



Facultade de Filoloxía

Traballo de
fin de grao

Internal factors in the
acquisition of English as
a second language: Age
and Motivation

Autora: Tamara Pereiras Cristobo

Titora: Elsa María González Álvarez

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Curso académico 2018 / 2019

Traballo de Fin de Grao presentado na Facultade de Filoloxía da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela
para a obtención do Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ❖ SLA: Second Language Acquisition
- ❖ L2: Second Language
- ❖ L1: First Language
- ❖ ESL: English as a Second Language
- ❖ UG: Universal Grammar
- ❖ CP: Critical Period
- ❖ CPH: Critical Period Hypothesis
- ❖ CNS: Central Nervous System

SUMMARY



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

CUBRIR ESTE FORMULARIO ELECTRONICAMENTE



Formulario de delimitación de título e resumo Traballo de Fin de Grao curso 2018/2019

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LIÑA TEMÁTICA ASIGNADA:	Adquisición de inglés como segunda lingua

SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

Título: Internal factors in the acquisition of English as a second language: Age and Motivation

Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:

The central idea of this TFG is focused on the factors that influence the acquisition process of English as a second language, in this case internal issues such as age and motivation.

The title is divided in two parts separated by a colon, so that the reader can understand that there will be two sections, that is, a more general part going into a more specific one. To start, the first part (the general one) will be an introduction about what is second language acquisition, followed by a description of the different internal factors that can affect it, but also making a reference to the external ones, since all of them are interrelated. The objective is to give a first idea about the topic. After that, there will be a section where I will deal in depth with the central issue. In this specific part I will establish different subsections dealing with age and motivation at the same level. Those terms will be examined keeping in mind young and adult learners, considering that age can affect the type and degree of motivation. At the same time, the role of teachers as well as some other factors will be taken into account. Even though it will be a theoretical project, some empirical studies or surveys in relation to this topic will be used in order to exemplify some sections.

Santiago de Compostela, 29 de Octubre de 2018.

SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

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SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

INTRODUCTION

Despite many years of investigation, there is still the doubt whether age affects the proficiency level of the learners in the acquisition of a second language. Hence, considering the importance that second language acquisition has in my field of study, attention has been directed to two internal factors that affect the acquisition of English as an L2 in this case. Those are age and motivation, analysed taking into account young and adult learners. Even though there is a lot of information from other people's studies and investigations that show the influence both factors exert over SLA, we cannot reach a unique conclusion that we can apply to end with this controversy. The only clear idea is that the different types of factors somehow modify the way we acquire a second language and they do not affect all of us the same way.

When someone makes the decision of learning a second language, he probably does not have in mind such doubts as 'When should I start learning an L2?', 'Have I enough motivation to deal with something new?', 'Am I competent enough to bury myself in the learning of a new language?' and so on. This happens due to the lack of knowledge about the existent factors that can affect our SLA. If we were aware of that and of the various beliefs that exist around these factors, we could probably see the L2 acquisition from another perspective. Therefore, I found somehow necessary to analyse this topic due to the experience I had in the acquisition of English as an L2, which made me very curious about the learners' age and motivation. Some questions came to my mind such as 'is a person older than another more capable to acquire an L2?', 'do some people have more motivation than others taking into account their ages?' or 'how both factors can affect the learners?'

Taking this into account, the objective of this project is threefold: (i) to use some empirical

studies in which the researchers present different positions regarding the perfect age to acquire an L2 so that we can see how it affects the acquisition of English as an L2 and whether there exists a specific age to learn an L2; (ii) to gather also empirical studies about motivation so that we can relate it to the age factor and see if the former is affected by the latter; and (iii) to analyse how teachers can help learners in the L2 acquisition process when they are affected by those factors.

In order to reach this aim, we will do the following: Before dealing with the two main sections, the introductory part will be an explanation of different aspects regarding second language acquisition because it helps the reader comprehend what comes in the ensuing pages. As a second language is not only the language that is not our native one, different terms are going to be explained as well as the types of second language acquisition and some theories, only the ones in relation to SLA. After that, as the previously mentioned factors are not the only ones playing a role in this field, we will explain briefly each of the internal and external factors since all of them are interrelated. This first part is crucial to introduce the reader to the second language background before dealing in depth with the main factors.

Once this general part is concluded, we will deal with the specific part of the project: the analysis in detail of age and motivation factors. In each of them, attention will be paid to various aspects keeping in mind young and adult learners. Concerning the age factor, before dealing with the learners, the stages related to SLA will be mentioned, focusing especially on the critical period hypothesis, about which there are different beliefs and opinions. This point is essential so that the reader can understand on what researchers base their arguments to say what the best age to learn an L2 is. The point following this one will gather, separately, some empirical studies about the acquisition of a second language in young (as the ones carried out by Asher & Garcia 1969; Patkowski 1980; Oyama 1976) and adult learners (Ekstrand 1959; Collier 1987). The aim is to get an own conclusion about the perfect age to acquire it, if there

really is a specific one. Another point is the role teachers have in helping the learners affected by the age factor. We will thus mention some specific strategies used by the learners as well as class methodologies applied by the teacher depending on the age of the person. Both will help us to understand the effect age has on SLA.

Finally, following the same pattern of adult and young learners, motivation will be analysed. We will deal with the different types of motivation followed by some empirical studies that will show us whether motivation changes with age. Taking into account the age factor, some specific motivational strategies used by the teacher in connection to young and adult learners will also be explained. As teachers play an important role in motivating learners, the last point will deal with some beliefs the learners have about the importance of the teacher in the classroom and the behaviours they can adopt to increase learners' motivation. In this section, it is very important to define the term according to the SLA field and to relate it to age, so that we can see that both are interrelated, that is, whether one can be affected by the other.

In this project, we will deal mainly with theoretical matters, but those will help to introduce the reader to the empirical studies that complement some of the sections. Theory is important to understand what we are going to deal with, but research helps us see more clearly the existing fixed beliefs about this topic and to reach a conclusion.

1. SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

1.1 What is second language acquisition (SLA)?

Finding a definition that explains what the concept of second language acquisition entails is not an easy task. It can be simply defined as a way through which people learn a language different to their native one or L1 (first language) but it is not enough to cover all the issue. Many learners have competences in various non-primary languages and all those are also second languages; therefore, any language learned other than the first is called second language, no matter if it is the third or fourth.

Even though this definition seems to be fairly complete, we need to make a detailed distinction among some terms concerning the acquisition. But before doing so, it would be useful to give a brief explanation of the term ‘acquisition’. Gass and Selinker (2008) refer to it saying that it “[...] might range from linguistic knowledge to the ability to use that knowledge in speech and the ability to process language in real time” (p.81), which means that it does not only implies knowing the theory but knowing how to apply it.

Focusing now on SLA terms, we should know that the distinction between second and foreign language acquisition is sometimes made. As Ellis (1994) explains, regarding the second language, it plays an institutional and social role in the community, such as the English language learnt as an L2 in the United States or in the United Kingdom (p. 12). On the contrary, “[...] foreign language learning takes place in settings where the language plays no major role in the community and is primarily learnt only in the classroom” (Ellis, 1994, p.12), as English learnt by French speakers in France. Another definition of this issue is the one provided by Gass and Selinker (2008) who say that foreign language learning concerns a non-native language we acquire in our native environment. However, second language

acquisition is the learning of a non-native language in the place it is spoken as Punjabi speakers in the United Kingdom who learn English (p.7). Even though this distinction exists, we will use the term second language instead of foreign language taking into account that a language in addition to your native one is already considered a second language; that is, we are not differentiating the place where the language is learned.

There is another difference made by some authors between acquisition and learning. Krashen (1988) suggested that the former has to do with the unconscious process of getting a language without being studied whereas ‘learning’ refers to the conscious manner of acquiring the language voluntarily, normally guided by someone (p.1). Along this paper, we are not going to make such a distinction.

It is also useful to clarify the use of two abbreviations to refer to second language acquisition: SLA and L2 acquisition. Ortega (2013) uses them differently in her book. She prefers to apply SLA to refer to the field and discipline while L2 acquisition has to do with the process of learning new languages (p.22). However, in this paper, we are going to use SLA to refer to the process itself (of acquiring a language) and L2 to refer just to the second language.

There is not a unique and perfect definition to explain what second language acquisition is, but considering that one of this paper’s main focuses is age, a good definition will be the one given by Lourdes Ortega. She (2013) argues that SLA “[...] is the scholarly field of inquiry that investigates the human capacity to learn languages other than the first, during late childhood, adolescence or adulthood, and once the first language or languages have been acquired” (pp.18-19). With this definition, Ortega shows the possibility of learning a second language in any of these stages of life, no matter the age. What we are going to do is to

analyse if really this is so or if there are more opinions and which conclusion/s we can extract.

