

ABSTRACT

Foreign Language Learning: An Exploratory Study on the External and Internal Influences Affecting Success

Brianne J. Johnson, M.A.

Thesis Chairperson: Linda M. McManness, Ph.D.

This study explores the influence that determinants such as age, length of exposure, learning environment, personality, attitude, study habits, personal practice, and personal motivation have on individuals studying a foreign language. Participants provide feedback on their own experiences while learning a foreign language to ascertain which elements are most influential in predicting future success in the areas of oral production, written production, aural comprehension, and reading comprehension.

Foreign Language Learning: An Exploratory Study on the External and Internal
Influences Affecting Success

by

Brianne J. Johnson, B.A.

A Thesis

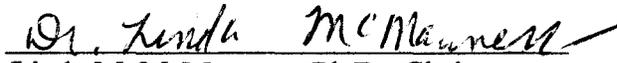
Approved by the Department of Modern Foreign Languages



Manuel J. Ortuño, Ph.D., Chairperson

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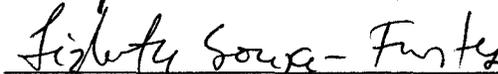
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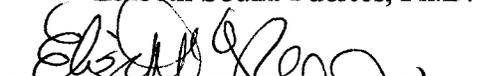
Linda M. McManness, Ph.D., Chairperson



Jaime L. Diaz-Granados, Ph.D.



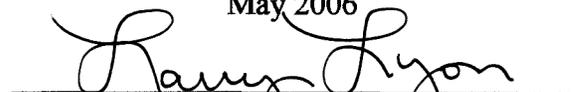
Lizbeth Souza-Fuertes, Ph.D.



Elizabeth M. Willingham, Ph.D.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going

Foreign language study has not gone unnoticed in linguistic and educational research nor has it been left out of popular discussion. It seems that foreign language education is a topic on which anyone can be an “expert.” Many people have numerous ideas, but most do not have the data to back up these ideas.

After the Second World War, the United States saw the need to incorporate foreign languages into national curriculum; however, as English has increasingly become the “lingua franca” of the world, many native speakers of English in the United States have lost the motivation to study foreign languages. With so many other nations mandating the study of English for all students, many Americans perceive that studying a language other than English is not a relevant use of time or energy. The few who do pursue the benefits of foreign language study suffer from a lack of resources, and they are not informed or are misinformed about practices that can help their endeavor. Both common myths and faulty or incomplete research have contributed to language study discrepancies; the incongruities should be resolved in order to improve foreign language study in the United States. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether differences exist among current research findings as well as to explore specific influences in foreign language study and the factors’ ability to predict success.

Foreign Language Study versus Second Language Acquisition

Before beginning the discussion on foreign language study (FLS), one must first establish what FLS is and how it differs from second language acquisition (SLA). In his book *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, Rod Ellis (1985) says that “SLA is used as a general term that embraces both untutored (or ‘naturalistic’) acquisition and tutored (or ‘classroom’) acquisition” (5). The present study will distinguish between the two methods of learning a language that Ellis provides. SLA can describe both learning environments, but this thesis will focus on the learning of foreign languages, which primarily takes place in a classroom; therefore, I will refer mainly to foreign language study (FLS) instead of the learning that takes place in a naturalistic setting. When talking generally about either style of learning, the term SLA will be used.

Factors that Determine FLS

Anyone who has studied a foreign language can verify that it is not an easy task. Multiple skills must be practiced and developed, and many factors can facilitate, or hinder, the progress one makes in the learning cycle. These factors include personal motivation, self-esteem and personality, age, attitudes toward the class and the language, study habits, learning environment, and language aptitude. Although Ellis uses the categories of “personal” and “general” factors, these do not adequately explain the characteristics of the elements. He explains that personal characteristics include group dynamics, attitudes toward the teacher and the course, and learning habits (101) while general factors include age, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation and personality (104). Each of these influences is indeed important, but the categories provided by Ellis are insufficient for the current study. He claims that personal factors are “highly

idiosyncratic features of each individual's approach to learning a [second language]" (100), and general ones are "variables that affect all learners" (100). Each component affects every learner of a second language, although perhaps in different ways. Because each impacts learners, it does not benefit this study to categorize them into personal or general groups. These classifications do not adequately describe the amount of control that the learner has in determining how these elements affect him/her.

Because of the insufficiencies of Ellis' categories, I have decided to divide the factors into two different groups: internal and external factors. These divisions are not based on whether the features are specific to an individual or to a variety of learners, but rather on what level of control the learner has on each one.

Internal Factors

Internal factors include those which are determined by the individual learner such as motivation, attitude, personal practice, and study habits. Each of these is an individual component of the student's ability to learn a foreign language, but each component also interacts with the others. When motivation is low, then study habits and attitudes are affected as well.

External Factors

External factors can be different for each individual, but their common attribute is that they are based solely on circumstances outside of the influence of the learner. They happen *to* the learner, not *because* of the learner. External factors include self-esteem, age, learning environment, aptitude, personality, length of exposure, and learning style.

Internal Factors versus External Factors

The level of influence that each of the above factors has on the success of FLS is difficult to calculate, because motivation level and attitude are subjective values based on the learner's own opinions and interpretations. While it may be difficult to measure the internal factors, it is easy to calculate the learner's opinion about how each influences his success. Although many studies have tried to determine which of the external factors has the greatest bearing on the learner's success, and others have attempted to manipulate the external influences in order to maximize success, this thesis will show that these external factors are minor once the internal ones are taken into account. It is increasingly obvious that the internal factors can overtake the externals in their realm of influence. Even when the externals are at the "perfect position" according to the studies, evidence now shows how the internal factors can alter success. Learning a language is not a textbook process and cannot be limited to concrete, specific parameters. The following will show that the internal factors have a high affect on a learner, and how the internal elements can surmount the external ones that seem to be "against" the learner.

Previous Research

Upon the introduction of the critical period hypothesis (CPH), applied linguistic research has focused on the concept of age as a primary factor affecting SLA. The CPH was first introduced by Eric H. Lenneberg; it states that because of the lateralization of brain tissue, language learning must take place before puberty in order to be successful. In his *Biological Foundations of Language* (1967), Lenneberg explains the evidence that gives him reason to believe the hypothesis is true:

Between the ages of three and the early teens the possibility for primary language acquisition continues to be good; the individual appears to be most sensitive to stimuli at this time [. . .]. After puberty, [however,] the ability for self-organization and adjustment to the physiological demands of verbal behavior quickly declines. The brain behaves as if it had become set in its ways and primary, basic language skills not acquired by that time, except for articulation, usually remain deficient for life. (158)

Based on these observations, Lenneberg proposed the critical period hypothesis for the acquisition of a first language (L1). It is important to note that at this time, Lenneberg did not specifically include SLA as brain activity that would be limited by age constraints. He claims that “most individuals of average intelligence are able to learn a second language after the beginning of their second decade, although the incidence of “language-learning-blocks” rapidly increases after puberty” (176). He does not state that the critical period will make it impossible for individuals to learn a second language, but that difficulties may exist.

Long after Lenneberg’s initial claims, linguists continue to study the critical period and heavily debate its validity. Many researchers have focused on the critical period as it relates to learning second languages, and the results seem to be inconclusive at this point. Most evidence cited is contrary to the CPH, while other evidence shows that the CPH is correct in relation to only certain aspects of SLA.

Research Disproving the CPH

Since the introduction of the CPH, researchers have done numerous studies on the different facets of language learning. They have tested whether or not age of introduction has caused great differences in the achievement of second language learners. In their study on native English speakers learning Dutch while living in Holland, Catherine E. Snow and Marian Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) conclude that the CPH must be rejected.

They show that students between twelve and fifteen years old demonstrated acquisition of Dutch at rates much higher than younger children (1125). Thus, Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle conclude that the critical period between age three and puberty must not exist.

In their article, “Critical Evidence: A Test of the Critical-Period Hypothesis for Second-Language Acquisition” Kenji Hakuta, Ellen Bialystok, and Edward Wiley (2003) show empirical evidence that proficiency abilities decline throughout the entire lifespan. Unlike Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle, they do not argue that proficiencies can actually grow stronger as age of introduction increases; instead they claim the CPH is incorrect because puberty is not a cut-off point. According to their work, as age of introduction increases, the general capabilities to acquire a language decrease. The age of onset of puberty has no legitimate value as this process continues throughout life.

Research on Phonology Acquisition

Other researchers have agreed with the conclusion that the CPH is not accurate; however, they do state that in the area of phonology, the CPH seems to be a viable concept. Thomas Scovel (2000) states that the CPH is a myth; he claims that in the areas of lexicon (or vocabulary) and pragmatics, adults are superior learners to children in a second language (126). Scovel states that the one advantage younger learners have is in phonology (128). He claims that unlike adults, children may be able to achieve “nativelike pronunciation” (129), and he is not alone in his thinking. In “The concept of Critical Age in Language Acquisition,” W. Von Raffler-Engel (1976) states that “an adult can become perfectly proficient in the grammar of a second language but past the age of puberty it is almost impossible to master the pronunciation of a foreign language” (17-

18). She believes that the critical period exists solely for the acquisition of a foreign phonological system.

In agreement with Scovel and Von Raffler-Engel are James Emil Flege, Grace H. Yeni-Komshian, and Serena Liu (1999). They studied native speakers of Korean who have moved to the United States and have begun to learn English. Their study shows that age of arrival in the United States, and thus the age of introduction to English, can affect the “degree of foreign accent in the [second language]” (78). In contrast to Scovel and Von Raffler-Engel, this study shows that foreign accent levels do not drastically change at the end of the critical period (near puberty), but the decline is steady (87); thus, Flege, Yeni-Komshian, and Liu agree that as age increases, the ability to learn a new phonological system decreases. In their opinion, the CPH is not supported (87); their results, like those of Hakuta, Bialystok, and Wiley, only show that abilities in language learning tend to decrease in regular intervals throughout the lifetime, as opposed to decreasing immediately at the end of a critical period.

The previously cited studies on phonology show that age can be a contributing factor to the success or lack thereof in acquiring foreign phonology; however, evidence also exists that demonstrates an adult’s ability to overcome age and acquire native pronunciation. Salim Abu-Rabia and Simona Kehat (2004) studied speakers who learned Hebrew as a second language. In a formal study, many of these individuals were mislabeled as native speakers based on their pronunciation abilities (92). This evidence seems to contradict both the CPH and the aforementioned research that a foreign phonology is unattainable by adults.

In agreement with Abu-Rabia and Kehat are Deborah L. Arteaga (2000), John J. Bergen (1974), Carolyn Dunlap (2003), and A. Raymond Elliot (1995); each of these individuals believes that it is important to introduce phonology practice into the foreign language classroom. They agree that adult learners can achieve pronunciation almost equal or equal to native speakers if the correct methods of instruction are introduced. Each describes a different method of instruction and offers evidence to its success. The importance seems to be not necessarily on *how* the instruction is given, but that students receive formal instruction. These researchers conclude that adults can achieve a higher level or even a native-like proficiency in this area with purposeful rehearsal.

