

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF ELEMENTARY ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN TAIWAN: DOES AGE MATTER?

Hsin-Fen Chang*

1. Introduction

Why do people in non-English-speaking countries have to learn English? Today, it seems to have more to do with the ideology of commodification than with that of identity (Heller, in press). In many Asian countries, for instance, English has become an inseparable part of their economic construction plans. Singapore is especially worth noting. With very limited natural resources, this small island state has benefited in a great measure from the English language (Tickoo 1996).

In my homeland, Taiwan, English too is considered as the most important foreign language. This is clearly reflected by the Taiwanese government's current English education policy (The Ministry of Education 1999 Progress Report, n.d.), which has required students since September 2001 to receive formal English instruction from grade five in elementary school through grade twelve in senior high school. Before this new policy came into effect, however, only junior and senior high school students had to take English courses to fulfill academic requirements. Thus, to include English instruction in the elementary school

Hsin-Fen Chang, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.

Hsin-fen, Chang

curriculum is, so to speak, a major breakthrough in my government's current educational reform.

Nevertheless, after the implementation of English instruction in elementary school, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan immediately found that a critical shortage of elementary school English teachers had forced approximately sixteen counties or cities to postpone their elementary English instruction programs (Liberty Times [Taipei], 31 August 2001). From here soon arose a controversial question among parents and educational reformers in Taiwan: Is it necessary to offer English instruction in elementary school? More specifically, is it proper to give English instruction to elementary fifth graders in Taiwan?

As Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow (2000) point out, it seems quite common to hear people say how easy it would have been for them if they had learned a foreign language at a earlier stage in life. However, no matter how commonly the public take it for granted that younger children can learn a new language easier, there are in fact some findings (e.g., Swain 1981; Genesee 1987) indicating that older learners may learn a second language (L2) more efficiently.

Hence, it is the purpose of this paper to investigate which findings or arguments known today can better fit into the English education environment in Taiwan. Although the Taiwanese government has apparently adopted the assumption that younger children are better L2 learners, there are still a number of areas that need to be carefully examined and adjusted in terms of when and how to carry out elementary English instruction in Taiwan.

In the next two sections of this paper, there is a literature review of the issue "whether younger or older learners are better at learning second languages." Three studies in support of younger L2 learners are discussed: Johnson and Newport's (1989) support for the critical period, Krashen, Long, and Scarcella's (1979) generalization of younger L2 learners' better ultimate performance, and Swain and Lapkin's (1989) finding of younger L2 learners' tendency to have better speaking and

Theoretical Considerations of Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

listening skills. In contrast, three studies in favor of older L2 learners are also reviewed: Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle's (1978) rejection of the critical period, Swain's (1981) suggestion of older L2 learners' better cognitive proficiency, and Genesee's (1987) claim of late immersion students' more efficient second language acquisition (SLA). Finally, on the basis of the literature review, the current English education policy in Taiwan is thoroughly examined.

It is the intention of this paper to provide a theoretical foundation for the future English education policy in Taiwan through a literature review of the controversial question: Which age is better for L2 learning, younger or older? This paper, however, does not aim to make any conclusion but rather seeks to bring to light those blind spots that have long been taken for granted, reexamine them theoretically, and throw light on them in some practical ways.

2. Younger Is Better

As Marinova-Todd et al. (2000) point out, it is generally agreed that there is a "critical period" for first language (L1) acquisition, and after that period, with the onset of puberty, it becomes very difficult for L1 learners to achieve the native-like ability. However, as Marinova-Todd et al. question, the claim that the "critical period" too is true for SLA (Johnson & Newport 1989) is still controversial and needs to be examined carefully before any conclusion is reached. In other words, there is a critical need to clarify the notion from a broad range of perspectives that younger L2 learners are better.

Thus, three relevant studies in favor of younger L2 learners are discussed below: first, Johnson and Newport's (1989) support for extending the critical period to SLA; second, Krashen et al.'s (1979) claim that younger learners can ultimately acquire higher L2 proficiency; finally, Swain and Lapkin's (1989) suggestion that younger L2 learners tend to perform better than older ones in listening and speaking.

