

Assignment 1

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A Review for “*Factors Affecting Second Language Learning*”

Written by Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada

Second language (L2) learning research is a diverse and complex field concerning linguistics, biology, psychology, education, sociology, etc. A lot of research has been done on the factors related to second language learning since at least the Greeks. But the individual learner variables are complex and dependent on one another; the research results on the same factor might be often incompatible with each other. Thus it is still hard to make precise predictions about how a single factor affects an individual's success in second language learning.

1. An Overview of the Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

There are many factors affecting second language learning, such as learners' intelligence, aptitude, personality, motivation and attitude, preferences, beliefs, age of acquisition, and so on. Many scholars around the world have shown great interest and done kinds of studies in this research field.

Intelligence There are multiple types of intelligence including linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, etc. Many scholars have a lot of research in the relation between intelligence in broad sense and second language learning via different IQ (Intelligence Quotient) tests. Some studies suggest that intelligence in abroad sense is more closely related to certain language abilities than others. Anyway, intelligence is complex and an individual has different kinds of strengths and talents. A person who is strong in

academic performance doesn't necessarily become a proficient second language learner. Many people who are weak in academic performance have achieved considerable success in second language learning. Whereas, what should be pointed out is that an individual with high linguistic intelligence is distinguished in speaking, vocabulary using, writing, presentations and solving word problems.

As far as second language teaching and learning is concerned, teachers could make less effort on students with high traditionally measured IQ scores in language analysis and rule learning because they are often outstanding in these aspects.

Aptitude Aptitude usually means the ability to learn a second language in an academic classroom and is composed of different types of abilities: the abilities to identify and memorize new sounds, words, to understand the function of words and figure out grammatical rules (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). Some people have more aptitude than others. **Background reading** not be strong in all of the components. An individual may be strong in grammatical rules but average in other components.

The inspiration that a second language teacher could get is that the aptitude profile will help teachers to design program activities for different students in second language learning classrooms.

Personality Some scholars are interested in the relationship between personality and language learning. Some tend to believe that extroversion will play an active role in language learning but it turns out that many successful language learners don't get high scores on measures of extroversion. On the other hand, some suggest that inhibition may be negative in learning a second language. **Critical thinking** but experience tells us that many inhibited people are successful learners. In general, there is not a defined relationship between personality and second language learning.

Motivation and attitudes It is widely accepted that both integrative and instrumental motivation and attitudes will do good to active second language learning. Motivation and attitude works in two-way directions. High motivation is one of the many factors to enhance successful language learning and in reverse successful language learning together with other factors may increase motivation to learn.

Inspired by the close relationship between motivation and language learning, many teachers make use of motivation. **Criticality** in their pedagogical practices. However, the problem how motivation is exactly related to learning is an area that needs further study.

Learner preference and beliefs Individuals have different learning styles in which they learn things including languages; language learners often know and believe the best way for them to receive language instruction on the basis of their language learning experience.

Although little research shows there is relation between learning styles and success in learning languages and little research was done in the area of learner beliefs, second language teachers could adopt according teaching strategies in the classroom based on different learner preferences and learner beliefs, such as dividing the whole class into different learning groups and providing different instruction methods.

2. The Factor of Age in Second Language Learning

The factor of age is easier to define and measure than other factors mentioned above and it draws the most attention of scholars and is always in hot debate. There are two different or opposite attitudes toward the best age at which an individual starts to learn a second language. The first school which is typically represented by Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) holds the opinion that a person needs to acquire a second language before puberty or even earlier if they want to achieve native-like language proficiency. The other school suggests that at each individual could be successful in second language learning at any age in contexts where they can make use of the language on a daily basis in social, personal, professional, or academic interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2000).

Anyway, the aim to argue the best age of second language learning is to help individuals develop their second language proficiency so as to achieve their specific goals in life with the aid of the second language. Actually the ideal age when second language instruction starts very much needs to take into account the goals that a person learns a second language.

