

*The Cambridge Guide to
Learning English as a Second Language*

THE CAMBRIDGE GUIDES SERIES

Authoritative, comprehensive and accessible guides, addressing both the theoretical and the practical aspects of key topics in second language teaching and learning.

For more information on these titles, please visit: www.cambridge.org/elt

Other titles in this series:

The Cambridge Guide to Blended Learning for Language Teaching

Edited by Michael McCarthy

The Cambridge Guide to Research in Language Teaching and Learning

Edited by James Dean Brown and Christine Coombe

The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Assessment

Edited by Christine Coombe, Peter Davidson, Barry O'Sullivan and Stephen Stoyhoff

The Cambridge Guide to Pedagogy and Practice in Second Language Teaching

Edited by Anne Burns and Jack C. Richards

The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Teacher Education

Edited by Anne Burns and Jack C. Richards

The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

Edited by Ronald Carter and David Nunan

The Cambridge Guide to

Learning
English as
a Second
Language

Edited by
Anne Burns
Jack C. Richards



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108408417

© Cambridge University Press 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2018

First published in 2018

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-108-40841-7 Paperback

ISBN 978-1-108-40842-4 Apple eBook

ISBN 978-1-108-40843-1 Google eBook

ISBN 978-1-108-40844-8 Kindle eBook

ISBN 978-1-108-40845-5 eBooks.com eBook

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		page viii
Introduction	Learning English as a Second Language <i>Anne Burns and Jack C. Richards</i>	1
<hr/>		
Section 1	Learners and Learning English	7
Chapter 1	Learning as a Child <i>Yuko Goto Butler</i>	9
Chapter 2	Learning as an Adolescent <i>Tracey Costley</i>	19
Chapter 3	Learning as an Adult <i>Carol Griffiths and Adem Soruç</i>	27
Chapter 4	Learning with Learning Difficulties <i>Judit Kormos</i>	35
Chapter 5	Learning Two or More Languages <i>John Witney and Jean-Marc Dewaele</i>	43
<hr/>		
Section 2	Individual, Social and Affective Dimensions of Learning English	53
Chapter 6	Motivation <i>Stephen Ryan</i>	55
Chapter 7	Language Aptitude <i>Shaofeng Li</i>	63
Chapter 8	Language Anxiety <i>Elaine K. Horwitz and Lama Nassif</i>	73
Chapter 9	Language Learning Strategies <i>Rebecca L. Oxford</i>	81
Chapter 10	Identity and Language Learning <i>Martha C. Pennington</i>	91
<hr/>		
Section 3	Contexts of Learning English	99
Chapter 11	Learning Through Social Interaction <i>Patricia A. Duff and Victoria Surtees</i>	101
Chapter 12	Learning in the Classroom <i>Martin East</i>	110
Chapter 13	Learning Beyond the Classroom <i>Alice Chik</i>	118

Section 4	Learning English for Particular Purposes	127
Chapter 14	Learning for Academic Purposes <i>Helen Basturkmen</i>	129
Chapter 15	Learning for Specific Purposes <i>Christoph A. Hafner</i>	137
Chapter 16	Learning for the Workplace <i>Jane Lockwood</i>	146
<hr/>		
Section 5	Learning the ‘Systems’ of English	155
Chapter 17	Learning Pronunciation <i>Ee Ling Low</i>	157
Chapter 18	Learning Vocabulary <i>David Hirsh</i>	167
Chapter 19	Learning Lexical Phrases <i>Frank Boers</i>	176
Chapter 20	Learning Grammar <i>Scott Thornbury</i>	183
<hr/>		
Section 6	Learning the Four Skills of English	193
Chapter 21	Learning Listening <i>Joseph Siegel</i>	195
Chapter 22	Learning Speaking <i>Christine C. M. Goh</i>	204
Chapter 23	Learning Reading <i>Lawrence Jun Zhang</i>	213
Chapter 24	Learning Writing <i>Neomy Storch</i>	222
<hr/>		
Section 7	Learning the Social Uses of English	231
Chapter 25	Learning Genres <i>Susan Feez and Zuocheng Zhang</i>	233
Chapter 26	Learning Literacy <i>Marie Stevenson</i>	242
Chapter 27	Learning Pragmatics <i>Naoko Taguchi</i>	251
Chapter 28	Learning Intercultural Competence <i>Farzad Sharifian</i>	260
<hr/>		
Section 8	Approaches to Learning English	269
Chapter 29	Learning Through Tasks <i>Ali Shehadeh</i>	271

Chapter 30	Learning Through Content <i>John Macalister</i>	281
Chapter 31	Learning Through Translation <i>Guy Cook</i>	289
Chapter 32	Learning Through Textbooks <i>Gregory Hadley</i>	298
Chapter 33	Learning Through a Corpus <i>Averil Coxhead and Oliver J. Ballance</i>	307
<hr/>		
Section 9	Technology and Learning English	317
Chapter 34	Learning Through Technology <i>Rodney H. Jones</i>	319
Chapter 35	Online Language Learning <i>Nicky Hockly and Gavin Dudeney</i>	327
Chapter 36	Learning Through Social Media <i>Christopher Jenks</i>	335
List of Contributors		343
Index		345

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE CO-EDITORS

A substantial number of people have supported us in the development of this volume and we are grateful for their contributions. First, we would like to thank all the authors for their willingness to write the various chapters and for their patience over the time it took to bring the volume to fruition. The anonymous reviewers helped to shape the volume further through their useful and thought-provoking feedback. Karen Momber, Jo Timerick, Joanna Garbutt and Sarah Almy offered us their excellent editorial, content, and copy-editing expertise and their guidance has been much appreciated. Finally, the many students we have taught over the years and the curiosity they have shown about the learning of English as a second language inspired us to edit this book in the first place.

Anne Burns
Jack C. Richards

THE CO-EDITORS AND THE PUBLISHERS

The authors and publishers acknowledge the following sources of copyright material and are grateful for the permissions granted. While every effort has been made, it has not always been possible to identify the sources of all the material used, or to trace all copyright holders. If any omissions are brought to our notice, we will be happy to include the appropriate acknowledgements on reprinting and in the next update to the digital edition, as applicable.

John Benjamins Publishing Company for the diagrams on p. 44 from *Third Language Acquisition in Adulthood* edited by Jennifer Cabrelli Amaro, Suzanne Flynn, and Jason Rothman. Copyright © 2012 John Benjamins Publishing Company. Reproduced with kind permission; Oxford University Press for the text on p. 60 from *The New Oxford English Dictionary* edited by Judy Pearsall and Patrick Hanks. Copyright © 1998 Oxford University Press. Reproduced with kind permission; Dagmar Abendroth-Timmer and Eva-Maria Hennig for the text on pp. 95–96, adapted from *Plurilingualism and Multiliteracies: International Research on Identity Construction in Language Education* by Dagmar Abendroth-Timmer and Eva-Maria Hennig, published by Peter Lang AG. Copyright © 2014 Dagmar Abendroth-Timmer and Eva-Maria Hennig. Reproduced with kind permission; Stephen D. Krashen for the figure on p. 186, adapted from *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning* by Stephen D. Krashen, published by Pergamon Press Inc. Copyright © 1981 Stephen D. Krashen. Reproduced with kind permission; Cambridge University Press for the figure on p. 205 from *Teaching Speaking: A Holistic Approach* by Christine Chuen Meng Goh and Anne Burns. Copyright © 2012 Cambridge University Press. Reproduced with kind permission.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a Second Language

Anne Burns and Jack C. Richards

RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

In modern society, the majority of the world's citizens speak one or more second languages and learning a second or third language in childhood is a normal part of the lives of many people. In many countries, such as Singapore, Indonesia, Finland, India and Nigeria, it is often an aspect of socialization typical of a multilingual and multicultural environment. The bilingual or multilingual communicative repertoire that many people make use of in such settings is an important part of their identities. For many others, learning a second language may commence later in life, either at primary or secondary school, and may be essential for education, employment or social survival, as well as many other purposes. Fluency in a second language, particularly an international language such as English, is now mandated by educational policies in many countries, and the teaching of second languages requires a considerable investment of resources at many different levels, including investment in policy and curriculum development, teaching and teacher training, textbook development, technology, and assessment.

While it is now important to be cognizant of the plurilingual nature of language learning and use, and the increasing relevance of translanguaging in multicultural education (e.g., García and Wei, 2014), a key focus is on the learning of English as a second or additional language. The learning of English has been the subject of a considerable amount of research and theorizing in applied linguistics for over half a century, particularly since the research domain of second language acquisition (SLA) emerged in the 1970s. A great deal has been researched and written since then within SLA studies, from cognitive, interactionist, and sociocultural perspectives. Much of this research has focused on the acquisition of the grammatical system of English as a second or additional language and on the role of input and output in promoting grammatical development, as well as the contribution of individual factors such as age, motivation, aptitude, affect, and personality. The benchmark for acquisition has typically been the monolingual native speaker of the target language. Missing from the SLA perspective, however, has been a broader view of the

nature of second language knowledge and use – one, for example, that considers the second language in its own terms as a component of the speaker’s bilingual or multilingual competence, rather than being a defective form of the native-speaker’s language. In addition, the SLA paradigm has typically excluded a focus on other dimensions of language knowledge and use apart from grammar, such as the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, pronunciation and vocabulary, as well as the acquisition of pragmatic and intercultural second features of language use. This gap in the literature prompted the present book.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The chapters in this collection seek to move the study of learning English as a second language beyond its typical narrow focus and to provide a more comprehensive overview of learning. To do this, we invited a number of scholars and applied linguists to contribute chapters on language learning processes as they occur across a wide range of domains of language use. The intention was to provide a variety of different perspectives, since no single learning theory can account for all aspects of the development of English as a second language.

The book is aimed at an audience of pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators who are seeking a comprehensive coverage of the field, as well as graduate and postgraduate students wishing to gain an authoritative and up-to-date starting point for their studies or research. To that end, the book offers tasks for further reflection and suggestions for essential reading, as well as coverage of the various topics included.

