

NOTES

¹ A full description of the Virtual Picture Album and available materials can be found at the VPA website:

<http://carla.acad.umn.edu/VPA/VPA.html>

² These exercises were designed for a first-year course based on the textbook *Learning Irish* (Ó Siadhail 1980); thus, for example, the vocabulary and grammar I used in the first group of exercises corresponds to those found in the first 4-5 lessons in the text. The exercises could easily be adapted to accommodate a different textbook, though, or students at a different level. The complete set of sample exercises for Irish can be seen at

<http://carla.acad.umn.edu/VPA/Irish/exercises.html>.

³ Teachers who don't have access to a computer lab could use copies of the exercises or pictures printed out in advance, although the quality of the printed photographs may not be as good.

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Reviews

Ron Crow, *St. Patrick's Irish Primer, Book 1: Sanctus Patricius*, Carroll, Ohio, 1997.

Available from Ron Crow, Irish Home Tutor,
 3990 Ravensport Road, Carroll, Ohio 43112.
 \$15.99 for primer only. For all four books and cassettes \$249.95.
 On installment plan, \$50.00 for first book and cassette and \$70.00
 later for books and cassettes 2, 3, and 4.

This is the first of four books in a series and each one is accompanied by a cassette. The text is handsomely printed and each lesson begins with a reading or story followed by sections on vocabulary, grammar, and spelling together with aids to pronunciation. Of course, with the cassette, pronunciation is stressed.

There are ten readings in this book and all are attractively presented. The first reading is rather short, but readings get longer from lesson to lesson. The readings are given in large type with very generous margins and on the same pages with the readings there are drawings of ancient art or famous sites. St. Patrick is the subject of the lessons and each story is told by Maol Phádraig, a fictional follower of the saint. Ron Crow reads each lesson on the cassette and then comments on the text. He also introduces some simple sentences and these are repeated in subsequent lessons. In addition, he asks questions of the student and, after a pause, gives the correct answers. He then gives instructions on how to study.

In the book, each lesson is followed by questions on vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation. The learner is told to check his answers in the Answer Key in the back of the book. Translations from English into Irish and Irish into English are given in the Answer Key.

Each lesson ends with a paragraph in English on Irish geography, tradition, and language. This provides an interesting break from the hard work of memorization.

Myles Dillon and Donncha Ó Cróinín, in *Irish: A Complete Introductory Course*, begin each of their lessons

with a heavy section on grammar. Crow treats grammar but only after each reading and in much smaller units. As is inevitable in grammatical analysis, Crow introduces unfamiliar terms such as vocative case and habitual verb tense, and he also employs more familiar grammatical terms. He provides a useful glossary of language learning terms. Most of the definitions are followed by helpful examples. Such a glossary is necessary as many college students do not know the parts of speech or what a diphthong is.

Dillon and Ó Cróinín use the International Phonetic Alphabet to indicate pronunciation. This is fine for those who know the IPA, but Crow, wisely, it seems to me, explains spelling and pronunciation using English spelling conventions. For example, the English "ou" renders the Irish sound in *abha, eabh, ogha, odha, amh, and amha*.

On the cassette, Crow speaks in a clear, measured, and resonant voice. His book is easy to handle while listening to him on the cassette. The large pages (11" x 8 1/2") and the ring binding make it extremely easy to open the book and the pages lie flat and can be easily turned.

Crow speaks of Kerry Irish as though that were his dialect, but he speaks standard Irish. He speaks always to the learner as though the learner were sitting before him. Irish Home Tutor is a fine thing for someone who wishes to learn Irish at home.

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David Singleton & Zsolt Lengyel, eds. *The Age Factor in Second Language Acquisition*. Clevedon, Philadelphia & Adelaide: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1995. 190 pp.

Available from Amazon.com on the Web at www.Amazon.com:
US\$34.95 plus postage (US\$3.95 for the USA, US\$5.95 for surface mail international orders).

This volume is a highly relevant collection of studies on a much-debated and extremely important area of linguistics. Second language acquisition has been the subject of numerous impressionistic beliefs and affects a large number of people from elementary school to the college level and beyond. In the Introduction and six articles compiled here, numerous aspects of language learning are addressed through bibliographical citation.

David Singleton's introductory remarks, "A Critical Look at the Critical Period Hypothesis in Second Language Acquisition Research," provides a good overview. Singleton points out that the age factor may have a tendency to affect final achievement, but that it does not have to determine the ultimate success of language acquisition. Success, he notes, is also measurable in different ways, and accent may be both over- and under-estimated. Singleton does observe that lexicon, especially lexicon in interaction with grammar, has not frequently been the subject of L2 acquisition research, and that lexical growth even in L1, can be a lifelong process. These introductory observations present viewpoints and counterpoints effectively, challenging assumptions and asking readers to guard against hard and fast theories about the L2 learning process, especially without considering a variety of factors and subjects.

Chapter 1 is "Can Late Learners Attain a Native Accent in a Foreign Language? A Test of the Critical Period Hypothesis," by Theo Bongaerts, Brigitte Planken and Erik Schils. It presents a study of Dutch learners of English as a second language. The researchers observe that instruction in pronunciation can result in the acquisition of very accurate oral performance, to the point of being able to

pass as native speakers. While they admit this is a privileged set of circumstances, they also feel it provides important arguments against the Critical Period.

Chapter 2, Vivian Cook's "Multicompetence and Effects of Age," observes that an individual who knows more than one language organizes linguistic data in one or more grammars. This article brings up the important issue of the aura of failure frequently surrounding evaluation of a L2 speaker's performance, and proposes that the monolingual standard is not necessarily appropriate, and particularly should not be based so heavily on perception of accent. Cook suggests that the evidence for two separate linguistic systems in the mind of the bilingual is also inconclusive. After presenting some of the features proposed for child vs. adult bilinguals regarding lexical and functional parameterization, the article ends somewhat abruptly, as if there were a lack of room, a computer glitch, or at least no conclusive evidence.

