

# **The Analysis of Environmental Influence on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

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**Abstract:** The research on the factors influencing children's second language acquisition is of vital significance in the practice of second language teaching. Quite a number of scholars at home and abroad have conducted profound researches from the points of view of pedagogy, brain cognitive science, child psychology and linguistics. Among the numerous factors that affect children's second language acquisition, the influence of environment on children's language acquisition is more comprehensive and complicated, including classroom teaching environment, family language environment and parent-child interaction. This thesis will make a brief analysis on the vital influence of environment on children's second language acquisition in the context of globalization.

## **1. Literature Review of Children's Second Language Teaching**

### **1.1. Research Significance**

Magnified by the rapid development of social economy, the globalization has penetrated into multiple fields such as politics, economy and culture. Mastering a second foreign language has become an essential skill for talent development and industry competition. Therefore, in the passing years, people lay more emphasis on foreign language learning in the social environment. In the social context of "bilingual craze", the theoretical and practical research on second language teaching in China increasingly take on a younger-age trend. In the field of research on second language teaching, the Critical Period Hypothesis exerts a significant impact on the second language education of preschool children. In light of this theory, educational products such as early education classes, animation, APP, teaching CD and the like emerge in endlessly. In the trend of parents making all-round investments in children's bilingual learning, the choice of educational institutions and parenting education methods have become key issues during second language learning. Hence, it is of great practical significance to explore the influence of environment on children's second language acquisition.

### **1.2. Concept Definition**

Second Language Acquisition (SLA): second language acquisition, referred to as SLA, refers to the learning of any other language after the acquisition of the mother tongue. Second language acquisition in this thesis refers to English language acquisition.

Children: the age of children in this thesis is from 0 to 12 years old.

Environment: the environmental analysis in this thesis can be roughly classified as family environment, social environment and educational environment

Immersive teaching mode: a teaching mode in which a second language is used as the teaching language. That is, children are "immersed" in a second language environment during all time or a period of time on campus.

### **1.3. Influence of Environment on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

In the passing years, researches on the second language acquisition of preschool children at home and abroad are principally embodied in two aspects: the optimal age for early second language acquisition of children and the influence of second language acquisition on children's cognitive development. The research on early childhood language acquisition began at the

beginning of the last century from the perspectives of psychological and applied languages based on cognition. Psychologist K. Levin once came up with the theory of “Psychodynamics Field” and expounded the interactive relationship between human and environment. The theory proposes that human behavior is conducted in a certain “dynamic field”, namely, the interrelation between human and environment. Italian educator Montessori also emphasized the principle of “environmental design” during child care. In his view, an external environment suitable for early childhood development plays a crucial role in early childhood care. In the early 1970s, the American educator G. F. Mcvey briefed the physical environment factors in the classroom environment in “Perceptual Factors in School Learning Environment”. Moos expounded the relative relationship between environment and individuals from the perspective of social psychology, pointing out that the influence of environment on individuals is principally embodied in interpersonal relationship, individual development, and system maintenance and change. Tian Huisheng, a Chinese scholar, also stated that the enhancement of the overall teaching environment system should be principally boosted from two aspects: the material environment and the social and psychological environment.

## **2. Factors Influencing Children’s Second Language Acquisition**

### **2.1. Influence of Social Environment on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

The influence of social environment on children's second language acquisition principally comes from urban language landscape, social media, population mobility and other aspects.

#### **2.1.1. Influence of Urban Linguistic Landscape on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

Landry & Bourhis first proposed and applied the concept of “linguistic landscape” and defined it as: “languages appearing on public signs, billboards, street names, place names, shop signs and public signs of government buildings together form the language landscape of a territory, region or city group.” In the course of urban modernization and internationalization, basic urban language landscapes such as English signs for urban roads, English slogans, English explanations for scenic spots, English broadcasting notices for subways and airports have long been common occurrence. These language landscapes not merely furnish convenient life guides for foreign tourists, but offer more abundant English learning materials for native English learners. When parents and children travel together in daily life, parents can selectively guide children to notice warnings and slogans on buses, in subways and some other city road signs, which can enhance children's awareness of English learning and language sensitivity. Besides, it allows them to flexibly accumulate vocabulary and strengthen acquired vocabulary during observation. However, while offering conveniences, inappropriate translation in a lot of places has also resulted in obstacles to information transmission and incorrect word guidance. “Research on Translation of Public Signs in Shaanxi Province” mentions that there are some problems in the translation of public signs for road traffic, such as inconsistent translation forms, grammatical errors, Chinglish, incorrect and missing translation of the original information, etc. For instance, the translation of “xiao xin hua dao” into “Carefully Slide” gives an unclear instruction and is somewhat Chinglish. The more appropriate translation is “Caution! Wet Floor.” The accuracy and standardization of urban language landscape exert a subtle influence on children's English learning, especially the habit of using precise words and the cultivation of English learning awareness, while the translation of slogans is also a significant part of the enhancement of urban humanistic quality, and standardized management needs to be intensified.

