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THE EFFECT OF FIRST LANGUAGE TRANSFER AND AGE ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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To the memory of my dearest father
Askanaz Minasyan

Thank You for the example of love, courage
and wisdom you have given me.

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“... our pursuit of understanding (or truth) is inevitably a little like chasing *something*, but we don't know what, *somewhere*, but we don't know where, *somehow*, but we don't know how”

(Leo van Lier, 1994, p. 329).

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture – both productively...and receptively” (Gass & Selinker, 1983, p. 22).

“We have room for but one language here and that is the English language, for we intended to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house” (Theodore Roosevelt, Jan. 3, 1919, cited in Reich, 1986, p. 205).

This study investigates the effect of first language transfer on second language acquisition. Specifically, it examines the influence of Armenian (L1) on learners of English as a foreign language.

Armenian learners from Yerevan and Gyumri, of different age groups and educational background took part in my research study. There were 22 learners/participants from the MA TEFL, CTEFL graduate programs and IAEP Program (Intensive Academic English Program), from the American University of Armenia (AUA), Yerevan, as well as ten participants from the English Department of the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri, Armenia.

The participants' of this research study were both males and females and their ages ranged from 16 to 51. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire in the English language. The total number of analyzed questionnaires was 30; since two students did not return their questionnaires.

The results of the study reflect how first language affects second language acquisition both negatively and positively, and how many other factors such as age, motivation, risk taking, negative attitude and the learner strategies might also play an important role in this process.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have always wondered if L1 plays any role in the L2 acquisition process (no matter whether this role is negative or positive) and whether different factors like motivation, negative or positive attitude and other factors can affect second language acquisition (SLA).

The other issue, which also interested me very much, was whether an age factor plays any role in SLA or not. Therefore, in my thesis I wanted either to find support or to disprove my research question regarding whether younger learners have any advantages over older learners or just the opposite.

As the above-mentioned two issues are becoming more and more modern nowadays and many linguists do different and interesting research based on this topic, it did not take me a long time to understand that I want to choose a topic about SLA for my thesis.

For many years the Russian language was accepted as the second language for Armenian people. Russian was taught at schools starting from the first grade. It was nearly as important as Armenian. The empire of the Russian language lasted a long time, until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now it can be said that Russian is no longer accepted as important as it was before for many Armenian people. Now it is taught in the third grade in many schools. I think this is done as people have started to focus their attention on other languages, especially English, although, English is a foreign not a second language for Armenians.

Therefore, I wanted the present study to focus on the very nature of L1 while one is acquiring an L2 and its impact on the process. The study will also focus on several key factors, like motivation, learner strategies, attitude, etc., which also can affect L2 acquisition.

The first chapter of my thesis is the Introduction. In this part I introduce the reader to the order according to which the thesis is constructed. The *second*, *third*, and *fourth* chapters of my thesis are devoted to the literature that describes and explains the process of second language

acquisition and its historical background. These chapters are entitled Literature Review 1, Literature Review 2, Literature Review 3, and Literature Review 4.

I decided to divide my Literature Review into four separate Chapters, as I think that each factor should be discussed separately, though they all are strongly interconnected.

In my Literature Review 1, Chapter two, I speak about the historical background of SLA: what SLA is, when and how it occurs, its route of acquisition and many other issues. The *third* and *fourth* chapters cover ideas about the differences between the acquisition of L1 and L2 languages and age difference. The *fifth* chapter studies the other factors which also affect SLA.

The *sixth* chapter discusses the methodology, where I speak about the research I have conducted by giving the reader some information about the participants, the steps of conducting the research, and the questionnaire, which was used to conduct the research. In the *seventh* chapter I analyze the collected data and present the results I found.

In the last chapter I provide conclusions for the whole thesis, as well as speak about the limitations of the research and give some suggestions to future researchers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW 1: INTRODUCTION TO SLA

This chapter is devoted to the literature that describes and explains second language acquisition and its historical background: what SLA is, when it occurs, its order, goals and many other issues.

There has been a lot of research done comparing the first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition processes and the role of different factors, such as, for example, motivation, learner strategies, risk taking and negative attitude in this process, but there has not been done as much research comparing the process that children and adults pass through while acquiring their L2. As it is not possible to focus equally on all the factors which affect SLA, in my thesis I am mainly focusing on the age factor, and also some other factors, such as, for example, motivation, risk taking, learner strategies and negative attitude.

It is already well known that the first language affects SLA, and in my thesis I am not going to try to prove what has already been proven long before, but the purpose of my research study is to shed some light on the extent to which the L1 effects SLA in the Armenian context and the role of age in this acquisition process. My thesis covers such topics as: the process of acquiring both L1 and L2, the difference between L1 and L2 acquisition, child L2 acquisition versus adult L2 acquisition, age and the critical/sensitive period in both L1 and SLA and how other factors, such as, for example, motivation, risk taking, negative attitude, and learner strategies affect SLA.

The thesis consists of two parts: the *theoretical* and the *practical*. In the *theoretical* part I am introducing the reader to such issues as what language transfer is, how and when language transfer occurs, etc. The theoretical part also speaks about the issue of language transfer, which is a very controversial and complicated one which has been the topic of numerous debates in the literature of both linguistics and psychology.

In the *practical part* I have tried to find support for the following research question, “***Do younger learners have advantages over older learners in SLA?***” I have looked at this research

question from different angles. I have tried to find support for my research question with an analysis of the results of questionnaires, which I have asked people of different age groups to respond to.

Linguists who have done research on SLA and the effect of age, such as, for example, Gass and Selinker (1983), Wode (1983), Odlin (c, 1989), and others, emphasize the role of age differences, which is a factor to which different writers assign different degrees of importance. For example, some researchers think that younger learners have an advantage over older learners because they are open to new information, while others think that older learners can use their background information and knowledge from L1 to learn L2, which makes their learning process faster and in some cases even easier. The older learner's cognitive superiority over the younger learner may be traced to his immense collection of L1 lexicon, on the one hand, and his ability to rationally generalize the grammatical rules of the L2 on the other.

As Klein states (1986 (a), p. 8) “Language acquisition is, in the case of the child, easy, quick, and – to use Chomsky’s nice phrase – *‘hopelessly underdetermined’* by the accessible language data, whereas for the adult learner it is an extremely arduous, time-consuming, and imperfect quest”.

“It is not inevitable that an adult will have an empathetic personality, a high aptitude for mimicry, or any skill in reading or writing” (Odlin, 1989 (b), p. 137). It is inevitable, however, that an adult will have experienced childhood and the sequence of developmental changes that accompany growing up. If the common belief is true that ‘younger is better’ for the acquisition of a second language, there may be a definite relation between transfer and aging. “Younger learners may be more receptive to transfer, or they might be less receptive. Not all second language researchers subscribe to the ‘younger is better’ position, but even if that position is correct, the apparent relation between aging and foreign accents warrants consideration. Moreover, there is other evidence for a relation between child-adult differences and transfer that also merits consideration” (Odlin, 1989 (b), p. 137).

Krashen (1978 (a), p. 152-161) downplays the role of cognitive maturity by considering it more of a liability than an advantage to the older learner's language acquisition. Through his "Monitor Model, he claims that the adult learner's conscious knowledge of the syntactic rules of L2 is detrimental to his production of the forms of language for he constantly monitors his utterances".

As Odlin states (1989 (b), p. 137), according to several researchers "In the large body of literature on age and second language acquisition, a number of studies indicate that younger children are more likely to achieve native-like pronunciation. Such studies thus support the notion that the older the learner, the more important the influences of native language pronunciation will be. Other studies have shown very different results, however. Some indicate that the older learners are likely to have just as good or better pronunciation than younger".

"Moreover, it is possible that differing abilities that have been observed in adults and children are related to differences in their literacy skills, their use of the target language, their manner of learning the target language, their social background, their social attitudes, and many other factors as well" (Odlin, 1989 (b), p. 138).

Various SLA theorists have attempted to conceptualize/define SLA in a number of ways and propose to examine some of them in my study. Wode (1983) states that interference can occur only if L1 and L2 have structures, which can be traced to prior L1 knowledge. This view has two supports: first, transfer can be seen as a cognitive strategy, that is to say, the learners can rely on what they already know and second, it specifies exactly when transfer will occur.

