positive emotions provide an amplification of individuals' ways of thinking and acting, which in turn allows for continued growth towards optimal functioning and improved emotional well-being. It is through the experience of positive emotions that

individuals can transform themselves, becoming more creative, knowledgeable, resilient, socially integrated and healthy (Fredrickson, 2004).

## **GRATITUDE AS SCIENCE**

After many studies and taking into consideration, several factors, it is possible to recognize gratitude as an object of study. Bearing in mind that Gratitude has been an area of interest for both philosophers and educators. Today, sociologists, psychologists and researchers have named gratitude in their research as a phenomenon that must be defined, investigated and studied. Such as: Simmel, Schwartz, Gouldner, Heider, Weiner & Graham, Lazarus & Lazarus, Ortony, Clore and Collins.

Gratitude is a character strength that presupposes that those who possess it are aware of what good happens to them and do not take it for granted. It is a judgment of another person's elevation to the level of moral character and positive qualities (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Seligman, 2008). As an emotion, it conveys wonder, gratitude and appreciation for the gift offered. It can be expressed in relation to other people, but also in relation to non-human entities, such as God or animals, or impersonal entities, such as nature (Emmons & Shelton, 2005; Emmons, 2009; Seligman, 2008). In this sense, gratitude is not just a feeling, it is something that requires the recognition that there was someone who presented us with their kindness in some way, that it was something intentional, and that it may even have had personal costs, and even that the so-called "gift" has value for its receiver. Furthermore, gratitude is intrinsically related to the notion that nothing has been done in the sense of deserving the benefit provided, or having received more than what would be really deserved, motivating reciprocity. There

is therefore the notion that the kindness of others is independent of ourselves and our actions. Therefore, recognizing the existence of good and pleasant things is a necessary condition for being grateful (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons, 2009; McCullough et al., 2001; Tsang, 2006; Tsang, 2007).

However, research on the importance of gratitude and its benefits was not popular until Robert Emmons, Michael McCullough, among the most prominent.

In early 2000, and thanks to the John Templeton Foundation (JTF), a Project: Expanding the Science and Practice of Gratitude Project (ESPG) was started, and that's when research on gratitude began to emerge. Since then, there has been a series of documents and serious investigations about gratitude.

In these investigations, different Gratitude Scales are already mentioned where we can see the forms, questionnaires, methods of measuring gratitude, divisions and/or types of gratitude that we would like to mention, although it is not the objective of this work. One of the scales that must be mentioned is the Transpersonal Gratitude Scale (TGS), which was designed with the aim of including the transcendental aspects that can accompany feelings of gratitude. Hlava, Elfers & Offringa, (2014). That's where four subdivisions were mentioned: a) expression of gratitude: "I show appreciation for those who have a positive influence in my life", b) the value of gratitude: "Gratitude helps me feel happier", c) transcendent gratitude: "I feel grateful to be alive" and d) gratitude with spiritual connection "I thank God for being in my life".

There are therefore three conditions that enhance the experience of gratitude. One of them is the appreciation of what is received, and the more important it is for the recipient, the more easily he will feel gratitude. Second, acknowledging that there is someone who has

intentionally given us something good and positive also helps to make it easier to feel grateful. And, finally, the greater the feeling that the gift offered has no reason to be, and it is a gesture in which there is no interest or objective of obtaining something in return, the more likely the feeling of gratitude (Barlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & Shelton, 2005).

According to studies by Emmons and McCulloughs (2003), individuals who practice gratitude feel more connected with others. As such there is a strong, perhaps even major, prosocial reciprocity component in gratitude (Fredrickson, 2001).

## **GRATITUDE IS THE CULTURE**

Gratitude seems to be interpreted differently depending on gender and/or culture, as individuals with different characteristics may attribute different connotations to the expression of gratitude. Male individuals are less likely to show gratitude, as these are indicative of dependency and debt (Emmons, 2009). Even in children, the differences are verifiable, because while girls are usually more grateful than boys and direct their gratitude essentially towards family and friends, gratitude in boys is more related to material goods (Gordon et al, 2004). There are also differences between American men and German men. The former do not perceive gratitude so positively, considering it less constructive and useful than the latter (Kosmitzki & Sommers, 1988).

## **THE BENEFITS**

Gratitude has been shown to bring benefits in different areas, as not only does it generate a sense of calm in the moment, but by turning it into a habit, people focus on present well-being and gain greater hope for the future. When thanking, the student is required to recognize a fact as positive and expose or express about the probable circumstances

or difficult moments he/she faces; especially during the pandemic year.

