

## The Role of Age in Second Language Acquisition

İkinci Dil Ediniminde Yaşın Rolü

**Emin Yaş**  0000-0001-6813-1160  
Batman University

### ABSTRACT

When it comes to learning a second language, no matter what age, almost every publication talks about individual differences that lead the learners to success. It is possible to say that the age factor is the most significant of these. Various elements occur as a result of individual differences: The rate of acquisition, ultimate achievement and the processes involved in language acquisition are important ones affected by differences among learners, particularly their age. The present work deals mainly with the age issue in second language acquisition, along with other factors related to individual differences, which are often treated in psychological positions. The data were obtained from a literature search. Looking at the written literature in the field, it has been found that the onset of second language acquisition and the final accomplishment are also the two titles that scholars have studied very much. The question of whether a critical period addressed language acquisition exists is a controversial one in the scientific world. However, even though there are no well-delineated age restrictions ready for attaining native or native-like proficiency in a second language, the period (age) at which one starts has been shown to correlate with ultimate proficiency.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 Oct 2024  
Accepted 14 Dec 2024

### KEYWORDS

Age Factor in Second  
Language Acquisition,  
Second Language  
Acquisition, Language  
Acquisition, Foreign  
Language Learning,  
Foreign Language  
Teaching

## Introduction

The question of how age influences the acquisition of first and further languages (Here, more emphasis will be placed on second language acquisition.) is one of the most recurrently addressed issues in second language acquisition (SLA) inquiry. We see that a number of books – a few to be mentioned are Harley, 1986, Singleton and Lengyel, 1995, Birdsong, 1999 – and a large number of articles have addressed this matter in the framework of a variety of theoretical standpoints over decades. As always, this issue attracts the attention of scientists and linguists, and the debates on this subject continue with all its intensity.

There are both theoretical and practical reasons for studying how the time at which learners start to learn a language affects second acquisition. The work provides empirical evidence from the research in connection with the points of how people acquire languages and how their ability to do so varies with age (Ellis, 2015). Ellis offers an in-depth look at this important realm of applied linguistics. He examines different theories of second language acquisition and critical responses to them rather than taking a particular stance.

It is widely believed that children can acquire language better than adults, i.e., they are better learners, which is why if individuals start to learn a language at a younger age, they will be more

**CONTACT** Emin Yaş, Asst. Prof. Dr., Dept. of English Language and Literature, Batman University, Türkiye | [emin.yas@batman.edu.tr](mailto:emin.yas@batman.edu.tr); ORCID# 0000-0001-6813-1160; <https://doi.org/10.47777/cankujhss.1570045>

**CUJHSS** (e-ISSN 3062-0112) Published by Çankaya University. © 2024 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

successful. Even though it seems reasonable, the evidence from the works written until now gives us the clue that the phenomenon is multifaceted. It would be better if there were a distinction between ultimate attainment and the rate of acquisition. The issue with the ultimate attainment is perhaps the most controversial and the most fascinating dispute in theory.

The more we know about the age factor (i.e., the internal factor), the more beneficial it will be to us. Because the teaching of foreign languages can be organized accordingly, curriculum arrangements can be shaped according to these research results. It should also be noted that in this age of increasing migration between countries, the need and amount of learning and teaching of foreign languages are increasing daily.

It must be said that the discussions on learning two languages and the age factor have always been interesting points in linguistics. We satisfied our curiosity regarding the point mentioned in this study. Unfortunately, in the literature we scanned, we realized that almost all of the scientific studies covered the childhood-adolescence periods and that very little was said about the acquisition of two languages by middle-aged or older people. It should also be said that the acquisition of two or more languages in middle and older ages is crucial in the educational realm and should be studied.

Although it is perhaps the most widely observed language acquisition phenomenon among people, the success of children in acquiring a second language with respect to that of adults is paradoxically still hotly debated, circa a half-century after the work of Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which is an exceedingly debated substance between specialists of a significant number of scientific areas such as linguistics, biology, psychology, cognitive psychology, second language acquisition, first language acquisition, sociolinguistics together with bi-multilingualism.

The following two questions give the central theme pertaining to age (i.e. maturation) as a fundamental problem in a second language's acquisition, which is a broad outline consideration realized that has not been until now.