The contributors were asked to address three main areas:

1. The nature of the domain/construct/skill: a brief overview of the topic of the chapter and its key dimensions.
2. The key learning issues for this domain: the issues covered would depend on the topic, but could include:
 - factors that influence the development of proficiency in the domain;
 - how development is characterized;
 - differences between novices and experts;
 - links to proficiency frameworks.
3. The implications for teaching and assessment.

Contributors were invited to use the areas above as a framework for their chapter, or to adapt this structure according to the domain they wrote about. While, as we have mentioned, the focus of the book is primarily on the learning of English, several authors also included the learning of other languages in relation to English. This book may also be relevant, therefore, to readers whose interests lie in languages other than English.

The guide contains nine sections, which aim to organize and reflect different dimensions of the diverse and complex scope of learning English as a second or additional language.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The chapters contained in the various sections of the book present a wide and diverse range of perspectives on the learning of English. Nevertheless, there are themes and implications that permeate the chapters as a whole, and we outline four of the major themes below.

LEARNING AND LEARNERS

One major motif that runs throughout the guide is the focus on who language learners are, as the authors reflect on:

LEARNERS AS EMERGENT BILINGUALS OR MULTILINGUALS

Discussion of L2 learners' language development and use has traditionally foregrounded the monolingual native speaker as the reference point. The target of learning has been narrowly defined and referenced to L1 norms, failing to acknowledge the distinct role that the L2 and other languages may play in shaping learners' multilingual and multicultural identities. Many of the contributors argue that a second or additional language forms part of the learner's multilingual competence (or translanguage competence). Second language learners can more appropriately be described as emergent bilinguals or multilinguals who integrate their use of an additional language with other languages they know.

THE ROLE OF AGENCY AND IDENTITY

Agency has been defined as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001: 112). Kalaja, Alanen, Palviainen, and Dufva (2011: 47) comment: "L2 learners are no longer viewed as individuals working on their own to construct the target language, but very much as social agents collaborating with other people and using the tools and resources available to them in their surrounding environment". In many of the examples in this collection, the learners are engaged actively and purposefully in their language-using experiences. The learners set goals for themselves and make use of the situation and resources available to them to achieve their goals.

Identity refers to how learners position themselves in relation to speakers of other languages, and how this positioning is shaped by their experience of self in their other language or languages. L2 learners, particularly adults, are often positioned as novices, despite the fact that they may be proficient in several other languages. In the case of learning in academic contexts, L2 learning involves entry into a community of practice and the development of a disciplinary identity as learners acquire disciplinary knowledge.

LEARNING AND LANGUAGE

Language is viewed by contributors to this book as a complex and dynamic phenomenon. Language learning thus involves taking account of:

THE SITUATED NATURE OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Second language learning takes place in a diversity of both formal and informal contexts, each of which reflects a different configuration of elements that shape the nature of interactions learners are engaged in. Contexts include the home, classrooms, workplaces, social situations, heritage learner environments and technology-enhanced learning contexts, each of which involve different roles, participants and power structures, as well as different purposes and means for using a second language.

A DYNAMIC RATHER THAN A STATIC UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE

As summarized by Pennington (2015: 149), this view of language involves a shift in perspective "from monocompetence, defined as knowledge of an autonomous, unvarying, and uniform system acquired in a homogeneous speech community, to multicompetence, defined here as use of an interactive, variable, and non-uniform system acquired in a heterogeneous world of intersecting groups and individuals".

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AS MORE THAN THE ACQUISITION OF GRAMMAR

Contributors demonstrate the need to broaden the focus of research well beyond the acquisition of the grammatical system of language. In contrast to the traditional SLA approach to learning, which focuses on the acquisition of grammatical rules that develop in a linear fashion, language learning is no longer viewed simply as a cognitive issue involving mastery of the linguistic system. Instead, it is seen to involve a multidimensional change in both the resources learners use to fulfill socio-communicative goals and the affordances beyond the traditional classroom space they make use of in acquiring them (Jenks, 2010).

MULTIMODAL INTERACTIONS IN DIVERSE SITUATIONS THAT MERGE TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF LANGUAGE AS SEPARATE SKILLS

The spoken and written texts learners encounter and use are increasingly integrated and multimodal. Pedagogical approaches for developing literacy and communication skills described by many of the contributors are based on a view of language as social practice, i.e. one in which the different skills are often 'merged' through learners' participation in real-world activities that involve multimodal forms of communication.

LEARNING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

As many of the contributions reflect, there is a need to broaden current concepts of language learning to expand understanding of:

THE NATURE OF 'DEVELOPMENT' IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

No single theory of development or acquisition can account for how learners progress in their language learning trajectories. Perspectives in this guide view development in a number of ways: as incremental improvement in proficiency as determined by greater fluency, accuracy and pragmatic effectiveness, as well as growing confidence and risk-taking; as a movement from novice to expert language user; as a transition from outsider to insider within a community of practice; as acquiring an expanding range of learning resources and affordances; as developing membership of different kinds of communities through social media; as developing a metalanguage for talking about language and texts; making a transition from collaborative and independent practice; as reconstructing one's understanding and view of the world and one's place in it; and as the ability to transfer learning from one context (e.g., the classroom) to the workplace.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Contributors emphasize the need to recognize the multifaceted nature of language learning and of language use. Atkinson (2011) emphasizes that second language acquisition is a very complex phenomenon with many different dimensions. It requires multiple theories of second language acquisition to provide a complete understanding of it. Contributors to this book refer to different views of learning to explain dimensions of L2 language learning: incidental learning; scaffolded learning; learning as socialization; learning through participation and apprenticeship within social groups; learning through observation and participation in social practices; autonomous and self-directed learning; learning through modeling and guidance from experts; and language learning as the negotiation and development of identities.

LEARNING AND LEARNING CONTEXTS

The role of context is highly significant in language learning. New perspectives offered in these chapters highlight the need to consider language learning contexts in terms of:

THE NEGOTIATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

A second or additional language is a resource for participation in cross-cultural encounters and experiences and for the development of intercultural communicative competence. This involves the ability to mediate and translate between languages and cultures in diverse settings involving speakers with multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

CHANGING LEARNING AFFORDANCES

The new opportunities or ‘affordances’ for language learning that are available through technology, the internet and the media, and the resulting shift from classroom-based learning to out-of-class learning as a primary source of both input and output for many second language users, has prompted the need to reconceptualize the nature of second language learning. New learning affordances provide opportunities for different kinds of interaction and language use, as well as access to different learning processes that are available in classroom-based teaching.

RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE NATURE OF SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING

While from a cognitive perspective it was often suggested that a language was not teachable but could be ‘acquired’ through experientially based learning, drawing on implicit rather than explicit instruction, contributors to this guide offer different perspectives on instructional contexts. Contributors describe a variety of roles for explicit classroom-based instruction, including strategy training, modeling expert language use, comparing pragmatic features of languages, and translation activities, as well as activities that involve implicit learning. Explicit and implicit teaching are seen to tap into different learning processes.

CONCLUSION

This introductory chapter foregrounds our aim in editing this book – to expand the range of current perspectives on what it means to learn English as a second or additional language. Our intention in the following pages is to provide readers with a broad and composite set of accounts of language learning, written by authors well-versed in the topics that are covered, that can be used as a starting point for further reflection, reading and investigation. In compiling this collection, we stressed to the contributors that they did not need to take any particular theoretical stance on language learning, but to offer their own theoretical frameworks and perspectives. In this respect, we hope that the book opens up many avenues for further discussion, exploration and research in an area that is of the utmost importance for the field of English language teaching.

References

- Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, 109–137.
- Atkinson, D. (Ed.) (2011). *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition*. London: Routledge.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jenks, C. (2010). Adaptation in online voice-based chat rooms: Implications for language learning in applied linguistics. In P. Seedhouse, S. Walsh, & C. Jenks (Eds.), *Conceptualising ‘Learning’ in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 147–162). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Kalaja, P., Alanen, R., Palviainen, Å., & Dufva, H. (2011). From milk cartons to English roommates: Context and agency in L2 learning beyond the classroom. In P. Benson & H. Reinders (Eds.), *Beyond the Language Classroom* (pp. 47–58). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pennington, M. P. (2015). Research, theory and practice in L2 phonology: A review and directions for the future. In J. A. Mompean & J. Fouz-González (Eds.), *Investigating English Pronunciation: Current Trends and Directions* (pp. 149–173). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

SECTION I

LEARNERS AND LEARNING ENGLISH

The first section focuses on who second language (L2) learners are, which, in the case of English, is becoming increasingly diversified across the world, as learners begin their learning at a variety of different ages and with a multiplicity of learning and language(s) backgrounds and repertoires.

In the first chapter on the language learner, **Yuko Goto Butler** examines features of L2 learning in children, comparing first language (L1) and L2 learning, as well as differences between young and older learners. She highlights the different contexts in which young learners acquire additional languages, and discusses how context impacts the goals and processes of a learner of English as an L2. She also describes how age factors relate to the learning of phonology, vocabulary, morphosyntax and literacy, and reviews the role of implicit learning, explicit learning, and learning strategies.

In the next chapter, **Tracey Costley** explores the different contexts in which adolescents learn L2s, and the particular attributes and dispositions that influence both their understanding or ‘idea’ of English and their approaches to learning. She highlights the role of social contexts and maturational factors on L2 learning, discusses how age, gender and language-learning background influence language learning in adolescents, and points out the implications of these factors for the teaching of adolescent learners.

In their chapter on language learning among adults, **Carol Griffiths** and **Adem Soruç** review research findings on adult learners and outline the characteristics and dispositions of this group of learners. They discuss neurological, psycho-affective, sociocultural and other factors that affect the English language learning outcomes of adult learners, and suggest that research findings prompt a rethinking of the common assumption that adults are often unsuccessful in their attempts to learn additional languages.

