

On advantage which older learners hold over young learners

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Abstract

This is a case study of English morphology acquisition by two immigrants children mainly cross-sectional with element of longitudinal study. The subjects are one year and a half apart in their age but started to be exposed to English speaking environment at the same time. Burko “wug” test was utilized to detect the condition of the acquisition of morphological aspects of English and it turned out that the elder subject performed better in morphology acquisition and the younger subject in pronunciation. The result will be discussed from the view point of both age and personality attributes.

1. Introduction

1.1. Points of departure

I would like to present this research, conducted in 1994 trying to shed some light on the advantage of the older learner has over the younger learners of the second language (hence L2), as an evidence to be provided for the discussion of introduction of English as L2 to primary schools in Japan, whose was announced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Japan (hence MEXT) in the amendment plan of educational guidelines for primary school in 2008. Under the guidelines¹ Year 5 and 6 are to have foreign language (hence FL) activity on e class hour per week.

Torikai(2006), citing both pros and cons to the issue, gives comprehensive discussion on the introduction of English education into primary schools in Japan. She points out that a notion that the younger a L2 learner, the more proficient the learner will become in the L2 which is blindly believed by Japanese citizen led MEXT to make such a decision. As once being a citizen without specific knowledge about language acquisition, I also held the notion true based on my experience and observations. Here are some of them.

- (1) In my university days, those who possessed better linguistic competence in English as L2 than me shared a few common features. They started their stay in English-speaking countries earlier than age eighteen and stayed there longer than one year. Though I also home stayed and

attended local senior high schools in the United States for ten months as an exchange student, my English sounded somewhat fundamentally inferior to the English spoken by those who stayed in English-speaking country earlier and longer than me.

- (2) In my experience of teaching English in senior high schools in Japan, even the students with most brilliant performance in the English written exams had a very difficult time communicating with their assistant English teachers who is native speakers of English.
- (3) My daughters, when they were seven and six in age, both having attended Australian primary school for no more than one year and three months, are interacting with their classmates in English quite naturally, while their competence particularly in pronunciation are much closer to that of native speakers than those adults L2 learners like me.

Since these are rather rough summaries of my impression, I have to be careful in inducing conclusion from them. However, it would not be totally unreasonable to assume that; from (1) and (2), one has to be immersed in L2 environment earlier and longer and from (3), children acquire L2 faster than adults. Therefore younger learners learn better than older learners.

What was wrong with my conclusion or the notion believed by Japanese generally? This is probably because the notion was based on wholistic impressions but not discrete analysis to determine the causes from the comprehensive set of variables as Spolsky(1989: 91) correctly stated, if we look “only at informal L2 language learning and bilingualism, we naturally tend to assume that children learn language better than adults” There could have been some overlooked factors that have never occurred to the minds of the people or missed out in making of such assumptions or the belief. A notion based on informal observations or experiences, where the variables are not controlled quantitatively, cannot be validated at significant level. So before moving on to further discussion, I would like to pick up several crucial points in need to be clarified from the observations from (1) to (3) to determine the variables and points to be focused on as follows.

- (i)
 - a. On which specific skill in the linguistic competence was the comparison made? i.e. speaking, writing, listening, reading
 - b. What specific type of linguistic education/environment had they gone through?
 - c. When and how long had they been immersed in the English-speaking environment?
- (ii) Under what type of approach/method/technique did they learn English as

- a foreign language?
- (iii) a. Is interaction among children and adult in their daily life domains the same? i.e. children interact mainly among themselves, whereas adults, for example, have to interact with various types of people such as bankers to open accounts, colleagues to discuss business.
- b. How much English had the children acquired before starting to be exposed to an L2 environment?

As for (i)a. those who had been to English-speaking countries seemed superior in all skills except for writing, since I did not closely examine any of written corpus of theirs. It could be assumed, however, that if one's listening comprehension was better and reading comprehension was faster and more accurate than the other, then his/her writing is likely to be better than the other. As for (i)b. those who appeared superior in linguistic competence had gone through mainly two patterns of linguistic environment. i.e., attending native schools on weekdays and Japanese school on Saturdays, or attending Japanese school which strictly follows the curriculum under the guidelines for domestic schools in Japan. In the former case, their environment was the combination of L2 submersion and L1 maintenance and in the latter their environment is much closer to the domestic situations in Japan i.e., L1 situation and the amount of L2 interaction is substantially reduced compared with the former case.

As for (i)c., the onset time and duration varied with individuals. It was observed that the longer and earlier one started to be immersed in the L2 environment, the better their L2 competence became but at the same time, the more their L1 competence deteriorated.

As for (ii), English at secondary level is taught as a FL. The objectives in practice is primarily geared to the entrance examinations of the tertiary education. In these entrance exams skills such as reading and writing are emphasized whereas listening comprehension possesses secondary importance, and speaking is never tested. Therefore, the English teaching at secondary level tends not to follow a communicative approach. Had the approach been brought into the education for such brilliant students, they might not have had such difficulty in L2 communication.

As for (iii)a., it would be reasonable to assume that interaction amongst children and amongst adults, the parents of the children, are different as interaction between adults requires world knowledge or socio-cultural/economic knowledge which is much more diverse and complex than that of children. It is considered that linguistic skills required in adult interaction comprised of

multiple layers, whose basic stratum is what they learnt in their childhood and layers learnt at later stage of the lives are accumulated. Therefore, adult migrant, for example, have to acquire children's level of communicative competence first but have to acquire more to be able to interact at adults' level. The adults may well have difficulty in interacting naturally in L2 compared with their children, who just have to catch up with their colleague's level. (iii)b. will be discussed later when the subjects of this research are introduced.

As a summary, it would be reasonable to discuss the age issue in the following two domains: (i) the difference of SLA between adults and children and (ii) the difference of SLA among children vary from younger age to puberty.

In this paper I would like to discuss the relation between age and the L2 acquisition. Firstly, based on various research conducted to this issue, with a particular focus on the advantages of older learners and younger learners. Secondly, I attempt to discuss whether such results can explain the difference in the morphology test performance of the subjects.

2. Empirical studies on age difference in SLA

2.1 The difference of SLA between adults and children

Harley (1986), referring to the study by Seliger, Krashen & Ladefoged (1975), which shows that in natural settings, those who begin L2 acquisition as children are more likely, in the long run, to develop a native or near native level of attainment in oral/aural L2 skills than are adult beginners. This supports that the notion "The younger one starts learning L2 and the longer he continues, the better his linguistic competence becomes"

In the realm of syntax, the findings of the study by Patkowski (1980) suggest that the ability to achieve native-like syntactic usage in naturalistic oral communication may extend up to a starting age of 15.

