*I dedicate this book to three outstanding professionals: Professor Mirjana Vilke and Professor Richard Johnstone, the most inspiring researchers of young language learners, and Dr. József Bognár, who motivated me to teach children.*

# An introduction to why context matters

Oleanders and lemon trees are precious plants kept in pots in my hometown, Pécs, Hungary. I place mine in the sunniest spots from spring to fall, keep them in the house during winter, and do everything to make them blossom. When I first saw the robust differences of their wild growing relatives abroad I could not help but notice the importance of the local environment. Context matters. Similar to horticulture, the impact of the context is visible everywhere in early language learning. This volume is about how context contributes to early language learning and teaching.

The first two chapters prepare the reader for the variety of topics in the rest of the book. The first paper discusses the relevance of the critical period hypothesis, types of curricula for young language learners and provides an overview of recent inquiries. Chapter two, by Peter Edelenbos and Angelika Kubanek, is about principles, research and good practice in Europe.

Four chapters focus on assessing young language learners. Helena Curtain gives a detailed account of assessment instruments and proficiency standards used with early start programmes in the USA; Ofra Inbar-Lourie and Elana Shohamy discuss why the construct is the main issue in assessing young learners. Joanna Jalkanen's chapter shows how teaching and assessment are implemented in harmony at a kindergarten in Finland, whereas Andrea Haenni Hoti, Sybille Heinzmann, and Marianne Müller give an account of young learners' oral assessment in Switzerland.

The next two chapters focus on how age impacts on language learning. Carmen Muñoz overviews the relationship between input and long-term outcomes of early learning in a formal setting, whereas Chise Kasai compares how Japanese children and adults acquire two sounds.

Three chapters explore individual differences: Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović overviews the large body of research accumulated on young learners' motivation, anxiety and other areas. Marina Mattheoudakis and Thomaï Alexiou look into how young learners' socio-economic status interacts with other factors in Greece; whereas Csilla Kiss gives an account of how an aptitude test was developed for Hungarian learners.

Innovation is the common theme in the next section. Qiang Wang's chapter provides insights into a survey documenting Chinese teachers' enthusiasm towards teaching children English. Another Asian context is the focus of Jayne Moons' paper in which she shows through case studies how policy decisions are implemented in Vietnam. Classrooms and Chinese learners are focused on in Jing Peng and Lili Zhang's chapter.

Discussions in the last three papers analyze the status of languages. John Harris argues against the traditional division between heritage, foreign and minority programmes based on studies conducted in Ireland, whereas Janet Enever discusses how the status of the target language influences young language learners' choices in England. Finally, a critical discourse analysis reveals what is involved in early English programmes in the Israeli context.

I hope readers will find the richness of the topics and the depth of the discussions in the many local contexts informative and helpful. The chapters document the impressive development in research methods into early language learning and teaching and may serve as a valuable resource for future studies. I am sure readers will find evidence on how context matters in age-related research. Enjoy the book as I enjoy my oleanders and lemon trees!

Marianne Nikolov

# Contents

# 1. The age factor in context

*Marianne Nikolov*

Who would ever have predicted such an enormous increase in enthusiasm towards teaching children foreign languages all over the world in the late 1970s during the low ebb of interest due to the Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen, and Hargreaves (1974) report? The world has definitely changed a lot since then. As readers will find out, a smorgasbord of recent studies have inquired into how young language learners develop in a variety of programmes.

An early start to learn a new language tends to be seen as conducive to proficiency over time. Evidence used to come from second language contexts; however, in recent years a wide range of studies have been conducted on the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages (FL) at an increasingly early age in contexts where the target language is limited to the classroom. The aim of this chapter is to provide a critical overview of issues and challenges characterizing recent empirical research inquiring into early FL programmes. In the first part of this chapter I discuss the Critical Period Hypothesis, the point of departure usually claimed to provide a theoretical underpinning to early modern FL programmes. Then, I introduce models and their aims and time frames for early language learning (ELL). In the third section I overview recently published studies on various aspects of the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages.

As will be shown, a range of large- and smaller-scale studies have been implemented to explore how the age factor works in a variety of educational contexts and they tend to fail to support "the younger the better" assumption. These findings, however, do not mean that ELL is a waste of time. Studies provide insights into complex ways of how young learners develop and offer an opportunity to discuss research methodology and areas for further research. As will be argued, the advantages and outcomes of an early start need to be analyzed in the specific contexts where young learners and their teachers interact with one another in classrooms in hugely varying conditions. Therefore, further research is necessary indeed.

# 1. The age factor and the Critical Period Hypothesis

## 1.1. The Critical Period Hypothesis

Young learners are widely perceived to aquire languages in a qualitatively different way from adolescents and adults. Children before a certain age seem to pick up a new language with ease and success, whereas older learners often fail to do so. Discussions on the age factor tend to focus on the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) for language (e.g., Scovel 1988, 2000; Singleton 2001, 2005). The CPH has been a hotly debated research area not only in second language acquisition (SLA) research, but also in linguistic theory and cognitive science (Hernandez, Ping and MacWhinney 2005; Paradis 2004; Pinker 1994; McWhinney 2005). Some researchers argue that different critical, or sensitive, periods characterize language acquisition in different linguistic areas, and "the existence, or not, of one or more sensitive periods for SLA has major implications for the validity of any SLA theory" (Long 2005: 311).

An important distinction has been confirmed in recent cognitive and neurobiological explanations of SLA reflecting a dual procedural/declarative dimension widely accepted in cognitive science (e.g., McWhinney 2005; Paradis 2004; Ullman 2001). Two systems exist side by side: a rule-based analytic procedural system, and a formulaic, exemplar-based declarative system (Skehan 1998). In the first system, storage and powerful generative rules operate together to compute well-formed sentences; in the second one, a large memory system is responsible for drawing on some rules operating on unanalyzed wholes or chunks. Young language learners use memory-based processes, whereas adult language learners rely on rule-based learning.

The CPH concerns implicit linguistic competence (DeKeyser 2003; Long 2005). "The decline of procedural memory for language forces late second-language learners to rely on explicit learning, which results in the use of a cognitive system different from that which supports the native language" (Paradis 2004: 59). The acquisition of implicit competence is affected by age in two ways: (1) biologically, the plasticity of the procedural memory for language gradually decreases after about age five; and (2) cognitively, reliance on conscious declarative memory increases both for learning in general and for learning a language from about age seven. Learners may apply compensatory mechanisms to counterbalance decline in implicit learning: learning new vocabulary,

for example, relies on declarative memory, thus, it is not susceptible to the CPH (Paradis 2004). This fact explains how exceptionally successful adult learners manage to become proficient despite a late start (for an overview see Moyer 2004; Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović 2006: 236–240): most of them possess unusual memory capacity (Skehan 1998) and rely heavily on metalinguistic knowledge and pragmatics (Paradis 2004).

Recent neuroimaging techniques have triggered new types of studies on the CPH debate. The overall findings (Stowe and Sabourin 2005; Wattendorf and Festman 2008) show that (1) the same brain areas are used for both first and second language; (2) late learners may draw on other areas as well; and (3) areas responsible for processing language seem to be used less efficiently for second languages in the case of very early proficient bilinguals as well as late bilinguals.

Discussions on the CPH have focused on the question whether there is an abrupt fall or a continuous decline in SLA. Some researchers analyzing large-scale datasets (Chiswick, Lee, and Miller 2004; Hakuta, Bialystok, and Wiley 2003) used self-assessment data on age on arrival, length of exposure, and language development from immigrants in Australia and the United States and found linear relationships between age on arrival and language proficiency. These findings indicate that success in SLA declines steadily over time and thus, a counter argument against a critical period.

A plausible explanation is put forward in MacWhinney's (2005: 64) Unified Competition Model: older learners become increasingly reliant on connections between sound and orthography and they vary in the constructions they can control or that are missing or incorrectly transferred. They have restricted social contacts and their cognitive abilities also decline. In his view, none of these factors predict a sharp drop at a certain age in SLA, but a gradual decline across the life span. An in-depth analysis of maturational constraints is proposed by Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2003): they argue that a "consensus model" can integrate the accumulated evidence on empirical facts and the relationships among them. As they claim, maturation can account for the general linear decline in learning potentials with increasing age on arrival for learners in general, "whereas the variability between exceptionally successful and non-exceptional L2 learners of the same starting age is accounted for best by non-maturational factors" (Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2003: 574).

Two main perspectives have been examined in research into the CPH: (1) the rate of acquisition and (2) ultimate attainment. Most studies have confirmed the findings of the seminal paper by Krashen, Long, and Scarcella published in 1979: older age is an initial advantage in the rate, but a disadvantage in ultimate attainment. The widely accepted findings state that (1) adults progress at early stages of morphology and syntax faster than children; (2) older children acquire faster than younger children; and (3) child starters outperform adult starters in the long run. Most parents and decision makers in foreign language contexts seem to be aware of the third point, but they mistakenly assume that young learners develop fast. In other words, enthusiasm towards an early start is not supported by empirical studies, as the younger means the slower.

