

7-10-2019

## THE AGE FACTOR IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DIFFERENCES IN REACHING PROFICIENCY

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### Recommended Citation

Abdukadyrova, Gulbakhor and Suyunova, Mohinur Ilhom qizi (2019) "THE AGE FACTOR IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DIFFERENCES IN REACHING PROFICIENCY," *Scientific Bulletin of Namangan State University*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 3 , Article 49.

Available at: <https://uzjournals.edu.uz/namdu/vol1/iss3/49>

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**Cover Page Footnote**

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**Erratum**

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## THE AGE FACTOR IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND DIFFERENCES IN REACHING PROFICIENCY

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses the role of age in Second Language Acquisition and presents the different results of relevant researches on this topic. It also compares the results and conclusions of researches conducted by 20 scholars, linguistics and researchers. Furthermore, it explains why and when this issue began to draw attention of linguistics along with interpreting the Critical Period Hypothesis by Lenneberg (1967). It further aims to examine whether young L2 learners are better than adult L2 learners. Taking all research together, it concludes that even though adult second language learners may achieve particular success in SLA especially in terms of grammar, the early age in SLA is supported considering the fact that young learners will eventually surpass adult second language learners in final stage of acquisition.*

**Key words:** *CPH (the Critical Period Hypothesis), language proficiency, native-like excellency, pronunciation, grammatical complexity, language exposure, "Language Specific Cognitive System", "Problem-Solving Cognitive System", the Maturational State Hypothesis, the Exercise Hypothesis, "sensitive period".*

## ВОЗРАСТНОЙ ФАКТОР В ОСВОЕНИИ ВТОРОГО ЯЗЫКА И РАЗЛИЧИЯ В ДОСТИЖЕНИИ ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОГО УРОВНЯ

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**Аннотация:** *Эта статья обсуждает роль возраста в освоении второго языка и представляет различные результаты соответствующих исследований по этой теме. Она также сравнивает результаты и выводы исследования, проведенные 20 учеными, лингвистами и исследователями. Эта статья объясняет, почему и когда эта проблема начала привлекать внимание лингвистики наряду с интерпретацией гипотезы критического периода Леннеберга (1967). Кроме того, с целью изучения того, лучше ли молодые ученики изучающие второй язык, чем взрослые ученики. Собрав все исследования вместе, можно сделать вывод, что, хотя взрослые, изучающие второй язык, могут достичь определенных успехов в усвоении второго языка, особенно в плане грамматики. Ранний возраст в этой сфере более подходящий, учитывая тот факт, что молодые ученики в конечном итоге превзойдут взрослых в заключительной стадии.*

**Ключевые слова:** СРН (гипотеза критического периода), владение языком, превосходство, подобное нативному языку, произношение, грамматическая сложность, языковая экспозиция, «языковая когнитивная система», «проблемная когнитивная система», гипотеза состояния зрелости, гипотеза упражнения "чувствительный период".

**ИКККИНЧИ ТИЛ ЎРГАНИШДА ЁШ ОМИЛИ ВА ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЛИК  
ДАРАЖАСИГА ЭРИШИШДАГИ ТАФОВУТЛАР**

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**Annotatsiya:** Bu maqola yosh omilining ikkinchi til o'rganishdagi rolini o'rganib, mazkur mavzu bo'yicha o'tkazilgan tadqiqotlar natijasini taqdim qiladi. Shuningdek maqolada 20 ta olim, tadqiqotchi va tilshunoslar tomonidan o'tkazilgan tadqiqotlar natijalari va xulosalari solishtiradi. Bundan tashqari, bu mavzu nima uchun va qachondan boshlab tilshunoslar e'tiborini torta boshlaganini va Lennebergning " Tanqidiy Davr Nazariyasi" mohiyatini tushuntirib beradi. Shuningdek maqolada yosh ikkinchi til o'rganuvchilar yoshi katta ikkinchi til o'rganuvchilardan ko'ra ko'proq muvaffaqiyatga erishishi yoki aksinchaligi tahlil qilinadi. Barcha tadqiqotlarni jamlagan holda, yoshi katta ikkinchi til o'rganuvchilari Ikkinchi Til O'rganish(ITO') da ma'lum bir muvaffaqiyatlarga, ayniqsa grammatika sohasida, erishsalar-da, ITO' ning oxirgi bosqichida yosh til o'rganuvchilar yoshi katta o'rganuvchilarni ortda qoldirishi isbotini topgan.hisobga olgan holda kichik yosh ma'qullanadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** TDN (Tanqidiy Davr Nazariyasi), til malakaviyligi, talaffuz, grammatik murakkablik, " Aniq Shakllangan Til Sistemasi", "Muammoni yechish Sistemasi" , "Voyagf Yetganlik Holati Nazariyasi", " Mashq Nazariyasi", " Ta'sirchan Davr".