2.1 Critical Period

Based on Lenneberg's (1967) conclusion that there is a critical period effect on L1 learning, Johnson and Newport (1989) further investigate whether the concept of the critical period effect can be extended to SLA. The main focus of their study is on the correlation between syntactic proficiency in the L2 (i.e., English) and the age of first exposure to it. Their results show a positive relationship between these two variables. That is, those exposed to native-like English earlier scored higher on the test. Accordingly, Johnson and Newport conclude that the critical period effect is extended to SLA as well.

These findings do give a boost to those in favor of younger L2 learners. However, a few points they make need to be further clarified. First, Johnson and Newport (1989) only tested L2 learners' ability in making grammaticality judgments, which is only one part of the various aspects of L2 competence and does not seem to be adequate in measuring learners' overall ultimate attainment in the L2. In fact, as Swain (1981) argues, there should be a distinction between cognitive academic linguistic proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), and L2 learners at different ages may be efficient at different aspects of L2 proficiency. Second, even though Johnson and Newport (1989) claim that all the participants were exposed to an English-speaking environment for at least five years, it is still uncertain whether there is a differentiation among these participants in terms of the environment to which they were exposed. In other words, some of them might have had more exposure to natural settings (i.e., those with more opportunities for interpersonal communication) than others, which might have made a difference in the test results.

One thing worth noting here is that Johnson and Newport (1989) think it interesting to further investigate the benefit of early classroom exposure to an L2 especially if the classroom setting is more immersion-like. Their suggestion seems to imply that early L2 instruction might be more beneficial to learners particularly when it is given in a native-like setting.

2.2 Ultimate Attainment

Theoretical Considerations of Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

Another significant conclusion concerning the effect of age differences on SLA is Krashen et al.'s (1979) three generalizations: 1) Adult learners are faster in syntactic and morphological development than children; 2) Older children learn faster than younger children at the early stages of syntax and morphology when their exposure to an L2 is held constantly over time; 3) Starting natural exposure to an L2 in childhood brings about higher L2 proficiency than that in adulthood. These generalizations imply that age differences affect SLA in a more complicated way than is suggested by Johnson and Newport (1989). That is, younger L2 learners are superior to adult learners as far as ultimate attainment and natural exposure to L2 environments are concerned, whereas older L2 learners are faster at the early stages of L2 development with respect to syntax and morphology.

However, like Johnson and Newport's (1989) conclusion, Krashen's et al.'s (1979) generalizations do not adequately account for the possible effects of various language tasks on SLA. As was pointed out previously in this paper, following Swain's (1981) conceptualization, language proficiency generally consists of two dimensions: 1) cognitive academic linguistic proficiency (CALP), and 2) basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS). The first dimension includes skills of reading and writing, and the second refers to oral proficiency and sociolinguistic competence. In other words, all the different components of language should be considered in terms of language proficiency. In Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978), for instance, different aspects of the participants' L2 proficiency were tested in order to explain how language components (e.g., morphology, syntax, listening comprehension, and pronunciation) affect L2 learners differently.

Another point that requires further exploration is Krashen et al.'s (1979) Generalization Three. That is, younger L2 learners will ultimately attain higher L2 proficiency if exposed to natural L2 environments. Nevertheless, it is unclear how long (i.e., time length) and how often (i.e., intensity) younger L2 learners should be exposed to natural L2 settings in order to

acquire higher L2 proficiency eventually. Does it mean an immersion-like L2 program is needed for younger learners' successful acquisition of an L2? Obviously, Krashen's generalizations are not adequate enough to deal with these issues, and some more relevant studies are to be examined here. This leads us to the literature by Swain and Lapkin (1989) with their focus on how various aspects of language proficiency can make a difference in SLA.

