

Study: There Is a Critical Period for Language Learning

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Category : Education/Family

Unlocking Word Meanings

Read the following words/expressions found in today’s article.

1. **optimum** / **ˈ****ɒ****p****t****ɪ****m****ə****m** / (adj) – most favorable or effective
Example: They say that the **optimum** age to give birth is from 20 to 35.
2. **learning curve** / **ˈ****l****ɜː****n****ɪ****ŋ** **k****ɜː****r****v** / (n) – the length of time during which a person develops a skill
Example: I have a very slow **learning curve** when it comes to scientific concepts.
3. **deteriorate** / **dɪ****ˈ****tɪ****r****i****ə** **r****eɪ****t** / (v) – to decrease in quality
Example: My performance is **deteriorating** because of stress.
4. **eloquence** / **ˈ****ɛ****l****ə****k****w****ə****n****s** / (n) – the ability to speak effectively
Example: I admire her because she always speaks with **eloquence**.
5. **rule out** / **ˈ****r****u****l** **ə****ʊ****t** / (phrasal) – to exclude something
Example: Our team decided to **rule out** the plan because we know that it will not be effective.

Article

Read the text below.

英語を学ぶのに最適な期間(optimum : 最適)

A new study suggests that the **optimum** language-learning period takes place by age 10.

その研究は年齢と言語の関係について解析された

～のクイズをFacebook上に投稿した

およそ～人のネイティブと、そうでない英語のスピーカーがこの質問に答えた

クイズの項目は～を識別する為に受け手が必要とする(require : 必要)

与えられた文面が文法的に合っているかは関係なく(whether or not : ～かどうかに関係無く)

解答者は～について尋ねられた(respondents : 解答者 residence : 居住区)

話してた言語、学習し始めた歳、どのくらい英語の国で暮らしていたか

クイズの答えは～を暗示した(imply : 暗示する、伴う)

若い時に英語を習い始めると大人よりも習得するスピードが早い(learning curve : 学習曲線)

人の言語学習能力は17か18歳で衰え始める(deteriorate : 衰える)

要因を決めつける事が出来ない(determine : 決心、決意、決定)

データが不十分の為に減少の背景を(insufficient : 不十分)

研究結果によると、遅い学習者は、早い学習者と同じレベルで発育する機会は少ない(develop : 発育 eloquence : 巧みさ、力強さ)

それにも関わらず

研究者は、遅い学習者の可能性を完全に排除しない(rule out : 除外する)

新しい言語で熟練に成る事を(proficient : 熟練、堪能)

現在、同じ様な研究を実施している(conduct : 実施する)

スペイン語学習の背景(context : 背景、事情)

最適な学習期間の識別以外は(identify : 識別)

アクセントの様な言語のスキル要素が最適な期間を持って様が関係無く(optimum : 最適な)

The quiz items required the takers to identify whether or not the given statements were grammatically correct. The respondents were also asked about their previous places of residence, the languages they spoke, their age when they started learning English, and how long they had stayed in an English-speaking country.

Results of the quiz implied that those who started learning English at a young age had a speedier **learning curve** than adults. Findings also suggested that one’s language learning ability starts to **deteriorate** at age 17 or 18. However, the researchers were not able to determine the factors behind this decline due to insufficient data.

According to the findings, late learners also have a smaller chance of developing the same level of **eloquence** as the early learners. Nevertheless, the researchers have not completely **ruled out** the possibility of late learners becoming proficient in a new language.

On another note, Hartshorne is currently looking into conducting a similar study in the context of the Spanish language. Aside from identifying the best period for language learning, he also wants to know if learning periods vary for every grammar aspect. The future study will also determine whether or not language skill elements like accent have an optimum period.

Viewpoint Discussion

Enjoy a discussion with your tutor.

Discussion A

• Do you think that other languages (aside from English and Spanish) should also be included in the new research? Explain.

• Do the study’s findings encourage you to learn another language? Why or why not?

Discussion B

• In your opinion, what are the advantages of learning a second language? Discuss.

• What factors do you think affect one’s ability to learn a language? Share your ideas.