

MOTIVATION, AGE, AND LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN ADULT SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A COPARATIVE METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF TWO LEARNERS

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Abstract. This methodological article examines the second language acquisition (SLA) processes of two adult learners from Central Asia through a comparative qualitative case-study approach. The research focuses on how motivation, age, instructional background, and affective factors influence the development of linguistic competence, particularly in morphology and syntax. The learners, Lola and Almaz, demonstrate contrasting learning trajectories shaped by deductive and inductive learning strategies, investment, and sociocultural identity. Drawing on established SLA theories such as motivation and investment, affective filter hypothesis, and age-related cognitive factors, the study highlights strengths and weaknesses in learners' grammatical accuracy and communicative confidence. The findings suggest that balanced instruction, supportive learning environments, and task-based methodologies significantly contribute to effective adult language learning. Pedagogical implications are provided for English language teachers working with adult learners in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, adult learners, motivation and investment, morphology and syntax, affective filter, teaching methodology.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu metodologik maqola Markaziy Osiyodan bo'lgan ikki nafar katta yoshli o'rganuvchining ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish (SLA) jarayonlarini taqqoslovchi sifatli holat tadqiqoti yondashuvi orqali o'rganadi. Tadqiqot motivatsiya, yosh, ta'limiy tayyorgarlik va affektiv omillar lingvistik kompetensiyaning, ayniqsa morfologiya va sintaksis sohalarida rivojlanishiga qanday ta'sir qilishini tahlil qiladi. O'rganuvchilar Lola va Almaz deduktiv va induktiv o'rganish strategiyalari, sarmoya (investment) va sotsiomadaniy identitet ta'sirida shakllangan turli o'rganish yo'nalishlarini namoyon etadilar. Krashenning affektiv filtr gipotezasi hamda yoshga oid kognitiv omillar kabi SLA nazariyalariga asoslanib, tadqiqot o'rganuvchilarning grammatik aniqligi va kommunikativ ishonchidagi kuchli va zaif tomonlarni yoritadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, muvozanatli ta'lim, qo'llab-quvvatlovchi o'quv muhiti va vazifaga asoslangan metodologiyalar katta yoshli o'rganuvchilarda tilni samarali o'zlashtirishga sezilarli hissa qo'shadi. Ko'p tilli kontekstlarda katta yoshli o'rganuvchilar bilan ishlovchi ingliz tili o'qituvchilari uchun pedagogik tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish, katta yoshli o'rganuvchilar, motivatsiya va sarmoya, morfologiya va sintaksis, affektiv filtr, o'qitish metodologiyasi.

Аннотация. В данной методологической статье рассматриваются процессы усвоения второго языка (SLA) у двух взрослых обучающихся из Центральной Азии с использованием сравнительного качественного метода исследования случаев. В исследовании анализируется, как мотивация, возраст, учебный опыт и аффективные факторы влияют на развитие лингвистической компетенции, особенно в области морфологии и синтаксиса. Обучающиеся Лола и Алмаз демонстрируют различные траектории обучения, сформированные дедуктивными и индуктивными стратегиями обучения, инвестициями и социокультурной идентичностью. Опираясь на теории усвоения второго языка, такие как гипотеза аффективного фильтра и возрастные когнитивные факторы, исследование выявляет сильные и слабые стороны обучающихся в грамматической точности и коммуникативной уверенности. Результаты показывают, что сбалансированное обучение, поддерживающая образовательная среда и

методологии, основанные на заданиях, существенно способствуют эффективному обучению взрослых. Представлены педагогические рекомендации для преподавателей английского языка, работающих со взрослыми обучающимися в многоязычных контекстах.

Ключевые слова: Усвоение второго языка, взрослые обучающиеся, мотивация и инвестиции, морфология и синтаксис, аффективный фильтр, методика преподавания.

Introduction. Second language acquisition among adult learners is influenced by a complex interaction of cognitive, affective, social, and instructional factors. Unlike young learners, adults often bring established learning strategies, strong motivation, and life experience; however, they may also face challenges such as anxiety, limited time, and interruptions in learning trajectories. Motivation, identity, and investment play a crucial role in sustaining long-term engagement with language learning. [4] This study aims to analyze the language learning experiences of two adult learners – Lola and Almaz – by examining their motivational orientations, learning strategies, and linguistic challenges. The research further investigates how age and instructional background affect grammatical accuracy, fluency, and confidence in English as a foreign language (EFL).

