The Effects of Age on the Ability to Learn English As a Second Language

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

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requirements for a BA Hons in English and Teaching English as
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Contents

1 Abstract

The idea that there is an age factor in language development has long been, and continues to be a constant debated topic. In this dissertation which examines the relationship of age to second language acquisition, we begin by a literature review, followed by briefly revisiting some of the early perspectives on the issue of age being a factor in language development and it goes on to explore some of the relevant findings which emerged when comparing the English language of two adults of different ages, who migrated from India. These two participants were tested on a wide variety of structures of the English language, by analysing their conversations in English in a natural situation, demonstrating a clear and strong advantage for young age over the older age. The dissertation concludes with a short discussion — in the light of the foregoing — of the notion that there may be not one, but a number, of age-related factors that affects second language acquisition.

Substantial interest surrounds the question of how age affects second language acquisition. This is a particularly intriguing question for educators who must develop appropriate curricula and instructional strategies for refugees and immigrants of different ages who are entering this country. Unfortunately, too little is known about language acquisition in general to allow us to say definitively that X or Y makes acquisition easy at one age or difficult at another.

A word of caution is necessary at the outset: generalisations about the relationship of age and language acquisition are treacherous for two obvious reasons. First, people of the same age do not share all the same characteristics. We can speak of

a typical 16-year-old or an average 41-year-old, but we have to keep in mind that a norm or an ideal may be as much fiction as fact in the real world. Among people of the same age, differences in attitudes, abilities, knowledge, and skills make generalisations about learners' indefinable. Second, there is no uniform pattern of development that everyone follows. Even if we could say that everyone eventually achieves certain characteristics, it is clear that there is no common route to be followed. Knowledge and skill are acquired by each of us according to a highly individual map.

2 Introduction

The term *second language* is used to mean a language that is learnt after the native language is relatively established. Learning is defined as a deliberate, conscious attempt to master a language. Acquisition is defined as a less deliberate, subconscious process of mastering a language. First language is also referred to as L1 in the literature. L2 is the second language. *Target language* is the second language, the language being learned by the learner.

The communicative approach to language learning fosters the use of appropriate and positive learning strategies. In today's world communicative language teaching and learning have become a significant feature in ESL contexts across many countries. Also the adult learners, especially in the target language situation directly benefit from the use of communicative skills. Many theoretical and research studies in second language learning strongly suggest that good language learners utilise a variety of strategies to improve their communicative ability. From the practical perspectives, speaking strategies are one of the most important aspects in dealing with communication skills, particularly in second or foreign language situations, as they enhance learners' confidence and fluency. 'The communicative approach implicitly encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to use a wide range of language learning strategies' (Oxford, 1989: 29).

This dissertation consists of a literature review which discusses the issues related to the acquiring of English as a second language. The literature review looks at

existing literature and research which shows the problems and difficulties an

adult may have when acquiring English as a second language.

The dissertation itself looks at the comparison of the spoken English of two

people, one who came from India to live in England at the age of 16, who is now

25 years of age and the other who came from India to England at the age of 32,

who is now 41 years of age. Neither of them were taught any English whilst they

were in India and both attended Hindi school during their time in India. Since they

came here, they have been trying to fit into the job market and at the same time

adjusting themselves in the target language situation as well. This dissertation

investigates how they are coping with the target language communication, and,

specifically in speaking, what strategies they are employing when faced with

some difficulties.

As a conclusion to this dissertation, it refers to whether a person's age has any

effect on the ability of learning English as a second language.

2.1 Purpose and rationale

Gaining good communicative skills has always been considered as one of the

most important factors in settling down in a new society for the immigrants,

especially in a monolingual country like England. In a recent study some

participants stated that 'if immigrants are not fluent in English before they arrive

in England they face a real barrier when finding work and communicating with

people in the wider community' (Department of Internal Affairs, 1996, 2: 51),

here strategy use in communication can enhance language proficiency in many

ways. Bialystok (1983: 117) states clearly, 'the effective use of appropriate

strategies is an important aspect of communicating in an imperfectly learned

language'. Studies show highly proficient learners are more likely to use strategies in communication than less proficient learners. This strategy use in communication may vary in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, motivation, personality and nature of job. Many research studies emphasised on the strategy instruction and the conscious use of strategies in communication. However, I have not found any relevant research though I assume that a few such studies might have been carried out in dealing with speaking strategies to overcome communication problems for the adult migrants.

Communication competence is one of the crucial issues in many countries for the learners from non English speaking backgrounds. On the other hand, 'strategies depend on the speaker's language knowledge and the linguistic competence of the interlocutor in the topic discourse' (Corder, 1983: 15). Controversy still exists among the researchers as to what extent learning strategies and communicative strategies are different. However, from their elaborate discussions it is apparent that strategies in learning and communication are not radically different but rather complementary to each other.