Special discussions concern what linguistic areas are mostly affected by a critical or sensitive period. It is widely accepted that accent is at the very heart of the CPH. In Long's view (2005), native-like accent is impossible to attain unless first exposure occurs before age six or twelve, indicating quite a controversial range; whereas a sensitive period for lexical, collocational abilities and morphology and syntax ends between the ages of six and mid-teens.

Although a growing body of studies on successful adult language learners provide evidence that native-like proficiency (including accent) is available to some exceptional adults, these discussions are beyond our scope (for recent overviews see e.g., Moyer 2004; Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović 2006; Singleton and Ryan 2004).

To summarize: the CPH claims that natural language acquisition is available to young children, whereas older adolescents and adults have limited or no access to it. Although the existence of age effects is widely accepted, many applied linguists disagree on whether they are consistent with a critical period. Overviews on the age factor tend to rely on the same body of empirical evidence; however, some authors interpret studies in favour of the existence of the CPH (e.g., DeKeyser 2003; DeKeyser and Larson-Hall 2005; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson 2001, 2003; Ioup 2005; Long 2005) or against it (e.g., Bialystok 2001; Birdsong 2005; Marinova-Todd, Marshall, and Snow 2000, 2001; MacWhinney 2005; Moyer 2004, Tomasello 2003), whereas others present a balanced view (e.g., Johnstone 2002; Muñoz 2006; Scovel 1988, 2000; Singleton 2001; Singleton and Ryan 2004). No wonder Singleton (2005: 269) calls the CPH "a coat of many colours" and claims that "it is like a

mythical hydra, whose multiplicity of heads and capacity to produce new heads rendered it impossible to deal with" (p. 280).

## 1.2. The CPH and early foreign language programmes

One wonders how these scholarly discussions are relevant to early modern foreign language programmes. It is clear from the literature on the CPH that the vast majority of studies rely on data collected in second language contexts and not in educational contexts where the target language tends to be limited to the classroom as a foreign language and is simply one of the school subjects. Even in second language contexts, one needs to bear in mind, there is no guarantee that all children will attain native-like proficiency levels (Long 2005: 289), as there are many other factors contributing to ultimate attainment. To illustrate, a recent longitudinal study found that young children had strong accents after four years of enrollment in English-medium schools in the United States (Flege, Birdsong, Bialystok, Mack, Sung, and Tsukada 2005). Research shows that native accent is not automatically available in second language contexts either. Therefore, we need to take into consideration what these findings imply for ELL in foreign language contexts.

Some experts (e.g., Nikolov 2002; Singleton 2001) have cast doubt on the relevance of the CPH to ELL, despite the fact that most programmes for young learners tend to refer to "the earlier the better" slogan. DeKeyser and Larson-Hall (2004: 101) point out that early foreign language and partial immersion programmes do not capitalize on children's implicit learning skills for two reasons: first, they are form-focused, and second, they are limited in time. The latter is the reason why Larson-Hall (2008) calls ELL "minimal input situation".

A third, equally important reason has to be added: in most ELL contexts teachers are non-native speakers of the target language and their proficiency may often be below what enthusiastic advocates of ELL expect to achieve – native-like proficiency (Enever, Moon, and Raman in press; Nikolov 2002, 2008). These points lead us to the aims ELL programmes set and the models they implement in their limited time frames.

## 2. ELL programme models: Time and aims in curricula

Research into the CPH has focused on what is possible over many years in bilingual contexts. In foreign language learning contexts young language learners study a new language in different conditions.

### 2.1. Time devoted to language learning in ELL models

Early FL programmes devote a limited amount of time to ELL: between less than an hour a week to short daily sessions (for an overview see Curtain and Dahlberg 2004). A realistic recommendation suggests a "minimum time allottment ... should be 30 minutes three times per week" (Curtain 2000: 202). A recent overview on European countries found that time devoted to ELL ranges between roughly one hour and several hours in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) programmes (Edelenbos, Kubanek, and Johnstone 2007; Edelenbos and Kubanek present volume; Johnstone in press). This finding shows that in most programmes an extremely limited amount of time is available for ELL.

In contrast, bilingual programmes vary in the ratio of the curriculum available to learners in their first (L1) and second language (L2) (Curtain and Dahlberg 2004), but learners tend to study subjects in their L2 in about half or more of their curricular time. As a result, many learners achieve close to native-like levels in listening and reading comprehension, whereas their spoken and written L2 is less good (Cummins no year).

The amount of time is only one of many important factors contributing to ELL. Opportunities to learn, the quality and amount of input and interaction available to learners in and outside the classroom also vary to a large extent, similary to the time when ELL starts. In line with research into the CPH, most sources consider learners "young" before age 12, but the typical starting age ranges between 3 and 11 years. This wide age range means enormous differences not only in what children literate in their L1 can do, but also in what tasks and activities may work with them, thus making programmes hardly comparable. Another important point relates to when and how children transfer from ELL programmes to later ones and how their achievements are built on.

## 2.2. Achievement targets in ELL

### *2.2.1. Range between awareness raising and content learning*

The detailed overview of ELL in Europe analyzed published research, good practice and main principles (Edelenbos et al. 2007) and found enormous variability in the programmes (see Kubanek and Edelenbos in present volume). They range from initiatives aiming for no more than broad awareness in a number of languages to partial immersion. The type of programme has important implications for curricular aims (Julkunen 2000) as well as for assessment (see Inbar-Lourie and Shohamy in present volume) and teacher education.

### *2.2.2. Achievement targets in the new language*

Achievement targets vary a lot in different programmes, but young learners of foreign languages are not expected to achieve native level in school, although sometimes parents and policy makers may voice unrealistic goals and expectations (Curtain 2000; Nikolov 2002). In most contexts achievement targets tend to be modest (for details see e.g., Blondin et al. 1988; Edelenbos et al. 2007; Curtain; Haenni Hoti, Heintzmann, and Müller; Inbar-Lourie and Shohamy all in present volume) and different levels may be required in the four skills. Also, in FL contexts the target language is a curricular area in its own right and it is assessed similary to other schools subjects (for a discussion of the construct see: Inbar-Lourie and Shohamy present volume). All in all: achievement targets should reflect developmental stages in ELL and a gradual shift from prefabricated utterances to more analyzed language use (Johnstone in press).

### *2.2.3. Shaping attitudes and motivation*

Recent European guidelines for curricula suggest going beyond linguistic aims and setting complex goals for ELL. They promote exposing young learners to an L2 not only for linguistic purposes, but also to allow them to develop favourable attitudes towards languages and language learning, and to help them become proficient users of foreign languages as adults. For example, a European language policy document states that ELL in the kindergarten and primary school is a priority, as in such programmes "attitudes towards other languages and cultures are

formed, and the foundations for later language learning are laid" (Commission of the European Communities 2003: 7). This point coincides with what handbooks for teachers emphasize (Cameron 2001; Curtain and Dahlberg 2004; Moon 2000a; Pinter 2006) and empirical research also underpins (e.g., Johnstone 2002; Nikolov 1999). A further affective aim may concern language learning anxiety in ELL (Mihaljević Djigunović present volume) and learners' own culture and identity (Prahbu in press; Vickov 2007). Little is known about the implementation of these aims and how they feature in the long run in various contexts.

### *2.2.4. Learning to learn languages*

A third area besides socio-affective and linguistic aims concerns metacognition and "learning to learn". Research on early bilingualism has consistently found (Bialystok 2001, 2005) that bilingual children process languages more effectively than their monolingual peers and the constant management of two competing languages enhances executive functions and results in a higher level of metalinguistic awareness. Thus, another important aim may involve the development of metacognitive skills and learning strategies (Edelenbos et al. 2007) to support children in learning new languages not only in ELL programmes but also as adolescents and adults. As will be seen some research is available on learning strategies, but more would be desireable.

### *2.2.5. Learners' mother tongue*

All young learners in ELL programmes have mastered their mother tongue (L1) to a certain level and the two languages interact with one another. Some ELL curricula may emphasise the role of L1. In recent years English as a lingua franca has been not only the most popular L2 in ELL, but it has been perceived both as a blessing and as a threat in certain contexts (Graddol 2006; Nunan 2003). Prahbu (in press) even voices his concern about English becoming a substitution for other languages in India. In the European context language policy documents promote the learning of two modern foreign languages to counterbalance the spread of English thus promoting the ideal of plurilingual citizens which could be paraphrased as speakers of not only English. Interestingly, no research has been conducted to explore the impact of ELL on L1 development.

