



**BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA**

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**FACULTAD DE LENGUAS**

**LICENCIATURA EN ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

**“A Case Study Exploring the Differences Reported Between Adult and  
Child L2 Learners”**

**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Languages**

**for the Degree of**

**LICENCIATURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS**

**Presented by:**

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**Thesis Director:**

**Dr. Michael Thomas Witten**



**MAY 2015**



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**BY CHRISTIAN COZATL TEPANECATL**

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May 2015

## DEDICATIONS

I would really like to begin by thanking God for giving me life and health to carry out my purposes in life, for giving me the strength to achieve them, for giving me everything to not defect. One of them was successfully finish this degree, presenting this thesis and be able to conclude fortuitously this episode. Thanks to him and my family was able to consummate this goal. It is true that our family as we owe much in charge of guiding us since we were children to defend large sepals and cope with any endeavor that we consider and be victorious. So I want to thank my mother **Marisol** who never doubt my dreams, who she was always there anytime, for being the force behind me, the person who always helped me when something is getting bad , to be unconditional for me. To my father **Tomás** for always seek to offer me the best, to work hard for we never lack for nothing, to be demanding with me, because thanks to this requirement I got where I am. To my siblings **Michel, Erika** and **Tomás** because although most of the time we seem to be in a battle, there are moments when war ceases and join us to achieve our goals, thanks for not only helping me through this development, but by all those moments spent in this process. You all are the reason why I am here today.

Sincerely

Christian

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Realmente, me gustaría empezar agradeciendo a Dios por darme vida y salud para llevar a cabo mis propósitos en la vida, por darme la fuerza para lograrlos, por brindarme todo lo necesario para no desertar. Uno de ellos fue terminar de manera satisfactoria esta licenciatura, de presentar esta Tesis y así poder concluir de manera exitosa este episodio. Gracias a él y a mi familia fue posible consumir esta meta. Es cierto que a nuestra familia le debemos mucho, pues se encarga de guiarnos desde que somos niños para que de grandes, sepamos defendernos y salir adelante con cualquier emprendimiento que nos planteemos y salir victoriosos. Así que quiero agradecer a mi madre **Marisol** quien nunca dudó de mis sueños, quien siempre estaba ahí apoyándome en cualquier momento, por ser la fuerza que me impulsó, la persona que siempre me ayudo cuando algo se ponía mal, por ser incondicional para mí. A mi padre **Tomás** por siempre buscar ofrecerme lo mejor, por trabajar duro para que nunca nos falte nada, por ser exigente conmigo, pues gracias a esa exigencia he llegado hasta donde estoy. A mis hermanos **Michel, Erika** y **Tomás** porque aunque en la mayoría de las veces parece que estuviéramos en una batalla, hay momentos en los que la guerra cesa y nos unimos para lograr nuestros objetivos, gracias por no solo ayudarme durante este desarrollo, sino por todos esos bonitos momentos que pasamos durante el proceso. Todos ustedes son la razón de el por qué estoy hoy aquí.

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Christian

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The current research is concerned with how age affects foreign language learning. The importance of the students' age is a vital factor that intervenes in this process (Ellis, 1989). Learning a foreign language could be more or less successful depending on the maturity of the person. Age is a factor in the foreign language learning process that is sometimes not understood by course instructors and insufficient attention is often given to the age of the learner.

A second language (L2) according to Sharwood Smith (1994) stands as a cover term for any language other than the first language learned by a given learner or a group of learners a) irrespective of the type of learning environment and b) irrespective of the number of the other non-native languages possessed by the learner. Krashen (1982) maintained that adult second-language learners have at their disposal two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a *second language acquisition*, which is a “subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language” and *learning* which is a “conscious process” that results in knowing about the knowledge.

It has been suggested by Smith (1982) that the term *learning* defies precise definition because it is put to multiple uses. Learning is used to refer to the acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something, the extension and clarification of meanings of one's experience, or an organized, intentional process of testing ideas relevant to problems. In other words, it is used to describe a product, a process, or a function (Smith, 1982). In 1997, there was a project called “Age as an obstacle to learning a foreign language” where the researcher Navarrete Fuentes said that students' age comes to be a serious problem for most learners because it is seen as an obstacle to learning. The results and conclusions of this research project

supported the general belief that age is a debilitating factor in the language learning process, even though not all scholars agree that this is a notion supported by research (Ellis, 1985).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

I have observed two special cases in which age plays an important role in the learning process. An adult and a child both are learning a foreign language at a basic level, and both perceive particular strengths and weaknesses when they are learning. I have observed that the adult has more perceived difficulties than the child, yet he is also more adept at articulating the strengths that he brings to the language learning process. The child learner seems to instinctually trust his ability to learn a second language, yet also recognizes that adult learners bring more sophisticated and analytical skills to the language learning process. The question here is *“what strengths and weaknesses do they face when learning a foreign language?”*

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The current study sets out to explore the role that age plays in the foreign language learning process as perceived by participants who represent learners of different ages. More specifically, the study intends to explore the perceptions of a child participant about his beliefs and attitudes toward language learning who was eight years old at the time of data gathering. The data explores his beliefs about his perceived strengths and weaknesses as a language learner as well as his reported perceptions as to how he engages in the learning process. These perceptions are compared to an adult participant’s perceptions about the same issues surrounding the L2 learning process. This comparison sheds light on the manner in which different aged learners engage in the L2 learning process as well as how they conceptualize what it means to learn a language. It is

intended to contribute to the general field of Second Language Acquisition by providing additional data and insights into the role that age plays in the L2 learning process.

### **1.3 Research questions**

RQ1: What strengths and weaknesses does an adult learner perceive when learning an L2?

RQ2: What strengths and weaknesses does a child learner perceive when learning an L2?

RQ3: What processes does an adult learner report engaging in when learning an L2?

RQ4: What processes does a child learner report engaging in when learning an L2?

### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This topic is very important because most of the time we do not realize that age plays an important role in the learning process. A few months ago I could observe that age not only affects learning in a cognitive way, but also in a physical way. This is because of the vocal apparatus works according to age, which means that if an adult is learning a foreign language, the adult has to make different sounds than the language mother tongue. However, most of the time the learner is accustomed to make only the sounds of mother tongue and suddenly it is difficult to face the new pronunciation of the foreign language. I was able to make this observation as I was watching how an adult was doing his foreign language homework next to a child who was doing foreign language homework at the same time. I could observe the distinct problems that the two types of learners faced. This observation served as the genesis of the current study.