2.3 Speaking and Listening Skills

As already noted in this paper, whether younger or older L2 learners are better at acquiring a language also depends on which aspects of language proficiency one refers to. According to Swain and Lapkin (1989), early French immersion students appear to perform better than late ones in listening and speaking but not in literacy-related tasks. In other words, late immersion students may be faster in SLA than early ones with respect to reading and writing. What comes this difference? As Swain and Lapkin argue, it is probably because late immersion students are cognitively mature enough to transfer their L1 strategies to the L2, and that is why it takes them less time to acquire the literacy-related skills of the L2.

To put it simply, there are two points Swain and Lapkin (1989) wish to suggest: first, older L2 learners may acquire cognitive linguistic proficiency (e.g., reading and writing) faster than younger ones; second, younger L2 learners tend to be better in speaking and listening than older ones. Hence, they not only reject the commonly held belief that younger children are better L2 learners, but they also suggest that there is no "critical period" for L2 learning as Johnson and Newport (1989) have claimed, for younger learners seem to be only better in some aspects of an L2, whereas older ones may sometimes be quite efficient in other L2 skills.

But why do early immersion students tend to be better than late ones especially in speaking and listening? Is it because early ones have more natural exposure to the L2 than late ones as Krashen et al. (1979) have maintained, or is it because there is

indeed a “critical period” that accounts for this difference? These questions are not further discussed by Swain and Lapkin (1989), but are still worth as much attention when we consider what teaching strategies to use to develop older L2 learners' speaking and listening skills. That is, a better understanding of how younger L2 learners acquire their speaking and listening skills may provide us a clearer picture of how older L2 learners could be taught more effectively. In fact, Swain and Lapkin (1989) point out in their conclusion that teaching methodology for immersion programs should be improved so that it can be effective for learners at all ages. It seems to imply that age differences should not be taken as a main factor of successful SLA but a reminder to pay more attention to the effects these differences may bring about.

3. Older May Be Better

As was pointed out earlier, it remains a controversial issue whether there is a “critical period” for L2s as well in spite of the generally accepted notion of a “critical period” for L1s (Marinova-Todd 2000). On the one hand, some studies have shown that younger learners are better in ultimate L2 attainment and certain aspects of L2 competence such as listening or speaking; on the other hand, however, there is other evidence available to support the claim that older L2 learners may be better.

It is therefore the focus of this section to reexamine the notion of a “critical period” by reviewing the work of Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) and to search for more evidence in favor of older L2 learners by looking into two other relevant studies, Swain (1981) and Genesee (1987), respectively.

3.1 No Critical Period

Similar to Johnson and Newport (1989), Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) tested the prediction that a “critical period” is true for SLA as well, but their findings rejected such a hypothesis. In other words, it was found that L2 learners older than the age of puberty could still be efficient in SLA.

According to Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978), three reasons can explain their different findings: 1) L2 learners of different ages were included in their study; 2) The assessment of SLA by participants lasted for one year; 3) A wide range of language components (e.g., sentence structure, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and oral proficiency) were tested several times over a period of one year. Thus, unlike Johnson and Newport (1989), Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle observed the acquisition of several aspects of the L2 by different age groups longitudinally, which provides a better explanation for the various language skill effects on L2 learners of different ages as well as the various changes of different age groups' L2 proficiency over time.

Hence, with a wide range of age groups and language abilities tested, Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) came up with a more complete picture of the differences among L2 learners of different ages. For instance, despite their rejection of a "critical period" in SLA, Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle agree with Johnson and Newport (1989) that younger L2 learners are better at grammaticality judgment than older ones. On the other hand, their findings are consistent with Krashen et al.'s (1979) claim that older L2 learners are better in syntax and morphology. That is to say, Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle's findings show considerable variations among L2 learners in different age groups. One thing, however, for sure is that L2 learners passing the age of puberty (i.e., between age 12 and age 15) can be quite efficient in SLA. Still, what needs to be further investigated is why older L2 learners, especially those aged 12-15, can be better than younger ones in SLA. Is it a result of positive transfer from the L1 as Swain and Lapkin (1989) suggest? Or is there any other reason available to provide a clear explanation?