Question 1: Are adults learning a second language capable of reaching a proficiency level in this language similar to native speakers?

Question 2: Do second language beginners in childhood attain a higher position of competence than adult beginners learning a second language do?

An important aspect of research to date has been the landscape of the linguistic domain involved. For example, while researchers have predominantly investigated "competence" regarding articulation, be it accent or be grammar, other indispensable characteristics of competence that are essential for being well understood exist, such as lexical knowledge (as well as formulaic orders) and pragmatic capability which are necessary to practice language in a socio-linguistically suitable way. We observed that both have received little research attention.

We see that the linguistic studies carried out for the age research talk about two specific human experiments (i.e. Genie and Victor), which are well-known in the field. It should be pointed out that not only the idea of the case of Genie in connection with language development but also that of Victor (Lane, 1976) is mentioned the most in the literature. Both, which have given evidence for the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), hold that when the first language development does not begin during the critical period/sensitive time, it will not occur at all. The criticisms raised to the mentioned cases are that the evidence is challenging to comment on, information about them is insufficient, the amount of exposure to language experienced is not accurate, and the status of their mental health is not fully known.

It is necessary to repeat here that plenty of academic examinations have been done to find out the reasons why some second language learners are more successful than other learners. Various

factors influencing second language acquisition have been studied extensively in linguistics. However, it seems that there is no certainty that age only plays a role in native-like proficiency or optimal success in second language learning, even though age, along with other internal factors, has been well-researched and much-reasoned discussion has taken place. (For more reading, see Cook and Singleton 2014; Herschensohn 2007). In addition to CPH, the main topic i.e. individual differences in second language learners will be discussed, with a particular focus on age and second language acquisition. This will be followed by the discussion and conclusion section.

### **Individual Difference in Learners**

One aspect acknowledged by the discipline of Second Language Acquisition as an academic branch is that there are individual differences when language acquisition occurs. The mentioned phenomenon occurs as a result of the psychological dimension of difference. We can say that there are a great number of miscellaneous dimensions playing a role in language acquisition. The so-called affective factors (Ellis, 2023), like the personality of individuals, can have an impact on the amount of anxiety the learners experience and the willingness whether they can have the power to come face to face with the risks during learning and employing a second language. Almost all people learning a second language use different strategies in producing their speech, in prosody or punctuation. It is possible to list the significant reasons why there are differences in the acquisition of a language between learners as follows: Language aptitude, gender, motivation, personality, cognitive style, learning strategies, and age. When the subject is handled, specific consideration will be given to the issue of age.

Actually, cognitive style, personality and learning strategy are narrowly interconnected and interact with each other. The pivotal question that arises is how individual differences function and to what extent they are effective. Despite the absence of a definitive answer within the scientific community, a number of compelling arguments will be presented in this regard.

The argument that language aptitude is part of general abilities and, at the same time, partly separate from them is a point made in linguistics. The supposition that an ability exists (particularly in language learning) has been widely believed for a long time. The same idea must have motivated Carroll (1965) to write his work to classify innumerable constituents of language aptitude. The four important components that are frequently found in the linguistic literature are "Grammatical sensitivity, Inductive language learning ability, Phonemic coding ability, and Associative memory capacity." We are going to discuss them briefly because they are essential for understanding language acquisition.

**Grammatical sensitivity:** It is concerned with central processing. It means that the capability to diagnose the grammatical functions of words inside sentences, identifying a sentence's subject and object, can be provided as a good instance.

**Inductive language learning ability:** It is also concerned with central processing, i.e., recognizing whether arrangements of matching and affiliations exist between form and meaning. We can give the following example: whether the learners have the capacity to spot that in English, the preposition "to" can indicate direction and that the preposition "at" location. We can talk about some other crucial abilities encapsulating the features below: Explaining further processing of the segmented auditory input by the brain with the aim to make generalizations, to know the grammatical functions belonging to elements and articulate rules.

**Phonemic coding ability:** This feature is the aptitude to operate on the input of auditory into sections which can be put in storage and re-claimed without any kind of effort. It means the ability to detect the sounds of a foreign language with the intention of the fact that these can be recalled at a specific time later. We see this skill mentioned is connected to the capacity to handle sound-

signs connections, e.g., to ascertain the sound for which “th” stands.

