

DOES THE AGE MATTER IN ACQUIRING SECOND LANGUAGE?

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ABSTRAK

Pemerolehan bahasa kedua merupakan permasalahan yang selalu menjadi perdebatan antara para peneliti sejak dari lama. Beberapa ahli mengatakan bahwa usia merupakan faktor utama yang mempengaruhi seseorang dalam memperoleh bahasa kedua. Sebagian dari mereka beranggapan bahwa anak-anak pada usia di masa *critical thinking* akan memiliki kemampuan lebih baik dalam memperoleh bahasa kedua dibandingkan dengan orang yang sudah melewati masa *critical thinking*. Akan tetapi, beberapa ahli mengatakan bahwa orang dewasa mampu belajar dan memperoleh bahasa kedua lebih baik dari pada anak-anak, karena mereka memiliki kemampuan lebih dalam mengerti suatu bahasa. Penelitian ini fokus untuk menemukan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi seseorang dalam pemerolehan bahasa kedua. Penelitian ini melibatkan sembilan orang mahasiswa Internasional di Hongaria sebagai subjek penelitian. Mereka mulai mempelajari dan memperoleh bahasa Hongaria di usia mereka yang sudah melewati masa *critical thinking*. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian ini, usia bukanlah satu-satunya faktor penting dalam memperoleh bahasa kedua, ada beberapa faktor lain yang memiliki andil besar seperti lingkungan masyarakat, akses ke bahasa target, etitit terhadap bahasa, cinta, hubungan/persahabtan.

Kata kunci: Pemerolehan bahasa kedua, *early starter*, *late starter*

ABSTRACT

It has been being debatable issue for very long time, the early starter verseus late starter in the second language acquisition. Some researchers assumed and found that the early starter can acquire language better than the late starter, because they are in the critical period. While, some researchers found that the late starter can acquire and perform the new language better than the early starter, because they have better ability in understanding some aspects of languages. Therefore, this current paper concerned to find any factors influence someone in acquiring the second language acquisition. This study involved nine International students who are studying in Hungary, they started learning and acquiring Hungarian language when they have passed their critical period. This current study found that the age is not the only main factor in acquiring the language, but there are some other factors, including the society, access to the language, attitude toward language, love, and friendship/relationship.

Keywords : *Second Language Acquisition, early starter, late starter*

INTRODUCTION

The second language acquisition has been being a very interesting issue among the researchers from year to year. It does not have any end if we are talking about this tremendously related topic to our daily life. As we can see, there are many cases related to the second language acquisition which we can find in the society.

The second language acquisition is a process of acquiring new language beyond the native language. It can be happened after someone acquiring her/his first language (mother tongue) or at the same time as he/she is acquiring the first language.

As the development of the research from year to year, there have been many theories appear related to the factors in acquiring the second language, one of them is the age effect. Some researchers approved that the age is a main factor in acquiring the second language; Lenneberg (1967) known as the first Linguist who came with his popular hypothesis that people tend to acquire language more easily when they are in their critical period, the age of 5-13 years old. This critical period was belived as the golden age, when people can receive and acquire language and knowledge better than the older age.

Moreover, this critical period hypothesis is supported by recent researches that showed

the ignorance during the first five years old of human's life will encourage a permanently smaller of head circumference, smaller brain size, and impaired ability to learn language, and to develop social behavior of someone in his life (e.g., Chugani, Behen, Muzik, Juhasz, Nagy, & Chugani, 2001; see Uylings, 2006). Therefore, this critical period is considered as the best period for someone to learn knowledge, to acquire any language, to shape their brain and to shape their social behaviour.

However, in contrast, many researchers assumed and found that there is no effect of age in acquiring new language. Even, some of the researcher assumed that the late starter of L2 can acquire the language better and easier than early starter, they believed that the older learners have more abilities to use the implicit and conscious learning mechanisms in comparison to younger learners. Initially, Snow (1983) observed based on studies which tested L2 ability within five years study that the older learners are better than younger learners. Furthermore, in their studies, some researchers found many late starter of L2 acquire language in native-like levels of proficiency (e.g Kinsella & Singleton, 2014; Moyer, 1999; Munoz & Singleton, 2007).

Furthermore, there are many facts prove that age is not the main factor in acquiring the second language. For example, Joseph Conrad, he is one of

popular novelists. He acquired English as his third language at the age of 40. This age is far from the critical period age. However, English makes him to be a very popular novelist. He wrote his most famous books in English, the third language that he acquired in his late age. Moreover, in their review of age-related, Krashen, Long, & Scarcella (1979) concluded that there is no a significant effect after a critical period 5-10 years in the second language acquisition.