Another definition of the term '*language transfer*' is given by Odlin (1989 (a), p. 27). He claims that language transfer results from the similarities and differences between a target language and a second language. The words 'similarities' and 'differences' here stand for the terms 'positive' and 'negative' transfer.

Of course there are also a lot of other definitions to the term 'language transfer' given by many different researchers, but as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to review them all, I will try to speak about some of them in Chapter 2. 1.

2. 1. Describing and Explaining Second Language Acquisition

What is the study of SLA? It is the study of how a second or foreign language is learned. “It is also the study of how learners create a new system with only limited exposure to a second or foreign language. It is the study of what is and is not learned about a second language; it is the study of why most second language learners do not achieve the same degree of proficiency in a second language as they do in their native language; it is also the study of why only some learners appear to achieve native-like proficiency in more than one language” (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 1).

What is SLA? According to Klein (1986 (a), p. 1), SLA appears to be a process which “exhibits certain regularities, is constrained by a number of factors determining its course, rate of progress and final outcome, is subject, within certain limits, to external influences such as instruction”.

A ‘second language’ is one that becomes a tool of communication alongside the first language; it is typically acquired in the social environment in which it is actually spoken. SLA is a process of enormous complexity in which a variety of factors are at work, which will be discussed in Chapter 6 (sections 6. 1. 1 to 6. 1. 4).

The term ‘*second language acquisition*’ also refers to the learning of a language *after* the learning of the native language. As with the phrase “second language acquisition”, L2 can refer to any language learning *after* learning the L1, regardless of whether it is the second, third, fourth or fifth language, that is to say, “second language” will normally stand as a cover term for any language other than the first language learned by a given learner or group of learners.

“The acquisition of a second language, be it by everyday communication or by instruction, follows certain principles, which stem from various properties of human language processing, from the learner’s specific motivation and, finally, from the way in which samples of, or information about the language to be learned are made accessible to the learner. The objective of SLA studies is to uncover these principles” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 1).

A second language can be acquired in a variety of ways, at any age, for a variety of purposes, and to varying degrees. Accordingly, we may distinguish different types of second language learning. Traditionally, a fundamental distinction has been made between tutored, that is to say instructed or taught, and untutored, that is to say spontaneous or naturalistic, language learning.

There is also another term, which is connected with the acquisition of L2. It is the term “*transfer*”, which refers to the influence of the mother tongue on the learner’s performance in the development of a given target language. Whenever a learner of a L2 tries to comprehend or to produce utterances in that language, she relies on all sorts of knowledge that might help her. One component of this knowledge is what she knows about her first language, and application of this knowledge leads to what is called “*transfer*”. However “it is crucial to remember that her first language competence is one of her possible resources; it always interacts with the other sorts of knowledge she may draw on. It is this interaction of different kinds of knowledge that needs to be considered in order to understand what a learner does, and why she does it” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 28).

Many researchers claim that the habits of the L1 prevent learners from learning the habits of the L2. This theory is more widespread among behaviorists. Behaviorist/cognitive theorists considered the role of the L1 less important in L2 acquisition because, according to them, few errors were the result of the L1 transfer. Their main objection to the behaviorist theory of SLA is that differences between L1 and L2 do not always result in learning difficulty.

The direction of transfer is usually understood to be from L1 to the L2. L1 can influence L2 in a number of ways. One way is *negative transfer* as L1 can cause errors in L2. The other way is *positive* as L1 can occasionally facilitate L2 acquisition.

2. 2. Historical Background and Theoretical Approaches

Like many areas of “pure” empirical research, “the study of SLA has its origins in attempts to solve practical problems. In fact, until quite recently, research in this area was widely regarded as falling entirely within the field of applied linguistics, and many still see the primary

motivation for this research as that of contributing directly to the solution of the complex and socially important problems surrounding foreign or L2 instruction” (Ritchie & Bhatia, 1996, p. 4). However, a large and growing body of research has addressed theoretical questions independent of their practical significance.

As suggested above, many important developments have taken place in SLA research over the last fifteen to twenty years; nonetheless, “much progress toward the formulation and investigation of theoretical questions in the study of SLA had already been made in the 1960s and 1970s beyond the work of the previous decade. One can divide the recent history of the study of SLA into two periods: “early” developments from the 1940s and 1950s to late developments of the 1960s through the 1980s” (Ritchie & Bhatia, 1996, p. 4).

Nowadays, the concept of SLA is very common and modern. Many linguists and applied linguists have done extensive research on this topic.

2. 2. 1. How Does Language Transfer Occur?

In order to examine the occurrence of language transfer in a learner’s oral or written production of the target language, it is important to take into consideration whether the L2 learner uses her knowledge of L1 structures and forms consciously or unconsciously. If the interference of L1 is conscious, then the learner chooses it for transferring communication techniques or for solving an L2 communication problem.

Very often, if the learner does not know how to express herself in the target language, she will turn to her mother tongue. Therefore, it can be said that negative transfer or interference may be traced to the learners’ unconscious decision to use L1 structures and forms due to her assumption that some L1 structures are identical to the equivalent L2 ones; therefore, they may be used in L2 production.

2. 2. 2. Route of Acquisition

Studies of L1 acquisition confirm the view that the age factor affects the processing strategy embarked upon in the acquisition of language. Fernald and Mazzie's (1991) study compared the

strategy employed by the participants in telling a story to toddlers as opposed to adults. It was found that adult participants intuitively resorted to more heavily stressed suprasegmental patterns in relating the story to toddlers than to adults (p. 209-221).

As cited in Sepassi's article (Sepassi, 2006), "the 'Competition Model' of language use has been widely adopted in studying learners' preferences in sentence interpretation". For instance, Bates et al. (1984) discovered that "younger children were more likely to follow phonological cues than syntactic ones in their interpretation of sentences". Likewise, Kail's (1989, p. 77-117) study of French-speaking participants revealed that preference for phonological cues in identifying the agent/subject of the sentences was decisively more rampant in the youngest age category".

2. 2. 3. The Order of Second Language Acquisition

Researchers have found a very consistent order in the acquisition of first language structures by children, and this appears to have drawn a great deal of interest from SLA scholars. "Considerable effort has been devoted to testing the identity hypothesis, which asserts that first-language and second-language acquisition conform to the same patterns, that is to say the elements of the language or language rules are acquired in a predictable order. The order is the same regardless of whether or not instruction is involved" (Abrahamsson, 2005).

According to Ellis (1985), cited in Abrahamsson (2005), "Most learners begin their acquisition process with a "silent period" in which they speak very little if at all. For some this is a period of language shock, in which the learner actively rejects the incomprehensible input of the new language. However, research has shown that many "silent" learners do engage in private speech (sometimes called "self-talk"). While appearing silent, they are rehearsing important survival phrases and lexical chunks. These memorized phrases are then employed in the subsequent period of formulaic speech. Whether by choice or compulsion, other learners have no silent period and pass directly to formulaic speech. This speech, in which a handful of routines are used to accomplish basic purposes, often shows few departures from L2 morphosyntax. It eventually gives way to a more experimental phase of acquisition, in which the semantics and grammar of the target

language are simplified and the learners begin to construct a true interlanguage” (Abrahamsson, 2005).

The nature of the transition between formulaic and simplified speech is disputed. Some researchers (Ellis, 1997 (a), p. 12), have argued that there is no cognitive relationship between formulaic and simplified speech, and that the transition between them is abrupt. Thinkers influenced by recent theories of the lexicon have preferred to view even native speaker speech as heavily formulaic, and interpret the transition as a process of gradually developing a broader repertoire of chunks and a deeper understanding of the rules which govern them. Some studies have supported both views, and it is likely that the relationship depends in great part on the learning styles and strategies of individual learners.

2.3. The Goals of Second Language Acquisition Research

“The goals of SLA are to describe how L2 acquisition proceeds and to explain this process and why some learners seem to be better at it than others” (Ellis, 1997 (a), p. 6). That is to say, one of the goals of SLA research is the description of L2 acquisition. Another one is explanation: identifying the external and internal factors that account for why learners acquire an L2 in the way they do.