If the goal of learning a second language is to master it as proficiently as a native speaker or to be a bilingual, the suggestion is the earlier the better. First, considerable studies on second language learning have been done from the perspective of neurobiology. The Critical Period Hypothesis puts forward that human beings are predisposed for success in language learning only within a certain period of time in their development, after which time language learning may not be based on the innate biological structures (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). In other words, an individual is only capable of learning language at the peak time between the age of two years and the early teens (Cook, 2008). CPH is closely related to a person's plasticity which is a property of the neuro-cognitive mechanisms and systems that enable and constrain second language learning. Plasticity declines over age until it loses completely at the end of the critical period. Recent research shows that the neurobiological culprit is maturationally regulated myelination in the circuitry that is necessary in language learning and will be dismantled after CPH. Myelination insulates axons for efficient transmission of electrical impulses but does so at the cost of reducing the synaptic

plasticity required for new learning (Birdsong, 2018). Other research proposes there is language lateralization difference in the brain between bilinguals and monolinguals. In some findings the first language and the second language are in distinct but near areas in the brain of early bilinguals while in late ones two languages are stored separately (Baker, 2014). This phenomenon shows that similar or the same regions in early bilinguals' brain serve both L1 and L2 and indicates further that an individual who learns a second language very early has different linguistic mechanism from those who start later. Second, from the aspect of experience and facts, it has been widely believed that children master a second language better than adults. People often hear this kind of anecdotes that a child before puberty is exposed to an English speaking country with his or her parents as visiting scholars or postgraduates for one or two years, and they master English more proficiently than their parents. Young children acquire a second language naturally, unwittingly and subconsciously. Compared with adults, they pick up pronunciation more accurately and quickly. Although some research proposes that it is possible for young children, teenagers and adults could learn a second language fluently and proficiently or even all of them could become bilinguals, young children acquire authentic pronunciation better than adults (de Houwer, 1995). It is often the case that a person's first language brands their pronunciation in their second language if he or she learns L2 late as an adult. And moreover the way to the success of second language proficiency for adults seems more effort-consuming and harder than the early bilinguals'. All in all, in naturalistic situations those who begins second language learning in childhood in general eventually surpass those in adulthood, even though the latter usually show some initial advantage over the former (Cook, 2008). Therefore many linguists tends to suggest the earlier a language is taught the better even in immersion (Baker, 2001).

If the goal of L2 learning is basic communicative ability of the target language rather than native-like mastery which, as we know, is not the goal for all L2 learning, or if the L2 learner is going to learn it for a few years and then drop it or if a child's native language remains the primary language, it may be more efficient to begin L2 learning later (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). It is because that under the same L2 learning conditions, adults make greater progress at the first stage and then slow down while children start up slowly and become more successful in the long-run. It is not an easy thing for everybody to master a second language, it may cost a large number of time, energy and money on it. So if the goal of L2 learning is not be a native-like speaker, there is an advantage to start learning later.

The factor of age in second language learning also concerns a problem, should the teaching methods vary according to the age of students? The answer is "yes". Informal teaching methods are suitable for children students while older students would like teaching methods containing sophisticated analysis process.

3. Conclusion (Overall Response)

The factors affecting second language learning are complex including variability which is conditioned by factors either intellectual, linguistic, conative, **identificational**  or educational in nature and age which is the sum of an individual's cognitive, neurological and linguistic development along with motivational, identificational, attitudinal and experiential characteristics. All the factors mentioned go hand in hand and are intersecting and interacting one another. Due to the complexity of each factor and other research limitations, it is still hard to predict precisely how a person's characteristics influence his or her success in L2 learning. Nonetheless, the research already done gives enough inspiration to parents and language instructors to consider seriously and make full use of the affecting factors in the process of second language learning and teaching. They could make varieties of pedagogic strategies and methods for students according to the factors mentioned above. Besides what's more important, they could give advice to the government on a nation's language policy including the age a child in the country starts to learn a certain second language and the learning time per week in the particular social context.  

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Assignment 1

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

65 / 100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

This is a very good answer which is well presented and clearly defined.

You have displayed a good coverage of the material.

You provide a well-structured argument and the mark recognises work at a high level.

You also demonstrate an effective grasp of the literature and your emerging voice.

You might want to consider:

1. Elaborating on key EFL theory by further referencing key texts.

2. Refer to theoretical studies in more detail.



Comment 1

Useful overview.



knowledge

QM

Background reading

Evidence of wide reading

QM

Critical thinking

Ability to be critical and appraise the literature to further knowledge and thinking.

QM

Criticality

Good ability to be critical and appraise the study's findings to further knowledge and thinking.



Comment 2

Very good reference to key issues here.



Comment 3

Quote?



Comment 4

Try to paraphrase key findings.



Comment 5

Valid point. Is there further evidence for this?



Comment 6

Meaning unclear?



Comment 7

Are you quoting from Birdsong or Baker here?



Comment 8

Agreed.