This project is very useful in the Facultad de Lenguas Modernas BUAP in Licenciatura en la Enseñanza del Inglés because, as its name says, *teaching* involves imparting knowledge or skills, in this case, imparting foreign language. This study could help to raise awareness that age not only affects the foreign language learning process but also any kind of learning process. The

teacher has to be conscious about planning classes. It is inadequate to create the same class for children and adults, and there are several reasons why one should not do this. It is well known that there are different styles and types of learning, but sometimes teachers do not consider these differences in regard to the students' age.

The environment of globalization that we live in creates within Mexican institutions and individuals the need to establish and promote ties of any kind with other countries whose language is not Spanish. To deal with this problem, the support of people who speak other languages is required, but in our country there is an elitist education. Most of the time, families do not have enough money to send children to school. In view of this problem, a bilingual education in public schools has been proposed. But children are not the only citizens who deserve this important opportunity; adults deserve the same, which is necessary for immediate societal advancement.

### **1.5 Definition of key words**

**Second language:** stand a cover term for any language other than the first language learned by a given learner or a group of learners. *Sharwood Smith (1994)*.

**Second language acquisition:** Subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language. *Krashen (1982)*.

**Learning:** Conscious process that results in knowing about the knowledge. *Krashen (1982)*.

**Foreign language:** The study of a language that is not spoken in the country of the student. *Krashen and Terrell (1982)*

**Age:** The period of time someone has been alive or something has existed. *Cambridge University Press 2008.*

**Child:** A boy or girl from the time of birth until he or she is an adult, or a son or daughter of any age. *Cambridge University Press 2008.*

**Adult:** A person or animal that has grown to full size and strength. *Cambridge University Press 2008.*

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

There have been many questions about the role that the age plays in language learning. The objective that this chapter has, it is to focus on the importance of the students' age. First of all, we will define what foreign language is. It contains a brief definition of foreign language. Then, we will find the characteristics of adult foreign language learning. In this section, it will review a table, which summarizes the information explained. After this, Age Factor in Foreign Language is reviewed, which leads to the subtopic of the Critical Period Hypothesis. Finally, we will work on the Neurological Processes involving The Critical Period.

### **2.1 Foreign Language Learning**

According to Ellis (1994, p12), "Foreign language learning takes place in settings where the language plays no major role in the community and is primarily learnt only in the classroom". For example, if one student who lives in France is learning English, English is the foreign language because on France English is not spoken. Krashen (1995) says that language learning refers to the conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them. But according to Belz (2005, p342) Learning a foreign language implies more than the mastery of mere grammatical rules but also of skills that contribute to their development.

### **2.2 Characteristics of adult foreign language learning**

A leading problem in the study of foreign language is determining how foreign language learning by children and adults are different from each other. Naturally, the first two obvious criteria that differentiate children from adults are age and cognitive maturity. In addition to these

two, prior linguistic knowledge, input, and affective factors also play a role in the process and outcome of foreign language learning (Krashen, 1995).

These are illustrated in a Table 2.2.1, and further discussed below.

Factors		Mother Tongue	Adult Foreign Language Learning
1. Previous linguistic knowledge		none	L1 knowledge (fully developed)
2. Input	a. timing	early exposure (birth)	late exposure (after puberty)
	b. setting	naturalistic	naturalistic and instructed
	c. mode	aural	aural and written
	d. amount	abundant & frequent	varying (in amount & frequency)
	e. quality	linguistically varied and rich, contextually appropriate	contextually restricted, less variety of structures/vocabulary, input from other non-native speakers
3.- Personality and affective factors		irrelevant	relevant
4.- Target system	a. types of errors	developmental errors	developmental and transfer errors
	b. fossilization	does not occur	typical
	c. outcome	successful & complete	variable & typically incomplete

Children have no prior linguistic knowledge; while adults start the foreign language learning process after their mother tongue is fully in place. In addition, critical differences between mother tongue and foreign language learning involve the linguistic environment (input) and, related to that, the mode of learning.

There are at least five dimensions of input that need to be considered: (a) *timing*, when exposure to input began; (b) *setting*, the context in which input is received; (c) *mode*, how input is received; (d) *amount*, how much input or frequency of input the learner is exposed to; and (e) *quality*, the contextual and structural variety and accuracy of input.

Children are exposed to the language of the environment early, soon after birth (or even *in utero*). They mostly receive aural input through interaction and conversation with caregivers and siblings, and they hear such input all day, several hours a day, every day of the week. Therefore, it is said that mother tongue acquiring children are typically exposed to rich, frequent, and abundant aural input early in life. Adult learners begin exposure to foreign language later in life, after their mother tongue has had the chance to develop completely.

First language acquisition takes place exclusively in a naturalistic context, and children do not take language lessons to learn to speak. Although foreign language learning can take place in a naturalistic context (a foreign language environment) as well, the vast majority of foreign language learning takes place in a classroom setting. Despite efforts to emulate the natural linguistic environment that surrounds mother tongue acquirers, a great deal of explicit instruction, grammar practice, and over correction- negative evidence- contributes to the learning process in adults. For some researchers, negative evidence facilitates learning, especially in cases when the L1 of the learners and the target FL differ in systematic ways and exposure to positive evidence (naturally occurring speech or written text) is not sufficient for the FL learners to take notice of and incorporate specific features of the FL (Doughty 2003; Lighbown 1998; Rusell & Spada 2006). None of this explicit instruction, correction, or grammar practice happens with FL-learning children before they go to school.

In addition to input, environment, and mode of acquisition, affective and social factors play a role in foreign language development in general. By contrast, motivation plays no role in mother tongue acquisition by children. It would be naïve to deny that babies and children have a strong desire to communicate with people in their environment, but is doubtful that such need is



sufficient motivation for rapid learning. As matter of fact, infants are very successful at communicating their basic needs when they have no words.

Children have no conscious control over their learning process, while many adult foreign language learners make a decision to learn a foreign language and for different reasons: to find a job opportunities in another country and immigrate, to go to college, to get a better job, to communicate with a foreign friend or loved one, to learn about another culture, to become a part of a group, and so on. In many ways, their conscious decisions about the *when*, *how* and *how long* language learning may determine their degree of acquisition and success with the language, although these tendencies cannot be generalized to all learners because one can also find many learners, especially in instructional settings who do not achieve high proficiency despite their best efforts.