### *2.2.6. Transition and continuity*

Besides what aims different models define it is crucial to consider what happens after the first few years of ELL covered in language policy documents and how young learners' achievements and development in the areas mentioned in the above sections are integrated into later programmes. ELL curricula tend to cover a certain number of years – usually the first years in kindergarten and primary school. Continuity and transfer, however, have represented major challenges since the early 1970s. Continuity may be lacking not only for the particular languages young learners started learning, but also in the area of methodology and integration of what they can do and are good at (Nikolov 2001, 2002). Therefore, it is a must to examine ELL in their wider educational contexts; if teachers in upper grades fail to build on what and how young learners are able to do in their new language, the ELL effort may easily be wasted and lead to frustration.

The only published study comparing and contrasting curricula for primary and secondary teaching was conducted in Greece on German as a second foreign language (Papadopoulou 2007). By analyzing objectives, themes and contents of activities, teaching methodology and assessment the author suggests how a common curriculum could be designed and implemented. Such studies would be needed in other countries and for all languages taught in ELL.

## 2.3. Teachers

Teachers should be proficient users of both languages and familiar with the general curriculum and the principles of how young children learn. However, this is not always the case. Two main models exist in ELL: the teacher is (1) a generalist homeroom teacher; (2) or a language specialist. In the first case teachers are familiar with the curriculum, can integrate curricular areas and know how to manage young learners with ease, but their proficiency may not be very good. In the second case teachers may be more proficient in the L2 but less skilled in implementing age-appropriate methodology. Therefore, teachers represent a major challenge in ELL (Goto Butler 2004, 2005; Curtain 2000; Enever, Moon, and Raman; Graddoll 2006; Nikolov 2002, 2008; Shohamy and Inbar-Lourie 2006). Research into teacher education and classroom observation studies involving analyses of classroom discourse

and interaction provide insights into these points (see sections on teachers and classrooms).

### 2.4. Why ELL is a good idea

Aims in ELL need to be in harmony with how young language learners develop and other components in their general curriculum. In ELL models achievement targets tend to be modest and way below native proficiency matched for the age groups. Given the limited time frame and other typical constrains, such goals are realistic but fall short of why the CPH would be a relevant point for consideration.

The main reason why ELL is a great initiative is that by early exposure children may enjoy the potential advantages of starting young, as well as profit from what they experience at later stages in their language learning. In other words, as Johnstone (2002, in press) puts it, those making an early start may benefit from advantages at an early point in their education (relative ease of acquiring the sound system and unanalyzed wholes, higher level of motivation, lower anxiety, more time over years, etc) as well as at a later stage (more background knowledge, literacy and learning skills, strategies and analytical skills). As is widely accepted, ELL may also influence learners' affective, cognitive and metacognitive development over the years. However, these long-term outcomes need to be researched systematically in individual contexts – an area where more studies are needed.

## 3. Themes and research methods in ELL studies

This section provides an overview of the emerging themes, issues and challenges characterizing recent empirical research inquiring into ELL programmes with a primary focus on studies conducted in Europe, where compulsory foreign language education tends to start at an increasingly early stage (*Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe* 2008). However, the overview goes beyond Europe and attempts to provide insights into trends on other continents as well. The most important criteria for inclusion are that the study (1) was published during the last decade or so; (2) participants are young learners (or older but started young), their teachers, or other stakeholders; (3) the number of hours per week is between one and five, but the aim of the pro-

gramme is neither awarenesss raising towards various languages, nor partial immersion or CLIL; (4) the context is embedded in the state and not the private sector; and (5) the research method is appropriately documented. Chapters in the present volume are also included in the review, but they are not discussed in detail, as the interested reader will find them in the book.

The worldwide increase in early foreign language learning in state education has resulted in a growing number of empirical studies. Some of these developments are well documented in country case studies (Enever, Moon, and Raman in press; Nikolov and Curtain 2000), publications of small-scale research projects usually focusing on a particular aspect of ELL (e.g., studies in Moon and Nikolov 2000; Nikolov in press; Nikolov, Mihaljević Djigunović, Mattheoudakis, Lundberg, and Flanagan 2007; and see studies in further sections), as well as large-scale longitudinal national projects (e.g., in Spain by García Mayo, and García Lecumberri 2003; Muñoz 2006; in Ireland by Harris and Conway, 2002; Harris et al., 2006; Wang in present volume). Recent state-of-the-art reviews show (e.g., Blondin et al. 1998; Edelenbos et al. 2007; Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović 2006) that although many studies are cross-sectional and follow a quantitative or a qualitative tradition, more and more studies apply triangulation: they look into linguistic, affective factors as well as classroom variables, and some of them provide insights into learners' and teachers' perspectives; also, some, mostly smaller-scale studies are longitudinal.

Overall, as will be seen, reseach on ELL is gradually becoming more sophisticated and complex and the pictures emerging from studies present all shades of various colours. However, most examine either teaching or learning, and few are replicable in other contexts. On the other hand, comparative studies have also emerged aiming to examine issues across borders.

## 3.1. Large-scale national projects

### *3.1.1. Pilot projects versus ELL on a large scale*

ELL programmes are often launched first as pilot projects to prepare ground for later programmes. In the 2002/03 academic year ten European countries reported a pre-primary or primary pilot project (*Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe* 2005: 32). As Johnstone (2008) claims, it is well-known that ELL can be a great success when

implemented in individual project schools, where appropriate conditions are provided and where the teaching is of high quality. However, larger-scale implementation of ELL across schools is a different matter.

In some countries ELL is introduced without piloting either as a result of strong parental pressure or a governmental decision. In many contexts major differences have been documented between the pilot phase and later large-scale programmmes. For example, in Austria (Jantscher and Landsiedler 2000), Croatia (Mihaljević Djigunović and Vilke 2000), Italy (Gattullo and Pallotti 2000), Ireland (Harris in present volume) and Scotland (Blondin, et al. 1998) enthusiasm was on a high level and good progress was documented in the initial phase; however, attitudes towards ELL changed and professional quality declined as ELL became part of everyone's daily routine. It has been found in various contexts that experimental and pilot programmes implemented by enthusiastic teachers produce remarkable results (e.g., Edelenbos, Kubanek and Johnstone 2007; Moon and Nikolov 2000; Nikolov 2002); but the spread of ELL often results in less research and funding and teachers do not find daily challenges as exciting and easy to cope with as teachers participating in monitored projects.

For example, in Italy, carefully designed in-service teacher education programmes supported the introduction of ELL, but enthusiasm declined as the practice gradually spread (Gattullo and Pallotti 2000). In Croatia, a large-scale national ELL project taught a variety of languages as part of a longitudinal study; however, the ministry withrew support and the project was over (Mihaljević Djigunović and Vilke 2000; Vilke and Vrhovac 1993, 1995). Years later, when the government introduced compulsory ELL from grade 1 for all children in Croatian schools, they failed to intergrate the results. A similarly well-documented ELL project in Scotland ended up differently from the original initiative without specialist teachers (Blondin et al. 1998). The same trend is true not only for foreign languages but also for second languages, making the distinction between these two terms less marked (Harris in present volume).

A different example comes from Hungary and the author's own experiences. I used to teach young learners English from their age 6 to 14 at an 8-year primary school from the late 1970s for two decades. As there was no tradition or syllabus to rely on, I had to find out how to develop learners' English with the help of intrinsically motivating and cognitively challenging tasks. As a result of this major challenge, I involved them in negotiations on what they liked and disliked and developed an

eight-year-long story-based syllabus with them (Nikolov 1999, 2002). As a teacher educator in the second part of my professional life I have found out much to my dismay that not all teachers are enthusiastic about ELL. In a number of studies on teachers (2008) and ELL classrooms in nation-wide surveys (2003, in press) I have documented that many teachers of young learners wish they could teach older ones, and lack not only proficiency and pedagogical skills but also a desire to improve their practice in the ELL classroom.

### *3.1.2. Large-scale projects on start and rate of ELL*

A number of large-scale projects have been implemented and documented in various publications serving with lessons for ELL. The eight-year-long ELL project mentioned in the previous section (Mihaljević Djigunović and Vilke 2000; Vilke and Vrhovac 1993, 1995) involved over 1,000 first graders learning English, French, German, and Italian. It aimed to find the optimal starting age to launch ELL and to pilot age-appropriate materials and meaning-focused classroom techniques. The project followed learners' development in the target languages and changes in their attitudes and motivation over time. Control groups starting in grade 4 were involved to make outcomes comparable. At the end of year 8, the earlier starters were slightly better but achievements over time depended on many variables besides length of ELL.

