

Smith, Asha H. "Language Learning in Adulthood: Why Some Have More Trouble Than Others." Diss. Stanford University, 2009. Print.

This dissertation explains how even though some adults are eventually able to conquer mastery of a second language through diligence and hard work, those that had second language exposure at a young age were able to more efficiently learn a new language. This source gives a number of examples of how learners with previous experience not only outperform monolingual learners, but have an entirely different learning style altogether. This showed to be true on multiple counts of language including vocabulary as well as grammar and sentence construction. This seems to be related to lexical knowledge from learning other languages. The straightforward and high quality abstract seems to clearly and nicely summarize the dissertation most likely due to the nature of the high quality student of Stanford University and his writing, in which he has carefully aligned his research with his abstract.

Late second language learners are more likely to have trouble, as it seems, because there is a dependence on a first language and attempting to translate and draw connections through the first language to build second language lexical and grammatical knowledge. Smith wrote that, "Later L2 learners, on the other hand, may rely more on L1 knowledge when adding a new language. When learning the L2 word 'gato,' rather than mapping the new word directly to their representation of a cat, late L2 learners may be more likely to make use of their L1 in the process. They may first map 'gato' to its L1-translation (cat) and make use of their existing mapping between 'cat' and the referent under consideration. (Smith, 29) This inhibits the ability of someone to learn a language that is not in the same family of languages as their first language. In Kelvin Camilo's personal narrative, "Native Tongue Twist," he talks about how his parents are

both immigrants that learned English at an older age and , “Surely having been in the United States for over a decade they can at least understand some of it, but like a lot of immigrants actually using it was hard for them to do.” (Native Tongue Twist) My mother is also an immigrant and it is very apparent that she feels the same way. Kelvin’s parents as well as my mother seems to be able to communicate extremely effectively having learned at an older age, but would not classify themselves as “comfortable,” with it. Children do not face this problem, because they are not developed and sophisticated enough mentally to attempt to draw such distinctions, which would inhibit learning. Essentially, their “ignorance,” of sorts is beneficial to learning new languages.

In terms of countering, there are some parts of the argument that childhood learners of foreign languages are better at learning more languages later in life that Asha Smith seems to leave vague. An example is learning style at an early age. He states, “Different learning contexts could represent different L2 learning experiences. For example, classroom learning may involve explicitly learning the words and rules of a language and receiving feedback, while learning through immersion may involve learning more implicitly how to form meaningful utterances. It seems that learning by immersion is more effective at any age, though infinitely more effective than a classroom setting.