**Associative memory capacity:** The capacity to form and retain associations between stimuli is crucial for vocabulary acquisition. This process is integral to the storage, recall, and utilization of linguistic items. The extent of an individual's associative memory capacity determines the selection of appropriate elements from the stored second language repertoire, which in turn influences the speaker's fluency.

In his 1998 review of inquiry in this area, Skehan largely supports the above-mentioned supposition. However, he also states that there is the possibility that a learner's ability may show a discrepancy depending on specific factors that can play a role. For instance, a learner who demonstrates grammatical sensitivity at a high grade may exhibit poor associative memory or vice versa. It should be stated that it is unnecessary to possess innate talent in all factors to succeed in second language learning. Skehan (1998, p. 209) reports: “Some proficient learners achieve success as a result of their linguistic-analytic abilities, while others do so due to their memory ability. I additionally posit that language-learning aptitude is not completely separate from general cognitive abilities, as reflected in intelligence tests. However, it is not identical to these abilities either.”

It is necessary to point out that the results demonstrate that ability is a significant predictor of success, which is drawn to be a discrepancy in second language learning not only in naturalistic circumstances but also in official classroom surroundings. We should emphasize that it is, however, not an absolutely deterministic phenomenon and is but one of some causes that may affect eventual second language ability.

Next, we want to express “learning strategies,” which are used to describe the approaches and techniques that learners employ with the purpose of simplifying the learning of a language. The ease with which a language can be learned depends on these strategies' effectiveness. Consequently, the main objective of the learner is to detect and utilize efficacious strategies, thereby ensuring success in their linguistic pursuits.

There are miscellaneous strategies used by the learners, some of which have also been recognized by Ellis (2003, p. 77). Cognitive strategies are defined as those processes contained in the analysis, synthesis, or transformation of materials being learned. To illuminate that, an example can be “recombination”, which contains the construction of an expressive sentence by recombining known components of the second language in a novel manner. He says: “Metacognitive strategies are those involved in the processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning.” An example of that can be “selective attention,” whereby learners learning a language make a deliberate judgement by focusing their attention on particular elements of the input. The last category mentioned is social/affective strategies, which encompass the ways in which learners decide to interact with other speakers. An example can be “questioning for clarification.” It encompasses requesting a reiteration, a restatement, or an instance.

It should be said that this way of learning is important. Because the investigation of learning strategies may prove beneficial for those engaged in the arena of language instruction, i.e. if learning strategies that are crucial for learning can be identified, it may be possible to implement a training programme for students to enable them to use them.

Motivation plays an essential role in determining the extent of effort that language learners of a second language invest in at altered phases of progression. The term “motivation” is defined in many different ways, but it is habitually imagined as a construct incorporating a minimum constituent. Some prominent scholars, such as Oxford and Ehmans (1993) and Dörnyei (2001), handled this. They delineate it as a “noteworthy aim or requirement, a wish to achieve the goal,

the insight that second language learners are relevant to accomplishing the goal of meeting the necessity, a confidence in the possible attainment or failure of second language's learning, the worth of probable consequences or rewards to be received."

On the other hand, the two most commonly recognized categories of motivation are integrative and instrumental (Skehan, 1989). We should give some brief information about both terms. Integrative motivation can be defined as the following: It is grounded on an interest which is or will be displayed while learning a second language occurs due to a wish to learn about or associate with the individuals in the community who practise it (if necessary to give an instance: romantic reasons), or due to a goal to join in or fit in the second language speech community where it is utilized; whatever the circumstance may be, it can be said that sentimental or affective factors are central point. From the other point of view, the following term can be demarcated so: Instrumental motivation is concerned with the perception shown for the practical worth designed for learning the second language, such as augmenting one's employability or business prospects. Likewise, the motivation to learn a language may be driven by some other influences, including the desire to gain opportunities, boost one's prestige and power, get into academic and technical information, or simply pass a lesson exam in the school he is going to.