Two longitudinal projects carefully designed to examine various aspects of the age factor explored early and later introduction of English as a foreign language into the school curriculum of bilingual (Catalan-Spanish; Basque-Spanish) learners. The Barcelona Age Factor (BAF) Project (Muñoz 2006 and present volume) started in 1995 and involved 2,068 participants. It aimed to find out whether age has an effect on the rate of ELL, whether older learners surpass younger learners the way they do in natural L2 contexts, and how age affects different language areas in ELL. Data were collected at three time intervals: after 200, 416 and 726 hours of instruction on several measures: speaking, listening, writing, and reading in English, two tests measuring comprehension in L1 (Spanish and Catalan) and a questionnaire. Some tests were discrete point, others were integrative skills tests, whereas oral interviews and role-plays were meaning-focused.

The earliest beginners (age 8) showed the highest rate of learning in the last third of the followed period, the middle young beginners (age 11) progressed fastest in the second third (between 200 and 416 hours

of instruction), whereas adolescent beginners showed fastest initial rate of learning in the first third of the period (after 200 hours). For those starting at ages 8 and 11 the rate of learning became salient at the age of 12. Muñoz concludes that younger children need a longer time than young beginners in L2 contexts. After nine years of learning English, the difference in scores on tests implying implicit learning (e.g., listening comprehension) got smaller. As Muñoz (2006) points out, differences disappear between younger and older beginners with the same time and exposure once they reach the same stage of cognitive development.

A similar project involved Basque and Spanish speaking learners of English from the ages of 4, 8, and 11 (García Mayo and García Lecumberri 2003). The research design was parallel with the previous longitudinal study and the findings are also similar: on a number of performance measures, including oral and written perception and production tasks, older beginners achieved significantly higher scores than younger learners (Cenoz 2003; Garcia Lecumberri and Gallardo 2003; Garcia Mayo 2003; Langabaster and Doiz 2003; Muñoz 2003 and in present volume).

Both studies followed a special up-to-date research design allowing for triangulation of the data. Researchers looked into not only linguistic development in several skill areas but also young learners' motivation and strategies. In both studies, however, the same tests were applied for the different age groups for the sake of comparability (Muñoz 2003: 167). Therefore, it is unclear how learners would have performed on tests more tuned to their cognitive and proficiency levels. Another important complex variable, the quality of teaching including teachers' proficiency (accent which is at the very core of CPH studies) and classroom methodology were not included in any form. Garcia Lecumberri and Gallardo (2003: 129) point out that all teachers were non-native speakers of English, but "for obvious reasons, this can be a sensitive issue, which we have not been able to address yet". This may mean that younger groups were taught by less proficient teachers than their older peers and it is also possible that the actual classroom activities were more conducive to older learners' development.

Overall findings of these projects support what Krashen et al. (1979) found in their overview of the literature: younger learners develop at a slower pace than older ones. Therefore, it would be desirable to collect more evidence on how ELL is beneficial over a long period of time.

## 3.2. Studies on long-term effects of ELL

### *3.2.1. Studies involving adolescents and adults*

The best way of testing the impact of ELL programmes and how, if at all, the CPH exerts its influence in the long run, would involve adults who started young. No such studies exist, most probably because research does not go beyond the time span of a few years. The only project relevant here is Urponen's (2004) study on Finnish women married to native speakers of English. She found age when learning English as a foreign language started to be one of the significant predictors of success over time; however, some later starting women also achieved native proficiency.

In a very different research paradigm Chise Kasai in the present volume uses an experimental design focusing on Japanese speakers' perception and production of highly problematic sounds in English. She found an age effect for production, but not for perception of /l/ and /r/. In other words, younger learners were better at producing words with these sounds than adults but not at distinguishing them.

Yet another research design was applied in a retrospective study involving young adults (Nikolov 2001). In an exploratory qualitative enquiry on 94 adult learners' school experiences various foreign languages were involved. All participants studied an L2 for 5 to 8 years in primary school, but they all perceived themselves as "unsuccessful": they felt they never benefited from early exposure (see next section on continuity problems).

The research design of a study implemented in the US combined a large-scale longitudinal survey and retrospective interviews with a few particpants after ten years (Heining-Boyton and Haitema 2007). The majority viewed their ELL positively and their attitudes towards speakers of foreign languages and cultures were also favourable.

Some correlational studies examined the relationship between how long a time learners spend studying the FL and how proficient they are. In one project representative samples of Hungarian learners' proficiency was assessed in English and German in years 6 and 10 (ages 12 and 16) after studying the L2 for 1 to 6, and 2 to 10 years, respectively. The correlations between achievements and the number of years of language study were very low (between .25 and .29), and the ones between the number of weekly classes ranging from 2 to more than 5 were higher but also modest (.39 to .43) (Nikolov and Józsa 2006).

In a small-scale correlational study Larson-Hall (2008) studied Japanese college students who started studying English between ages 3 and 12. They were examined on a phonemic discrimination and a grammaticality judgement task. Modest relationships were found and age effects seemed to emerge after a substantial amount of input had been gained – a finding in line with what Muñoz has repeatedly pointed out.

### *3.2.2. Transfer and continuity*

The lack of continuity was one of the most important findings of the "French in the Primary" report in Britain (Burstall et al. 1974) and transfer has been a major challenge in ELL in many educational contexts (see country case studies in Nikolov and Curtain 2000). Continuity may be lacking in various areas. (1) Students are not offered an opportunity to study at an appropriate level and are placed in groups of beginners. Such practice may lead to a decline in motivation. (2) They may not be able to study the language they learnt in ELL years. This is acceptable after an awareness raising programme if students are motivated to start a new language. It may, however, result in a demotivating experience if learners are denied an opportunity to continue learning their L2 due to limited access. (3) The lack of continuity may occur in classroom methodology: learners may feel they cannot come up to expectations, as the new course does not build on what they can do.

The study on unsuccessful adult learners mentioned in the previous section revealed how ELL opportunities interact in complex ways with other factors in the educational system (Nikolov 2001). Over half of the participants were placed in beginner classes or had to give up the language they had learnt for years. One of the participants claimed, "I've been learning languages for years but I haven't got anywhere".

A later large-scale study involving all year 9 (age 15) students in state secondary schools in the same country (Hungary) revealed that two-thirds started learning the same language they had learnt for 5 to 8 years in primary school as beginners or false beginners (Vágó 2007). This picture is further coloured by the status of the languages they are offered.

In summary, in order to find out how ELL programmes are beneficial in the long run, continuity is an area to examine. Unfortunately, no published research is available on how secondary school teachers build on ELL.

## 3.3. Studies on young learners

A large number of studies have become available in recent years exploring how young language learners develop and how various factors contribute to their proficiency over time. Among these factors, time was discussed in previous sections. In this part the affective, cognitive and social contribution are examined in interaction with classroom variables.

### *3.3.1. Affective domain*

Young language learners' attitudes, motivation and anxiety have been examined in several contexts exploring the arguments for an early start: children's attitudes are positive, and they are more motivated and less anxious than older students, as research has systematically revealed. The interested reader is directed to an excellent overview by Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović in the present volume on research into individual differences and to the detailed discussions of recent research in Europe (Edelenbos et al. 2007).

There is, however, hardly any research into how ELL contributes to openness towards other cultures and speakers of other languages over time, although it is widely assumed that learning a new language at a young age should impact on these areas favourably. The reason must be that most studies inquire into processes and outcomes within realistic time frames, for example, in one type of school. Retrospection would allow researchers to gain insights into these areas, but no such studies are known.

A narrower focus, the relationship between language learning motivation and cross-cultural contact was examined among Hungarian eighth-graders by Csizér and Kormos (2009). Their results indicate that students of English have more positive attitudes towards native speakers and higher level of linguistic self-confidence, invest more energy into language learning and receive more support from their environment than students of German. However, all learners showed low expectancy of success and they did not report investing substantial effort into language learning. The findings also reveal that learners of English experience more frequent written contact than learners of German. Integrativeness, linguistic self-confidence and perceived importance of intercultural contact were found to be closely related to how much effort students are willing to invest into foreign language learning.

Studies providing young learners and their teachers with opportunities to present their emic perspectives allow us to hear children's and their teachers' voices and understand what is involved in ELL. Qualitative studies applying interviews, observations, analyses of teachers' and learners' diaries and other techniques may offer insights not available in other research paradigms. Following the tradition set in a previous study on ELL (Nikolov 1999), Nagy (2009) invited young learners to think about their reasons of learning English, what helped and hindered them, and other questions. Her findings reveal that in many cases ELL is not without its daily problems and even at an early stage children are aware of important points and may provide crucial insights and feedback to teachers. The same is true for many teachers in ELL programmes: they may be familiar with the principles of methodology, but may find it difficult to implement meaning-focused tasks on a daily basis (Goto Butler 2005; Kiss 2000; Lugossy 2007, Moon in present volume; Nikolov 2008; Wang in present volume).