The learner’s constant objective in language acquisition is to reduce the gap between her language performance and that of native speakers of the target language. “The progress towards this goal is not necessarily even-paced or direct. The learner may make false assumptions and will find it very difficult to get rid of them” (Klein, 1986 (c), p. 138).

“Progress in language acquisition also requires the learner to match continuously her own language performance against the standards of the target language speakers” (Klein, 1986 (c), p. 137). These standards can vary strongly from speaker to speaker. Each speaker can have his/her beliefs but none of them are allowed to impose these on others. That is to say, one group of human beings should not judge other people as failures for not belonging to their group, whether in terms of race, class, sex or language. People should be measured by their success at being L2 users, not by

their failure to speak like native speakers. As cited in Cook (1993), according to Grosjean (1982, p. 172), the object of acquiring a second language should be to become an L2 user, not to pass for a native speaker. SLA research has to do justice to its constituency - people who know two or more languages - not subordinate them to people who only know one language. The L2 user is a person in her own rights not an imitation of someone else.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW 2: FROM L1 TO L2 ACQUISITION

This chapter is devoted to the literature that describes and explains the process of bilingualism, as well speaks about the processes of L1 and L2 acquisitions, their differences and similarities.

3. 1. Bilingualism

Bilingual first language acquisition means that two languages (for example English and Russian) are being learned by a child in parallel. Any two-language systems, no matter how different they are, have some features in common. For instance, they may employ the same categories, such as time, modality, person; many of their words may have equivalents in the other language and so on.

“A bilingual person who, in addition to a first language, has acquired another as a second language initially develops one system (maybe not an entirely separate one, depending on how early he has started to learn the second language). Subsequently, he builds up another system and can then operate the two in parallel. Changing from one language to the other, he switches over within one, compound system” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 11).

There is no evidence that bilingual children differ in their development from other children, except that they know two languages.

According to Grosjean (1982, p. 172) “bilingualism in childhood occurs because of the need to communicate with those who play an important role in the child’s life and when they lose their importance for the child, the child will become monolingual. Most children become bilingual in a ‘natural’ way, i.e. there are a lot of reasons why a child becomes bilingual, for example intermarriage, movement of peoples, and others reasons, but the main factor is school, which often causes much “stress and hardship and results in high dropout rates”. At schools there are two choices for a child: either to become a bilingual or be a monolingual and use the majority language.

However, regardless of any strategy and factor, it is nearly impossible for a child to become a true bilingual in a country where one language clearly dominates.

3. 2. The Process of L1 Acquisition

“Learning the first language is but one part of the young child’s overall development into a fully-fledged member of society. Language enables the child to express feelings, ideas, wishes in a socially accepted manner; the child learns that it is not advisable to speak one’s mind at all times, in any way or to anyone; she comes to realize that words can serve to make friends as much as foes and that it is not always possible to tell the truth. Language is the medium through which the child acquires the cultural, moral, religious, and other values of society” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 5).

“First language acquisition occurs when the learner, usually a child, has been without a language so far and now acquires one. If it is one language, we speak of *monolingual* FLA (first language acquisition), if we speak of a child learning two languages in parallel is known as *bilingual* FLA” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 5).

“All normal humans acquire a language in the first few years of their life. The knowledge acquired is largely of an unconscious sort” (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 5). That is to say, every normal child acquires a language, her first language or ‘native tongue’, in the first few years of life. There are exceptions, for either physiological (e.g. deafness) or social grounds (e.g. ‘wolf children’); but usually a child can communicate freely by the time she goes to school.

“First language acquisition is thus *primary* in at least two ways: in terms of sequence (‘first’) and in terms of (mostly life-long) importance” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 4).

Most people learn more than one language. There are various ways in which this may happen, and transition between them is gradual. For example, a child may be exposed to two or even more languages right from the beginning, for example “if her parents are bilingual, that is they are accepted to be the native speakers of more than one language. In this case, we may still speak of ‘first language acquisition’ except that not one but two languages are ‘first’ for the learner” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 4).

“If a second language is learned before the acquisition of the first is completed, the distinction becomes blurred. A further complicating factor arises when a language is re-learned after a lapse of years or is gradually recovered” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 4).

3.3. The Process of L2 Acquisition

L2 can be acquired in a variety of ways, at any age, for different purposes. A “second language” is one that becomes another tool of communication alongside the L1; “it is typically acquired in a social environment in which it is actually spoken” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 19). SLA appears to be a process which, “exhibits certain regularities, is constrained by a number of factors determining its course, rate of progress, and final outcome, is subject, within certain limits, to external influences such as (methods of) instruction. The focus throughout is the learner, who is seen as being obliged by social circumstances to apply his language learning capacity to the available linguistic material” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 1). A further essential aspect of learning L2 through contact with everyday situations is the marginal attention paid to the language itself. The learner focuses instead on communication, and is prepared to use any means to serve that end.

For a learner with a given L1 background, a specific L2 structure may be easy to perceive but hard to produce, or vice versa (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 26). Whenever a learner of L2 tries to comprehend or to produce utterances in that language, she relies on all sorts of knowledge that might help her. One component of this knowledge is what she knows about her L1, and application of this knowledge leads to what is called ‘transfer’. But it is crucial to remember that her L1 competence is but one of her possible resources; it always interacts with the other sorts of knowledge she may draw on. “It is this interaction of different kinds of knowledge that needs to be considered in order to understand what a learner does, and why she does it” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 27).

The inevitable conclusion at this stage is that “SLA is a process of enormous complexity in which a variety of factors are at work and which evades description, let alone explanation” (Klein, 1986 (a), p.23).

3. 4. The Difference Between L1 and L2 Acquisition

There are a lot of *differences and similarities* between L1 and L2 acquisition, but whatever theoretical position one wants to take concerning the differences and similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition, observation and common sense alone tell us a number of things. Here I will state some of these differences. According to Smith (1994 (a), p. 42) “first, the L1 acquirer knows considerably less about the world and hence has only fairly basic things about the here-and-now to communicate. Second, the L1 acquirer has little fear of making “mistakes”. Third, L1 acquirers are highly motivated to communicate in their L1. Fourth, L1 learners spend considerable time acquiring their mother tongue. Fifth, L1 acquirers will acquire native-speaker status in the normal course of events. The last point is that L1 acquirers don’t undergo grammatical instruction. Some L2 acquirers do”.

About *SLA* the following can be said, that “SLA is not easily understood; it is a complex process. Second, SLA is not a random process. It shows a great deal of systematicity. Third, there are some theoretically interesting links to be made with mother tongue (MT) development despite the different circumstances in which learning takes place. Forth, learners have a great deal of control over their own development but unfortunately, not conscious control. The fifth and the last one is that, learners approach the learning task strategically, forming hypotheses and testing them out” (Smith, 1994 (b), p. 43).

However, much of the work in SLA appears to be driven by the notion that L1 and L2 acquisition involve the same processes. This is not to suggest that differences were not noted; rather, proposals to account for these differences were made with an attempt to salvage the major theoretical claim of L1 and L2 similarities.

The “*difference hypothesis*’ starts from the belief that with regard to language learning children and adults are different in many important ways. In normal situations, children always reach a state of ‘complete’ knowledge of their native language. In second language acquisition not only is complete knowledge not always attained, it is rarely, if ever, attained.

Another difference concerns “the nature of knowledge these two groups of learners have at the outset of language learning. L2 learners have at their command knowledge of a full linguistic system. They do not have to learn what language is all about at the same time that they are learning a specific language” (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 124).

As cited in Gass & Selinker (1994, p. 125), according to Schachter (1988), children are capable of learning *any* language. Given exposure to the data of a language, a child will learn that language. No language is easier to learn than another; all languages are equally learnable by all speakers. This is not the case with second language learners.

One final difference to mention is that of motivation and attitude towards the target language and target language community. It is clear that, as in any learning situation, not all humans are equally motivated to learn languages nor are they necessarily motivated to learn a specific language. Differential motivation does not appear to impact a child’s success or lack of success in learning language. “Children learn without difficulty two languages in succession, the second one on the whole presenting even less difficulty than the first” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 8).