In the next chapter, **Judit Kormos** examines the impact of specific learning difficulties on L2 development, particularly those difficulties that are neurological in origin and often inherited, rather than those that reflect socio-environmental dimensions. She discusses factors that may influence many components of English language proficiency, including grammar, vocabulary and reading, writing and listening skills.

John Witney and **Jean-Marc Dewaele** examine how learners acquiring a third language can draw both on metalinguistic awareness and on familiarity with learning strategies developed from learning previous languages. They suggest that learners acquiring a third or further language have greater metalinguistic awareness, make use of a great number of learning strategies and use them more frequently.

The chapters in this section draw our attention to the very extensive range of learner factors that need to be considered in L2 learning. They highlight the importance of being cognizant of, and sensitive to, these factors in determining the goals and needs of learners at different points in their life trajectories, and also the kinds of linguistic and learning resources they bring with them, whether their learning takes place in actual or virtual settings.

CHAPTER 1

Learning as a Child

Yuko Goto Butler

INTRODUCTION

For children, learning a second language (L2) differs in important ways from learning a first language (L1), as well as from learning an L2 as an adult. After all, children are still in the process of their cognitive, social-affective, and linguistic (L1) development, which in turn influences their L2 learning in various ways. Educators must consider such differences when teaching and assessing children who are learning an L2. Although the research on children's L2 learning still remains relatively limited, this chapter summarizes researchers' current understanding of children's L2 learning, so that educators can make use of this emerging knowledge. To that end, I begin by describing who young L2 learners are and their varying L2-learning contexts and needs. I then discuss key characteristics of child L2 learning. I conclude by suggesting ways that educators can put these findings to work for teaching and assessing young L2 learners.

OVERVIEW

WHO ARE YOUNG L2 LEARNERS?

Young L2 learners are often defined as children of preschool and primary school age who are learning a second language. Although the exact age range for preschool and primary school differs depending on educational systems, it is generally between 4 and 12 years old. I should note, however, that young L2 learners can be defined in alternative ways. Researchers who subscribe to some notion of a critical period in L2 acquisition – a hypothesis that one can no longer acquire 'native-like' proficiency in the target language once they reach a certain age – may argue that young L2 learners should be defined as children who are exposed to their L2 sometime after birth but before the critical period ends. However, the existence of a critical period is debated among researchers, and even among supporters the exact range of such a period in L2 is controversial. Some researchers also distinguish

young L2 learners from children who have regular contact with two languages from very early in their lives; such children, sometimes referred to as simultaneous bilingual children, are considered to have two L1s. Here again, however, the cut-off point – the age children need to be exposed to two languages to qualify as speaking two L1s – is not clear: it ranges from two months to three years of age (Unsworth and Blom, 2010). So, while acknowledging that the age range of four to twelve years old for young L2 learners has some critics, this is the range frequently used within the pedagogic and policy community, and it is the range I use here.

VARYING LEARNING CONTEXTS AND GOALS OF YOUNG L2 LEARNERS

Young learners are by no means homogenous, and the contexts of their L2 learning differ greatly. Young L2 learners include language minority children who have a minority language (or languages; see Chapter 5) at home and learn a majority language in the community and school as their L2. Depending on circumstances (e.g., their home language became a less dominant language), children's home language can be considered an L2, in the form of a heritage language to be maintained or relearned. Young L2 learners also include children who have a majority language as their home language but are enrolled in an immersion program and receive academic instruction (at least partially) through their non-home language (L2). Lastly, children learning a foreign language (FL) are also considered to be young L2 learners, and this type of young L2 learner is growing rapidly in number worldwide. In principle, FL-learning children are assumed to have limited exposure to the target language outside of the classroom, but the amount and quality of children's exposure to the target language vary substantially by region and by socio-economic status.

Reflecting such variability in learning contexts, the goals of L2 learning differ substantially – not only across the above-mentioned L2 groups but also within any given group. While sometimes the goal of young L2 learning is to develop age-appropriate basic linguistic knowledge and skills that allow children to converse daily with target-language speakers, at other times the goal is to develop high L2 proficiency in academic contexts (i.e., academic language) so that learners can acquire content subject knowledge (e.g., mathematics and science) through the target language. Academic language is generally considered to be “the vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse associated with language used to teach academic content as well as the language used to navigate the school setting more generally” (Bailey and Huang, 2011: 343); however, it is important to note that researchers disagree about what constitutes academic language abilities and, further, that the relationship between academic language abilities and content subject learning is not yet well-understood.

KEY LEARNING ISSUES

Considering such diversity of learning contexts and goals of L2 learning for young learners, we can expect that learning outcomes vary as well. Various social contextual factors, as well as individual factors (e.g., motivation, aptitude, etc.; see Chapters 6 and 7), influence their L2 development. As mentioned already, it remains controversial if the ultimate attainment of L2 is affected by the onset of first exposure to L2; researchers debate if a critical period exists, and if it does, when it is and what domains are affected by it. In FL contexts, learning L2 from a very young age may not be most effective. In this section, I sketch major aspects of young L2 learning that we know so far, first in the domain of language development and then in the domains of learning styles and strategies (see Chapter 9).

PHONOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Among the general public, there is a widespread belief that children can acquire ‘native-like’ sounds in their L2/FL with ease. Researchers have found, however, that the influence of a child’s L1 is persistent and observable. Although research directly examining phonological development among young L2 learners remains very limited, retrospective research has shown that non-native accents can be perceived, at least in some properties, even among learners who started being exposed to their L2 before the age of three. Researchers have proposed models for phonology development that may explain the reason for the persistence of non-native accents even among those who started learning L2 at a very young age (see Chapter 17). One such model is Flege’s Speech Learning Model. According to this model, both L1 and L2 share a common phonetic space, and L2 learners perceive new L2 sounds based on their existing L1 phonetic categories, either through assimilating or disassimilating the L1 categories, depending on similarities and dissimilarities between novel L2 sounds and L1 sounds (Flege, 1999).

A number of studies have examined the relationship between the age of onset of L2 and the ultimate L2 phonology acquisition, as measured by perceived accent ratings, as well as by physical phonetic and phonemic properties (e.g., voice onset time). Such studies have generally found correlations between the age of onset and phonology acquisition. However, researchers disagree on whether there is any cut-off point in the course of phonology development (i.e., a critical period) and, if so, when exactly the critical period is.

In addition to the age young learners are first exposed to the target language, a few other factors have been suggested as influencing their L2 phonology acquisition. Most notably, the amount and type of L2 input (which is usually negatively correlated with the amount of use of L1) has been found to be an important predictor of L2 phonology attainment. Also influential are the learner’s desire to acquire ‘native’ sounds in L2, and how the learner identifies himself or herself in relation to his or her L1 and L2. Moreover, phonological differences between L1 and L2 cannot be ignored. For example, Flege and Fletcher (1992) found that among children who had been immersed in English since they were five to eight years old, Chinese L1 speakers had more perceivable non-native accents in L2 (English) than their Spanish L1 counterparts.

Unlike in L2 contexts, in FL contexts where learners usually have limited target language input, ‘the earlier, the better’ is not warranted. In fact, most existing studies have found no advantage for young starters in perceiving and producing FL sounds. In FL contexts, the amount and quality of instruction appear to be more influential over one’s phonology acquisition than the age of onset of FL instruction (Muñoz, 2014).

LEXICAL DEVELOPMENT

In L2-learning contexts, young L2 learners’ lexical processing (i.e., the process of recognizing, accessing, and producing words that are stored in one’s mental lexicon) improves gradually throughout their primary school years, consistent with the general development pattern observed among L1 monolingual children. However, it is often reported that lexical processing among child L2 learners is less efficient or slower, compared with their monolingual peers. Researchers have also found that L2 learners’ vocabulary size (both receptive and productive vocabulary) in both their L1 and L2 is smaller than the vocabulary size of their monolingual counterparts (Bialystok, 2009).

A caution is necessary, however, when we compare young L2 learners – namely, children with various degrees of bilingual/multilingual abilities – with monolingual children. Researchers such as Grosjean (2010) argue that bilingual children’s language knowledge and processing are *qualitatively* different from those of monolingual children. Under this view, it does not make sense to evaluate L2 learners’ linguistic abilities against monolingual

norms. In addition, we need to keep in mind that there are substantial individual differences in vocabulary development among young L2 learners, as well as among monolingual children learning their L1 (Murphy, 2014).

Among young L2 learners, older learners tend to acquire lexical knowledge faster than young learners, due to their greater cognitive maturity and richer experiences. From a multilingual developmental perspective, it is also important to note that children who have an opportunity to develop basic literacy skills in their L1 tend to keep developing their L1 vocabulary better than children who do not have a chance to develop basic literacy skills. Retrospective research often shows that children who immigrate to an L2 environment when they are around eight to ten years old, as well as L2-learning children who receive instruction in both their L1 and their L2, have a better chance of developing grade-equivalent (or higher) L2 vocabulary while retaining a high level of L1 vocabulary.

MORPHOSYNTAX DEVELOPMENT

Morphosyntax acquisition patterns of young L2 learners are often similar to those of monolingual L1-learning children. For instance, morphologies acquired late by L1-learning children also tend to be acquired late by young L2 learners, and common errors observed among young L2 learners have also been found among L1-learning children. However, young L2 learners also exhibit different patterns from L1 learners. For example, the overgeneralization of the copula (e.g., “I am play baseball”) and the omission of a subject (e.g., “play baseball”) are frequently observed among young L2 learners, irrespective of their L1 (Paradis, 2005). These phenomena may be largely attributable to children’s cognitive maturity rather than other factors, such as L1 influence. It is important to note, however, that most current research on this topic was conducted among children whose L1 and L2 are European languages; more research looking at different language combinations is necessary. Indeed, while earlier studies claimed that children’s L1 plays little role in their L2 morphosyntax acquisition (e.g., Dulay and Burt, 1974), more recent studies suggest that children’s L1 may play a larger role than we used to believe. Similarly, the extent to which young L2 learners’ morphosyntax acquisition is different from that of adult L2 learners remains unclear.