1.2 Spontaneous and guided second language acquisition

When talking about second language acquisition we have to bear in mind that there are two different ways of learning it: through a spontaneous or a guided procedure. The term spontaneous refers to the acquisition of a second language in everyday communication that is, without being instructed or also free from systematic guidance (Klein, 1986, p.16). An example of this type, as given by Klein (1986), would be a person who settles in another country without knowing a single word of the local language and who manages to learn it only by his relationship with society (p.16). Everyday communication is the main help the learner has to learn and improve his knowledge. The person has to “[...] learn the language, and in order to learn it, [he] must communicate”, a process through which the learner is faced with two related, but different tasks (Klein, 1986, p.16):

- the communication task, which consists in using his actual and (for a long time) quite limited repertoire in an optimal way, in expressing himself as well as in understanding others.

- his learning task, which is to approximate himself to the target language, the one used in the environment he is.

The former task encourages the learner to develop an optimal language variety, to reach an efficient communication; the later probably “[...] incit[es] the learner to abandon the means he has developed thus far in favour of more efficient ones” (Klein, 1986, p.17). In some specific cases, the learner uses paraphrases instead of some words he is not sure of; or he avoids the topic if he has no vocabulary to face it, what is called a strategy of language use (Klein, 1986, p.17).

On the contrary, when we are referring to guided language acquisition we cannot forget the presence of an instructor, who leads the acquisition of the learner. It is crucial that the learner has access to the target language so that he can obtain the rules for its use. In guided learning, this material is presented in 'digested' form (Klein, 1986, p.20) by the teacher. The learner can be offered no more than a description of the material (as traditional grammarians did); or can be instructed with very little grammar and a practice of real-life communication (Klein, 1986, p.20). Furthermore, the order in which this material is presented also matters because it is given by the teacher under judgements of difficulty and relevance, for instance, the attention paid to morphological issues (Klein, 1986, p.20). Once the material is learned it needs to be applied to practice which is governed by exercises like dictation, essays and so on, given by the teacher which eases the way of language production (Klein, 1986, p.21).

In summary, we see thus some differences between both types of acquisition taking into account that spontaneous acquisition is characterised by communicative practice. In it there is almost no grammar presence, more than the one learned by real-life practice and the application of the learner's language potential he has acquired, which is presented in an unsystematic way in the course of everyday communication with the environment (Klein, 1986, pp.20-21). This means that he does not follow rules given by an instructor, but those learned by his own practice and application of the language in the environment. However, guided acquisition is totally the contrary, because the learner's SLA depends on the teacher, who gives him the material that is going to be learnt and who decides how it is going to be presented. Therefore, guided acquisition is always more premeditated and spontaneous acquisition is more unplanned. According to Klein (1986) "[t]here exists [...] the natural expectation that the study of guided learning (i.e. language instruction) would yield evidence of considerable value to the language teacher [...]" (p.18), probably evidences about the learner acquiring the language in an accurate way, not as in spontaneous learning. Even so, as

time goes by, human beings have developed the ability to learn a language, first or even second, through actual communication (Klein, 1986, p.19); therefore, it cannot be said that guided acquisition is better than the spontaneous one.

It is evident that such distinctions do exist; hence, we cannot think that there is a single way of learning an L2. This shows us that depending on the learner, his capacities and the situation he chooses to be in, the type of acquisition will be one or another, that is, he is somehow responsible for the selection of the way in which he prefers to acquire an L2.

1.3 Theories of second language acquisition

The field of study of SLA encompasses many different issues we cannot leave out, as theories focused on the way people get to learn an L2. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) say, “[...] there are at least forty ‘theories’, ‘models’, ‘perspectives’, ‘metaphors’, ‘hypotheses’ and ‘theoretical claims’ in the SLA literature, [and] these terms are generally used in free variation” (p.288). The objective of this section is to briefly explain some of the theories that were chosen taking this project’s topic into consideration, that is, the factors that affect second language acquisition as well as a relation with the first language to explain issues about the second. Some of the following are not originally labelled as theories of SLA, but as influential ones in its research.

Before going into detail with the explanation, it is important to clarify what we understand by a theory. According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), it is a synthesis of what is ‘known’ at a given point in time about some natural phenomena, such as the factors involved in SLA or what has been discovered through empirical observation (p.222).

➤ Nativist theories

Those theories attempt to explain the acquisition “[...] by positing an innate biological

endowment that makes learning possible” (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, p.227). The best known nativist theories are those presented by Chomsky about language development in children, especially Universal Grammar (UG). Even though it has always been related to the acquisition of a first language, in the past two decades it has been applied to second language acquisition (Gass and Selinker, 2008, p.160). Chomsky (2006) defines it as the study of the conditions that must be met by the grammars of all human languages (p.112). He claims that all humans have an innate or biologically determined ability to learn a language, first or second, that is, people already possess general knowledge of what all languages have in common, including how any natural language can be structured (Saville-Troike, 2006, p.47).

The problem has to do with the acquisition of a language which the speaker has almost no input of, because there are many complex formations the child cannot know by innatism. Gass and Selinker (2008) suggest that “[...] children come to know certain properties of grammar that are not obviously learnable from input” (p.162). Some examples of this are the ones discussed by White (1989) quoted in Gass and Selinker (2008, p.162), about the use of ‘want’ or ‘wanna’:

(6-9) Who do you want to feed the dog?

(6-10) *Who do you wanna feed the dog?

According to Chomsky (2006), the learner would know, using his latent and unconscious knowledge of UG, the structures of the language (p.112). White explained that the location of the element about which the question is made is what blocks the contraction, as in (6-9) that can be interpreted as ‘You want someone to feed the dog’, thereby, as ‘someone’ is between ‘want’ and ‘to’, ‘wanna’ cannot be used (cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008, p.162). The main problem in these cases is that it would be very difficult for him to guess the correct use because the input does not give enough information. Nonetheless, Chomsky (2006) states that

the grammar of a language must be discovered by the child from the data presented to him (p.76).

Another nativist theory is the one presented by Krashen, called Krashen's Monitor Theory. This was one of the most influential theories in relation to SLA between the 1970s and 1980s. At first, it encompassed several hypotheses which finally were condensed into five: the Natural Order, Monitor, Affective Filter, Input and Acquisition-Learning Hypotheses.

The Natural Order Hypothesis is based on the acquisition of L2 rules, which according to Krashen (1985) are learned in a predictable order, that is, a natural order independent of the order in which they are taught in language classes (p.79).

The Monitor Hypothesis explains "[...] the relationship posited between the acquired and learned systems during SL performance" (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, p.242). Krashen (1985) argues that our ability to produce utterances in another language comes from our acquired competence, from our subconscious knowledge (p.79) and what is learned is available only as a monitor, to correct the output of the acquired system (p.80).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis presents issues such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety as tools that can cause a mental block on the learner (Krashen, 1985, p.81). Krashen (1985) explains that when learners are unmotivated the affective filter is up, blocking the access to the comprehensible input and the process of acquisition; but when it is down then the learner is not concerned with the possibility of failure, which allows free access to the comprehensible input (p.81).

The Input Hypothesis is based on the only way a person can acquire an L2, by understanding messages, that is, by receiving comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985, p.80).

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) say that it takes place when the language that is heard or read is understood (p.242).

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis makes a difference between two ways of learning an L2. By using the term ‘acquisition’ it refers to the subconscious process used by children developing their first language (Krashen, 1985, p.79), a process through which “[t]he learner is oriented not to the form but to the content and the effect of his utterances, remaining unaware of the linguistic rules and structures used in the process” (Klein, 1986, p.28). However, ‘learning’ is a conscious process, which results in ‘knowing about’ language (Krashen, 1985, p.79). That means to say that when someone acquires a language is not aware of doing it, it is a spontaneous action; but learning the language implies that the person has to put more eagerness because it is conscious of doing so, that is, the person decides to learn the language out of choice.