As we have already noted, “no sharp dividing line can be drawn between L1 and L2 acquisition for the simple reason that the latter is frequently initiated before the former has come to a close” (Klein, 1986). The overall conclusion is that there are both similarities and differences between first and second language acquisition-something that is hardly surprising.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW 3: AGE DIFFERENCES

This chapter is devoted to the literature that describes and explains the role of age in second language acquisition.

According to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), age is an important variable in SLA for both theoretical and practical reasons. It helps theorists to draw conclusions based on findings about age difference, and teachers to make decisions about teaching programs. There are various opinions about the influence of age on SLA. Some suggest similar success among children and adults, and even better results by adults because they learn faster. Others consider the data ambiguous and state that adults are at disadvantage in certain areas, whereas children are at advantage, especially in areas such as SLA phonology. As cited in Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) an interesting study had been done by Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979), who did short-term and long-term observations and concluded that “*older is faster, but younger is better*”. In their study, adults were more successful in early stages of syntactic and morphological development and young children in pronunciation.

4. 1. Child L1 Acquisition versus Adult L2 Acquisition

Many researchers argue about whether the age at which one learns or acquires an L2 affects acquisition of that language. It is commonly believed that children learn languages better than adults. However many linguists have proved that this is not always a general truth.

If we compare the speed of learning of an L2 among learners of different ages we will see that very often children “lack advantages”. Many researchers support the idea that adults are better learners because they learn faster. Children, on the other hand, are better in phonology and in accent free performance.

As cited in Gass & Selinker (1983, p. 243), according to Birdsong’s (1992) investigations competence and proficiency depends also on Universal Grammar (UG), as the first language of many learners may influence their L2 learning abilities. And again age plays an essential role in

mastering the language since younger learners acquire native-like proficiency, especially phonology, more easily than teenagers or adults.

There are also some other factors which support children's successful learning. One of them is the *social psychological* reason, where adults do not want to lose their sense of identity and adopt a new language. The next one is *neurological changes*, which prevent adults from using their brain as flexibly and plastically as children. The last factor I want to speak about are the *cognitive factors*, which prevent adults from learning successfully. Along with these factors there is an *input explanation* which claims that modifications adults make for children (so called "here and now language") provide better input.

As cited in Klein's article (1986 (a)), according to Krashen (1981 (b)) "there are two ways for adult learners to gain proficiency in a second language: *subconscious acquisition* and *conscious learning*. The former, which is by far the more important of the two, is based on meaningful and purposeful communication with speakers of the target language. The learner is oriented not to the form but to the content and effect of his utterances, remaining unaware of the linguistic rules and structures used in the process" (1986 (a)).

4. 2. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

How children acquire their native language and the relevance of this process to foreign language learning has long been debated. Although evidence that L2 learning ability declines with age is controversial, a common notion is that children learn L2(s) easily, while older learners rarely achieve fluency. This assumption stems from ideas regarding a 'critical period'.

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) has been the focus point for most of the research related to age and second language learning, probably because no counter evidence has yet been found for this long-term advantage of child starters. The controversy in this area arises both from the explanations researchers have produced for this correlation, and also from the various ways in which they have interpreted the CPH.

The CPH refers to a long-standing debate in linguistics and language acquisition over the extent to which the ability to acquire language is biologically linked to age. The CPH states that “the first few years of life is the crucial time in which an individual can acquire L1 if presented with adequate stimuli. If language input doesn't occur until after this time, the individual will never achieve a full command of language” (Abrahamsson, 2005).

The evidence for such a period is limited, and support stems largely from theoretical arguments and analogies to other critical periods in biology, but nonetheless is widely accepted. Some writers have suggested a "*sensitive*" or "*optimal*" period rather than a *critical* one. The duration of the period also varies greatly in different accounts.

In SLA the strongest evidence for the CPH is in the study of accent, where most older learners do not reach a native-like level. However, under certain rare conditions, native-like accent can be observed.

At the same time, while speaking about CPH we cannot ‘stay away from’ speaking about its weak points. According to Genesee (1988, p. 98), the CPH has a number of conceptual weaknesses and he criticizes the proponents with the following three arguments. *First*, “the evidence pertains to L1 competence and, therefore, does not necessarily apply to the L2. *Second*, their evidence pertains to relearning L1 skills that had already been acquired. In the case of SLA, what is in question is the ability to learn a new set of language skills for the first time. *Third*, their evidence pertains to adults with impaired L1 skills as a result of brain damage or pathology. It does not necessarily follow that healthy adults with intact neurological systems will have difficulty learning a L2.”

It is commonly believed that children are better suited to learn a second language than are adults. However, in general second language research has failed to support the critical period hypothesis in its strong form, which argues that full language acquisition is impossible beyond a certain age. Even those who begin learning a language late in life are capable of gaining a high level of fluency. The only aspect of language shown to follow the (strong) critical period hypothesis is

accent: the overwhelming majority of those who begin learning a language after puberty are unable to acquire a native-like accent (Abrahamsson, 2005).

The L1 is normally acquired in childhood. So we might ask whether “there is an age beyond which first language acquisition (FLA) is impossible. A preliminary question here would be: “How long does the learning of the first language last?” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 10).

As cited in Klein’s article (1986 (a), p. 9), according to Lenneberg (1967), between the age of two and puberty the human brain shows the plasticity which allows a child to acquire his first language. Therefore, there seems to be no clear-cut answer as long as there are doubts as to what covers a language and what complete language mastery means. If we consider the babbling of the newborn, or the crying of the infant to express wishes and needs or to give vent to feelings, as the beginnings of language development, then we must time birth as the onset of FLA” (Klein, 1986 (a), p. 10).

CHAPTER 5

LITERATURE REVIEW 4: OTHER FACTORS THAT AFFECT L2 ACQUISITION

This chapter is devoted to the literature that describes and explains the role of other factors such as motivation, risk taking, learner strategy and negative attitude on second language acquisition.

5. 1. Personal Variables

There are various theories that claim that certain personality factors are important predictors of success in second language learning. As it was not possible to discuss all the personality factors here, in this thesis I speak only about a few of the more commonly discussed personality factors such as: motivation, risk taking, learner strategies and negative attitude.

5. 1. 1. Motivation

Many researchers have given different definitions to the term “motivation”. I have written several of these definitions here. “Individuals who are motivated will learn another language faster and to a greater degree. Motivation is a predictor of language-learning success. The exact nature of motivation is not so clear. It has something to do with drive” (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 250).

The role of motivation in SLA has been the subject of extensive scholarship, closely influenced by work in motivational psychology. Motivation correlates strongly with proficiency, indicating both that successful learners are motivated and that success improves motivation. “Thus motivation is not fixed, but it is strongly affected by feedback from the environment. Accordingly, the study of motivation in SLA has also examined many of the external factors, such as the effect of instructional techniques on motivation” (Abrahamsson, 2005).

Motivation is also regarded as one of the most important factors in language learners’ success. The linguists who did research on motivation, such as, for example, Brown (1994); and Oxford & Shearin (1994) emphasize the role of motivation not only in the achievement or failure of the students but also in their success, development and personal growth.

According to Ellis (1997 (b), p. 75), various kinds of motivation have been identified: “*instrumental*, when the reason to learn an L2 is for some functional reason (eg. to pass an exam, to get a better job, to get a place at university, etc.). *Integrative*, when the reason to learn a particular L2 is that the learners are interested in the people and culture represented by the target-language group. *Resultative*, where the motivation is the result of learning. That is, learners who experience success in learning may become more, or in some contexts, less motivated to learn”.

Motivation is clearly a highly complex phenomenon. These four types of motivation, mentioned above, should be seen as complementary rather than as distinct options. Motivation can result from learning as well as causing it. Furthermore, “motivation is dynamic in nature; it is not something that a learner has or does not have but rather something that varies from one moment to the next depending on the learning context or task” (Ellis, 1997 (b), p. 75).

Indeed, it is possible that many learners do not hold distinct attitudes, which they can clearly articulate, either positive or negative, towards the target language group. Such is probably the case with many foreign language learners. It does not follow, however, that such learners are unmotivated. They may find the kinds of learning tasks they are asked to do intrinsically motivating.

For example, Brown emphasizes the importance in considering two other subdivisions of motivation in terms of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation. Deci (1975) (cited in Brown 1994, p. 155) characterizes intrinsic motivation as a drive that leads to activities for which people do not expect any outside reward. They are engaged in an activity that entails clear goals, a reasonable challenge and a positive result. They get involved in the task according to their own wish and pleasure.