Personality plays a noteworthy role in second language acquisition. Some key facts can be given: Extroversion vs. Introversion discussion is that extroverted learners tend to be more eager to communicate and take risks, which can lead to more practice and faster language gaining. We should speak of an important point about introverted learners; they are more cautious and less likely to speak up, and this can decelerate their advancement in language acquisition. Again, anxiety is one of the most investigated components of personality traits (Bartol, 1995). High levels of anxiety can hinder language acquisition in the manner that it induces stress and plummets the capability to process and produce a language that is being learned or is on the way to being learned.

Self-esteem is also a feature of personality. Learners with higher self-esteem are more likely to take risks and participate in communication, which is fundamental for language exercise. One of the other components of personality is empathy. Empathetic learners might be better at understanding and mimicking the social and cultural degrees of the language, which can boost their communicative competence. In essence, the diagnosis and making a speech about differences in learners regarding personality can facilitate the development of language learning approaches that are optimized for the individual learner. To examine and read wide-ranging overviews of enquiry pertaining to aptitude, motivation, cognitive style, personality, and learning strategies, one can read some important works written by scholars such as Dörnyei (2005, 2006), Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) and Granena and Long (2013).

The age factor, which is scrutinized within the framework of personal differences (sometimes of internal factors), always appears before us and is often treated under the title of Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). It would be useful to address the questions of what CPH really is, how it relates to age, and what its characteristics are.

### **Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)**

This hypothesis was first put forward by Penfield and Roberts (1959), who argued that a phase exists. The spoken period is characteristically defined as the age up to the beginning of the teenage years. In this period, language learners are able to easily and implicitly acquire a second language and succeed in native speaker proficiency. However, when this phase finishes, second language acquisition becomes more difficult and is hardly ever wholly successful. We should talk about the evidence circulating in the linguistic field. Lenneberg (1967) reported on a study showing that infants had language difficulties after right hemispheric injury, but adults had no such difficulties. Conversely, adults who underwent left hemisphere surgery experienced almost complete

language loss, whereas children did not. After such operations, the adults exhibited long-lasting language impairment, but the children quickly regained full control of their language. Lenneberg concluded that language's biological foundation differs between children and adults.

Lenneberg believed that the human capability to acquire language is restricted by a critical period from the age of two until puberty, which coincides with lateralization - the specialization of the dominant brain hemisphere for language. It is compulsory to say that a wide range of evidence indicating alterations in the brain that were taking place during this phase was offered. However, his assertion that lateralization finishes in adolescence has been seriously undercut by means of studies carried out afterwards reinterpreting the facts in question as demonstrating that the process is complete in early childhood (Kinsbourne and Hiscock, 1977; Krashen, 1973). Furthermore, the part of Lenneberg's argument that concerned second language learning, that the claim that post-pubertal second language learning is "laborious" and that foreign accent learning is "difficult" (Lenneberg, 1967, p. 176), was questionable in academic terms.

Some situations called unfortunate children supported Lenneberg with respect to the views he reported in the field. Throughout their childhood, such children have been deprived of the opportunity to hear and speak a language. A study of Genie was reported by Curtiss (1977). According to Curtiss, she was set aside in virtual isolation for most of her life. When discovered at the age of thirteen, she did not have speech. Later, Genie could successfully learn English to a definite extent, particularly with vocabulary, but she did not accomplish full grammatical ability. She was also struggling to engage in normal social interaction. Curtiss proposed that her limited grammatical development was due to the fact that she had passed the critical period, which was crucial for language acquisition. However, some counterarguments appeared, suggesting (Rymer, 1993) that it may have been caused by the disorder in feeling Genie lived as a child, which continued to manifest as an adult. This could be an explanation for her problems with social interaction, which in turn may have been a limitation on the enlargement of her grammatical competence.

It must be explained that the ending time of the critical period is disputable; in other words, there is no clear consensus on where the critical period for language learning comes to an end. Looking at the written literature displaying this problem, we can see that the claims range from the time close to birth to the late teenage years. We can also understand that if there is a critical period, there is a discrepancy in terms of which aspect of the language is being studied. For example, Granena and Long (2012) offer data to propose that the end of prospect in language acquisition is reached first for second language phonological skills, possibly at age 4, then for vocabulary and collocations, and then for grammar, by the mid-teens.

