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AGE AND THE SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract

The article traces the age influence to the second language acquisition. Language is a cognition that truly makes us human. Language is remarkable phenomenon. The feature which makes the language extremely marvelous is, that foundation of evidence for the mastery of this complex skill in increasingly younger children.

Key words: makes, children, language, foundation, marvelous.

It is fact that, the native language acquisition happens automatically during the child's growing up period. But the point which is ought to be highlighted is the second language acquisition. It is commonly known that children with regular faculties and given normal circumstances easily master their native language. However, another language acquisition is not always mastered easily, there are numerous researches and arguments which states about the age influence to the second language acquisition.

The following linguists and psychologists stated different opinions about it. For example, Noam Chomsky [1,1] emphasized the essential role of biological contribution, as opposed to the child's social life and culture experience, appear to play in level 1 development. The only explanation possible is that children are pre-programmed to acquire language at a definite point in their development. Lenneberg's critical period hypothesis [2,3] suggests that there is a biological determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily. But beyond this time a language is more difficult to acquire. According to Lenneberg, bilingual language acquisition can only happen during the critical period (age 2 to puberty) which means that the early you start the better you get, moreover it is said that babies' brains are the best learning machines ever created, and that infants' learning is time-sensitive. Their brains will never be better at learning a second language than they are between 0 and 3 years of age.

Controversially, linguists, psychologists and pedagogues have been struggling for years to identify whether it is possible to reach proficiency in learning

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second language during the after puberty period (late second language learning means the period after puberty) First of all adults have an indispensable advantage: cognitive maturity and their experience of the general language system. Through their knowledge of their mother tongues, not only can they achieve more advantageous learning conditions than children, but also they can more easily acquire grammatical rules and syntactic phenomena. Few aspects in first language or second language learning have engendered more controversy than the age factor. The views range from the position that children are in all respects more efficient and effective second language learners than adults to the complete contrary position that adolescent and adults are more efficient and effective second language learners than children.

Adults are quite adept at parsing sentences to determine relational meaning. In fact, studies of adult language comprehension indicate that readers and listeners are so skilled at this process that they typically achieve it in real time, as each word is perceived. By measuring eye fixation and reaction time midsentence, these studies confirm that adults rapidly package incoming words into likely phrases using a variety of probabilistic cues gleaned from the sentence and its referential context Recently, Trueswell and colleagues have examined how this rapid parsing system develops. In a series of studies, eye movements of children age 4 and older were recorded as they heard instructions to move objects about on a table. Children's visual interrogation of the scene during the speech provided a window into the ongoing interpretation process.

Of particular interest was their reaction to ambiguous instructions that required an implicit grammatical choice, e.g., Tap the doll with the stick. Here the phrase with the stick can be linked to the verb Tap, indicating how to do the tapping, or it can be linked to the noun doll, indicating which doll to tap. Adults tend to rely on the referential context when making choices like these, picking the analysis that is most plausible given the current scene. Which analysis did children choose? It depended heavily on the kind of linguistic cues found in the utterance itself. For instance, regardless of how likely the analysis was given the scene, children would interpret with the stick as how to carry out the action when the verb was of the sort like Tap, which tends to mention an instrument as part of its event. In contrast, they would interpret this same phrase as picking out a particular doll when the verb was of the sort that tends not to mention an instrument, e.g., Feel Thus, like the Saffran. infants who used probabilistic cues

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to package syllables into likely words, older children package words into likely phrases using similar distributional evidence regarding these larger elements. Further experience is apparently necessary to detect the contingencies of when phrases are likely in given referential settings. Indeed, Trueswell found that by age 8, children begin parsing ambiguous phrases in a context-contingent manner.

These examples of language learning, processing, and creation represent just a few of the many developments between birth and linguistic maturity. During this period, children discover the raw materials in the sounds (or gestures) of their language, learn how they are assembled into longer strings, and map these combinations onto meaning. These processes unfold simultaneously, requiring children to integrate their capacities as they learn, to crack the code of communication that surrounds them. Despite layers of complexity, each currently beyond the reach of modern computers, young children readily solve the linguistic puzzles facing them, even surpassing their input when it lacks the expected structure.

No less determined, researchers are assembling a variety of methodologies to uncover the mechanisms underlying language acquisition. Months before infants utter their first word, their early language-learning mechanisms can be examined by recording subtle responses to new combinations of sounds. Once children begin to link words together, experiments using real-time measures of language processing can reveal the ways linguistic and nonlinguistic information are integrated during listening. Natural experiments in which children are faced with minimal language exposure can reveal the extent of inborn language-learning capacities and their effect on language creation and change. As these techniques and others probing the child's mind are developed and their findings integrated, they will reveal the child's solution to the puzzle of learning a language.

Although distributional analyses enable children to break into the words and phrases of a language, many higher linguistic functions cannot be acquired with statistics alone. Children must discover the rules that generate an infinite set, with only a finite sample. They evidently possess additional language-learning abilities that enable them to organize their language without explicit guidance These abilities diminish with age and may be biologically based However, scientific efforts to isolate them experimentally encounter a methodological

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complication: given that today's languages were acquired by children in the past, language input to children already includes products of innate biases. It is therefore difficult to determine whether any particular linguistic element observed in a child's language is inborn or derived.