Stephen Krashen (2003), in his article “A Conjecture on Accent in a Second Language,” argues that children and adults can both achieve native-like pronunciation in a second language, but that all have an output filter that “prevents us from using what we have acquired” (14). He goes on to explain that the output filter causes inhibitions to rise; thus performance is not as good as it could be (15). He concludes that adults do not fail to achieve the phonological system of a new language, but they fail to use this system. Krashen offers the following reason as the answer to why accents exist in speakers of a foreign language:

Sociolinguists tell us that language has two functions: To communicate and to mark the speaker as a member of a social group. A part of language that plays a major role in marking us as members of a social group is accent. Accent has little to do with communication; we can communicate quite well in another language having acquired only some of the sound system. Accent tells the hearer who you are, where you are from, in some cases your social class, and in other cases your values. When we identify with the members of a group, we talk the way they do. [. . .] My conjecture is that accent is acquired rapidly but is not performed, because we do not feel like members of the group that uses it; [. . .]. (16)

It is interesting to see another perspective, that perhaps learners do acquire the phonological system, but for one reason or another, they do not perform this competence because they do not feel it is appropriate.

Research on Other Factors in SLA

Despite the common belief that age is the primary contributing factor to success in SLA, many researchers have found that other influences can be of importance as well. In her study, Zakaria A. Abuhamdia (1985) claims that a factor of greater importance to SLA is length of exposure: “It was the long and sustained exposure and opportunity to use the language which gave the younger group an advantage over the older ones, not simply their being at a young age” (40). Abuhamdia is not necessarily concluding that age had no influence at all in the abilities of the subjects studied, but instead she claims that length of exposure should also be considered a viable factor in SLA. Additionally, Abuhamdia names another determinant that can be of greater importance than age: “[. . .] adults who set themselves a goal of social survival acquire language more efficiently than those who pursue merely a goal of occupational survival” (40). Here, Abuhamdia clearly recognizes that when survival within a community depends on the knowledge of a language, individuals are more apt to learn it. Motivation, for whatever goal, can be a very powerful factor in overcoming obstacles and learning a language. This influence should not be forgotten.

In his research on second language pronunciation, A. Raymond Elliot claims that “subject attitude toward developing native or near-native pronunciation, as measured by the Pronunciation Attitude Inventory (PAI), was the most significant variable in relation to target language pronunciation” (531). He agrees with the claims of Abuhamdia that

personal motivation can greatly affect the achievement of SLA, but Elliot also specifies that this motivation can directly influence the acquisition of a phonological system, and not necessarily other areas of SLA.

In a study using both spoken and signed languages, Rachel I. Mayberry and Elizabeth Lock (2003) introduce another factor that can affect SLA, claiming that the timely introduction of a L1 is the key to second language success. By studying deaf individuals who had not learned a formal language system until later being introduced to sign language, these two researchers were able to calculate results showing that “language experience during human development dramatically alters the capacity to learn language throughout life [. . .]” (380). Mayberry and Lock express that age of introduction for the second language is not as important as the availability of L1 stimuli during the developmental stages of childhood.

Due to their claim that native-like pronunciation is possible for adult language learners regardless of age of introduction, Abu-Rabia and Kehat attempt to identify other factors that may affect SLA. They offer the following conclusions:

[. . . w]e can positively conclude that social/psychological/affective factors, such as attitude, motivation, empathy, self-esteem (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), ego permeability (Guiora, 1992), type of input, length of exposure, cognitive explanations (learning style), and amount of L1 versus L2 use, may also account for the differences in proficiency level between children and adults. (96)

Thus, these researchers offer an abundance of aspects that may influence success in SLA more than age can. Along with those previously mentioned, this final study provides a point of departure for the current research on FLS influences and their strength in relation to age.

Current Research

While they have provided a foundation for research, the previous studies have not shown which of these alternative determinants can overcome the disadvantage of age. Although the investigators have identified various factors that may influence success, to date, no study has measured the relative influence of each of these factors. With so many possible determinants affecting success or failure in SLA, it is important to decipher which aspects have the most importance as perceived by language learners. While many studies have discussed these elements and their influence on students, no one has placed them in a hierarchy of strength. Each one has an effect on learning, but certain factors may have a higher level of influence and thus can change the progress based on their value. Therefore, this thesis will establish the hierarchy of factors and will explain what this discovery means in relation to language learners and educators.

The current study explores foreign language learners, their own perceptions of their abilities, and their opinions on how these determinants affect their experience. The findings are based on the language learner's self-evaluation provided in a survey. The methods, participants, and results of these findings will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Current Survey Research

Methods and Procedures

In order to discover if age can be a primary component in determining success in a foreign language, and if it is, to what degree it has influence, participants filled out surveys concerning their language learning experience. Based on the responses to these surveys, one can draw conclusions on the effect age appears to have on language acquisition.

Participants

Participants were grouped based on their language experience. The first group consists of faculty and graduate students of the Modern Foreign Language (MFL) department at Baylor University. Letters and surveys were sent to every professor and faculty member in the MFL Department; this group includes fifty-five members. Additionally, surveys were given to the eight graduate students in this department; all graduate students are studying Spanish. These two groups represent individuals who have an assumed linguistic capability in at least one foreign language. The faculty members and professors have a presumed capability in their foreign language based on their employment; several filled out additional surveys to comment on their experiences with a third or fourth language. The graduate students also have a demonstrated ability in a foreign language; those who study Spanish as a foreign language have demonstrated their proficiencies based on their acceptance into the program. Those whose native

language is Spanish have a demonstrated capability in English, based on their acceptance into an American institution.

The second set of participants was selected because the individuals are still in the process of acquiring the basics of the language they are studying. While all language learning may be considered a life-long process, these participants were obviously in the very early or intermediate stages. One set of students came from a third year course on Spanish conversation and composition. The second set of students was in a first semester Spanish course. Most had previously studied Spanish or another foreign language, and they filled out the survey based on their experience with the language they had studied for the longest period of time.

Surveys

The survey used in this research (see Appendix A) was constructed for the purpose of this study. It consists of twenty-two questions which ask responders to provide answers on a scale. The survey includes two final questions inquiring both the native language and the second language of each individual. The survey allots space for responders to provide comments and feedback explaining their answers further. This space is also designed for participants to clarify a response, especially if they feel that their experience falls “in between” categories on the scale.

Collection of Results

Participants in the first group were given letters explaining the process of this survey and the goals of research (see Appendix B). The individuals were given a copy of

the survey as well. Surveys each had a number assigned instead of names so as to protect the identity of the responders.

Members of the second group were given the surveys during a regular class period. The process and goals of the research were explained to each student and they demonstrated acceptance of the terms for the research by taking a survey and completing it. These surveys were assigned numbers as well to protect the rights of the individuals.

Any participant who has studied more than one foreign language was asked to fill out additional surveys for each language. These surveys were marked with the same number as the participant's original survey so that it would be clear that the survey pertained to an individual who studied more than one foreign language.

Once surveys were collected from both groups, the results were tallied in a spreadsheet (See Appendix C) and were calculated.

Results of Individual Components

Responders

Of the 109 individuals who received the opportunity to fill out a survey, 77 responded. Of the 77 who responded, seventeen were students in the third year, eight were graduate students, twenty-six were students in the first year classroom, and twenty-six were members of the faculty or staff.

Of the 77 responses, eight individuals filled out more than one survey; more specifically, seven participants filled out two surveys and one responder filled out four surveys. This brings the total number of survey responses to 87.

Age of Acquisition

According to the question about the age of introduction to the foreign language, seven responders (8%) began studying the language between 0 and 5 years of age, 20 (23%) began between 5 and 12 years of age, 47 (54%) began between 12-18 years of age, 11 (13%) began between 18 and 30 years of age, and 2 (2%) began after 30 years of age.

This data indicates the majority of participants started studying their foreign language during the years in which the onset of puberty is most likely; this data will be essential in considering whether or not age seemed to affect these individuals' capabilities in learning a foreign language.

Length of Exposure

Because every participant began studying their foreign language at a different age, it was important to see if the amount of time they have been studying and working with the language affects their levels of proficiency. Six people (7%) said that they have studied the language for less than one year. Seven individuals (8%) said they have studied the language between one and two years, 13 (15%) said they have studied between two and three years, 11 (13%) said they have studied the language between three and four years, and 50 responders (57%) have studied the language four years or more.

Number of Languages Studied

Responders also gave information as to the number of languages they have studied in their lifetime. 29 people (33%) have only studied one language, 28 people (32%) have studied two foreign languages, 11 responders (13%) have studied three languages, and 19 (22%) have studied four or more languages. This data indicates that

some participants have studied multiple foreign languages, but did not fill out additional surveys.

Style of Learning and Native Language Input

According to the question about the mode of learning a second language, 67 responders (77%) studied their language in a classroom setting, 15 participants (17%) lived with native speakers or moved to a country in which the language was spoken natively, one responder (1%) used a self-instructing program such as a computer or book, and four participants (5%) learned their second language simultaneously with their first language.

Responders also answered a question about the amount of time they heard their native language while studying the second language. This refers not to the classroom time, or the time when they actively studied the language, but to their general experience such as the environment such as where they lived. Sixty-eight participants (78%) claimed that they mainly heard their native language while studying the new language. Sixteen responders (18%) claimed that they heard their native language half of the time and heard the new language the other half of the time. Two responders (2%) mainly heard the new language while learning. One participant did not respond. This participant commented that “there is no choice really applicable. Of course I learned Spanish in the classroom, but spoke with native speakers outside of class, not just in Spanish, but two other languages.”

When these results are compared, it is obvious that there is a clear correlation. Of the 67 responders who said they learned their language in a classroom setting, 62 (93%) said they mainly heard their native language throughout the day. This means that these

individuals were exposed to the new language only during the class period. Most individuals did not study the language in a classroom and live in a native environment at the same time.

Speaking Proficiency

All participants were asked to rank their own abilities in speaking their foreign language based on their own opinions. Of the 87 responders, six (7%) said they do not feel they are understood when they speak, 32 (37%) said they can speak, but with a marked, non-native accent, 28 (32%) said they speak the language with only a minor accent, and 18 (21%) said they speak the language almost perfectly. These final 18 responders feel that a native speaker of the language would not recognize them as a foreign learner of the language. Three individuals did not respond. All three individuals did not respond because the language was Latin, and they all stated that they did not speak the language while studying it.

Listening Comprehension Proficiency

When asked about their skills in listening comprehension, two responders (2%) said they cannot understand native speech at all, 19 people (22%) said they can understand some language of native speakers, but not enough to get the main idea, 38 (44%) said they can understand the main idea of native speech, although specific words are still confusing, and 25 (29%) said they understand the language almost perfectly. Again, three participants (3%) did not respond. These are the same three that did not respond to the speaking question because again, the language is Latin and they state that they did not listen to a spoken version of the language.

