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The Best Age for Learning a Foreign Language

Svitlana Shevchenko

(svstas@rambler.ru)

Tavria State Agrotechnological University, Melitopol, Ukraine

The Best Age for Learning a Foreign Language

Abstract

When should we start to learn a foreign language? Nowadays children begin their acquaintance with foreign languages before starting school. Teenagers and young people are motivated to learn foreign languages for successful future. Adults know that English, for example, is very popular now. They realize that it is impossible to achieve a real success without foreign language. What age is the best for learning a foreign language? The author of the article had summarized the ideas of different specialists about this question. Different points of view and investigations about the best age of foreign language studying are considered in the article. Some examples of the paper are from the author's professional background. The author describes the abilities, demands and problems of three age categories in learning a foreign language.

1 Introduction

Today, the good command of a foreign language is very important for the success in many spheres of modern life. An employer, for example, will hire you if you can speak one, two or even more foreign languages. The more languages we speak, the more successful we are.

2 Beginning of learning a foreign language

Ukrainian children begin to learn a foreign language at the age of 3-5 years old, the second language they can begin to master at the age of 10-11 years old. The subject "Foreign language" is obligatory in secondary and high schools of Ukraine. Nowadays, the most part of Ukrainian parents understand the importance of foreign languages. So, our children haven't the problems with studying a foreign language. What about their parents or grandparents?

It is rather difficult, sometimes, to overcome the complexes for adults, even they need in a foreign language very much. Some people complain that they can't study language because of their age, lack of time or money. But, we can find time for studying a foreign language, if we really want and need it. As for money, there are a lot of online free dictionaries or programmes for studying a foreign language. Our age isn't the reason too. We don't use our brain for 100% ever. Every person makes to work the brain for his own per cent or power. What is the range of this power? There are different

opinions and hypothesis, but the majority of scientists think our brain works for 14% maximum and 3% minimum, supposedly (Znakov, V.V., 2004).

3 Brain power

As you know, we have two cerebral hemispheres, one of them is dominant. We use dominant hemisphere more often than another one. Mankind hasn't found the ways of using the whole brain power yet (Loznytsia, V.S., 1999). Our brain works for 3-4% helping us to do everyday routine things: eating, drinking, sleeping, reproduction, etc. We use 5% of our brain power for speaking or communication, and 5% for studying or learning. So, we use only 13-14% of brain power while 86-87% wait for their demand (Znakov, V.V., 2004). It means the age isn't the reason not to study a foreign language.

Maybe Ukrainian adults are afraid to study languages. Why? To my mind, the problem is psychological and social. The most adult people of Ukraine think they will be funny making mistakes and studying with younger people in the same classroom. They think they are not smart any more for studying something new because of the age. They are afraid to be a laughing-stock contrasting themselves with their children or grandchildren.

There are some countries in the world where the pensioners can enter the University. They can get diploma or even defend a theses. The life of these people is full of discoveries and wishes in 65-70 years old or even more. They are active being retired. So, Ukrainian people are afraid or don't want to study something absolutely new.

4 Age categories for a foreign language learning

The people of different ages were taught by me (from 3 to 55 years old). Every age is unique. It's necessary to find the special ways, methodology, individual findings for the student of every age. Let's divide the people into three age categories. The first is the category of children (1-12 years old), the second is the category of teenagers and youth (13-25 years old), and the third is the category of grown ups (30 years old and older).

According to international investigations, and my own practice (I've got two sons), a one year old child can recognize the objects around him by ear. First, the children have to understand the

pronunciation and names of the objects in his native language. After that it's possible to teach them foreign pronunciation of the same objects and things.

At the age of 2-3 years old the intellectual progress of children helps them to understand the difference between foreign and native sounds. It means that at this age the children can start study a foreign language.

Visual thinking at the age of 4 years old gives additional opportunities in language studying. According to international investigations of the philologists the age of 5-10 years old is "magic" for studying a foreign language. Psychologists claim that it is easier for children to master a foreign language than for adults because the children have the keen interest to all new things, so they have greater motivation than grown ups. The second reason is in better liveliness of a child's speech organs than an adult's one. Psychologists think that any person has awkward possibilities for quick and natural studying at the age under 20 years old. Approximately at this age the formation of cerebrum has been finished. All the brain sections have final construction, and the quantity of nervous cells is maximum (Loznytsia, V.S., 1999).

The second category for a foreign language studying includes teenagers and youth. This category needs in foreign languages more than younger and older people. The age of this category is the most convenient because there is no necessity to start studying from the beginning. The representatives of this category improve their English (German, French, and so on) through speaking, writing, listening and reading. The teachers usually prefer to work with teenagers or youth. This category is the largest one. Teaching the students of this age category you haven't to teach them in the form of play or action. You needn't to find simple words that to explain hard grammar things. You haven't to find a lot of different colours pictures or favourite toys. The students of this category are usually under 20 (the schoolchildren and students). You remember this age is good for quick and natural studying. This age category is "soft" and "flex" like plasticine. The teachers or foreign languages instructors prefer to work with this age category for their own professional advancement. The members of this category have already realized: "The more languages you know, the more successful you are". They understand that foreign languages are the chance. It's the chance to start living and thinking in another way, to find a new and interesting job, to make new friends, to travel without interpreters and dictionaries. Of

course, not every teenager or a young person wants to study a foreign language. There is the part of young people in the “golden” age category who doesn’t want to study a foreign language at all. The others deny the idea to study the second foreign language. It can be explained by different routine problems, financial difficulties, the sources of easy entertainment, inaction and unwillingness to achieve new goals. Does it mean the older we are, the lazier and inactive we are?

Studying a foreign language is a new emotional feeling. Adults master a foreign language more intensive, more interesting, more venturesome comparing with young people. Besides, some young people can’t or don’t want to overcome difficulties. They sometimes don't understand why they should study languages. Young people are afraid to make mistakes and to be ridiculous among the persons of the same age. Modern Ukrainian youth is lazy to do extra home task. Adults are mental hardened. They know what kind of methods to use. The methods they have used during life. Adults have already known that studying and learning must be intuitive understandable. We have to be creative in everything including studying. People who reached maturity know how to get food for thought from small details, minor things, insignificant events comparing with their knowledge and experience. Finally, the greatest advantage of this age category is ability to see and achieve the aim, skill to spend own power reasonably.

The people of this category have some weak points, of course. One of them is to make the first step, i.e. to begin studying again. To my mind Ukrainian middle-age people have some social problems in this field. Our people think they are too old to study something new; they have to work hard that to survive, even they are retired; they think it’s a shame to study when you have grandchildren. These are stereotypes of the former USSR. I hope we’ll ruin all these stereotypes in the nearest future thanks to European integration. Ukrainian middle-age people will understand that their skills and wishes will play vitally important role in their life. Studying a foreign language is a new higher level of their personality. They should imagine they will help their children or grandchildren with a foreign language studying, they will have possibility to understand favourite songs, they will be able to find new foreign friends in gardening, fishing, cooking, etc., and maybe they will find a new interesting job.

5 Conclusion

There are no barriers in a foreign language learning. The person of any age is able to learn a foreign language. It doesn't matter how old you are: 5, 25, 55 years old or even more. Every age is unique and has its advantages for individual perfection. It depends on you, on your desire!

It doesn't matter you were born in the XXth or XXIst century. The world will be developing the science, will be make new discoveries and findings, and the people will need to communicate with each other more and more. The year after year a foreign language will become the necessity of life.

It's possible to learn foreign languages in any age. And your knowledge won't be worse then a child's or a teenager's. It's not late to learn foreign languages never. The main thing is to have purpose and be sure in achieving it.

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