The next definition is given by Gardner (1985), according to whom motivation is considered to be a construct with many kinds of attitudes that cluster mainly around two major subdivisions: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation provides learners with the desire to use the knowledge of the language to improve their social status. In contrast to instrumental

motivation integrative motivation, is expressed in the wish of the learner to become integrated into the target language society and to perform as a target language community member.

Older learners often learn a new languages for economic or academic reasons, and therefore work harder to reach their target fluency. Such motivation is absent in children and may therefore result in slow SLA in school. In contrast, children successfully learn languages naturally due to intrinsic motivation to partake in peer-group activities.

5. 1. 2. Risk Taking

There are various theories that claim that certain personality factors are important predictors of success in second language learning. Here, I would like to speak about the risk taking factor.

It has been suggested that a tendency to take risks is associated with success in second language learning. According to Beebe (1983, p. 39) risk taking has been defined as “a situation where an individual has to make a decision involving choice between alternatives of different describability; the outcome of the choice is uncertain; there is a possibility of failure”.

To say that an individual is a risk taker is to say that she or he is generally more willing to take risks than the average person. Thus, risk taking should be based on a background of general behavior. For this reason, the important work of Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (1982) (cited in Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 262) cannot be ignored. They found that individuals are generally risk-averse when contemplating a gain, but risk-seeking when contemplating a loss. To give common examples, if we have an opportunity to make a financial gain, we generally prefer conservative, but safe, investments. If we are threatened with a loss, we are much more willing to undertake risky actions that could mitigate our losses if successful. It is also important to remember here, however, that gain and loss are subjectively determined, not necessarily objective.

5. 1. 3. Learner Strategies

The third factor I would like to speak about is learner strategies. Many definitions and explanations are given to the term “learner strategy” by many researchers. I will talk only about some of them.

The first definition I want to speak about is provided by O’Malley and Chamot (cited in Cook, 1993, p. 113). They define learning strategy is “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information”.

The next definition is given by Ellis (1997 (b), p. 76): “learning strategies are the particular approaches or techniques that learners employ to try to learn an L2. They can be *behavioural* or they can be *mental*. They are typically problem-oriented”. That is, learners employ learning strategies when they are faced with some problem, such as how to remember a new word.

The last definition I want to speak about in this thesis is given by Oxford & Cohen (1992, p. 1) (cited in Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 265). According to them, learning strategies are: “steps or actions taken by learners to improve the development of their language skills. Learning strategies clearly involve internal mental actions, but they may involve potential improvements in language learning related to the selection of information from the input and the organization and integration of it in terms of learners system”.

There have been various attempts to discover which strategies are important for L2 acquisition. One way is to investigate how ‘good language learners’ try to learn. This involves identifying learners who have been successful in learning an L2 and interviewing them to find out the strategies that work for them. “One of the main findings of such studies is that successful language learners pay attention to both form and meaning” (Ellis, 1997 (b), p. 77).

In my opinion, the idea of strategy training is attractive because it provides a way of helping learners to become autonomous, that is to say, learners become responsible for their own learning. Therefore, the study of learning strategies is of potential value to language teachers. If

those strategies that are crucial for learning can be identified, it may prove possible to train students to use them. This will allow us to make the learning process easier.

5. 1. 4. Negative Attitude

The last personal variable included in this thesis is ‘negative attitude’. Attitudes in language learning is another affective factor worth considering since negative attitudes can negatively affect success in learning a language. Young children have not yet developed enough to possess ‘attitudes’ towards races, cultures, ethnic groups, classes of people and languages. On the other hand, adults may resist the socialization, which is the end product of child language acquisition, and may prefer, for instance, to speak accented L2 speech, which identifies them as a speaker of a particular L1.

That is to say, the process of language learning can be very stressful, and the impact of positive or negative attitudes from the surrounding society can be critical.

Students with negative attitudes toward the target language community, as well as students with negative attitudes toward their own first-language community, face particular difficulties in acquiring that language. We may conclude that, positive or negative attitudes towards this or that language can help or can cause just the opposite, interfere in SLA.

“Community attitudes toward the language being learned can also have a profound impact on SLA. Where the community has a broadly negative view of the target language and its speakers, or a negative view of its relation to them, learning is typically much more difficult” (Abrahamsson, 2005).

We have provided above a wider theoretical context for understanding what SLA is and the affect of different factors on it. In addition, they have described some of the important approaches to SLA and some elements relating to it. At this point, we need to turn to a detailed description of the methodology used to collect data for this research.

CHAPTER 6

METHODOLOGY

In this methodology section, information about the participants in the current qualitative research is presented, as well as information about the data collection method and the procedure(s) used to analyze the data collected.

6. 1. Participants

The study has been conducted in Yerevan and Gyumri, Armenia. The participants in this research are 32 students, falling into two main age groups. As I have mentioned above, Armenian learners of different age groups and educational background took part in my research study. There were 22 learners/participants from the MA TEFL and CTEFL graduate programs and from the IAEP Program (Intensive Academic English), from the American University of Armenia (AUA), Yerevan, and 10 students from the English Department of the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri, Armenia. Since two students did not return their questionnaires my study had 30 participants.

In terms of ethnic and educational background, all the subjects of the research, that is to say, students from the MA TEFL Program, CTEFL Program, IAEP Program and students from Gyumri are homogeneous. Nearly all of the students are Armenians with higher education diplomas, that is, as a minimum, with an undergraduate degree from an institution of higher education. In contrast to the others, there were four participants who were 16 years old and they are the first year students in the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. In other words, nearly all were intermediate, high intermediate or advanced level Armenian learners of English. Except for two participants, the other 28 participants' first language is Armenian and they all speak Russian as a second language. For the other two, Russian is their first language. The participants of this research study were both males and females and as stated above, their ages ranged from 16 to 51. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire in the English language. The total number of analyzed questionnaires was 30 (two of the questionnaires were not returned).

6. 2. Data Collection Instrument

This part of my thesis is qualitative, based on the answers to the questionnaire (see Appendix A, Parts A and B). The instrument used for data collection is a questionnaire in the English language.

I have chosen a questionnaire as the main instrument for my thesis as I think it has several advantages, both for me and for the participants. As for me, questionnaires are more convenient to be used as my population is rather large (30 participants), and it would have been rather difficult and time consuming for me to use other tools, like interviews for data collection, and my collected results would have been less reliable and valid, as in this case I would have interviewed maybe 10 people. As for the participants, questionnaires were more useful as they had chance to take them home, and think before filling them out.

However, it should be noted that I have used the data generated through the answers to the questionnaire very selectively. Details of this process are presented in the following section.

6. 2. 1. Questionnaire

As has already been said, the questionnaire was conducted in English and was administrated to the English learners in the two Armenian settings. The questionnaire is divided into two parts (see Appendix A, Parts A and B). It was designed to be both close-ended and open-ended, so that a detailed understanding of students' thoughts could be determined.

The first part of the questionnaire is designed to elicit some background information about the respondents related to the following areas such as: personal data (their age, their gender, their educational background, their first language, years of learning English and other questions). This part is composed of nine questions.

Although the questionnaire used in this study are basically closure-focused, there is also a second part (Appendix A, part B), which consists of an open-ended questions/items where the students were required to write an essay describing the process they went through acquiring their foreign language(s) and what was the role of age and their first language in this process.

The questionnaire was checked and modified by my supervisor Dr. Agajeenian, as well as piloted with a small group of other students around the same level in order to make certain that the questions were clear and elicited the type of information I wanted to know relating to students' beliefs. The pilot study was an important step since it led to changes in the overall format to make it user-friendlier. Also, the wording in the questionnaire was made more standard throughout to help the reader understand the requirements better.

The data collected from the open-ended question (see Appendix A, Part B), was categorized into three main groups, taking into consideration the age of the participants. In the first group learners from ages 16-24 were included, in the second group learners from ages 25-33, and in the last group learners from ages 34-51. In Appendix B for the 10 Sample Responses I have included questionnaires and essays for 6 participants less than 30 years of age (including one questionnaire of a 16 year old participant) and for 4 participants 30 and over.