Sometimes personality plays a role as well: some foreign language learners are shy and perfectionist, while others are outgoing and risk-takers. However, no research to date has clearly shown exactly how affective and social variables affect the acquisition of specific grammatical areas. Despite differences in experience and affective reasons for learning a language, L1 and FL learners must construct a grammatical system based on the input they receive.

### **2.3 The Age Factor in Foreign Language**

Age has received considerable attention from sociolinguistics. There is a widely-held lay belief than younger foreign language learners do better than older learners. This idea is supported by *the critical period hypothesis*, according to which there is a fixed span of years during which language learning can take place naturally and effortlessly, and after which it is not possible to be completely successful. Despite divergent opinions to date as to whether a critical period exists in

adult foreign language learning as well, the undeniable fact is that given ample input and linguistics opportunities to use the language, late onset of acquisition is a high predictor of fossilization, even if the effects are not as dramatic and irreversible as in first language acquisition.

Early onset predicts complete foreign language learning. The typical characterization of the age effect in foreign language learning is a negative correlation and linear function, as schematized in Figure 2.3.1

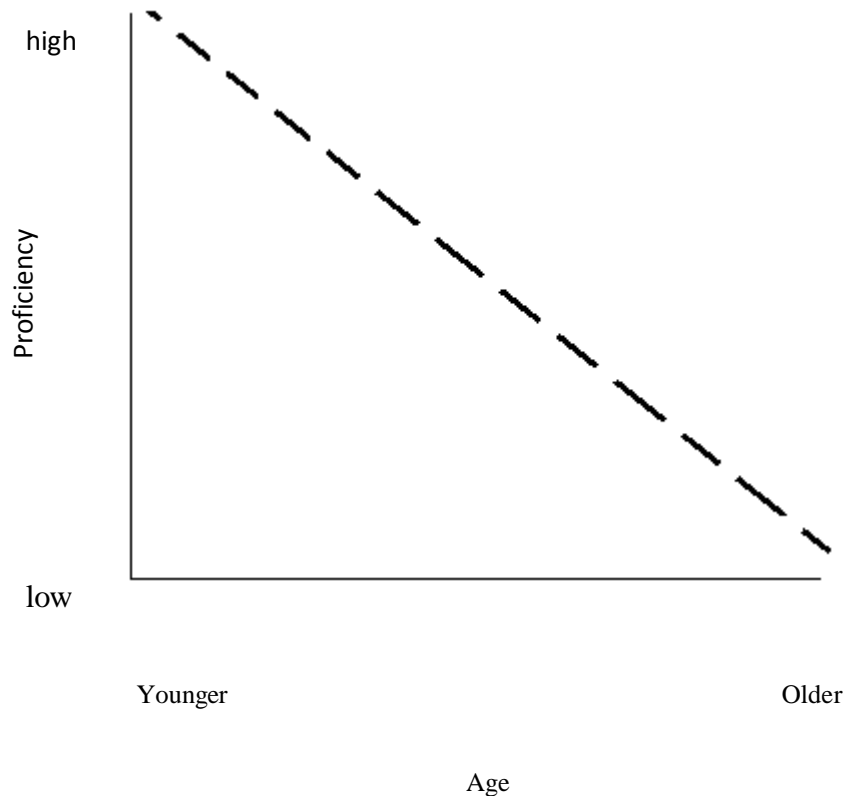


Figure 2.3 Typical shape of negative correlational between age and proficiency for FL

See : Montrul, S. (2008)

Although the graph is a mere approximation, it shows that of all FL-learning populations, young adoptees attain native-like command of the FL as adults, and adults are less likely to attain

full grammatical competence (proficiency) in the FL. If age is a crucial for acquisition, it seems to play a significant role in language loss as well.

However, recent articles reviewing past research in this area come to very different conclusions about the neural substrate for L1 and FL learning (Abutalebi, Cappa & Perani 2001, 2005; Abutalebi & Green 2007). For example, Abutalebi (2005, p 497) concludes that attained FL proficiency, and perhaps FL exposure, are more important than the age of FL learning as a determinant of the cerebral representation of language in bilinguals: very proficient FL speakers appear to engage the same neural network subserving the L1 within the dedicated language areas. In another recent view, Abutalebi and Green (2007, p. 242) conclude “ *Neuroimaging data, we argue, support the notion that the neural representation of a second language converges with the representation of that language learned as a first language*”.

As Ellis (1994) has pointed out, children generally enjoy an advantage over adults in FL learning because of their age, particularly in pronunciation. However, this will only become evident after substantial exposure to the FL. In short term, adults may learn faster. The evidence relating to the existence of a critical period for FL learning, after which full competence is not possible, is mixed, with no definite conclusion possible. Children and adults manifest similar processes of learning.

## **2.4 The critical period Hypothesis**

According to Singleton (2004) the critical period is the term used in biology to refer to a limited phase in the development of an organism during which a particular activity or competency must be acquired if it is to be incorporated into the behavior of that organism. If we are to use the term “*critical period*” in relation to language acquisition, we have presumably to

demonstrate that the language acquisition maturational constraints we are positing are in line with the above criteria.

If language acquisition in human beings is rigidly constrained by the limits of a critical period of the above kind, the implications is that L1 development begins only at the onset of this period, and that unless it gets under way during the period in question, it will not happen at all. A further implication may be that even if L1 development begins within the critical period it does not continue beyond the end of that period.

As Ellis (1994) said, that critical period states that there is a period during which learners can acquire an FL easily and achieve native speaker competence, but that after this period FL learning becomes more difficult and is rarely entirely successful. Researchers differ over when this critical period comes to an end. Kirby and Hurford (1997) showed that the critical period can be made to vary independently of puberty, given various settings of language size and the average rate at which it is acquired.

Birdson (1999) argued that when discussing the critical period implicates some aspects of the central nervous system (CNS) during the course of development. More specifically, CPs involve an interaction between some innately given part of the CPS and input from the periphery. For example, although the development of visual cognition in primates involves brain mechanisms laid down during the prenatal genesis of the neural architecture (Rakic, 1991) as well as exposure to optic stimuli, that exposure must take place within a rather narrow slice of time, a critical period (Marler, 1991). This connection between innate structure and peripheral stimulus is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition on CPs. CPs appear only where development of the mature state depends on a significant contribution of both the relevant neural

architecture and peripheral exposure (Birdson, 1999). Further, CPs involve so-called *canalized* behaviors, behaviors that, according to Brauth, Hall, and Dooling (1991) are critical for species identification and survival.