#### **2.1.2. Influence of Social Media on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

Media such as television, radio and the Internet have played a tremendous role in boosting the dissemination and input of language. For instance, children's English learning applications such as “Children's Interesting Dubbing” and “Teach Me Toddler” furnish parents and children with a parent-child game platform and personalized learning program design to enhance children's interest and capability in language learning in an interesting game environment. In the meanwhile, the

spread of British and American animation films in China has also produced a profound impact on children's English learning. The British and American animation carrying the theme of growth vividly displays the conflicts and emotional sublimation of characters from the perspective of mimicry of human's child interests. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, it can be understood that language input is an essential condition for second language acquisition. The language level of English and American animated films is slightly higher than that of children's original English, which is simple, clear and easy to imitate and authentic. Hence, it is suitable as language input materials for children's second language acquisition, which exert an effect on promoting children's second language acquisition.

In respect of reading, the publishing industry of bilingual books for children has mushroomed. Take the Children's Publishing Branch of Foreign Language Teaching and Research Publishing House as an example. The branch aims at "edutainment" and furnishes all-round and multi-media publications covering language learning, knowledge education and quality education for Chinese children. Bookworm is a graded English learning book for young people jointly launched by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and Oxford University Press. The series is presented to readers in simplified versions of classic literary works such as *Jane Eyre*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tess*. In light of the physical and mental development characteristics of young people of different ages and their mastery of English, the series is classified from the entry level to the sixth level, and the vital words in the selected passages are summarized at the end of each chapter. The development of bilingual reading and publication has created an authentic language environment for children's foreign language learning, offering fairly good language materials for vocabulary accumulation, language sense cultivation and cultural perception in different stages of children's English learning.

Inspired by Mayer's classical Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, multimedia learning relations are classified as passive multimedia and interactive multimedia, i.e. emphasizing on children's passive reception of graphic information and virtual reality technology. As multimedia resources become increasingly abundant, a variety of forms of multimedia have exerted a transformative impact on foreign language teaching both inside and outside the classroom. Multimedia resources make English teaching gradually become less dependent on the classroom and go into family life. However, in the auxiliary teaching links of mobile phone APP, foreign language songs and other equipment, there generally exist such phenomena as low efficiency, strong entertainment interference and insufficient parents' interactive participation.

### **2.1.3. Influence of Population Mobility on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

Fueled by the deepening of reform and opening up and the advancement of globalization tendency, the population mobility in the society is continuously reinforced. The proportion of people who go abroad to work overseas, pay academic visits, study and travel abroad grows with each passing day, and an increasing number of residents can come into contact with foreign languages and cultures and feel the differences and influences of different cultures.

In an environment where cross-cultural exchanges are more open and prosperous, a lot of primary schools and kindergartens have hired foreign teachers from different countries and regions to teach their students. In the oral class, the students actively participate in group discussions, which, while training students' oral capability, cultivate their sense of teamwork and communication skills. During summer and winter vacations, a large number of primary schools will also receive international student program exchanges or organize teachers and students to visit friendship schools in other countries and regions for short-term academic study. The rich and colorful activities have created a strong language communication environment for students.

Based on data released by China Tourism Academy and National Tourism Administration Data Center, in the whole year of 2017, 130 million person-times of Chinese citizens travelled abroad, an increase of 6.56% over the same period of the previous year. In 2018, the number of outbound tourists in China further expanded to 6.5 million, with the number of young people increasing, accounting for nearly half of the 80's and 90's, with more and more families going on family trips.

More and more families choose to take their children abroad for tourism, which increases their chances of contacting foreign cultures and enhancing their communicative competence in foreign languages, and this has a certain promotion effect on children's language learning.

## **2.2. Influence of Educational Environment on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

### **2.2.1. Influence of Theoretical Research on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

Domestic research on the developmental advantages of bilingual children emphasizes on the Influence of bilingual learning on children's executive function, cognitive function and intercultural communication capability. The research on the relationship between bilingualism and cognition has a history of nearly 100 years. In the early research on bilingual children, Daray and Lewis proposed: bilingual learning is not conducive to the cognitive development of second language learners; Peal and Lambert proved in the classic studies of 1960s that bilingual learning has a positive effect on cognitive development. Since the 1990s, language researchers have extended their research perspectives to many aspects of cognitive control (Barac, Bialystok, Castro & Sanchez, 2014.), and began to explore the relationship between bilingual learning and brain structure and function (Wong, Yin.).