The number of useable questionnaires in this research totaled 30. Each person's response was taken in turn and distinct content elements, substantive statements, or key points were marked in them. Then based on these ideas and concepts highlighted in the text, broader categories were formed to describe the content of the response in a way that allows for comparisons with other responses.

CHAPTER 7

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

As I am interested in attempting a more definitive understanding of the phenomena in focus (see Introduction and Methodology chapters), I believed that the phenomena should be looked at qualitatively. This could help me come to terms with the dynamics and ramifications of the unfolding phenomenon.

7. 1. Introduction

In this chapter I am going to present the analysis of the data obtained in the present study. This study was conducted either to find some support or to disprove the research question I have put forth before starting to write the thesis. I wanted to see whether younger learners have any advantages over older learners in SLA acquisition or not. The data was collected through written questionnaires in English. I had 30 respondents but had chosen only 10 of them to show as representative responses. In section 7.2 the results of the questionnaire are presented.

7. 2. The Results of the Questionnaire

The total number of responses given by the respondents was 30, two questionnaires were not returned. The data collected was analyzed according to age and L1 transfer on SLA. Twenty-eight respondents were of Armenian educational background, while the other two had Russian education. Even though the 10 questionnaires for analyzing were chosen randomly, the results of the study shows that the majority of the Armenian respondents have university degrees or even higher. Only four of the participants were 16 years old and they are the first year students in the Pedagogical Institute, but their work were not chosen for analyzing. The reason for taking only 10 questionnaires instead of analyzing all the 30 is that the number of Thesis pages are limited, besides there were several essays which were very close to each other.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of nine questions, which gave me personal information about the participants.

Based on the answers to the *first question* about their age, the collected data was categorized into three main groups. In the first group participants from ages 16-24 were included, in the second group participants from ages 25-33, and in the last group participants from ages 34-51. Three questionnaires out of the randomly chosen 10 were included in the first group, four in the second group and three in the last, third group.

The *second question* was about their gender. Out of 30 respondents 10 of them were male and the other 20 were female.

The *next three questions* were about the participants' educational background, their mother tongue and their second and/or third language. Taking into consideration the data stands, it can be said that nearly all of the participants were from Armenian educational background, except 2 participants out of 30 (they had Russian educational background). Though, all of the participants were able to speak more than two languages, Armenian as native and usually Russian and English, (some of them also knew French, German, Spanish, Japanese or Persian) as their second language.

The *sixth question* of the questionnaire was "At what age did you start studying English?" the results appears to suggest that the majority of the participants (27 out of 30) started learning their second language during their school years and in the Institutes/Universities (see Respondent 1, 2, 6, 7 9, and others), except for three participants, who started learning their second language in their last years of high school. For example, "The stages haven't been so numerous as my real studying started at the age of 15 as a university student. I started to study English at the age of 10 when I was a 4th grader (this was the grade where English was taught at school in my hometown). However, I have to state that I cannot remember learning any English during my English classes at school" (see Response 5, p. 49) or "...by the time I have completed my 9th grade at school, I could hardly read in English, let alone speaking, writing or listening. Thus, I started taking private classes starting from the summer of 1996 (as soon as I finished my 9th grade). I started from the alphabet, however I managed to enter the Yerevan State University a year later, in 1997, getting 18 out of 20 for the written and oral exams in English" (see Response 6, p. 51).

The last, the *ninth question* “When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it?” of Part A of the questionnaire (see Appendix A), as the participants commented later, was the most difficult one to be answered. Though the majority answered “No” or “never”, as they said, it took them a long time to draw this conclusion. However, there were several people who answered that “Probably into Russian, but it happens unconsciously” (see Respondent 8, p. 56) or “I used to, but now I don’t” (see Respondent 6, p. 51).

In the second part of the questionnaire (see Appendix A, Part B) the participants were supposed to write a short essay on the provided topic. They were asked to describe the process they went through when acquiring their foreign language(s). They were also asked to talk about different factors, which affected that process, for example the influence of age or first languages.

Nearly all the participants of the research were speaking about different factors which effect SLA, such as motivation, risk taking, negative attitude and several others, but one of the factors, which was not discussed by me at all, and at the same time, mentioned by several participants, was the “time” factor. While trying to interpret the results obtained in the second part of the questionnaire, I came to realize that besides the objective reasons presented in the questionnaire, like L1 transfer or the age factor, the participants also suggested several other subjective factors, which affect L2 acquisition (eg. the time factor or the fact of being a bilingual). For example, “I think that in my case the important factor which influences my language learning is *time*. As long I study as much I learn. I think age doesn’t have any influence” (see Respondent 2, p. 43) or “I don’t think that the factor such as learner age had any influence on my learning, but first language interference really had influence...” (see Response 4, p. 47) or “Another thing that helped me learn Spanish is my bilingualism” (see Response 3, p. 45).

There were also many participants who said that one of the most effective factors is to think or try to think in a target language. For example, “When I was in my 8th grade, I very much liked writing compositions in English, but I sometimes failed doing it good, as my teacher told me, I just translated ideas from my native tongue. I tried not to do so, later. I succeeded. Now I don’t think in

Armenian, when I speak English. When I write in English I also do not think in Armenian. I think this is very important, when you start thinking in L2” (see Respondent 1, p. 41), or “I rely not on translations, but think in the target language” (see Respondent 4, p. 47) or “While learning the words in English, I was learning by heart the translations, not the definitions of the words, and I think that was the reason that I always translated the sentences in my mind for understanding them better. And whatever I wanted to say in English I translated it in my mind. It took me a long time to give up this habit. They say that as soon as you start thinking in the language you learn, you can claim that you have acquired it quite well. I caught myself on this, when I entered AUA; once I was going home after classes in a van, and realized that I started thinking in English. I was very happy by this fact, and I felt that my first language started playing less negative role on my English” (see Respondent 6, p. 51).

However, many other participants spoke about the age factor as one of the major factors, which influence SLA and the affect of L1 on L2 acquisition, but all of the students, while speaking about the role of L1 on SLA, spoke about both negative and positive transfer. Nobody spoke about just the negative or just the positive transfer. This is to suggest that according to most of them these two types of interference (negative and positive) cannot “exist” without each other, they support each other. For example, “Regarding the factor such as the age, I would live [sic] to say that it plays a huge role while acquiring a foreign language. I believe that it is very important to study the foreign language at the earlier age. Acquiring the language at this age allows learners to avoid a big problem named ‘heavy accent’” (see Respondent 8, p. 56) or “Age is obviously one of the most important factors. Learners in their younger are more flexible to acquiring a foreign language, as well as shifting to another language from their mother tongue” (see Response 10, p. 60) or “I don’t think that the factor such as learner age had any influence on my learning, but first language interference really had influence, and this interference had both negative and positive influence, depending on what I was acquiring” (see Respondent 4, p. 47) and many other similar samples can be found in the collected questionnaires.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8. 1. Limitations of the study and future directions

There are some limitations to the present study that should be considered. First, this study was conducted in Yerevan and Gyumri only. Therefore, the results of the study do not reflect the regions in Armenia outside these two cities.

Second, the study is not large-scale: it includes only 30 students.

Third, the questionnaire used in this research may have resulted in certain limitations; the questionnaire is short. I think it can be longer and include several other questions, which will allow receiving much more detailed information, such as the reason for learning L2, their attitude towards learning it, etc.

The *fourth* limitation of the study is the lack of resources in Armenia about my topic. All of the books were printed during the Soviet period, and it was very difficult to track and find up-to-date sources. The main part of the most up-to-date information I found on the Internet.

There is clearly room for more extensive research in the local setting and other settings, including similar studies on a large scale. Accordingly, my discussion of the present findings remains essentially exploratory in spirit. In spite of this I consider that my study contributes to a better understanding the role of age and L1 transfer on SLA in Armenia.

8. 2. Suggestions for further study

In my opinion, future studies are absolutely necessary for generalization of the results presented in this study. This study can be considered only as a base or a start for future studies on a large scale. It would be very interesting to conduct research where real life situations are recorded and the interference is looked upon in a real life context.

It might also be interesting to carry out new research focusing on other factors such as the ‘time aspect’, which was talked about by several participants of the research.