### *3.3.2. Cognitive domain*

Language learning aptitude of young language learners is a generally under-researched area, most probably because children are expected to develop interpersonal communication skills with ease. A few recent projects set out to explore what role cognitive skills play in ELL in the Hungarian and the Greek context. Both educational systems are characterized by a strong streaming tradition – a reason why placement is an issue from an early age.

Three studies examined how young Hungarian learners' abilities contribute to their achievements in learning languages. In a context where streaming has been present for many decades and English tends to be provided for the more able learners, in a study involving over 400 learners from ten schools 22 per cent of the variation in English performances was explained by their aptitude (Kiss & Nikolov, 2005).

An even younger age group was involved in a similar project piloting an aptitude test for 8-year-olds (Kiss in present volume). The chapter reveals why such a test was necessary, how it was validated, and what lessons can be learnt from the enquiry.

In a large-scale longitudinal study on nationally representative samples of over 40,000 learners of English and German (ages 12, 14, 16 and 18) learners' scores on an inductive reasoning test predicted a large portion of the variance in their performances on reading tasks (e.g., 14% in

English at age 12). In the younger age groups inductive reasoning skills explained larger portions of the variance than in the older cohorts. The relationships between the cognitive variable, L1 reading, and other factors were stronger than in the case of older learners. Interestingly, relationships between L2 skills became weaker over time (Csapó & Nikolov 2009).

Greek learners were involved in a project examining five- to nine-year-old Greek learners' cognitive abilities and their learning of English vocabulary. Significant relationships were found between young children's aptitude and vocabulary development in English (Alexiu 2009).

### *3.3.3. Socioeconomic status*

Although socioeconomic status (SES) is widely accepted to contribute to school success in educational research, it is rarely addressed explicitly in studies on ELL. In contexts where the private sector offers a range of early programmes, socio-economically advantaged children's parents are more able to afford them (see national case studies in Enever, Moon, and Raman in press).

Several nationally representative samples participated in various projects on Hungarian language learners (Csapó and Nikolov 2009; Nikolov 2009; Nikolov and Józsa 2006). In all of these large-scale studies showing a larger picture significant relationships were found between learners' SES and their language proficiency, and language learning plans, as well as motivation.

An innovative study explored the relationships between young language learners' SES and language development in English in a particular town in Greece (Mattheoudakis and Alexiou in present volume). As the results show, all learners, irrespective of their SES, get private tutoring besides learning English at school. Although their families' SES impacts significantly on young Greek learners' level and progress in English, no such relationship is found for their language learning motivation – a finding in contrast with the previously discussed studies.

### *3.3.4. Languages interacting: First language and additional languages*

In several studies overviewed in previous sections young learners were bilingual, and the additional language was often their L3, but the relationships across languages were not explored. In other contexts attention is paid to young learners' L1 and L2 as well. For example, in the multilingual Netherlands, Goorhuis-Brouwer and de Bot (submitted)

report on the outcomes of a project evaluating early English language teaching in Dutch primary education where Dutch is not L1 for many children.

Mihaljević Djigunović (submitted) reports on different interactions between performances on listening, reading and writing tasks of the same format in L1 Croatian and L2 English between earlier and later starters, whereas Csapó and Nikolov (in press) scrutinize the relationships between reading in L1 Hungarian and L2 English and German, and how the relationships change over time.

Overall, interestingly, few studies explore such relationships, most probably because most researchers focus on the target language rather than the interaction between languages. However, if ELL is meant to be accepted widely and to maintain its position in official curricula, sooner or later the interaction across languages in literacy development needs to be put on the research agenda.

In most studies English is the target language in ELL and early start programmes are responsible for the most recent dynamic expansion of English (Graddol 2006), as was pointed out in the previous sections. In some contexts (e.g., Enever in present volume; Harris and O Leary 2009), mostly where English the official language, the picture is more varied. Discussions related to the role and status of English are beyond the scope of our discussion, but Carmel's chapter in the present volume offers an excellent example of how English at an early age has recently become part of special discourse on larger issues.

### *3.3.5. L2 skills, vocabulary, grammar and strategies*

As more fine-grained studies look into various skill areas, a lot of valuable insights are gained into how young language learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing, vocabulary and grammar develop. These studies provide useful information on what realistic achievement targets include and how teachers can build on developmental stages in ELL. Studies tend to be either cross-sectional (involving more participants) or longitudinal (repeated cross-sectional or following development of a few learners over a period of time. Both types of studies add valuable insights into important areas of processes and outomes.

Several large-scale studies followed learners' development in certain skill areas, lexicon and grammar. The interested reader is directed to the edited volumes discussed in the previous section on projects involving large samples (e.g., García Mayo and García Lecumberri 2003;

Harris and Conway, 2002; Harris et al. 2006; Mihaljević Djigunović and Vilke 2000; Muñoz 2006; Nikolov and Józsa 2006; Vilke and Vrhovac 1993, 1995).

Other studies use a much narrower focus and inquire into one area involving fewer students. This type of research provides more detailed information on the actual learners and is often combined with an exploration of strategy use. Some studies look into how young language learners develop in these domains; others focus more on the outcomes.

For example, Szpotowicz (2000, 2009) and Orosz (2009) examine young language learners' vocabulary in two different contexts: the first one discusses what factors influence the process of vocabulary learning, whereas the latter the growth in size.

All four skills were involved and combined with textbook analyses on two target languages in the Ukraine, where Ukrainian is the official language, whereas English is a foreign language for minority Hungarian learners (Huszti, Fábián, and Bárányné Komári 2009).

Reading and literacy development are the focal points in several projects: a new literacy programme is adapted from Australian practice in Norway (Drew 2009); and ways of using picture books are examined with Hungarian learners (Lugossy 2007). Young learners' writing processes are explored by Moon (2000b) in Bhutan and by Griva, Tsakidirdou and Nihoritou 2009) in Greece; whereas Bors (2008) compares how 14-year-olds' writing performances can be analyzed combining criterion-based and corpus-based methods.

### *3.3.6. Exploring ELL classrooms*

Without information on what happens in classrooms it is impossible to evaluate how achievement targets and principles of ELL are implemented on a daily basis. Some recent studies allow us to gain insights into how children interact with their peers and teachers, and what type of tasks and activites characterize ELL. Although the principles of age-appropriate methodology are clearly outlined in teachers' handbooks, practice varies to a large extent. In this section a few typical examples are chosen to show the variety in learning opportunties (S stands for students, T for teachers). In the first example the teacher is drilling a structure using English only with a large class. Students respond in L2 English exclusively, and this type of practice was found typical in several classrooms in a classroom based study (Peng and Zhang 2009).

As the curriculum is prescribed for teachers the exact same structures were taught in all schools where observations were conducted.

*Excerpt 1*
Large class of 10-year-olds at a Chinese school (Peng and Zhang 2009)

T: Where are you from?
S: I from Chongqing.
T: No.
S: (confused) Oh, I from China.
T: No, I am from Chongqing.
S: I am from Chongqing.
T: Good, sit down.

In the second extract young learners are busy working on a drawing task. Both students and the teacher use L1 Croatian mostly and insert a few words in L2 English. The excerpt is borrowed from a conference presention on a new international project (Early Language Learning in Europe; ELLiE) aiming to compare classroom practice in seven European countries with the same instruments to allow researchers to compare their findings.

*Excerpt 2*
A class of 22 learners in a first-grade class (Mihaljeviic Djigunovic and Szpotowicz 2008)

S: Teacher, šta trebamo nacrtati? [what should we draw?]
T: Eeee sad gledam [now I look] carefully. Ovdje su [Here are] two trees, na svakom [on each] tree trebate napraviti plodove [you need to make fruits]. Ovdje znači [So here] apples, ovdje [here] pears. A iznad toga, lijepo ćete ih obojiti [And above that you will colour them nicely], colour them and match them. Ovako. [Like this] Čekaj, čekaj, čekaj. [Wait, wait, wait] Who is big? Tko je od njih [Who among them is] big?
Ss: Ovaj tu. Ovaj tu. [This one. This one.] Father. Father.
T: Ok, who is strong? To ćete sami odlučiti i spojiti. [You will decide for yourselves and connect.] Vidite ko je [See how it is] small, pa povučete crte do njega . . . [then you draw lines to it]

Another type of study takes a close look at how children do oral tasks in pairs and how they scaffold one another's learning. Pinter (2007) analyzes young learners' discourse patterns and the role of repetition on a

paired oral task involving picture description: children are comparing their pictures with some differences.

*Excerpt 3*
Two 10-year-old boys describe and compare what they see in their pictures (Pinter 2007: 196)

S1: Yes. My bedroom in one dog.
S2: Yes. In my bedroom there is a spider.
S1: No, two spider.
S2: /z/
S1: Spiders. In my livingroom on cat.
S2: Yes.