Writing Proficiency

Participants also responded to a question about their ability to write in the foreign language. Three responders (3%) said they could not write the language at all, 22 (25%) said they can write with some difficulty including errors that make their writing difficult for native speakers to understand, 39 (45%) said they write the language with minor errors that do not make the writing indiscernible to native speakers, and 23 (26%) said they write the language almost perfectly.

Reading Proficiency

Participants also responded to a question about their level of reading comprehension. Three individuals (3%) said they understand nothing when they read native material, 13 people (15%) said they can read the language with consistent use of a dictionary, and they have trouble understanding the main idea of the material, 46 responders (53%) said they can read the language with few difficulties, only look up a few words, and are able to understand the main idea, and 25 people (29%) said they can read almost perfectly and rarely have to use a dictionary.

Individual Factors that Affect Language Learner

The survey also included a list of eleven factors that can affect the rate and level of achievement in foreign language acquisition. These factors include personal motivation, learner attitude, study habits of the learner, self-esteem of the learner, age at introduction to the language, length of exposure to the language, learning environment, language aptitude, personality in relationship to others' in the environment, learning style, and personal practice.

Personal motivation. Two people (2%) saw this factor as having no influence on their language learning experience, zero saw it as having little influence on their experience, 13 (15%) saw it as somewhat influencing their experience, 35 (40%) claimed it had significant influence, and 37 (43%) claimed it had maximum influence.

Attitude toward the experience. One person (1%) said this factor had no influence, one (1%) said it had little influence, 16 (18%) said it somewhat influenced the level of success, 39 (45%) said it had significant influence, and 30 (34%) said it had maximum influence on their experience.

Study habits. Two participants (2%) claim this factor had no influence on their success, five (6%) said it had little influence on their experience, 15 (17%) said it somewhat influenced their experience, 44 (51%) said it had significant influence on their success, and 21 (24%) said it had maximum influence on their success.

Self-esteem. Seven participants (8%) found this factor was not influential, 10 (11%) found it to have very little influence, 23 (26%) said it was somewhat influential, 33 (38%) said it was very influential, and 14 (16%) said it had maximum influence.

Age at introduction. Five people (6%) said this had no influence on their success, 11 (13%) said it had little influence, 27 (31%) said this somewhat had influence, 24 (28%) said it had significant influence, and 20 (23%) said it had maximum influence on their success.

Length of exposure. Two participants (2%) said this had no influence on their success, nine (10%) said it had little influence, 12 (14%) said it somewhat influenced

their success, 36 (41%) said it had significant influence, and 27 (31%) said it had maximum influence. One person did not respond, but no reason was given.

Learning environment. One individual (1%) said this had no influence on their achievement, four (5%) said this had little influence on their success, 18 (21%) said it somewhat influenced their achievement, 35 (40%) said it had significant influence on their achievement, and 29 (33%) said it had maximum influence on their achievement.

Language aptitude. Six (7%) individuals said this factor had no influence on their success, four (5%) said it had little influence on their success, 28 (32%) said it somewhat influenced their success, 36 (41%) said it had significant influence, and 11 (13%) said it had maximum influence on their success. Two surveys had no response. Both surveys came from the same individual, each one for a different language; for his/her first language he/she wrote this comment: "It's hard to know whether I developed an aptitude for learning languages because of my early age of introduction to a second and third language or that I was innately born with this facility/aptitude." He/She included a note on the second survey that his/her answer for leaving it blank was the same as the answer on the first survey.

Personality. Two people (2%) said this factor had no influence on their success, nine (10%) said it had little influence, 21 (24%) said it somewhat influence their success, 37 (43%) said it had significant influence, and 18 (21%) said it had maximum influence on their success.

Learning/Cognitive style. Three people (3%) said this factor had no influence on their success in the language, six (7%) said it had little influence, 27 (31%) said it somewhat influenced their success, 31 (36%) said it had significant influence, and 18 (21%) said it had maximum influence on their success level. The same participant who did not respond to the question about aptitude did not respond to this question. The individual wrote another answer on each of his/her surveys that said, “I don’t know. I learned in a total language and cultural immersion scenario.” Apparently, he/she felt that learning style applied only to a classroom experience.

Personal practice. This component encompasses more than the “Study habits” component. Here, the practice refers to what the participant did, not to “learn” an element of the language, but what the participant did in order to repeatedly practice a language skill. One person (1%) said this factor had no influence on his/her success, two (2%) said it had little influence on their success, 16 (18%) said it somewhat influenced their experience, 44 (51%) said it had significant influence, and 24 (28%) said it had maximum influence.

Correlation of Results

Age and the Levels of Proficiency in Speaking

When comparing age with the four competency areas, it is interesting to see how age affects the perceived level of proficiency. Of the seven people who started studying their foreign language between the ages of 0 and 5 years, three (43%) said they speak their language with a minor accent, and four (57%) said they speak almost perfectly.

Of the 20 people who said they learned the language between 5 and 12 years old, five (25%) said they speak the foreign language with a marked accent, eight (40%) said they speak with a minor accent, and seven (35%) said they speak almost perfectly.

Of the 47 people who started studying their language between 12 and 18 years old, four people (9%) said they cannot speak the language at all, 21 (45%) said they speak with a marked accent, 14 (30%) said they speak with a minor accent, and six (13%) said they speak almost perfectly. Two people did not respond because their language was Latin.

Of the eleven people who started studying between 18 and 30 years old, one (9%) said that he/she cannot speak the language at all, six (55%) said they speak with a marked accent, three (27%) said they speak with a minor accent, and zero said they speak perfectly. One person did not respond because his/her foreign language was Latin.

Of the two individuals who started studying the foreign language after 30 years of age, one person (50%) said he/she cannot speak the language at all, and one (50%) said he/she speaks the language almost perfectly.

Age and the Levels of Proficiency in Listening Comprehension

Of the seven people who started studying their foreign language between the ages of 0 and 5 years, three (43%) said they understand the main idea of what they hear while a few words are not understood, and four (57%) said they understand native speakers almost perfectly.

Of the 20 people who said they learned the language between 5 and 12 years old, four (20%) said they understand some of the speech of native speakers, nine (45%) said

they understand the main idea of what native speakers say, and seven (35%) said they understand native speakers almost perfectly.

Of the 47 people who started studying their language between 12 and 18 years old, one (2%) said he/she cannot understand native speech, eleven (23%) said they understand some native speech, but not enough to get the main idea, 23 (49%) said they can understand the main idea, but not every word, and ten (21%) said they understand native speech almost perfectly. Two people did not respond because their language was Latin.

Of the eleven people who started studying between 18 and 30 years old, four (36%) said they understand some native speech, but not enough to get the main idea, two (18%) said they understand the main idea of native speech, but not every word, and four (36%) said they understand native speakers perfectly. One person did not respond because his/her foreign language was Latin.

Of the two individuals who started studying the foreign language after 30 years of age, one person (50%) said he/she cannot understand native speakers at all, and one (50%) said he/she understand the main idea of what native speakers say, but specific words and constructions might still be confusing.

Age and the Levels of Proficiency in Writing

Of the seven people who started studying their foreign language between the ages of 0 and 5 years, one (14%) said he/she can write the language with a degree of difficulty, three (43%) said they write with minor errors, and three (43%) said they write in the foreign language almost perfectly.

Of the 20 people who said they learned the language between the ages of 5 and 12, one (5%) said he/she cannot write in the foreign language at all, four (20%) said they can write the foreign language with a degree of difficulty, eight (40%) said they can write with minor errors, and seven (35%) said they can write the language perfectly.

Of the 47 people who started studying their language between 12 and 18 years old, one (2%) said he/she cannot write in the foreign language at all, 11 (23%) said they can write with a certain degree of difficulty, 23 (49%) said they can write with minor errors, and 12 (26%) said they can write in the foreign language almost perfectly.

Of the eleven people who started studying between 18 and 30 years old, one (9%) said he/she cannot write the language at all, five (45%) said they can write the language with a degree of difficulty, four (36%) said they can write with only minor errors, and one (9%) said he/she can write in the foreign language perfectly.

Of the two individuals who started studying the foreign language after 30 years of age, one person (50%) said he/she can write with some difficulty, and one (50%) said he/she writes with minor errors.

Age and the Levels of Proficiency in Reading Comprehension

Of the seven people who started studying their foreign language between the ages of 0 and 5 years, four (57%) said they can read the language with few difficulties, and three (43%) said they can read native material almost perfectly.

Of the 20 people who said they learned the language between 5 and 12 years old, one (5%) said he/she cannot understand native written material at all, two (10%) said they can read the language with marked difficulty, often having to consult a dictionary,

eight (40%) said they can read the language with few difficulties, and nine (45%) said they can read the language almost perfectly.

Of the 47 people who started studying their language between the ages of 12 and 18, one (2%) said he/she cannot read native material at all, nine (19%) said they can read with great difficulty, 27 (57%) said they can read with minor difficulty, and ten (21%) said they can read native material almost perfectly.

Of the eleven people who started studying between 18 and 30 years old, one (9%) said he/she cannot read native material at all, one (9%) said he/she can read native material with great difficulty, six (55%) said they can read with minor difficulty, and three (27%) said they can read the foreign language almost perfectly.

Of the two individuals who started studying the foreign language after 30 years of age, one person (50%) said he/she can read the language with marked difficulty, and one (50%) said he/she can read with minor difficulty.

Actual Age and the Perceived Affect of Age

It is important to know how people perceive age's affect in relationship to what their personal age of introduction was. Of the seven people who started learning a foreign language between 0 and 5 years, one (14%) said age had significant influence on the level of success he/she achieved, and 6 (86%) said that age at introduction had maximum influence on their level of success.

Of the 20 people who started studying the language between 5 and 12 years of age, one (5%) said that age had no influence on his/her level of success, two (10%) said that age had little influence on their level of success, eight (40%) said that age somewhat

influenced their level of success, four (20%) said that age had significant influence on their success, and five (25%) said that age had maximum influence on their success.

Of the 47 participants who were introduced to their foreign language between 12 and 18 years of age, three (6%) said that age had no influence on their success, seven (15%) said that age had little influence on their success, 15 (32%) said that age somewhat affected their success, 15 (32%) said that age had significant influence on their achievement, and seven (15%) said it had maximum influence on their success.

Of the eleven responders who began studying their language between the ages of 18-30 years, one (9%) said age had no influence on his/her success, two (18%) said it had little influence on their level of achievement, three (27%) said it somewhat influenced their experience, three (27%) said it had significant influence, and two (18%) said it had maximum influence on their success.

Of the two people who started studying their language after 30 years old, one (50%) said age somewhat influenced his/her experience, and one (50%) said that age had significant experience on his/her experience.

Length of Exposure and Levels of Proficiency in Speaking

Of the six individuals who have studied their language for less than one year, five (83%) said that they can speak the language with a marked accent. One person did not respond because the studied language was Latin.