In the passing years, the research on brain changes and plasticity in second language learning continues to heat up and “bilingual brain” research has begun. Ellen Bialystok proposed “bilingual cognitive advantage” after more than 40 years of research, and mentioned that bilingualism can change human cognitive system and shape bilingual brain (Bialystok, 2017). The emergence of concepts such as the Critical Period Hypothesis, Additive Bilingualism, Bilingual Children and Bilingual Brain has set off an upsurge in the research and practice of children's second language acquisition on a social scale. Along with the adjustment of the birth policy, China's early childhood education industry has ushered in a new golden period, with a variety of forms of children's second language teaching materials and early childhood classes coming into being.

### **2.2.2. Influence of Classroom Design on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

Goeman proposed in his “Emotional Theory of Second Language Learning” that during second language acquisition, the stronger the affective filter factor, the less the language acquisition. Emotional filter is more obvious in adult language learning and brings less influence on children. Hence, the English classroom design of children's English in kindergartens and primary schools usually emphasizes on interactive links and interesting teaching, such as introducing original English animation, oral conversation with Partner, immersion teaching, etc. “Theoretical Support for Application of English Original Animation to English Teaching in Primary Schools” holds that compared with adults, children are more eager to explore the outside world and are better at observation and imitation, thus “their language learning relies more on listening and action behaviors in a bid to acquire language information”. Take the original English animation as an example. Compared with only playing animation to children, adding animation background introduction, repeated playing of key segments and questions, vocabulary brainstorming, role playing and other links in classroom design can significantly improve children's learning effect. Hence, based on children's psychological development characteristics, classroom design plays a crucial role in cultivating children's interest in second language learning, creating a fairly good language acquisition environment and fully exploiting foreign language learning resources.

### **2.2.3. Influence of Multimedia Resource Teaching on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

Compared with the traditional teaching mode, multimedia teaching integrates the media of characters, images, audio, video, etc., which boasts significant advantages in teaching activities. For instance: vivid and humorous animation video and dubbing, etc. show are helpful to boost students' interest in foreign language learning; interactive software design stimulates the nervous system from visual, auditory and sensory aspects, which is conducive to training and enhancing students' practical application capability of language, audio, video and speech.

In language learning, abundant and diversified multimedia resources are favorable for creating a

dialogue environment of complex scenes in children's daily life, building a scientific and close link and bridge for classroom interaction between teachers and children. Multidimensional tools for language learning facilitate the development and application of language teaching to children's imitation capability, bring authentic foreign language scenes into learning, and exert a significant impact on children's foreign language enlightenment.

However, there still exist some problems in the multimedia teaching mode. For instance, in the classroom, teacher-student communication activities are reduced, and teaching courseware reduces teachers' subjective initiative in classroom interaction, and teachers are easily bound by courseware content, thus reducing more personalized classroom communication content. Facing a large amount of information and complicated classification of learning resources, parents, teachers and children will fall into the decline of subjective initiative. They will adjust their learning plan design closely based on the content and process furnished by multimedia equipment, and will be restrained and affected to a certain extent.

### **2.3. Influence of Family Environment on Children's Second Language Acquisition**

The influence of family environment on children's second language acquisition is principally affected by the complexity of family language use, parent-child interaction during children's language acquisition, and the educational level of family members. In his theory of early childhood education, German educationist Froebel emphasized the influence of family environment on children's education. In his view, to develop and boost children's wisdom, the family is of primary importance. It is not merely the cell of society, but the foundation for people to master their mother tongue, form their living habits, and lay the foundation for personality and socialization. Verhagen, Mulder and Leseman (2017) found in the research that, family language environment has an impact on the performance of inhibition and control tasks of bilingual children. Children growing up in bilingual families, i.e. one parent speaks one language respectively, are significantly better than children in monolingual families in performing conflict tasks and delayed gratification tasks. High-frequency bilingual conversion is significantly correlated with children's bilingual cognitive advantages and executive function performance.

#### **2.3.1. Influence of Complexity in Family Language Use**

The complexity of family language use produces a significant impact on children's pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition and adaptation to grammatical rules. Different languages will have a transfer effect during children's bilingual learning. It is easier for family environment with multi-lingual cultural background to guide children to accept multi-social culture and create conditions for multi-lingual communication and use. He Huimin's "Investigation Report on English Learning Environment in Children's Families" reveals that "families with parents who have English listening and speaking capability usually use English to talk with their children and listen to English programs much more frequently than those with monolingual environment". In "A Case Study of Bilingual Acquisition of Twin Children in Sino-Korean Bilingual Families", the author Liu Zaixi recorded the bilingual acquisition process of twin daughters growing up in Sino-Korean multinational marriage families from 1 to 4.5 years old for a total of 3.5 years through corpus collection and natural observation. The similarity between Chinese and Korean bilingualism plays a role of positive transfer in the process of Twin A and Twin B learning Chinese and Korean in the case. The phonetic characters in Korean need morpheme combination, and learning them together with Chinese pictographic characters and ideographic characters is conducive to enhancing children's memory. Meantime, there are a large number of homonyms in Korean and Chinese, so the bilingual listening level of A and B can be intensified.