These three excerpts are meant to illustrate the wide range of learning opportunities characterizing young language learners' classrooms. Although classroom studies are extremely time consuming they provide valuable insights into what is involved in ELL and they are essential in teacher education as well. A lot more research is necessary on different task types and work formats in different contexts.

### *3.3.7. Assessment in ELL*

As ELL is becoming more widely spread, stakeholders want to monitor outcomes (see previous section on large-scale projects). This may be the reason why an increasing body of research has been conducted into assessing young learners' proficiency in their new language, as documented in a special issue of *Language Testing* in 2000 and other publications (Hasselgreen 2005; McKay 2006). The most important question concerns what the construct to be measured is, as is discussed in detail by Inbar-Laurie and Shohamy in the present volume. It has to be in line with the curriculum.

Many assessment projects are limited to a particular context (e.g., Jalkanen in the present book), whereas others are part of institutional evaluation projects (e.g., Henni Hoti, Heinzmann and Müller in the present volume). Besides assessing what young language learners can do at the end of their ELL, some experts advocate the use of portfolios (Hasselgreen 2005).

What is clear from recent developments in the area of assessing young language learners is that as programmes are less an exception and more typical, achievement targets are also more specific, and accountability is a logical next step. In the European context it would

be desireable to develop age-appropriate refined scales in harmony with the *Common European Framework of Reference* (Council of Europe 2001) and in similar detail to documents illustrated by Curtain in the present volume. It would also be extremely useful to develop an international database of tasks validated in different contexts at certain levels of performances to allow experts to share expertise in this highly specific area.

Some international initiatives are already in place. ELLiE is a longitudinal project on the introduction of ELL in primary school classrooms in seven European countries. It was launched in response to the rapid expansion of provision for ELL in Europe. It aims to "clarify what can realistically be achieved in European classrooms where relatively limited amounts of curriculum time are allocated to second/foreign language learning" (http://www.ellieresearch.eu/). Schools from Croatia, England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden are involved and data are collected along the same lines with the help of the same instruments. The outcomes of this project, now in its second year, will hopefully allow us to see not only the larger picture, but also the day-to-day details in a variety of contexts.

A recent international comparative study looked into levels of achievement of year 8 learners of English in Croatia and Hungary (Nikolov, Mihaljević Djigunović, and Ottó 2008) and showed that earlier starters were slightly, but significantly better on several measures (meaning-focused tests on the four language skills and on pragmatics) than later starters. Croatian learners, however, outsmarted their Hungarian peers despite the fact that they tended to start English later, in larger groups and fewer classes – a sobering result for advocates of ELL.

### 3.4. Studies on teachers and teacher education

Teachers and teacher education are key areas for explorations in ELL, but what is known about them is not enough. Therefore, this is where more research is definitely necessary.

Teachers in ELL classrooms tend to belong to two groups: (1) generalists or homeroom teachers often with modest proficiency but good skills in age-appropriate methodology and familiarity with the overall curriculum, and (2) language specialists with better proficiency in the target language, but not trained to manage young learners and with less insight into what children know in other curricular areas. Teachers

in the first group tend to teach children the whole curriculum and a new language, whereas language teachers usually do the language classes only.

### *3.4.1. Research on teachers*

Several studies have examined teachers in ELL. However, even in the most carefully designed complex studies, teachers' proficiency and its impact on children's development are seen as a delicate issue. An exception to this rule is the research conducted in Israeli schools by Shohamy and Inbar-Lourie (2006 cited in Inbar-Lourie and Shohamy in present volume). Their study triangulated classroom observation data with proficiency measures for learners and interviews with teachers, thus showing the complexity of how teachers implement ELL curricula and how different perceptions of what children can do interact with their goals and behaviour.

The way teachers of young learners think about their teaching and how they evaluate their own needs is the focus of some recent studies. Challenges are numerous in contexts where English has recently become part of curricula without appropriate teacher education (for various contexts see chapters in Enever, Moon, and Raman in press). On the Asian continent Goto Butler (2005) explored teachers' views on communicative methodology in Korea, Japan and Taiwan and found that they were concerned about using communicative activities for a number of good reasons. She also asked them to reflect on their own language proficiency and learnt that they felt their productive skills lagged behind their receptive ones and needed to develop their English to be able to implement ELL programmes (Goto Butler 2004). A similar picture emerges from Moon's chapter in this volume: she worked with Vietnamese teachers and her case studies throw light on teachers' needs and possibilities of meeting them.

Although in European coutries ELL traditions have existed for a long time, several inquiries reveal that there is room for improvement in both pre- and in-service teacher education. Lundberg's (2007) research shows how Swedish teachers in remote places benefit from a three-year project and how action research allows them to reflect on their own work. Lugossy (2007) looks at a narrower focus: how teachers involved in a picture book project use storybooks with their learners and how their reflection on their own practice changes over time. Kiss (2000) and Lugossy (2006) compared what teachers know and believe, and

what they actually do in their classrooms. Both studies found that there is a discrepancy between the two planes and these points interact in complex ways with teachers' motivation and how rewarding they perceive their daily work with young language learners.

Very young learners may turn out to be a real challenge, as a study on Polish pre-service English teachers documents (Szulc-Kurpaska 2007). Daily practice with young language learners may not be as rewarding as many advocates of ELL think. An obverstation study applying inteviews with teachers reveals that few teachers found satisfaction in teaching young learners, they wished they could stream them and teach the more able only, or teach older learners; they perceived games and storytelling as a waste of time, and looked forward to "proper teaching" in later years (Nikolov 2008).

In many educational contexts the introduction of ELL involves major curriculum change (e.g., Moon's chapter on Vietnam). Wang's large-scale survey (in this volume) examines how teachers relate to their innovative curriculum involving not only a challenge in teaching English to young learners, but also a major shift towards learner-centered teaching. Chinese teachers' enthusiasm towards implementing top-down change will hopefully impact on ELL favourably.

## 4. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to overview some important areas related to the age factor in recent research. As has been shown, the relevance of the critical period hypothesis, widely assumed to underlie the reasons why ELL is a good idea, is not the most important point of departure for discussions on early start programmes. The age factor needs to be viewed in its context; all conditions have to be taken into consideration, as so many other factors contribute to the implementation of ELL programmes that they vary to a large extent. No wonder curricula and models are so different and achievement targets also vary in line with them. Overall, what young learners are expected to be able to do as a result of ELL tends to be modest.

Many fascinating studies have been implemented in recent years and it is difficult to overview all research relevant to ELL. This is a welcome move forward and it is hoped that more studies allow us to understand

what is involved in ELL in specific contexts in different parts of the world. One point is clear from the overview: young children develop at a slower pace than older students and adults – a finding in line with previous research, but rarely emphasised.

The research methods in the studies have become a lot more sophisticated and complex. Longitudinal studies are quite frequent, triangulation is applied in many studies and mixed methods are a lot more typical than a decade ago. Some researchers allow us to gain insights into children's, teachers' and other stakeholders' lived experiences, and this new line in research offers a lot of potential. The emergence of classroom research is also a welcome trend in ELL research, but there is a lack of research into what task types work with what age groups at certain levels. Comparative international projects also offer new perspectives. It would be good to know, for example, how portfolios work in ELL. These points lead us to a neglected question: to what extent studies are replicable in various contexts. Replication studies are valuable for many reasons; few of the studies overviewed could be replicated, either because the instruments are not made available, or because the contexts are very different.

As for the target language, English is overwhelmingly in the focus of research but other languages are also given attention and hopefully the interaction between learners' languages will also become a more popular research area.

Despite the fact that the wide range of innovative studies provides a lot of information on ELL, more studies are needed. We do not know enough about how young learners actually move along developmental stages in their new language skills, vocabulary and grammar, how the early chunks from classroom discourse, rhymes and games form the basis of rule-based learning, how their ELL contributes to their strategic, pragmatic and intercultural competence over time, how early exposure to a foreign language impacts on the learning of new languages in later school years on in adulthood, and how it helps them to become happier people.

A lot more research is needed on teachers and teacher education. What level of proficiency and type of professional knowledge and personal qualities are necessary for teachers? What do they need to know about young learners and their language development to be able to help them achieve goals set in curricula? There is hardly any research into teachers' motivation and how it changes over time. Working with

young language learners is rewarding but hard work. More studies should involve teachers in their own classroom research – another area for futher inquiries.

The overview did not touch upon language policy, but that is also an area worth exploring in depth.

Finally, professionals interested in and researching ELL and related topics would benefit from sharing an international forum perhaps in the form of a refereed online journal.

## Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the support she received while working on this chapter from the Research Group on the Development of Competencies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA-SZTE Képességkutató Csoport).