## **THE DIARY**

Gratitude journaling allows students to focus on the positives, leaving the problems for a moment. While commercial gratitude journals exist today, young people were not asked to buy anything else as students were invited to join using WhatsApp, and the gratitude journal will be sent electronically, so there is no need to purchase any booklets.

To work with a gratitude journal requires 5 minutes of student attention per day, or just an instant; However, when making this gratitude journal in another language, it will require more time as it involves thinking about it, writing it down, looking up a word in the dictionary if necessary, writing your thanks in English and revising it, as well as correcting this if necessary.

There are some authors who claim that practicing gratitude on a regular basis brings benefits in the area of physical and mental health. Since we have noticed these positive elements in our lives, we:

- Decrease negative feelings that generate depression
- You gain confidence in yourself
- improve health
- You gain more self-awareness
- Eliminate self-pity
- Reduces stress and anxiety in the face of uncertainty
- Generates empathy in others by perceiving us as kind and pleasant people, and
- You rest better

Gratitude influences academic performance, García (2015) conducted a study with 145 students to verify whether the experience of gratitude influences the performance of students of a second language.

The results demonstrated the importance of gratitude in the educational issue to enhance interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships that are fundamental for the success of learning a second language. With these results, it can be stated that grateful people improve their performance when learning a second language.

## THE HABIT

As with every habit, starting to work with a gratitude journal is difficult, but students are encouraged to see their colleagues' messages when they are forwarded to the group, so they want to participate, share their positive experiences and/or finally, not be left behind. This habit of sharing positive experiences little by little spreads throughout the group, and ends up motivating everyone, including the teacher.

It is true that noticing the positive things around us is a difficult habit to obtain, as people are more used to complaining, noticing the bad things, listening to complaints and criticism or negative comments all the time. Grateful people tend to be happier, healthier, more complete. They usually overcome stress and improve heart conditions. For Dr. Martin Seligman in some tests conducted, a week of gratitude equals a month, three and even six months of happiness later.

## METHODOLOGY

Level 2 English students (A1+) were selected during the pandemic. This group kept a gratitude journal during the second half of the course, ie 8 weeks. During which they wrote their first thoughts of gratitude in English on WhatsApp. These students are enrolled at the AFBG (General Basic Training Area of ``Universidad Veracruz), Mexico. Currently, 26 students are studying different careers such as engineering, pedagogy, dentistry, communication sciences,

commerce, among others. They received the following instructions:

- a) Write a sentence in English thanking you for something.
- b) Keep a gratitude journal Monday through Thursday (school days)
- c) Send a message via WhatsApp if you have any questions.
- d) Review the corrections.
- e) Record your thanks digitally.
- f) Organize them to present the gratitude journal at the end of the course.

We chose to use the scale: Transpersonal Gratitude Scale (TGS), Hlava, Elfers & Offringa, (2014). And the results were recorded. However, it was observed that some actions of gratitude did not correspond, it was decided to add to the scale some items that were considered necessary. Leaving our scale as follows. Also, its name has been changed to distinguish the original scale from ours.

TGS plus scale
Expression of gratitude
The value of gratitude
Transcendent gratitude
Gratitude with spiritual connection
Gratitude for animals
Gratitude for the art
Gratitude for the entertainment
Gratutud for learning process

## RESULTS

On the first day, 14 students submitted their participation and among them they made 9 grammatical errors. On the second day, 9 entries were obtained, of which two made the same mistake, this time a not so serious "error". On the following occasion, 15 students participated, 5 errors were recorded, one student immediately corrected his mistake, two more students omitted some elements in the essay and, on the other

hand, the integration of recently acquired elements in the discipline can be verified in the acknowledgments. The acknowledgments continued with fewer errors, sometimes the students participated more, sometimes they participated less. However, the errors are getting smaller and the entries gradually include more than one phrase, phrases and/or emoticons.

At the end of the course they added not just statements but complete writings from which some were selected as examples. And even if the time spent on this activity was very short in relation to time, we see that for the language level of A1+ students, they have a good linguistic production. Below is a sample of the first day of the gratitude journal, the students barely wrote sentences, by the end of the course they began to write small paragraphs.