We can summarize the five previous theories with a single claim presented by Krashen (1985) who suggests that “[...] comprehensible input is the essential ingredient for second-language acquisition” (p.82):

People acquire second languages only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input ‘in’. When the filter is ‘down’ and appropriate comprehensible input is presented (and comprehended), acquisition is inevitable. It is, in fact, unavoidable and cannot be prevented – the language ‘mental organ’ will function just as automatically as any other organ. (Krashen, 1985, p.82)

➤ **Identity Hypothesis**

This is another type of the numerous hypotheses that have received considerable attention in second language acquisition research. It asserts that both first and second languages are one and it is irrelevant whether or not any other language has been learned before (Klein,

1986, p.23). This position has not been seriously held though, basing that on the following notions cited by Klein (1986, p.24):

-The first language is normally acquired with perfect pronunciation. Even though this is not clear evidence to say that a second language cannot be acquired with perfect pronunciation, as a general rule, the pronunciation in an L2 is not the same as in the native one.

-Both languages have some features in common. As explained by Burt and Dulay (1980) and Wode (1981) “[...] in both modes there is a parallelism in the acquisition order of such structures as interrogatives, negation, or certain morphemes” (quoted in Klein, 1986, 24).

-Both of them are amazingly variable.

We can come to the conclusion that first and second languages have differences and also some similarities, so they should not be studied as a single one.

➤ **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**

Contrary to the identity hypothesis we find the contrastive one, which exposes that “[...] the acquisition of a second language is largely determined by the structure of an earlier acquired language” (Klein, 1986, p.25), which means that the learner probably transmits the structures of the L1 to the L2. Klein (1986) explains that the structures of an L2 that coincide with those of the L1 are learned in an easier way as a result of positive transfer (p.25). An example of this is the transfer of a Spanish plural morpheme –s, on nouns, to English, like in ‘lenguajes’ to ‘languages’ (Saville-Troike, 2006, p.35). However, the contrasting structures are more difficult to get due to ‘negative transfer’, as the transfer of Spanish plural –s to a modifier in number agreement with the noun, as ‘lenguajes modernas’ to ‘Moderns

Languages’; or false friends as ‘asistir’ in Spanish and ‘assist’ in English (Saville-Troike, 2006, pp.35-36).

Conclusion of the previous SLA theories

The large number of SLA theories demonstrates the great interest this field of study has caused on researchers, but the problem is to know if there is a theory that is considered the most appropriate one for SLA. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) state that

what makes them difficult to evaluate is the fact that they sometimes differ greatly in (1) *scope*, or the range of SLA phenomena they treat; (2) the type of *data* to which they are (implicitly or explicitly) held accountable; and (3) the degree of *abstraction* of the statements they contain. (p. 288)

Notwithstanding, it is generally said that a theory with a wider scope is better than one of narrower scope because it can be used to deal with a broader number of problems (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, p.288).

1.4 Influential factors

All of us learn an L1 in an unconscious manner since we are born but when we refer to an L2 then the learners find internal and external issues that influence the way they are going to face this new challenge in their lives. As both types of factors are in some way interrelated, a definition of each one will be given, paying special attention to the two main issues that are our object of study: age and motivation.

The factors here explained will be taken from a research made by an English lecturer called Md. Faruquzzaman Akan (2018) in which one of his objectives was to find out the language learners’ factors and explain them. In some of the factors, my own explanation will also be given.

1.4.1 Internal factors

When we refer to internal factors we are talking about those intrinsic characteristics that a learner has. One of them is age, but does age really influence when we try to learn an L2? There is a strong belief that younger learners are more capable than older ones in doing so thanks to the existence of a critical period. Brown (2000) refers to it as the “[...] biologically determined period of life when the language can be acquired more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire” (p.53). Penfield and Roberts (1959) explain that “[...] the optimum period for language acquisition falls within the first ten years of life, when the brain retains its plasticity” (quoted in Ellis, 1994, p.484). According to these statements, there is no possibility for adults to learn an L2 with a perfect realization, but there are different positions concerning this belief, which we will analyse later. One of the major points of this controversy is “[...] whether the differences between child and adult learners are to be explained as primarily the result of environmental factors or of changes in the mental and neurological mechanisms responsible for language learning” (Ellis, 1994, p.492). At this point, we cannot really provide a solution for the number of existing opinions, but what is clear is that age can play an important role in SLA.

Another crucial factor is motivation, that is, the learner’s readiness to really get knowledge of the new language. The degree of acquisition, in this case, will depend on the person’s attitude towards the different difficulties that can arise in the process of learning. Taking this idea into account, motivation is presented by Keller (1983, p.389) as “[...] the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect” (quoted in Brown, 2000, p.160). However, Brown (2000) adds that a person’s acts are always carried out within a cultural and social setting and cannot be completely separated from it, that is “[...] you may be unmotivated to learn a foreign language because you fail to see the rewards, connect the learning only to superficial needs

(e.g., fulfilling a requirement) and see no possibility of a social context in which this skill is useful” (pp.161-163). The higher the learner’s motivation is, the harder the person will work and the better the results achieved will be. A person who enjoys the process and shows interest in what he is doing will probably reach better results than a person that learns the language because someone or something forces it. Motivation is normally seen in terms of intrinsic (the person’s individual attitude) and extrinsic influences (which include any external factor, such as the educational system, the family and so on). In conclusion, the strength of motivation is a main predictor of L2 success.

Personality is a more general factor that includes all the traits that define an individual. An extroverted learner will be in advantage when learning an L2, more than a shy person, due to the fact that the former may be more active in communication, which entails practice and more progress. Griffiths (1991b) opines that extroverted learners will do better in acquiring basic interpersonal communication skills because they have more opportunities to practise. Nevertheless, introverted learners, who prefer calm and to be quiet, will do better at developing cognitive academic language ability, (cited in Ellis, 1994, p.520).

The aptitude factor refers to the learner’s inner capacities to do something well. Not everybody has the same aptitudes, neither everybody has aptitudes to do things others can. Carroll (1981), quoted in Ellis (1994, pp.494-495), claims that it must be seen as a stable factor, maybe innate and as a capacity that enhances the rate and ease of learning. We cannot confuse it with the learner’s attitudes, which depend only on how they want to act with regard to the L2. Ellis (1994) explains that learners have different attitudes towards the target language, the target language speakers, the target-language culture, the social value of learning the L2, particular uses of the target language, and themselves as members of their own culture (p.198). Those attitudes have an impact on the proficiency they achieve in the

L2; therefore, learners with positive attitudes will get a positive effect, whereas learners with negative ones will achieve negative results.

Another internal factor is the experience the learner has. Those who have prior experience about the language, even if this is not much, will have more possibilities of acquiring a second language with less difficulty. Even having previous knowledge about other languages will have an effect on the learning of a new language since some of them can have some similarities; therefore the process becomes easier since it is accelerated.

Gender is also considered as a factor that can influence the acquisition of an L2. Ellis (1994, p.202), as other authors, differentiates between ‘sex’ (a biological distinction) and ‘gender’ (a social distinction). There exists the belief that females tend to be better L2 learners than males, but it can be only a social construct. A study conducted by Boyle (1987), in which he pays attention to 490 Chinese students of English as an L2 in Hong Kong, shows that the females achieved higher levels on tests of general L2 English proficiency (cited in Ellis, 1994, p.202). Other studies, as the one made by Bacon (1992), show that there is no difference between the sexes in two authentic listening tasks (quoted in Ellis, 1994, p.202). However, without analysing this factor we cannot reach a unique conclusion, neither say emphatically that women are better than men.

1.4.2 External factors

The influences the learner finds in the outside world are known as external factors. One of these is the teachers’ influence on the learners’ SLA, because they, as well as the students, have an own personality which will affect their performance in the classroom. Whatever they do in the classroom, they should bear in mind the learners’ necessities and level in order to help them to achieve a good linguistic development. Sometimes teacher’s expectations also affect because “[i]f you don’t believe a particular student is capable of achieving a certain

goal, you may not provide the support necessary for him or her to do it [...]” (Akan, 2018, p.125), which can create a barrier for the student to continue learning an L2.

Apart from teachers, parents also play an important role in the proficiency the learner achieves “[...] by monitoring their children’s curricular activities” or “[...] by modelling attitudes conducive to successful language learning” (Ellis, 1994, p.228). It is true that some students can achieve a good level without any kind of encouragement, just with their own efforts and attitude, but from my point of view, it would be less hard for a person to immerse himself in an L2 if he has the support of others that encourage him.

