



 Research Article

## LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Submission Date: February 26, 2022, Accepted Date: March 16, 2022,

Published Date: March 28, 2022

Crossref doi: <https://doi.org/10.37547/philological-crjps-03-03-17>

Journal Website:  
<https://masterjournals.com/index.php/crjps>

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### ABSTRACT

In given article is described about learning foreign languages from early childhood. Foreign languages are learned much faster in children at an early age. Knowledge of several foreign languages is called bilingualism.

### KEYWORDS

Language, children, learning, linguistic, problem, bilingual, people, development, body, speaking, conversation.

### INTRODUCTION

In this article we will look briefly at some of the characteristics of the language of young children. We will then consider several theories that have been offered as explanations for how language is learned. There is an immense body of research on child

language. Although much research has been done in middle class North American and European families, there is a reach body of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research as well. Researchers have travelled all over the world to observe, record, and study children's



early language development. Our purpose in this chapter is to touch on a few main points in this research, primarily as a preparation for the discussion of Second Language acquisition, which is the focus of this book.

Early childhood bilingualism is a reality for millions of children throughout the world. Some children learn multiple languages from earliest childhood; others acquire additional languages when they go to school. The acquisition and maintenance of more than one language can open doors to many personal, social and economic opportunities. According to professor F. Genesee's point of view: "Children who learn more than one language from earliest childhood are referred to as simultaneous bilinguals, whereas those who learn another language later may be called sequential bilinguals". There is a considerable body of research on children's ability to learn more than one language in their earliest years. We sometimes hear people express the opinion that it is too difficult for children to cope with two languages. They fear that the children will be confused or will not learn either language well. However, there is little support for the myth that "learning more than one language in early childhood is a problem for children". Although some studies show minor early delays for simultaneous bilinguals, there is no evidence that learning two languages substantially slows down their linguistic development or interferes with cognitive and academic development. Indeed many simultaneous bilinguals achieve high levels of proficiency in both languages.

Ellen Bialystok and other developmental psychologists have found convincing evidence that bilingualism can have positive effects on abilities that are related to academic success, such as metalinguistic awareness. Limitations that may be observed in the language of bilingual individuals are more likely to be related to the

circumstances in which each language is learned than to any limitation in the human capacity to learn more than one language. For example, if one language is heard much more often than the other or is more highly valued in the community, that language may eventually be used better than, or in preference to the other.

There may be reason to be concerned, however, about situations where children cut off from their family language when they are very young.

Lily Wong-Fillmore observed that, "...when children are submerged in a different language for long periods in pre-school or day care, their development of the family language may be slowed down or stalled before they have developed an age-appropriate mastery of the new language. Eventually they may stop speaking the family language altogether".

Wallace Lambert called this loss of one language on the way to learning another "subtractive bilingualism". "It can have negative consequences for children's self-esteem and their relationships with family members are also likely to be affected such early loss of the family language." In these cases, children seem to continue to be caught between two languages: they have not yet mastered the one language, and they have not continued to develop the other. During the transition period they may fall behind in their academic learning. Unfortunately, the solution educators sometimes propose to parents is that they should stop speaking the family language at home and concentrate instead on speaking the school language with their children.

The evidence suggests that a better solution is to strive for additive bilingualism-the maintenance of the home language while the second language is being learned. This is especially true if the parents are also learners of



the second language. If parents continue to use the language that they know best, they are able to express their knowledge and ideas in ways that are richer and more elaborate than they can manage in a language they do not know as well. Using their own language in family settings is also a way for parents to maintain their own self-esteem, especially as they may be struggling with the new language outside the home, at work, or in the community. Maintaining the family language also creates opportunities for the children to continue both cognitive and affective development in a language they understand easily while they are still learning the second language. As Virginia Collier and others have shown, "...the process of developing the second language takes years. But teachers, parents, and students need to know that the benefits of additive bilingualism will reward patience and effort".