Methodology. This study adopts a qualitative comparative case-study research design to explore adult second language acquisition processes in depth. A qualitative approach was selected as it enables the examination of learners' experiences, perceptions, and language development within their real-life sociocultural and educational contexts. The comparative case-study framework allows for the identification of similarities and differences between two learners who share the same age group but differ significantly in instructional background, motivation, and learning strategies. By focusing on individual learning trajectories rather than generalized outcomes, this design provides rich, contextualized insights into how personal, cognitive, and affective factors interact in shaping language acquisition. Such an approach is particularly appropriate for investigating complex constructs such as motivation, investment, and affective variables, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone.

The participants in this study were two adult learners of English as a foreign language, both aged 30, selected through purposive sampling due to their contrasting learning experiences and professional backgrounds. Lola is an Uzbek female currently working as an English teacher at a law college. Her language learning history is characterized by formal, deductive instruction with a strong emphasis on grammar and examination-oriented learning. In contrast, Almaz is a Kyrgyz male employed as a call center operator in an American logistics company, whose English acquisition has largely occurred through autonomous, inductive learning and extensive exposure to authentic input. Although both participants share similar age and adult learner status, they differ in terms of learning context, instructional access, motivational orientation, and sociocultural identity. This contrast makes them suitable cases for examining how different learning paths influence linguistic competence, confidence, and accuracy in adult SLA.

Data for the study were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to ensure depth and triangulation. Learner narratives were used to capture participants' personal histories, motivations, and perceptions of their language learning journeys. Classroom observations provided insight into instructional practices, learner behavior, and interaction patterns, particularly in relation to grammar use and communicative confidence. In addition, error analysis of both spoken and written language production was conducted to identify recurring morphological and syntactic difficulties. Reflective self-reports further contributed to understanding learners' emotional responses, self-evaluation, and perceived challenges during language use. The collected data were analyzed thematically, with particular attention paid to motivation, age-related factors, morphological accuracy, and syntactic structures. This thematic analysis enabled the identification of patterns across data sources and facilitated a comprehensive interpretation of how internal and external factors influence adult language learning processes.

Results and Analysis. Learner Profile A: Lola

Lola was born and raised in Uzbekistan and received multilingual education in a private school, where Russian was taught as a second language and English and Turkish as foreign languages. Initially, she demonstrated equal interest in Turkish and English; however, her focus gradually shifted toward English. Due to university entrance requirements emphasizing grammatical knowledge, Lola adopted a strongly deductive learning approach. Her solid grammatical foundation enabled her to develop complex sentence structures and accurate tense usage. However, due to interruptions caused by family responsibilities and childbirth, her engagement with English was inconsistent, resulting in partial attrition of previously acquired skills. After resuming her studies through IELTS preparation courses, she achieved a score of 5.5. Currently, Lola's primary strength lies in her grammatical competence, which facilitates the development of other language skills. Nevertheless, she experiences speaking anxiety, particularly in public contexts, due to fear of making errors. This anxiety reflects a heightened affective filter, which may hinder fluent language production. [5] Despite these challenges, Lola remains highly motivated to pursue a Master's degree abroad, demonstrating strong long-term investment in her language learning journey.

Learner Profile B: Almaz

Almaz is a Kyrgyz national who moved to Uzbekistan approximately ten years ago due to political instability in border regions. Growing up in a multilingual household, he acquired Uzbek naturally through interaction with his Uzbek-speaking mother, achieving a B2 proficiency level. His educational background also includes Russian as a dominant language during schooling. Unlike Lola, Almaz acquired English primarily through an inductive, self-directed approach. He engaged in extensive exposure by reading online news, watching films, listening to music, and summarizing podcasts. After three years of autonomous learning, he achieved a B1 level on a CEFR-based examination. Almaz

demonstrates strong speaking confidence and pronunciation skills, which contribute to high self-esteem and reduced anxiety. His integrative and intrinsic motivation aligns with Brown's assertion that intrinsically motivated learners tend to achieve greater communicative success. [1] However, his lack of formal instruction results in persistent grammatical inaccuracies, particularly in tense and passive constructions. Additionally, sociopolitical experiences influence his reluctance to attend instructional courses due to perceived risks of discrimination. [4]