As with phonology development, there is no consensus on whether the age of initial exposure to L2 affects the ultimate attainment of morphosyntax; it remains unclear if there is a critical period in morphosyntax acquisition and, if so, when it is. However, when it comes to efficiency of acquisition, young L2 learners can pick up morphosyntax knowledge faster than L1-learning younger children, due to the older L2 learners’ greater degree of cognitive maturity. Similarly, research conducted in FL contexts has shown that later starters of FL learning develop morphosyntax more efficiently than earlier starters (e.g., García Mayo and García Lecumberri, 2003).

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

For young minority-language-speaking children who receive education in their L2 context, acquiring sufficient literacy skills (see Chapter 26) in L2 is a pressing issue. Existing studies, primarily conducted in North America and the United Kingdom, repeatedly report that many young L2 learners lag behind in their reading comprehension and academic studies. Interestingly, however, as far as the research from North America is concerned, young L2 learners on average perform equally well with their monolingual L1-speaking peers in word-decoding skills. Such word-decoding skills, which include phonological awareness, lexical access, and working memory, have long been known as critical elements for successful reading comprehension. But young L2 learners tend to have a weaker

vocabulary, academic vocabulary in particular, which influences their reading comprehension. Oral language proficiency also seems to be associated with young L2 learners' reading comprehension, although the precise relationship remains unclear. Nonlinguistic factors, including socio-economic background, individual characteristics (e.g., motivation, personality, learning strategies, etc.), and type of instruction they receive, all contribute to young L2 learners' literacy development in complicated ways. For example, research has shown that teacher-centered instructional approaches tend to work better for quiet and analytical learners, while more activity-based instructional approaches appear to work better for active and outgoing children (Murphy, 2014).

When considering these findings, it is important to remember that many studies measure children's reading comprehension using standardized tests, while usually setting monolingual L1 children's performance as the norm, and what counts as literacy skills is usually defined narrowly. Studies also tend to pay almost exclusive attention to learners' L2 literacy skills, and ignore their literacy in L1 or any other language(s) that they may know. Increasingly, scholars are questioning such narrow, monolingual-based conceptualizations of literacy, and are advocating instead for multimodal and multilingual approaches to literacy (e.g., the translanguaging approach advocated by García and Wei, 2014).

LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES

It is often assumed that children learn L2 more implicitly (i.e., learning through an unconscious and unintended process), whereas adults tend to learn L2 more explicitly (i.e., learning through a conscious and intended process) (e.g., DeKeyser, 2003; Ellis, 2005). However, empirical studies on implicit and explicit learning among young L2 learners are so scarce that it is unclear to what extent such assumptions are based on evidence. Lichtman (2013) suggested that our perceptual bias toward implicit L2 learning for children and explicit L2 learning for adults might, at least in part, be due to the fact that children tend to receive implicit instruction while adults tend to receive explicit instruction. Research conducted in FL learning contexts reports that older children (upper grade primary school students) appear to benefit from receiving both explicit and implicit instruction. When it comes to academic language, however it is defined, it needs to be explicitly instructed.

Young L2 learners may exhibit age-specific language learning strategies, such as incorporating body movements to interact with word meanings, and repeating and playing around with sounds. They appear to use some of these strategies (e.g., repeating sounds) unconsciously. As children become more cognitively mature and gain more experiences, they start incorporating many of the same language-learning strategies that are observed among adult L2 learners. The use of L1 as a strategy (e.g., memorizing L2 spelling using L1 phonetic knowledge) has also been observed (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2009).

It is also important to point out that many children today grow up immersed in technology. Prensky (2001: 52) argued that cognitive styles of children who are used to technology are different from previous generations in a number of ways, in that:

- they can process information much faster than the conventional speed;
- they are good at parallel processing rather than linear processing;
- they access information randomly as opposed to in a step-by-step fashion;
- they rely on graphics first rather than texts;
- they are accustomed to being connected with others as opposed to being unconnected;
- they prefer active learning to passive learning;

- they see *play as work* as opposed to *play vs. work*;
- they make constant decisions between payoff and patience;
- fantasy, rather than reality, pervades their lives;
- they view technology as their friend, not their enemy.

Although we still need more empirical evidence to affirm Prensky's observations, it is important for educators to pay close attention to children's learning characteristics when designing material and instruction for them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

In the following sections, I translate the preceding research findings into a few practical suggestions for teaching and assessing young L2 learners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR L2 TEACHING

USE MEANING-FOCUSED, HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO L2 LEARNING, SUCH AS TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

Children have a strong drive both to make meaning while interacting with other people and to acquire new knowledge and skills playfully (Bland, 2015). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be used as an effective pedagogical approach, particularly if the learning goal is mainly to acquire age-appropriate communicative competence in L2. In TBLT, real-life communicative tasks are employed as instructional materials or syllabus designs, while primarily focusing on meaning rather than linguistic accuracy. Thus, it is particularly suitable for young learners.

When designing or choosing tasks for young learners, it is important to carefully consider young learners' unique characteristics, such as their cognitive maturity and experiences, as well as their language proficiency. Children's affective elements, such as their motivation, must be considered as well. And given children's affinity for stories and fantasies, narrative and fantasy features can be incorporated into task designs in order to motivate and engage children. Educators can control cognitive demands for completing tasks in a number of ways. For example, *tell a story based on pictures*, a common task introduced to young L2 learners, can be made less cognitively demanding by using fewer pictures, providing the pictures in sequential order, using a simpler plot line, and offering sufficient planning time prior to the task. Cognitive demands can also be reduced by providing children with scaffolding, such as incorporating whole-class brainstorming of major plot lines and ideas, or allowing children to work together in groups or pairs (Pinter, 2015).

AVOID 'ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL' APPROACHES TO L2 INSTRUCTION

If the learning goal is mainly to acquire academic language, young L2 learners need to receive explicit instruction in vocabulary, syntax, and discourse associated with academic learning. A number of instructional strategies have been suggested in order to assist learners in comprehending content subjects (e.g., mathematics and science) through their L2. Learners' L1 can be used effectively as well. Multilingual- and multimodal-based literacy exercises may need to be promoted, depending on the children's background and purpose of the study. For example, educators can encourage children to construct texts involving multiple languages or incorporate various audio and visual materials into their learning. Importantly, there are substantial individual differences among children, both in their L1 and L2 development and in their needs. To meet such diversity, teachers must be flexible in their approach to L2 instruction. After all, there is no 'one size fits all' teaching method or strategy for young L2 learners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

ADOPT AN ASSESSMENT APPROACH THAT SUPPORTS ONGOING LEARNING

In assessing young learners, measuring their abilities makes sense only if the results directly assist their learning. In other words, learning should be the core purpose of the assessment. Therefore, assessment for learning, a concept that has received substantial attention in recent assessment research, is particularly relevant to young learners. In assessment for learning, as opposed to assessment of learning, the primary goal of assessment is not to measure learners' learning outcomes accurately and consistently, but to obtain information about the process of learning in order to inform and assist their ongoing learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Thus, some researchers (e.g., Davison and Leung, 2009) argue that traditional psychometric notions of validity and reliability may need to be reconceptualized in assessment for learning.

In the assessment for learning paradigm, critical concerns include how best to provide the learners with diagnostic information and how best to assist them to be in charge of their own learning. Grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, dynamic assessment, as a diagnostic assessment, for example, aims to identify learners' potential for development through mediated teaching such as modeling during the process of completing tasks (Poehner and Infante, 2016). Self-assessment can be used effectively with young learners to assist them in reflecting on their progress and setting learning goals – as long as they are given sufficient guidance (Butler, 2016).

In order to make the assessment informative and diagnostic, the teachers' role is critical. Edelenbos and Kubanek-German (2004) have argued that teachers need to develop sufficient diagnostic competence, which is composed of a series of abilities and actions for capturing and interpreting students' learning growth, handling assessment material and procedures, and providing students with assistance that corresponds to diagnostic information provided by the assessment.

CHOOSE AN ASSESSMENT FORMAT THAT SUITS YOUR STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLES AND YOUR PEDAGOGICAL GOALS

Just as instructional tasks and strategies should be age-appropriate for learners, assessment tasks and formats also should align with learners' cognitive maturity and experiences. Individual students' characteristics and needs should be thoroughly considered when designing assessments. For example, in formative assessment, an individual-based assessment format (teacher–child dyad format) may be advantageous for young learners, in that it allows teachers to tailor the assessment content and scaffolding to children's individual proficiency levels, personalities, and learning styles; in other words, the format enables teachers to stretch children's abilities. But at the same time, the individual format tends to elicit limited types of interactive responses from children, and the elicited language often looks like an initiation–response–evaluation (IRE) response, which is a typical classroom interaction pattern between teachers and students. On the other hand, pair- or group-assessment formats, in which children work on assessment tasks in pairs or groups, has the potential to elicit wider ranges of interactional responses from children. However, teachers' careful oversight is necessary to ensure that children collaborate well (Butler and Zeng, 2011).

LINK L2 PROFICIENCY TO ACADEMIC CONTENT LEARNING

In L2 learning contexts where children learn subject-matter content in their L2, teachers are increasingly held accountable for assessing learners' language proficiency as it is embedded in their content knowledge. Language proficiency and content knowledge have traditionally been considered separate constructs; content knowledge is considered a construct-irrelevant variance in language proficiency assessments, and vice versa.

However, linking language proficiency and content learning is inevitable in L2 contexts; this may require redefining the construct of language ability in specific academic contexts (Llosa, 2011). In standard-based educational systems, sufficient guidance is necessary for teachers in order for them to be fully familiar with standards (both L2 standards and subject-matter content standards).

To assess young learners' L2 abilities while engaging in academic content learning, assessment tasks should be designed to elicit particular language functions that are associated with critical cognitive and metacognitive skills for completing the given academic task. Sufficient consideration needs to be paid to learners' affective factors, such as their interest in, and anxiety about, the assessment task.