Exploring the communication difficulties and strategy use within a particular community may become clear on how they are coping with the communicative language situation. This dissertation involves the study and comparison of two people living in the Midlands to identify their speaking difficulties and the strategies they use to overcome communication problems or to carry on communication.

2.2 Research questions

It is generally assumed that adult learners engaged in target language communication often have problems of various kinds and try hard to cope with them. Thus this dissertation mainly addresses two research questions, as follows:

1. Does age affect the ability to learn English as a second language?
2. How does age affect the acquiring of English as a second language?

Apart from these two questions, it is expected that some additional issues may come out of this study, such as culture, gender, religious values and motivation factors in relation to strategy use in communication.

3.1 Literature Review

Over the last two decades a considerable number of theoretical and research studies have been carried out on strategies of language learning, such as Tarone (1977), Bialystok (1981, and 1990), Corder (1983), Varadi (1983), Faerch and Kasper (1983), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1989, 1990 and 1996) who all did numerous studies. However, quite a few studies have been done by researchers particularly on the strategies in communications and their applications. Among them Shackle (1987), Bialystok (1981), Huang and van Naerssen (1987); Corrales and Cole (1989), Ross (1991), Dornyei (1995) and Dadour and Robbins (1996) are worth mentioning. Some studies have also dealt with diverse backgrounds of learners such as, Arabic, Chinese, Hispanic, Japanese, Nepalese, Nigerian, Indian, Thai and Vietnamese, for instance Shackle (1987). The study of Shackle (1987) aims at tracing the strategy use in practical life situations and also describes the most important typical pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and other mistakes of learners who speak Indian Languages, such as Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi.

3.2 What is language?

According to Harris (1980: 1-3) it has been suggested that:

> *anyone who asks 'what is a language?' must expect to be treated with the same suspicion as the traveller who inquires of the other passenger waiting on platform 1 whether they can tell him the way to the other railway station…the language user already has the only one concept of a language worth having.*

Chomsky (1957) believes that 'Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.' On the other hand, according to Halliday (1973):

> *Language is a range of possibilities, an open-ended set of options in behaviour that are available to the individual in his existence as social man. The context of culture is the environment of any particular selection that is made from within them."*

Harris (1980: 1-3) has two conflicting views of language. On one hand, he says 'it could be regarded as an autonomous system; on the other hand, as inextricably bound up with social and contextual factors'.

One of the ways linguists have approached the task of finding the meaning of 'language' is that they have agreed on various levels of languages and given them names, for instance phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.

3.3 The definitional concepts of communication strategy

Since speaking strategies are in most cases discussed under the broader area of communication strategies, it is better to have a look at those issues in order to have a clear understanding of communicative strategies. It is also an attempt to look for an effective connection between communication strategies and speaking strategies. We can consider the first two definitions as quoted in Bialystok (1990: 3) which have been proposed for the communicative strategies of second language learners:

'A systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficulty' (Corder, 1977).

'A mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situation where requisite meaning structures are not shared' (Tarone, 1980).

Though there is no common agreement on the definition of communication strategies yet, many researchers accept Corder's one as a working definition. According to Tarone (1983: 65) communicative strategies may be seen as attempts to bridge the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the target language interlocutor in real language communication situations and in which his definitional concept is also clearly reflected. Some other researchers, such as Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Poulisse, et. al (1984), also designed several thoughtful definitions, but for this study the above two definitions seem to be the most relevant and to the point.

Among the researchers there are some different opinions about the relationship between learning and communication strategies. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), communicative strategies (for example, changing the topic, using gestures or asking for help) are used to achieve communicative goals whereas learning strategies are meant for learning. On the other hand, Oxford (1990) argues that communication strategies result in speaker's staying in the conversation and thus provide the opportunity for further learning as well as further communication. Corrales and Call (1989) consider that communication strategies make up for missing knowledge.

As Dadour and Robbins (1996: 158) observed, 'communication strategies, ... thus could be considered as overlapping somewhat with learning strategies'. According to Shackle (1987):

Given the long – established position of English in the schools of the subcontinent, the problems encountered by learners are generally likely to be determined by their educational rather than their particular language background.

Despite some debates among the researchers on the definition of communication strategies, the basic points are very obvious for example, the speaker's difficulties, and steps taken to carry on communication. As long as speakers stay in conversation and face problems, they try to apply strategies since these efforts provide them with a sense of security in communication. So, strategies may be considered as the technical tools of dealing with troubled areas in communication. From the overall discussion, this kind of understanding can easily be formed in carrying out this dissertation.

3.4 Communication in the target language situation

One of the major factors that people who have migrated face while settling down in a new country is lack of communication skills. New immigrants often cannot join the workforce immediately and so language remains a problem to them. Sometimes their previous language knowledge may help communication to some extent but they have to learn how to use this effectively in real-life situations. As long as they make progress in communication, adjustment to the new society and environment becomes easier. As some researchers state language is a key form of communication. Therefore, language learning means learning to communicate, 'learning to use the language appropriately for the communication of meaning in social contexts' Oxford, Lavin and Crookall, (1989).