Another thing that is not clarified by Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) is that some of their tests seemed too easy for older learners but others were too difficult for younger ones. In other words, it is unclear to what degree this fact influenced the test results and therefore needs to be further examined. In addition, Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle admit that

there might be some environmental factors that were not well controlled in their study. For instance, none of the male adult participants spoke the L2 at work, and housewife participants limited their use of the L2 to informal settings such as shopping, greetings, contacts with government offices or their children's schools. These factors might partially contribute to the result that adult L2 learners are slower than younger ones with respect to ultimate L2 improvement.

3.2 Cognitive Strategies

Although Snow & Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) conclude that older L2 learners are better in syntax and morphology than younger ones, they do not attribute this to the result of positive L1 transfer. Swain (1981), however, makes it clear that older L2 learners' higher proficiency in literacy-related skills (e.g., vocabulary and grammatical knowledge) is due to their better cognitive strategies in the L1. Such aspects of language proficiency, as Swain claims, can be referred to as cognitive academic linguistic proficiency (CALP), which should be differentiated from basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS).

As Swain (1981) points out in citing Lapkin, Swain, Kamin, and Hanna's findings (1980), the early immersion students outperformed the late ones in listening comprehension, while the late immersion students were better in reading comprehension than the early ones. These results, as Swain argues, are due to the fact that older L2 learners are more cognitively mature than younger ones. That is to say, older L2 learners are more efficient in acquiring L2 reading skills than younger ones mainly because of the cognitive knowledge of the L1 they have attained, not because of the more hours they spend in learning the L2. However, a further investigation is still needed with respect to which age groups, older or younger, are faster in acquiring basic interpersonal communicative skills, for different results might have different implications for curriculum design.

Thus, another question also worth exploration is which aspects of L2 (e.g., CALP or BICS) should be the focus of L2

Hsin-fen, Chang

instruction. In response to this question, Swain (1981) makes a distinction between two language situations: a majority language situation and a minority one. According to Swain, in a majority language situation, the L2 becomes a minority language and the only way to develop BICS is probably at school; in a minority language situation, the L2 is a dominant language and it is easy to develop BICS outside school. Accordingly, Swain (1981) suggests that both CALP and BICS should be the focus in a dominant language situation, whereas only CALP needs to be emphasized in a minority language situation. In fact, this implication sheds light on the long disputed issue: of what aspects of the English language (e.g., listening, reading, speaking, or writing) should be taught at school in a non-English-speaking country (i.e., a majority language situation)?

Another implication that can be inferred from Swain's (1981) study of immersion students is that early immersion students may be more proficient in oral communication because of more opportunities to use functional language skills in the earlier grade levels. In effect, this anticipation is compatible with Johnson and Newport's (1989) suggestion and Krashen et al.'s (1979) generalization that earlier exposure to natural or native-like L2 settings leads to superior L2 proficiency. That is, younger L2 learners may not be better than older ones if not exposed to natural L2 environments. What if older L2 learners have sufficient natural exposure to L2? Will it bring about their successful SLA? Also, does sufficient exposure to an L2 refer to accumulated number of hours over a long time or more intensive ways of learning within a short time? These issues are not made clear enough here but are further explored by Genesee (1987) and given discussion in detail next.

3.3 Late Immersion Students

According to the comparative evaluations of the French immersion programs in Montreal, Genesee (1987) found that two-year late immersion students were consistently on a par with early immersion students in their L2 (i.e., French)

Theoretical Considerations of Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

proficiency even though they had had much less amount of exposure to the L2 than earlier ones (i.e., 1,400 hours vs. 5,000 hours) by the time of the assessment. This finding, as Genesee argues, implies that two-year late immersion students are faster than earlier ones in L2 learning. Again, what accounts for such a difference?