CONCLUSION

While research on child L2 acquisition is still relatively limited, we do know that L2 learning by young learners differs in important ways from children's L1 acquisition and adult L2 acquisition. This chapter described the heterogeneity of child L2 learners and outlined major issues in child L2 acquisition, offering a number of implications for teaching and assessing young learners. Due to the variabilities of learning goals and contexts, educators need to take flexible and localized approaches to teaching and assessment that meet learners' needs.

Discussion Questions

1. Think about a couple of tasks that you often use in your L2 instruction. What are some ways you can increase or reduce the cognitive demands for these tasks?
2. Edelenbos and Kubanek-German (2004) made a list of teachers' diagnostic competencies, based on their observations of teachers' assessment practices. Based on your own experience, what skills and actions do teachers need for capturing their students' learning processes and outcomes in order to provide them with useful diagnostic assistance?

Key Readings

- Murphy, V. A. (2014). *Second Language Learning in the Early School Years: Trends and Contexts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pinter, A. (2011). *Children Learning Second Languages*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

References

- Bailey, A. L., & Huang, B. H. (2011). Do current English language development/proficiency standards reflect the English needed for success in school? *Language Testing*, 28(3), 343–365.
- Bialystok, E. (2009). Bilingualism: The good, the bad, and the indifferent. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 12(1), 3–11.
- Black, P. J., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7–74.
- Bland, J. (2015). *Teaching English to Young Learners: Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 year olds*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Butler, Y. G. (2016). Self-assessment of and for young learners' foreign language learning. In M. Nikolov (Ed.), *Assessing Young Learners of English: Global and Local Perspectives* (pp. 291–315). New York: Springer.

- Butler, Y. G., & Zeng, W. (2011). The roles that teachers play in paired-assessments for young learners. In D. Tsagari & I. Csépes (Eds.), *Classroom-based Language Assessment* (pp. 77–92). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Davison, C., & Leung, C. (2009). Current issues in English language teacher-based assessment. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43, 393–415.
- DeKeyser, R. (2003). Implicit and explicit learning. In C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 313–348). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dulay, H., & Burt, M. (1974). Should we teach children syntax? *Language Learning*, 24, 245–258.
- Edelenbos, P., & Kubanek-German, A. (2004). Teacher assessment: The concept of ‘diagnostic competence’. *Language Testing*, 21, 259–283.
- Ellis, R. (2005). Measuring implicit and explicit knowledge of a second language: A psychometric study. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 141–172.
- Flege, J. E. (1999). Age of learning and second language speech. In D. Birdsong (Ed.), *Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis* (pp. 101–131). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Flege, J. E., & Fletcher, K. (1992). Talker and listener effects on degree of perceived foreign accent. *Journal of Acoustical Society of America*, 91, 370–389.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. London: Palgrave.
- García Mayo, M. P., & García Lecumberri, M. L. (2003). *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lichtman, K. (2013). Developmental comparisons of implicit and explicit language learning. *Language Acquisition*, 20, 93–108.
- Llosa, L. (2011). Standards-based classroom assessments of English proficiency: A review of issues, current developments, and future directions for research. *Language Testing*, 28, 367–382.
- Mihaljević Djigunović, J. (2009). Individual differences in early language programmes. In M. Nikolov (Ed.), *The Age Factor and Early Language Learning* (pp. 199–225). Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Muñoz, C. (2014). Contrasting effects of starting age and input on the oral performance of foreign language learners. *Applied Linguistics*, 35, 463–482.
- Murphy, V. A. (2014). *Second Language Learning in the Early School Years: Trends and Contexts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paradis, J. (2005). Grammatical morphology in children learning English as a second language: Implications of similarities with specific language impairment. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 172–187.
- Pinter, A. (2015). Task-based learning with children. In J. Bland (Ed.), *Teaching English to Young Learners: Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 year olds* (pp. 113–127). London: Bloomsbury.
- Poehner, M. E., & Infante, P. (2016). Dynamic Assessment in the language classroom. In D. Tsagari & J. Banerjee (Eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Assessment* (pp. 275–290). Boston: De Gruyter.

- Prensky, M. (2001) *Digital Game-based Learning*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Unsworth, S., & Blom, E. (2010). Comparing L1 children, L2 children and L2 adults.
In E. Blom & S. Unsworth (Eds.), *Experimental Methods in Language Acquisition Research* (pp. 201–222). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

CHAPTER 2

Learning as an Adolescent

Tracey Costley

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is often considered to be a challenging period in an individual's development and one in which significant physiological, cognitive and social change takes place. It is a period in time that is often synonymous with creativity and enthusiasm, as well as disaffection and disengagement (Ryan and Patrick, 2001). A 2012 United Nations world population monitoring report suggested that the world has approximately 721 million adolescents (United Nations, 2012). They define adolescence as being represented by young people aged 12–17 years old, which makes adolescents a very large and interesting group of learners to focus on.

This chapter seeks to present some of the key ideas and issues in relation to the impact of adolescence on language learning, with a specific interest in the learning of English. The chapter begins with an overview of the main assumptions about the relationship between age and language learning, before moving on to discuss the ways in which these assumptions may impact on teaching and assessment.

OVERVIEW

Much has been written about the way in which we acquire language, and within this research age is often a focus of interest, with studies seeking to establish whether there is an optimum time for language learning. Studies in this area often refer to a 'maturational period', which is considered to mark the point in age where an individual's language learning ability begins to halt and decline (Bialystok, 1997; Birdsong, 2006). It is considered to mark a period after which a learner is unlikely to achieve a 'native-like' mastery of the language they are trying to learn. Studies have shown that as we age our ability to process, produce and remember information, particularly language, decreases and that this decrease begins around puberty (see Birdsong, 2006, for a detailed overview of the literature). The

maturational period is important here, as it is often regarded as coinciding with the beginning of adolescence and has had a powerful impact on the ways in which these learners, and language learning, is understood.

The concept of a maturational period is a powerful one and one that has moved beyond the research community into society more broadly. For example, the idea that if language learning is to be successful, it should be introduced into the curriculum as early as possible, is one that has had a significant impact on language learning policies worldwide (see Chapter 1). The last 10-20 years have seen increased interest in, and calls for, the introduction of English into primary schools and kindergartens in countries such as South Korea, China and Japan, as well as the introduction of foreign languages into the primary school curriculum in England (see Cable et al. 2010; Tragant 2006). The idea of a maturational period is also often cited as an explanation for why, in many contexts, language learning often declines during adolescence. It is also not uncommon to hear people discuss the idea of an 'ideal age' for learning a language, and whether or not they feel as though they started learning at the 'right' age or not. As more and more studies in the field of applied linguistics have shown, however, even though there is some evidence that a maturational period may have an impact on some aspects of language learning, it is by no means as black and white as saying younger means better.

In her research, Bialystok (1997) identifies certain limits to the impact of the maturational period. Whilst she recognises that there is evidence to suggest that younger children tend to be successful language learners, Bialystok suggests that this is more to do with the ways in which children go about acquiring language than a biological influence. For her, the flexibility and ability young learners display is a more convincing proposition for explaining language learning success than a biological one. As she says, "children would appear to be more successful language learners ... not because of maturational limits on language learning but because of stylistic differences in learning at different times in life" (Bialystok 1997: 132).

Researchers such as Schmid (2014), for example, show how support for a maturational effect has often been drawn from comparisons between individuals learning the target language and monolingual speakers of the language, which she suggests may not be appropriate. Schmid (2014) discusses how such studies are potentially problematic, on account of not comparing similar learners or learning conditions. As a result, she suggests that the results may not be sufficiently reliable to draw firm conclusions, and also highlights the importance of context in understanding any impact of age on language learning.

Other research into the relationship between age and language learning success has shown that age, and in particular adolescence, is in fact a positive factor (Cook, 1996; Muñoz 2006, 2008; Ryan and Patrick, 2001; Tragant 2006; Tragant and Victori, 2006). Instead of being a hindrance, adolescence, and the co-occurring cognitive, emotional and psychological changes that take place at this time, have a positive impact on learning and are in fact beneficial, if classroom practices and learning opportunities are effectively designed and delivered (Muñoz, 2006, 2008; Ryan and Patrick, 2001; Tragant, 2006; Tragant and Victori, 2006).

These differences in approaches and findings highlight the need for us to ask questions both about how the period of adolescence impacts learning approaches and what the learning strategies of these young learners are. It is also important to discover more about other factors, such as the role of context, to develop a better understanding of how adolescence may impact the language learning process.

KEY LEARNING ISSUES

From the literature on adolescent language learners it is possible to identify three broad interrelated and interdependent themes. The three categories are: *Learning needs, strategies, and opportunities; Engagement, interest and motivation;* and *Learning contexts*, and

these are used to organise the following discussion, with specific reference to the learning of English.

LEARNING NEEDS, STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Ryan and Patrick (2001) posit that the developmental changes that take place during adolescence are very significant in terms of how they impact on learners' attitudes towards, and preferences, for learning. Some of the key changes they identify are an "increased desire for autonomy, increased reflection on more abstract constructs (e.g., fairness), increased need for positive and supportive relationships with both peers and nonparental adults, and increased self-consciousness and sensitivity regarding social comparison" (p. 439). For Ryan and Patrick (2001) these changes are important in that they are not regarded as 'choices' that learners make, but rather they are developmental needs that have to be met. Classrooms that, therefore, work with these needs rather than against them are likely to be sites of more effective learning.

In their work with adolescent learners of English, Tragant and Victori (2006) looked at the types of strategies used by this group of learners to try and understand more about how age may be an influence on learning strategies, and to what extent the strategies are positive or negative in terms of the learners' potential for learning English. In their work the authors found that, as older learners moved into adolescence, they tended to make increased use of more autonomous and metacognitively demanding learning techniques in comparison to the younger learners in the study. They found that the adolescent learners tended to use more "demanding strategies, such as analysing, classifying, studying and using mnemotechniques, all of which require a higher degree of elaboration on the part of the learner than simple memorisation techniques" (Tragant and Victori, 2006: 223).

