



Acquisition and Bilingualism

04/09



Assignment 4

Your job: pick one myth on Bilingualism and discuss it.

This is how your written work has to be organized:

- 1- Pick one myth and give its exact description provided in the "myths and misconceptions" image. Use full sentences only such as 'I chose to work on the following myth:...'. (5 points)
- 2- What is one argument that could explain where this myth is coming from? Use full sentences (10 points)
- 3- Debunk the myth: using what we talked about in class, science, and your own judgment, explain what the reality behind the myth is. Use full sentences. (10 points)

Span essay length: 200-500 words (respect for this rule: 2 points)



Myth: Parents who do not speak a language perfectly will pass their errors and their accent onto their children.

- 'I chose to work on the myth that states, "Parents who do not speak a language perfectly will pass their errors and their accent onto their children."




What is one argument that could explain where this myth is coming from?

- You will have to reason for yourself on this one; there is no one right answer
- If you are stuck, look back at the slides related to the myth you chose, and use an example from discussions in class



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- “One argument that might explain this way of thinking is: ...”
 - The prevalence of misconceptions about the importance of a child’s peers on their language development, by assuming that parents are the only language users a child pays attention to.
 - (Also remember, everyone has an accent! This would be a good ‘debunker’)



Debunk the myth: using what we talked about in class, science, and your own judgment, explain what the reality behind the myth is.

- One thing this myth mentions is passing on an accent -- what do we know about accents?
- What do we know about children learning multiple languages in their household?
- Tip: use other myths to help you think about the myth and to support your debunking!
- Make sure to spend most of your time/writing on this last question



Critical Period Hypothesis

- The critical period hypothesis states that the first few years of life is the crucial time in which an individual can acquire a native language (L1) if presented with adequate stimuli.
- Brown (2007) defines CPH as “a biological timetable during which, both first & second language is more successfully accomplished”.
- Ellis (1997) defines CPH as a period during which “target-language competence in an L2 can only be achieved if learning commences before a certain age is reached. (e.g. the onset of puberty)”



Critical Period Hypothesis

- The critical period hypothesis was first proposed by Montreal neurologist Wilder Penfield and co-author Lamar Roberts in 1959. Popularized by Eric Lenneberg in 1967 with his famous book Biological Foundations of Language.
- Lenneberg proposed that brain lateralization (the longitudinal fissure that separates the brain into two distinct cerebral hemispheres) at puberty is the mechanism which closes down the brain's ability to acquire language.
- Another well-known person who supports the critical period hypothesis would be Noam Chomsky, who believes that children are born with an inherited ability to learn any human language.



Main CPH claims on L2 acquisition

- Chomsky: every child has a 'language acquisition device' or LAD which encodes the major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child's brain.
- Lenneberg: there are maturational constraints on the time a first language can be acquired. If language acquisition does not occur by puberty, some aspects of language can be learnt but full mastery cannot be achieved.



The discussion continues...

- Despite huge debate on whether CPH matters to second language acquisition, we know it matters in L1 acquisition.
- Along with CPH, there can also be extra-grammatical factors like:
 - age, motivation, anxiety, culture, learning style, resources, and societal pressures/norms/lax are also important when considering the process of second language acquisition.
 - The discussion continues to this day (though linguists tend to side with the LAD proposal)