

## Critical Period Hypothesis in Grammar and Pronunciation of L2 Learners

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Language has already become an important aspect of our life, but mastering how to speak one seems harder than most of us have ever imagined. This is because it encompasses factors of outward and inward types that directly have impact on how we acquire language. A lot more scholars have delved deeply into language acquisition and have attached a greater importance to age by considering it a dominant one among other factors (Zhou Li, 2015). Moreover, some researchers have a long-held belief that children are thought to be more successful at learning how to speak a target language than adults do. And only they can master their language proficiency to the level that is close to that of native (Flege et al., 1995; Yeni-Komshian et al.1997).

This became a compelling theory due to the studies confirmed that emigrants were outperformed by their children in language acquisition. To explain why this, researchers Penfield and Roberts (1959) conducted a study which unearthed that children usually undergo a critical stage before they are 9. This is the period whereby language acquisition happen at a natural state. This conception is called “Critical Period Hypothesis” and that was supported by many researchers. After Penfield and Roberts, many linguists and scientists in particular Lenneberg popularized this hypothesis. The ability to learn language by less exposure can happen only during critical period, which involves between the ages two and puberty (Lenneberg, 1967), because after adolescence brain loose its plasticity and capacity which blocks natural acquisition process and thus leads to the lateralization of the function of language. Moreover, Lenneberg (1967) suggested that people who starts a L2 learning after the age 12-14 cannot manage foreign accents, due to the slackness of automatic acquisition after puberty.

However, a group of researchers adamantly opposed this theory. Krashen (1973) claimed that the lateralization of the brain is not connected with the critical period. It may happen before the puberty, in the process of first language acquisition. Likewise, Snow (1978), suggested that there is no particular age which leads the brain to the deprivation of its capacity. Bongarets (1997) also supported the idea that not only children but also adults are able to achieve native-like accent.

The point of this writing survey is to scrutinize the speculations about CPH and distinguish whether a critical period for language learning in reality exists or not. Researchers tried the acquisition of grammar and pronunciation of second and/or foreign language students of various age gatherings to discover the relationship between the age and the way language is acquired.

### Proficiency in the second language Grammar

Johnson and Newport (1989) who set out on testing the CPH investigated the impact of age in mastering the L2 grammar. They picked 46 Korean and Chinese participants immigrating to the USA at the age of 3-39. The participants' knowledge in terms of English syntax and morphology was tested. According to the results, subjects who came to the USA before the age 15 (early arrivals) showed a significant privilege over subjects whose arrival was later than the age 17 (late

arrivals). They came to the conclusion that second language acquisition is largely influenced by the critical period.

On the other hand, some studies showed the controversial results. White and Genesee (1996) explored that adults have a high a potential to achieve advanced grammar competence in second language inspite of the time of the first language exposure. Similarly, Birdsong conducted a research and according to its results he argued that syntax and morphology are more eligible to adults to achieve native-likeness rather than pronunciation in second language (Birdsong, 2004).

This study asked 20 English-speaking participants who were learning French to engage in a grammar test. 15 out of 20 showed a native-like level. This result, however, contradicts the CPH, and the reason for this was that all of them began to learn French once they left their puberty.

### **Proficiency in the second language Pronunciation**

Reaching the level of pronunciation to the level of native speakers is likely to be the highest barrier children have to raise above when mastering their target language. This is so because of the way that a native language influences it and thus makes it almost unfeasible to avoid a foreign accent (Flege, 1999). Researchers believe that the earlier children start to learn their target language the better they will perform, very close or even like natives. This belief goes hand in hand with CPH. Hakuta et al. (2003) asked immigrants from Spain and China to participate in a study intended to examine their English language proficiency to prove CPH. They concluded that language learners become more reluctant as they age.

Nevertheless, the researches which were held by Bongaerts (1999) can be the counter-evidence to the CPH in the area of pronunciation. All subjects, who participate in his first study, were “late learners”. They were asked to make a speech about their holiday experiences and read a text in a loud voice. The outcomes were intriguing in light of the fact that the way of pronouncing of the local speakers and the language students could not be recognized. Three different kinds of members: native English, native Dutch, and effective English students were associated with his subsequent investigation. Among them, the last gathering was stood apart by demonstrating all the more close articulation to locals in English. As indicated by the results, the researcher accepted that accomplishing a native-like pronunciation after puberty is conceivable; yet, the impact of the “biological barrier” is extremely high.

Klein (1995) also highlighted the ability of “late learners” which can help in the achievement of language proficiency. He claimed that substantial and gradual input plays a crucial role in attaining native-like pronunciation in adults.

### **Conclusion**

The existence of the Critical Period Hypothesis still remains disputable. Although the great number of researches were carried out, scientists cannot draw a single conclusion. The results of some researchers where they proved facilities of attaining proficiency in second language after puberty make people hesitate about CPH. Ellis (1994) supported this notion by believing that adult learners’ second language competence can be indiscernible from native ones if they acquired the language under ideal conditions.

The superiority of adults in the language learning, though they are considered more efficient ones, unfortunately, can be in the short run. It is the undeniable fact that children just “acquire” the language unlike their elder comrades who need a specific instruction. Therefore, in spite of the

controversial thoughts about CPH, involving children earlier to the foreign language learning make them to obtain native-likeness easier.

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