Formulated in different ways by different theoretical approaches to foreign language learning, the critical period position posits that differential outcomes in L1 and FL ultimate attainment are due to a maturationally determined critical period (Long 2007). A typical strict interpretation of the critical period hypothesis for FL learning implies that there is, as Lee and Schachter (1997) put it a “window of opportunity” for FL language learning. Successful and complete FL learning is possible only during the critical period and impossible after its closure. The implication here, though not always explicitly recognized by these researchers, is that there should be a dramatic decline, a complete breakdown, in linguistic ability at a specific cut-off age. Unfortunately, the cut- off age ranges in the literature from as young as 2 years of age for phonology to up 13 years of age for morphosyntax.

Montrul (2008) maintained critical/sensitive period are two kinds. On the one hand, there are those that seek to establish a correlational between age of onset of foreign language learning with degree of proficiency in language. On the other hand, there are studies that focus on very advanced FL learners or near-native speakers assumed to be at endstate who began acquisition of the FL after puberty, without testing FL learners with earlier ages of arrival. The goal of this approach is to show that no non-native speaker who started acquiring the FL late can achieve the level of linguistic mastery of a native speaker.

## 2.5 Neurological Processes involving Critical Period

A CP is often characterized as a period of (relative) plasticity, during which there is a possibility of change in the relevant domain. The term *plasticity* can be a misleading, however, or at least unenlightening metaphorical; the brain, after all, is not a muscle that gets stiffer with age. As Birdsong (1999) said plasticity means the ability of neurons to make new connections, and varied connections depending on the stimulus. In this sense, plastic is opposed to *hardwired*. Hardwired connections are made in accordance with genetically determined instructions, largely or totally without reference to the periphery. Learning, including of course the learning of some particular language, is a function of cortical plasticity in this sense: the ability of cortical neurons in the relevant cognitive area to form new connections based on peripheral stimuli.

However, connections once made are not necessarily permanent, and indeed one fundamental aspect of growth and development in the organism is the severing of connections (Thompson, 1993). To maintain a connection it is necessary that the connected neurons fire simultaneously; as the slogan has it, “Neurons wire together if they fire together” (Singer, 1995). Thus, one aspect of a CP phenomenon remains somewhat elusive, but the available laboratory evidence suggests the twin processes of long-term potentiation (LTP) and long-term depression (LTD)- the former an activity-dependent change resulting in increased synaptic efficiency and the latter an activity –dependent change resulting in decreased efficiency.

Identified in a number of brain regions, LTP- apparently the more studied of the two- appears to be modulated especially by the presence of receptor molecules known as N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA), which are located in dendritic membrane near sites of interneural communication (see e.g., Collingridge & Watkins, 1994; Haas & Buzsaki, 1998).

Ignoring many details the general picture seems to be that particular arrays of neutrally transmitted stimuli, if present in sufficient quantity, because NMDA receptors become active, and the receptors in turn, allow calcium to flow through the neural membrane to result, ultimately, in increased synaptic efficiency. Crucially, when the function of NMDA is blocked, the relevant neurons respond to stimulation, but LTP does not develop.

More generally, CP-relevant brain regions require a coordination of particular qualities and quantities of peripheral activity (stimuli) with subneural components that include the NMDA mechanism to result in a sustained response pattern like LTP-LTD. Just as important, it appears that NMDA is involved in neural development in response to new information, but not in the subsequent expression or retrieval of that information (Morrison & Davis, 1994). We are too sketchy, no doubt, on the details of neural mechanisms; but the fact is that it is not yet even known whether LTP-LTD occurs at all in natural (nonlaboratory) settings during learning, or how such laboratory-induced changes in neural function or morphology affect behavior. Indeed, although a role for NMDA has been isolated in cases of filial imprinting (for discussion, see Morris & Davis, 1994), it is nonetheless not yet evident that LTP participates in acquisitional processes that go beyond standard cases of long-term memory storage.

In the somatosensory cortex of rats, the critical period for reorganization of the barrel cells in response to haptic stimulation from the vibrissae is essentially coterminous with the period when LTP can be induced in those cells (Crair & Malenka, 1995). Several other conclusions seem less speculative. First and most broadly, one expects the CP phenomenon only where a confluence of neural architecture and random exposure to peripheral stimuli of the relevant general type conspire to form the mature state. Second, the mature state, so developed, remains stable in response to stimuli; this stable might be linked to NMDA- induced LTP or

some related process. Finally, if crucial development components- especially either stimulation from the periphery or possible NMDA-type mechanism-are missing or blocked during the crucial time window (CP), then the usual stable state will never develop. In the case of missing peripheral stimulation, one would find neural regions that are unorganized and unspecific, an architecture in which the relevant dendritic pathways for neural intercommunication remain significantly redundant.



## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, some information about the study subjects and study instruments for this investigation are presented in order to reach the answers of the research questions. The instruments and the research method, how data was collected will be described. It is important to mention that the participants do not have a sufficient proficiency in the foreign language to engage with the instruments in their respective L2's, and for that reason the instrument is draw up in Spanish, the mother tongue of both participants.

### **3.1 Subjects/ Participants**

This study will focus on an adult of thirty-nine years old and a child of eight years old. The adult needs the foreign language for communicative purposes in his work. This person is learning in a mixed gender group, which means that he studies with males and females. The majority of the group is in a middle socioeconomic class range, and they are considered adults. Interestingly, their class schedule varies depending on the shift of the worker, so their teachers are constantly changing. On the other hand, the child is learning a foreign language as a mandatory subject in school. The child is in a mixed gender group as well, and most of his classmates are in the same range of age. They are also in a middle socioeconomic class range.

Subject# :	1
Name:	Tomas Cozatl Mozo
Age:	39
Level of FL :	Basic
Gender:	Male

Subject# :	2
Name:	Tomas Gael Cozatl Tepanecatl
Age:	8
Level of FL :	Basic
Gender:	Male

### **3.2 Method**

This research will use the qualitative method because “qualitative research focuses on describing, understanding, and clarifying a human experience...” (Polkinghorne, 2005). This is relevant to this project because it intends to understand the experience that the participants are going through in their learning process. This will provide a deeper understanding of how they are living their experience during the L2 acquisition process.