8.3. Contribution of the study

This study presented data about L2 responses given by Armenian speakers. It shows that there is no significant difference in their view between studying L1 and L2. The important point that also was mentioned by the respondents was that when one starts thinking in one's L2, it means that she is already accepted to be like a native speaker of the target language.

8.4. Conclusions and implications

The controversial issues of first language transfer on second language have been much discussed among different theorists and researchers of SLA. This thesis has tried to show how L1 transfer appears to the language learner to affect L2 learning and what is the role of age in this process. This study also looked at aspects of SLA and other factors that affect this process, such as; motivation, learner strategies, negative attitudes and risk taking.

This research was conducted to find support or to disprove for the following research question, "*Do younger learners have advantages over older learners in SLA?*" I have looked at this question from different angles. I have also tried to see the role of different factors on SLA.

I have tried to find support for my research question with an analysis of the results of questionnaires, which I have asked people of different age groups and educational background to respond to.

Of course, before analyzing the results of the questionnaires, I had my own expectations about these two topics, and they were not so much different from the results I came to. Both my teaching experience and my analysis led me to believe that the results of this research appeared to suggest that the research question "*Do younger learners have advantages over older learners in SLA?*" was supported partly, as both younger learners and older learners have both advantages and disadvantages.

In conclusion, it can be said that the L1 can play both a negative and a positive role in SLA. We cannot draw a strict line between them and say that transfer is purely negative or purely positive. These two forces are at work simultaneously.

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Appendix A: English Questionnaire

Sample Questionnaire

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: _____
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): _____
- ✓ Second and/or third language: _____
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? _____
- ✓ How long have you studied English? _____
- ✓ Where did you study English? _____
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? _____

Appendix B: 10 Sample Responses (of 30)

Respondent # 1

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 23
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: English & Russian
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? 6
- ✓ How long have you studied English? 11 years
- ✓ Where did you study English? At school
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? Never

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

I started learning English when I was 6. My mother is an English teacher and a tutor, and thus I have listened to English being spoken in our house since I was 3. So when I started learning it it was not strange or unfamiliar for me. During the first years of study I remember myself memorizing words and structures, learning a lot by heart.

When I was in my 8th grade, I very much liked writing compositions in English, but I sometimes failed doing it good, as my teacher told me, I just translated ideas from my native tongue.

I tried not to do so, latter. I succeeded. Now I don't think in Armenian, when I speak English. When I write in English I also do not think in Armenian. I think this is very important, when you start thinking in L2. But as you see, in my case, it depended on age, I acquired that in my advanced level.

Respondent # 2

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 24
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: English/Russian/Japanese/French
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? 18 years old
- ✓ How long have you studied English? 6 year
- ✓ Where did you study English? In the University
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? That process became automatic and I can't answer yes or no

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

My first foreign language which I started to learn in the school was French. I studied French six years. Then I decided to enter the University and study other languages as Japanese and English. It was very difficult to learn English, because I didn't know anything, any word in English in spite of my peers and I had a lot of work to do. During my study I always felt the lack of vocabulary and experience which I hadn't. I think that in my case the important factor which influences my language learning is time. As long I study as much I learn. I think age doesn't have any influence (in my case).

Other factors as first language or other languages can have both bad and good influence. For example when I started to learn English my knowledge of French was always hindrance for me, because I always remembered words in French pronunciation and always mixed words. On the other hand the experience of foreign language learning helped me a lot.

Respondent # 3

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 24
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Russian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: Armenian, English, Spanish
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? 10
- ✓ How long have you studied English? 14 years
- ✓ Where did you study English? at home, at school, at university
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? No

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

Dear Gohar

First I would like to describe the process I went through while learning Armenian. As you know, I am a native speaker of Russian. That is why, I started 'acquiring' Armenian only when I joined my kindergarthen group. As I was five years old at that time I did have any difficulties. Acquiring Armenian was a very natural process. As far as I remember, I became a fluent user after 2-3 months.

English is a different thing. I started learning this language when I was 10. I engaged my language learning experience. However, I often felt frustrated because I could not articulate (Θ) and (Θ), another difficulty I had relates to understanding Past Indefinite and Present Perfect. There are no such terms in Russian and I spent much time trying to master them. Fortunately, Russian did not always hinder my FL learning process. Sometimes it helped me comprehend and use words having Greek or Latin Origin.

Spanish was the easiest language to learn as its grammar has many features similar to those in Russian and English. In addition, many Spanish words often sound like English ones.

Another thing that helped me learn Spanish well is my bilingualism.

I started learning Spanish at the age of 17.

Respondent # 4

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: ____25____
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): _____Armenian_____
- ✓ Second and/or third language: __English/Russian_____
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? __11 years old_____
- ✓ How long have you studied English? _____10 years_____
- ✓ Where did you study English? __In the educational institute_____
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? _____ No _____

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

I can't say that my foreign language acquisition was a difficult process but of course there were difficulties that I was to overcome.

I don't think that the factor such as learner age had any influence on my learning, but first language interference really had influence, and this interference had both negative and positive influence, depending on what I was acquiring.

When acquiring patterns which were similar in both languages (Armenian & English), the first language acted as a tool to remember the new patterns, while when there were differences of the forms I relied only on the target language.

However, I remember the negative influence of mother tongue when working on acquiring the structure of the English language.

The sentence structures of the two languages are quite different, and being a beginner learner, I often relied on my knowledge of structuring sentences in Armenian. As a result I produced structurally incorrect sentences, when even the place of a word changed the meaning of the whole sentence.

But working on the language for a long time helps to overcome this difficulty, & when communicating I rely not on translations, but think in the target language.

Respondent # 5

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 26
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: Russian and English
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? 11
- ✓ How long have you studied English? 15 years
- ✓ Where did you study English? At school, University
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? I have never thought of this, so haven't paid attention to what really happens

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

The following essay is aimed at exploring the stages I went through on my way to acquiring English. The stages haven't been so numerous as my real studying started at the age of 15 as a university student.

I started to study English at the age of 10 when I was a 4th grader (this was the grade where English was taught at school in my hometown). However, I have to state that I cannot remember learning any English during my English classes at school. I was "caught" by the years after the collapse of Soviet Union when there was a complete disregard to education by learners, teachers and people in authorities.

The learning of English I started as a 1st year student at a university. The actual motive behind my eagerly taking up English was my falling behind the whole group. All of my peers knew English quite well, and I was among the 'worst'. This had its reasons which are not relevant to this essay, so I'll not go deep into them. All I want to mention is that I couldn't bear my status since I had always been among the best during my school-years. So eager to be the 1st, I studied day and night I learnt my English at a fast pace with much ease. Secondly, I'm a person that strives for the best performance in every domain I find myself in. Thus, my motivation and eagerness to be a good professional functioned as the driving force in my studying English. The factors mentioned by you may have influenced; however, I didn't feel their impact while in the process of studying.

Respondent # 6

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 27
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other English
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: Russian/English
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? When I was 10
- ✓ How long have you studied English? 17 years
- ✓ Where did you study English? at school, have taken private classes, at Yerevan State University, at AUA
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? I used to, but now I don't

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

I started learning English when I was 10, at school and it was very difficult for me to acquire it because of many reasons, and the most important one was that it was the most difficult period for our country; we had no electricity, gas and as a result the schools were not operating properly. We didn't attend classes most of the year and many teachers left schools; we had no teachers to teach us. Even if we had some classes, the intervals between our classes were so long that we forgot whatever we acquired before that. As a result, by the time I have completed my 9th grade at school, I could hardly read in English, let alone speaking, writing or listening. Thus, I started taking private classes starting from the summer of 1996 (as soon as I finished my 9th grade). I started from the alphabet, however I managed to enter the Yerevan State University a year later, in 1997, getting 18 out of 20 for the written and oral exams in English. I worked really hard during this period, and now by having a retrospective look at this period, I will try to reveal some factors that influenced my fast, but successful learning period.