These results may indicate the younger learners' advantage over older learners but leaves a question where to draw the fine line between the younger and older learners.

2.1.1. Rate and route of SLA

About the issues of rate and route, Ellis (1985: 105) notes that "the available evidence suggests that age does not alter the route of acquisition" However, "rate and success of SLA appear to be strongly influenced by the age of the learner" That is:

Where rate is concerned, there is evidence to suggest that older learners are better. That is, if learners at different ages are matched according to the

amount of time they have been exposed to the L2, it is the older learners who reach higher levels of proficiency. The evidence should be treated with care, for in case of Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) in their pronunciation test conducted upon various age groups mainly from three to adults. This result suggests that the younger learners are better learners of pronunciation than the older learner but it is the opposite when it comes to morphology and syntax.

2.1.2. Biological arguments

Harley (1986), citing Penfield & Roberts (1954), explains the brain plasticity hypothesis. That is; the child’s brain is plastic compared with that of an adult. Before the age of nine to 12 a child is a specialist in learning to speak. At the age of nine, however, for the purpose of learning languages, the human brain becomes progressively stiff and rigid. The child’s brain plasticity makes for superior ability specifically in acquiring “the early set or the units of a language” though the older learner is seen to have the advantage in vocabulary expansion.

Since Penfield’s neurological argument above is based mainly on his studies of aphasia, caution has been advised from a number of commentators that he “ability of the damaged brain to regain loss of disrupted language is not necessarily related to the ability of the healthy brain to acquire a new L2” (Harley *ibid.*).

Lenneberg, along similar lines to Penfield, links “the close of the critical period to the completion of cerebral lateralization of language function” which takes place at puberty. This was concluded mainly on the basis of differential recovery patterns from the right and left hemisphere lesions at different ages.

Those two arguments suggest that there likely to be a critical period. However, the specific periods are different according to researchers. Following is a summation of the critical period in Van Els (1984).

Researcher	The critical age	Basis for reasoning
Penfield & Roberts (1954)	Between 4 and 10	Loss of brain plasticity after age 10
Lenneberg (1967)	Between 2 and puberty	Completion of brain lateralization after puberty
Krashen (1973)	Lateralization may be complete by age 4	Right-ear superiority of age 4 children is as the same degree as that of age 9 children

Molfese at al.(1975) (Kinsbourne 1975)	Lateralization from birth	Experiment basis
Seliger (1981)	Multiple critical periods hypothesis i.e., many critical periods, successive and perhaps everlapping, lasting probably throughout one's lifetime, each closing off different acquisition abilities	Based on the studies of aphasia

Van Els (ibid.) notes that these biological arguments could not offer a satisfactory explanation for the alleged superiority of children over adults in L2 learning and that cognitive and affective arguments were advanced in support of the critical period hypothesis as follows:

Researcher	The critical age	Basis for reasoning
Rosansky (1975)& Krashen (1975)	The onset of the stage of formal operations, in Piaget's sense, marks the beginning of the end of the critical period.	N.A.
Taylor (1974)& Shumann (1975)	Children have a greater empathic capacity than adults	N.A.

According to the biological explanations, the newer the version is, the less likely they support the argument that one experiences 'the critical period' only once in a lifetime. The affective and cognitive explanations, especially that of Taylor and Schumann, need to be discussed in relation to various social factors which affect learners' SLA, for it can be assumed that soci-linguistic norms which L2 society requires L2 learners to follow are different between adults and children.

2.1.3. Social factors

I would like to my family as an example for the beginning of this section in order to discuss various social factors. I was a university student and at the same time, a casual tutor while my wife was a part time worker at an institution. At the occupational domain, both of us are labeled as 'non-native speakers of English'. Therefore, we are spoke to with adjusted version of English such as 'foreigner talk²' to which we reply in 'interlangauge³' This situation seems to change at much slower pace than we expect. It is not so often that explicit

corrections are made. In short, society requires adults L2 learners no exercise for primarily communicative competence⁴ and the social pressure for adults to possess integrative competence is not as strong as in the situation of children.

In contrast to this, there is a strong pressure on my children to possess not only communicative but integrative competence at their occupational domain, i.e., their Australian primary school. After the initiation period they are in constant need to attain more than communicative competence in order to survive. Encouragement as well as explicit correction is made often by their teachers and their friends⁵.

Schumann (1978) notes:

According to Smigh, pidgin languages are generally restricted to the first function-communication. That is, their purpose is merely to convey denotative, referential information. Since pidgins are always second languages, the integrative and expressive functions are maintained by the speakers' native languages. As a result of this functional restriction, pidginization produced an interlanguage which is simplified and reduced.

Now, in order to make themselves more effective in L2, it is not enough for children to simply fulfill communicative function. When we see the research data by Taylor and Schumann above of children having a greater empathic capacity than adults, together with social pressure which is stronger than in the adults' case, it is not hard to imagine that children turned out to be better learners than adults.

2.2. The difference of SLA among different ages of younger learners

By younger learners I mean learners from infancy to puberty. The reasons for this are three fold. Firstly, in the dichotomy of the older learners and the younger learners, subtracting adult age group from all age groups leaves the age group under puberty. Secondly, research covering six and seven years old mostly deals with the age group from infant to puberty. Thirdly, the morphological research listed in Van Els (1984:84) deals with informants whose ages are ranging from 3 to 14, eliminating those studies which dealt with adults. In this section I shall attempt to discuss the results of a few empirical studies.

Study by Ervin-Tripp (1978)

The study was conducted in Geneva, Switzerland, and involved the testing including comprehension, imitation, translation, case material and social milieu, of thirty-one English-speaking children in the area between the age of 4 and 9 who were in school where French was the instrumental medium. The

conclusions are as follows:

Grammatical items	The older learners	The younger learners
Phonology	The children above 7 learned faster	N.A.
Morphology	The older children learned number and gender more rapidly	N.A.
Syntax	The older children learned syntax	N.A.