Even though I don't speak much, I don't participate in the class and my presence is not noticed. I was always in all your classes, because my big dream is to know the foreigner; English opens many doors, that's why I am very grateful for your classes so pleasant and enjoyable. I always did the exercises and paid attention, because I want to learn English; I know how necessary it is, how important it is and how beautiful it is to learn a language. Therefore, I thank you for your dedication to teach me English 2 Teacher, although I knew a little, I could never understand it 100%, mainly because I was reluctant to learn a new language. I say goodbye wholeheartedly Teacher and wish you the best vibes in life.

Gloria Latour

This month I am grateful because my family and I have health. I express my gratitude for the food that I had every day. I am thankful cause I am going to finish another English course soon. I give thanks to my dad's clients, my neighbors because they are kind and my friends who support me. I am grateful for the

privilege that I have the beach near. I am really grateful for having a family who loves me a lot. I am feeling gratitude for having excellent teachers. I give thanks because I have a house. I am so grateful for the life!

By: Liliana Leal Vásquez

I'm grateful with the life for have a good day, I'm happy because today I wasn't procrastinated, and I finished a project. I'm grateful with the life because today was a happy day I'm so grateful with the life, because my family stay together in this "Día de muertos" because for us is the celebration more important of the year. Too I'm thankful for have some days for rest I'm thankful because today I finish my homework, my flowers look pretty, and the weather is so nice. I'm grateful with the life because my family is healthy and I have a good life. I give thanks for everything that happens, I was accepted for a scholarship. I'm grateful with my mom because She stays with me and my siblings always. I am thankful with every person who stay with me in the difficulties. I'm grateful because my family and close friends are healthy. I'm grateful with BTS for make my life happier with it's beautiful songs. I'm grateful with myself because every day I try to be better I'm thankful to my parents because they always care about me. I'm so grateful to finish the semester I'm thankful to have a job and to be able to study I'm so Grateful with the teacher Claudia, because she is so kind, I give thanks to had class with she. THANKS TEACHER!

Angela Mariana Arrieta Hipolito

Thank you, teacher for all the learning you gave me, for teaching us that we must always give others a smile, especially for teaching us to be grateful for good things and bad things. I hope to continue agreeing with you, you are an excellent teacher. I love her very much and I hope God bless her and her family. Finally, I thank you for having met an excellent teacher.

On October 5, 2021	
1.	[23:24, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 457 3489: I am thankful with God for one more day of life. I am very grateful because my family and I are healthy
2.	[23:30, 5/10/2021] Lizet: I'm thankful because that in the pandemic so far neither I nor my family have been infected
3.	[23:34, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 605 6253: I am grateful to end another day with my family
4.	[23:36, 5/10/2021] +52 1 235 114 8356: I am grateful because my family this healthy and I feeling happy.
5.	[23:37, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 458 4685: I am grateful for one more day of life with my family. I am thankful that today was stronger emotionally than other days.
6.	[23:37, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 417 1368: I'm grateful because today my family is safe with me, i have a home to live, food to eat and bed to sleep
7.	[23:39, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 405 1313: I'm gratefull because I'm healthy and I have my parents and my grandparents with me all time.
9.	[23:49, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 481 4293: I'm thankful with God for being surrounded by the people that I like and love. For being able to exchange words with special people despite of the distance and to remain with health and love.
10.	[23:51, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 519 0411: I am grateful because even though my grandmother is gone, my family is still together.
11.	[23:52, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 154 8328: I'm grateful for having my family at home again
12.	[23:54, 5/10/2021] +52 1 285 114 6799: I am thankful with every person who stay with me in the difficulties. I'm grateful because my family and close friends are healthy.
13.	[23:56, 5/10/2021] +52 1 285 104 3856: I am grateful to music, because it is what makes my emotions feel good and make me think positive thoughts.
14.	[23:58, 5/10/2021] +52 1 229 492 1532: I thank God for giving me a family, a house and allowing me one more day to live. Beautiful night

See you soon!

Diego Valencia Rivadeneyra

I am grateful to have great parents who always go out of their way to give me their best to be well and excel. As well as I am also grateful for the brother I have, because he takes care of me and knows how to keep me on the right track, he guides me and keeps me away from things that are not right. I am very grateful for all the good and bad that happens to me because I know that everything is for the better. I want to give thanks for the excellent teacher assigned to me in this subject, English, because thanks to her I will improve every day, because I learned new words, and my English improved. I am also grateful for the good companions I had on this occasion, and although I did not meet them in person, they were very kind and friendly with some. Maybe not talk to everyone. I am very grateful to God, for allowing me one more day of life, for being the girl I am until now, a very good student and hard worker. I am very grateful to my employers for trusting me and giving me the opportunity to be with them, giving my service to clients. I thank my friends because they support me when I need someone, they guide me with the tasks when I have doubts, etc. Although I am also grateful for all those things or moments that did not happen in me. I thank my mom who made me dinner today, for all the days she makes me eat breakfast and lunch. And, to God, since I am grateful for giving us something to eat because there are children who suffer from hunger. I am very grateful and happy with my life; I totally love it.

