Indian Journal of Fundamental and Applied Life Sciences ISSN: 2231– 6345 (Online)
An Open Access, Online International Journal Available at www.cibtech.org/sp.ed/jls/2014/03/jls.htm
2014 Vol. 4 (S3), pp. 195-198/ Valipour and Davatgari
Research Article

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN FOREIGN-LANGUAGE PRONUNCIATION AND GRAMMATICAL RULES LEARNING

***Valeh Valipour[1] and Hanieh Davatgari Asl[2]**
[1]TEFL, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran
[2]Department of ELT, Ahar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahar, Iran
**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT
This study evaluated the age effects on foreign language pronunciation and grammatical rules learning due to a difference between adults and children as English language learners in terms of the perspective of interaction theory. The participants were 10 Iranian university students studying in the field of English language translation and 10 elementary school students who were passed English language as a general course of study. Both groups were taught during 3 months general English focusing on pronunciation and grammatical rules of English language. After this period, both groups were measured and compared at the end of the teaching sessions. The obtained results revealed that the children had higher scores on the given test in pronunciation parts of test in comparison with the adults while adults got higher scores on the part of the test consisting of grammatical questions than children after analyzing and measuring t-test as the statistical measurement.

Keywords: *Adult Learner, Child Learner, Interaction Theory, Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

A lot of research has been done to test the language learning ability of adults and children as foreign English language learners to find out the differences between them.
Due to some ideas and findings, it seems that children have an easier time picking up foreign languages, although some other researchers showed that but there are ways that adults can be as strong, or stronger, than children.
Linguistic researchers have found that adults under controlled conditions can learn English as a foreign language better. They believe that adults have pre-existing language knowledge, then they have a more developing of how language works as well as the more advanced elements of grammar, how to build a sentence and a good sense of punctuation and spelling. While children are still learning the mechanics of their own first language and these skills in children are still developing. Schmidt (1990) states that for adults, considering linguistic structure is important for language learning success, but according to DeKeyser (2000), children never notice language structure or at least it can be said that they don't consider structure constantly. Then it can be claimed that if adults in attaining in learning a language by paying attention to verbal ability and awareness of grammatical structures while children do not so, a significant difference between adults and children can be supported (Bley-Vroman, 1990; 2009; DeKeyser and Larson-Hall, 2005).
It is true that children are better in pronunciation because of their abilities at mimicking new sounds.
Biologically, a child's brain is more open to new sounds and patterns in pre-adolescence, but it is not true for older language learners, so it is very difficult for them to speak without an accent. Krashen *et al.*, (1979) state that some studies about comparing how children and adults learn a second language showed although it's true children achieve native-like fluency in the long run, adults actually learn languages more quickly than children in the early stages.
The ways adults and children learn a foreign language is measured differently**.** Because children use smaller vocabularies and simpler syntax than adults, then it leads to less standard of fluency for children, while adult communication is more complicated because they need language for broader range of settings, then they need to know more vocabulary and language competence in order to be considered fluent.

Additionally, inhibitions about speaking a foreign language are what adults care about it more than children, so children can practice communicating without intimidation.

According to biological features, children's brains are more flexible (Lenneberg, 1967). Newport (1990) argues that the different rates of L2 acquisition may be a sign of certain psychological and social factors that favor children in the learning process. Even without the regarding of pronunciation, it is still found that adults are better as learners in this case. Ostwald and Williams (1981) mention that the results of the studies on aging have demonstrated that learning ability does not decline with age, it depends on adults health then will lead to not declining their intellectual abilities and skills in another study on child language learning as foreigners, the results have shown that "children in bilingual classes, with exposure to the home language and to English, acquire English language skills equivalent to those acquired by children who have been in English-only programs" (Cummins, 1981; Ramirez *et al.*, 1991). Rogoff (1990) also points out that social class also influences learning styles and makes difference in learning a language by children and adults. In such situations adults are motivated more than children, because they are learning a foreign language for some special purposes rather than children, for example for using it in workplace or at holidays, even for some businesses.

The results gained by Walsh and Diller (1978) in terms of neurology from some researches done has revealed that, although there are differences in language learning in childhood and adulthood because of brain differences, "in important respects adults have superior language learning capabilities". The neural cells in adults' brains are responsible for higher-order linguistic processes using for understanding semantic relations and grammatical sensitivity develop with age as well as the locations for learning and using vocabulary and language structure which proves that adults are actually better language learners than children. Also, it can be mentioned that cognitive systems are more developed to make order associations and generalizations, and can adjust new language input with their previous learning experience. They also rely on long-term memory rather than the short-term memory function used by children and younger learners for rote learning.

Statement of the Problem

The question of the age at which to begin foreign language (FL) instruction has been always attracted the attention of parents, scholars and policy makers over the years. Recent studies show that adult learners may actually be at an advantage when studying a foreign language.