Not only that, the phenomenon of this late starter is also happened in Hungary. More than past 3 years, Hungary opens the relationship to many other countries. Many immigrants come to Hungary. Not only Immigrants, there are many International students come from other countries start looking at Hungary as their target country to pursue their study. Furthermore, since 2013, the Government of Hungary has opened an educational cooperation with 51 countries over the world as a part of the Hungarian Government's Global Opening Policy (Stipendium, nd). Since that time, there have been thousand International students studying in this lovely Hungary.

Hungary is one of non English speaking countries in Europe, they speak Hungarian as their mother tongue. To survive in a non English speaking country, the International students need to work hard related to deal, to know and to understand the language.

Since they come from other countries which do not speak Hungarian.

As we can see, actually the age of effect on the second language acquisition is debatable. It needs more research to prove that whether there is any difference between the early starters and late starters in acquiring new language or no. Therefore, this research current research will investigate whether the International students able to acquire Hungarian language as their LX in their age or not. Furthermore, this research was conducted to find some factors influence the International students in acquiring Hungarian as the late starters. We will try to find is there any other factors influence the learners in acquiring new language, such as society, friendship, relationship, or soon. This current research focuses on the X language acquisition among the International students who are doing their master degree at one of Universities in Hungary.

METHODS

This study was conducted by interviewing nine International students as the participants. Those participants were doing their master program in one of Universities in Hungary. They came from several different countries with different mother tongues. They speak more than two languages, some of them speak 3 languages, some of them speak 4 languages and some of

them speak 5 languages. All of the participants speaks English fluently. None of the participants knew and could speak Hungarian before.

Eventhough they were studying in English, but they took Hungarian language as the optional class. Moreover, as the International students in Hungary, they lived in Hungarian society. They had been living there for more than one year. They had connections to the local friends and local people.

To gain the required data in this qualitative study, the participants were asked some questions related to the topic. Furthermore, the researcher used the purposive sampling approach to chose and involve the participants.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A number of factors encourage the students from other countries come to Hungary. From year to year, the number of International students in Hungary is increased. Based on the data 2016/2017, it says that there are more than 3000 International students who are studying in Hungary (Stipendium, nd). These students are studying in some cities and Universities in the whole parts of Hungary.

The incredible growth of International students' population in Hungary, especially in Veszprem, contributes a positive phenomenon and effects for the city its self. It develops a

multilingual and multicultural society. However, living in the international community with diverse background, language, and culture is not easy. Many challenges and problems come up during their life in the multilingual and multicultural society, whether in academic activities or in their daily life.

Besides that, Hungary is one of European countries where English is a foreign language. Living in non English speaking country makes the international students encounter many challenges, because they do not speak Hungarian language and most of local people do not speak English. The difficulty of finding English speakers in Hungary, especially in Veszprem encourages the International students to learn Hungarian language.

The statistic says that Hungarian language is one of the most difficult languages in the world. It has weird structure and component for the foreign students. However, the situation in Veszprem encourages them to learn the Hungarian language. Because of listening to this language every day, gradually, the students are getting familiar with Hungarian language. From day to day, international students acquire the languages step by step. Hungarian language is also offered as one of courses in the university, students can choose this course as their elective class.

Based on the explanation above, it is proved that Living or moving to another country is one of extrinsic motivation in acquiring the second language. Therefore, living in the residence where the students always hear Hungarian language from the native speaker everyday helps them to learn and acquire language more easily. As Flege & Liu (2001) found in their study that learning by living in the place of language target can help L2 learners to acquire the language when the learners receive substantial amounts of native-speaker input.

It was written in German School Phoenix (2016), that there are several factors influence someone in acquiring new language, internally and externally. Internal factors are the factors come from the learner its self, while the external factors are factors come from outside, people, environment, society, etc. Internal factors including age, personality, intrinsic motivation, experiences, cognition, and native language. While, the external factors include curriculum, instruction, culture and status, extrinsic motivation, and access to the native speakers.

Therefore, beside of age, ther are several factors influenced someone in acquiring new language as their second, third, or X language. These factors can be seen in the case of International students in acquiring new language in their late age.

To find the required data, this current study involved nine International students who were studying in Veszprem, Hungary. They came from several countries with different language background. They were learning and acquiring Hungarian language as their X languages after their first, second, third, even fourth language. Before coming to Hungary, they never knew Hungarian language, they have not even ever listened to that language.

From simple implicit interview that was conducted involving the international students in Hungary, Veszprem. Four of nine students said that they are studying Hungarian language as their LX (L3, L4, L5, L6, etc) because they want to be engaged in the society. Here the information that were obtained

“Because I really want to communicate and interact with local people, feel the atmosphere of Hungarian society, but it is difficult to find local people who speak English, so I learnt Hungarian” [Raina]

“Because I want to communicate with Hungarians” [Neyna]

“I want to have Hungarian friends” [George]

Those participants admitted that the society unconsciously demand them to know and understand Hungarian language. They live in Hungarian society and they need to communicate with the local people.