### **The Role of Age**

First, we want to emphasize that the role of age as an internal factor, which is well-researched and cited in the literature, is perhaps the most important aspect of learner differences in second language acquisition. In addition to internal factors, external factors such as micro (for instance, interaction) and macro (for instance, economic, political) sociological aspects are important to us because they give us clues about how language(s) are acquired in the outside world.

It should be said that, on the one hand, it is widely believed that children are more successful second language learners than adults, but on the other hand, the evidence for this is truthfully mixed, which may be unexpected for many. One reason for the seeming inconsistency in inquiry findings is that some studies describe relative "success" in terms of initial learning rate (where, in contrast to popular belief, older learners have an advantage), while other studies describe it in terms of ultimate attainment (where learners introduced to the second language during the childhood do look like to have an advantage). Furthermore, some studies describe "success" with

regard to how close a learner's articulation is to that of a native speaker, others with regard to how close a learner comes to native grammatical judgments, and still others with regard to fluency or functional capability. So, it is very significant to keep the criteria for evaluation noticeably in mind when making judgments about disagreeing claims.

Whether and how age influences second language production has been an important topic in second language acquisition for several decades, and several recent publications have provided reviews from different perspectives (e.g. Birdsong, 1999; Scovel, 2000; Singleton, 2001).

Two important scholars have reported some of the benefits for both younger and older learners circulated in the literature. These are M. S. Troike and K. Barto (2020, 91). They give them as:

#### Younger advantage

- Brain plasticity
- Not analytical
- Fewer inhibitions (usually)
- Weaker group identity
- Simplified input is more likely

#### Older advantage

- Learning capacity
- Analytic ability
- Pragmatic skills
- Greater knowledge of LI
- Real-world knowledge.

It is worth pointing out once again that many linguists and psychologists agree that there is a critical period in the acquisition of a first language. According to them, children only have a limited number of years in which ordinary acquisition is potential. In addition, changes in physiological situations cause the brain to lose its plasticity or ability to take on the new functions which language learning requires. These scholars point out that persons who, for whatever cause, lack the linguistic input required to activate the acquisition of a first language for the critical period will never learn a language in the normal way.

As we dwelt on earlier, the case of the abused experimental girl (kept isolated from all language input and interaction until she became thirteen years old) is documented and well-known. We should take it for granted that it is rarely cited as evidence. That means that, despite years of intensive efforts at remediation, Genie never developed linguistic knowledge and skills for her first language (English), which were comparable to those of learners who start acquisition in early childhood (Curtiss, 1977).

## **Discussion**

Many linguistic circles discuss the age-related consolidation of bilinguals' first language acquisition or other cognitive characteristics of bilingualism. However, it should be stressed that some of these are age-dependent, while others are age-independent. We have talked a lot about the pros and cons of a CPH. To return to the subject, the following points should be made.

We want to note that the theoretical significance of the CPH, which has a direct connection with age disputation, is its support for Chomsky's (1965) understanding of language. He claimed that children are endowed with an apparatus through which they acquire a language. He maintained that children are equipped with a language acquisition device that is an innate, biological ability to learn language, unlike other cognitive abilities. This device was subject to some criticisms. It, in Chomsky's view, comprises knowledge of the linguistic universals that lie beneath the grammatical rules of every language, and it is because children have access to these universals that they are

capable of mastering the grammar of their mother tongue without challenges.

It is better to state that individual differences cannot show merely a part of the whole picture of internal factors ascribed to second language acquisition. In the end, it is better when a comprehensive clarification of age effects on second language acquisition is taken into account, which contains not only the numerous evaluative criteria (Herschensohn, 2007) of “success” mentioned but also the system of language which the individuals are learning, further the phase of second language progress thoughts, the role of both natural (i.e. innate) and environmental predispositions, and the complexity of input and differences in learners are also crucial for that.

We consider the opinions of two scientists to be important. There are Seliger (1978) and Long (1990). They argued that there are a number of periods that enforce constraints on different facets of language. It was pointed out that, for example, different periods have to do with the acquisition of phonology as opposed to the acquisition of syntax. At the same time, they recommended that these time limits should not be absolute. According to their views, it is simply the case that second language acquisition is more probable to be complete, provided that it begins in childhood than if it begins later.

