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*Age and the rate of foreign language learning* (review)

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the first in the SLA field to provide a comprehensive view of the important role that WM plays in both L2 comprehension and L2 production.

This volume will be an invaluable source of reference for researchers and graduate students conducting research on memory and L2 learning in a variety of contexts. It will also be of particular interest to experienced teachers, in Canada and elsewhere, who are interested in examining the cognitive processing implications of mainstream communicative teaching.

### References

Baddeley, A.D. (1986). *Working memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Leif French**, *Université du Québec à Chicoutimi*

**Muñoz, Carmen (Ed.)**. (2006). *Age and the rate of foreign language learning*. Toronto: Multilingual Matters. Pp. xi, 276, US\$124.95 (cloth).

The book explores the assumption that in foreign language learning, 'the younger, the better,' and questions whether findings for naturalistic learning or immersion education, such as the Canadian models, can inform the typical foreign language (FL) classroom context where learners have two to four hours' instruction per week. The 10 chapters report research from the Barcelona Age Factor (BAF) Project, a longitudinal study of the acquisition of English in public schools in Barcelona, Spain. The study, which ran from 1996 through 2003, began after a new law was enacted requiring the teaching of foreign languages to begin at age eight rather than at age 11, as required under the previous curriculum. In 1996, both eight- and 11-year olds started instruction, making possible a comparison of achievement over time with different ages of onset.

The key questions addressed by the papers in this collection are as follows:

Will there be an age-related difference in the rate of foreign language learning? Will younger foreign language learners eventually surpass older learners in the same way as naturalistic second language learners are generally observed to do? (p. 12)

Data were collected after 200, 416, and 726 hours of instruction. Testing instruments included cloze passages, various dictations, other listening tests, tests of grammar, compositions, oral narratives, oral interviews, phonetic imitation and discrimination, and role-plays.

The research shows consistent results for different skill areas, indicating robust findings for ultimate attainment and rate of learning. First, the initial rate of language development for older learners (those starting at age 11) was always faster than for younger learners (those starting at age eight) for all skill areas. Second, in ultimate attainment, learners who started at age eight never surpassed those who started at age 11 at 726 hours (the end of instruction). Thus, there was no benefit of beginning at age eight over beginning at age 11 in terms of either rate of learning or ultimate attainment.

The 10 chapters in the volume all reflect facets of the BAF project. Chapter 1 outlines the overall project, frames it in light of previous research related to the critical-period hypothesis, and presents overall findings. Chapters 2 through 8 look at the development of various aspects of language. Chapter 2 examines whether earlier classroom instruction leads to more native-like pronunciation and phonetic perception. Chapter 3 looks at the development of fluency; chapter 4 measures the oral and written productive vocabulary development of early- and late-starting learners. Chapter 5 studies the order of morphological acquisition and the rate at which these forms were learned; chapter 6 addresses morphological acquisition in oral narratives. Chapter 7 examines the development of written language. Chapter 8 looks at the acquisition of interaction skills. Finally, chapter 9 studies the use of language learning strategies by learners of different ages and proficiencies, and chapter 10 examines the development of and changes in motivation among learners.

This book's contributions to SLA research are substantial. In light of the global rush to ever-earlier instruction in English, the BAF studies provide strong evidence that such a policy is misguided in normal pedagogical contexts. When children do not have the benefit of constant naturalistic input or immersion learning, there appears to be no benefit to the earlier start. The evidence is even more convincing because of the way variables were controlled, including consistent hours of instruction for the different groups and the exclusive use of subjects who did not have outside instruction (e.g., tutoring) or other opportunities (e.g., foreign travel), as well as because of the wide variety of testing instruments used.

The book also has points that are less satisfactory. First, it would have benefited from a final summary chapter in addition to the

summary of findings in the initial chapter. Such a chapter could have summarized consistent findings, described apparent conflicts or paradoxes, suggested future directions, and detailed significant unexplored issues. For example, the connection between language development and what was actually taught is not always addressed. The study of pronunciation development (chapter 2) found no advantage for an earlier start, but the chapter does not state whether pronunciation was in fact ever explicitly taught in the curriculum. If it was not, the study's findings merely suggest that this ability does not develop naturally without instruction.

Second, the studies were careful to include only students who did not receive outside input; but, as the authors admit, many students did receive such input, and it would have been of great interest to see whether extra input resulted in greater improvement. In many areas of the world, outside input, in the form of tutors and cram schools, is a significant part of the instructional routine.

Despite these limitations, the BAF results should be of interest both to SLA researchers and language planners, as well as to applied linguists examining language development.

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**Katz, Stacey L. et Blyth, Carl S.** (2007). *Teaching French grammar in context, theory and practice*. New Haven : Yale University Press. Pp. 280, 35,00 \$ US (paper).

Dans ce livre, les auteurs examinent la problématique de l'enseignement de la grammaire française en langue seconde sous deux aspects : dans une première partie, ils passent en revue le traitement réservé à la grammaire durant ces trois dernières décennies ; leur objectif est de définir les différents niveaux de grammaire et surtout d'expliquer ce qu'est une grammaire du discours. Ils mettent en avant la nécessité de ne pas réduire l'enseignement de la grammaire aux niveaux morphosyntaxique et phrastique mais de le concevoir dans un ensemble plus vaste, celui du discours, condition indispensable, à leurs yeux, d'une meilleure maîtrise de la langue cible par les apprenants. Dans une seconde partie, ils sélectionnent un certain nombre de points de grammaire pour illustrer, sous forme d'activités de classe, les techniques d'enseignement qui correspondraient le mieux aux spécificités de chacun de ces points.