Of the seven participants who have studied their language between one and two years, three (43%) said they cannot speak the language at all, two (29%) said they can speak the language with a marked accent, one (14%) said he/she can speak with a minor accent, and one (14%) said he/she can speak the language almost perfectly.

From the thirteen people who have studied their language between two and three years, three (23%) said they cannot speak the language at all, six (46%) said they can speak the language with a marked accent, and three (23%) said they can speak with a minor accent. One individual did not respond because the language was Latin.

Of the eleven who have studied their language between three and four years, six (55%) said that they can speak the language with a marked accent, two (15%) said they can speak with a minor accent, and two (15%) said they can speak the language perfectly. One person did not respond because the language was Latin.

Of the 50 participants who have studied their language for four years or longer, thirteen (26%) said they can speak the language with a marked accent, 22 (44%) said they can speak with a minor accent, and fifteen (30%) said they can speak the language almost perfectly.

Length of Exposure and Levels of Proficiency in Listening Comprehension

Of the six individuals who have studied their language for less than one year, three (50%) said they can understand some native speech but not enough to get the main idea, one (17%) said he/she can understand most native speech and can usually gather the main idea, and one (17%) said he/she can understand native speech almost perfectly. One person did not respond because the language was Latin.

Of the seven participants who have studied their language between one and two years, two (29%) said they cannot understand native speech at all, three (43%) said that they can understand some native speech, but they often do not get the main idea, and two (29%) said they can understand most native speech, and often get the main idea.

From the thirteen people who have studied their language between two and three years, eight (62%) they can understand some native speech, but often do not get the main idea, and four (31%) said that they can understand most native speech. One person did not respond because the language was Latin.

Of the eleven who have studied their language between three and four years, three (27%) said they can understand some native speech, and seven (64%) said they can understand most native speech. One person did not respond because the language was Latin.

Of the 50 participants who have studied their language for four years or longer, two (4%) said they can understand some native speech, 24 (48%) said they can understand most native speech, and 24 (48%) said they can understand native speech perfectly.

Length of Exposure and Levels of Proficiency in Writing

Of the six individuals who have studied their language for less than one year, one (17%) said he/she cannot write the language at all, three (50%) said they can write the language with a degree of difficulty, and two (33%) said they can write the language with minor errors.

Of the seven participants who have studied their language between one and two years, two (29%) said they cannot write in the new language at all, four (57%) said they can write the new language with a degree of difficulty, and one (14%) said he/she can write the new language with only minor errors.

From the thirteen people who have studied their language between two and three years, eight (62%) said they can write the language with a degree of difficulty, and five (38%) said they can write with only minor errors.

Of the eleven who have studied their language between three and four years, one (9%) said he/she can write the language with a degree of difficulty, nine (82%) said they can write with only minor errors, and one (9%) said he/she can write with only minor errors.

Of the 50 participants who have studied their language for four years or longer, six (12%) said they can write the foreign language with a degree of difficulty, 22 (44%) said they can write with only minor errors, and 22 (44%) said they can write the new language perfectly.

Length of Exposure and Levels of Proficiency in Reading Comprehension

Of the six individuals who have studied their language for less than one year, one (17%) said he/she cannot read native materials at all, one (17%) said he/she can read the language with marked difficulty, three (50%) said they can read the language with a few difficulties, and one (17%) said he/she can read the language almost perfectly.

Of the seven participants who have studied their language between one and two years, two (29%) said they cannot read the language at all, two (29%) said they can read native materials with marked difficulty, and three (43%) said they can read native language with minor difficulty.

From the thirteen people who have studied their language between two and three years, seven (54%) people said they can read the language with marked difficulty, and six (46%) said they can read the native language with minor difficulties.

Of the eleven who have studied their language between three and four years, one (9%) said he/she can read the native language with marked difficulty, nine (82%) said they can read native materials with few difficulties, and one (9%) said he/she can read the language almost perfectly.

Of the 50 participants who have studied their language for four years or longer, two (4%) said they can read native writing with marked difficulty, 25 (50%) said they can understand native writing with few difficulties, and 23 (46%) said they can read native material almost perfectly.

Meaning of the Results

These results have serious indications regarding the actual amount of influence each factor can have on the level of success that a language learner can achieve. In the next chapter, the significance of these results will be discussed as well as the connection they have with previous research. The next section will also offer suggestions for future studies that are inspired by these results.

CHAPTER THREE

Discussion of the Survey Results

Is Age a Hindrance?

Age and Oral Language Production

As noted earlier, age is a highly debated topic among applied linguists studying second language acquisition. Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis proposed that individuals younger than the age of onset of puberty have an easier time acquiring a second language than individuals who are older. The debates specify certain parameters that are affected. The proficiency area that researchers are more likely to support as being affected by age is the area of phonology. Scovel, Von Raffler-Engel Flege, Yeni-Komshian, and Liu all commented that in one way or another, age tends to affect phonology acquisition, and thus pronunciation abilities.

The current research seems to prove that this theory has validity; 100% of people who started studying a foreign language between 0 and 5 years, which is long before puberty, claim to speak the foreign language with either a minor accent or without a detectable accent. This number starts to decrease as the age of introduction increases; 75% of those who started between 5 and 12 years speak with a minor accent or without a distinguishable accent. The other 25% speak with a marked accent. Only 43% of those who started between 12 and 18 years speak with a minor or no accent. The numbers continue to drop; of the learners who started between 18 and 30 years of age, 27% claim to speak with a minor accent and none say they speak without an accent. Of the two that

started studying after 30 years of age, one claims that he/she cannot speak the language at all; this data is consistent with the previous research. The other individual who started after age 30 says that he/she speaks the language almost perfectly. No comments were written on this survey, but the participant did respond that he/she learned the language by living with native speakers of that language, so it might be the hands-on experience that gave him/her an advantage with the phonology acquisition.

These data are based solely on the personal opinion of the learner. It is important to know if students themselves are capable of accurately gauging their own abilities in this area. In order to test this, more research was done in which native speakers evaluated the phonological performance of language students. This portion of the study will be discussed in the next chapter.

Age and Written Language Production

The results are not as clear for written language production. Of those who started between 0 and 5 years old, one person believes he/she writes with a degree of difficulty. Students who began language study this early should presumably have capabilities at a higher level; however, it is unknown whether this participant perhaps had primarily oral language exposure at a young age. If the written language exposure did not start for quite some time, it is possible that this individual struggles not with speech production, but instead with written grammar functions such as spelling and accentuation. The rest of the participants in this group seem to coincide with the idea that the younger you start, the more capable you are.

The next group, those who started between 5 and 12 years old, demonstrates that age can somewhat affect success in written language production. Fifteen people (75%)

say they can write with only minor errors or with no errors. Of the 25% remaining, four write with difficulty and one claims to have no abilities at all. These numbers seem to show consistency with the Critical Period Hypothesis, although the participant who cannot write at all seems to have an extremely low rank for having started so young. Again, the discrepancy might be because of a lack of written input while learning the language.

One would expect the numbers for the next group, those who started between 12 and 18 years old, to be lower, but again 75% say they can write with few or no errors. This percentage seems high, but there could be other circumstances such as length of exposure that are providing these participants with the abilities to write at such a high proficiency level. The next two groups, those who started at 18 years old or more, still show high proficiency levels, although they also show some lower levels as would be expected.

These results may seem contradictory, but it is again unknown what other variables could be affecting these results. As mentioned earlier, some participants may have not been exposed to written input, thus certain aspects such as spelling, different language symbols, or accentuation could be problematic. This could explain why some participants gave themselves lower ranks than would be expected. They also might be more critical of their own work, thus providing a lower rating than a native would otherwise think.

Conversely, individuals who have a much higher rank than would be expected, those who started later in life, might have been exposed to written material much earlier than they were exposed to spoken or aural material. Writing is also considered a more

perfect form of language as one has the ability to edit and made additions to it. Perhaps the higher levels of proficiency come from being able to perfect this form of language. These individuals might feel more comfortable with writing as opposed to speech because they do not need to rely on spontaneous performance but can more readily rely on competence. These participants may also just have a higher self-confidence level in this area.

No matter the reason for the seeming discrepancies, these particular results suggest that age can influence a student's ability to produce written output. Other causes might be responsible for the high or low levels that are not typically expected if one accepts the CPH. Age seems to affect both methods of language production, but not uniformly or predictably. It seems to be an independent variable alongside many others.

Age and Aural Language Comprehension

As is expected, of those who started between 0 and 5 years old, 100% can understand the main idea, if not all, aural input they hear from native speakers. This seems to indicate that age of introduction can be a strong indicator of proficiency levels.

The levels of proficiency seem to consistently drop as the age of introduction increases. Of those who started between ages 5 and 12, only 80% can understand the majority or all of native speech. Only 70% of those who started between ages 12 and 18 understand at least the main idea, and only 54% of those who started between ages 18 and 30 understand at least the main idea. The two individuals who started after age 30 again show some discrepancies. One cannot understand enough to get the main idea; this appears to be consistent with the CPH; however, the other individual understands almost all native speech, at least enough to get the main idea. It would seem that this individual

would not have this high a rank, but it is important to remember that he/she learned the language while living in a native environment. The amount of exposure to oral, native input he/she received may be the crucial cause of his/her increased capabilities.

In this category, age does seem to be an essentially good predictor of proficiency level. A few exceptions are present, but they are minimal. Again, it is important to know whether age was the only factor in determining this proficiency level, or if other factors were elemental in helping the participant achieve the level of success he/she did. Of ultimate priority would be to see what kind of input the participants received throughout their language learning experiences. Do these participants consider “native” speech what they hear in a classroom? If so, many may understand the main idea of “teacher talk” very well, but they would suffer great lacks of information while listening to a true native in a native environment. It would be important to note whether students receive regular, informal, native input, or only that of an instructor.

Age and Written Language Comprehension

Written language comprehension is another area where students seem to demonstrate that age can be a strong determinant of success in proficiency. Of those who started before age 5, 100% can read with few difficulties or better. Of those who started between ages 5 and 12, 85% have few difficulties or better. Only 78% of participants who started between 12 and 18 years old can understand with few difficulties or better. Causing a small discrepancy is the group who started between 18 and 30 years old; from this selection of participants, 82% can read with few difficulties or better. From the two participants who started at age 30 or later, one can read with few difficulties.

For the most part, these data seem to indicate a regular decrease in the number of people who achieve high levels of proficiency as the age of introduction increases; however, the group who started between ages 18 and 30 does not follow this trend. It is unknown why this group tends to have higher levels of achievement. It could be as simple as the amount of written input the students were exposed to while studying the language. These individuals may have more practice with reading the foreign language, especially if their experience takes place in a classroom. This age group quite possibly has studied the language primarily in a college classroom. Many university language programs provide a strong emphasis on literature classes. These participants may have developed this proficiency as a result of these circumstances. Another reason this may have occurred is that these students may have a strong reading background in their own native language. Students who start studying at an older age may have enough experience in understanding written material in their native language that the comprehension of written material in their new language is facilitated.