In relation to the previous factors are the classroom size and management. Depending on the number of students the final results and the L2 development will be better or worse. Logically, a teacher that has to instruct a few students will do it better than another that has a classroom with a huge amount of people. He cannot pay the same attention to all of them, thus the language achievement will not be as good as in the case the students are less in number. Hence, a small group “[...] increases language practice opportunities, it improves the quality of student talk, it helps to individualize instruction, it promotes a positive affective climate, and it motivates learners to learn” (Ellis, 1994, p.598). Furthermore, according to Akan (2018), “[g]ood classroom management can end bad behaviour before it begins [...]” (p.125) because it is crucially important for the learner’s success to feel relaxed and positive towards the learning of the L2.

Along with the previous factor is the syllabus presented to be learnt, because teachers should choose what they have to teach and in which order. That is, if they start teaching the students something that supposes a lot of effort, without even having a basic knowledge, this will lead to the learner’s mental block. However, if they start with something adapted to the learner’s level, it will cause interest and a positive attitude to continue learning.

Another social factor is the culture of the L2. Brown (2000) defines it as “[...] the ideas, customs, skills, arts, and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time [...] and [t]he fact that no society exists without a culture reflects the need for culture to fulfill certain [...] needs in human beings” (p.177). Then, the acquisition of a second language is also the acquisition of a second culture (Brown, 2000, pp.179-180), and therefore, a creation of a second identity, since the learner will act somewhat moved by the culture of the L2.

2. THE AGE FACTOR: DOES AGE REALLY MATTER?

Many researchers argue that SLA is affected by the learner’s age, whereas others state that what happens with the learning of the L2 depends more on other internal or external factors that can affect it. Most research made in this field in relation to age has to do with the existence of a critical period, that is, a stage within which the acquisition is more productive, or as it is thought, the only period in which a person can acquire an L2. However, age can affect SLA without being exclusively due to the existence of this specific period; that is, causing some physical wear as the deficiency of the auditory organ.

What we are going to do in this part is to focus the analysis only on the role the age factor has in the acquisition of English as an L2, explaining the so called critical period hypothesis (CPH) bearing in mind young and adult learners, in order to understand the different ideas about it.

2.1 The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

The existence of a critical period in the acquisition of an L2 is a topic still open to debate, which attracts many researchers to study and investigate it. There seems to be enough

research to show that older learners (exposed to the L2 after puberty) tend to be poorer language ‘achievers’ than children (Marinova-Todd, 2003, p.62). This idea is not actually always accepted, due to the fact that many researchers do not consider that learners with an earlier exposure to the L2 will achieve more proficiency than those who start at a later age as in adulthood. Despite that, it is still questionable whether the age effects on the L2 are a consequence of a pre-existent critical period or if the problem is that those are influenced by some factors, whether internal or external, as motivation.

Before we proceed further in our discussion of the CPH, it may be worth explaining what we are referring to when we talk about a critical period. Eubank and Gregg (1999) explain that it is “[...] a psychological phenomenon that implicates some aspect of the central nervous system (CNS) [...] CPs for us involve an interaction between some innately given part of the CNS and input from the periphery” (p.67). They also refer to it as “[...] a period of (relative) plasticity, during which there is a possibility of change in the relevant domain”, understanding by ‘plasticity’ the ability of neurons to make new and varied connections depending on the stimulus (Eubank and Gregg, 1999, p.69). That is one of the reasons why some researchers state that once this plasticity is gone by, the ability to acquire a language decreases.

Notwithstanding, there are manifold hypotheses related to this period of acquisition. On the one hand, those who hold the existence of a CPH for SLA account for some mechanisms that get worse when the CP is closed; that is, children and adults may have different mechanisms available. One of them is the loss of neural plasticity in the brain, which is not fully available after its closure; along with a loss of the language learning faculty that entails a loss of Universal Grammar, the innate knowledge of the possible forms all language grammars may take (Birdsong, 1999, p.10). Some researchers suggest that UG continues to be mentally represented but no longer available or accessible to the language learner in the

L2 (Birdsong, 1999, p.10). Hence, a person exposed to an L2 before the CP has ended, will have ‘access’ to the UG and thus will be more likely to acquire the L2 similarly to an L1; but if the person starts learning it after the completion of the CP, he will not have access to the UG and the acquisition will be different from the L1 (Marinova-Todd, 2003, p.61).

On the other hand, there are authors that are dubious about its existence. Singleton (2003) assumes that “both research and observations of those who are in daily contact with L2 learners suggest that an early start in a second language is neither a strictly necessary nor a universally sufficient condition for the attainment of native-like proficiency” (p.15). Even though Penfield is considered one of the main promoters of the critical period, he also recognises that an adult learner may become a ‘master’ of his/her target L2 under some circumstances (Penfield and Roberts, 1959, p.24 as quoted in Singleton, 2003, p.15). One relevant study is the one by Johnson and Newport (1989) in which they tested Chinese and Korean learners of English living in the United States. They found out that for those participants arriving prior to the closure of the critical period, there was a decline in performance that began after their age of arrival, approximately 7 years. However, for those arriving about the 17, after the CP has closed, the results were essentially random (mentioned in Birdsong, 1999, p.14). We can then conclude that the critical period is not as influential as those who are in favour of its effects in SLA think.

Consequently, if age effects are not to be explained by the presence of a critical period, we can assert what has been aforementioned, that other factors play a more relevant role than the CPH. Some of them are motivational factors, as we will see later or even educational factors. Marinova-Todd *et al.* (2000) have pointed out that some of the recently studied older beginners who achieve native-like proficiency have very high levels of motivation (cited in Singleton, 2003, p.16).

Moreover, we have to bear in mind the stages in which SLA can take place. Some researchers hold that there are five different stages. The first one is the silent period (pre-production stage). In L1 acquisition it is the moment in which children acquire sounds through listening to people before they produce their first words; in L2 it is not obligatory though, as the learner already knows about language (Ellis, 1994, p.82). The second is the so called early production, when the learner starts to create one-word phrases or short phrases. Krashen and Terrell (1995) explain that from their experience they have noticed that adults start this period rapidly, whereas young children “[...] very often show a delay in production from one to six months” (p.78). Successively is the speech emergence phase, the moment in which the learner brings forth phrases or short sentences having already a good comprehension, followed by the intermediate fluency, characterised by the creation of longer and more complex sentences (Hill and Miller, 2013, p.10) and excellent comprehension. It opens the way for the final period, the advanced fluency stage when the learner has a near-native level of speech. This classification can be illustrated briefly by Hill and Miller (2013) who explain that “[s]tudents then need sentence starters, such as ‘There are ____ red blocks than blue blocks,’ or the specific vocabulary words *more*, *less* and *equal* [recorded in the early production/speech emergence stage]” (p.10). This is useful for the final step, which allows the learner to come up with full sentences such as “There are more red blocks than blue blocks because this set has 8 and the other set has 6”, an example given by Hill and Miller (2013, p.10). Every learner will pass through these stages. It will depend on the person how much time each of them will endure, taking into account the effect several factors, such as their motivation, can cause in the acquisition process.

2.2 Young vs. Adult learners

As already mentioned, there still exists the controversy about the ideal age to start learning an L2. In this section we will deal in depth with the two main positions concerning this

specific issue: young and adult learners' positions, to see if it is possible to reach a more precise conclusion that allows us to clarify which of them is considered to be the most appropriate one.

2.2.1 The 'younger = better' position

The notion of the “younger = better” in SLA has been considered for a long time the most appropriate one. Some researchers posit the thought that younger L2 learners are globally more efficient and successful than older ones, besides the idea that puberty marks the onset of a decline in L2 capacity (Singleton, 1989, p.80). They also support the age-related point beyond which it becomes difficult or impossible to learn an L2 with a native's mastery: the CP (Gass and Selinker, 2008, p.406). Nevertheless, there is another thought about younger learners, who are only more efficient than the older ones just in some respects as in acquiring oral skills or basic communicative proficiency (Singleton, 1989, p.80).

But which is the evidence that supports this hypothesis? First of all, we have to bear in mind the 'better' notion in accordance with the difference between children as immigrants in a new country, where they are totally immersed in the language, and children exposed to the L2 only in the classroom. Cook and Singleton (2014) say that there has been a great amount of research about immigrants and the conclusion is that younger arrivals are more likely than older ones to achieve native's proficiency (p.21). Some of the examples in question are the following taken from Cook and Singleton (2014, p.21):

- “Asher & Garcia (1969): better pronunciation of English tended to be associated with immigrants who had arrived in the USA between one and five years of age rather than with those who had arrived at later ages”

- “Patkowski (1980): the grammatical competence in English of immigrants arriving in the USA before the age of 15 was better on average than that of those who had arrived at later ages”

In both statements, younger learners are the most likely to acquire a good proficiency of the L2. One of these studies, carried out by Asher & Garcia (1969), quoted in Singleton (1989, pp.83-84), compares the age of entry and the length of residence in order to clarify which of them affects the acquisition of the L2. In it, 71 Cuban immigrants to California aged 7 to 19 years were judged by 19 American children. No one was recognised to have native pronunciation but those who were near to achieve it were children who had entered the United States between the ages of 1 and 6 years, who also had lived there over 5 years. Nonetheless, “[c]hildren who came to America when they were 13 or older had a small chance of acquiring a near-native pronunciation even if they lived here for 5 years or more” (cited in Singleton, 1989, p.84). This shows that the length of residence does not affect the learning achievements, but age does.