Some second language acquisition theories give primary importance to learner's innate capacity for language acquisition. Others emphasize the role of environment, especially opportunities to interact with speakers who adapt their language and interaction patterns to meet learners' needs. Still others focus on learner's engagement with the broader social context.

By definition, all second language learners, regardless of age, have already acquired at least one language. This prior knowledge may be an advantage in the sense that they have an idea of how languages work.

On the other hand, knowledge of other languages can lead learners to make incorrect guesses about how the second language works, and this may result in errors that first language learners would not make.

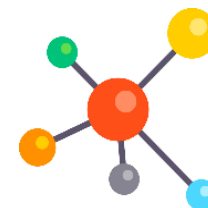
Very young language learners begin tasks of the first language acquisition without the cognitive maturity or metalinguistic awareness that older second language learners have. Although young second language

learners have begun to develop these characteristics, as well as in the area of the world knowledge, before they reach levels already attained by adults and adolescents.

In addition to possible cognitive differences, there are also attitudinal and cultural differences between children and adults. Most child learners are willing to try to use the language even when their proficiency is quite limited. Many adults and adolescents find it stressful when they are unable to express themselves clearly and correctly. Nevertheless, even very young, pre-school children differ in their willingness to speak a language they do not know well. Some children happily chatter away in their new language, others prefer to listen and participate silently in social interaction with their peers.

Younger learners, in an informal second language-learning environment, are usually allowed to be silent until they are ready to speak. They may also have opportunities to practice their second language voice in songs and games that allow them to blend their voices with those of other children. Older learners are often forced to speak –to meet the requirements of a classroom or to carry out everyday tasks such as shopping, medical visits, or job interviews.

Young children in informal settings are usually exposed to the second language for many hours every day. Older learners, especially students receive only limited exposure to the second language. Classroom learners not only spend less time in contact with the language, they also tend to be exposed to a far smaller range of discourse types. For example, class room learners are often taught language that is somewhat formal in comparison to the language as it is used in most social settings. In many foreign language classes, teachers switch to their students first language for discipline or classroom management, thus depriving learners of



opportunities to experience uses of the language in real communication.

Parents tend to respond to either children’s language in terms of its meaning rather than in terms of accuracy. Similarly, in second language learning outside of classrooms, errors that do not interfere with meaning are usually overlooked. Most people would feel they were being impolite if they interrupted and corrected someone who was trying to have a conversation with them. Nevertheless; interlocutors may react to an error if they cannot understand what the speaker is trying to say. Thus errors of grammar and pronunciation may not be remarked on, but the wrong word choice may receive comment from a puzzled interlocutor. In a situation where a second language speaker intends to be rude or simply does not know the polite way to say what is intended. In this case too, especially between adults, it is unlikely that the second language speaker would be told that something had gone wrong. The only place where feedback on error is the language classroom. Even there, it is not always provided consistently.

#### Importance of learning English as a second language

Language acquisition is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspect of human development. We listen with pleasure to the sounds made by a three-month-old baby. We laugh and “answer” the conversational “ba-ba-ba” babbling of older babies, and we share in the pride and joy of parents whose one-year-old has uttered the first “bye-bye”.

Indeed, learning a language is an amazing feat - one that has attracted the attention of linguistic and psychologists for generations. How do children accomplish this? What enables a child not only to learn words, but to put them together in meaningful sentences? What pushes children to go on developing

complex grammatical language even though their early simple communication is successful for most purposes? Does child language develop similarly around the world? How do bilingual children acquire more than one language?

In this article we will look briefly at some of the characteristics of the language of young children.

We will then consider several theories that have been offered as explanations for how language is learned. There is an immense body of research on child language.

Although much research has been done in middle class North American and European families, there is a reach body of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research as well.

Researchers have travelled all over the world to observe, record, and study children’s early language development. Our purpose in this chapter is to touch on a few main points in this research, primarily as a preparation for the discussion of Second Language acquisition, which is the focus of this book.

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