The Critical Period Hypothesis Revisited: An Investigation of Taiwanese University EFL Learners' Production of Two English Consonants

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Abstract

This study mainly investigates the relationship between onset age of exposure to formal English instruction and Taiwanese university EFL learners' accuracy in pronouncing two English consonants (i.e., /s/ and /θ/). A total of 50 English majors who studied at a single university in northern Taiwan were recruited to participate in the current research. All of the participants were asked to fill in a language background questionnaire, followed by receiving a pronunciation test that required them to read into a tape recorder 16 English words with either a /s/ sound or a /θ/ sound. The recordings of the participants were rated by three native speakers of English, who either held a PhD in the TESOL- or linguistics-related field or had taught English at university for at least 10 years. The learners' productive performances were then analyzed along with their ages of starting learning English (retrieved from the data of the questionnaires) via Pearson Product-Moment Correlations. The statistical results show that there were no significant correlations of onset age to the participants' production of the consonants. As a result, the findings of the study suggested that onset age did not appear to play a critical role in foreign language acquisition of producing consonants.

Keywords: critical period hypothesis (CPH), onset age, production, consonantssee the comments

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