### References

Alexiou, Tomai
2009 Cognitive skills in young learners and their implications for FL learning. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 46–61. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Bialystok, Ellen
2001 *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
2005 Consequences of bilingualism for cognitive development. In: J. F. Kroll and A. M. B. De Groot (eds.), *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*, 417–432. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Birdsong, David
2005 Interpreting age effects in second language acquisition. In: J. F. Kroll and A. M. B. De Groot (eds.), *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*, 109–127. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blondin, C., Candelier, M., Edelenbos, P., Johnstone, R., Kubanek-German, A., and T. Taeschner
1998 *Foreign Languages in Primary and Pre-school Education.* London: CILT.

Bors, Lidia
2008 Hungarian 8th-graders' writing skills in English as a foreign language: A criterion- and corpus-based measurement project. Ph. D. Diss. Department of English Applied Linguistics, University of Pécs.

Burstall, C., Jamieson, M., Cohen, S., and M. Hargreaves
1974 *Primary French in the Balance.* Windsor: NFER Publishing Company.

Cameron, Lynne
2001 *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cenoz, Jasone
2003 The influence of age on the acquisition of English: General proficiency, attitudes and code mixing. In M.P. Garcia Mayo and M. L. Garcia Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*, 77–93. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Chiswick, B.R., Lee, Y.L., and P.W. Miller
2004 Immigrants' language skills: The Australian Experience in a longitudinal study. *International Migration Review* 38 (2): 611–654.

Commission of the European Communities
2003 *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity: An action plan 2004–2006.* www.eu.int/comm/education/doc/official/keydoc/actlang/act_lang_en.pdf (retrieved on 11 December 2005)

Council of Europe
2001 *Common European Framework of Reference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Csapó, Benő, and Marianne Nikolov
2009 The cognitive contribution to the development of proficiency in a foreign language. *Learning and Individual Differences* 19: 203–218.

Csizér, Kata and Judit Kormos
2009 An investigation into the relationship of l2 motivation and cross-cultural contact among elementary-school students. In M. Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 62–74. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, Jim
no year Immersion education for the millennium: What we have learned from 30 years of research on second language immersion. http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/immersion2000.html (retrieved on 22 December 2005).

Curtain, Helena
2000 Early language learning in the USA. In: Marianne Nikolov and Helena Curtain (eds.), *An Early Start: Young Learners and Modern Languages in Europe and Beyond*, 191–208. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Curtain, Helena and Carol Ann Dahlberg
2004 *Languages and children – Making the match: New languages for young learners, grades K-8*. New York: Allyn and Bacon.

DeKeyser, Robert
2003 Implicit and explicit learning. In: C. J. Doughty and M. H. Long (eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* 313–348. London: Blackwell.

DeKeyser, Robert and Jenifer Larson-Hall
2005 What does the critical period really mean? In: J. F. Kroll and A. M. B. De Groot (eds.), *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*, 88–108. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Drew, Ion
2009 Using the early years literacy programme in primary EFL Norwegian classrooms: Factors influencing young learners' vocabulary acquisition. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 108–120. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Edelenbos, Peter, Johnstone, Richard and Angelika Kubanek
2007 *Languages for the Children in Europe: Published Research, Good Practice and Main Principles*. http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/doc/youngsum_en.pdf http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/key/studies_en.html

Enever, Janet, Moon, Jayne and Uma Raman (eds.)
2009 *Young Learner English Language Policy and Implementation: International Perspectives*. Reading, UK: Garnet Eduation/IATEFL.

Flege, J. A., Birdsong, D., Bialystok, E., Mack, M., Sung, H., and K. Tsukada
2005 Degree of foreign accent in English sentences produced by Korean children and adults. *Journal of Phonetics* 33 (3): 263–290.

Goto Butler, Yuko
2004 What level of English proficiency do elementary teachers need to attain to teach EFL? Case studies from Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. *TESOL Quarterly* 38 (2): 245–287.
2005 Comparaticative perspectives towards communicative activities among elementary school teachers in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. *Language Teaching Research* 9 (4): 423–446.

Griva, Eleni, Tsakiridou, Helen and Ioanna Nihoritou
2009 A study of FL composing process and writing strategies employed by young learners. In M. Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 132–168. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

García Mayo, M. P., and M. L. García Lecumberri (eds.)
2003 *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Goorhuis-Brouwer, S., and Kees de Bot
submitted Impact of early English language teaching on L1 and L2 development in children in Dutch schools. *International Journal of Bilingualism.*

García Lecumberri, M. L., and F. Gallardo
2003 English foreign language sounds in school learners of different ages. In M. P. García Mayo and M. L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age*

*and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*, 115–135. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

García Mayo, M. P.
2003 Age, length of exposure and grammaticality judgements in the acquisition of English as a foreign language. In: M. P. García Mayo and M. L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*, 94–114. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Gattullo, Francesca and Gabriele Pallotti
2000 Baseline study on FLT to young learners in Italy. In: M. Nikolov and H. Curtain (eds.), *An Early Start: Young learners and Modern Languages in Europe and Beyond*, 51–58. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Graddol, David
2006 *English Next*. London: The British Council.

Hakuta, K., Bialystok, E., and E. Wiley
2003 Critical evidence: A test of the Critical Period Hypothesis for second-language acquisition. *Psychological Science* 14: 31–38.

Harris, John and Mary Conway
2002 *Modern Languages in Irish Primary Schools: An Evaluation of the National Pilot Project*. Dublin: Institiuid Taengeolaiochhta Eireann.

Harris, J., Forde, P., Archer, P., Fhearaile, S. N., and M. O'Gorman
2006 *Irish in Primary Schools: Long-term National Trends in Achievement.* Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

Harris, John and Denise O Leary
2009 A third language at primary level in Ireland: An independent evaluation of the *Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative.* In Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 1–14. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Hasselgreen, Angela
2005 Assessing the language of young learners. *Language Testing* 22 (3): 337–354.

Heining-Boynton, Audrey and Thomas Haitema
2007 A ten-year chronicle of student attitudes toward foreign language in the elementary school. *The Modern Language Journal* 91 (2): 149–168.

Huszti, Ilona, Fábián, Márta and Erzsébet Bárányné Komári
2009 Differences between the processes and outcomes in 3rd graders' learning English and Ukrainian in Hungarian schools in Beregszász. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 166–180. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Hyltenstam, K., and N. Abrahamsson
2001 Age and L2 learning: the hazards of matching practical "implications" with theoretical "facts". *TESOL Quarterly* 35: 151–170.

2003 Maturational Constraints in SLA. In: C. J. Doughty and M. H. Long (eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, 539–588. London: Blackwell.

Ioup, Georgette
2005 Age in second language development. In: Eli Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, 419–436. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Jantscher, Elisabeth and Isabel Landsiedler
2000 Foreign language education at Austrian primary schools: An overview. In: Marianne Nikolov and Helena Curtain (eds.), *An Early Start: Young Learners and Modern Languages in Europe and Beyond*, 13–28. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Johnstone, Richard
2002 *Addressing "The Age Factor": Some Implications for Languages Policy.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
in press An early start: What are the key conditions for generalized success? In: Janet Enever, Jayne Moon and Uma Raman (eds.), Y*oung Learner English Language Policy and Inplementation: International Perspectives*. Kent, UK: IATEFL Young Learner Special Interest Group.

Julkunen, Kyösti
2000 Young learners' opinions on content and language integrated learning. In: Jayne Moon and Marianne Nikolov (eds.), *Research into Teaching English to Young Learners*, 374–385. Pécs: University of Pécs.

*Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe. 2008 Edition*. (2008). Brussels: Eurydice.

Kiss, Csilla
2000 "Words are but wind, but seeing is believing": Do the expressed attitudes of primary EFL teachers reflect their classroom practice? In: Jayne Moon and Marianne Nikolov (eds.), *Research into Teaching Young Learners*, 171–189. Pécs: University of Pécs Press.

Kiss, Csilla and Marianne Nikolov
2005 Preparing, piloting and validating an instrument to measure young learners' aptitude. *Language Learning* 55 (1): 99–150.

Krashen, Stephen, Long, Michael and Robin Scarcella
1979 Age, rate and eventual attainment in second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly* 13: 573–582.

Larson-Hall, Jeniffer
2008 Weighing the benefits of studying a foreign language at a younger starting age in a minimal input situation. *Second Language Research* 24 (1): 35–63.

