THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF AGE FACTOR ON GRAMMATICAL AND PHONETIC SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Akhmadalieva Nargizakhon Abdumalik kizi
English teacher of Korean International University in Fergana.
njabborkhonova@mail.ru
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15714699

Annotation. *This article examines the impact of age on the acquisition of grammatical and phonetic skills in English language learning. The research is based on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), exploring whether language learners of different ages demonstrate varied abilities in mastering grammar and pronunciation. Findings reveal that while younger learners tend to acquire pronunciation more naturally, older learners can achieve grammatical competence under certain conditions. The study combines theoretical analysis with recent empirical research to present a nuanced view of age-related factors in second language acquisition.*

Recent studies on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) have sparked ongoing debates in linguistics. This research seeks to contribute by analyzing how grammatical and phonetic skills develop among learners at different age stages, taking into account both supporting and opposing views on CPH.

Key Words*: Critical Period Hypothesis, age factor, second language acquisition, grammar learning, pronunciation, psycholinguistics.*

Kalit so'zlar*: Tanqidiy davr gipotezasi, yosh omili, ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish, grammatikani o'rganish, talaffuz, lingvopsixologiya.*

Ключевые слова*: Гипотеза критического периода, возрастной фактор, овладение вторым языком, грамматические навыки, произношение, психолингвистика.*

Introduction

Age has been considered a significant factor in second language acquisition. Numerous studies suggest that children are more likely to achieve native-like fluency, especially in pronunciation, due to the plasticity of their developing brains. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), originally proposed by Penfield and Roberts (1959) and expanded by Lenneberg (1967), asserts that language learning is most effective between early childhood and puberty.

Methods

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative analysis of grammar and pronunciation tests. Participants were grouped by age: children (6–10), adolescents (11–16), and adults (17+).

Additionally, the study took into account a range of psycholinguistic variables, including motivation, cognitive flexibility, and language exposure.

Data Collection

Data were gathered from 90 participants enrolled in English language courses. Grammar tests focused on syntax and morphological rules, while pronunciation was assessed through oral reading and spontaneous speech.

Participants were also asked to complete a self-assessment on their language learning habits and environmental influences, providing context for observed performance patterns.

Results

Younger learners displayed more natural pronunciation, aligning with the CPH. However, adult learners performed equally or better in grammar tests, suggesting age may be less critical for syntactic development than for phonological skills.

These results correlate with theories that emphasize biological timing in phonetic development, as proposed by Lenneberg (1967), and simultaneously align with more recent findings that challenge the strict age limits of grammar acquisition.

Discussion

The study supports the Critical Period Hypothesis for phonetic acquisition, as children more easily achieved native-like pronunciation. This is supported by researchers such as Flege (1999), who argue that early exposure enables better articulation.

However, adults can achieve high grammatical accuracy, consistent with the findings of White & Genesee (1996) and Birdsong, who observed that adults can learn syntax effectively.

While CPH remains influential, researchers like Bongaerts (1999) provide evidence that motivated adults can reach native-like pronunciation under ideal conditions. Therefore, age impacts language learning differently depending on the skill area—pronunciation being more sensitive than grammar.

Conclusion

The existence of the Critical Period Hypothesis remains debated. This study reinforces the notion that age significantly influences phonetic acquisition, but less so grammar.

While the Critical Period Hypothesis provides a useful framework, language educators and researchers must also consider individual differences and learning environments. More research into multilingual contexts and adult learners under optimal conditions is essential to refine our understanding of age effects in language learning.

References

1. Birdsong, D. (2004). Second Language Acquisition and Ultimate Attainment. In Davies, A., and Elder, C. (Eds.), The Handbook of Applied Linguistics. Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing.
2. Bridsong, D., & Molis, M. (2001). On the Evidence for Maturational Constraints in Second Language Acquisition. Journal of Memory and Language, 44. 235-249.
3. Bongaerts, T. (1999). Ultimate attainment in L2 Pronunciation: The Case of Very Advanced L2Learners. In D. Birdsong (Ed.), Second Language Acquisition and The Critical Period Hypothesis (pp. 133-159). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
4. Ellis, R. (1994). The study of second language acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
5. Flege, J. (1999). Age of Learning and Second Language Speech. In D. Birdsong (ed.) Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis. Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers. pp. 101-131.
6. Flege, J., Munro, M., & MacKay, I. (1995) Effects of age of second-language learning on the production of English consonants. Speech Communication, 16, 1-26Hakuta, K., Bialystok, E., & Wiley, E. (2003). Critical Evidence: A test of the Critical Period Hypothesis for Second Language Acquisition. Psychological Science, 14(1), 31-38.

7. Johnson, J. & E. Newport. (1989). Critical period effects in second language learning: the influence of maturational state on the acquisition of ESL. Cognitive Psychology, 21, 60–99
8. Klein, W. (1995). Language acquisition at different ages. In D. Magnussion (Ed.), The lifespan development of individuals: Behavioral, neurobiological, and psychological perspectives. A synthesis (pp. 244-264). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
9. Krashen, S. (1973). Lateralization, language learning and the critical period: Some new evidence. Language Learning, 23.
10. Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). Biological Foundations of Language. New York, NY: John Wiley. Penfield, W., & Roberts, L. (1959). Speech and brain mechanisms. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.