Patricia Duff in her paper, "Foreign Language Policies, Research, and Educational Possibilities" presented at the 2008 APEC Symposium on Education Reform, claims this downward push can be justified for affective and cognitive reasons. Other researchers believe younger children are more amenable to other languages and cultures. Furthermore, they are less self-conscious about FL production than older children and adolescents.

The purpose of this study is investigating the differences of English language learning by children and adults as foreign language learners by considering the development pronunciation and grammatical skills in both groups following interaction theory.

The Significance of the Study

For more than several decades finding an effective way to help how adults and children can learn English as a foreign language and what are the differences between them and children's way of learning in order to find some ways and methods to make them cope with their problems in learning processes to achieve the best results in this attempt.

Research Questions and Hypotheses of the Study

The present study will try to answer the following questions:

1. Are children better than adults in learning and producing pronunciation of English sounds as a foreign language?
2. Are adults better than children in learning grammatical rules and making correct sentences of English as a foreign language?

Based on the research questions the following null hypotheses are proposed:

1. Children are not better than adults in learning and producing pronunciation of English sounds as a foreign language.
2. Adults are not better than children in learning grammatical rules and making correct sentences of English as a foreign language.

** Significance level in this hypothesis is P=.05.*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The population of this study was 20 students of English as a foreign language, 10 adult students in the age range of 19-23, and 10 child students in the age range of 10 who were going to start English language learning as foreign language learners from the basic skills at Simin English language institute in Tonekabon, Iran. The gender factor was not controlled in both groups. Both groups were randomly selected from among those who have neatly no knowledge of English language after taking a general English test.

For both group the same teacher starts to teach the lessons due to the English language basic skills of English language using interactive methods.

After teaching period of 36 sessions, LTTC General English Proficiency Test at elementary level by focusing on the pronunciation and grammar questions was taken from both groups. This test has already obtained reliability and validity. The gained data was measured and analyzed through

Independent t-test by using SPSS software to find that by considering the significance of P=.05, if the hypothesis can be confirmed or rejected.

Descriptive Statistics of Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of the data collected from the applied tests will be presented.

Table 1: Frequencies of two scores of the same test from the two groups

Group Statistics

	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
grammar	children	10	8.8000	3.55278	1.12349
	adult	10	15.9000	1.59513	.50442
pronunciation	children	10	16.8000	.91894	.29059
	adult	10	9.2000	3.35989	1.06249

Table 2: Independent sample T-test: comparison of mean scores between two groups

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
grammar	Equal variances assumed	-5.765	18	.000	-7.10000
	Equal variances not assumed	-5.765	12.487	.000	-7.10000
pronunciation	Equal variances assumed	6.900	18	.000	7.60000
	Equal variances not assumed	6.900	10.339	.000	7.60000

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting data and statistical measurement done, the final results of independent sample t-test showed that children foreign language learners gained the better results from pronunciation parts of the given test while adult foreign language learners got the better results from grammar part of the given test. Therefore, the null hypotheses one and two were rejected due to the statistical measurements according to the difference with 95% degree of confidence and .05 level of significance.

Pronunciation >>> t observed = 6.900 > t critical=2.101 , then the null hypothesis 2 was rejected,
Grammar >>> t observed = -5.765 > t critical = 2.101 , then the null hypothesis 1 was rejected.

It can be concluded that age can affect learning a foreign language specially in learning grammar and pronunciation as it was done in this paper. Certainly, age can have effect on learning a foreign language in some other aspects too which can be the topic of further researches in this era.

REFERENCES

Bley-Vroman, R (1990). The logical problem of foreign language learning. *Linguistic Analysis* **20** 3–49.

Bongaerts T, Planken B and Schils E and Van summeren c (1997). Age and ultimate attainment in the pronunciation of a foreign language. *SLR*, **19** 447-465.

Cummins J (1981). The role of primary language development in promoting educational success for language minority students. In: *Schooling and Language Minority Students: A Theoretical Framework* (Los Angeles California State University; Evaluation, Dissemination, and Assessment Center).

DeKeyser R (1995). Learning Second Language Grammar Rules: An Experiment with a Miniature Linguistic System. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* **17**(3) 379-410.

DeKeyser R (2000). The robustness of critical period effects in second language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* **22** 499 – 533.

DeKeyser R and Larson-Hall J (2005). What Does the Critical Period Really Mean? In: *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*, edited by Kroll JF and De Groot AMB (Oxford University Press) 88–108.

Krashen S, Long M and Scarcella R (1979). Age, rate, and eventual attainment in second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly* **13** 573-582.

Lenneberg EH (1967). *The Biological Foundations of Language* (New York: Wiley).

Newport E (1990). Maturational constraints on language learning. *Cognitive Science* **14** 11-28.

Rogoff B (1990). *Apprenticeship in Thinking Cognitive Development in Social Context* (New York: Oxford).

Schmidt RW (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics* **11** 129-158.

Walsh TM and Diller KC (1978). Neurolinguistic Foundations to Methods of Teaching a Second Language. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* **16** 1-14.