As we can see, the result clearly shows that older learner possess an advantage over the younger learners. She give s reasons for this advantage as follows:

- i) In relation to age, oral language competence is more alike than it is different, the older learner having already discovered some basic principles of phonology.
- ii) Language tend to have similar semantic content. The older child has a fuller semantic system, so he/she merely needs to discover a new symbolic representation.
- iii) The older children have more efficient memory heuristics, relating to their greater knowledge. Because they can learn both strings and single items faster, they may acquire vocabulary too quickly, before they have enough text to discover the semantic and structural distribution.
- iv) The older learner is smarter. The child's capacity to solve problems, to make sub-rules, to carry in mind several principles increases with age.

The result of the phonology, where older learners learn faster contradicts the result of Fathman (1975)⁶ who argues that younger children's pronunciation was judged superior to that of older children. Although Ervin-Tripp notes that this result is consistent with the experiment of Olson and Samuels (1973)⁷, contention is raised by the fact that the testing method of phonology is not clearly mentioned. As a result, it is impossible to make accurate comparisons. I wonder if oder learners possess an advantage in pronunciation when it comes to French but not English.

Study by H.Reich (1986)

Reich studied Australian learners of German starting in grade 1 to 4 in three different types of language courses⁸ and succeeded in finding 'threshold' grade in SLA. She concluded that overall, each model shows that successive starting grades outperform the earlier starters i.e., Grade 2 starters performing better than Grad 1 starters, Grade 3 beginners perform better than Grade 2 starters and so on. Despite the difference amongst models, the tendency was found in all models. Referring to Grade 3 level, she notes:

In many of the test measures, Grade 3 seems to represent threshold at which the maximum benefits of language learning are experienced. The Grade 3s either obtain the highest overall scores, as in Oral Comprehension of the Grammar test for Plurals, or they obtain scores upon which the Grade 4 beginners improve little. Added to this, we see in some test (e.g. Cloze tests) that the Grade 1 and 2 beginners, upon reaching Grade 3, achieve results which approach a threshold. The classes above them do not show great improvement.

She also notes on Grade 1 level that;

initially the results indicate that Grade 1 beginners, in comparison with other age groups perform poorly in nearly every skill, particularly in tests involving grammar, reading and writing. The exception is Sound Discrimination. For this skill Grade 1 and 4 perform best. They do so for different reasons. The grade 1 approach is more concrete while the Grade 4s are analytical.

The result coincides with that of Ramírez and Politzer (1978:331). The information concerning the significant differences between grade 1 and 3, and 3 and 5 is of interest in so far as it shows that in some categories, the significant toward improvement occur rather late, namely in the interval from grade 3 to 5. These two results may indicate that children approximately ten years old perform better than those who are younger than ten. Thus among children, the older learners may learn better than the younger learners.

Study by Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978)

They studied 42 native speakers of English learning Dutch, dividing them into five age groups i.e., 3-5, 6-7, 8-10, 12-15 and adults. The test included items such as Pronunciation, Auditory discrimination, Morphology, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Sentence repetition and Translation. The results are as follows: Adolescents are the learners who progress most rapidly. Although the adults outperformed the children (6 to 10 years), the teenagers (12 to 15 years) learnt more rapidly than both these group, the teenagers learnt more rapidly than both these groups. They found that age was a factor only when it came to the rule-governed aspects of a second language-morphology and syntax in which, again, teenagers outperformed adults. There were only very small differences on pronunciation tests. Perhaps this result could be an indication of adolescents proving the best learners of all age groups.

While the results of the three studies above do not seem to support the simple notion that younger learners learn better than older learners, they do appear to

illustrate the advantage of learners whose age is not too young nor too old, that is, from around age six to adolescents.

Study by Harley (1986)

Harley studied issues concerning (i) the relative L2 proficiency of older late immersion students and younger early immersion students after a similar initial period of exposure to the L2, (ii) the eventual in-school attainment in the L2 immersion students of different starting ages, and (iii) the process of L2 acquisition among children and adolescent students. She compared five groups in French immersion programs i.e., (i) Early total immersion beginning at kindergarten, (ii) Late immersion beginning at grade 8, (iii) Early partial immersion beginning at grade 1, (iv) Francophone students whose average age is seven, (v) Francophone students whose average age is seven, (vi) Francophone students whose average age is 15. The tests given were interviews, story repetition tasks and a translation task, after a 1000 hours of exposure to a French immersion program. Various verb forms i.e., present, past and future tense were mainly focused on for the evaluation

The major difference found between younger learners and older learners are as follows:

In respect to *Number and Person*, the adolescent late immersion students are significantly more likely than the 6 to 7 years old early immersion students to mark number and person distinctions in the verb.

In respect of *Velancy*, the older learners hold an advantage.

In respect of *Lexical control*, older immersion students produced a greater variety of lexical verbs than did the early immersion students.

Harley (ibid:123) concluded:

These results suggest that while some minimum of time is obviously a prerequisite for reaching a functional level of L2 proficiency, there are other factors such as the nature of the L2 input in the classroom, the motivation of the students, and their relative cognitive maturity which appear to have been equal if not more important than time *per se* in determining how much of the target verb system has been acquired.

It can be concluded that older learners possess an advantage over younger ones.

3. Issues concerning immersion program

Before analyzing the test results of the subjects of this case study, and the

comparison and contrast of their learning environment against immersion program, it is important to discuss the type of linguistic environment under which test subjects learn L2. This would appear particularly important, when discussing the linguistic competence of children who are submerged in Australian school, in relation to the research based on the subjects involved in immersion course. This is because the objectives of these two types of course are different as is the effect on the students. Clyne (1986: 10) notes the difference in objectives of each types as follows:

Immersion programmes should not be confused with ‘submersion’, where migrant children are instructed in the national language only, in ethnolinguistically mixed classes and programmes in tended for native speaker of that language. The effect of such programs is generally to replace L1 by L2

He lists five objectives of bilingual education relevant to Australia, to which immersion programs belong to. They are (i)General educational⁹, (ii)Language maintenance, (iii)SLA through immersion, (iv)Ethnic identification¹⁰.

Comparing these objectives to the situation of the subjects of this research, the differences are as follows: As for (i), both share the same features as introducing instruction in L2 i.e., in English or enabling children from non-English-speaking countries to continue their schooling without too much disruption, while in an immersion program, basic skills are taught in L1 in the subjects’ case.

In an immersion program, education in L1 and l2 are conducted within the same school while in the subjects’ case each school conducts monolingual education. In the subjects’ linguistic life the factor of language maintenance¹¹ is also of concern. In the subjects’ case, submersion in the local school provides them withi overwhelming input of L2 compared with much less L1 input at their home, which seem to hinder their L11 development. The main reason they attend the Saturday school is to maintain and develop their L1 through the instruction and interaction in L1 class environment. From the view point of BICS(Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP(Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) in Cummins (1979b), the types of competence which are promoted at various domains can be presented as follows:

Immersion programs

	School domain	Family domain
Student’s L1	BICS & CALP	BICS
Student’s L2	Mainly CALP	N.A.