Similar to Swain (1981), Genesee (1987) attributes these older L2 learners' more efficient learning to their cognitive maturation. That is, the cognitive skills these older learners have attained in the L1 enable them to learn faster in the cognitive domains of the L2 (e.g., reading and writing). However, his evaluations of the French immersion programs in Ottawa show that early immersion students performed better than two-year late ones. Why was there such a discrepancy? As Genesee argues, it is "time" that makes such a difference in L2 learning.

Does this mean the more time the better? Or does it refer to more intensive learning over a short time? Genesee (1987), citing Lapkin, Swain, Kamin, and Hanna's findings (1982), points out that not only amount of L2 exposure can make a difference but also intensity of exposure. This factor, as Genesee figures, may therefore compensate late immersion students for their less accumulated amount of exposure to the L2. In other words, older L2 learners may be better than younger ones given effective concentrated L2 teaching within a short time period.

On the other hand, why did the early immersion students in Montreal not perform better than the late ones? One important factor, as Genesee (1987) speculates, may be a lack of stimulation in the L2 learning environment, which slowed the early immersion students' improvement in the L2. Here he seems to imply that younger learners may not be better than older ones in their ultimate L2 attainment if there are no increased demands for L2 skills in their learning environment.

Hence, as Genesee (1987) suggests, we are almost certain at this point that both younger and older learners have the potential to acquire a new language successfully as long as there is effective distribution of time and an extended supportive learning environment. Yet, some questions still need to be kept

Hsin-fen, Chang

in mind before any conclusions are drawn. For instance, what language components are to be focused on in L2 classrooms? How do we assess learners' overall L2 proficiency? Can our assessment really reflect learners' ultimate L2 proficiency? Can we adequately control all variables when comparing younger L2 learners with older ones? There seems no clear answer here yet. This is why most of the studies relating to age difference effects on L2 proficiency hardly make any conclusive claims but rather only suggest the possibilities for further exploration.

4. Implications for Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

On the basis of the theoretical review in the previous sections, the focus will turn now to the issue this paper aims to address: that is, elementary English instruction in Taiwan. But before moving on, we need to have a clear idea of what we have arrived at so far in terms of age difference effects on SLA.

There are several points that can be inferred from the previous discussion: 1) Whether younger or older L2 learners are better is still inconclusive; 2) Time allotment is an important factor that may affect L2 proficiency at any age; 3) The nature of the L2 learning environment is an influential factor that may make a difference in ultimate L2 proficiency; 4) Teaching strategies directed toward L2 learners may also affect the effectiveness of L2 learning.

With these points in mind, we will move on to the main issue "elementary English instruction in Taiwan" and reexamine the relevant policy from the perspectives of age, time, environment, and strategies to see how it has been working and whether there is any way that it can be made better.

4.1 Age

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the current English education policy in Taiwan requires students to receive English instruction from grade five in elementary school through grade twelve in senior high school. In fact, elementary school students used to be excluded from this policy, but why do they

Theoretical Considerations of Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

have to be included today? The reason stems from the widely accepted belief that younger learners are better than older ones in acquiring a new language. However, according to the literature cited in this paper (Krashen et al. 1979; Swain and Lapkin 1989; Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle 1978; Swain 1981; Genesee 1987), it has been found that younger L2 learners are not always better and that older ones may be better in acquiring certain L2 skills. Why do younger L2 learners sometimes fail to outperform older ones, and what makes it possible for older learners to be more superior to younger ones in certain aspects of an L2? Krashen et al. (1979) suggest that younger learners may not attain higher ultimate proficiency without more natural exposure to an L2. Swain (1981) argues that older learners' better L1 cognitive skills enable them to be more efficient in the cognitive domains of an L2. Genesee (1987) speculates that more concentrated teaching over a short time period may compensate older learners for less of accumulative exposure to an L2. Thus, as these researchers have suggested, Taiwanese English education policy makers should no longer act upon the assumption that younger learners are better. Rather, they should take into account some other important factors such as time, environment, and strategies that might also influence the effectiveness of English teaching. In the following three sections, some specific suggestions regarding time, environment, and strategies are offered in more detail.