The findings from their study echo similar findings to those of Muñoz (2006, 2008), Oxford (1989) and Tragant (2006), and also speak clearly to Ryan and Patrick's (2001) claims that adolescence marks a distinctive phase in the ways that learners actually go about learning. The crucial point for this discussion, however, is that the techniques and strategies used by this group of adolescents are the same as those often highlighted as being adopted by the most successful language learners (see Cook, 1996; Richards and Lockhart, 1996).

Building on the idea of adolescence as representing a stage in which distinctive learning strategies and styles are developed, and drawing from work in psychology and second language acquisition, Muñoz's (2006, 2008) work looks at the different ways in which the activities that learners are asked to engage in may complement, or actually contradict, their learning needs and strategies. Her work explores the extent to which learning at different ages can be aided, or indeed hindered, by different types of activities designed to practise the language.

Muñoz (2008) highlights both the implications that different types of activities have for successful language learning at different ages and the different impact activities have on the cognitive development of learners, as well as on learners' aptitude for language learning. She also looks at the ways in which different activities can help foster the development of successful learning strategies (see Chapter 9), as well as how activities impact (positively and negatively) on learners' motivation and personal engagement with the language (see Chapter 6).

Muñoz highlights the importance of providing opportunities for language practice that complement the age of the learner, and suggests that there are distinct activities that are more effective learning activities for older learners. For example, she suggests that activities that involve logic, reasoning and analysis, and which encourage cooperation rather than competition, are more suitable and effective for the cognitive and social needs of older learners. In contrast, Muñoz suggests that activities that require

some sort of physical involvement, which may be routinised and involve very familiar patterns and scenarios, and which may be more repetitive in nature, are more suitable for the needs of younger learners. She further suggests that activities which foster autonomy, and provide the learners with the agency to select materials and to also be involved in task design (see Chapter 29), are also very important for meeting the learning needs of adolescent learners.

What we see from this discussion is that understanding how learners are changing during the time of adolescence is crucial in identifying how learning may need to be organised and reorganised in order to foster optimum conditions for learning. Some salient points here are that, contrary to often-held opinions and stereotypes, adolescent learners, by virtue of the cognitive and psychological changes they may be experiencing, are likely to be developing approaches and attitudes to learning that match very well with the learning strategies and attitudes associated with 'good' language learners.

ENGAGEMENT, INTEREST AND MOTIVATION

As we can see from the discussion above, the changes that are taking place within adolescent learners are likely to have a significant impact on the ways in which learning is approached, taken up and, possibly, rejected. Although the previous discussion has shown that adolescent learners may naturally be well-placed to be successful language learners, adolescence is still a period in time during which interest in and motivation for language learning often decreases in school contexts (Cable et al., 2010; Tragant, 2006).

One of the key factors that is regarded as having a significant impact on motivation and engagement at this period of time is the nature of the learning that individuals are engaged in. A feature of the learning experiences for adolescents is that not only is this period characterised by internal changes, but it is also characterised by a significant change in the nature of the curriculum and types of learning that learners are engaged in. This is a period in which learning often moves away from lower-stakes, freer practice to higher-stakes, more examination-oriented, form-focused work. Instead of a focus on enjoyment, the goal is likely to shift towards a focus on outcomes and grades. As we know from the work of researchers such as Muñoz (2006, 2008) and Ryan and Patrick (2001), this might not be the most conducive of contexts for motivating adolescent learners. It is no surprise, then, that learners highlight the ways in which classes are organised, and what the content is, as being crucial in determining their interests in language learning (see Lo Bianco and Aliani, 2013 for an interesting account).

Much of the literature on adolescent language learners focuses on this period in a young person's life as being a time when they are most influenced by extrinsic factors such as their peers and social groups (Kissau and Wierzalis, 2008; Merga 2014). Research has found that adolescents tend to be very sensitive to what their friends do and/or think and that they are likely to engage, or disengage, with particular activities depending on how the activities are viewed by their peer and friendship groups (Kissau and Wierzalis, 2008; Merga 2014). Many learners are also motivated by more intrinsic factors, such as wanting to experience different cultures and cultural practices like music, film and literature.

Here the concept of capital, that is, the value that the learner places on the language, is crucial in terms of how a learner is likely to be motivated to take up and continue learning a language. For many learners, English is a language that they are likely to need for entrance into secondary schools, to university, and to the job market, and this need may be highly motivating (Lo Bianco and Aliani, 2013). For some, however, the relative dominance of English and the gatekeeping role it often serves can be highly demotivating. For others the sociopolitical history of English may be a barrier to taking up the language (Canagarajah, 1999, Harklau, 2007; Pennycook, 1994; Tragant, 2006).

LEARNING CONTEXTS

Any discussion of learning a language as an adolescent, particularly in relation to the learning of English, must recognise the many and varied contexts in which adolescent learners engage in the process of learning. When we think of these learners, we could be referring to young teenagers studying English as a required subject at school in classrooms for two to three hours a week in a broad range of different countries. Depending on where this learning is taking place, these learners may, in addition to their classroom study, be active users of English outside the classroom, whereas others may not. We may also be thinking of learners who are enrolled in language courses, sometimes within their home towns and countries. These may be young adults enrolled in a programme of general English classes at a language centre, or in courses designed specifically to help them pass particular examinations, or they may be learners attending summer schools or study trips in language centres during school holidays. The term also includes those adolescent learners who are learning English as an additional language as a result of their attending schools where English is the medium of instruction, but not necessarily the learner's first/home language. These may be learners in multilingual classrooms in urban (as well as rural) centres around the world. These may be learners who are newly arrived and/or temporary migrants, settled residents as well as refugees.

Whilst the contexts in which adolescents might be learning English are many and varied, there are key themes that crosscut the literature as impacting on the language learning process. In her work on adolescent English learners in the USA, Harklau (2007) makes the important point that, for these learners, judgements about their cognitive abilities, and therefore the activities and materials they are given to interact with, are often made based on the levels of their English rather than their age and experience of the world. This situation often results in learners being given material and activities that may be aimed at much younger learners and which, instead of engaging learners, actually have the potential to alienate and disengage them. Such findings are widespread and such ideas about these adolescent learners often have a very negative impact on the language learning trajectories of these young individuals (see, for example, Ajayi, 2006; Chun, 2009; Rubinstein-Avila, 2003; Safford and Costley, 2008).

Disengagement with the cultural context that is often present in language learning materials is also an issue that is widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Gray, 2002, 2013; Pennycook, 1994). In these cases, learners do not necessarily identify with the ideas, values and practices put forward in textbooks and other classroom materials. For some, it may be that the values and attitudes being put forward in the materials run counter to their own personal and cultural ideologies. For others, it might be that there is no common experience to draw their attention and/or interest in the materials, and there may be little motivation to allow the learners to make sense of the materials in relation to their own daily lives. In all of these cases, what these examples show us is that issues of power, identity and the extent to which learners are afforded individual agency play a significant role in the learning experiences of adolescent language learners (see Chapter 10).

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

What the literature, and the discussion presented here, has shown is that in the context of adolescent learners, effective teaching and assessment needs to take account of the unique set of characteristics and dispositions that adolescent learners bring with them to their language learning. Effective teaching and assessment needs to provide adolescents with a range of activities that allow them to take advantage of the cognitive changes that they may

be experiencing. This means trying to create supportive spaces, to design activities and to provide materials that challenge adolescent learners and which enhance their language learning strategies, so that they might move towards increasingly greater autonomy over their learning.

Effective teaching and assessment for adolescents should also take account of the types of activities that learners are asked to engage in and whether, and to what extent, these activities are likely to be the most effective ways to engage them. As discussed earlier, adolescent learners are likely to be sensitive to explicit evaluations and comparisons, as well as potentially disengaged by materials and activities that do not provide them with sufficient cognitive challenge.

Effective teaching and assessment of adolescent learners also needs to take into account the broader sociocultural and sociopolitical context in which the learning is taking place. Such a view of language learning requires us to consider classrooms not simply as sites in which teachers and learners are involved in transmitting and receiving knowledge, but rather as sites of power and identity, of contest and negotiation, and construction and deconstruction of knowledge and ideas (Leung and Street, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the main ideas and issues that are commonly discussed in research in relation to adolescent language learners. The chapter began by exploring the idea of the maturational period and what impact this has on adolescent learners. The discussion highlighted that contrary to often commonly held beliefs, research has shown that adolescence may in fact be a very positive and highly favourable age in which to learn a language. The discussion then moved on to explore some of the ways in which these potential advantages play out in language learning classrooms. The chapter concluded with some recommendations for teaching and assessment that take account of, and work with, the particular needs of this group of learners, rather than working against them.

Discussion Questions

1. What are your own assumptions about the role of age in language learning? How do you think these assumptions impact on your own ideas and approaches to language learning and teaching?
2. Thinking about your own learning and teaching contexts, how is/was learning organised for adolescent learners? What are some of the ways in which these arrangements might complement, as well as contradict, adolescent language learners' needs?
3. What motivates you to learn/teach English, and how has this motivation changed over time and with age? Are there examples of activities or experiences that you have also found demotivating? Are these the same for your colleagues/learners?

Key Readings

- Bialystok, E. (1997). The structure of age: in search of barriers to second language acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 13(2), 116–137.
- Harklau, L. (2007). The adolescent English language learner: Identities lost and found. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International Handbook of English Language Teaching, Part 1* (pp. 639–655). New York: Springer.

- Muñoz, C. (Ed.) (2006). *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Ryan, A. M., & Patrick, H. (2001). The classroom social environment and changes in adolescents' motivation and engagement during middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 437–460.