The subjects case

	Local School domain	The Saturday school domain	Family domain
Subjects' L1	N.A.	BICS & CALP	BICS
Subjects' L2	BICS & CALP	N.A.	N.A.

SLA through immersions and the subjects' case look alike. It is assumed, however, that there is a difference between the two environments, which is that students are allowed to respond with L1 to L2 instruction in immersion program while in the subjects' case, they cannot respond in their L1 because it is unintelligible to anyone but themselves. Therefore the pressure for them to comprehend and produce L2 is great. As for Ethnic identification, it is difficult to tell which culture students identify themselves in each types of class, thus no further discussion will be made.

4. A case study

4.1. Introduction

Most of the studies so far seem to indicate that older learners hold an advantage over younger learners in SLA, especially in the field of lexicon, morphology and syntax. Younger learners, however, sometimes outperform older learners in pronunciation. It might be interesting to investigate L2 performance of two L2 learners aged 6 and 7 after being submerged in L2 environment for almost exactly the same period. The reason I chose the subjects was that on my informal observation, the younger subject seemed to have been outperforming the older, which contradicted the results of various research in favor of older learners' L2 acquisition.

4.2. The subjects

There are two subjects, namely S and A. Their attributes are as follows:

S: a female of 7 years and 7 months old at the time this research was conducted.

A: a female of 6 years and 0 months years old.

Both were born and brought up in Japan, a monolingual environment, and the development of their L1, Japanese language had been normal. They started to have contact with English when they turned 5 and 3 mainly from the TV program "Sesame Street" and "*Eego de Asoboo*^{1 2}" They watched these quite frequently e.g. the former once a week, the latter, everyday. Also their family had interaction with several English speaking families, so they overheard the conversations among adults and had interactions themselves to a certain extent,

though they didn't even seem to comprehend what was spoken to.

They came to Melbourne, Australia when they were 6 and 4 and started attending local primary school, in grade 1 and prep respectively. They attended language class for migrant children to gain linguistic proficiency two to three hours per week. Otherwise they attended normal classes. The medium of instruction was English and there was no one except for them who understand Japanese. The ethnic breakdown of their school was, Anglo-Saxon making up less than 5 percent, while children from Vietnam, Cambodia, Greece and El Salvador constituted the remainder. Since English was the L2 for most of the children, it was in effect the official language. Both subjects had difficulties in settling at school in the beginning and it took about half a year for them to attend the school willingly. S started attending Saturday school three months after her arrival in order to maintain and develop L1 CALP and study skills.

After attending the local school for half a year, their production of English began at home. At the same time, each started showing different interpersonal tendencies. A voluntarily exchanged phone number with her classmates and frequently corresponded with them on the phone while S, remained inhibited. Also it was noticed that A not only produced English more than S but also pronunciation of A is much closer to that of a native speaker of English at her age. Their mother and I had a strong impression that A was more proficient in English than S.

Around then I tested whether they can recognize a phrase "I want to be your partner" in a song¹³ by letting them listen to the song. I thought it was a timely task for them to pick up the word 'partner' because they started mention the word in describing the school activities they had on each day. After listening twice, A could imitate and sing the phrase, understanding the meaning, whereas S could not. This incident reinforced our impression that A was more advanced in English proficiency than S.

Eleven months after their arrival, the whole family moved to the area which locates some 10km North of the area originally we settled and so changed the schools. In the new school, 90 percent of the students were from Anglo-Saxon background, thus English was the L1 for most of them. About a month after they started attending the new school, their oral production of English at home increased and as did a heavy mixture of English vocabulary in Japanese conversation and frequent code switching was observed. It is not clear whether this was due to the environmental change or a cumulative result which coincided to occur then.

They adjusted to the new environment much quicker than the previous time.

Within two months both of them made friends with their classmates and began to visit and invite them.

Since A and S have different personal attributes^{1 4}, as mentioned before, I would like to list some of their learner characteristics based on subjective observation for later reference.

Cognitive styles	Subject A	Subject S
Field dependence/independence	uncertain	uncertain
Reflectivity/impusivity	impulsive	reflective
Broad/Narrow category width	broad	narrow

Motivation	Subject A	Subject S
Intrinsic /integrative	both	both

Personality	Subject A	Subject S
	More extroverted and less anxious	More introverted and more anxious

4.3. The Method

4.3.2. The selection of testing method

The intention of this study is to investigate if there is any difference in the subjects' performance which is attributable to the learner characteristics, i.e., primarily age. Swain, Naiman & Dumas (1978) provided an applied Berko test originally invented by Berko(1958), which is considered suitable for younger learners. Berko test is to assess the development of morphological rules of five years olds in a French-immersion program. As they note, Berko's test is "an ingenious one" intended to measure a child's knowledge of certain morphological rules of the language. It was obvious, however, that it was suitable to use such a test, on children this age, that asks metalinguistic awareness apart from the context. As Adams (1978: 278) exemplifies below, a question that requires testees the understanding of the intention of the test as well as metalinguistic awareness would be rather difficult a task for small children.

Interviewer : Adam, which is right, 'two shoes' or 'two shoe'?

Adam : Pop goes the weasel!

For the purpose of avoiding this kind of breakdown and eliciting the morphological rules which testers expect by making testees concentrated in quasi-real language use, Berko "wug" test is quite suitable.

Berko (1989:159-60) describes a method to elicit negative sentence formation by introducing a child to a hand puppet and explaining that he always lilkes to

say the opposite of what the child says and encouraging the child to help the puppet to say the negative sentences.

This test is also suitable for a tester who is not a native speaker of English to judge clearly the developmental stages of the testees.

The morphological items tested were

- (i) Plural *s*,
- (ii) Past tense *ed*,
- (iii) Present progress *be Verb-ing*,
- (iv) Future tense *be going to*,
- (v) Formation of negative sentence,
- (vi) Third person singular present *s*,
- (vii) Formation of passive voice

4.3.2. Testing sessions

In order to place a small element of longitudinal study alongside the cross sectional one, i.e., to examine if there is any trace of longitudinal development, two sessions were conducted at 8 days intervals.