At the same time, Paradis and Genesee(1996:9) came up with another vital point of view: "we have made a reasonable assumption that the language input space of bilingual children is divided into two halves. In the same period of time, bilingual children need to acquire two languages and monolingual children need only acquire one language, so the time for bilingual children to contact each language is naturally reduced compared with monolingual children." This view is consistent with the data furnished by Pearson et al. who took children aged 8-30 months as the object: children

under multilingual education have virtually the same understanding and mastery of language as children under monolingual education, but the vocabulary of their spontaneous speech is less than that of monolingual children, and multilingual children over 5 years old can understand less vocabulary than monolingual children. This suggests that complex family language environment can also lead to negative transfer of children's bilingual learning during bilingual acquisition. Children from bilingual families perform better than monolingual children in cross-cultural communication and integration and bilingual conversion, but they are not as good as monolingual children in vocabulary and grammar mastery.

### **2.3.2. Influence of Parent-child Interaction in Family Environment**

Parent-child interaction in family education has a profound impact on children's second language acquisition. Bruner(1983) mentioned in his theory of “Language Acquisition Support System”. The development of children's language cannot be separated from the language interaction and language environment support furnished by the family and the surrounding environment. Bowlby (1971) also advocated that the expansion of children's intelligence and social ability is more influenced by mothers, whose parenting attitudes and language types are directly associated with the growth process of children.

The parent-child interaction in the family environment has a variety of forms, which can be completed by means of role-playing and props in the game, or through picture books, watching cartoons and other media. When talking about parent-child game interactive learning, Rashad mentioned: “infants and young children can learn new words by watching educational TV programs, but watching TV with adults can help infants and young children learn new words better than watching TV alone.” Compared with children alone, when parents watch English cartoons or movies together with children, parents can ask questions or discuss with children according to the content of the movies to guide children to think about the content, and repeat the repeated words and sentence patterns in the following dialogues to enhance memory. While learning vocabulary and conversation, parents can correct children's errors such as word order confusion and pronunciation confusion in a timely manner by observing children's pronunciation and grammar usage, and guide children to gradually improve their basic skills of bilingual expression.

Apart from watching English cartoons and simulating situational dialogues together, parents and children reading English story books together is also the basic form of parent-child interaction. During reading, parents can facilitate children's cognition of diagonal color and emotion through reading timbre changes and role playing, and can also examine children's understanding and language acquisition through questioning. Just as the research by Health and Leichter demonstrates, in parent-child reading, parents not merely transmit the reading mechanism and strategies, but the projection of world outlook and values by virtue of their previous life experiences.

Premised on the theories of “He'ermei” (stimulating children's internal learning motivation) and “Muneimei” (strong adaptability to the surrounding environment) proposed in “Montessori” interactive education, parent-child game interaction can effectively stimulate children's internal learning drive, develop children's strong learning and absorbing ability to the surrounding environment, and enhance language interest, thus laying a good foundation for in-depth learning. Thus, in parent-child games, parents need to attach importance to creating an equal, warm and common atmosphere for discussion. With reference to the children's physiological and psychological development characteristics, parents should work out realistic, orderly and reasonable and flexible activity plans so as to create an exclusive environment suitable for children to learn.

## **3. Conclusions and Suggestions**

### **3.1 Research Conclusions**

(1) In bilingual teaching, teachers and parents should give full consideration to children's cognitive characteristics, create a relaxed environment for second language use inside and outside the classroom, and imitate the process of natural absorption in children's language acquisition. On

the part of teachers, they should make full use of the advantages of school group cooperation and conversation, create an atmosphere of bilingual learning in the campus, and enhance students' practical application ability on the premise of consolidating the basic knowledge of subjects.

(2) While make full use of the interest and flexibility of multimedia foreign language teaching equipment in family activities, it is also suggested to increase the time and links of parent-child interaction, and mobilize the emotion of children's active participation in second language learning.

(3) Furthermore, it is recommended to create a relatively balanced bilingual environment, to balance the time of bilingual contact, and to minimize the negative influence of mutual obstruction between the two languages in the bilingual learning process.

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