It is important to convey a point that Krashen (Youtube: A historic webinar with Chomsky and Krashen in 2021: Modern Linguistics moderated by Nabil Belmekki) who is an expert of the field language acquisition expressed about the ultimate success in different areas of the language. There, he repeatedly touched on and emphasized it three years ago. This is his explanation about the pronunciation of second language learners who cannot reach the final conclusion, in other words, who cannot reach the mother tongue level. He states that the reason why second language learners cannot reach the level of the mother tongue is because they do not want to enter the opposite language community voluntarily. He says that because the people in question are unwilling to become club members, their pronunciation does not reach the level of native pronunciation. As stated, this is a voluntary and conscious form of linguistic behaviour.

The importance of phonetics in a language is once again brought to light. Children have the capacity to learn the pronunciation of several languages at the same time, and they do. In fact, it is reported that children learn the pronunciation of these languages much faster and at a much more perfect level (Baker, 2015). However, it is said that children often struggle with pronunciation difficulties after the critical period. Yaş (2019) gives a striking explanation and a quote in his study.

For example, in English, the rounded “r,” the guttural “th,” and nasal sounds are very difficult or even impossible to learn and pronounce. In his statements on this subject, Baker adds:

Usually their pronunciation carries the ring of the first language. Compare mainland Europeans, Africans, Arabs and Asians who have learned to speak English fluently. Rarely do they pronounce English like a North American or British person. Their first language's sound and pronunciation affect how the English is intonated. Young children are more likely to pick up the appropriate pronunciation of their two languages than those who later learn a second language. (2007, p. 32)

Let's try to answer the two questions we have raised before: “Can second language adult learners achieve native-like competence in a second language?” and “Do learners who begin to learn a second language at the time of childhood attain a higher level of proficiency in the second language than do learners who start to learn as adults?” It must be said that some studies have made known that late learners of a second language do not become native-like speakers, while other studies have proposed that second language learners who began learning after adolescence were able to attain native speaker proficiency. As Ellis (2015) reported, Bongaerts (1999) used the ratings of native speakers to scrutinize if nine post-adolescent Dutch learners of a second language, French,



had reached an accent at the level where a native speaker is.

The recordings of their speech were mixed with the recordings of 18 Dutch learners of French at a lower level of proficiency and with nine native speakers. Three of the advanced students were able to pass for native speakers. Bongaert argues that a high level of motivation in combination with pronunciation exercise qualified the mentioned capable learners to accomplish the level of native speakers. It is indispensable to show that there are, as a minimum, certain differences between highly successful late learners and native speakers in order to counter Bongaert's claim.

Evidence for this was found by Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2009). They stated that none of the learners beginning late, native-like learners in their scrutiny scored in the same range as native speakers on all ten measures they used, but on only some of them, which are pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. In contrast, some of the early learners younger than 12 years old performed at the same level as the native speakers. Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003, p. 580) maintained: "The subtle differences between near-native and native proficiency that we found lend backing to the CPH; on the other hand, we also noted that the mentioned differences are probable to be very small in all facets of the lives of second language learners."

When the differences between the acquisition of a second language that begins in childhood and the acquisition of two languages that begins in adulthood are considered, it is said that children show better and better success, while adults acquire a second language faster. It should also be emphasized that when considering the long years of work, it would not be wrong to state that the CPH idea cannot be denied.

Some prominent researchers, such as Abrahamsson, Hyltenstam, and Bylund (2018), have long conducted significant studies on age influence and one/two language acquisition. They provided some results from their research, stating that age onset does not reveal experimental, sociological, or psychological variables. They admit that they could not show a linear function between the starting age and the final achievement of bilingual acquisition of children. This linear function does not have a gradual decline over a supposedly critical cut-off age.

They state that they have failed to identify a single adult learner with second language proficiency that is indistinct from that of native speakers. They pointed out that their results do not suggest that bilingualism rather than late language exposure is preventing second language learners from achieving fully native-like proficiency or that monolingualism is an advantageous learning circumstance.

It should be pointed out that although many of the findings from the research carried out so far are entirely consistent with what would be predicted by the CPH, the mere conclusion that can be drawn from the normally disseminated samples of learners is that native-like final attainment is an exceedingly uncommon phenomenon among the adults learning a second language. The opposite statement is also true if it is said that all late learners are non-native speakers.