Both learners belong to the early adult age group, which research suggests is advantageous for vocabulary acquisition and cognitive flexibility. [7] Unlike late adult learners, Lola and Almaz demonstrate relatively stable memory retention and learning speed. Studies indicate that while older adults may outperform younger learners in grammatical accuracy due to greater attention to form, the learning process is often slower and more cognitively demanding. [9] In contrast, Lola and Almaz benefit from a balance of cognitive maturity and motivational drive, enabling more efficient language acquisition despite time constraints and external responsibilities.

Discussion. Morphological challenges

Both learners encounter difficulties with derivational morphology, particularly in the misuse of suffixes such as *-ly*, *-ness*, and *-y*. Common errors include confusion between adjectives and adverbs (e.g., *beautiful* vs. *beautifully*) and incorrect nominalization (*jealousness* instead of *jealousy*). Such errors often lead to corrective feedback, which may increase anxiety and raise the affective filter. [5] To address these challenges, student-centered activities such as gap-filling, matching exercises, and autonomous morphological tasks are recommended. These methods promote focused attention and self-discovery, aligning with Canagarajah's emphasis on learner autonomy. [2]

Syntactic Challenges

Syntactic difficulties primarily involve passive voice constructions. Almaz frequently substitutes past participles with base or past forms (e.g., *is make* instead of *is made*), while Lola struggles with passive continuous forms (e.g., *is be painting* instead of *is being painted*). Incorrect passive usage can distort meaning and impede effective communication. [8] Task-based learning and the direct method are proposed as effective strategies for reinforcing passive constructions through contextualized exposure and practice.

The author's teaching philosophy emphasizes the integration of grammar-focused instruction with communicative and task-based approaches. Authentic materials, interactive activities, and supportive classroom environments are central to reducing learners' affective filters and encouraging risk-taking in language use. Explicit feedback is prioritized to enhance clarity and comprehension, while peer feedback and collaborative learning foster autonomy and engagement. [6] Planning, goal-setting, and alternative

assessment methods function as metacognitive strategies that support sustained learner development. [3]

Conclusion. This methodological study demonstrates that adult second language acquisition is a multifaceted process shaped by the interaction of motivation, instructional background, age-related cognitive factors, and sociocultural identity. The comparative analysis of Lola and Almaz illustrates how different learning trajectories lead to distinct linguistic outcomes. Lola's deductive, form-focused learning background contributes to her high level of grammatical accuracy and structural awareness, which supports her development across the four language skills. However, her learning experience also reveals the potential affective challenges associated with accuracy-oriented instruction, such as speaking anxiety and fear of error. In contrast, Almaz's inductive and exposure-based learning approach fosters communicative fluency, pronunciation accuracy, and self-confidence, enabling him to use the language more spontaneously in professional contexts, despite persistent grammatical inaccuracies. The findings suggest that neither deductive nor inductive approaches alone are sufficient for fully effective adult language learning. Instead, a balanced pedagogical methodology that integrates form-focused instruction with communicative, task-based practice appears to be most beneficial in addressing the diverse cognitive, affective, and linguistic needs of adult learners. Such an approach allows learners to develop grammatical accuracy without compromising fluency and communicative confidence, while also lowering affective barriers and supporting sustained motivation. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of recognizing adult learners' sociocultural backgrounds and personal investments in language learning. Factors such as family responsibilities, professional demands, and experiences of inclusion or exclusion significantly influence learners' access to learning opportunities and their willingness to engage in instructional settings. A supportive and inclusive learning environment, therefore, plays a crucial role in maximizing learner engagement and long-term success. Future research may expand upon the present study by adopting a longitudinal design to trace changes in learners' linguistic competence and motivation over time. Additionally, incorporating a larger and more diverse sample of adult learners across different multilingual contexts would allow for greater generalizability and deeper understanding of how instructional practices and sociocultural variables interact in adult second language acquisition. Such research would further contribute to the development of effective, equitable, and learner-centered approaches in adult language education.

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