### **3.3 Instruments**

The instrument that is used to collect data from the participants is a guided interview, which consisted of a list of previously formulated interview questions that was meant to guide the data collection process. According to Kvale (1996), “An interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 37) . The interview is meant to explore the attitudes and perceptions of the participants.

The interview is considered “open”, because there is a list of previously formulated questions as mentioned above: however, not all the questions will be used. The interview will begin with some basic questions to explore and contextualize the learning experiences of the participant, and depending on the answers, questions will be selected from the interview format to explore relevant issues. It is important to mention that the interview is in oral format and in the mother tongue of the participants in order to gather authentic and genuine data from the participants, allowing them to fully engage in the interview process.

The first section of the instrument consists of knowing: the name, the age, and the level of the foreign language, which were asking to the participants to concentrate on the correct

information for this study, for example the point “Age” is a crucial and indispensable to classify the participants. The issue needs participants of different ages: a young learner and an adult learner.

- 1) ¿Cuál es su nombre? / ¿Cómo se llamas?
- 2) ¿Cuántos años tiene? / ¿Qué edad tiene?
- 3) ¿Cuál es el nivel del idioma que está aprendiendo?

As mentioned before, there is a question bank. To see the question bank see Appendix A. In this Appendix, a list with the possible questions for both participants is presented.

To see the transcription of the child interview see appendix B and for the adult interview see appendix C. In this part, the real interview (questions and answers that emerged) is described.

This instrument gives to the study an overview for the differences and similarities between the ages.

### **3.4 PROCEDURE**

The instrument was applied on April 21, 2014 in Puebla, Pue. The participants were chosen for proximity and ease of conducting research. The child participant was more difficult to interview because his ideas were not clear. He was nervous when he was answering. The adult participant was clearer with his answers. He was sure about it. The specific places where the instrument was applied were in their homes, because there, they felt comfortable without any pressure.

The procedure to apply the instrument was, first of all, asking participants personal information (name, age and gender) then the level of the language. After that, they were asked if they could answer an interview. Both accepted to respond without objections. The average time for answering the interview was 5 minutes to 7 minutes. The interview was oral and recorded. During the examination, the researcher asked to the participants if they had questions or doubts with the survey's instructions but there were no complications about it.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In this chapter, the data that was collected for the current study is analyzed and presented. The two participants' interview responses are categorized into distinct concepts, notions and attitudes that they hold towards learning a language as well as the foreign language that they are learning. First, the adult learner's interview data is presented and discussed. This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the child learner's interview data. Finally, a comparison of the two participants' responses is presented as well as a final discussion of all the data. Each participant's data is first presented in a summary table. These tables are complemented with more detailed discussions of the significance of the data.

### 4.1 Analysis of Adult Learner's Interview Data

The following table (see table 4.1 below) is a summary of the adult participant's responses to the interview questions. The responses were analyzed and divided into distinct categories, which are discussed further below.

<b>Adult Participant-Categorizations</b>					
Attitudes		Conceptions about language and language learning	Motivational aspects	Conceptions about language and language learning	
Recognizing the new demands of society and globalization	Justifying limitations	Recognizing the differences between L1 and L2 (L1 as a tool)	Internal and Instrumental motivations	How languages are learned	Advantages of the child when learning a language
<i>"¿Ah pos si! De haber sabido que le iban a pedir a uno otro idioma pues desde chamacos le hubiera echado ganas...pero ahí también van los chances... antes no se tenía tanta facilidad....ahora donde sea se puede</i>	<i>como uno no está acostumbrado escuchar el idioma pues se complica</i>	<i>luego que la gramática no se parece nada a la del español (using L1 as a tool to learn L2?)</i>	<i>Si, mucho (likes German)</i>	<i>Como todo, con la práctica y siendo constante</i>	<i>"¿Hijole!... pues es que el niño esta fresquesito..."</i>

<i>aprender....hasta en el internet.”</i>					
	<i>pero pues por el trabajo que te absorbe no se puede o no rindes lo mismo.</i>		<i>pero ni modo en la chamba lo piden</i>	<i>Pero fijate que al verle el lado bueno pues como ya tienes experiencia en ciertas cosas pues como que agarras más seguridad y confianza.”</i>	<i>aprenden de volada...nada más les dices algo y se lo aprenden</i>
	<i>Pues porque ya tienes otras cosas en que enfocarte, los problemas, el estilo de vida...</i>				<i>ellos nada más se dedican a estudiar</i>
	<i>uno tiene más cosas en que enfocarse</i>				

**Table 4.1**

As table 4.1 above shows, the interview data from the current study was analyzed through a categorization process. The actual words of the adult participant were taken to represent more general categories that expressed different attitudes, motivational aspects, and conceptions about language and language learning. These three general categories were further categorized into six distinct subcategories. The category of ‘attitudes’ was divided into two subcategories that included: ‘Recognizing the new demands of society and globalization’ and ‘justifying limitations’. The category of ‘motivational aspects’ had only one subcategory, which was: ‘internal and instrumental motivation’. Finally, the category of ‘conceptions about language and language learning’ was divided into three subcategories that included: ‘Recognizing the differences between L1 and L2 (L1 as a tool)’, ‘How languages are learned’ and ‘Advantages of the child when learning a language’.

#### 4.1.1 Discussion of Adult Learner's Interview Data

The adult participant maintained *“Si, mucho... como uno no está acostumbrado escuchar el idioma pues se complica, luego que la gramática no se parece nada a la del español....pero ni modo en la chamba lo piden.”* Here the participant wanted to show provide a justification for some of the challenges that he faces when learning an L2. He adopts several strategies to justify the fact that the L2 acquisition process is challenging for him. First, he mentions the fact that the adult learner is not accustomed to the phonetic and phonological sounds and rhythms of the L2. He also mentions the grammatical and syntactical differences between his L1 (Spanish) and his L2 (German). Finally, we points out that he is not actually intrinsically motivated to learn the L2 in question. He is obligated to learn German because of his work context, making his motivation type, instrumental.

The man used *“Como todo, con la práctica y siendo constante pero pues por el trabajo que te absorbe no se puede o no rindes lo mismo.”* In this part the learner is trying to solve his own difficulties and exposing in general the adult learner's cases. The solution that he proposes is consistency and dedication to practicing the L2. However, there are additional challenges that he feels are difficult to overcome. Time seems to be an overriding issue for this learner as he feels 'absorbed' by his work, which limits his performance.