References

- Ajayi, L. J. (2006). Multiple voices, multiple realities: self-defined images of self among adolescent Hispanic English Language learners. *Education*, 126(3), 468–480.
- Bialystok, E. (1997). The structure of age: in search of barriers to second language acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 13(2), 116–137.
- Birdsong, D. (2006). Age and second language acquisition and processing: A selective overview. *Language Learning*, 56, 9–49.
- Cable, C., Driscoll, P., Mitchell, R., Sing, S., Cremin, T., Earl, J., Eyres, I., Holmes, B., Martin, C., & Heins, B. (2010). *Languages and Learning at Key Stage 2: A Longitudinal Study Final Report*. Department for Children, Schools and Families, UK.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chun, C. W. (2009). Critical literacies and graphic novels for English-language learners: Teaching *Maus*. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(2), 144–153.
- Cook, V. (1996). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). London and New York: Arnold.
- Gray, J. (2002). The global coursebook in English language teaching. In D. Block & D. Cameron (Eds.), *Globalization and Language Teaching* (pp. 151–167). London: Routledge.
- Gray, J. (2013). *Critical Perspective on Language Teaching Materials*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Harklau, L. (2007). The adolescent English language learner: Identities lost and found. In J. Cummins & C. Davison (Eds.), *International Handbook of English Language Teaching, Part I* (pp. 639–655). New York: Springer.
- Kissau, S., & Wierzalis, E. (2008). Gender identity and homophobia: The impact on adolescent males studying French. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(3), 402–413.
- Leung, C., & Street, B. V. (Eds.) (2012). *English – a Changing Medium for Education*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Lo Bianco, J., & Aliani, R. (2013). *Language Planning and Student Experiences: Intention, Rhetoric and Implementation*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Merga, M. (2014). Peer group and friend influences on the social acceptability of adolescent book reading. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 57(6), 472–482.
- Muñoz, C. (Ed.) (2006). *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Muñoz, C. (2008). Age-related differences and second language learning practice. In R.M. DeKeyser (Ed.), *Practice in a Second Language: Perspectives from Applied Linguistics and Cognitive Psychology* (pp. 229–256). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. L. (1989). Use of language learning strategies: A synthesis of studies with implications for strategy training. *System* 17(2), 235–247.

- Pennycook, A. (1994). *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. Harlow: Longman.
- Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubinstein-Avila, E. (2003). Conversing with Miguel: An adolescent English language learner struggling with later literacy development. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 47(4), 290–301.
- Ryan, A. M., & Patrick, H. (2001). The classroom social environment and changes in adolescents' motivation and engagement during middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2), 437–460.
- Safford, K., & Costley, T. (2008). 'I didn't speak for the first year': silence, self-study and student stories of English language learning in mainstream education. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(2), 136–151.
- Schmid, M. S. (2014). The debate on maturational constraints in bilingual development: A perspective from first-language attrition. *Language Acquisition*, 21(4), 386–410.
- Tragant, E. (2006). Language learning motivation and age. In C. Muñoz (Ed.), *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning* (pp. 237–267). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Tragant, E., & Victori, M. (2006). Reported strategy use and age. In C. Muñoz (Ed.), *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning* (pp. 208–236). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- United Nations (2012). *World Population Monitoring: Adolescents and Youth: A Concise Report*. New York: United Nations.

CHAPTER 3

Learning as an Adult

Carol Griffiths and Adem Soruç

INTRODUCTION

A number of well-known studies have presented a negative view of adults' ability to learn language, and various reasons have been suggested to explain why language learning might be more difficult for adults than for younger learners, including maturational factors (such as the Critical Period Hypothesis or myelination), identity issues (see Chapter 10), and affective variables (such as culture shock and language shock; see also Chapter 8). In more recent years, however, research evidence has been accumulating which indicates that motivated adults can manage to learn a new language to high levels of proficiency, sometimes to the point that they are indistinguishable from native speakers, especially if they are also exposed to an input-rich environment. In order to be able to learn language effectively, however, adults may need to be allowed to utilise their more highly developed cognitive abilities (somewhat out-of-fashion, according to a Communicative Approach), and to employ their familiar learning style (whether or not this accords with other classmates' styles). The commonly-employed 'native speaker' criterion for success may also need to be reconsidered, since learners may be able to communicate very effectively in their new language, but prefer to retain something of their old accent as an identity marker. This chapter aims to discuss these various aspects and to suggest implications for the facilitation of successful adult language learning.

OVERVIEW

Unfortunately for those who would like to adopt a 'can do' approach to adult language learning, much of the research has been quite negative. Several early studies (e.g., Harley, 1986; Oyama, 1976; Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978) all concluded that, although adults made faster progress initially, younger learners were more successful than adults in the long run. Several well-known case studies painted a similarly pessimistic picture. For instance,

Schumann (1976) describes a ten-month study of Alberto, a 33-year-old Costa Rican living in the USA. Although test results indicated that Alberto was not lacking in cognitive ability, he appeared to lack motivation to learn English, did not socialise with English speakers, and made very little progress during the ten months of the study. Schmidt's (1983) subject, Wes, a Japanese artist living in Hawaii, also 33 years old, was very sociable and had a strong drive to communicate, and his oral competence developed considerably; but Wes showed little or no interest in formal study, so he remained unable to read or write in English and his grammatical control remained low after a three-year observation period. Another example of an unsuccessful adult, Burling (1981) recounts his own experience of trying to learn Swedish during a year as a guest professor at a university in Sweden. Burling was in his mid-50s, and he considered himself to have high motivation and positive attitudes. Nevertheless, he judged his own progress as "distinctly unsatisfactory" (p. 280).

Reasons which have been suggested for such negative results vary. The Critical Period Hypothesis has long been used to suggest that, past a certain age (often located around puberty), language learning becomes more difficult, or even impossible (see Chapter 2). Another possible maturational explanation is the process of myelination which, as Long (1990) explains, progressively wraps the nerves of the brain in myelin sheaths as the brain develops; like concrete pathways in a garden, myelin defines learning pathways, making it easier to get from one point to another, and removing the need to re-learn information or procedures every time they are encountered, but reducing flexibility. Maturational constraints are also suggested by Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003) as the reason why successful adult language learners "deviate from the unspoken norm" (p. 539).

Viewing the question from a somewhat different angle, "the construction and reconstruction of learner identity" (Marx, 2002: 264) is noted as a potential issue for adults when trying to develop a new language (see Chapter 10). Although identity may not be an issue only for adults, our sense of who we are (and are not) tends to become more established as we mature, and this may result in our being less willing to accept change of any kind, including language, since most adults have already developed their own first language (L1). Indeed, according to Piller (2002), identity is actually more important than age when it comes to learning a language. The identity issue was also noted by the Turkish adult university students in a study by Soruç and Griffiths (2015): although there was some initial uptake of native-speaker features of spoken English in this study, by the time of the delayed post-test, most of these features were no longer being used. Several of the students attributed this attrition to conflict with their own identity, which created embarrassment and a sense of artificiality.

Other possible explanations which have been suggested in the literature include socio-affective factors such as culture shock, which leaves the learner feeling confused and excluded, and language shock, which leaves the learner feeling nervous and humiliated. Indeed, according to Schumann (1976), these may be the most important variables accounting for Alberto's failure to learn English in spite of living in an English-speaking environment, which might have been expected to facilitate his learning. Burling (1981) attributes his lack of success with learning Swedish mainly to social constraints, such as the need to maintain relationships among highly proficient English-speaking colleagues, which can erode motivation and mean that an adult is "likely to give up and conclude that he has lost the capacity to learn a language" (p. 284). And, according to Schmidt (1983), although his subject (Wes) was socially motivated to achieve a high level of oral communicative competence, he lacked the motivation to work hard to achieve equal competence in the more formal areas of the language (reading and writing).

Nevertheless, in spite of these negative views of adult language learners, there has been "growing evidence that some learners who start learning as adults can achieve a native-like competence" (Ellis, 2008: 31), leading Muñoz and Singleton (2011: 1) to recommend "a

loosening of the association” between age and the ability to learn language. Examples of positive studies include a well-known case study by Ioup, Boustagui, El Tigi, and Moselle (1994) which documents a case of a successful adult language learner who achieved native-like performance in a new language (Arabic) within about two years, when her new husband was conscripted into the army and she was left in a situation of total immersion with her husband’s relatives. This led Ioup et al. (ibid.) to re-examine the Critical Period Hypothesis, since, as Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) put it, “biological restrictions such as brain maturation should not be so easily overturned” (p. 177). A number of adult Dutch learners of English in a study by Bongaerts, van Summeren, Planken and Schils (1997) could not be distinguished from native speakers, suggesting that “it is not impossible to achieve an authentic, native like pronunciation of a second language after a specified biological period of time” (p. 447). Although they found that overall, target language attainment was negatively correlated with age, Birdsong and Molis (2001) nevertheless found “modest evidence of native like attainment among late learners” (p. 235). When Muñoz and Singleton (2007) asked L2 adult learners of English to re-tell the narrative of a movie, two of the students scored within the native speaker range, as judged by native speakers of English. High levels of native-like proficiency were discovered by Reichle (2010) among some of the adult participants in his study, leading him to conclude that “these results are incompatible with the traditional notion of a critical period for second language acquisition” (p. 53). And when Kinsella and Singleton (2014) investigated 20 adult Anglophone near-native users of French, 3 of the participants (all of whom were married to a French spouse, had either bilingual or French-speaking children, and strong links to the French community) scored within the native speaker range, and the authors concluded that “native-likeness remains attainable until quite late in life” (p. 458).

KEY LEARNING ISSUES

Given that evidence seems to be mounting that adults can become highly proficient in a language other than their first, it is useful to consider how successful learning is achieved by adults. Two factors which seem to be repeatedly in evidence with the adult language learning issue are motivation (see Chapter 6) and exposure (see Chapter 11).