4.2 Time

Here, again, is it necessary to offer English instruction in elementary school in Taiwan? In other words, can Taiwanese students be successful English learners when their exposure to English starts in junior high school rather than in elementary school? According to Genesee (1987), older L2 learners may be quite efficient in SLA with more concentrated exposure to the L2 (e.g., immersion programs) over a short period of time. What does this mean for Taiwanese English education policy makers? It suggests to them that Taiwanese junior high school students (i.e., those beginning exposure to English in junior high school)

may eventually achieve higher English proficiency if given more intensive English instruction over a limited period; that is, the junior high school English extended programs should be made more compact and effective. Currently, these conventional English programs offer junior high school students only three to five hours of English instruction each week. With such a limited amount of exposure to English, how can Taiwanese junior high school students eventually attain higher English proficiency? On the other hand, what if Taiwanese students start exposure to English in elementary school? Will it make a difference because of the increased amount of exposure to English? According to the current policy, elementary fifth graders in Taiwan only have two hours of English instruction each week. Compared with those offered to early French immersion programs in Canada, the English instruction hours that have been offered to elementary school students in Taiwan are far below the amount of time needed to attain higher English proficiency. This is something Taiwanese English education policy makers need to bear in mind when evaluating the effectiveness of the current elementary English instruction programs.

4.3 Environment

In addition to time allotment, as Krashen et al. (1979) argue, those who are exposed naturally to an L2 as children generally attain higher L2 proficiency than those starting as adults. That is to say, beginning to learn English in elementary school may not lead to higher English proficiency unless it occurs in a natural English-speaking environment. Thus, even though Taiwanese students begin to be exposed to English in elementary school, it does not mean they will eventually achieve higher English proficiency unless they are provided with a natural English learning environment. In fact, Swain (1981) points out that in a majority language situation like Taiwan, the role of school is to develop both CALP and BICS because there is a severely limited use of the L2 in the wider context. Is this true of Taiwanese schools? As was pointed out previously, only two hours of weekly English instruction are offered to Taiwanese

Theoretical Considerations of Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

elementary school students and three to five hours are offered to junior high school students. Besides, in most of the public schools, the English instructors are Taiwanese, not native speakers of English, and in some schools, there is even a critical shortage of English instructors. Apparently, the current English learning environment in either Taiwanese elementary or junior high schools is far from native-like, let alone able to develop CALP or BICS. Hence, creating a native-like environment at Taiwanese schools for the development of students' higher English proficiency is something of which Taiwanese policy makers should also be aware.

4.4 Strategies

Another important factor that may affect SLA is utilization of strategies. As Swain (1981) argues, older L2 learners' cognitive maturation in their L1 enables them to be more efficient in acquiring L2 skills in cognitive domains such as reading, vocabulary, and grammar. This shows that the proper use of strategies can lead to more effective SLA. On the other hand, as Swain maintains, younger L2 learners should possess more functional L2 skills (e.g., more speech acts) than older ones because elementary schools usually provide a better environment for the development of communicative skills. What Swain points out here, however, is referred to French immersion programs, not the English extended programs in a dominant language situation like Taiwan. In fact, in most Taiwanese public schools, traditional teacher-centered methodology still dominates most classrooms in both elementary and junior high schools. In other words, in most Taiwanese elementary schools, communicative or learner-centered teaching rarely occurs in classrooms. Similarly, in Taiwanese junior high schools, English teaching is hardly communicatively oriented due to the pressure of the annual scholastic aptitude test. As Swain and Lapkin (1989) indicate, the isolation of L2 practice from coherent contexts retards the improvement of L2. Hence, it might be concluded here that in Taiwanese schools, both English teaching methodology and regular subject teaching need to be improved so that a more

Hsin-fen, Chang

communicative and coherent English learning environment can be created, which will not only benefit the development of BICS but also that of CALP. This is another suggestion that Taiwanese English education policy makers may wish to take into consideration.