I was already 16 when I started learning English and I think by that time I was already a mature person to realize fully the aim of my learning; I wanted to enter the University, where my major was going to be English. So my instrumental motivation had a great role in this process. Besides that, by that time I had already much formal schemata knowledge in Armenian and

English, I knew how the ‘language works’; I knew the grammar system in Armenian and Russian to be able to differentiate at least parts of speech, the suffixes that help formulate new words; the main clauses from the subordinate ones, and the types of them; the subject, predicate, objects, and other parts of the sentence. I can state that all this knowledge was transferred from my native, as well as second language, which is Russian, and it helped me a lot while learning my foreign language. While learning the words in English, I was learning by heart the translations, not the definitions of the words, and I think that was the reason that I always translated the sentences in my mind for understanding them better. And whatever I wanted to say in English I translated it in my mind. It took me a long time to give up this habit. They say that as soon as you start thinking in the language you learn, you can claim that you have acquired it quite well. I caught myself on this, when I entered AUA; once I was going home after classes in a van, and realized that I started thinking in English. I was very happy by this fact, and I felt that my first language started playing less negative role on my English. I think one of the reasons is that I was given a chance to communicate with native speakers and I had no chance for communicating in Armenian or Russian with them, so I had to deal with that situation. My responses had to be given spontaneously in English, and we didn’t do any translations while studying at AUA, thus I came to the conclusion that for stimulating English thinking, students should be instructed only in English.

From all stated above, you can see that my native and second languages had their positive as well as negative roles while acquiring English. However, I would like to mention negative effects of English as well; now I feel that foreign language has its negative influence on my native and second languages; whenever I want to explain something in my native or foreign languages, English words come to my mind instead of the equivalents in Armenian or Russian. As a result, I have some difficulties while communicating in my native language now. This is another paradox in language learning. Thus, think twice before learning a foreign language☺.

Respondent # 7

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 30
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: Russian & English
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? around 10
- ✓ How long have you studied English? 20 years
- ✓ Where did you study English? school & University
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? don't think so

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

Studying a foreign language is a thrilling job. One starts to understand a language which is spoken by people representing a different nation. From my perspective, few things can cause a more incredible feeling than this.

Along the way, you become aware of how knowledgeable you gradually grow about their culture and manners as well, which itself is so instructive. They say, the more languages you master, the larger-than-life personality you acquire. I believe you just start to think twice before you take another crucial step and eventually you discover you are getting wiser and far more inclined to behave positively. At least, this is one of the ways that I for one have been influenced by while studying a foreign language.

There is one good point to it. As we all know perfectly well, a lack of a good sense of humour makes one's life dull and absolutely helpless. What is more, it can make other people's lives dull or even intolerable. Now, my idea is that sometimes people miss a great deal if they fail to get a fantastic joke only because they are still too 'far away' from the foreign language they think they can speak. The reason is that to speak a foreign language takes much more than a word-for-word translation. I genuinely believe that one should have a distinctive flair for languages to be able to speak them very well, which means entire competence, fluency and correctness.

Respondent # 8

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 34
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: Russian, English, German, French
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? 23
- ✓ How long have you studied English? about 3 years
- ✓ Where did you study English? at the university, l-ge center
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? Probably into Russian, but it happens unconsciously

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease.

This may depend on many factors, such as the age, the first language interference, etc. I am not an exception and all these factors had their influence on me too while acquiring the second/foreign language.

Regarding the factor such as the age, I would like to say that it plays a huge role while acquiring a foreign language. I believe that it is very important to study the foreign language at the earlier age. Acquiring the language at this age allows learners to avoid a big problem named 'heavy accent'. Certainly, the first language influence also plays a role in acquiring the foreign language. I mean the concepts of transfer and interference in bilingual people, I'm bilingual myself, I can say that there is confusion and overlap between languages, and not only my Armenian (my native language) influenced my Russian speech and writing, but also my Russian started with time to change the way I speak Armenian.

My native language helped and hindered the second language acquisition. The factors such as pronunciation, syntax, etc. of mother tongue differ from the target language. But at the same time my proficiency in the native language helped me to transfer and apply the concepts of my mother tongue to a new language.

The main point while acquiring the second language is the setting and the stimuli to learn the foreign language proficiently.

Respondent # 9

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: 42
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other Persian
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): Armenian
- ✓ Second and/or third language: Persian, English
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? 12
- ✓ How long have you studied English? thirty years now
- ✓ Where did you study English? at school, university
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? No

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

I was born in Iran and as a child and teenager I lived there. I acquired Persian as my second language naturally and with daily exposure to the language. My home language has been Armenian but my school language and the language through which I received information (TV, radio, newspapers, etc.) was Persian. In addition I had some Persian-speaking friends with whom I communicated in Persian, though some of them knew Armenian as well. They had learnt from us.

As far as my English is concerned it is difficult for me to recall the first years of my learning it. It was, however, through an academic setting and school program. We had regular 2-hour English lessons twice a week (as I remember). After leaving school I took English intensive courses at a language institute in Tehran where I had exposure to English 3 hours a day, 5 days a week. Similar situation was my studies at Yerevan State University.

During these long years of learning English I have experienced both negative and positive interference of my two first (Armenian/Persian) languages, because I have always compared and contrasted the structures and expressions in the target language with similar/contradictory structures in these two languages. However, I think the influence of positive transfer on my learning of English has been greater than the negative transfer.

Respondent # 10

Part A

This questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis research at the American University of Armenia, Yerevan and at the Pedagogical Institute of Gyumri. I would very much appreciate it if you would take a few minutes of your time to fill it out. Complete anonymity is assured.

Thank you for your help.

- ✓ Age: _____51_____
- ✓ Gender: Male Female
- ✓ Education/background: Armenian Russian Other _____
- ✓ Mother tongue (First Language): _____ Armenian _____
- ✓ Second and/or third language: __ Russian, English _____
- ✓ At what age did you start studying English? __ at the age of 7 _____
- ✓ How long have you studied English? _____ all my life _____
- ✓ Where did you study English? __ in Yerevan _____
- ✓ When you are asked a question in English, do you translate it into Armenian before answering it? _____ No _____

Part B

Please, write a short essay on the topic provided below. Use the provided place. Use another piece of paper if needed.

Some learners experience great difficulty when acquiring their second language, while others acquire their second language with great ease. This may depend on many factors such as their age, first language interference, etc.

Please describe the process you went through when acquiring your foreign language(s). How did the factors such as an age or first languages influence play a role in acquiring your foreign language? Did your native language help or negatively influence you while acquiring your foreign language? Describe the process you went through while acquiring your foreign language.

It's true that some learners have great difficulty when they acquire their second language and some do it with ease. Considering people's age, abilities, language skills and strategies they use, it is natural that the results cannot occur overnight or at a limited time period. It's a long process and is endless.

There are different factors that influence foreign language acquisition. Age is obviously one of the most important factors. Learners in their younger are more flexible to acquiring a foreign language, as well as shifting to another language from their mother tongue. Kids learn languages without any intention or purpose, that is, they learn the language in their living environment or family. They don't realize any difference in languages to translate from one language into another. For example, in bicultural families, children learn both languages unintentionally and simultaneously, without and difficulty. When they grow up and start learning another language, they try to integrate their language ability in learning the new one. Sometimes they may translate the foreign language they hear in their mind in order to understand what is said and then respond to it.

Adults have different approach to language learning. They try to understand what is said by translating the idea in their mother tongue and then respond to it. There is no immediate

reaction to it, and it takes time. Most of the time, it may drive to misunderstanding based on misinterpretation.

I used to experience different periods of language learning.

I started learning English since I was seven, when I went to school. And though it as an English school, the classes were conducted in Armenian. Thus, we didn't learn to think in English. We used to translate from one language into another (Armenian into English) for rather a long time. It continued to be the same at the university, so the interference of my native language was always parallel to my learning English.

All this changed when I entered AUA CTEFL program in 1997. I learned how to be free from strict rules and patterns and to communicate my own ideas in English. Later, when I started teaching General English at AUA Extension Program, I came to realize the importance of free speech in listening comprehension, reading, speaking and writing. These four language skills were taught in a way that learners at different ages could learn to control accuracy of their pronunciation, grammar, and rate of speech to make their spoken responses intelligible to the listener, to listen o understand the basic comprehension of main idea, the relationship between ideas presented in a conversation or lecture, and make interferences, form generalizations and draw conclusions. All these drew me to think English without having to use my own language. It's a long way if you are not in the country where the target language is spoken.

