

A Close Investigation of the Critical Period Hypothesis:

Other Variables that Effect SLA

Introduction

- CPH as defined by Brown is the claim that there is a biological timetable before which and after which, language acquisition, is more successfully completed (Brown, 2007)
- Within this definition as explained in Hakuta (2003) various theorist have claimed different ages for the termination of the CP:
 - Krashen (1973)- 5 years
 - Pinker (1994)- 6 years
 - Lenneberg (1967)- 12 years
 - Johnson & Newport (1989)- 15 years

Arguments Against CPH

- First argument, If we cannot pinpoint an exact definition how is it possible to find solidifying support for the hypothesis?
- Second argument, how can we support the CPH when there are countless success stories of second language learners learning after the so-called “critical period” who become communicatively competent in their target or L2, some gaining such success as to be mistaken for native speakers



Other Variables to Consider

- As found in the research of Abu-Rabia (2004), Hakuta (2003), Nikolov (2000) and Ojima (2005) other variables that effect successful SLA include but are not limited to motivation, proficiency of learner, socioeconomic status, educational variables, potential, and opportunity, as well as age of arrival, length of stay in origin that second language is spoken, and amount of use of second language
- In regards to motivation, my belief is that motivation evolves out of necessity, communication being necessary for survival



Research Synthesis

- First couple of articles Hakuta, Bialystok, Wiley (2003) and Scovel (2000) review literature which support my belief that without an exact definition it is difficult to solidify evidence in support of the CPH
- The next few articles Abu-Rabia (2004), Agullo (2006), Bongaerts (2005), and Nikolov (2000) highlight research and evidence supporting that adults can become native-like speakers of a L2, some even being mistaken for native speakers, thus they have developed a native accent
- The last few articles Ojima, Nakata, and Kakigi (2005), Nikolov and Djigunovic (2006), Moyer (1999) and Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000) will connect with both of the previous arguments while also explaining in detail the other variables to be accounted for in successful SLA besides age

CPH

What is it **EXACTLY**?

- “Defense of the position that language learning is constrained by a critical period requires specifying the maturational stage language learning potential changes, and ideally the reason for the change. However, there has been little consensus about what age constitutes the critical point, and reasons for proposing different ages have rarely been offered” (Hakuta, 2003, p.31)



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- An alternative to the CPH “..that second language learning becomes compromised with age, potentially because of factors that are not specific to language but nevertheless interfere with the individual’s ability to learn a new language” (Hakuta, 2003, p.31)



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- This particular study investigated 2.3 million immigrants from Spanish and Chinese language backgrounds who now live in the U.S.
- The evidence found in the study supported that decline in SLA does not just begin after a critical period but steadily declines throughout life and that other factors play an important role in successful SLA



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- In the article by Scovel (2000) it is reiterated that due to “conflicting evidence and contrasting viewpoints that still exist” (Scovel, 2000, p. 220) persons in the education realm should be continually cautious in translating what is read about the CPH. “If applied linguist have learned anything at this important juncture in history, we have learned to look at the critical period hypothesis a bit more critically” (Scovel, 2000, p. 220)



Native-like Speakers of an L2

- Abu-Rabia and Kehat (2004) explored ten case studies of late starters who attained a native-like Hebrew accent, the majority of the cases proved to have native-like accents, it was concluded that other factors such as attitude, motivation, empathy, self-esteem, type of input, length of exposure, among others were accountable for the success



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- Nikolov (2000) investigated 33 successful learners ranging in age from 20-70, 2 studies were conducted
- Study 1 consisted of 20 learners of different native languages acquiring Hungarian
- Study 2 consisted of 13 Hungarians who had been learning English
- Across both studies 12 learners were mistaken by judges as native speakers of the language



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- In this study the strong version of the CPH is disputed.
- “These successful language learners share intrinsic motivation in the target language and seem to be proud and conscious of their achievement. Language is either part of their profession or they have a very strong integrative motivation to become bona fide residents of the target language society” (Nikolov, 2000)



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- Nikolov and Djigunovic (2006) reviewed a variety of studies that involved highly proficient late learners
- Most studies had a percentage rate of 35-45% of subjects being mistaken for native-speakers by the judges



Other Variables

- Motivation seems to be a repeated theme throughout my research
- The most successful late learners were individuals that were married to speakers of their L2 or who used their L2 in their profession
- In Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000) there was specific importance stressed upon individuals and their socio-psychological factors



Age in regards to SLA

- Age plays a role in SLA, however, other variables can override age and many adults, depending on their individual socio-psychological factors, can in fact become native-like speakers of a second language.