There are a number of reasons that these results are not completely conclusive. What is important to see is that age can be a fairly consistent predictor of achievement levels that are possible for students of a foreign language. The atypical data may be caused because of other circumstances, or they may indicate individuals that overcame age as a variable that affects their success.

Is Length of Exposure a More Determining Factor?

Length of Exposure and Oral Language Production

Length of exposure to a language may also be an aspect of language acquisition that can help predict what a learner's achievement level will be. As would be expected, those in this survey who have studied their language for less than one year did not claim to achieve a minor accent or no accent in their foreign language. All participants who studied a language other than Latin said they spoke with a marked accent. This appears to make sense as these individuals have not been exposed to the phonological system of the language for long enough to achieve its features at a native or near-native level.

Only 28% of those who have studied their language between one and two years have achieved a native or near-native proficiency. This actually seems to be a high percentage, but it is possible. It might be that these participants learned the language in a native environment, or perhaps in total immersion. It is also possible that these individuals were talking about a multiple language that shared the same features with a previously learned language. In this case, the amount of time required to learn the language might be much smaller.

Of the participants who have studied between two and three years, only 23% feel they have achieved a native or near-native fluency. From those who have studied between three and four years, 30% claim to have near-native or native fluency, and 74% of those who have studied the language for four years or more have native or near-native fluency. These numbers seem to be more concurrent with the idea that length of exposure must be longer in order to achieve higher levels of oral production proficiencies.

For the most part, the data indicate that the longer a student is exposed to a language the more likely he/she is to achieve a high level of proficiency in speech production. There are some exceptions, but it is unknown if these exceptions represent individuals who are not affected by length of exposure, or if they exist because of other circumstances. In general, it seems safe to say that length of exposure can affect the success students achieve in speech production.

Length of Exposure and Written Language Production

The data indicate that length of exposure may or may not affect the ability to write in a foreign language. Of those who have studied their language for less than one year, 33% say they can write in the foreign language with only minor difficulties or better. Only 14% of those who have studied the language between one and two years can write in the new language with few difficulties. Of the participants who have studied the language between two and three years, 38% say they can write with few difficulties or better. Of the participants of who have studied between three and four years, 91% say they can write with few difficulties or better, while only 88% of those who have studied the language four years or more can write at this level.

These data seem to be contradictory with the idea of exposure being a determinant of success. It is unknown why these data are so scattered. It may indicate that length of exposure truly has nothing to do with achieving success in writing in a foreign language; however, it seems that perhaps the participants have very inflated or deflated opinions of their own abilities. For example, the participants who have studied the language for less than one year and said they write with few difficulties may be over-generalizing. If they are studying the language in a classroom, they may be required to write in the foreign

language. At their level of study, the errors might be few, or the teacher might assign their grade based on what they should know at this point; this does not mean that they write at a near-native level. If the participants are basing their proficiency level on these grades, they might be inaccurately assessing their abilities. Regardless of the reasons, these data do not offer conclusive proof that length of exposure determines success in writing in a foreign language.

Length of Exposure and Aural Language Comprehension

These data again seem inconclusive as to whether or not length of exposure can determine success in a foreign language. Of the participants who have studied the language less than a year, 34% claim to understand native aural input at a near-native or native level. Only 29% of those studying the language between one and two years claim to be at this level, while 31% of those studying between two and three years are at this level. The numbers continue to increase as 64% of those who have studied the language between three and four years can understand native speech enough to get the main idea. Understandably, 92% of those who have studied the language four years or more can understand all or almost all native speech.

The discrepancies in this data seem to come from the group who has studied the language for less than one year. Again, it is unknown why this is the case. It may be that these participants understand “teacher talk” but not native speech. They may not understand the difference between these two concepts, and thus have ranked that they understand all native speech. It may also be that these participants are learning in a native or immersion environment; that being the case, they may feel extremely confident in their ability to understand native speech. It is not certain why these data seem to

contradict the other data; however, it is important to note that in general, it seems that the longer someone has studied a language, the more likely they are to understand at least the main idea of native speech.

Length of Exposure and Written Language Comprehension

Written language comprehension is another area where length of exposure has varying results. Of the group that has studied their language for less than one year, 67% claim to read native material with few or no difficulties, while only 43% of those studying between one and two years have this level of achievement. Those studying between two and three years only have 46% that understand written material at these levels. From the group who has studied between three and four years, 91% claim to understand written material at the native or near-native level, while 96% of those who have studied the language for more than four years are at this level.

The final four groups show a general increase in abilities, which is to be expected. In the first group, those who claim to be at an almost perfect level of understanding may or may not truly be at the level. It is questionable if these students' answers mean they feel they could pick up a native newspaper and read with understanding, or if they are answering based on their experience in the language classroom. Their instructor might be only selecting texts that are at a level they are capable of handling. If this is the case, the results are skewed because these participants did not answer according to the same scale as other participants.

Regardless of these errors, the remaining groups show a general increase in abilities as the number of years of exposure increase. This shows that perhaps length of

exposure can be a determinant in predicting at what level a student will be able to understand native, written material.

What Conclusions Can We Draw?

According to the results of this study, these two elements, age and length of exposure, can influence a person's ability to achieve high levels of proficiency. They seem to show an overall influence which corresponds to previous studies and that of the CPH. The problem, however, is that the data do not provide a definite, 100% clear conclusion that this is the case. It seems safe to say that age and length of exposure can have an overwhelming affect on students' abilities, but they are not the final determinant in this process. Other aspects of language learning may affect the process as much or more than simply age or length of exposure. It may be that other factors influence certain individuals more than others.

Other Determinants of Language Proficiency

On the survey, participants were also asked to evaluate the amount of influence specific elements had on their proficiencies in the foreign language, based on their personal experiences or opinions. It is interesting to note that many people found all or almost all of these factors to be influential at either a significant or maximum level. According to the responses received, this is the list of factors in order from most influential to least influential: personal motivation (83%), attitude toward the experience (79%), personal practice (79%), study habits, (75%), learning environment (73%), length of exposure (72%), personality (64%), learning style (57%), self-esteem (54%), language aptitude (54%), and age of introduction (51%).

These results show that without a doubt, language learners, although they may exhibit signs that age of introduction has affected their language proficiency, do not feel that age is the only influence on their language learning experience. It is the least influential factor as described by participants in this survey. The greatest determinant according to those who responded in this research is personal motivation.

As noted in Chapter One, some aspects are internal, or they can be determined by the learner himself, and others are external, or they happen to a learner. The original hypothesis for this research was that internal factors would become of greater influence than external ones, meaning that if a person has high levels of internal elements, he/she could overcome the negative influences of the externals. The internal influences are motivation, attitude, personal practice, and study habits. All four of these aspects coincide with the top four highest-ranked influences as perceived by participants in this study. The lower ranked influences are all external factors.

This data appears to prove the original hypothesis that, although external determinants, especially age, can influence a person's ability to achieve success in studying a foreign language, internal factors such as the person's desire to succeed can overcome these barriers. This information is extremely valuable to language educators. Students who start later in life, who do not learn in the same manner in which the class is taught, who do not thrive in the learning environment, who do not have an aptitude for languages, or who have a personality that conflicts with their teacher's may have many obstacles to overcome, but if their motivation level is high, they practice on their own, they have excellent study habits, and they maintain a positive attitude, they can overcome these difficulties and still achieve superior proficiency ratings.

Future Research Needs

This study provides a starting point for future research. While the purpose of the current research was exploratory, future studies might be more scientific in order to draw more definite conclusions. Based on the above information, more research is needed in terms of age and levels of proficiency. As was noted earlier, age seems to affect individuals differently. Age may affect speech production more than written language production, aural comprehension, or written comprehension. Of importance would be to note whether early age of introduction includes all forms of language input, or only specific types of input. The levels of proficiency a student can achieve would highly depend on the forms of input they received and at what ages.

Another way to enhance this research would be to include native speaker evaluations. Because the current study was exploratory, the data are based solely on the personal opinion of each participant. Several show they may have inflated views of their abilities, others deflated views, and still others correct views. It would be important to incorporate a test that native speakers evaluate in order to see if their opinions are in concordance with those of the learner. A researcher could develop a test that allows participants to perform orally, to perform in written format, and to listen to and read native input. The test could be evaluated by native speakers of the language to see if the results show predictable outcomes based on the participants' age of introduction. The research should also include the other elements of influence as indicated here to see in a quantitative analysis the amount of influence they have on the proficiency levels achieved. This information would support the conclusion that internal factors can be more influential than external ones.

Continuing the Research

In order to begin the research suggested above, this study also took a small sampling of participants' speech in order to have native speakers listen and evaluate it. The process used, the results found, and the conclusions will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

Speaking Proficiency Evaluations

Methods and Procedures

Because the individual surveys are based solely on the personal evaluation of each participant, it is hard to know if the proficiencies are evaluated accurately. Each individual more than likely has a distorted view, either positive or negative, of their own capabilities. For this reason, seventeen individuals were chosen for a second segment of research. I recorded a sample of their foreign language pronunciation abilities so that their proficiencies in speaking could be evaluated by native speakers.

Participants

From the pool of individuals that participated in the survey, I selected a small group to also perform in the oral proficiency test. I selected the third year Spanish class for this task because they are in a unique stage of the learning process; their class was based on practicing conversation and composition skills. There are seventeen students in this class, and all of them participated. Because of the diversity of their languages and the timing of their schedules, the faculty and staff of the MFL Department were not selected to participate in this portion of the research.

Evaluators

Two native-speakers of Spanish were selected to evaluate each student's performance. Evaluator one is a professor of Spanish at Baylor University and a native of Monterrey, Mexico. Evaluator two is a native from Nicaragua and a graduate student

at Baylor University. Other evaluators were unavailable due to time constraints. Each evaluator represents a different dialect of Spanish.

Process

During a regular class hour, students met with the administrator individually and were taped while reading a paragraph excerpt from *Hija de la fortuna*, by Isabel Allende (See Appendix D). This text was selected for its conversational, contemporary language. I felt the students would not be confused by antiquated structures, spellings, or lexicon in this text. Students had no prior experience with this excerpt, and they were taped during an unrehearsed reading. Each speaker was assigned a number to protect his/her anonymity. Afterward, students completed a survey with a corresponding number. They later returned it to their instructor so that all the results would be private.

Once the taping was complete, the tape was delivered to the evaluators. They listened to each individual while looking at a copy of the excerpt. They were instructed to listen for distinguishing features of the individual's speech that identify him/her as either native-sounding or non-native. Each evaluator filled out a form for each speaking participant (See Appendix E). They ranked the speaker on a scale similar to the one each participant used on the survey. Students were ranked as sounding native, as sounding near native, having a strong foreign accent, or not being understood. They also were asked to provide comments about the speech of each individual as to how his/her pronunciation could be improved to be more native-like.

Once the evaluators completed their work, they returned both the tape and the forms, and the information was tabulated into a spreadsheet (see Appendix F). The following explain the results from this process.