The participant used expressions in which he shows opposite ideas or opinions, for example he said *“Pues porque ya tienes otras cosas en que enfocarte, los problemas, el estilo de vida.... Pero fíjate que al verle el lado bueno pues como ya tienes experiencia en ciertas cosas pues como que agarras más seguridad y confianza.”* Here the participant begins by highlighting the difficulties and obstacles that he must overcome. These included providing an acceptable



'lifestyle' for himself and his family, which obviously relates back to issues of time that can be dedicated to the L2 acquisition process. He also mentions that 'personal problems' become obstacles that debilitate one's ability to learn the L2. However, the participant does see a positive view towards his 'adult status' as a language learner. He seems to recognize that his previous experiences in life, in some ways, have prepared him to be a better language learner than someone who has less life experience. He seems to be particularly referring to his knowledge of Spanish as an L1 and the way that it can serve as a tool in the L2 acquisition process. This appeal to experience can be seen quite saliently in the following data: "*pues sí..... Uno ya ha vivido más ya entiende más...ya tiene más noción de las cosas...*" In this data, we see that the adult places great value on his previous life experience, which he sees as an important advantage for him that brings facilities to learn anything.

The participant continues to comment on the advantages that children have over adults when learning an L2, saying, "*¡Hijole!.... pues es que el niño esta fresquesito...aprenden de volada...nada más les dices algo y se lo aprenden...uno tiene más cosas en que enfocarse y pues ellos nada más se dedican a estudiar.*" In this part, he is recognizing the abilities that the young learner has. The adult learner seems to have an instinctive awareness of the difference between L2 acquisition and L2 learning. When he says, "*nada más les dices algo y se lo aprenden*", it is a comment on the manner in which children have an more adept ability in acquiring the language without conscious effort. The adult on the other hand must 'learn' the language. We previously saw his comments on this necessity in the previous paragraph when the adult commented on his ability to use prior knowledge and experiences with the L1 (in this case Spanish) to facilitate the 'learning' process of an L2. This belief became clear when the adult said, "*pues sí..... Uno ya ha vivido más ya entiende más...ya tiene más noción de las cosas...*".

Finally, the adult learner expresses an increased awareness of recognizing the new demands of society and globalization as he says, “*¡Ah pos si! De haber sabido que le iban a pedir a uno otro idioma pues desde chamacos le hubiera echado ganas...pero ahí también van los chances... antes no se tenía tanta facilidad....ahora donde sea se puede aprender....hasta en el internet.*” With this expression he is justifying himself because in his childhood he didn’t have the same opportunities than the children have nowadays, yet he also recognizes concrete changes in the globalized society. The demands of modern society have changed, and the need to speak an L2 is now a non-negotiable requirement in the workforce. This awareness has led him to L2 classes and provided him with instrumental motivation to learn, yet he cannot resist the urge to comment on the disadvantage that people of his generation faced in comparison to the young people of the modern world. While he did have opportunities to learn, it was doubtlessly traditional learning with limited resources in a different time in Mexican history. Now, the learners have unlimited resources in a digital society.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Child Learner’s Interview Data

The following table (see table 4.2 below) is a summary of the child participant’s responses to the interview questions. The responses were analyzed and divided into distinct categories, which are discussed further below.

Child Participant-Categorizations						
Motivational aspects		Conceptions about language and language learning				
Internal motivation	External motivation	Self-evaluation of his learning (metacognition)	Problem solving strategies	Recognizing limitations of child L2 learners	Recognizing the advantages of child L2 learners	Conception toward the nature of the language
pues me gusta mucho el inglés	<i>siempre saco diez</i>	<i>luego me equivoco cuando escribo y los verbos</i>	<i>pues estudio... bueno no</i>	<i>mmm...pues es que luego los grandes</i>	<i>los niños.</i>	está bien fácil

			<i>me gusta estudiar.. Nada más pongo más atención.</i>	<i>entienden cosas más difíciles...</i>		
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**Table 4.2**

As table 4.2 above shows, the interview data from the current study was analyzed through a categorization process. The actual words of the child participant were taken to represent more general categories that expressed different ‘motivational aspects’, and ‘conceptions about language and language learning’. These two general categories were further categorized into seven distinct subcategories. The category of ‘motivational aspects’ had two subcategories, which were: ‘internal and external motivation’. Finally, the category of ‘conceptions about language and language learning’ was divided into five subcategories that included: ‘self-evaluation of his learning (metacognition)’, ‘problem solving strategies’, ‘Recognizing limitations of child L2 learners’, ‘Recognizing the advantages of child L2 learners’, ‘conception toward the nature of the language’.

#### **4.2.1 Discussion of Child Learner’s Interview Data**

The first comments that we hear from the child learner refer to his different types of motivation. He first reaction during the interview is to express his affinity for the English language as he says, “*pues me gusta mucho el inglés.*” This comment is revealing and important. The child learner could have just as easily said, “no me gusta el inglés” and we would have a very different situation at hand. However, his affirmation about actually liking English reveals that he has ‘internal motivation’ which serves as a catalyst for positive learning and positive learning experiences. This internal motivation is probably at least partially responsible for the resulting external motivation that he also reports. The child learner claims, “siempre saco diez”, which is a reference to his grades in the English class. The child obviously feels good about

getting superior grades in his English class, which further inspires him to excel at learning the English language. However, there must be a dual relationship between his internal and external motivation since it is highly unlikely that he could ‘sacar un diez’ in English if he did not enjoy learning the language regardless of his school notes.

The participant continues during the interview by expressing various beliefs and attitudes that he holds towards his conceptions about language and language learning. The child learner begins by saying, “mmm....eh...luego me equivoco cuando escribo y los verbos ... y .... Creo que ya.” This comment actually demonstrates that the child learner has developed some metacognitive strategies, which are considered the most advanced and useful type of learning strategy. In this case, the child shows the ability to self-evaluate his L2 learning process. Particularly, he has begun to identify areas of the language where he has opportunities for improvement. This self-evaluation process is obviously not very sophisticated. We see that his self-evaluation process is still rudimentary as he only identifies two weaknesses in his learning process, “me equivoco cuando escribo y los verbos ... y .... Creo que ya.” Nevertheless, for a seven year old child, any trace of metacognitive strategies being employed is impressive.