4.4. The Results

- (i) Plural *s*,

The tests were conducted in such a way for the subjects to complete the sentence with plural *s* as follows:

The interviewer: This is a (coined noun). (showing a picture of two of them^{1 5}) There are two,,,

The subjects : (coined noun)s

	A	S
Session 1	Ungrammatical 4 ^{1 6} , 6, 8, 49	Grammatical 61, 67
Session 2	Ungrammatical 131	Grammatical 177

There is a difference in this item between the subjects. Plural *s* never occurred grammatically in A's case while S were able to use it after the noun grammatically. It was also found that S has a stronger tendency than A to use monitor in line 67 and 177. This could be an indication of her reflective character. All that can be said is that s knew the rule and its application, therefore, had not 'acquired' in Krashen's sense^{1 7}.

(ii) Past tense *ed*,

The tests are conducted in such a way for the subjects to complete the sentence with past tense *ed* as follows:

The interviewer: He knows how to (coined verb). (by showing the picture)
He did the same thing yesterday. So yesterday, he,,,"

The subjects : (coined verb) ed

	A	S
Session 1	Ungrammatical 12	Grammatical 75
Session 2	Grammatical 137	Grammatical 187

Although A at the second session was judged grammatical, "(She) was torring", she never produced regular past suffix *ed*. However, this improvement from the first to session to the second maybe the development during the interval. In S's performance, there are two utterances which suggests that she understands the function and thus manipulation of the verb in 183, she succeeded in separating 'tor' rom 'torring' by listening to the previous sentence, then in 187 she succeeded in adding *ed* to the fake verb. S also demonstrated her ability to use the fake verb 'tor' as a transitive verb which takaes the object 'coffee bag'.

(iii) Present progress *be Verb-ing*,

The test was conducted in such a way for the subjects to complete the sentence with present progress *ing* as follows:

The interviewer: He is going to (coined verb). And now he,,,"

The subjects : ,,,"is (coined verb) ing

	A	S
Session 1	Grammatical 20	Grammatical 95
Session 2	Grammatical 137 Ungrammatical 149	Grammatical 197

Unlike the previous two items, there is no significant difference in the performances in this item. As Hakuta (1978: 140) and Pienemann and Johnston (1986: 117) suggest, it can be said that present progress is the form which has been observed to be acquired by the L2 learners at comparatively eaerly stage of language development. This maybe the reason for the subjects' rather successful performance. The line 87 indicates that S was using 'gling' as a verb 'jump' because she put "into the water" after 'gling'.

(iv) Future tense *be going to*,

The tests were conducted in such a way for the subjects to complete the sentence with future tense *be going to* as follows:

The interviewer: she knows how to (coined verb). She is going to do the same. Tomorrow she is,,

The subjects: ,,going to (coined verb)

	A	S
Session 1	? ^{1 8} 16	Ungrammatical 79,85
Session 2	Ungrammatical 145	? 195

In the line 16 the elicited response was “(she is) *dobbing*”, which seems to have been influenced by the previous line 15. “(He) gonna hif someone’s hair” in the line 195 cannot be judged correct. This may be the result of exposure to the L2 environment and thus remembering the phrase *(be) gonna Verb* as a set phrase or a prefabricated pattern^{1 9}.

(v) Formation of negative sentence,

The tests were conducted in such a way so that the subjects come up with the negative sentence as follows:

The interviewer: Say opposite. I can drive.

The subjects: I (auxiliary verb + contracted negative) can't drive.

	A	S
Session 1	Grammatical 45,47,49	Grammatical 113,115,119
Session 2	Grammatical 159,161,163,171	Grammatical 211, 214, 219

Both subjects use contracted form such as don't and can't except for *may not* in 49 and 171 which only a used. The reason for the different tendency between the subjects is that S seemed to be focusing on the meaning of the interviewre's utterance, “I may have some marbles” while A seem to be focusing on the form itself, for in reply to the interviewer's line, S asked “How many?” and A thought aloud “Opposite...”

What could be longitudinal development appeared in A's response. A, in the first session, replied “I may not have a marbles” while, in the second session, her reply was “You may not have any of acorn” The concept that the negation of ‘some’ is ‘not any’ and the expression to it might have been related during the interval.

(vi) Formation of passive voice

The tests were conducted in such a way so that subjects come up with the response as follows:

The interviewer: This girl patted the donkey. The donkey was,,

The subjects : the donkey (be+pastparticiple+by) was patted by this girl.

	A	S
Session 1	Ungrammatical 51,53	? 123
Session 2	Ungrammatical 153	Grammatical 223,225

It was irrelevant for the interviewer to use ‘hit’ to elicit the formation of a regular past participle in the first session. Nevertheless, the response of both subjects in the first session makes an interesting contrast. While A seems to be context conscious, focusing on the meaning of the lines 50 and 52, S seems to be grammar rule conscious in her response in 123. The response of s in 123 “hitted” is an overgeneralization. It also indicates, however, that S made two correct assumptions, i.e., the intention of the question was to examine grammatical rules and elicit passive voice sentence. The different response by the two subjects remains the same in the second session. This could be attributable to S’s greater ‘testpertise^{2 0}’ than A or possibly S’s acquisition of the morpheme.

(vii) Third person singular present *s*,

The tests are conducted in such a way so that subjects come up with the negative sentence with third person singular *s* as follows:

The interviewer: Say opposite. Sue likes spaghetti.

The subjects: Sue doesn’t like spaghetti

	A	S
Session 1	Ungrammatical 47	Ungrammatical 101, 109, 111
Session 2	? 165	?215

Though both responded grammatically in 165 and 215, this is obviously due to the influence of the previous line 164 and 214 respectively. This morpheme does not seem to have been acquired by either of them yet.

5. Conclusion

Judging from the particular set of tests of Plural *s*, past tense and Passive voice, it can be said that S, the older learner, outperformed A, the younger learner. The superiority of the older learner to the younger is not as great as it turned to be, given the nature of the tasks which is relatively cognitively demanding, context-reduced. There certainly is, however, a difference in the performance between the two subjects shown. What can it be attributable to? The answer may be sought from the cognitive maturity and learner characteristics. S had been involved in the formal education for 4 years and 2 month (3 years in crèsh or hoikuen in Japan, a year and 2 months in primary schools in Australia) and the Saturday school, while A, for 3 years and 2 months

(2 years in crèsh in Japan and a year and 2 months in primary school in Australia, a year of crèsh in the Saturday school in Australia). This could have caused the difference in maturity between the two subjects. Among the schooling factors, Saturday school seemed to have made S mature than a in respect of testpertise. Also the introspective character of s could have helped her to be grammar conscious in such a way to abstract the grammatical rules from various input.