## **Conclusion**

The reason why some second language learners are more successful than others is often discussed in the linguistic field. We know that there are many differences between learners. Age, which is one of them, is an important one. In particular, the influence of age on starting a second language and ultimate success is hotly debated. In their studies, the scholars recurrently attained measures of two different variables: starting age and second language proficiency, i.e., ultimate attainment.

Symptomatically, no study has testified to the absence of a relationship between the age of starting and final attainment. Although the coefficients of correlation differ across research, it is well acknowledged that the age of starting seems to be the independent variable that best explicates the data. It must be given that it normally accounts for about 30% of the variance in final second

language grammar achievement and about 50% in pronunciation, as reported by Long (2013, p. 7).

Although the clearly ascertained age boundaries for attaining native proficiency in a second language do not exist, the maturation period, i.e., the age at which proficiency begins, has been shown to correlate with ultimate proficiency (the first question which is raised in the introduction). We should emphasize that it is only when learners possess sufficient exposure to the aimed language that the benefits of starting young for ultimate attainment are realized. It seems like it gives us a reason for the fact that there are doubts about the importance of beginning to learn a foreign language in a classroom milieu at an early age.

One conclusion drawn from the inquiries is that, with the exception of pronunciation, older learners acquire a second language more quickly than younger learners in the primary phases. This may be because older students use more conscious learning strategies while younger students use more tacit learning strategies.

On the other hand, it is uncertain whether or not age, in other words, maturation times, has an impact on the process of second language acquisition. Certain studies have made known that the age of entry does not have an influence on the order and sequence of acquisition. However, some other studies propose that the analytical skills of older learners do have an effect on how they acquire certain grammatical features. Put differently, while learners who begin to learn as adults can achieve a high level of proficiency in a second language, there is increasing evidence that they may fall short of the full range of competence similar to their native language. But this may simply reveal the fact that the “multilingualism” of a bilingual is qualitatively different from that of a monolingual.

Critical, sometimes called sensitive period, phases were identified in different aspects of the language, beginning with phonology, then vocabulary and collocations, and termination with grammar. In the literature, different estimates have been proposed for native-speaking adult learners.

Perhaps the most cited is that of Selinker (1972, p. 212), who found that only 5 per cent of second language learners reached the final level. Nevertheless, the experimental studies differ in their reports, ranging from a relatively high number of occurrences, between 10 and 20 per cent, to no occurrences at all. It seems significant to note that these results are linked to the type of learners studied, the sort of linguistic constructions analyzed and even the sort of techniques used or the type of definition advocated.

One possible explanation for the idea that younger is better is that younger learners are better suited to be involved in inherent learning, and older learners are more reliant on non-inherent learning (i.e., implicit vs. explicit learning or conscious vs. unconscious learning). Conscious learning is a slow process that requires a massive amount of exposure to the second language. Therefore, there is no instantaneous benefit to be gained for younger learners. Truthfully, explicit learning may lead to more immediate success.

We should repeatedly point out that, perhaps different learning mechanisms, e.g. implicit-procedural or others, are used by children and adults to develop language.

Future research should include measures of second language skills in all modes/domains of language, such as phonetics, syntax, lexis, pragmatics, phonology, and morphology, with other social and psychological variables, etc., in both production and perceptual realms. It is better to select highly advanced participants for studies, especially those involving only participants whom native speakers consider to be potentially native-like. It becomes important to use tools that are sensitive enough to distinguish between near-native and native-like proficiency, along with

between different amounts of near-native proficiency.

Finally, far-reaching studies involving different kinds of monolingual and bilingual first and second language speakers encapsulating different facets of linguistic knowledge are unquestionably needed to clarify these issues.