The child L2 learner continues to provide insight into his conceptions toward the nature of language and language learning when comments on his problem solving strategies and how he overcomes challenges in the L2 acquisition process. The child participant claims that “*pues estudio... bueno no me gusta estudiar... Nada más pongo más atención.*” With this comment we see that the child is not particularly fond of engaging with explicit cognitive strategies in the L2 learning process as he does not like to spend time studying. He prefers to simply ‘pay closer attention’ to what is going on in the class. This seems like a logical solution to a real problem that the child participant faces. He has already reported an affinity for the language. Furthermore, he

feels that he acquires the language easily. As such, he relies more on ‘acquisition processes’ than ‘learning processes’. Consequently, he generally rejects the notion of ‘studying’ and prefers to enhance his chances of ‘acquiring’ the language by simply ‘paying more attention’ during class as he faces challenges.

Later the child participant explicitly recognizes the ‘limitations of child L2 learners’ as compared to their adult counterparts. The child reports that “*mmm...pues es que luego los grandes entienden cosas más difíciles...*” In this part, the boy is assuming that potential that an adult has in conscious learning is more developed than that of a child. It is a comment on the ability to employ cognitive strategies in the learning process, which would include skills such as analyzing and categorizing aspects of the language such as grammar and vocabulary. Here, the child participant expresses the view that adults have certain advantages in the L2 learning process, which is a view that was also expressed by the adult participant in the previous section. It seems that both participants see the value of cognitive strategies in the L2 process, yet the child participant never actually expresses his age as an advantage. It seems that only the adult participant can see youth as an advantage when acquiring an L2, while the child participant is unaware of this advantage.

Interestingly, the child does provide a contradiction in his beliefs about the inherent advantages and disadvantages that child and adult learners have when in the L2 acquisition process. The research asked the question: “*¿Crees que tienes las mismas habilidades que un adulto? Osea la pronunciacion, la memoria...?*” The child participant hesitated briefly and answered, “*eh...sí...*” With this brief phrase the boy contradicts his previous point of view that adults do hold a distinct advantage over children in regards to cognitive strategies. Such contradictions are not at all uncommon in these types of interviews. We can simply assume that

the child is actually of two minds about the issue. On the one hand, he does recognize that with age comes more sophisticated understanding of certain aspects of language learning. On the other hand, he doesn't think that adults are necessarily better language learners than children. He simply cannot make explicit why children also hold certain advantages over adults in the L2 acquisition process. This belief is made quite clear; however, as the child participant answers the final interview question. The researcher asks: "*entonces para ti ¿quién aprende más fácil, los niños o los adultos?*" to which the child participant answers quite decisively, "*los niños.*", showing an attitude of superiority and security over the adult learner.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the results of the data analysis process that the current investigation used in order to address the research questions presented in Chapter I. The process involved a process of data elicitation, organization categorization and interpretation. Having presented the results as well as a discussion of these findings, the work will now present the conclusions of the study in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter presents the conclusions obtained about this research and the answers the research questions developed in Chapter 1. Also, the point of view and the interpretations made through the entire investigation are presented. Furthermore, in these chapter conclusions, limitations, and recommendations (Further research and Pedagogical Implications) are discussed.

### **5.1 General Conclusion and Summary of Key Findings**

As a general conclusion about the factors that intervene in the language learning process, many factors were identified during the interview process that affects L2 acquisition. The adult participant expressed distinct attitudes toward learning an L2 that were positive and negative. While he recognizes the demands of a globalized society and the need to speak more than one language in professional contexts, he also recognizes the limitations that he faces in his local context which make L2 learning particularly challenging for adults. The adult language learner also has very defined ideas about what it means to learn a language and seemed to engage in analyzing language as he compared and contrasted characteristics of his L1 and the L2. This cognitive element of his learning process utilized the L1 as a tool in learning the L2. The adult learner also distinguished himself from the child learner in regards to the type of motivation that he had in the learning process. The adult learner was primarily driven by instrumental motivational factors, seeing the L2 as a road to increased opportunity in the professional environment. Finally, the Adult learner seemed to recognize that children seem to pick up an L2 in a more natural manner, giving them certain advantages over adults.

On the other hand, the child learner displayed two types of motivation in the L2 learning process, internal and external motivational factors. The child learner also seemed adept at self-

evaluating his L2 learning processes. This is interesting since metacognitive activity such as self-evaluation is a domain that is usually thought to be occupied primarily by adult learners. The Child learner also engaged in various types of problem solving strategies, seeming to recognize his own strengths and weaknesses in the L2 learning process. Much like the adult learner, the child seemed to recognize his own limitations and the parts of language learning that are usually mastered more easily by adults. On the other hand, he also recognized the areas of language learning that are usually mastered more easily by children, which seems to show that he is quite aware of his own strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the child participants conception of the English language is quite unsophisticated, yet very positive as he simply states: 'English is easy'. This is contrasted to the adult who found his L2 (German) extremely complex.

## **5.2 Implications**

As a future English Teacher, I really would like to work with adults. I learnt a lot from them, especially from the adult participant. His answers gave me insights about how a teacher should perform their professional duties. As the data demonstrated, the age of the participant determines many factors in their learning process. These factors are complicated and may include issues that include their attitude toward learning a language, the manner in which they conceptualize the language itself, the manner in which they conceptualize language learning in general and what it means to be a language learner. Teachers should keep all of these complex issues in mind as they prepare to teach a course. These issues affect all aspects of teacher preparation ranging from materials development to choices in teaching methodologies. If teachers are not aware of the issues that are associated with the age of the learner, they will surely not be as prepared as they could be as teaching professionals.



### **5.3 Limitations**

When I started to apply my first instrument, it did not work. I designed an ambitious questionnaire and obviously the child could not answer the questions. Talking about the child, I faced limitations because he didn't have the level to express what he really wanted to express. It was so difficult to adapt the same questions for both participants. Furthermore, the limited number of participants was also a limitation for the study. It would be desirable to repeat this interviewing process with more adult participants and more child participants in order to have a larger data set in which we could compare their interview responses. Finally, a longer and more sophisticated interview tool would be desirable. However, as mentioned above, it is a challenge to interview child participants who lack the verbal skills to express themselves clearly and accurately about a topic as sophisticated and abstract as language learning. Nevertheless, an instrument which could gather more detailed data would still be desirable.