Chapter 3, Hans Dechert's "Some Critical Remarks Concerning Penfield's Theory of Second Language Acquisition" seeks to question Penfield's neuroscientific work on L2 acquisition and the Critical Age Theory. Unfortunately, the plethora of quotations undermines the coherence and fluidity of the article and the reader is not entirely clear as to how the author reaches his conclusion: "It is clear that there are more people in the world who are multicompetent one way or another than who are monocompetent." (p. 77) The appendices of hypotheses on language acquisition are too brief to be very useful, and other appendices are so lengthy as to provoke questions about why they are not part of the main text discussion.

Chapter 4, "Evaluating the Need for Input Enhancement in Post-Critical Period Language Acquisition," by Georgette Loup, considers the relevance of input enhancement or formal instruction in adult learners of Arabic who achieve a high level of competence. If children, states Loup, frequently learn by primary linguistic or nonexplicit data, they must use internal mechanisms to

correct or restructure formations. Adults, some theories (e.g., Krashen) postulate, need some awareness of linguistic structure; even so, their final-state grammars tend to have fossilized non-native features. To the various theories, some of them conflicting, Loup adds the observation that talented learners may possess 'unique neurocognitive abilities.' Over all, she states, some adult learners appear capable of integrating learned linguistic knowledge into their underlying competence grammars.

Chapter 5, "Some Critical Remarks on the Phonological Component," is authored by Lengyel. This essay questions the simplistic conclusions about the age factor in L2 acquisition, Lengyel states that the Critical Period Hypothesis particularly involves phonology for the L2 and cannot be later than age 6 - 12. Lengyel argues that this theory has shortcomings and that it is necessary to note which languages are involved in the learning process, since certain features may be shared by some and thus not represent learning hurdles. Finally, the author notes that foreign language teachers can testify that not all children are 'good phoneticians' as often supposed and asserts that learner strategies are individual, not universal.

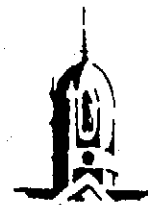
Chapter 6, G. Martohardjono and Suzanne Flynn, "Is There an Age Factor for Universal Grammar?" is the final essay in this series which questions the universal validity of the Critical Period. The authors state that at least two areas of language are not affected by such a period: universal grammar and the acquisition of syntax; and sound system development and sensory abilities. E.g., the biologically endowed faculty for language acquisition (which is not age-related) has an important role. Some learning may be achieved through inductive processes, and not limited to a specific developmental phase. Also, the biological ability underlying the construction of sound systems remains intact throughout life. Older learners, the authors observe, actually have an advantage in some areas, and phonemic, phonetic, and acoustic modes are all accessible to them.

The articles in this volume are papers from two conferences (one of which was not held) in 1991-1992. They serve as a whole to raise considerable questions regarding the Critical Period Hypothesis, while not totally discarding its general empirical observations. The result is that while the effects of age may be felt in different ways, there is reasonable doubt as to its role as the primary factor. Some of the support for this doubt may come from the use of list-oriented studies, and the fact that specific aspects of the teaching/learning process such as the methodology, instructor credentials, and degree and type of motivation which characterize the learners, have still not been systematically analyzed. The Age Factor in Second Language Acquisition is most useful, not for the questions it answers, but for the many questions it raises and the many sources it uses to help raise or destabilize a popular theory of language learning. Readers will come away with the sense that a great deal more research is needed, both on specific languages and on the factors which combine to make learning either successful or deficient.

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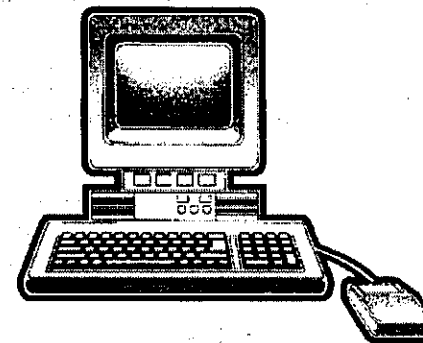
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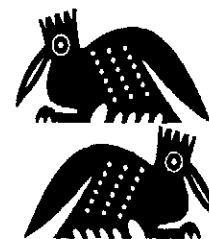
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Announcements

NAACLT'99: The fifth annual NAACLT Conference will be held in Ontario, Canada, 7-8 May 1999. The Conference will be sponsored by the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at the University of Ottawa. Abstracts for 20-minute papers should be sent to Dr. Seamus Blake, 230 East 15 Street, Apt. 9P, New York, NY 10003, USA (e-mail: Blakejsdb@aol.com) by 8 February 1999. The abstract should be double spaced and no more than 300 words. A 50-word summary should also be included. For the complete call for papers and general conference information see <http://www.naacit.org/>. General conference information can also be obtained by contacting Dr. Paul Birt, Modern Languages and Literatures, University of Ottawa, 25 Université, Suite 138, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, Canada (e-mail: pwbirt@uottawa.ca).

A Professional Development Summer Institute for Teachers of Less Commonly Taught Languages: Developing Classroom Materials for Less Commonly Taught Languages, University of Minnesota, 6-10 July 1999. Focus on adapting and developing materials. Write CARLA, U of MN, 333 Appleby Hall, 128 Pleasant St. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, or e-mail lctl@tc.umn.edu

11th International Congress of Celtic Studies, NUI Cork, Ireland, 25-31 July 1999. For information write: Combined Departments of Irish, University College Cork, Ireland.