Lugossy Réka
2006 Shaping teachers' beliefs through narratives. In: Marianne Nikolov and József Horváth (eds.), *UPRT 2006: Empical Studies in English*

*Applied Linguistics*, 329–352. Pécs: Lingua Franca Csoport. Available online: http://www.pte.hu/uprt/

2007 Authentic picture books in the lives of young EFL learners and their teachers. In: Marianne Nikolov, Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović, Marina Mattheoudakis, Gun Lundberg, and Tanya Flanagan, (eds.), *Teaching Modern Languages to Young Learners: Teachers, Curricula and Materials*, 77–90. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Lundberg, Gun

2007 Developing teachers of young learners: In-service for educational change and improvement. In: Marianne Nikolov, Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović, Marina Mattheoudakis, Gun Lundberg, and Tanya Flanagan, (eds.), *Teaching Modern Languages to Young Learners: Teachers, Curricula and Materials*, 21–34. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Langabaster, D., and A. Doiz

2003 Maturational constraints on foreign-language written production. In: M. P. García Mayo and M. L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*, 136–160. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Long, Michael

2005 Problems with supposed counter-evidence to the Critical Period Hypothesis. *IRAL* 43 (4): 287–318.

MacWhinney, Brian

2005 A unified model of language development. In: J. F. Kroll and A. M. B. De Groot (eds.), *Handbook of Bilingualism: Psycholinguistic Approaches*, 49–67. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marinova-Todd, S. H., Marshall, B., and C. E. Snow

2000 Three misconceptions about age and L2 learning. *TESOL Quarterly* 34: 9–34.

2001 Missing the point: A response to Hyltenstam and Abrhamsson. *TESOL Quarterly* 35: 171–176.

Mihaljević Djigunović, Jelena

Submitted Starting age and L1 and L2 interaction. *International Journal of Bilingualism.*

Mihaljević Djigunović, Jelena, Nikolov, Marianne, and István Ottó

2008 A comparative study of Croatian and Hungarian EFL students. *Language Teaching Research* 12 (3): 433–452.

Mihaljević Djigunović, Jelena and Magdalena Szpotowicz

2008 Interaction of contextual and individual variables in instructed early SLA. EUROSLA 18. Aix-en-Provence, France: 11–13 September 2008.

Mihaljević Djigunović, Jelena and Mirjana Vilke

2000 Eight years after: Wishful thinking vs the fact of life. In: Jayne Moon and Marianne Nikolov (eds.), *Research into Teaching English to Young Learners*, 67–86. Pécs: University Press Pécs.

Moon, Jayne
2000a *Children Learning English.* London: Macmillan Heinemann.
2000b Exploring the effects of drafting on Bhutanese children's story writing in year 3 and 4 of schooling. In: Jayne Moon and Marianne Nikolov (eds.), *Research into Teaching Young Learners*, 386–416. Pécs: University of Pécs Press.

Moon, Jayne, and Marianne Nikolov (eds.)
2000 *Research into Teaching English to Young Learners.* Pécs: University Press Pécs.

Pinter, Annamaria
2006 *Teaching Young Language Learners.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2007 Some benefits of peer–peer interaction: 10-year-old children practising with a communication task. *Language Teaching Research* 11 (2): 189–207.

Moyer, Alene
2004 *Age, Accent and Experience in Second Language Acquisition.* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Muñoz, Carmen
2003 Variation in oral skills development and age of onset. In: M. P. García Mayo and M. L. García Lecumberri (eds.), *Age and the Acquisition of English as a Foreign Language*, 161–181. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Muñoz, Carmen (ed.)
2006 *Age and the Rate of Foreign Language Learning.* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Nagy, Krisztina
2009 What primary-school pupils think about learning English. In M. Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 229–242. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Nikolov, Marianne
1999 "Why do you learn English?" "Because the teacher is short." A study of Hungarian children's foreign language learning motivation. *Language Teaching Research* 3 (1): 33–56.
2001 A study of unsuccessful language learners. In: Zoltán Dörnyei and Richard Schmidt (eds.), *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition* (Technical Report #23, 149–169). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center.
2002 *Issues in English Language Education.* Bern: Peter Lang.
2003 Angolul és németül tanuló diákok nyelvtanulási attitűdje és motivációja. [Attitudes and motivation of learners of English and German] *Iskolakultúra* 13 (8): 61–73.
2008 "Az általános iskola, az módszertan!" Alsó tagozatos angolórák empirikus vizsgálata ["Primary school means methodology!" An empirical study of lower-primary EFL classes]. *Modern Nyelvoktatás* 10: 1–2, 3–19.

2009 Early modern foreign language programmes and outcomes: Factors contributing to Hungarian learners' proficiency. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 90–107. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Nikolov, Marianne, and Helena Curtain (eds.)
2000 An early start: Young learners and modern languages in Europe and beyond. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Nikolov, Marianne, and Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović
2006 Recent research on age, second language acquisition, and early foreign language learning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 26: 234–260.

Nikolov, Marianne, Mihaljević Djigunović, Jelena, Mattheoudakis, Marina, Lundberg, Gun, and Tanya Flanagan (eds.)
2007 *Teaching Modern Languages to Young Learners: Teachers, Curricula and Materials.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Nikolov, Marianne, and Krisztián Józsa
2006 Relationships between language achievements in English and German and classroom-related variables. In M. Nikolov, and J. Horváth (eds.), *UPRT 2006: Empirical Studies in English Applied Linguistics*, 197–224. Pécs: Lingua Franca Csoport, PTE. Available online: www.pte.hu/uprt/

Nunan, David
2003 The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region. *TESOL Quarterly* 37: 589–613.

Orosz, Andrea
2009 The growth of young learners' vocabulary size. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 181–194. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Papadopoulou, Charis-Olga
2007 German as a second foreign language in Greek compulsory education: Curriculum and continuity. In: Marianne Nikolov, Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović, Marina Mattheoudakis, Gun Lundberg, and Tanya Flanagan, (eds.), *Teaching Modern Languages to Young Learners: Teachers, Curricula and Materials*, 91–104. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Paradis, Michael
2004 *A Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Peng, Jing, and Lily Zhang
2009 An eye on target language use in elementary English classrooms in China. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 212–228. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Pinker, Steven
1994 *The Language Instinct.* London: Penguin.

Prahbu, N.S.
in press Teaching English to young learners: The promise and the threat. In: Janet Enever, Jayne Moon and Uma Raman (eds.), *Young Learner English Language Policy and Implementation: International Perspectives*. Kent, UK: IATEFL Young Learner Special Interest Group.

Scovel, Thomas
1988 *A Time to Speak: A Psycholinguistic Inquiry into the Critical Period for Human Speech.* Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
2000 A critical review of the critical period research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 20: 213–223.

Singleton, David
2001 Age and second language acquisition. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 21: 77–89.
2005 The critical period hypthesis: A coat of many colours. *IRAL* 43 (4): 259–268.

Singleton, David, and Lisa Ryan
2004 *Language Acquisition: The Age Factor* (2nd edition). Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Skehan, Peter
1998 *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shohamy, Elana and Ofra Inbar-Lourie
2006 *The teaching of EFL in the first grade: EFL teachers versus homeroom teachers*. The Pedagogical Secretariat, Jerusalem: The Israeli Ministry of Education (in Hebrew).

Szpotowicz, Magdalena
2000 Young learners: Do they remember vocabulary? In: Jayne Moon and Marianne Nikolov (eds.), *Research into Teaching Young Learners*, 360–372. Pécs: University of Pécs Press.
2009 Factors influencing young learners' vocabulary acquisition. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes*, 195–211. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Szulc-Kurpaska, Malgorzata
2007 Teaching and researching very young learners: "They are unpredictable". In: Marianne Nikolov, Jelena Mihaljević Djigunović, Marina Mattheoudakis, Gun Lundberg, and Tanya Flanagan, (eds.), *Teaching Modern Languages to Young Learners: Teachers, Curricula and Materials*, 35–46. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Tomasello, Michael
2003 *Constructing Language.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Ullman, Michael
2001 The neural basis of lexicon and grammar in first and second language: The declarative/procedural model. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 4: 105–122.

Urponen, Marja Ingrid
2004 Ultimate attainment in postpuberty second language acquisition. Ph. D. Diss. Boston University.

Vágó, Irén
2007 Nyelvtanulási utak Magyarországon [Language learning paths in Hungary]. In: Irén Vágó (ed.), Fókuszban a Nyelvtanulás [Focusing on language leaning], 137–173. Budapest: Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet.

Vickov, Gloria
in press Learners' own cultural identity in early language learning. In: Marianne Nikolov (ed.), *Early Learning of Modern Foreign languages: Processes and Outcomes.* Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Vilke, Mirjana, and Ivonne Vrhovac (eds.)
1993 *Children and Foreign Languages*. Zagreb: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb.
1995 *Children and Foreign Languages II*. Zagreb: Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb.

Wong Fillmore, Lily
1998 *Supplemental declaration of Lily Wong Fillmore.* http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/linguistics/people/grads/macswan/fillmor2.htm (retrieved on 22 December 2005)