Patkowski (1980) investigated 67 immigrants to the United States and found that the ones who entered the country at the age of 15 were rated as more proficient in grammar than learners who had entered after that age. Furthermore, the range of adult group scores was smaller than the range of child group scores. In this case, neither the length of stay nor the amount of instruction had a significant effect, but again the age effects are the main ones (quoted in Matsuoka and Smith, 2008, p.35). Similar results had been provided from a study in which Oyama (1976) examined 60 male immigrant learners to the United States, whose ages ranged from 6 to 20 years old. Even though they had lived there for between 5 and 18 years, there was no significant relationship between the length of stay and their accent. The results showed that the youngest arrivals had a near native accent (cited in Matsuoka and Smith, 2008, p.35).

On the other hand, children that are exposed to the L2 only in school, or in some cases at home as well are also thought to be more successful than adolescents or adults. A study that supports this hypothesis is the one carried out by Yamada et al. (1980, p.245) to 30 Japanese elementary school pupils, distributed across three age-groups (7, 9 and 11 years old), none of them having previous experience of English. In it, they had to learn four different English mono- and di-syllabic words associated with a picture. Observing the individual tests it was noticed that mean learning scores decrease with age (cited in Singleton, 1989, p.83), which concludes again that learning at a younger age is better and preferable.

Another study of this type is the one conducted by Alsairi (2018) in which he tested 33 Arabic students aged between ages 11-14 all learning English, as well as five English teachers. It was observed that early learners' pronunciation was closer to the English native; they were even more fluent and had attained a higher English proficiency in terms of reading, writing, spelling and speaking. Their teachers also agree that teaching at an early age helps students learn more smoothly than later in life (pp.143-147). Therefore, looking at those studies, SLA yields better results when it begins in childhood.

2.2.2 The 'older = better' position

Here we will deal with the counter-proposal of the previous position, in which older learners are seen as more efficient and successful than younger ones. This belief was examined to a lesser extent due to the strong belief about SLA young learners' command as the best one. Bialystok & Hakuta (1999) claim that older learners generally have a more sophisticated knowledge of their L1 that could influence SLA, whereas young children are still developing their L1 when they are faced with the task of learning an L2 (cited in Marinova-Todd, 2003, p.66). It is said that the hypothesis of older L2 learners being more successful than younger ones "[...] mostly comes from studies of learning as an outcome of

formal instruction, that is to say, very short-term experimental research [...]” (Singleton, 1989, pp. 94-95).

One of those studies, concerned with the teaching of English in the early grades of Swedish primary schools, was reported by Ekstrand (1959, 1964). This project was based on the study of 1,000 pupils from 8 to 11 years and drawn from elementary school grades ranging from 1 to 4 who were exposed to 18 weeks of English audio-visual instruction. The accuracy of their pronunciation was effected by three methods: the first was a transcription and comparison of entire utterances, the second was based on looking at individual speech sounds and the third consisting in a rating done by an experienced radio teacher. Through this methodology they observed the scores achieved by the pupils improved with age, favouring the older learners (quoted in Singleton, 1989, p.97).

This position is also seen in an ESL study conducted by Collier (1987), in which 200 children from eight to fifteen years (resident in the USA for from one to three years) were assessed their English morphology, syntax and pronunciation. Eleven- to-fifteen-year-olds outperformed six- to ten-year-olds on morphology and syntax, although the younger group did better on pronunciation. Collier also found that, among the younger group, older ESL learners (8-11 years) outperformed younger learners (5-7 years) in SLA (examples taken from Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991, p.157).

Taking into account the research based on specific aspects of the language, Krashen et al. (1979), as mentioned in Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p.156), proposed that adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children. They also pointed out that older children (in early stages of morphological and syntactic development, with a constant time of exposure) acquire the L2 faster than younger children.

Cook and Singleton (2014) expose a personal example in favour of adult learner acquisition. This is the case of Ola's (name changed) experience of English who tells it in her own words:

My name is Ola. I'm Polish. I was introduced to English for the first time at school at the age of 18. Until that time my only foreign language had been Russian. I made two brief visits to English-speaking countries in my twenties, and then, at the age of 28, I moved to Dublin, where I have now been living for seven years. My English is by no means perfect but quite a lot of English-speakers I talk to think I'm Irish. (p.19)

Bearing this case in mind, it is also worth saying that a person who tries to learn an L2 in adulthood is not destined to get a dismal result. In some cases, learning it in the adult years can lead to solid results as we can observe in Ola's experience, who has acquired quite a native-like performance.

➤ **Then, what is the best age for SLA?**

Different studies, different views and even more distinct conclusions, but, which position is the most appropriate one? Is there an ultimate resolution to end with this controversy? At first sight, SLA studies and results look chaotic, some studies reveal clearly child superiority, some others favour adults. Notwithstanding, we have to bear in mind that there are some studies that are not that explicit and cannot be included in any of the two previous points. For instance, Cazden *et al.* (1975) found that child, adolescent and adult learners went through the same stages; thus they seem to process linguistic data in the same way, irrespective of how old they are (mentioned in Ellis, 1985, p.105). Another empirical study carried out by Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) found that age was a factor only when it came to morphology and syntax (quoted in Ellis, 1985, p. 105). Finally, a clear example is the study done by Fathman & Precup (1983) in which two groups of 20 adults and 20 children were

assessed in English. The first was learning it in the United States and the second in Mexico but the results were the same. The only difference was that children scored better in pronunciation, while adults did in syntax (cited in Singleton, 1989, p.109).

What we can conclude is that age is no excuse in acquiring an L2, thus anyone who really wants to learn another language only needs to put all his effort and apply his capacities, which will vary depending on each individual learner. This will lead to different levels reached in relation to the L2, but this does not mean that age prevents the acquisition; which explains that any age-related decline will also vary from person to person. Hence, good results in SLA can be achieved at any age if we apply mainly high motivation and perseverance, among other factors.

2.3 Does age affect the use of learners' strategies and teachers' methods?

Every classroom is an appropriate place for learners to immerse themselves in the acquisition of an L2. In this specific space, the relationship between them and their teachers is crucial so that the learners can achieve good proficiency in the language. Both the relationship along with the methods teachers employ play a main role in SLA. However, the personal strategies learners have are also crucial, therefore, in this section we are going to make reference to those strategies and methods, classifying them depending on the age. This way we will see how much those vary or even if there are some strategies or methods that can be used by both young and adult learners.

With learners' strategies, as Oxford (1999, p.518) explains, we are referring to specific actions, behaviours steps or even techniques the students use to improve their own progress in L2 acquisition (see Gass and Selinker, 2008, p.439), that is, to gain control over the SLA process and make it simpler. Among those are the cognitive ones, which involve specific conscious ways of facing learning; metacognitive, that involve planning and directing

learning at a general level; and social strategies, based on the interaction with other people (Cook, 1991, p.78). Young learners use mainly social strategies along with some cognitive ones. This is what we can see in a nine-month study of five Mexican children learning English in the United States carried out by Wong-Fillmore (1976; 1979). He extracted natural spoken data by pairing each of them with a native-speaking child. One of the social strategies used was to join a group and act as if you understand what is going on, even if you do not; while the cognitive one was to assume what people were saying at the situation, which was relevant (cited in Ellis, 1994, p.555). However, studies that involve adult learners have shown that they prefer to employ cognitive and metacognitive strategies, that is, more elaborated ones.

Furthermore, young children “[...] have been observed to employ strategies in a task-specific manner, [whereas] older children and adults make use of generalized strategies [...]” (Brown et al. 1983, cited in Ellis, 1994, p.541). Thus, young learners use simpler tactics and mature ones prefer more complex and sophisticated ones. One example of this is the one given by Brown et al. (1983) which found out that the word ‘rehearsal’ for children consisted of rote repetition while for adults it involved active, systematic and elaborative procedures (Ellis, 1994, p.541).