The majority of learners are taught English at school in their Countries of origin, but they have less opportunity to use that language. Their whole learning system is greatly marked by constraints caused by culture, and also lack of institutional supports. Clyne (1982: 114) reminds us of another important point which may lead to communication breakdown in the target language situation saying:

> *Even among migrants with a high proficiency in English, rules for communicating intentions and for structuring discourse, e.g. in essays, letters and meetings are largely determined by cultural background and especially country of schooling.*

However, in the target language situation learning may go simultaneously with communicative practice in real life or vice versa. Brown and Yule (1983), Bryne (1986), Huang and van Naerssen (1987), Scarcella and Oxford (1992) Dornyei and Thurrell (1994), Dornyei (1995) and Shackle (1987) suggest various ways of helping learners achieve oral communications skills and how to motivate them as they improve their speaking ability at different stages. It might help learners of diverse backgrounds achieve more proficiency in communicative language ability despite other constraints and variables.

3.5 Strategies in speaking

Speaking as a productive language skill is considered to be a creative and complex process. In many countries where English is taught mainly as an academic subject, this skill is often neglected which could provide the primary foundation for practical communication. Since all learners use strategies in communication regardless of them being native or non-native, their frequency of

interactive language use will account for the proficiency level. It appears that learning strategies and communication strategies contribute to each other and speaking strategies directly fall within the communication strategies.

3.6 Follow up discussion

It can generally be assumed that adult learners most often engage in the conscious process of learning. Experiencing some difficulties in the target language situation is also common to adult learners. Several research studies show that successful learners tend to use more strategies in communication. There are other factors which are more or less responsible for the degree of strategy use in real life communication such as motivation, ethnicity, age, gender and cultural background. Furthermore, as many adult learners are inhibited, language phobic or inexperienced with language learning, strategy use in communication can delay their capability to learn.

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This part gives a brief history on the English language. Mainly it explains how the recordings were developed, how the participants were selected and how the questions were prepared. It also includes profiles of the participants and the variables that were considered before the participants were selected and the recordings took place.

4.2 English as an international language

English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is taught in schools in almost every country. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language. It is estimated that 300 million people speak English as a second language, and an additional 100 million people use it fluently as a foreign language. English is learnt everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for a better career, better pay, advanced knowledge and for communication with the entire world particularly the developed world.

4.3 Selecting the participants

The majority of Indians migrating to England has been occurring since the 1950's. There was a large gap in the labour market, which meant there were plenty of opportunities for work in the country.

For this study I chose two people on the basis of their age, gender, profession and length of stay in India. As I also belong to the same community and share the same cultural and first language experience, I knew that both speakers came from the same part of India and shared similar backgrounds and that the only main difference was the age that they migrated from India to the UK.

The reason I chose Indians is because it is one of the largest populations to migrate to the UK, that means that we have a larger range to select from, also that we have a variety for example, educated and non- educated, different times when people migrated, different types of education and different ages.

4.4 Profile of the participants

The first participant (speaker 1) is now 25 years of age, he came from India (Gujarat) in 1998 when he was 16 years old. His Mother tongue is Hindi, and he was not taught any English for the duration of his education in India. Upon his arrival in England he moved to Leicester with his mother, father and sister and lives there to this day. After settling down in Leicester, speaker 1 completed an English language learning course. He then worked for his uncle for two years at a take away after which he was offered a job at the call centre of 'HSBC' where he was working for three years. After leaving HSBC he was successful in obtaining a job at 'Phones 4 U' as an Assistant Manager where he is currently working.

The second participant (speaker 2) is now 41 years of age, he also came from India (Gujarat) in 1998 when he was 32 years old. His mother tongue is also Hindi and he was not taught any English for the duration of his education in India. When he came to England he moved to Nuneaton (the outskirts of Leicester) with his

wife and both are presently living there. After settling down in Nuneaton, speaker 2 could only find low paid, manual work jobs due to his lack of English, for example factory work . He then attended evening English classes for four years after which he was successful in finding a job working for the 'Royal mail' as a 'Customer Service Advisor'.

In both speakers' previous education they did not have a great influence of English language as they used to depend mostly on Hindi texts during their academic study. As they were from a very culturally distinctive nation, they did not have much of a positive attitude towards the English culture and/or language.

Although we know that the British ruled India until the late 1940's, the influence of English language would not have been apparent in both the participants. Speaker 1 was born after the rule of the British Raj, which means his education would not have been influenced by this. Likewise, speaker 2 began his education also after the British Raj, thus his English language would not have been influenced. Now, English as a second language has a very advantageous position in education, official and business communication in India. English is spoken as a second language by approximately 20-25 million Indians. However, Hindi (first language) is used as the main language for the overall communication in all aspects of life.

