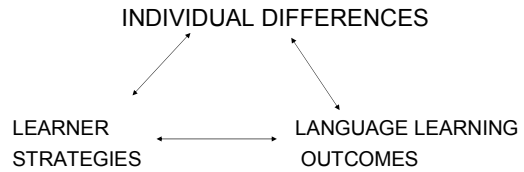


Individual differences: Learner beliefs, anxiety, aptitude, age, and other individual characteristics



The relationship of individual differences, learner strategies and language learning outcomes (adopted from Ellis, 1994)

Overview of the lecture

1. Language learning beliefs
2. Anxiety
3. Aptitude/working memory capacity
4. Age
5. Personality traits
6. Learning style

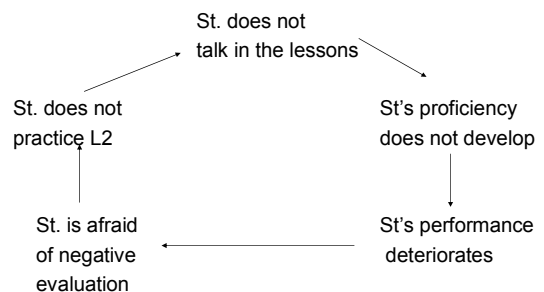
1. Beliefs about language learning

Main types of beliefs: (Horwitz's Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, 1988):

- The **difficulty** of L2 learning in general and the difficulty of learning the target language. E.g.: Some languages are easier to learn than others.
- The role of **language aptitude**. E.g.: Some people are born with a special ability which helps them to learn a foreign language.
- The **nature of language learning**. E.g.: It is better to learn the foreign language in the foreign country.
- Learning and communication **strategies**. E.g.: It is important to review and practice a lot.
- **Motivation** and expectations. E.g.: If I learn to speak this language well, it will help me get a good job.

2. Anxiety

- **Facilitating anxiety**: motivates the learner to cope with the task, has a positive effect on performance, and is generally low level anxiety.
- **Debilitating anxiety**: makes the learner avoid the task, has a negative effect on performance, and is generally high level anxiety.
- **Foreign Language Learning Anxiety** (Horwitz)
 1. Communication apprehension 2. Test anxiety 3. Fear of negative evaluation
 2. Symptoms: Physiological, Psycholinguistic, Psychological
- Foreign Language Learning Anxiety is related to: Willingness to communicate in L2, Motivation, Language aptitude, Proficiency, The learning situation, tasks, Introversion



3. Aptitude

- Basic question: *Why do some learners learn a foreign language quickly and thoroughly while others with the same opportunities fail?*
- Foreign language aptitude predicts the *rate of progress* the learner is likely to make under optimal conditions.
- Language aptitude consists of several independent abilities.

3.1. John Carroll's (cf. Carroll, 1981) theory of language aptitude

Phonetic coding ability	The ability to identify distinct sounds, associate sounds and symbols that represent them and memorise these associations.
Grammatical sensitivity	The ability to recognise the grammatical function of words in sentences.
Rote learning ability	The ability to remember associations between sounds and meaning.
Inductive language learning ability	The ability to identify rules and patterns in the foreign language.

3.2. The Modern Language Aptitude Test

1. Number learning	
2. Phonetic script:	
3. Spelling clues:	LUV A . carry B. exist C. affection D. wash E. spy
4. Words in sentences:	LONDON is the capital of England. He liked to go fishing in Maine. A B C D E
5. Paired associates:	

3.3. Pimsleur's (1966) Language Aptitude Battery

- Specifically designed for adolescents
- Tests the following three parts of language aptitude:
 1. verbal intelligence, which measures familiarity with words and an ability to reason analytically about verbal material;
 2. motivation;
 3. auditory ability.

3.4. Hungarian version of the aptitude test

MENYET (Magyar Egyetemi Nyelvérzőmérés Teszt) -Ottó István (1996).

4 parts: hiddens sounds, language analysis, words in sentences and vocabulary learning.

Ottó claims that language aptitude tests can be used for:

- ✓ selection, i.e. in decisions on admissions to language programs;
- ✓ placement of students in groups;
- ✓ diagnosis of learning problems.

Feladat elnevezése	Mémi kívánt készség/képesség	Pelda (Ottó és Nikolov, 2003)
Rejtőző hangok	Fonetikai kódolás	[tik] hangsort halljuk; a tanulási szakasz alatt hallott hangsorok és átírásuk alapján válasszuk ki a következő öt lehetőségéből a helyes átírást: A. thik, B. dik, C. dhik, D. tiik, E. egyik sem.
Nyelvi elemzés	Szabálykivonás	adottak a következő mesterséges nyelvi és magyar nyelvi szópárok: „dant = ház”, „dantim = házban”, „gup = pohár”; a négy lehetséges válasz közül azt kell kiválasztani, amelynek jelentése „pohárban”: A. dantim, B. dant, C. gupim, D. gup.
Szavak szerepe a mondatban	Nyelvtani érzékenység	adott a következő mondat: „London Anglia fővárosa.” Válasszuk ki a következő mondat öt megjelölt szavából azt, amelyik ugyanazt a szerepet tölti be a második mondatban, mint az első mondatban a LONDON szó: „(A) Tamás (B) imádott (C) horgászni a (D) város melletti (E) kis patakban”.
Szótanulás	Asszociatív memória	A tanulási fázis alapján válasszuk ki a „simba” szó jelentését az öt lehetséges válaszból: A. oroszlán, B. sárkány, C. villany, D. doboz, E. egér.