Moving now to teachers’ methods, the first doubt that comes to our minds is whether a language teacher should take the students’ age into consideration. At particular ages, some specific methods are preferred, therefore, so that the learner can get a good acquisition of an L2, teachers should think on their ages before starting teaching. Teenagers may dislike “[...] any technique that exposes them in public; role-play and simulation are in conflict with their adolescent anxieties” (Cook, 1991, p.85). Notwithstanding, adults will feel kind of ridiculous or even think that they are not learning properly if they see themselves involved in play-like situations; they prefer a conventional formal style of teaching though (Cook, 1991, p.85).

Spolsky (1989a) describes three conditions, related to the students' age that should be taken into account in the classroom (cited in Cook, 1991, p.85):

i. formal classroom learning is directed to adult learners, which requires skills of abstraction and analysis, that is, a method that entails reasoning by the student as, for instance, a traditional grammar-translation method.

ii. the child is more open to learning in informal situations, that is, through an informal approach.

iii. the natural L2 situation may favour children, that is why it is concerned with the 'here and now', using objects that are not absent and topics such as the weather. Therefore, teaching employing physical objects or pictures is preferred in the early stages of L2 learning.

We can thus conclude that formal instruction is preferred by adult learners while young ones are prone to feel more receptive to interactive activities such as plays, even though, sometimes this could create a negative response if they have to act in front of others. Therefore, teachers should select the methods according to their students which will be crucial for the development of good proficiency in L2.

The aforementioned studies have led us to the conclusion that age is not really a matter in acquiring a second language, taking into account each individual learner. However, in this last section, it was seen that this factor plays an important role in employing specific methods to teach the L2 and personal strategies to acquire an L2. Thus, age is not a crucial factor to decide to start learning a new language but to know in which way a teacher/ learner should face the learning situation.

3. MOTIVATION

3.1 Types of motivation

Saying that a person is motivated does not only involve that he wishes to do a certain thing but something more complex. Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) define motivation as the choice of a particular action by a person, the persistence with it and the effort expended on it (p.614). On his behalf, Gardner explains that motivation is made up of motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and attitudes toward learning the language (cited in Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003, p. 613). Here we will focus specifically on L2 motivation.

In defining it, we have to bear in mind that there are different types of motivation. Those people that learn an L2 having their own goals are intrinsically motivated, whereas the ones that attempt to do that due to external reasons, without a personal aim, are extrinsically motivated (Brown, 2000, p.162). Edward Deci (1975, p.23), as quoted in Brown (2000), defined intrinsic motivation as the one in which there is no apparent reward in what the person does, except the activity itself (p. 164). Moreover, learners seem to engage in the activities which for them are satisfying or enjoyable (Legault, 2016, p.1). Ryan and Deci (2000) explain that this term reflects, apart from the propensity of organisms to engage in activities that interest them, the inclination to learn, develop and expand their capacities (p.16). The intrinsic motivation in an extroverted learner makes him feel satisfied by communicating with others, while an introverted one makes use of language for meditation and personal thinking (Sepora and Jafari, 2012, p.234). Notwithstanding, extrinsic motivation “[...] refers to performance of behaviour that is fundamentally contingent upon the attainment of an outcome that is separable from the action itself” (Legault, 2016, p.1). Sepora and Jafari (2012) define it as the propensity to take part in activities in order to get a reward, like getting a good mark, or to evade a punishment (p.232), in this case taking part in

the SLA process to get some kind of reward. Those extrinsically motivated individuals have a lesser quality of motivation because they have less positive attitudes and less cultural interest, that is, they exhibit less powerful motivation (Ortega, 2013, p.187).

Apart from this distinction, there are two more terms referred to motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation. With the former, we are talking about those learners that acquire the L2 because they wish to integrate themselves into the culture of the L2 group and become involved in social interchange in that group, somehow assimilate themselves in the target community. Gardner (2001) cited three dimensions an integrative learner should have: favourable attitudes towards L2 speakers, general interest in foreign languages and having reasons for learning the L2 related to interaction with its members (cited in Ortega, 2013, p.171). However, instrumental motivation is only focused on the learning of the L2 in order to attain instrumental goals (Brown, 2000, p.162), which means that the learners want to acquire the L2 so that they can accomplish some purpose such as to pass an exam or get a better job, among others. This instrumental orientation (patterned very strongly with extrinsic motivation) arises when utilitarian reasons are more important than personal ones; whereas integrative orientation is entirely related to identification with the target culture and a desire to become more like a member of the L2 (Ortega, 2013, pp.173-177).

In order to understand those terms more clearly, we are going to see some examples. Taking into account the intrinsic/extrinsic classification of motivation, we can see the latter reflected in a student who does his homework only because he fears parental sanctions for not doing it or because he personally believes it is valuable for his chosen career, that is, he does not find it interesting (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 60). Probably a student that is intrinsically motivated will reach better results than one whose motivation is mostly extrinsic because he will lose the initiative to learn the language. This initiative, as Ryan and Deci (2000) point out, diminishes after early childhood, that is, the freedom to be intrinsically motivated

decreases with the presence of social demands and roles that require the individuals to assume responsibility for nonintrinsically interesting tasks (p.60). For instance, when the teacher persistently talks about the importance of extrinsic outcomes such as grades, students may become highly focused only on obtaining those outcomes and their intrinsic motivation will decrease (Anderman and Dawson, 2011, p. 233). In a study conducted by Lepper, Greene and Nisbett (1973) children were assigned to either receive an expected reward, and unexpected reward or no reward. Results showed that children's intrinsic motivation was lower for students in the expected reward condition than for the other two conditions (cited in Anderman and Dawson, 2011, p. 227).

Looking now at integrative/instrumental motivation, Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that integrative motivation leads to higher scores on proficiency tests on language learning, but Lukmani (1972) demonstrated in a study that among Indian students learning English, those with instrumental motivation scored higher in tests of English proficiency (see Brown, 2000, p.163). As Brown (2000) points out, some learners are more successful in learning a language if they are integratively motivated while others in different contexts benefit from an instrumental motivation (p. 163), but it is an issue of each individual. Furthermore, most situations involve a mixture of both types, such as international students learning English in the United States who may be instrumentally motivated for academic purposes and integratively motivated to become somewhat integrated with the culture and people of the country (Brown, 2000, pp. 163-164).

Motivation is an internal factor that affects each individual differently. Therefore, the most appropriate way for learners to acquire an L2 is to free them from external restrictions such as some rewards or punishments (as happens with extrinsic motivation), which will make them act somehow moved by those conditions. Each learner should react towards the language as

they really feel, even if that person is or not highly motivated, only that way we can really test their own motivation.

3.2 Degree of motivation: Does it decrease with age?

The learners' degree of motivation with regard to the L2 can vary depending on the age they have. What is going to be done in this section is to gather three empirical studies from different researchers and summarise them, which will help us to reach a conclusion about this topic.

The first of them was conducted by Senad Bećirović and Remzija Hurić-Bećirović (2017) at the University of Sarajevo. In it, 210 students (aged ten, fourteen and eighteen) who were learning English as a second language (from elementary, middle and high school) were tested. In the questionnaires, some questions were related to intrinsic motivation (meaning that the learner enjoys using the language in situations other than the classroom) and extrinsic motivation (he wants to do well in the class in order to show his ability to others). The results showed a great difference in the learners' motivation. Those from elementary and middle schools were significantly more motivated than the students from high schools. The smallest and insignificant difference was found between motivation of elementary and middle school students, the 14-year-old students were less motivated than 10-year-old but more than 18-year-old learners. The conclusion is that the ten-year-old (the youngest group) had the highest motivation for learning English and they also scored the highest achievement in learning it; whereas the eighteen-year-olds had the lowest one. Therefore age of the participants had a significant influence on their motivation to learn English as a second language. Bećirović and Hurić-Bećirović also say that those results can be explained taking into account that in Sarajevo English starts being taught in elementary schools. Hence, when students are in high

school they have already acquired a certain level of knowledge and skills what makes motivation decrease (Bećirović and Hurić-Bećirović, 2017, pp. 26-33).