MOTIVATION

Of course, motivation is well known to be a major predictor of success not only for adults, but also for learners of any age. However, if we look more closely, it is possible we may be able to identify different kinds of motivation. For younger students, motivation is often (though, of course, not always) extrinsic: they need to pass an examination, they are afraid of parental disapproval, or they feel some such other external pressure which drives them to be successful, or, at least, to avoid being unsuccessful. For adults, these kinds of pressures are largely behind them. Evidence from the literature suggests that what tends to drive an adult to learn another language is often the desire to integrate with a target person or group (such as a spouse, the spouse’s family, or a target community), or the desire to use the language as an instrument to achieve a particular goal (such as a qualification or a job). In other words, in the case of an adult, motivation is more likely to be integrative and/or instrumental, and it is this that will drive an adult to invest time and energy in learning a new language.

We can see integrative motivation at work in the cases of Julie, who needed to integrate with her husband’s family (Ioup et al., 1994), and Kinsella and Singleton’s (2014) three very successful adult learners of French, who had strong ties to the target-language-speaking community. Examples of instrumental motivation might be the participants in a study by Bongaerts (1999), the most successful of whom were highly motivated for professional

(instrumental) reasons. Other examples might be Kira and Kang, two of the most successful adult learners in a study reported by Griffiths (2013), who were both driven by the desire to improve themselves professionally and to achieve higher incomes and better lifestyles for themselves and their families. Kira (a 28-year-old Japanese man), and Kang (a 41-year-old Korean) were both very focused on their studies and they both invested a considerable amount of effort and out-of-class time in order to achieve much faster than average progress through the levels of the school – in fact, they progressed much more quickly than many of the much younger students with whom they studied. Compared with these two, Yuki (a 44-year-old Japanese woman) appeared to have minimal motivation to learn (she attended the school only as an immigration requirement, in order to be near her children who were studying at the school), and to invest little or no time or effort in her study. As a result, she made negligible progress over a two-year period, although she was quick to ascribe her lack of progress to her age: “my mind is blank”, she said (Griffiths, 2013: 110).

EXPOSURE

As with motivation, exposure is not a factor only with adult language learning; for instance, study-abroad programmes aimed at giving students experience with a target language have become very popular among students of all ages (e.g., Freed, Dewey and Segalowitz, 2004; see also Chapter 11). But exposure does seem to be a factor which is commonly mentioned in connection with successful adult learners. Julie, for instance (Ioup et al., 1994), was totally immersed in her husband’s family environment when he was called away soon after their marriage. Marinova-Todd (2003) found that out of 30 participants, the 6 most proficient students all lived with native speakers of the target language. Moyer (2009) also concluded that interactive experience in the target language was more important for target language development than instruction. Likewise, in a study involving 11 Spanish students, Muñoz and Singleton (2007) found that the most proficient learners were living with native speakers of English. Furthermore, the three most proficient participants in Kinsella and Singleton’s (2014) study all participated actively in the target language community.

We might perhaps, suggest, then, that although merely living in an input-rich environment does not necessarily guarantee that a learner will be motivated to use the opportunity to learn (e.g., Yuki interviewed in Griffiths, 2008, 2013), there is evidence to suggest that such an environment maximises the opportunity for effective language development for those who are prepared to invest the time and the effort. Having said that, however, there are examples of adult learners who have achieved remarkable results with minimal exposure to the target language. One such case is described in Griffiths and Cansiz (2015). Gökhan was in his 40s when he decided he wanted to sit an international exam (IELTS). He describes his motivation as trying to avoid “being embarrassed in front of others” (p. 484). He worked hard, investing “as much time as possible” (p. 484), and he used many strategies, which are described in detail in the article. When he sat the IELTS exam he scored a Band 9 (reckoned to be native-speaker level). Yet he had never been out of Turkey (except for a brief holiday in the USA), and had had minimal contact with native speakers of English, whom he had found “not available at every corner or when you happen to find them they are usually too busy to offer a helping hand” (p. 484). In other words, we might suggest that, although there are studies which stress the importance of exposure to the target language (e.g., Kinsella and Singleton, 2014; Marinova Todd, 2003; Moyer, 2009; Muñoz and Singleton, 2007, see above) and although intuitively such exposure must be useful, it would seem that lack of this opportunity does not have to be a handicap for sufficiently motivated learners. This generalization probably applies to all learners irrespective of age, but Gökhan’s case illustrates that it is no less applicable to adults than to younger learners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

However, if we accept that adults can learn a language, we must consider that they may not necessarily learn in the same way that younger learners do. They may, for instance, require more allowance to be made for familiar learning styles and established strategies which they have developed over many years (see Chapter 9). For instance, Hiro, a 64-year-old from Japan (Griffiths, 2013), tended to struggle with the kinds of communicative activities favoured by his teacher and enthusiastically enjoyed by his younger classmates. In order to cope with this situation, he would quietly withdraw to the back of the classroom and busy himself with reading or writing in his notebook. This troubled his teacher, however, who felt it interfered with classroom dynamics, and also was defensive about what she felt was an implied criticism of her teaching methods. After discussion with the Director of Studies, the teacher came to be more willing to allow Hiro to work according to the style with which he was comfortable, and, over the time they were together, they gradually negotiated a mutually satisfactory compromise, which included Hiro being progressively more willing to engage in the kinds of communicative activities that he had avoided in the beginning.

Cognitive differences between older and younger learners have also been hypothesised as an explanation of the results of several studies which have found that adults often make faster initial progress with language learning (e.g., Harley, 1986; Muñoz, 2006; Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). Krashen (1985) explains that older learners can achieve faster initial progress in terms of their ability to use more well-developed cognitive abilities to negotiate meaning. Ellis (2008) also acknowledges that “the greater cognitive development of older learners is advantageous where explicit learning is concerned” (p. 21). Given that cognition has tended to be downplayed in recent years in favour of communicative approaches, this may require some rethinking of contemporary teaching methodologies, and adults may need to be allowed more cognitive engagement with the language they want to learn in order to work out and apply the lexicon and the rules of the target language (e.g., Hiro interviewed in Griffiths, 2013).

When it comes to assessing what is ‘successful’ and what is not, the emphasis has traditionally been on the native-speaker norm, which is used as the criterion in many studies, (e.g., Birdsong and Molis, 2001; Bongaerts et al., 1997; Ioup et al., 1994; Muñoz and Singleton, 2007; Kinsella and Singleton, 2014). It is quite possible, however, that non-native speakers may get to be extremely effective communicators in a new language, but still retain an accent: indeed, this may be something they choose to do in order to preserve identity (Muñoz and Singleton, 2011). And when we add to this the difficulty (if not the impossibility) of defining what actually is the ‘standard’ accent, even within speakers of the same language, the use of native-speaker norms as a criterion gets to seem even more questionable. As Yates and Kozar (2015: 1) put it, “optimal proficiency development” according to the needs and preferences of the individual learner may actually be more important and useful than emphasizing native-speaker-like attainment. This does not, of course, apply only to adults, but it may be more applicable to adults, since they have had longer to establish the way they speak. They may, therefore, find it correspondingly more difficult to change, and they may be less willing to give up an accent which, as Muñoz and Singleton (2011) note, can be an identifying feature which they may wish to retain.

CONCLUSION

It is probably undeniable that the majority of successful language learners learn when they are younger (e.g., Birdsong and Molis, 2001; Harley, 1986; Oyama, 1976; Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). Even with the more positive studies, the highly successful adult students are usually a minority, amounting, for instance, to just 2 out of 12 in Muñoz and

Singleton's (2007) study or 3 out of 20 in the study by Kinsella and Singleton (2014). However, to go from this observation to conclude that adults cannot learn a language is not reasonable, since, there is evidence to indicate that under the right conditions, and given sufficient motivation, highly successful adult language learning is possible. And if it is possible for some, there is no logical reason why maturation per se should explain the fact that, in general, successful language learning is most likely to occur when the individual is pre-adult. There may be any number of reasons why adults, generally, do not learn a language as successfully as younger learners, including motivation, reconstruction of identity, time constraints, affective difficulties, social factors or lack of exposure and opportunity for practice. The fact that, in spite of these constraints, there are numerous examples of adults who do indeed manage to achieve high levels of competence in a new language, places the existence of a critical period for language learning in serious doubt. It would rather seem that motivated adults can learn to very high levels of proficiency. Some may even become indistinguishable from native-speakers, in as far as that is a valid comparison. And even though such learners may be the exception, the authors of this chapter would like to suggest it is time we adopted a positive 'can do' approach to adult language learning for those who wish to undertake it and who are prepared to invest sufficient time and effort in the endeavour.

Discussion Questions

1. How can adult learners manage their learning in order to achieve successful language learning outcomes? (For some possible ideas, see Griffiths and Cansiz, 2015.)
2. What can teachers do to facilitate successful language learning for their adult learners?
3. If you, as an adult, decided to try to learn a new language, what do you think your main constraints would be? What are some of the things you could do to try to manage these constraints?

Key Readings

- Birdsong, D., & Molis, M. (2001). On the evidence for maturational effects in second language acquisition. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 44, 235–249.
- Griffiths, C. (2008). Age and good language learners. In C. Griffiths (Ed.), *Lessons from Good Language Learners* (pp. 35–48). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kinsella, C., & Singleton, D. (2014). Much more than age. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(4), 441–462.
- Marinova-Todd, S. H. (2003). Know your grammar: What the knowledge of syntax and morphology in an L2 reveals about the critical period for second/foreign language acquisition. In M. P. García Mayo & M. L. García Lecumberri (Eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language* (pp. 59–73). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Moyer, A. (2009). Input as a critical means to an end: Quantity and quality of experience in L2 phonological attainment. In T. Piske & M. Young-Scholten (Eds.), *Input Matters in SLA* (pp. 159–174). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Muñoz, C., & Singleton, D. (2011). A critical review of age-related research on L2 ultimate attainment. *Language Teaching*, 44, 1–35.

References

- Bialystok, E., & Hakuta, K. (1999). Confounded age: Linguistic and cognitive factors in age differences for second language acquisition. In D. Birdsong (Ed.), *Second*