I had held the prejudice that A is superior to S in the whole aspects of L2 acquisition before this research was conducted based on A's amount of speech production and the quality of pronunciation^{2 1}. This may support the idea of the idea of the principle that the younger the child on arrival, the higher the probability of approaching a native accent^{2 2}. Also A's impulsive, i.e., being quick in response without thinking much, and extrovert, i.e., sociable, chacter which is contrastive to S's reflective and introverted character made A appear better in L2 acquisition.

As for longitudinal development, some evidences found are listed below.

Subject A

	Session 1	Session 2
Past tense	Ungrammatical 12 (Yesterday he) <u>rick</u>	Grammatical 139 (Yesterday he) <u>was torring</u>
Negative sentence formation	Grammatical but not expected 49 I <u>may not</u> have a marbles.	Grammatical but not expected 171 You <u>may not</u> have <u>any of acorn.</u>

Subject S

	Session 1	Session 2
Future tense	Ungrammatical 79 (he is going to) ricking/ricked again.	Ungrammatical 195 (Tomorrow he) is going to hiffing. Gonna hif someon's hair.

There is a certain change in their response after the interval, though the progress did not necessarily lead them to produce grammatical sentences.

The subject A succeeded in producing grammatical form in the session 2 in the test of past tense. S came to be able to analyze the meaning, i.e., to put a coffee bag in a cup and jiggle, and function, i.e., transitive/intransitive, of the coined verb, in the session 2. It is difficult, however, to assert that all of these changes reflect the real competence that had been developed during the interval, for this

change can fluctuate.

In 2009, 15 years after the original research was conducted, the subjects told me what they were thinking while the interview test was going.

Referring to the passive sentence, A confided that she wasn't thinking about the sentence structure or anything but was absorbed in the donkey's perspective when she replied to the stimuli "The girl patted the Donkey" by "The donkey was happy", instead of "The donkey was patted by a girl", which she was supposed to answer.

S confided that in the test of plural *s* she wasn't sure what answer she was expected of. The hindsight could work as testimony to reinforce the learner characters. A was quick in reply because she was not thinking of the sentence structure but rather focused on the context of the narrative which turned out to be generated in her mind by the sentence completion task. S, on the other hand, could be considered as norm conscious, another aspect of reflective character.

Given all the evidence the following conclusions can be made.

- i) The younger learner was superior to the older in pronunciation.
- ii) The older learner was superior to the younger in cognitive ability
- iii) Various learner characteristics aimplify the impression of developmental stage of each L2 learner which does not necessarily reflect their real L2 developmental stage.
- iv) Learner characteristics plays as vital role as age in L2 morphological acquisition.

6. Suggestion for the introduction of English to primary school in Japan

Given the intensity and duration of the L2 interaction the subjects went through, the L2 environment is comparable to submersion course. Compared to such L2 environment, the intensity and duration of L2 interaction that MEXT designed, which takes place at an hour per week EFL class consisting of all Japanese as L1 learners would be very low and small. Torikai (2006:12), citing two research result, argues that there is no significant difference in the English competence between the two groups of junior and senior high school students who have experienced EFL at primary school and have not. Therefore, it can be concluded that current EFL education at primary school is not adequate to L2 acquisition. Theoretically increase of the intensity and duration would be a solution to address this inadequacy.

MEXT needs to increase the intensity and duration if it aims English acquisition and it doesn't have to be from as early as Primary education.

Note

¹ 文部科学省では、平成 20 年 3 月 28 日に小学校学習指導要領の改訂を告示し、新学習指導要領では小学校 5・6 年で週 1 コマ「外国語活動」を実施することとしました。

http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/gaikokugo/index.htm (as at September 15 2009)

² Ferguson, C.A. 1971 “Absence of copula and the notion of simplicity: a study of normal speech, baby talk, foreigner talk, and pidgins” In D.Hymes(ed) *Pidginization and creolization of languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Selinker, L. 1972 “Interlanguage” *IRAL* 10

⁴ Shumann (1978), referring to Smigh (1972) classifies function of language into three types; communicative, integrative and expressive.

The communicative function operates in the transmission of referential, denotative information between persons. The integrative function is engaged when a speaker acquires language to the extent that it marks him as a member of a particular social group. That is, his speech contains those features (such as correct noun and verb inflections, inversion in questions, and correct placement of the negative particle) that are unnecessary in order to sound like a member of the group whose language contains these features. The expressive function goes beyond the integrative in that through it, the speaker becomes a valued member of a particular linguistic group. In other words, he displays linguistic virtuosity or skill such that he becomes and admired member of the community.

⁵ I remember that after being immersed in Australian school for a few months, the utterance they initially made in English after the silent period such as “Shut up”, “go away”, “I hate you”, “I’m not your friend” made me afraid that such negative and discouraging phrases might be commonly used among them or, worse yet, it might be that they were constantly subjected to such verbal act toward them. So I assumed that these utterances were the result of their intaking of such phrases as comprehensible input. Later my wife observed and told me that girls have to use those somewhat harsh phrases to repel bullying from boys.

⁶ Fathman, a. 1975, The relationship between age and second language productive ability. *Language Learning*, 25, 245-53 which Harley (1986) summarises as follows: He used a structured oral interview with picture stimuli, similar in format to the Berko(1958) “wug” test, to assess the acquisition of morphology and syntax in English hL2 of 200 immigrant children who had been in the U.S.A for less than three years. Holding length of residence constant, it was found that older children of 11-15 years performed significantly better than younger children aged 6-10 years. On a picture description task, however, which was recorded and rated globally for correctness of grammar, pronunciation, general fluency by two linguists, the younger children’s pronunciation was judged superior to that at of the older children.

⁷ This could not be found neither in the notes of Ervin-Tripp (1978) nor in the references in Hatch.

⁸ Reich notes three types of language courses as follows: Model A is partial immersion program whereby students learn a part of their curriculum in German. Model B runs a more traditional program where the language is seen as an object rather than as a medium. Model C allows students to learn through the medium of German but provides less hours of exposure to the language than model A.