As second language learning process is a complex phenomenon, linguists have been conducting researches on different aspects of it ending up with non-identical and controversial results. Also, the age of second language acquisition and differences in reaching proficiency in the language have caused many arguments and observations. As a consequence, it has come up with different corollaries. This topic has began to draw attention of more and more researchers and scholars since Lenneberge's [1] Critical Period Hypothesis(CPH) was introduced.It is frequently noticed that most children from immigrant families often end up speaking the language of their new community with native-like fluency, whereas their parents fail to reach such high levels of mastery of the spoken language. However, there are some cases where adult second language learners have mastered language skills proficiently. To give an example of this, Joseph Conrad, a native speaker of Poland, became a remarkable writer in English Literature. According to CPH there is a particular period in which the brain is susceptible to learn a language and developmental changes. Also, Lenneberg introduced the term "lateralization" to state that

biological changes or development in human are connected with ability to acquire languages in human's left hemisphere during puberty. Showing disagreement for this interpretation, Lamendalla [2] considered that it was too overstated and suggested another term "sensitive period" instead of "lateralization" which holds a view that ability to acquire languages may continue to exist after the age of 5. Johnson and Newport [3] introduced two interpretations for CPH considering the role of Age in L2 acquisition, that are, the Exercise Hypothesis and Maturational State Hypothesis.

The Exercise Hypothesis is a notion that humans have a superior aptitude for learning languages during the early ages of life, unless this capacity is exercised, it will be at a total loss or decline through the age. If exercised, it will be added further language abilities.

The Maturational State Hypothesis, on contrary, holds a view that, the capacity to acquire languages dissolves or deteriorates with maturation.

Researchers suggested different interpretations, proposed different perspectives towards Maturational State Hypothesis (MSH). However, conclusions and findings from a few studies showed that MSH is a reasonable notion and created a concept supporting it. Oyama [4] examined 60 male incomers who had lived in the US for between 5 and 18 years. In order to test the level of nativeness in them, she asked two native speakers to judge this aspect with the help of two different tasks related to phonology, that are, reading loud the given task and a free speech. As a result of her investigation, Oyama found that those who arrived in childhood outperformed and showed more native-like pronunciation. This study strongly approved the notion of age-related decline in phonological domain. Harley's investigation on learning capacity decline through the age in morphological domain has come up with similar conclusion. Harley's [5] investigation included students who acquiring the French verb system in Canada dividing them into two groups regarding their age. After both group received 1000 hour instruction, Harley examined their levels of attainment. As a result of his investigation, Harley found out that neither group could fully master the control of the verb system. However, at the end of their schooling the level of ultimate attainment was higher in younger group. This study also proved that L2 acquisition ability decline through the age in morphological domain too.

Precisely, it is difficult to compare adults and children in second language learning. Besides biological differences, the conditions where adults and children learn the language are also different. The children acquire more opportunities for intensive exposure to the language in informal language learning environments not experiencing pressure to speak fluently and accurately. Moreover, their developmental errors are not criticized, but easily accepted. However, older learners often find themselves in situations that require them more complex language and complicated ideas. When they are not able to express what they mean, they develop a sense of inadequacy together with embarrassment after experiencing the lack of mastery of the language which may cause to kill motivation and willingness to use available opportunities efficiently to employ the new language. In an

agreement with this, Singleton and Ryan [6] claims that children have an opportunity to acquire the second language in an efficient way, while adults seem to encounter a number of difficulties which partially contributes to maintain foreign trace in pronunciation and accent in adults. Furthermore, second language development of older and younger learners are different even though they learn in similar circumstances. In order to illustrate, more success goes to older learners due to the fact that they can practically apply a number of skills or strategies related to memory or finding a solution.