3.5. Summary of aptitude research

- Is motivation independent of aptitude or an integral part of it,
- Does verbal intelligence contribute to aptitude?
- Verbal intelligence affects academic and reading skills, while language aptitude in its narrow sense influences interpersonal communication skills (e.g. speaking)
- High-quality teaching might neutralise the effect of aptitude on the success of L2 learning. Under poor quality teaching conditions, however, aptitude might influence the learning outcomes positively.
- Aptitude plays no role in child SLA.
- Aptitude plays a different role in various methods of teaching

Working memory capacity

- most influential theoretical account of human short-term memory (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974).
- 1. Central Executive, which is responsible for the allocation of attentional resources and the control of a number of subsidiary slave systems 1) the Visual-Spatial Sketchpad, which is capable of storing images and space relations, and 2) the Phonological Loop (PL), which holds speech-based information.
- 2. Individuals differ in their PL capacity, measured through various experimental tasks, such as digit span, word-list recall, and nonword repetition.
- 3. Robust and consistent associations between PL capacity and vocabulary development in both native and foreign languages
- 4. PL capacity influences the acquisition of syntax.

The critical period hypothesis and what it means

- Early interpretations: successful L2 learning is not possible above a certain age; the younger, the better.
- Language acquisition from mere exposure, the only mechanism available to a young child, is severely limited in older adolescents and adults (deKeyser and Larson-Hall, 2005).

CPH is not only a linguistic concept

- e.g. birds learning species-specific songs
- learning certain sports (ballet dancing)

Evidence for the Critical Period Hypothesis for L1

- Children with brain damage can regain their linguistic abilities below a certain age
- Isolated and neglected children who did not acquire their L1

Explanations of age effects

Biological/Neurological explanation

- Greater plasticity of the child's brain
- The lateralization or specialization of functions in the adult brain (with the language function concentrated in the left hemisphere for most people).

Cognitive explanation

- Piaget's (1929) theory of intellectual growth: around the age of 12, a capacity for abstract thinking develops. The young child is cognitively open, whereas the meta-awareness of adolescents and adults inhibits natural learning and leads to an alternative approach.

Affective/Social-psychological explanation

- changes that occur in the child's affective/emotional state around the onset of puberty

Differences between children and adults

Culture bound: children < adults

Motivated by peers: children > adults

Developed identity: children < adults

Afraid of sounding ridiculous: children > adults

Willing to take risks: children > adults

Young children are

- less culture-bound than adults
- are very strongly motivated as a rule by the need to be accepted by their peer-group
- have not yet developed inhibitions about their self-identity,
- are not afraid to sound ridiculous
- are prepared to take risks when experimenting with their imperfect foreign language knowledge

Reformulations of the original Critical Period Hypothesis

- There are a number of Critical Periods for various aspects of L2 learning (e.g. syntax, pronunciation etc.)
- No critical period but a general effect of age on learning

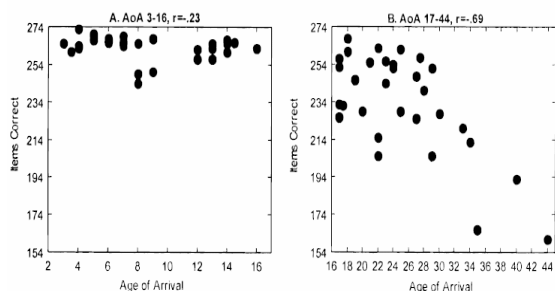


FIG. 2. The age function in the present study: Early Arrivals (A) and Late Arrivals (B).

Research findings concerning the role of age in L2 learning





- At the beginning of the L2 learning process, if it takes place in a classroom setting, adult learners have an advantage because they learn faster. Children, however, overtake adults in the long run.
- Only children are able to acquire native-like accent in the target language environment.
- Some adults can acquire native-level linguistic competence.
- The acquisition of grammar was not found to be affected by age, but the acquisition of pronunciation seems to be influenced by it.
- There seems to be a linear decline in linguistic abilities.

5. Personality traits

Arrange the following individual traits in the table: self-esteem, extroversion, risk-taking, sensitivity to rejection, empathy, inhibition, tolerance of ambiguity

Promote language learning	Hinder language learning

6. Learning style

1. Field independence/dependence
2. Reflectivity/impulsivity
3. Analytic/holistic
4. Perceptual modalities
 - Visual 
 - Auditory 
 - Kinaesthetic 
 - Tactile 

Summary

- What are the most important language learning beliefs and how do they influence SLA?
- What are the two types of anxiety and how do they affect L2 performance?
- What is language aptitude?
- What are the main components of language aptitude and how can they be measured?
- What is the Critical Period Hypothesis?
- What explanations exist for the Critical Period Hypothesis?
- What personality traits can influence SLA?
- How can learning style affect language learning?