5. Conclusion

Is it necessary to offer English instruction to elementary fifth graders in Taiwan? This has remained a controversial issue among Taiwanese parents and educational reformers. In fact, this policy too has long been disputed by researchers. Some argue that younger children are faster in learning L2s; others claim that older learners may acquire higher L2 proficiency. Thus, several studies regarding this issue have been reviewed and discussed in this paper.

Overall, this literature review illustrates that younger L2 learners are not always better unless they are provided with sustained natural exposure to L2, whereas older L2 learners are capable of acquiring some aspects of an L2 such as literary-related skills with mature cognitive skills in the L1 and concentrated L2 instruction over a short time. These findings show that factors other than age difference, including time, environment, and strategies, also play a role in SLA and need to be taken seriously by L2 program policy makers.

What implications can be drawn from the above findings and suggested in relation to the current elementary English education policy in Taiwan? First, the findings imply that the effectiveness of elementary English instruction depends on communicatively oriented methodology as well as a natural English learning environment. Second, they further suggest that junior high school students can be successful English learners if provided with learner-centered strategies and more intensive English training within a limited period.

Hence, Taiwanese English education policy makers should no longer base their decisions on the long-held belief that younger L2 learners are better, but focus more attention on other important factors such as time allotment, learning strategies, and

Theoretical Considerations of Elementary English Instruction in Taiwan

learning environment. In other words, what is urgently needed today for the improvement of elementary English instruction in Taiwan is policy makers' awareness of the importance of an authentic L2 environment, communicative experience in the L2, and compact L2 instruction. In fact, these implications are not only for English instruction during the elementary grades but also for that in junior high schools. Therefore, Taiwanese English teachers should be excited that all of their students, either younger or older, have the potential to be efficient English learners with effective learning strategies applied in natural settings across carefully planned time spans. This is really good news for all English learners in Taiwan, but whether they will really have a bright future still depends on how well policy makers, administrators and English instructors work collaboratively toward those goals that have been suggested in this paper.

WORKS CITED

- Genesee, F. 1987. Research findings: French language achievement. In *Learning through Two Languages: Studies of Immersion and Bilingual Education*, 44-61. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House.
- Heller, M. In press. Globalization and the commodification of bilingualism in Canada. In *Language Learning and Teaching in the Age of Globalization*, ed. by D. Block and D. Cameron. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, J., and E. Newport. 1989. Critical period effects in second language learning: The influence of maturational state on the acquisition of English as a second language. *Cognitive Psychology* 21: 60-99.
- Krashen, S., M. Long, and R. Scarcella. 1979. Age, rate, and eventual attainment in second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly* 13: 573-582.
- Lapkin, S., M. Swain, J. Kamin, and G. Hanna. 1980. Report on the 1979 evaluation of the Peel County late French

Hsin-fen, Chang

- immersion program, grades 8, 10, 11 and 12. Mimeo. Toronto: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Lapkin, S., M. Swain, J. Kamin, and G. Hanna. 1982. Late immersion in perspective: The Peel study. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 39: 182-206.
- Lenneberg, E. 1967. *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York: Wiley.
- Marinova-Todd, S., D. Marshall, and C. Snow. 2000. Three misconceptions about age and L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly* 34: 9-33.
- Ministry of Education. n.d. *The Ministry of Education 1999 Progress Report*. <<http://www.edu.tw/english/index.htm>> [2002, April 9].
- Snow, C. and M. Hoefnagel-Hohle. 1978. The critical period for language acquisition: Evidence from second language learning. *Child Development* 39: 1114-1128.
- Swain, M. 1981. Time and timing in bilingual education. *Language Learning* 31(1), 1: 1-13.
- Swain, M. and S. Lapkin. 1989. Canadian immersion and adult second language teaching: What's the connection? *Modern Language Journal* 73: 150-159.
- Tickoo, M. L. 1996. English in Asian bilingual education: From hatred to harmony. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 17: 225-240.