

THE CRITICAL PERIOD HYPOTHESIS AND ITS APPLICATION IN ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

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Annotation: *The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) suggests that there is a specific period during childhood when language acquisition occurs most effectively, with language-learning abilities declining after adolescence. This case study investigates the impact of CPH on adult language learning, focusing on a 35-year-old female, Anna, who is learning English as a second language. The study examines her progress in learning English and compares her abilities with younger learners. The findings highlight the challenges Anna faces in acquiring vocabulary and pronunciation, supporting the notion that age plays a significant role in language learning.*

Keywords: *Critical Period Hypothesis, language acquisition, adult learners, English language, age and language learning, grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, second language learning, learning challenges.*

Annotatsiya: *Kritik davr gipotezasi (CPH) bola chaqalog'ida tilni o'rganish eng samarali bo'ladigan maxsus davr mavjudligini va o'sish davridan keyin til o'rganish qobiliyatlari pasayishini ta'kidlaydi. Ushbu ishchi holat tadqiqoti CPH ning kattalar til o'rganishga ta'sirini o'rganadi, bunda 35 yoshdagi ayol Anna, ikkinchi til sifatida ingliz tilini o'rganayotgan shaxs sifatida tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot Anna ning ingliz tilini o'rganishdagi muvaffaqiyatini o'rganadi va uning imkoniyatlarini yoshroq o'quvchilar bilan taqqoslaydi. Natijalar Anna ning lug'at va talaffuzni o'zlashtirishda duch kelgan qiyinchiliklarini ko'rsatib beradi, bu esa yoshning til o'rganishda muhim rol o'ynashini tasdiqlaydi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *Kritik davr gipotezasi, tilni o'rganish, katta yoshdagi o'quvchilar, ingliz tili, yosh va til o'rganish, grammatika, talaffuz, lug'atni o'zlashtirish, ikkinchi tilni o'rganish, o'rganishdagi qiyinchiliklar.*

Introduction

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) proposes that language acquisition ability is most effective during childhood, with a decline in this ability after adolescence due to brain maturation. This hypothesis remains debated, but the key point is that scientific research should always guide our understanding. To explore CPH, I focused on a 35-year-old female acquaintance, Anna, whom I began teaching at a language learning center. This study examines whether CPH is valid by comparing her language learning progress with that of younger learners in a pre-intermediate English class. The study aims to determine if the hypothesis holds true for adult language learners.

The goals of the study include:

- Determining the accuracy of the Critical Period Hypothesis
- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the learner
- Achieving meaningful results from the study
- Comparing Anna's results with those of younger learners
- Assessing Anna's language learning abilities
- Providing recommendations for future research

Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted to evaluate the validity of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Most researchers agree that language acquisition is most effective before the age of 13, with significant difficulties arising for adults after this period. The process of language learning becomes more challenging for adults due to cognitive and physiological factors.

The Critical Period Hypothesis was first suggested by neurologists Wilder Penfield and Lamar Roberts (1959) in their book "Language and Brain Mechanisms". They argued that children who learn multiple languages before puberty are able to distinguish and use languages effectively. Lenneberg (1967) emphasized that after adolescence; the brain's plasticity diminishes, making language acquisition harder. The case of "Genie", a girl isolated from social interaction until the age of 13, demonstrated the impact of late language exposure (Curtiss, 1977).

However, some researchers, like David Birdsong (2006), argue that factors such as motivation, social environment, and educational setting may also influence language acquisition, suggesting that age is not the sole determinant of success in learning a second language. Further studies by Schouten (2009) and others have shown that although younger learners tend to acquire language more easily, older learners can still achieve high proficiency in a second language.

Profile of Participant

Anna, the participant in this study, is a 35-year-old History teacher at the Academic Lyceum in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. A native Russian speaker, Anna has learned Uzbek as a second language in her youth. Her motivation for learning English is driven by her professional goals and travel aspirations. Despite her older age, Anna has a strong desire to improve her English skills.

Anna's experience with learning languages is notable; she was able to acquire Uzbek at a young age through immersion and interaction with neighbors, without

formal grammar instruction. This experience sparked her curiosity about learning languages as an adult, leading her to question whether the same approach would work for learning English.

Research Design

This study follows a case study approach, focusing on Anna's language learning journey. The research design includes:

-Data Collection: Through regular interviews, quizzes, and observations, Anna's progress was tracked in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and pronunciation.

-In-Class Tasks: Grammar exercises, vocabulary quizzes, and speaking activities were conducted, with Anna participating alongside younger learners.

-Out-of-Class Tasks: Vocabulary building and pronunciation practice were assigned as homework, utilizing resources like Quizlet for vocabulary learning.

Anna's performance was compared with that of the younger learners in the same pre-intermediate class.

Findings

-Vocabulary: Anna struggled with new vocabulary, often relying on words she had learned in her youth. Despite using flashcards and audio resources, she was slower to learn and recall new words compared to younger learners. Interestingly, Anna's 12-year-old son demonstrated a better ability to pick up new vocabulary, suggesting that age plays a crucial role in the speed of language acquisition.

-Grammar: Anna excelled in grammar exercises, showing a solid understanding of grammatical rules. Her ability to produce grammatically correct sentences was above average compared to her younger peers. However, her slow speech and adherence to grammar structures often made her less fluent than the younger students.

-Pronunciation: Despite repeated practice, Anna's Russian accent remained noticeable. She was unable to match the pronunciation of native speakers, even after several attempts. This suggests that pronunciation is more difficult to master for older learners, supporting the idea that the critical period for language learning includes not just vocabulary and grammar, but also pronunciation.

Conclusion

This case study provides evidence that the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) holds relevance in adult language learning. Anna's challenges in vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and fluency support the hypothesis that language learning

is most effective before adolescence. While she demonstrated proficiency in grammar, her difficulties in other areas suggest that age-related factors significantly influence language acquisition.

The findings reinforce the idea that children should be encouraged to learn languages before reaching the age of 13, as language learning abilities tend to decline with age.

Further Implications

Future research in this area should consider a broader sample of participants and explore the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies, including audio-lingual approaches. By involving more participants from diverse age groups and backgrounds, researchers can better understand the role of age in language learning and develop more effective strategies for adult learners.

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