⁹ Clyne (ibid.) “The teaching of basic (literacy and numeracy) skills in L1 while at the same time introducing instruction in L2: or : continuity of education to enable children from non-English-speaking countries to continue their schooling without too much disruption; or ; an entire educational program in two languages. Fundamental to these objectives is the threshold hypothesis”

- ¹⁰Clyne (ibid.) e.g. through religious or cultural instruction in an ethnic language(not necessarily in L1)
- ¹¹“Immersion” in Canada in the strict sense is basically L2-medium education thus, is not concerned with language maintenance.
- ¹²“Let’s play in English” would be the English translation and it is a 15 minutes program for children which provides cartoons depicting contact situation between English and Japanese, and various activities are instructed in English.
- ¹³“Dance with Me” by Orleans 1975 “Dance with me. I want to be your partner. Can’t you see? The music is starting.”
- ¹⁴Van Els et al (1984: 112-25)
- ¹⁵Confer appendix for the picture.
- ¹⁶These are the line numbers in the transcript of the dialogues, where the utterance related to the morphological items occurred. The entire transcript is in the appendix.
- ¹⁷Krashen (1985)
- ¹⁸? signifies clear cut judgment was unable to made due to various factors.
- ¹⁹Færch & Kasper (1984: 9)
- ²⁰Van els (1984: 106)
- ²¹ A number of native English speakers noted that a had native like “accent”.
- ²²Harley (1986: 34) notes that Asher & Garcia (1969) found that members of a group who had arrived between age one and six and had lived in the U.S.A for five to eight years were most likely to be rated as the “near-native speaker” level, thus in general upholding the principle that the younger the child on arrival, the higher the probability of approaching a native accent.

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Appendix

Appendix

Transcription of the sessions

A and S stand for the subject A and S respectively. I stands for the interviewer

The first session 1/5/93

Subject A

Test of plural s:

- 1I: What is this? (Showing green text marker)
2A: It's a green texter
3I: Now, there is another one.(Showing two text markers) There are...
4A: Two texter.
- 5I: This is a lep. (Showing a triangle in which a face is drawn) Say lep.
6A: Lep.
7I: And now here are three of them. (Drawing three of them) There are three...
8A: Lep.

Test of past tense

- 9I: This is a man who knows how to rick.(Showing a man pulling a cable in a weight training gym)
10A: Rick.
11I: He did the same thing, same thing yesterday. So yesterday he...
12A: Rick.

Test of future tense

- 13I: This is a girl who knows how to dob.(Showing a girl who is skydiving)
14A: Dob.
15I: She is dobbing. Tomorrow, she is going to do the same.
Tomorrow, she is...
16A: dobbing.
17I: Tomorrow, she is going...
18A: dobbing.

Test of present progress

- 19I: This is a man who is going to gling. (Showing a man on a bridge who is about to bungee-jump) He is about to gling.
And now...

20A: He is glinging.

Test of negative/Third person singular present s

21I: You can ride bicycle.

22A: Yeah.

23I: Does Sumi ride bicycle?

24A: Yes.

25I: Sumi...

26A: Ride a bike.

27I: Can she ride a bike?

28A: Yes.

29I: Yes, she...

30A: can

40I: She can...

41A: ride.

42I: Now say opposite.

43A: Opposite.

44I: I can drive.

45A: I can't drive.

46I: Sue likes spaghetti.

47A: She don't like spaghetti.

48I: You may have some marbles. Opposite.

49A: Opposite,,, I may not have a marbles.

Test of Passive voice

50I: OK. A , you hit me. I was hit by you. (Showing a girl who is patting a donkey)So this girl patted the donkey. The donkey was...

51A: happy.

52I: This time, you patted me. I was patted by you. The girl patted the donkey. And the donkey was ...

53A: Happy.

Subject S

Test of plural s:

54I: Sumi, now what is this?(Showing green text marker)

55S: Green.

56I: Green what?

57S: Green pen.

58I: So this is a green pen,,, green texter This is a green texter, all right?

59S: Yeah.
60I: Now, here is another one. So there are two,,
61S: Texters.

62I: What's this?(Showing a triangle in which a face is drawn)
63S: I forgot it.
64I: This is a lep.
65S: Lep.
66I: Lep. Now there are three of them. There are three...
67S: Lep... leps.

Test of past tense

68I: Now, Do you know what he is doing? (Showing a man pulling a cable in a weight training gym)
69S: I don't know.
70I: He is ricking. And yesterday, he did the same. So he, yesterday he...
71S: Pull...
72I: Yesterday, he...
73S: He...
74I: In a louder voice.
75S: He... ricked.

Test of future /past tense

76I: Tomorrow he is going to do the same. (Again, showing a man pulling a cable in a weight training gym)
So he is going...
77S: Going to ricking again.
78I: He is going to... He is going to...
79S: ricked

80I: This is a girl who knows how to dob. Dob.(Showing a girl who is skydiving)
81S: Dob.
82I: She is now dobbing. Yesterday she did the same thing. Yesterday, she,,
83S: Dobbbed.
84I: And tomorrow, she is going to do the same thing again. So she is going to,,
85S: Dobbbed.

Test of present progress

86I: Here is the man who knows how to gling. Gling (Showing a man on a bridge who is about to bungee-jump)

87S: Gling into the water.
88I: Yes, yes. He is about to gling. All right? And now he is,,
89S: Gling.
90I: He is now,,
91S: Jump down from the bridge.
92I: He is now,,
93S: Gling,,
94I: Gling,,
95S: ,,ging.

Test of negative/Third person singular present s

96I: Now s , do you like spaghetti?
97S: Yes.
98I: Does A like spaghetti?
99S: Yes.
100I: Yes, A ,,,
101S: Do.
102I: Do?
103S: Yes, she do.

104I: Do you like tapioca pudding?
105S: What?
106I: Tapioca pudding. Do you like it?
107S: Yeah.
108I: Does A like it?
109S: She like it.
110I: She like it?
111S: She like it, too.

112I: Now, you say the opposite. I like you.
113S: I don't like you.
114I: Your mum can drive.
115S: My mum can't drive.
116I: Can't?
117S: Can't.
118I: I may have some marbles.
119S: You don't have any marble.

Test of passive voice

120I: Sumi, you hit me. I was hit by you. All right? (Showing a girl who is patting a donkey) So the girl patted the donkey.
121S: The donkey.
122I: The donkey was...
123S: Hitted

124I: Pat...
125S: Pat from the girl.

The second session 9/5/93

Subject A

Test of plural s

126I: Do you know what this is?(Showing a picture of an atom)
127A: Yeah. Zib.
128I: This is a zib. Say zib.
129A: Zib.
130I: All right. Here are two of them. There are two,,
131A: Zib.