A wide range of researches are made in order to identify the mutual interrelations between age of language learning and overall success in the process being based on mostly pronunciation. But what is the scenery like in terms of grammar structure, sentence connection or awareness of word formation. As a wide range of researches and studies follow each other, the topic and hypothesis related to it, findings, conclusions, results have become even more controversial.

Mark Patkowski [7] comparatively, analyzed the effect of age on other linguistic features, not accent. He presupposed learners who began learning in elementary years of childhood could manage to reach high levels which is the same as natives even if accent were not taken into consideration. Patkowski intended to find the answer to the following question: "What kind of dissimilarities may emerge between two groups of learners who are distinguished according to the starting age of second language learning?" As a part of his investigation, the spoken English of highly educated foreign settlers in America whose starting period, at the same time, living period was different was recorded. He conducted the same thing with US born people who acquire education in advanced level. The distinguishable points in their English could be reckoned as second language learners' target language. Every stretched interview with participants was fully recorded. In order to support the pureness of the investigation Patkowski shrugged off any indicating point about the interviewees' history of migration and language transcribing a five-minute fragment from their speeches. The raters judged these speech fragments in transcription form on a scale from 0 to 5. Precisely, 0 indicates of no language awareness and 5 represents the learners' knowledge in the same level as a native speaker. The result was quite dramatic. Native speakers and the learners who started learning before fifteen headed the list receiving more than 4 or 5. In contrary, post-puberty learners only stayed with 3+. When Patkowski tested other factors that are believed to affect Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the results were not clear enough. Naturally, there was indisputable connection between those factors and success in the process. However, it is well known that it is impossible to separate the age and other factors entirely because of their close association. Patkowski found out that the age of acquisition plays a major role in the development of native-like excellency in the language. These results further supported the CPH. Also, Thompson's [8] study found the answer to the question "Do young children succeed in nativeness of pronunciation as they are exposed at early ages?" When Thompson examined the nativeness of pronunciation in Russian inhabitants to the United States, he found out that the immigrants who arrived in the US between the ages from 1 to

10 acquired a more native-like pronunciation, whereas immigrants who arrived after this age seemed to maintain Russian accent in their pronunciation. Thompson concludes that they failed to achieve nativeness in pronunciation mainly because of maintenance of high level of proficiency in Russian. This view resulted in that Weinreich [9] named it "interlingual identification".

Another research was conducted by Jacqueline Johnson and Elissa Newport [10]. They examined how second language learners acquire other linguistic features of the language. Participants consisting of second language learners who were Chinese and Korean immigrants, at the same time students of American universities who started learning at various ages were asked to judge complex sentences in terms of grammar and some rules in English morphology and syntax. They were asked to identify grammatically correct sentences when they heard on a tape. In the same way as Patkowski, they divided the participants into the group involving second language learners who began exposure to the language before fifteen and the group involving those who arrived in the US after fifteen. Johnson and Newport found that those who began earliest achieved higher results in the test, while those who began later failed to represent native-like language abilities and their performance in the test was not remarkable.

For the view for "the younger, the better" Morford and Mayberry [11] offered their answers. They claim that learners who began to learn the language at earlier stages of life systematically show high proficiency both in written or spoken form of languages. However, Ekstrand [12] presents opposite outlook for this view. He claims that L2 learning capacity is upgraded with age.

According to Herschensohn [13] the reason for outperforming of adults in grammar section of languages is that they can masterfully apply their first language learning abilities into the process. In further addition, he adds that children show much higher levels of language excellency in other areas such as pronunciation and accent being able to acquire basic interpersonal communication skills.