### **5.4 Further Research**

This study could be well complemented by more researchers engaging in the difficult process of rigorously interviewing child and adult L2 learners in order to add to the existing body of information that the field already has accumulated. As more data is assimilated into the existing body, more insights will be uncovered and a greater understanding of L2 learning in adults and children will emerge.

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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

Possible questions to ask

- 1) ¿Cuál es su nombre? / ¿Cómo se llamas?
- 2) ¿Cuántos años tiene? / ¿Qué edad tiene?
- 3) ¿Cuál es el nivel del idioma que está aprendiendo?
- 4) ¿Se le hace difícil? / ¿Se le dificulta?
- 5) ¿Por qué le es difícil?
- 6) ¿Que se le dificulta?
- 7) ¿Que problemas tienes cuando aprendes algo nuevo?
- 8) ¿Se le dificulta: gramática, pronunciación, escritura o algo más?
- 9) ¿Que haría para solucionar esos problemas? (Especificar, dar ejemplos)
- 10) ¿Cree que la experiencia juega un papel importante en el aprendizaje? ¿Por qué?
- 11) ¿Cree que usted (niño) aprende más rápido que un adulto? ¿Por qué?
- 12) ¿Cree que como adulto aprende mejor que un niño?
- 13) ¿Cree que como niño aprende mejor que un adulto?
- 14) ¿Qué problemas tiene (adulto) cuando aprende un idioma extranjero?
- 15) ¿Qué problemas tiene (niño) cuando aprende un idioma extranjero?
- 16) ¿Cree tener las mismas habilidades para aprender que un niño?
- 17) ¿Cree tener las mismas habilidades para aprender que un adulto?
- 18) ¿Cree que si tuviera más edad sería más fácil aprender?
- 19) ¿Cree que si tuviera menos edad sería más fácil aprender?

## APPENDIX B

### Child Interview

- ❖ Interviewer: Hola, buenas tardes... Yo soy Christian Cozatl y cómo te había dicho te voy a hacer una entrevista... ¿Estás de acuerdo?

Child : aja...

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Cómo te llamas?

Child: mm... Tomas...

- ❖ Interviewer: Tomas... ¿Qué?

Child: Tomas Gael Cozatl Tepanecatl

- ❖ Interviewer: ah...ok Tomas... ¿Cómo estás? ¿Cómo te sientes?

Child: mmm ...bien...

- ❖ Interviewer: ¡Me da mucho gusto!... ¿Podemos comenzar con la entrevista?

Child: sí, pero ¿De qué me dijiste que era?

❖ Interviewer: de lo que te gusta de inglés, de lo que se te hace difícil ...mm fácil... que te gusta y que no te gusta...

Child: ah... Si es cierto...pues me gusta mucho el inglés... está bien fácil siempre saco diez pregúntale a mi mamá...

❖ Interviewer: ¡Oh muy bien! ¿Entonces eres muy inteligente o solo en inglés porque te gusta?...

Child: mmm es que... es que inglés me gusta

❖ Interviewer: ¡Órale!...oye, y ¿Sabes en qué nivel estas?

Child: en el uno

❖ Interviewer: ¡Oh qué bien! Cuando aprendes un idioma extranjero ósea inglés ¿Qué se te hace difícil?

Child: mmm...eh...luego me equivoco cuando escribo y los verbos ... y ... Creo que ya.

❖ Interviewer: ¿Entonces, como resuelves tus errores? ¿Qué haces para ya no equivocarte?

Child: pues estudio... bueno no me gusta estudiar... Nada más pongo más atención.

❖ Interviewer: ¿Crees que si fueras más grande sería más fácil aprender?

Child: mmm...pues es que luego los grandes entienden cosas más difíciles...

❖ Interviewer: ¿Crees que tienes las mismas habilidades que un adulto? Ósea la pronunciación, la memoria...

Child: Eh...sí....

❖ Interviewer: Entonces para ti ¿Quién aprende más fácil, los niños o los adultos?

Child: Los niños.

❖ Interviewer: Muchas gracias Tomas, eso es todo, sígueme echando ganas en inglés sale....

Child: Sí de nada...

## APPENDIX C

### Adult Interview

- ❖ Interviewer: Buenas tardes, mi nombre es Christian Cozatl y estoy aquí para realizar la entrevista que habíamos acordado.

Adult: Buenas tardes, ¡si claro!

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Cuál es su nombre?

Adult: Tomas Cozatl Mozo

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Qué edad tiene?

Adult: 40 años

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Qué nivel de su lengua extranjera está cursando?

Adult: ...es para Niveau A1/1 le llaman...

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Se le dificulta aprender el idioma?

Adult: Sí, mucho... como uno no está acostumbrado escuchar el idioma pues se complica, luego que la gramática no se parece nada a la del español...pero ni modo en la chamba lo piden.

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Cómo cree usted solucionar esos problemitas que se le dificultan en el idioma?

Adult: Como todo, con la práctica y siendo constante pero pues por el trabajo que te absorbe no se puede o no rindes lo mismo.

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Por qué piensa que no se puede o que no rinde lo mismo al enfrentar sus dificultades?

Adult: Pues porque ya tienes otras cosas en que enfocarte, los problemas, el estilo de vida... Pero fíjate que al verle el lado bueno pues como ya tienes experiencia en ciertas cosas pues como que agarras más seguridad y confianza.

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Cree que la experiencia juega un papel importante en el aprendizaje? ¿Por qué?

Adult: Pues sí... Uno ya ha vivido más ya entiende más... ya tiene más noción de las cosas...

- ❖ Interviewer: Entonces, ¿Cree que como adulto aprende mejor que un niño?

Adult: ¡Hijole!... pues es que el niño esta fresquesito... aprenden de volada... nada más les dices algo y se lo aprenden... uno tiene más cosas en que enfocarse y pues ellos nada más se dedican a estudiar.

- ❖ Interviewer: ¿Cree que si tuviera menos edad sería más fácil aprender?

Adult: ¡Ah pos sí! De haber sabido que le iban a pedir a uno otro idioma pues desde chamacos le hubiera echado ganas... pero ahí también van los chances... antes no se tenía tanta facilidad... ahora donde sea se puede aprender... hasta en el internet.



❖ Interviewer: Bueno pues...con esto concluimos la entrevista. Muchas gracias por su apoyo.

Adult: Al contrario, espero que haya servido de algo...

❖ Interviewer: Bastante, gracias...