Test of past tense/ Present progress/ Future tense

132I: Can you see what's going on?(Showing a hand jiggling a coffee bag in cup)
133A: Yep.
134I: What she is doing?
135A: Em. She is putting the coffee in the cup.
136I: Now, putting the coffee bag in the coffee,, um jiggling,, it's all called tor. Now she is,,
137A: Torring.
138I: Yesterday she did the same thing. Yesterday, she,,
139A: was torring.
140I: Good. Now you know what he is doing.(Showing a picture in which a barber massaging a head of a customer)
141A: No.
142I: Hiffing. He is hiffing. Can you say hif.
143A: Hif.
144I: Tomorrow he is going to do the same thing. It's his job. Tomorrow he,,
145A: Hiffing.

Test of present progress

146I: Now Aya, he is going to mot.(Showing a baseball batter about to hit a ball)
147A: Mot.
148I: He is going to mot. He is about to mot. He is about to mot. Now he ,, (Showing a baseball batter hitting a ball)

149A: Motting.

Test of passive voice

150I: This is a dog named Taro.(Showing picture in which a girl is calling a dog)

151A: Taro,Taro.

152I: So, she called Taro. In other words, Taro was,,

153A: Coming.

Test of negative/third person singular present s

154I: Do you like computer game?

155A: Yeah.

156I: How about Sumi? Sue,,

157A: Like computer game.

158I: How about your mum?

159A: She don't like it. Because she's can't play very well. She always die.

160I: Can you say the opposite? I like spaghetti.

161A: Opposite,, You don't like spaghetti.

162I: Sue likes spaghetti.

163A: Sue don't like spaghetti.

164I: Mum doesn't like spaghetti.

165A: Mum does like spaghetti.

166I: Now, you know what acorn is.

167A: Yeah.

168I: Now, I may have some acorns.

169A: How many?

170I: About five. Say opposite.

171A: Opposite. You may not have any of acorn.

Subject S

Test of plural s

172I: Sumi, this is a zib. (Showing a picture of an atom)

173S: Zib.

174I: Can you say zib?

175S: Zib.

176I: Now, there are two,,

177S: Zib, Zib, Zibs.

Test of past tense.

178I: Do you know what this hand is doing? (Showing a hand jiggling a coffee bag in a cup) What this hand is doing?
179S: Putting coffee bag?
180I: So, this hand is putting coffee bag in a cup.
181S: Yeah.
182I: This is called tor. She is torring.
183S: Tor.
184I: Can you say torring?
185S: Torring.
186I: So yesterday, she did the same thing. So yesterday, she...
187S: She torred the coffee bag.

Test of future tense

188I: Look at this man. (Showing a picture in which a barber massaging a head of a customer) Do you know what this man is doing to him?
189S: No.
190I: It's called hif,,, hif.
191S: Hif.
192I: He is hiffing.
193S: Hiffing?
194I: He is hiffing. Now, tomorrow, he is going to do the same thing. Tomorrow he...
195S: Is going to,,,em,,, going going to hiffing. gonna hif someone's hair.

Test of present progress

196I: He is about to mot. (Showing a baseball batter about to hit a ball)
He is about to mot. (Showing a baseball batter hitting a ball) Now he...
197S: He is mot,,, motting.

Test of negative/Third person singular present s

198I: Do you like computer games?
199S: Sometimes.
200I: How about ayano.
201S: Yes, she do.
202I: She do? She...
203S: Like computer game.
204I: And how about your mummy?
205S: I don't know.
206I: Maybe she...
207S: Doesn't like it. Because she can't do it.
208I: But maybe she...
209S: Like it.

210I: Can you say the opposite? I like you.
211S: I don't like you.
212I: Now, Aya likes spaghetti.
213S: Aya don't like spaghetti.
214I: Your mum doesn't like computer game.
215S: My mum does like computer game.
216I: I may have some acorns.
217S: How many?
218I: Sumi, I may have some acorns.
219S: You don't have any acorns.

Test of passive voice

220I: This is a dog named Taro. (Showing a picture in which a girl is calling a dog) She called Taro. So Taro was,,
221S: Running.
222I: She called Taro. And Taro was,,
223S: Called.
224I: By,,
225S: The girl.

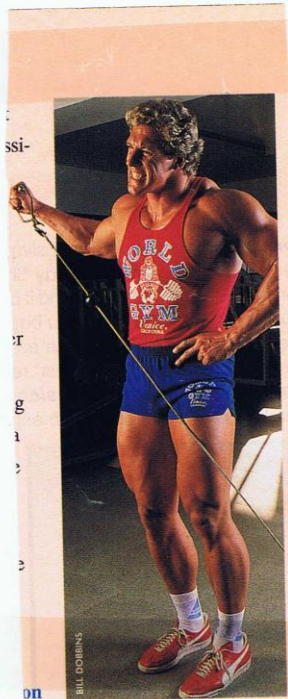
Pictures and Words used for the test.

The first session.

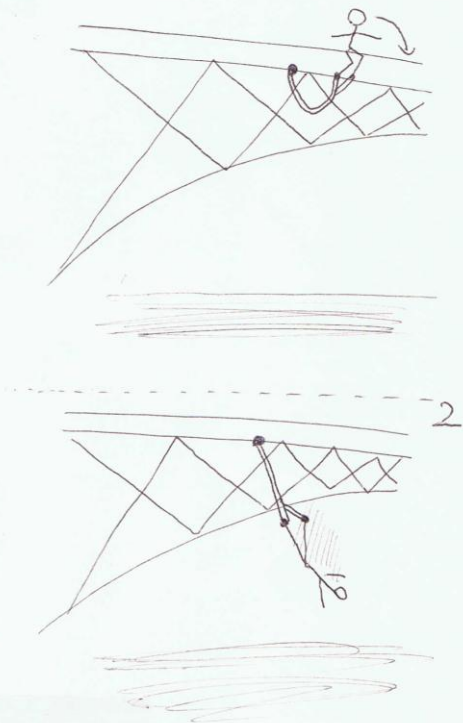
lep



rick.



gling

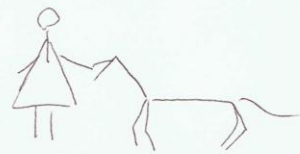


dob



71

Passive sentence



The second session.

zib



tor



hif



mot.

2

1



Passive sentence.

