



CHILDREN vs ADULTS SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the comparative analyses of children and adults second language acquisition. The article is mainly focused on the importance of taking into consideration the specific peculiarities of children and adults in second language teaching.

Keywords: *language acquisition, basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), cognitive-academic language skills (CALP), deep motor area.*

Learning is a process in which people study to acquire or obtain knowledge or skills. Second language learning is a process of internalizing and making sense of a second language after one has an established first language. Many think that second language learning is the same as second language acquisition. In fact, it differs in some ways. Krashenin his book “*Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*” (2002), defines learning as a process between acquiring and utterance. Learning a second language is different from learning first language.

The knowledge and skills that are learned a man in mastering his first language, easily transferred to a second language through this common language competence. J. Cummins (Cummins and Swain 1986, Cummins 1996) supports the need for strengthen the first language of the child in order to develop his "cognitive-academic language skills" (CALP) (i.e. language proficiency at the level providing processes knowledge and training). “Basic interpersonal communicative skills” (BICS) can be developed in a second language and achieve conversational fluency in 2-5 years. Scientific research (Cummins 1996; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt 2000; Thomas and Collier 1997, 2002), however, shows that students need 5 to 7 years to develop fluency in a more technical, academic language (depending on many variables, including the level of general language proficiency, age and time of admission to the school, the level of cognitive-academic language skills in the first language, as well as the amount of support that a child receives to achieve cognitive-academic language proficiency).

Develop fluency in a more technical, academic language (depending on many variables, including the level of general language proficiency, age and time of admission to the school, the level of cognitive-academic language skills in the first language, as well as the amount of support that a child receives to achieve cognitive-academic language proficiency). However, compared to children, adults have different ways to process a foreign language in their brains. According to



Tippin (2011), a research conducted by Dr. Paul Thompson and other neuroscientists from UCLA, children use a part of their brains called “deep motor area” to process language information. Deep motor area is a part of the brain which processes the activity that is not thought about or happens without thinking consciously, such as reading a sentence, blinking and breathing. Children acquire and learn language intuitively, while adults think about it actively so it becomes “intellectual process” for them.

The second difference is unlike children, adults are able to digest abstract or formal thinking cognitively. Children have no merit or detention of formal operational thought in learning language. Children’s cognitive abilities have not been developed while adults’ is mature cognitively. In contrast, adults have gained this ability which leads them to metalinguistic knowledge in which one is aware of the use of language and realizes that sentence may have its literal and implied meaning and analytic abilities which refers to the skills of picking up information, visualizing, solving complex problems, analyzing and making decision as well as conclusion.

The last difference is adults are more conscious that they are learning than children are. Children mostly learn without awareness of their proficiency and motivation. Even if their proficiency of second language is limited, they do not feel nervous as much as adults do. This is because adults have pride of not making mistakes. Thus adults pay more attention when they speak in second language. It can be said that adults learn second language in an analytic way. They tend to monitor their second language speech and avoid taking the risk of making mistakes. Despite having many different characteristics, children and adults have two things in common in learning a second language.

The first similarity is imitating as a way which is used by both children and adults to learn second language. Because adults have the experience in comprehensive learning, they know how to imitate surface structure. Therefore, they are paying more attention to grammar and surface features while children are paying more attention to the meaning of the utterance. The most important is they can deliver the message to the person they are talking to without paying too much attention to the grammar or proper vocabularies. In addition, children learn by imitating people around them such parents and teachers. They will imitate the way those people say something to deliver a message. For adults, they usually imitate native speakers by watching movies or reading books.

Both children and adults apply meaningful learning. Adults are able to relate their experiences or existing knowledge to the second language they are learning about because adults have cognitive framework. Even though it is said that children are rote learners by using aimless repetition and mimicking, children actually practice contextual and purposeful activity by using imitation to learn. It is



not meaningless, it is not categorized to rote learning because by using imitating to learn a second language, children acquire and store the items and information to an “established conceptual hierarchy” in their minds.

To sum up, although adults and children are alike in the way of imitating and using meaningful learning for second language learning, they have their own characteristics. In order to be successful learners, both adults and children have to adopt the learning strategies based on the characteristics they have. Therefore, adults have to realize that they have different characteristics with children, so they cannot learn a second language in the same way as children do. Not only the learners but also the teachers have to be aware of this. By analyzing the differences between adults and children, teachers as the ones who give guidance and instruction during the second language learning can apply the appropriate methods.

References

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