Another empirical study that shows the influence age has on motivation is the one carried out by Pauline Ghenghesh (2010), in which she wanted to find the effect some factors have in the acquisition of an L2, but we will focus only on one of them, whether motivation decreases with age. The participants were one hundred and forty-four students and five teachers from Tripoli. The students belonged to different age groups, all learning English as an L2; while teachers belonged to both elementary and high school. In the study, Pauline Ghenghesh used questionnaires for both teacher and students and also interviews. Focusing on the students, all answered that they were motivated to some degree to learn English in the lower grades (elementary and middle school), but when they entered senior high school their motivation decreased. A consistent pattern emerged from the results, as the variables that showed age difference were characterised by a decline with age particularly amongst the older learners. Apart from the age, the students attributed this decrease mostly to the teachers. They mentioned factors such as making the lessons interesting and explaining them clearly, as the main lack in schools which lead to low motivation (Ghenghesh, 2010, pp.129-134).

The third and last study lasted for six months and was conducted by Jorge Humberto Tapia Celi at a university in Ecuador. Tapia (2017) used 310 participants categorized in age groups of 17-22, 23-27, 28-33 and above 34 who were attending classes of English as an L2. He employed questionnaires along with practical sessions in order to measure the students' level of motivation to learn English. This study assumed that the students would show tremendous improvement in the level of proficiency in the language if their motivation was high. However, those with low motivation were expected to have minimal progress. Finally, the results demonstrated what has already been tested in the two previous studies quoted in this section: older students had lower motivation to learn English as compared to their younger

counterparts. The younger individuals aged between 17 to 22 years had the highest motivation in the first month, which improved 15% in the third month and even more in the sixth month. Nonetheless, older individuals above 34 had the poorest motivation in the first month and in the third it only increased by 2%. The improvement in the proficiency of English was only noticeable in the youngest group, while across the other groups it decreased and the lowest level of motivation was across the elderly (Tapia, 2017, pp. 40-42).

From the above findings, it is evident that the motivation in the acquisition of English as an L2 is partly determined by age, which reduces motivation, so younger L2 learners are usually more motivated to learn it as compared to their adult counterparts (Fraser, 2000 as cited in Tapia, 2017, p. 42). If students are less motivated when they are old, it can be due to the beliefs about the perfect age to learn an L2 but also to the teacher who should apply certain strategies to help this motivation grow. Language learning attitudes, mainly of younger students, are primarily based on classroom experience and are shaped by teachers (Nikolov, 1999 as quoted in Kormos & Csizér, 2008, p. 22). In the eyes of the learners, the teacher is seen to be a key figure in determining the attitude to the language and in shaping motivation (Ghenghesh, 2010, p.134), therefore we will analyse this factor in the next section.

3.3 Motivational strategies in the language classroom

Motivating people involves, according to Dörnyei (2001), trying to persuade a person directly by exerting indirect influence on him (pp. 24-25). But, who has such responsibility? Sometimes parents are thought to be the main force that influences motivation, but teachers have to be taken into account due to the direct relationship they have with the learner's SLA in the classroom. As Wlodkowski (1986) says "[...] it is vital to make the first encounter with the L2 as positive as possible. [T]his impression [...] will strongly influence how learners

will anticipate future experiences with the subject” (cited in Dörnyei, 2001, p.53). Therefore, in this section, we will analyse the different strategies that can be used by the teacher in relation to the age of the learners.

Those strategies are seen as “[...] motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect” (Dörnyei, 2001, p.28). Some of them are general, that is, they can be used for any kind of learner in the classroom, but this does not mean that they will work with everyone the same way. A good classification is the one proposed by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) called the ‘Ten Commandments for motivating language learners’ which emerged from a Hungarian study of 200 teachers of English (p. 215):

1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners’ linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learners’ goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture

There are also specific strategies depending on the age of the learner. Taking into account adult learners, it is quite more difficult to motivate them than the younger ones probably due to the maturity some of them have. Therefore, finding activities or ways to instruct the L2 becomes an arduous responsibility. According to Wlodkowski (2008), in order for adults to

have a positive attitude toward learning, they have to see it as relevant and they also need to see the activity to which they are responding with free choice and self-determination (p. 172). Another aspect that motivates adults to learn is that their individual values are taken into account, that is, teachers should understand that motivation and learning go hand in hand with the learner's thinking and emotions, as well as with the social context in which the activity takes place (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 96). Generally, adults are seen as more responsible persons than children due to their experience in life. Malcolm Knowles (1989, pp.83-84) clarifies that

adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own lives... [and] develop a deep psychological need to be seen and treated by others as being capable of self-direction. [Furthermore], adults become ready to learn those things they need to know or...to cope effectively with their real-life situations (cited in Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 97).

These two statements show that adults are quite concerned about being treated as independent people capable of doing what they propose. Therefore they often choose vocational and practical education and they have a strong need to apply what they have already learned and to be competent in that application (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 97).

Brophy (2004) says that younger students attend primarily to their own goals achieved rather than to those of classmates, so they tend to feel competent and successful if they complete a task or show improvement in what they are doing. Those learners tend to attribute success more to effort than ability (p. 348). Moreover, "younger students are less likely [...] to infer that their teacher believes they lack ability if they are encouraged or praised for effort" (Barker & Graham, 1987; Lord, Umezaki, & Darley, 1990 as cited in Brophy, 2004, p. 348). Due to the younger students' personality, teachers should give them feedback and even praise them for their efforts and accomplishments; and focus the students' attention on appreciating their accomplishments to date and building on them in the future, not on

comparisons with classmates (Brophy, 2004, p.348). Unlike adults, children are enthusiastic and talkative but they lose concentration and motivation easily, besides the fact that they have limited world knowledge and experience (Gürsoy, 2010, p. 165).

Taking this into account, the following motivational strategies taken from Dörnyei (2001) are going to be explained from my own point of view. A crucial aspect of SLA success is the atmosphere of the classroom, which should be the appropriate one. Taking into account that younger learners normally dislike activities in front of others and are more prone to feel humiliated, teachers can personalise the classroom according to the students' age and create a cohesive learner group, which they are happy to belong to. Furthermore, for both adult and young learners, being part of such groups tends to increase their motivation, due to the fact that students share an increased responsibility for achieving the group goals (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 43). Another strategy that can be used is to emphasize the importance and usefulness of learning an L2, which can be done by inviting the learners to apply what they have previously learned in their life (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 56), that is, the experience they have with the L2. This is probably more useful with adult learners. Wlodkowski (2008) says that adults generally differ from children quantitatively due to the experience they have by virtue of being older. Qualitatively they have had more time and seen the benefits or outcomes of a bigger amount of experiences. (p. 99).

It is also necessary to increase the learners' expectancy of success, that is, make them sure that they can achieve what they want. Teachers have to make their materials attractive to the learners and adapted to the specific ages. For instance, adult learners prefer activities in which they have to put effort, that is, formal and elaborated activities as group discussions; whereas younger learners prefer play-like situations. These are more prone than adults to be vulnerable and suffer humiliation, thus teachers have to protect the learners' self-esteem and increase their self-confidence. Those self-issues are particularly sensitive areas in

primary/secondary school learning because the learners are in their developmental age when doubts and worries about oneself are more common feelings than confidence or pride (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 87). Due to this fact, this seems to be one of the most difficult strategies to put into practice; hence teachers should encourage them, provide them with experiences of success and again by creating a safe and pleasant atmosphere in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 89).

Not all the strategies suggested by Dörnyei (2001) were mentioned here, only those I have found more relevant to explain the difference of its application between young and adult learners, due to the fact that some of them can perfectly be applied to both types of learners.

3.4 The role of teachers: beliefs and behaviours

Teachers play an important role in the acquisition process of the L2 and Csikszentmihalyi (1997) points out that the most influential ones are those that are remembered because they have made a real difference in their students' development, that is, those who love what they are doing, who have a passion for teaching. Wild et al. (1992) have proved from a study that if a teacher is perceived as more intrinsically motivated this enhances the students' enjoyment and interest of the lesson. Finally, Carboneau et al.'s (2008) analysis shows that teacher enthusiasm and passion function more as antecedents rather than consequences of student motivation and adaptive behaviours (the three examples are quoted in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, pp.187-190).

In a survey conducted by Dörnyei and Kata Csizér among Hungarian teachers of English, they found out that the participants also considered the teacher's own behaviour to be the single most important motivational tool (cited in Dörnyei, 2001, p.31). Another example that shows us the importance a teacher has in the language classroom has been taken from an interview with a teacher of English, in which he tells his experience:

[...] I started to like English when I was in high school. I started to enjoy it a little bit more because of a teacher I had. She was really, ah, a role model for me, you know. The way she taught us, it was really great. And that made me love this language and that made me understand that, 'Ok, now I want to be an English teacher'. (see Dörnyei, 2001, p.32)

Ghenghesh (2010) uses declarations of some students in which they emphasize the importance teachers have in SLA. One of the students says:

I think that my motivation is very low when I ask a question that I don't know and the teacher just totally just looks at me as if I'm stupid or something for not knowing this thing, but the teacher is there to teach you and you're trying to learn and they're trying to bring you down, so I feel very low about myself when like they just bring you down like that. (p. 133)

Those statements confirm that almost everything the teacher does in the L2 classroom will somehow affect the learners' attitudes and results in SLA. Therefore, their behaviour is crucial to motivate learners. Some of the points to take into account, proposed by Dörnyei (2001) are the teachers' enthusiasm; commitment to and expectations for the students' academic progress; relationship with the students and relationship with the students' parents (p.32).