Fatima Morgado

I am very grateful that my plans are working out well. today I feel very thankful because I woke up in my bed. I am very grateful to my parents for helping me achieve my goals. today I am very grateful for my work. I am grateful that my niece is back today. I am very grateful

to my parents for supporting me in everything. I am very grateful to be able to eat what I want when I want. I am grateful to my teachers this semester, because they have been very understanding with me and my classmates. I am thankful that I have a home and food on my table every day. I am grateful to be able to see my grandparents every day. I am very grateful to my friends for always supporting me. I am grateful to be able to travel. I am very grateful to be studying at the university. I am thankful for waking up every day and being able to see the world. I am thankful that I did not have coronavirus. I am thankful for my skin color. Today I am thankful that I no longer have depression. Today I am just thankful to be alive. I am grateful to myself for never giving up.

Jesús Ricardo Hernández Rivera

I express my gratitude to all the people who have passed through my life, they have all taught me something, good or bad, they are lessons that will serve me in my future. I am grateful for my fears because thanks to them I am improving day by day. I am grateful to myself because despite how much my grandmother's death has hurt me, I have been strong enough to continue living. I am grateful for each one of my dreams and those of my family because these dreams are the ones that drive me every day. I am grateful to all my teachers, because thanks to their effort, dedication and love they provide us with their knowledge. I am grateful to my English teacher because in this semester certain things have become clear to me that I did not understand very well. I am grateful for the life I have, with its ups and downs. I am grateful to the people around me who provide me with support, love, care, and understanding. I am grateful to my mother, because whenever she cooks, she does it with a lot of love and is super delicious.

Abigail Ortiz Torres

I am grateful to myself because despite my



problems, my sorrows and all my mistakes, I am still a good person. I am grateful to all the people who congratulated me, and who sent me kind wishes and blessings. I really appreciate them a lot. I am grateful for having friends who are there when I need them most, and for being my support when I have needed the strength to get up. I thank life for sending me good wishes and also for the joys in my life. I am grateful for the love of those around me, the good and bad moments, what I learned, what I gained and also, for what I lost and what I am about to live. Today I thank my best friend for thanks for being my support, for always being by my side and for being my loyal friend. I can only thank you infinitely.

Brando Martínez González

Escala TGS	TOTAL
I show gratitude for my family or friends (EG)	34
Gratitude helps me... (VG)	0
I feel grateful for life (GT)	67
Thankful to God (GE)	22
Other (OG)	91

As it was mentioned earlier, a scale was modified because some entries did not match any of the default parameters. It must be mentioned that in this case the modification of our scale was very important. Identifying a new pattern was interesting. The data with the original gratitude scale would have had too many unrecognized entries or data, and as the information represented a very important number, it was decided to modify it.

TGS plus scale	Total
Expression of gratitude	34
The value of gratitude	0
Transcendent gratitude	67
Gratitude with spiritual connection	22
Gratitude for animals	18
Gratitude for the art/culture	12
Gratitude for the entertainment	18
Gratitud for learning process	43

It can already be seen that the new entries also inform about the interests of the students, the opportunity they have to get involved with cultural and artistic aspects is very relevant, in addition to the love for animals. Not forgetting that they alert you to your linguistic progress and are aware of it, while also recognizing the contributions of your teachers. Something that undoubtedly also impacts the teaching-learning process. Because he manages to motivate his two main protagonists.

In conclusion, the gratitude journal improved the academic performance of English students at ``Universidade Veracruz``, in addition to generating a pleasant atmosphere between students and the professor in charge. It is important to include that some students (7) indicated that this activity allowed them to stop thinking about “stop living”, “running away from all these problems”, etc. They come to the session and from the computer they begin to say: thanks to classmates and the teacher.

Emotional, neurolinguistic and social connections have improved considerably, optimizing the time, effort and materials of the teacher and students, as saying thank you is free.

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