We can break this logical circle by examining those rare situations in which the language environment is incomplete or impoverished. Can children who are deprived of exposure to a rich, complete language nevertheless build a structured native language? The recent situation of deaf children in Nicaragua presents such a case In general, there are two ways in which children may learn a second language: simultaneously or sequentially [3,2].

Simultaneous learners include children under the age of 3 who are exposed to two languages at the same time. These children may include those who are exposed to one language by parents at home and another language by providers in their early childhood program. Simultaneous learners are also young children whose parents each speak separate languages to them at home (e.g., mother speaks Spanish to child, father speaks Chinese to child).

Before 6 months of age, simultaneous learners learn both languages at similar rates and do not prefer one language over the other. This is because they build separate but equally strong language systems in their brains for each of the languages they hear. These separate systems allow children to learn more than one language without becoming confused. In fact, the pathways infants develop in their brains for each of the languages they hear are similar to the single pathway developed by children who are only exposed to English.

At 6 months, children begin to notice differences between languages and may begin to prefer the language they hear more. This means that parents must be careful to provide similar amounts of exposure to both languages; otherwise, children may begin to drop vocabulary of the language to which they are less exposed [4,3].

Such study leads us, for example, to a better understanding of the **significance of errors** in the learning process. Producing them need not be seen as necessarily problematic (in fact, some errors can be evidence of a more advanced linguistic system than the equivalent correct form: for example, learners will usually produce rote-learned formulaic questions such as «Where's X», e.g. «Where's the ball», in which «Where's» is an unanalyzed chunk, before producing the developmentally more advanced 'Where the ball

is», the second stage in the development of the interrogative system before the final stage in which «Where is the ball» is produced correctly; This is often referred to as the «U shape of learning», typical also of L1 learners, by which learners start with the correct rote-learned form, e.g. took, before over-applying the past tense rule and producing talked, prior to learning the exception to the rule and producing took again, creatively rather than rote-learned this time.

Teachers will also be less frustrated, and their learners too, when they become aware that teaching will not cause skilful control of a linguistic structure if it is offered before a learner is developmentally ready to acquire it. Now, of course, if we can speed up progression along the route that research has identified we need to understand how to do so. But understanding this route is inseparably bound up with clarifying the question of rapid and effective teaching.

The robust research findings regarding the systematic of the route followed by L2 learners do not have straightforward implications for language teaching, however. One logical possibility might be that curricula should closely follow developmental routes; this is not sensible however, given (a) the incomplete nature of our knowledge of these routes, (b) the fact that classrooms are typically made up of learners who are not neatly located at a single developmental stage, and (c) the fact that developmental stages typically contain non-target forms. (For example, typical stages in the acquisition of negation will be:

1. «No want pudding»;
2. «Me no want pudding»
3. «I don't want pudding», with forms 1 and 2 representing normal developmental stages, therefore to be expected in early L2 productions, but which will not be taught). Other possibilities are that curricula should be recursive with inbuilt redundancy, and that teachers should not expect immediate accuracy when teaching a new structure, or that they should give up on closely prescribed grammar curricula and opt instead for functional and or task-based syllabus models. Many teachers/language educators have actively welcomed the role of 'facilitator' rather than 'shaper' of development, implied by such models.

There are many cognitive benefits for young children who are simultaneously exposed to more than one language. For example, they have greater neural activity and denser tissue in the areas of the brain related to memory, attention,

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and language than monolingual learners. These indicators are associated with long-term positive cognitive outcomes for children [5,3].

Sequential learners include children who have become familiar with one language, but are then introduced or required to learn a second language. The classic example of sequential learning is when a non-English speaking child enters an English-dominant classroom.

The cognitive and information processing models generally, which originate from psychology (and neurolinguistics), claim, on the other hand, that language learning is no different from other types of learning, and is the result of the human brain building up networks of associations on the basis of input. Information processing models see learning as the shift from controlled processes (dealt with in the short term or working memory and under attentional control) to automatised processes stored in the long term memory (retrieved quickly and effortlessly). Through this process, what starts as declarative knowledge (knowing 'that') becomes procedural knowledge (knowing 'how') which becomes automatic through repeated practice. Recently, connectionist models have further assumed that all learning takes place through the building of patterns which become strengthened through practice. Computer models of such processes have had some success in replicating the L1 and L2 acquisition of some linguistic patterns (e.g. past tense, gender; The view of language encapsulated within **connectionism**, as this view of cognition is called, is fundamentally different from linguistic models, where language is seen as a system of rules rather than as patterned behavior.

In both the UG and cognitive models, the focus is on explaining learner-internal mechanisms, and how they interact with the input in order to give rise to learning. The emphasis on the role played by the input however, varies, with the UG approach assuming that as long as input is present learning will take place, and the other models placing a larger burden on how the input is decoded by learners, paying particular attention to concepts such as noticing or attention. Unlike simultaneous language learning, sequential learning of languages can occur at any age and can be influenced by factors like the child's temperament or motivation. To conclude, the question regarding the potential impact of bilingualism on children's development has always been important, but has increasingly emerged as a crucial concern for modern societies. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand the impact of these language backgrounds on

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children's cognitive and educational futures. It is very important for educators, biologists, computer scientists, speech and hearing scientists, psychologists, and linguists to work together to understand how children's critical "Windows of opportunity" for learning work, what triggers their inception, and how learning can be encouraged once the optimal period for learning has passed. The ultimate goal is to alter the trajectories of learning to maximize language and literacy skills in all children.

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