Dörnyei (2001) explains that the first one encompasses questions such as 'Who have been your most influential teachers?' or 'who do you still remember as someone who has made a difference in your life?' The answer is the same statement aforementioned, that is, the ones that love what they do and who see it as a real passion, who want the students to really learn what they teach (p.32). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1997, p.77) points out that if a teacher does not believe in his job, does not enjoy the learning he is trying to transmit, the student will sense the same and thus, he will feel that the subject matter is not worth mastering (as cited in Dörnyei, 2001, p. 33). Hence, teachers' enthusiasm means that they are able to identify their

reasons for being interested in the topic and then share these with the learners (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 33).

The teacher's commitment to the students is also important. Its absence in the classroom tells the students that what they are doing does not matter, which will demoralise them. As the leader of the group, the teacher "[...] embodies the class spirit" (Dörnyei, 2001, p.34) and it is crucial that everybody is aware of his interest, that he really throws himself into the L2 teaching process. Some of the ways of expressing that the students' learning matters to you are the following (Dörnyei, 2001, p.34):

- Offer concrete assistance
- Offering to meet each student individually to explain things
- Responding when help is requested
- Encouraging extra assignments and offering to assist with these
- Showing concern when things are not going well (and so on)

Along with the teachers' commitment, it is important that they have some expectations for what the students can achieve in order to increase the learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2001, p.35). This means to make the learner believe that he can achieve what he proposes.

The third behaviour to take into account is the good relationship with the students. Teachers who share warm, personal interactions with their students, who respond to their concerns in an empathic manner and who succeed in establishing relationships of mutual respect with the learners are more likely to inspire them (Dörnyei, 2001, p.36). So that this situation takes place, the teacher must accept the students and have a non-judgemental positive attitude, but this does not involve that he should accept everything the learner does; he must pay attention to the students and be kind with them, that is, have a closer relationship; and he must be as available as possible (Dörnyei, 2001, pp.37-38). The last point

encompasses, according to Dörnyei (2001), some gestures such as joining students for lunch in the school canteen or in the playground or giving them the home telephone number for times when they need assistance (p. 38). Personally, I think that you can also be available and motivate your students without doing such things because this gives them too much confidence with the teacher and sometimes this leads to a loss of respect. We cannot forget that a teacher is a teacher, not a close friend, even having a good relationship with the students, so we have to bear this in mind and do not cross the line that separates both teachers and learners.

Finally, connected to the previous behaviour is the good relationship with the parents. Good relationships with the students somehow depend also on those with their progenitors. Even though there are students that prefer to be kind of independent, for most of them their parents' opinion matters, and therefore parents can be powerful allies in any motivational effort (Dörnyei, 2001, p.39). Gardner (1985) explains that with regard to L2 learning the parents also play a 'passive role' when they support the learner's academic progress as checking their homework (quoted in Dörnyei, 2001, p. 39) in the case of younger learners.

All these behaviours are crucial to get a good L2 level for both young and adult learners. Davies (1996) explains that "[t]he teacher of English must create opportunities within the classroom situation, which enable students to think through language and to express their learning through the language modes of speaking, listening, reading and writing" (as cited in Gömleksiz, 2001, p.222). Moreover, Smith (1982a, 1983) states that learning can only happen when the learner has positive attitudes as for instance when he considers himself to be a potential member of the group speaking the target language (quoted in Krashen, 1985, pp.81-82). Therefore, such factors as the role of teachers along with a positive attitude of the learners can facilitate the acquisition process of the L2.

CONCLUSION

The sections developed in the previous pages revolve around two internal factors, age and motivation which somehow affect the acquisition of English as a second language.

The first section was totally theoretical as its main objective was to familiarize the reader with the topic before dealing in depth with the two factors objective of study. We have found that there are various terms used in relation to SLA and that the use of some of them differs from one author to another, as is the case of the terms 'foreign' or 'second' language acquisition. We have used along the project the term 'second' without taking into account the place where it is learned. The same way, we prefer to use the terms 'learning' and 'acquisition' indifferently instead of making the distinction Krashen proposes focusing on whether it is a conscious or an unconscious process. Furthermore, we have noticed that there are a great number of theories related to language acquisition, but we have just selected those related to SLA. The definition of the different internal and external factors made in this first section helped us understand them because we made reference to some of them in the other sections.

In the second part, we analysed in detail the age factor with the aim of finding whether there is a perfect age to learn an L2 and how this factor affects it. We have noticed that there is evidence in favour of starting to learn an L2 when you are young (Patkowski 1980; Oyama 1976). This position is based on the fact that after the Critical Period has closed, a good proficiency in L2 acquisition cannot be achieved. Moreover, immigrant children that arrive at the destination country before the closure of the CP are also more productive. These are not affected by the length of residence, but by their age. There are also empirical studies that demonstrate adult people can also acquire an L2 with good proficiency (Ekstrand 1959,1964;

Collier 1987), studies in which the scores achieved by the learners increased with age. Furthermore, added to these positions, some researchers have also found that both types of learners are equally good in acquiring an L2 or that age is only a factor when it affects some abilities such as morphology or syntax (Cazden et al. 1975; Fathman & Precup 1983). With all these studies we can conclude that the matter here is not the capacity a person has depending on the age. Age affects the learner when they choose the strategies they use to learn an L2 or when acquiring such abilities like the aural or grammatical ones. As time goes by, some organs become deteriorated, for instance, an adult person is not going to hear as clearly as a younger one. In the same way, the experience an adult person has in life will probably ease the process of speaking in an L2 due to the amount of vocabulary those can have. Then, a person is not destined to failure in SLA just due to his age. This means that anyone who makes the decision to acquire an L2, in this case English, can achieve his goal if he takes the process seriously. Thus, the proficiency achieved in the language can vary from one person to another, but not depending exclusively on the age, but on many other circumstances and factors as the motivation, as well as on the learners' strategies or teachers' methods.

The second aim of the project was to see if motivation is affected by the learner's age. We have firstly defined the different types and we have concluded that intrinsic motivation is related to integrated motivation; as well as extrinsic motivation is related to the instrumental one. The former depends on the learner, that is, how he wants to react to the L2 acquisition, whereas the latter is also affected by external aspects such as society. Focusing now on the aim of this section, we have found that motivation decreases as a person grows up, basing this conclusion on the empirical studies we have gathered (Bećirović and Hurić-Bećirović 2017; Ghenghesh 2010; Tapia 2017). Younger students had the highest motivation and also scored the highest achievement in learning, whereas adults had the lowest one, probably because

they see fewer opportunities in life, therefore they feel less motivated. This is clear evidence of the interrelation that there is among SLA factors.

Finally, the last aim of the project was to analyse in which way teachers can help learners taking into account the effects of age and motivation. What we conclude was that depending on the age there are specific strategies used by the learners and special teachers' methodologies. Taking into account motivation, there are general strategies that can be applied to any learner, but also specific ones that can be applied by the teacher to increase motivation bearing in mind if the learner is young or adult. Moreover, the teacher's behaviours in the language classroom can help to improve learners' motivation as well. In the case of age, as well as in the motivation, the application of the right learners' strategies or teachers' methodologies, according to each learner, is a good way to reduce those factors' effects and help the learner achieve the proficiency he wants in the L2.

Considering that the conclusions here made are based on studies already carried out, my idea is to continue investigating in this field and do my own study about age and motivation factors affecting the acquisition of English as an L2. In this way, when I do it, I can compare the gotten results with those already investigated. Will those vary too much? Will I reach a conclusion that helps to end with this controversy? The idea is to do it and get updated results to see if, with the advances in the society, the opinions have changed or are more or less the same as in past years.

For the moment, we can say that everyone, whatever their age, is able to acquire an L2 if they apply enough motivation, effort and all their abilities to get what they want. There is no limit to study an L2; the only limits are the ones we create. We are the ones that put our own barriers.

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