Some other researches show that older learners can also achieve high level of language proficiency. The study by Krashen, Long and Scarcella [14] made them conclude that adults are much more proficient in language acquisition and the speed of acquiring in older children will be higher than younger children. This has been proved by Catherine Snow and Marian Hoefnagel-Hohle [15]. They studied the progress achieved by English speakers who were learning Dutch as a second language. The research included three year old children as well as older children, adolescents and adults. They used a wide range of tasks to measure different aspects of the language. By this investigation, they examined their language ability by assessing pronunciation, grammatical morphemes, grammatical complexity, sentence translation, reading comprehension and storytelling. The results showed that the adolescents reached the highest level. Astoundingly, adults were second best learners, not children. However, at the end of the year, children managed to surpass adults on several aspects, but adolescents retained the highest level of overall performance. The results of their research created critical concept against CPH for language acquisition.

However, other researches explicated these results differently. The reason for low performance of younger learners was that some tasks (for instance, sentence judgement or translation) were too complex for them. But, in full extent, the study by Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle shows that adults and adolescents learn much faster in the first stage of second language development. This study is especially valuable to indicate that adolescents and adults can make huge progress towards mastery of a second language and attain high level of language proficiency. However, from the perspective of initial rate of acquisition, clearly, the stage at which the learner will attain more native-like proficiency, Felix [16] indicates children, not adults. In an agreement with this, Singleton[17] express the opinion that the learners who are exposed to language learning in childhood achieve higher levels of excellency in ultimate stage of learning than those who started in later life. Felix(1994) concluded that presumably, children will achieve high levels of acquisition in terms of both grammar and pronunciation. However, other studies created opposite view for children's superiority. For example, in the study by Olsen and Samuel[18] included American English speaking adults, adolescents and children. After a particular period of German pronunciation sessions, the results were higher in adolescents and adults. In an disagreement with this, Cochrane [19] investigated the naturalistic perform of 54 Japanese children and 24 adults to distinguish English /r/ and /l/. Naturalistic perform in adults was observed after 245 hours, while in children the period was 193 hours. Although in this task they outperformed the adults, after teaching phonemic distinction, adults showed more considerable results.

Age-related effects on L2 acquisition has brought about conducting a number of researches and resulted in the existence of many hypotheses and models as well. Felix's (1994) Competition Model and Bley Vroman's [20] Fundamental Difference Hypothesis suggested their view regarding the age-related effects in L2 acquisition. Felix's Competition Model holds a strong view that "Language Specific Cognitive System" which is considered to be counterbalanced to "Universal Grammar" leads the process of SLA in children, while it is guided by "Problem-Solving Cognitive System" in adults. When children and adults approach the tasks in language learning process, these two "Cognitive Systems" play a major role and they are driven to complete each other. As "Language Specific Cognitive System" is much more adequate and "Problem-Solving Cognitive System" is basically insufficient, children tend to achieve by far the highest levels in language excellency.

Unlike to Competition Model, Bley Vroman's Fundamental Difference Hypothesis supports the view that adults have two fundamental advantages over children: their "Native Language" and "Problem-Solving ability". Despite the fact that they both give an access to "Universal Grammar" it can not fully compensate the loss of the knowledge of Universal Grammar. That is the reason why they are less successful than children in language learning.

Through all available information , a common question is raised : " At what age should a learner begin learning a second language?" " Are younger learners better than adults in SLA process? " People who have never heard of the CPH think that the earlier

one starts, the better. However, as a second language learner I started the language learning before fifteen and my overall development in a particular period is more remarkable in comparison with those who started after fifteen, especially in terms of pronunciation. In further addition, one of groupmates always fail to sound natural even though she knows pronunciation rules well. Taking all the research together, what seems most clear is that adults may be faster and rapidly attain the language, but children's ultimate level of attainment is remarkable at the final stage of learning. Although a number of researches have resulted in different perspectives, most of them show that younger learners, namely children are more proficient second language learners. And a few researches stated above fully support the Critical Period Hypothesis. The whole succes or development in SLA can not be completely associated with age-related effects, some other factors such as motivation, personality can make contribution to achievement, but the role of age can not be neglected. And aforementioned findings and conclusions support this view.

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