Moreover, there was a participant who said he will stay for more years in Veszprem to continue his study.

“I am planning to continue my PhD degree here, so studying Hungarian will be useful for me”
[George]

“Well, after finishing this master, I guess I will continue my study here. So, maybe I will need Hungarian language to survive” [Bas]

They said that they need to learn this language, because they will stay longer and it means they will use this language not only for one year or two years, but they will use it for more years. By staying in this city for long time, they will interact and communicate more with the local local students and local people, so by acquiring the language, they will not have problems with language anymore. He can have good communication with them, whether in English or Hungarian.

Furthermore, some of participants said that they listen to Hungarian language everywhere, because they are living in a country where

Hungarian is the official language. These participants said that having access to the language helped them to acquire this language. Those participants said

“Yes, I am living here, eventhough English is the main language for the International students and used in the academic life, but the society, the local people speak this language in their daily life.” [Neyna]

“The society makes me familiar with this language. I listen to this language everyday, so, gradually I get some input” [Sonya]

The opportunity to be in to the native country helped them to know and understand Hungarian, even though they do not understand, even speak the language perfectly. However, they get used to the language.

Not only the society gives positive impact in language acquisition, but love also has a big role in the second language acquisition. Nowadays, many researchers related love and language. They conducted study about love in multilingual and multicultural couple. As Pilller (2002) in his study about multilingual couple communication, there is an effect of multi lingual couple and inter cultural couple in acquiring LX.

Here, some information from the International students who fall in love with the Hungarian.

“I have Hungarian girl friend; I learn some Hungarian words from her” [Ronald]

“I practice my Hungarian language with my girl friend and her family” [Bas]

In another side, some Hungarian students are developing their English ability to speak with the International friends and International beloved.

“I am doing my best to speak English with my boy friend, because he cannot speak Hungarian” [Barbie]

“I am practicing my English by communicating with the International students” [Reyna]

These data relevant to Takashi (2010) in her review about the multilingual talk, she found an increase of Japanese of a Polish man who loves a Japanese woman, although they choose English as their love language, but there is an increase of his Japanese, even sometimes they speak Japanese instead of English

Furthermore, many of them say that they get used to with Hungarian language, because they listen to this language every

day. They live and study in the country where the language is spoken, so they always find people speak in this language everywhere.

“Firstly, it is strange for me to listen this language, but now.. I am familiar with this strange language” [Sonya]

“Because I hear this language every day, I get used to with it, even sometimes, I can guess the meaning” [George]

“It is easier for me to understand what local people say, because beside learning by myself, I ever learnt Hungarian language in the Summer school for one month, we stayed in a dormitory, and most of people spoke Hungarian most of the time” [Bas]

Furthermore, the attitude of learners towards the Hungarian language also matters. We can find the reason of this matter from these following statements uttered by some of participants.

“Firstly, I felt this language is strange. So, I did not want to learn about it and I did not think that I need it. But, now.. I get used to and I feel it is

interesting to learn this language”

“Learning new language is my favorite”

“I love learning this kind of difficult language”

“I feel challenged to learn this language. And now, I can speak, although not perfectly”

As it was found in the initial study conducted by Khasinah (2014) who found that there are several factors considered to affect the learners in acquiring the new language, including motivation, attitude, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, and personality. This current study found that age is not the one main reason in acquiring new language.

Based on the interview data, it can be seen that it does not matter whether the learners start acquiring language early or late. In this current study, all participants started acquiring Hungarian language in the late age. This data supports the initial studies that age is not the main factor in acquiring the language acquisition. There are a lot of factors that affect someone in acquiring the language, such as society, love, attitude, and friendship or relationship. Living in the country where the target language has a big role for the second language acquirers. Whether it is the critical period or

later, the most important is the input that they gain.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this current study, it showed us that the main factors of second language is not only age. There are a lot of factors that influence and help someone in acquiring new language. Those factors can come from the learner itself or come from outside.

The data gained from the some International students in Veszprem, Hungary, besides age, the society, love, friendship or relationship, and attitude toward the language also have a role in influencing them acquiring the Hungarian language as their X language.

This finding is related to findings in some initial researches. As it was found by Khasinah (2014) that there are several factors considered to affect the learners in acquiring the new language, including motivation, attitude, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, and personality.

Moreover, the society and access to the language also have a very big role in the second language acquisition. As stated in German School Phoenix (2016), there are several factors that influence someone in acquiring new language, internally and externally. Internal factors are the factors that come from the learner itself

self, while the external factors are factors come from outside, people, environment, society, etc. Internal factors including age, personality, intrinsic motivation, experiences, cognition, and native language. While, the external factors include curriculum, instruction, culture and status, extrinsic motivation, and access to the native speakers.

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