Results of Evaluations

The results showed that some students have views of themselves that natives find accurate; however, other students have very different opinions about their proficiency compared to those of native speakers. Each participant is a separate case and must be looked at individually.

Participant One

This individual said that he/she can speak the foreign language with a marked accent, and evaluator one agreed. The evaluator commented that the student's pronunciation of the geminate consonants in Spanish (rr and ll) is defective. He also commented that vowels are not distinguishable and that the student does not read with sufficient fluency. Evaluator two also categorized this student on the "not proficient" end of the scale, but she rated this student as unable to speak the language at all. She mentioned the aspects of speech that lead to this choice are the [ɾ] which occurs between vowels, the geminate consonant rr, the vowels, the Spanish pronunciation of l and ll, and the use of word stress.

The student generally has the same opinion about his/her pronunciation as that of the native speakers. Although one native speaker gave a different rating, both agreed that the student does not have an effective pronunciation. They had similar ideas as to which elements of speech qualify the student in this category as well.

Participant Two

This participant ranked himself/herself as speaking Spanish with a minor accent. Each native speaker agreed with this evaluation. Evaluator one said that this student was also distinguished as non-native because of the geminate consonants rr and ll. Evaluator

two commented on the same aspects, but also added that the student does not use pure Spanish vowels, but instead adds many schwas [ə] which highly identify this person as a native speaker of English.

Participant Three

This student ranked himself/herself as speaking with a marked accent. It appears that this person is more critical of his/her own work as both native speakers evaluated this person as speaking only with a minor accent. Evaluator one said that the student had trouble with vowels at the ends of words. Evaluator two mentioned the vowels, but she also said that the biggest giveaway is the pronunciation of the l.

Participant Four

This individual ranked his own speaking as being marked with a heavy accent. Evaluator one agreed with this assessment. He said that the student did not have a native fluidity in his/her speech. He also mentions that word stress is incorrect on several words. Evaluator two gave this individual the rank of speaking with only a minor accent. She mentioned word stress as a problem here as well, but also included vowel pronunciation as an element that the student should work on.

Participant Five

This participant claimed to speak at an almost perfect level. Evaluator one said that she speaks with a minor accent. He did not mention specific structures that identify the individual as non-native, but said that the speaker paused on certain words that were obviously unknown to her. For this reason, he ranked her as speaking with a minor accent. Evaluator two said this individual is a native speaker. She mentioned that the

only thing she heard were “little” mistakes, but she feels that they come from a careful and slow reading, instead of being a non-native.

Participant Six

This speaker claimed to have only a minor accent. Evaluator one disagreed and said that he/she spoke with a marked accent. He stated that the student struggles with the geminate consonants (rr and ll), and the fluidity of speech is non-native. Evaluator two agrees with the first evaluator that the student speaks with a marked accent. She said the fricative [g] is a problem, the vowels are incorrect, and stress placement is wrong in certain words. She also commented on the problems with both the r and the rr. Both evaluators think this student is definitely non-native.

Participant Seven

This individual claimed to speak with a marked accent. Evaluator one agrees that the speaker is definitely a non-native, but he ranked the student as not being able to speak the language at all. He said that the word stress is defective, the student does not link the words together, and both vowel and consonant pronunciation lead the evaluator to not understand what the student is trying to say. Evaluator two agrees that the student is non-native, but she gives the student the rank of speaking with a marked accent. She mentions that the student struggles with diphthongs, the l, stress placement, the rr, the pronunciation of z, which should sound as an [s], the ll, and vowels, which she adds are often pronounced as schwas [ə].

Participant Eight

This participant feels that he/she speaks at a level which only exhibits a minor accent. Both evaluators disagree with this level and rank the student as speaking with a marked accent. Evaluator one mentioned the geminate consonants (the rr and ll) and stress placement as being defective. Evaluator two also mentioned stress placement, but added vowels, particularly [e] and [o], the fricative [ð], and the l as being problematic for the student.

Participant Nine

This student says that he/she speaks with a minor accent. Both evaluators agree that the student speaks almost perfectly. Evaluator one says there are very few words that cause problems for this speaker. Evaluator two gives these thoughts:

I think this person grew up with/in a Spanish speaking family, but has more than likely lived in the U.S. for a long time and prefers to speak English rather than Spanish. I evaluated her as a 'd' [an almost perfect speaker]. I noticed certain aspects (madera – [ð]). It seems that at times she doesn't 'recognize' words – I think native speakers are able to 'predict' a word when they are reading.

This evaluator assumes correctly about the language experience of the student because on her survey, this participant says that she learned the foreign language by living with native speakers of that language or by moving to a country that speaks the language.

Participant Ten

This individual says he/she speaks with a marked accent, but both evaluators agree that he/she speaks with a minor accent. Evaluator one says that word stress is defective as well as the ll, the rr, and the j was given an English pronunciation. Evaluator

two says the student struggles with both the r and the rr, the l, the z being pronounced as in English, and the Spanish vowels.

Participant Eleven

This student says he speaks with a marked accent. This participant is the only one to receive such a dichotomy between evaluators. Evaluator one says this speaker is almost native because the speaker reads with fluidity. Evaluator two says this speaker has a marked accent. She says the l, the rr, and the ll all cause problems for this speaker.

Participant Twelve

This speaker claims to speak with a minor accent, and both evaluators agree. Evaluator one commented that the fluidity is a little off and the pronunciation of the rr and x is incorrect. Evaluator two says that the l is the main giveaway in her opinion. She also comments that the student should practice linking between the words.

Participant Thirteen

This student says he/she speaks with a marked accent, and evaluator one agrees. He says the speaker has grave problems with the rr, the ll, the j, and the x. He also says that some words have incorrect stress placed on them, and some vowels are not correct. Evaluator two says this speaker only has a minor accent. She says the most problematic are the l, the rr, and the vowels. She also commented that the stress placement is incorrect.

Participant Fourteen

This individual says that he/she speaks with only a minor accent. Evaluator one agrees and says that the student struggles with the ll, the rr, and the j. He also mentions

that the fluidity should be improved. Evaluator two thinks this person says that the student has a marked accent. She mentions the l and the vowels as being problematic.

Participant Fifteen

This student says he/she speaks with a marked accent. Both evaluators are in agreement with this rank. Evaluator one says that the student's speech is interrupted by unrecognized words, the rr and the ll are incorrect, and the student reads with no intonation. Evaluator two says the reader uses English pronunciation of the vowels, the student uses English pronunciation of the x ([ks] instead of [h]), and the student struggles with the fricative [d̃] common in Spanish.

Participant Sixteen

This student says that he/she speaks with only a minor accent, but both evaluators rank him/her as having a marked accent. Evaluator one says the fluidity, the rr, the ll, and the j and the x cause problems for the speaker. Evaluator two says the features that caused her to rank him/her as having a marked accent are the l, the z (pronounced [s]), and the vowels.

Participant Seventeen

This individual claims to speak with only a minor accent. Evaluator one says he/she speaks with a marked accent because of the slow rhythm which lacks fluidity. He also commented that the geminate consonants (ll and rr) and the r are pronounced incorrectly. Evaluator two listed this participant between having a marked and a minor accent. She leans toward giving him the rank of minor accent. Again, the student has difficulty with the rr and the l.

Age and the Implication on Speaking Abilities

The most important question to this study is whether or not age is affecting the speaking proficiencies of these individuals. Also, if age is not a contributable factor, can the length of exposure to a language make a difference in phonological proficiencies? The corresponding ages, length of exposures, and self-rankings, and those of the evaluators are listed below.

Self-Evaluation

One individual started studying the language between 0 and 5 years of age, and he/she ranked his/her speaking proficiencies having only a minor accent. Five students started studying the language between 5 and 12 years of age. Of these, one (20%) ranked himself/herself as speaking with a marked accent, three (60%) ranked themselves as speaking with a minor accent, and one (20%) ranked himself/herself as speaking with no accent. Nine participants started studying the language between 12 and 18 years of age. Of these six (67%) said they speak with a marked accent, and three (33%) said they speak with a minor accent. Of the two who started studying between 18 and 30 years of age, one (50%) said he/she speaks with a marked accent, and the other (50%) said he/she speaks with a minor accent.

There were four students who have studied Spanish for two to three years; of these, two (50%) said they speak with a marked accent, and two (50%) said they speak with a minor accent. One person has studied the language between three and four years, and he/she claims to speak natively. Twelve students say they have studied the language four years or more. Of these, six (50%) claim to speak with a marked accent and the other six (50%) speak with a minor accent.

Evaluator One

The student who began studying Spanish between the ages of 0 and 5 was given a native speaker rank by the first evaluator. Of the five students who began studying between 5 and 12 years, evaluator one said three (60%) speak with a marked accent and two (40%) speak with a minor accent. Of the nine who began between 12 and 18 years of age, evaluator one said that one (11%) is not understandable at all, four (44%) speak with a marked accent, three (33%) speak with a minor accent, and one (11%) speaks natively. Of the two who began studying the language between 18 and 30 years of age, evaluator one said that one (50%) speaks with a marked accent, and the other (50%) speaks with a minor accent.

Of the four students who have studied Spanish between two and three years, evaluator one said that one (25%) is not understandable, two (50%) speak with a marked accent, and one (25%) speaks with a minor accent. The student who has studied the language between three and four years speaks with a minor accent. From the twelve students who have studied the language four years or more, evaluator one said that six (50%) speak with a marked accent, four (33%) speak with a minor accent, and two (17%) speak natively.

Evaluator Two

Evaluator two rated the student who began studying Spanish between 0 and 5 years of age as speaking natively. Of the five who started between 5 and 12 years of age, she ranked one (20%) as speaking with a marked accent, three (60%) as speaking with a minor accent, and one (20%) as speaking natively. Of the nine who started between 12 and 18 years of age, she ranked one (11%) as being not understandable, five (55%) as

speaking with a marked accent, and three (33%) as speaking with a minor accent. Of the two who started between 18 and 30 years of age, she ranked one (50%) as speaking with a marked accent and one (50%) as speaking with a minor accent.

Of the four students who have studied the language between two and three years, evaluator two gave two (50%) the rank of having a marked accent, and the other two (50%) as speaking with only a minor accent. She ranked the one student who has studied Spanish between three and four years as speaking natively. Of the twelve who have studied for four years or more, she ranked one (8%) as being not understandable, five (42%) as having a marked accent, five (42%) as having a minor accent, and one (8%) as speaking natively.

Significance of the Results

These results have implications for both the study of age as a factor in SLA and for foreign language education practices. These ideas will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of the Listening Evaluation Results

Can Age Affect Proficiencies in Speaking and Phonological Pronunciation?

As cited earlier, Scovel, W. Von Raffler-Engel, Flege, Yeni-Komshian, and Liu state that the older a learner begins his study, the more likely he is to have a foreign accent in the language. In contrast, Abu-Rabia, Kehat, Arteaga, Bergen, Dunlap, and Elliot say that adults can overcome pronunciation barriers. This portion of the study provides results that are as varied as these studies. The evidence confirms that age seems to affect some students and not others.

