

# A CRITICAL PERIOD IN THE ACQUISITION OF PHONOLOGY AND SYNTAX IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

Whether there is a critical period for second language learning or not remains a mystery. Many researchers have attempted to investigate the effects of age on a second language acquisition, but they come up with different results. They conducted the study by using the measure of both ultimate attainment and the pace of learning. By reviewing a range of scientific studies in age effect on the acquisition of second language, the writer attempts to reveal whether younger learners acquire language better than their older counterparts and whether critical period in language learning affect all language modules. The studies prove that, in terms of phonology, the younger the learners exposed to a second language the more likely they achieve native accent. In contrast, learners who are exposed to a second language at a later age would most likely speak a foreign accent. For the acquisition of syntax, the same circumstance applies.

**Keywords:** critical period, L2, syntax, phonology

## A. Introduction

Among the common conceptions of second language learning is that children who live in the source language setting (naturalistic environment) tend to acquire a second language relatively more quickly and achieve more native-like proficiency compared to adults who learn a second language in the same setting (O'Grady, 1989). These cases lead to the idea that there is a critical period for language learning. Using the measure of ultimate attainment and the rate of learning of a second language, many researchers have

been debating whether the age at which learners are exposed to a second language affects the second language learning or not. The human brain undergoes a process through a period of several years before it is perfectly developed (Long, 1990). There has been a strong proposition that language and other cognitive skills must be acquired before puberty (O'Grady, 1989: 263), which is generally known as critical period for language learning.

It is believed that younger people in the critical period, which is before puberty, learn a second language more easily than