## References

- Abrahamsson, N., Hyltenstam, K., & Bylund E., (2018). Age effects on language acquisition, retention and loss. Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, C. (2007). A parents' and teachers' guide to bilingualism. Multilingual.
- Birdsong, D. (ed.) (1999). Second language acquisition: The critical period hypothesis. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. In *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*.
- Bongaerts, T. (1999). "Ultimate attainment in L2 pronunciation: The case of very advanced late L2 learners." In D. Birdsong (ed.) *Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 133-159.
- Carroll, J. B. (1965). The prediction of success in intensive foreign language training. In R. Glaser (ed.), *Training, Research and Education* (pp. 87-136). Wiley.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspect of theory and syntax*. MIT Press.
- Cook, V., & Singleton, D. (2014). Key topics in second language acquisition. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783091812>
- Curtiss, S. (1977). *Genie: A psycholinguistic study of a modern-day "Wild Child."* Academic Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). New themes and approaches in second language motivation research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21: pp. 43-59.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). The psychology of the language learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. In *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ryan, S. (2015) *The Psychology of the language learner revisited*. Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Granena, G., & Long, M. H. (2013). *Sensitive periods, language aptitude, and ultimate L2 attainment*. John Benjamins.
- Granena, G., & Long, M. H. (2012). Age of onset, length of residence, language aptitude, and ultimate L2 attainment in three linguistic domains. *Second Language Research*, 29(3), pp. 311- 343.
- Harley, B. (1986). *Age and second language acquisition*. Multilingual Matters.
- Herschensohn, J. (2000). *The second time around: Minimalism and L2 acquisition*. John Benjamins.
- Herschensohn, J. (2007). *Language development and age*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511486487>
- Hyltenstam, K., & Abrahamsson, N. (2003a). Age of onset and ultimate attainment in near-native speakers of Swedish. In Fraurud, K. and Hyltenstam, K. (eds), *Multilingualism in Global and Local Perspectives: Papers from the 8th Nordic Conference on Bilingualism*, November 1-3, 2001. Stockholm University, pp. 319-340. <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-34735>
- Hyltenstam, K., & Abrahamsson, N. (2003b). Maturational constraints in SLA. In: Doughty, C. and

- Long, M. H. (eds), *The handbook of second language acquisition*. Blackwell. pp. 539-588.
- Hyltenstam K., Bylund E., Abrahamsson N., & Park, H. S. (2009). Dominant language replacement: The case of international adoptees. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 12, 121-140. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728908004008>.
- Krashen, S. (1973). Lateralization, language learning and the critical period: Some new evidence. *Language Learning* 23, 63-74.
- Kinsbourne, M., & Hiscock, M. (1977). Does cerebral dominance develop? In Segalowitz, S. and Gruber, F. (eds) *Language development and neurological theory*, pp. 171-91. Academic P.
- Lane, H. (1976). *The wild Boy of Aveyron*. Harvard University Press.
- Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. Wiley.
- Long, M. H. (1990). Maturation constraints on language development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 12. pp. 251-85.
- Long, M. H. (2013). Maturation constraints on child and adult SLA. *Language Learning & Language Teaching*, 3-42. <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.35.01lon>
- Penfield, W., & Roberts, L. (1959). *Speech and brain mechanisms*. Princeton University Press.
- Rymer, R. (1993). *Genie: An abused child's flight from silence*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Oxford, R. L., & Ehrman, M. (1993). Second language research on individual differences. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), pp. 188-205.
- Seliger, H. (1978). Implications of a multiple critical period hypothesis for second language learning. In Ritchie, W. (ed.), *Second Language Research: Issues and Implications* (pp. 11-19). Academic Press.
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10, pp.209-231. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209>
- Scovel, T. (1982). Individual Differences and Universals in Language Learning Aptitude. In Karl C. Diller (ed.), Rowley, MA.: Newbury House, 1981. pp. 218. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 5(1), 120-125. doi:10.1017/S0272263100004691
- Scovel, T. (2000). A critical review of the Critical Period Hypothesis. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 20, pp.213-223.
- Singleton, D. (2001). Age and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, pp.77-89.
- Singleton, D., & Lengyel, Z. (eds) (1995). *The age factor in second language acquisition*. Multilingual Matters.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Skehan, P. (1989). Individual differences in second language learning. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 12(4), pp. 511-515.
- Troike, M. S., & Barto, K. (2020). *Introducing second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Yaş, E. (2019). Can becoming bilingualism in the childhood and becoming bilingual later be parallel? *Journal of Current Debates in Social Sciences*, 2(2), pp. 243-249.
- Youtube: [A Historic webinar with Chomsky and Krashen: Modern Linguistics - YouTube](#)

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s)