On the self-evaluation, the students who started before age 12 have a varying degree of answers. The majority feel that they speak with a minor accent. One feels that he/she speaks natively, and one feels that he/she speaks with a marked accent. According to the CPH, all of them should be at the native or possibly at the minor accent level. It is unknown if the person who gave himself/herself a lower rank has a more critical view of his/her speech, or if in this case, the CPH does not hold true. Those who started studying between the ages of 12 and 18 show results consistent with the CPH. The majority claim to speak with a marked accent and several claim to have a minor accent. None believe they speak natively. The group who started between 18 and 30 years of age also show results consistent with the CPH. They both claim to speak with accents.

On the evaluations by the native speakers, the results are just as varied. The first evaluator gave a native rating to the student who started between 0 and 5 years old. This seems to correlate with the CPH. In the group that started between 5 and 12 years, he

ranked two as having a minor accent and three as having a marked accent. This seems to contradict the CPH as puberty generally starts around the age of 12; this means that most of these students should be able to achieve near-native fluency. The next group of students, those who started between ages 12 and 18, also showed inconsistency with the CPH in the first evaluator's opinions. He said that one was not understandable, four had marked accents, three had minor accents, and one speaks natively. Those who are not understandable and have accents seem to comply with the CPH, but the student he ranked as having no accent seems to contradict the hypothesis. Because the student started after puberty, it seems that he/she should not be able to achieve that native fluency. Either the CPH is wrong, or maybe this student serves as an exception. He/She also could have started studying the language closer to 12 years old, thus starting before the onset of puberty. The students who started studying the language between ages 18 and 30 were both ranked as having accents by this evaluator. This seems in line with the CPH.

Evaluator two also shows the same variations. She also ranked the student who started before age 5 as sounding native. This is consistent with the CPH. Of the students who started studying Spanish between ages 5 and 12, she ranked one as native, three as having only minor accents, and one as having a marked accent. Except for the student with the marked accent, this seems to be consistent with the CPH. Of those who started between ages 12 and 18, she ranked one as being not understandable, five as having a marked accent, and three as having minor accents. Again, her results seem consistent with the CPH. Finally, of the students who started between ages 18 and 30, she ranked one as having a marked accent, and one as having a minor accent. The only

inconsistency with the CPH seems to be with the student she ranked as having only a minor accent although he/she started between the ages of 18 and 30.

For the most part, data seem to be varied in regards to age. Many individuals have pronunciation abilities that show consistency with the CPH, but there are exceptions. The exceptions go both ways as well; the results do show individuals who started late, but have high ranks from the evaluators, but they also show individuals who started earlier yet have low ranks in the evaluations. This implies that the CPH cannot be proven either right or wrong; in some cases it seems to be correct, but in some cases it seems completely invalid. This study shows that there are always exceptions to every hypothesis.

Can Length of Exposure Affect Proficiencies in Phonological Pronunciation?

If age does not show conclusively that it is the only factor that can predict phonological proficiencies, perhaps it is the length of exposure to a language that helps develop these abilities. As previously explained, Abuhamdia claims that length of exposure is a more influential measure of success in a foreign language. This study again provides varied results.

In the self-evaluation, students who have studied the language between two and three years said they had either marked or minor accents. This seems consistent with Abuhamdia's ideas. The student who has studied Spanish between three and four years claimed to speak natively. It seems that the student must have picked up the phonology very quickly in order to already be at the native level. The data that are inconsistent with this idea are in the final group of students. Of those who have studied the language for more than four years, half ranked themselves as having a marked accent and the other

half said they had a minor accent. These students presumably should have higher speaking abilities based on the mere fact that they have been working with the language for a longer amount of time.

The first evaluator seems to show data more consistent with Abuhamdia's ideas. Of those studying the language between two and three years, one was ranked as not understandable, two as having marked accents, and one as having a minor accent. These data seem to demonstrate this idea. The student who has studied between three and four years was ranked as having a minor accent from the first evaluator. This also seems consistent with Abuhamdia. In the final group, those who have studied for more than four years, the evaluator ranked six as having a marked accent, four as having a minor accent, and two as sounding native. These data fall in line with the concept that length of exposure to a language can determine ability in foreign language proficiencies, especially in phonological development.

Evaluator two did not have data that were as consistent with Abuhamdia's ideas. Of those who studied between two and three years, she ranked two as having a marked accent and two as having a minor accent. These data seem fairly consistent with the length of exposure hypothesis. She ranked the student who has studied between three and four years as being native. This seems to be a fairly high rating, especially considering that she ranked students who have been studying the language longer at a lower level of speaking proficiency. Of those students who have studied more than four years, she ranked one as being not understandable, five as having a marked accent, five as having a minor accent, and one as being native. The students she ranked as native or only having a minor accent seem to demonstrate consistency with the idea that length of

exposure can affect proficiency; however, the six students that she ranked as having marked accents or not being understandable seem to contradict this idea. Ideally, the students who have studied the longest should have the highest rankings.

Again, the data seem inconclusive. Some evaluations show that the longer a student has been studying a language, the higher their proficiency levels are in pronunciation, and the shorter amount of time they have studied tend to predict a lower level of proficiency. On the other hand, other evaluations seem to indicate that length of exposure does not predict in a consistent or accurate manner what level or pronunciation proficiency the student will achieve.

Is Age a Greater Determinant of Success or is Length of Exposure More Influential?

What these results show seems to be inconclusive; however, a careful inspection does show irrefutable evidence of one phenomenon. One cannot say that age is definitely the sole factor that determines success in developing the phonological system of a language, but it is also incorrect to say that age is definitely not a factor that determines success. Age seems to affect different learners in different ways. Age can determine success, but it is not the only factor. Age can be overcome while learning a language, and some learners show they have a higher level of success with the phonological system of Spanish as ranked by native speakers.

Length of exposure seems to show the same tendency. Some learners demonstrate a higher level of success because they have been studying the language longer; on the other hand, many learners who should have a higher rank, do not. This study did not examine possible reasons for this discrepancy. It is possible that students who marked that they had been studying the language for more than four years had not

been studying any aspects of the phonological system for that same number of years. Many language programs do not include speaking practice. Perhaps they would have higher levels of proficiency in writing, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension based on evaluations by native speakers, because their learning experience has been limited to these three components. It is unknown exactly why length of exposure does not provide more predictable results. What is known and valuable to this study is that length of exposure, as well as age, are factors that may affect a learner's abilities, although both of these can be overcome.

What Can These Results Tell Us?

This research goes beyond offering information on age and the acquisition of languages; it also offers insight into foreign language instruction. Students in this study shared many similar problem areas such as the geminate consonants (rr and ll), the l, vowel pronunciation, word stress, and speech fluidity. This test could be used in language classrooms on a regular basis. If instructors find that students all share similar problems, the instructor can adopt a method in order to allow these students to practice these areas. Deborah L. Arteaga, John J. Bergen, Carolyn Dunlap, and A. Raymond Elliot all offer suggestions for methods of teaching phonology in the foreign language classroom. Each method seems to have positives and negatives. A language instructor need only find the method that best suits his students. By having a native speaker evaluate the students' progress, instructors can focus on the elements of speech that are troublesome to the students. Instructors will also learn the aspects of the foreign language that seem to concern all students, no matter what year of study they are in.

These aspects can be practiced from the first day in order to attempt to overcome the difficulty.

Further Research Possibilities

By no means did this study cover all possibilities in this area of research. The current study only included a reading portion. Students could also be interviewed by native speakers in order to see how their natural conversations flow. Students may perform better by not having to say specific words, but by hand-selecting words they are more comfortable with, although some students may find spontaneous speech much more difficult.

Another way to expand this research would be to study individuals who have all shared the same educational experiences. To see if age and length of exposure have predictable influence on a student, it would be valuable to test students who have experienced the same style and amount of phonological instruction.

A final way to further this research would be to include more native evaluators. Due to time and resource constraints, this research only had two native speakers evaluating the tape. It is important to have several opinions about the students' abilities. In this manner, an average could be taken. It would also be imperative to include native speakers from a range of dialects in order to account for differences in speech to which the students might have been exposed.

The current study provides a basic understanding of the effects of age on phonological development, but further research is needed in order to support or contradict these findings. Future studies may also support this research with more details based on the above recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Results and Conclusions

By exploring the types of influences on language acquisition, this study has provided valuable information for future SLA research. Through the results of the survey, I have shown that both age and length of exposure can affect proficiencies in oral production, written production, oral comprehension, and written comprehension; however, neither can accurately predict success levels in any category for all language learners. Because proficiency levels cannot be predicted, it is clear that neither factor affects every language learner in a uniform manner. As shown with the reading evaluations, many students who should have received a higher rating did not, and we assume it is because the students had other factors working against them. Additionally, students who received a higher rank than would have otherwise been expected must have overcome the barriers in some way. Some might say that exceptions exist to every rule, but the data seem to indicate that these are not merely exceptions, but examples of another phenomenon at work. It seems that age can affect a learner, but other determinants can have more influence on him. These determinants include those that were originally labeled as internal factors: personal motivation, attitude toward the experience, personal practice, and study habits.

As indicated by participants in the survey, these four internal influences are the strongest predictors or indicators of future success in a foreign language. Responders felt that these four aspects had the most significant impact on the success they experienced.

It is clear that most individuals attribute their success to one or more of these internal influences more so than any of the external factors. While many participants indicated that age and other external elements were significant, no one felt that they were significantly more important than the internal ones.

If foreign language learners do not feel the burden of age as the sole influence on success, and if exceptions exist that show how older language learners can have success in all areas of language proficiencies, then it stands to reason that age must not be the ultimate indicator of foreign language success. Age may be a barrier that must be overcome, but with the proper motivation, attitude, study habits, and means of practice, any student, young or old, can become proficient in a foreign language.

Future Research Needs

Based on the findings of this research, more studies are needed to continue the exploration of internal influences that can help language learners achieve success. Future studies should include tests in which language learners perform various tasks in all four areas of communication that can be evaluated by multiple native speakers in that language. This research is imperative in establishing results that are not based solely on a learner's perspective, but results that represent what native speakers of the given language believe as well.

The present study acts as a point of departure for future studies. The data presented here provide foreign language learners, educators, and administrators with new tools and information that can increase the success of their studies and those of their students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Second Language Learning Survey

- 1) At what age did you begin learning the second/foreign language for which you are filling out this survey?
 - a. 0-5 years
 - b. 5-12 years
 - c. 12-18 years
 - d. 18-30 years
 - e. 30+

- 2) How many years have you studied/did you study this second/foreign language?
 - a. Less than one
 - b. 1-2
 - c. 2-3
 - d. 3-4
 - e. 4+

- 3) How many languages have you studied or learned in addition to your native/first language?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4+

- 4) What method best describes how you learned this second/foreign language?
 - a. in a classroom setting
 - b. by living with native speakers of that language/by moving to a country that speaks that language
 - c. by teaching it to yourself (using computer programs, language books, etc.)
 - d. You learned it simultaneously with your native/first language.

- 5) While learning the second/foreign language, how much contact did you have with your native language?
- a. MAINLY HEARD NATIVE LANGUAGE - The majority of language input was in my native language. (For example, I only studied the second language in a classroom once a day and had no contact with native speakers of the new language.)
 - b. HALF NATIVE LANGUAGE – HALF NEW LANGUAGE – I heard both languages almost an equal amount of time. (For example, I heard the new language all day while in school, in the community, listening to the radio, and watching TV, but at home I used my native language.)
 - c. HEARD MAINLY NEW LANGUAGE - I heard the new language continuously and did not have the opportunity to speak my native language hardly ever.
- 6) What best describes your reason for learning this language?
- a. Necessity – you couldn't function in the community without learning the language.
 - b. Desire – you had an interest in learning the language
 - c. Outside encouragement – someone told you it would be “good” to study the language – an employer, a family member, etc.
 - d. To fulfill a requirement – a school or job required that you learn it
- 7) While learning the new language, how did you feel about your experience and about yourself?
- a. Positive – I felt good about myself because I was learning a new language.
 - b. Mainly positive – I felt good about myself most of the time, but at times I criticized myself because I wasn't learning at the rate that I wanted to.
 - c. Neutral – I felt neither good nor bad about myself while learning the new language.
 - d. Mainly negative – I usually felt that I was not doing well at learning the new language, but I did experience a few positive moments.
 - e. Negative – I generally did not feel good about myself while learning the new language.

- 8) Please rank your level of proficiency in SPEAKING your second/foreign language based on your opinion.
- a. I cannot speak the language at all – I am not understood when I try to speak.
 - b. I can speak the language with a marked accent – I can speak, but native speakers of that language can tell I have learned their language secondarily.
 - c. I can speak the language with a minor accent – I can speak well, and at times I sound native, but I still have various structures or letters that identify me as a “non-native” speaker.
 - d. I can speak the language ALMOST perfectly – for the most part, I sound like a native. Most native speakers cannot identify me as a “non-native” speaker.
- 9) Please rank your level of proficiency in LISTENING COMPREHENSION in your second/foreign language based on your opinion.
- a. I cannot understand the language at all – when native speakers talk, it is too fast, and there are too many words that I do not understand.
 - b. I can understand some of the language of native speakers – I understand certain words, but there are still many words and structures that confuse me, and I don’t quite get the entire meaning of things.
 - c. I can understand the “gist” – I usually understand the majority of what I hear. There may be specific words that I don’t quite understand, but with context, I usually get the general meaning of most things.
 - d. I can understand the language ALMOST perfectly – for the most part, I understand and comprehend everything than ANY native speaker says.

- 10) Please rank your level of proficiency in WRITING your second/foreign language based on your opinion.
- a. I cannot write the language at all – I am not understood when I write something in the second/foreign language.
 - b. I can write the language with a degree of difficulty – When I write, I have many errors and it is difficult for native speakers to make sense of my ideas. I have marked spelling and grammar errors in my writing.
 - c. I can write the language with minor errors – I write fairly clearly. While my writing is not perfect, native speakers understand my ideas and are not hindered by my grammar and spelling errors.
 - d. I can write the language ALMOST perfectly – for the most part, native speakers cannot identify my writing as being from a “non-native” speaker.
- 11) Please rank your level of proficiency in READING your second/foreign language based on your opinion.
- a. I cannot read the language at all – I do not understand writing from native speakers.
 - b. I can read the language with marked difficulty – When I read the language, I constantly need the dictionary and am still confused by the structures. I do not understand what the text is saying.
 - c. I can read the language with few difficulties – When I read, I have to look some words up, but even without knowing all the definitions, I understand the “gist” of what the writing says.
 - d. I can read the language ALMOST perfectly – for the most part, I understand all writing in the language. I rarely have to look words up in the dictionary.

For the following questions, please rate the amount of influence that each of the factors had on your language learning experience. Do not base your answer on whether the influence was positive or negative, but rather choose the answer that reflects how much “power” each factor had on your level of success.

12) Personal motivation – your own desire to succeed

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

13) Your attitude (toward the language, toward the learning environment, etc.)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

14) Your study habits (your method of studying enabled you to succeed or hindered your success)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

15) Your self-esteem (how you felt about yourself during the learning process)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

16) Your age at introduction to the language

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

17) The length of exposure to the language (Regardless of your age when you started, how many years have you studied/practiced/used the language?)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

18) Learning environment (native community, classroom)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

19) Your aptitude for languages

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

20) Your personality (in relationship to your teacher's, to your community)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

21) Your learning style (in relationship to your instructor's teaching style if you learned in a classroom)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

22) Your personal practice (what you did on your own in order to succeed)

- a. Had absolutely no influence on my success or failure
- b. Had very little influence on my success or failure
- c. Somewhat influenced my success or failure
- d. Had a lot of influence on my success or failure
- e. Had maximum influence on my success or failure

23) What do you consider to be your native language?

24) Which language did you study/learn as a second/foreign language? (If more than one, please only list the language for which you filled out **this** survey. You may fill out more surveys for multiple languages.)

Please feel free to use the rest of this sheet to add any additional comments that you did not include with a specific question. Thank you again for your help in this matter.

APPENDIX B

Letter to Faculty

Dear Participant,

I am writing my Master's thesis in Spanish on the topic of second language acquisition. In order to collect data, I have created a survey that will provide me with information central to my writing.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this process. The following survey is intended to collect information about your experience in learning a second/foreign language. Please answer each question according to your experience. Extra space is given so that you may add additional comments or information that you think would be beneficial to me.

Confidentiality is important to me; each survey has been given a random number. Please answer honestly knowing that your personal information will be unknown. **By returning the completed survey, you acknowledge that the information provided will be used anonymously in my writing, and you give me permission to use the data as I need.** If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact Dr. Matthew S Stanford, One Bear Place #97334, Waco, Texas 76798-7334, or call Baylor extension 2236.

If you have studied more than one language in addition to your native language, I would love for you to fill out multiple surveys. Because each survey has a number instead of a name, please make sure you write the same number on all surveys so that I will know when surveys are from the same person. As you fill each survey, please answer the questions according to your experience for one specific language at a time.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, or if you need additional surveys, please email me at Brianne_Johnson@baylor.edu. You may also call my Baylor extension at 6179. Any questions may also be directed to Dr. McManness, my advisor at Linda_McManness@baylor.edu or at extension 4426.

In order to provide myself with plenty of time to calculate the results and write about my findings, I request that you place your completed surveys in my box in the MFL office by **Thursday, December 1st**.

I truly appreciate your consideration in this matter. I look forward to continuing my research and sharing the results.

Sincerely,

Brianne Johnson

APPENDIX C

Results of the Survey

QUESTION # SUBJECT #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1	3	5	3	2	1	2	3	2	3	3	2	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	2	4	2
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19																						
20																						
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22-A	4	1	2	1	1	4	5	2	2	2	3	4	4	5	3	5	5	3	3	4	4	4
22-B	3	4	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	5	5	5	3	5	5	4	5	5	5
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31-B	1	5	2	4	1	1	3	3	3	2	3	3	4	1	3	5	4	5	1	4	4	3
32-A	4	1	2	1	1	3	4	2	2	3	3	5	5	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	4
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37-B 3 3 2 1 1 3 3 0 0 2 2 3 4 4 4 3 2 5 4 4 5 3
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85-B	4	2	4	1	1	4	2	1	2	2	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	5	4	3	3	3
85-C	4	1	4	1	1	4	2	0	0	1	1	5	5	5	3	4	1	3	3	4	4	5
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86	2	5	3	1	1	2	1	3	3	3	4	5	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
87																						
88																						
89																						
90																						
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93-B	3	4	3	2	2	1	1	4	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	5	5	5	0	5	0	5
94																						
95																						
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108																						
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DISTRIBUTION

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5	2	50	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	37	30	21	14	20	27	29	11	18	18	24

CODE**0 = No Answer****1 = A****2 = B****3 = C****4 = D****5 = E**

APPENDIX D

Reading Excerpt

Allende, Isabel. *Hija de la Fortuna*. España: Nuevas Ediciones de Bolsillo, 1999. (297-98).

“Era un villorrio surgido en pocos meses de la nada, construido por tráfugas en un suspiro y sin ambición de durar. A falta de una arena de toros, como las que había en todos los pueblos mexicanos de California, contaban con un amplio círculo despejado que servía para la doma de caballos y para encerrar mulas, reforzado con tablas y provisto de galerías de madera para acomodar al público. Esa tarde de noviembre el cielo color acero amenazaba con lluvia, pero no hacía frío y la tierra estaba seca. Detrás de la empalizada, centenares de espectadores respondían a cada rugido del animal con un coro de burlas. Las únicas mujeres, media docena de jóvenes mexicanas con vestidos blancos bordados y fumando sus eternos cigarritos, eran tan conspicuas como el oso y también a ellas las saludaban los hombres con gritos de olé, mientras las botellas de licor y las bolsas de oro de las apuestas circulaba de mano en mano.”

APPENDIX E

Listening Evaluation Form

Participant # _____ Evaluator: _____

Please rank the level of proficiency in SPEAKING you feel that this speaker has.

- a. Speaker cannot speak the language at all – If I did not have the excerpt in front of me, I would not understand what he/she is trying to say.
- b. Speaker can speak the language with a marked accent – I understand what he/she is trying to say, but he/she speaks with a very marked accent. Word stress, vowel pronunciation, and word linking easily identify this person as someone who has learned the language secondarily.
- c. Speaker has only a minor accent – I can understand the speaker well, and at times he/she sounds like a native. Various structures or sounds still identify the speaker as a “non-native”; however, this speaker has effective pronunciation.
- d. Speaker speaks ALMOST perfectly – for the most part, the speaker sounds like a native. I would not identify this person as a non-native.

In the space provided, please list or discuss the specific elements of this person’s speech that enable you to identify them as a non-native. Offer suggestions as to how this person could improve their pronunciation and flow of speech in order to sound more native-like. Please feel free to add additional comments as well.

APPENDIX F

Results of Listening Evaluation

SUBJECT #	Self-Evaluation (from #8 on survey)	Evaluator 1 Rating	Evaluator 2 Rating	Age of Introduction (from #1 on survey)	Length of Exposure (from #2 on survey)
1	2	2	1	3	5
2	3	3	3	2	5
3	2	3	3	4	3
4	2	2	3	3	5
5	4	3	4	2	4
6	3	2	2	2	5
7	2	1	2	3	3
8	3	2	2	3	5
9	3	4	4	1	5
10	2	3	3	3	5
11	2	4	2	3	5
12	3	3	3	3	5
13	2	2	3	2	5
14	3	3	2	3	5
15	2	2	2	3	5
16	3	2	2	4	3
17	3	2	3	2	3

CODE

A = 1

B = 2

C = 3

D = 4

E = 5

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