Culturally the Indian community is very integrated. Quite often they socialise on various occasions and visit each other's houses. Speaking in their first language (among adults), associating mostly within their own community are distinctive characteristics. On the overall feature of this community, it appears that through

their cultural integrity, they are more or less maintaining their own language and culture and at the same time they are also gaining proficiency in the target language situation. It would be interesting to look at the findings of language maintenance and shift among different community people as some studies have recently been done in Wellington (see Daly, 1990 and Holmes, et. al., 1993).

4.5 Considering the variables

When selecting the participants, it was important to consider the variables. The main aim of this dissertation is to see whether age has an effect on the ability to learn English as a second language. The principle variable will be the age of the two speaker's, the two speakers that I have chosen have been carefully selected in order to maintain fairness and to ensure that all variables, apart from age are kept as constant as possible.

Both participants were born in Gujarat and they both migrated to England in the same year, 1992. To ensure that both speakers had a similar accent, it was important that I chose participants who have been living, and are currently living in the same area – both these participants are from the Midlands. One major factor that needed to be taken into consideration was the amount of education the participants had in English. Both participants were educated in India, however they went to a Hindi based school, so the amount of English Language that was taught was very limited. Speaker 1 was in full time education until the age of 16; after he left school his parents brought him to England. He was unable to speak English when he migrated to England, so he completed an English language learning course in order to find well paid employment. Speaker 2 came to England

when he was 32 years of age; he attended school in India until the age of 16, before he started working in a factory for the duration of his time in that Country. Upon his arrival in England he decided to undertake English lessons for four years due to the unsuccessful search for well paid employment. This ensures that both learners have had education in the English language and they have also attended school in the same country, both until the age of 16.

The type of occupation the participants have had would also have a major impact on their English language fluency; speaker 1 has been working in a customer based environment for over 7 years and deals with customers face-to-face on a daily basis. Speaker 2 has been working for Royal Mail as a Customer Advisor for over 8 years and is frequently dealing with customer issues over the telephone and occasionally face-to-face. This ensures that both participants have been in a customer based environment for approximately the same time and have had to speak English continuously.

Another factor that must be taken into consideration is the family background of both participants. Both participants were born in a small family, with their parents and one sibling in each household. Speaker 1 came to England with his family, who at the time, were unable to speak fluent English. Speaker 2 came to England alone, who then got married 6 months later and lived with his wife in Nuneaton. His wife was born and brought up in England and was educated until Secondary school, this meant she was fluent in her English Language. Due to the lack of English of speaker 2, he could only communicate with his wife in Hindi, which meant that she had very little influence, if any, on the acquiring of his English language. One of the variables that we had to attempt to discount was the

influence of the wife of speaker 2. She could have either had a negative impact or a positive impact on the speaker. The reason for the negative impact is that the speaker may have been dependant on his wife; hence he would not need to tackle the everyday use of English language. It may have had a positive impact as his wife may be helping him to practice his English language. Thus taking both situations into consideration we can say that this can be disregarded as a variable.

4.6 Developing the questions for the recordings

Before the recordings took place it was important to consider the questions that were needed to be asked to the participants in order to obtain an accurate and substantial amount of speech from them. To ensure an accurate and fair test, it was also important that the conversations being recorded were as natural as possible. The participants would be recorded over a telephone conversation and would not be aware that their speech was being recorded until the conversation had finished. The participants' permission was granted before their conversation was recorded, however they were not aware when and where to expect the telephone call.

During the telephone call they would be asked three main questions, amongst other questions that occur during the conversation. The three main questions are "what are you doing?", "what have you been doing today" and "what are your plans for tomorrow?" These three questions require the participant to answer in the present, past and future tense. It is not essential that the above questions are asked in the exact format, as long as each participant is asked questions that require him to answer in the three different tenses it would be sufficient. This

would give us an insight as to how the participant deals with the tenses, and if they are comfortable talking in different tenses when put under pressure.

4.7 Carrying out the recordings

In order to carry out the recording for Speaker 1, I asked his friend who he had not spoken to in a while to call him whilst I was in the speakers' presence so I could record the conversation. I advised the caller of what to ask him when making the telephone call. When the speaker answered his phone, I set the Dictaphone to record and left the room so the speaker was able to talk comfortably, unaware that the conversation was being recorded. Although the conversation lasted over 5 minutes, I only needed the first 1.5 minutes for my analysis.

When it was time to record the conversation of speaker 2, I asked his cousin to make the telephone call. His cousin had come from America for a holiday and could not speak any other language but English, so speaker 2 had no option than to speak in English. Once again, I advised the caller of what to ask him when making the telephone call; I set the Dictaphone on timer, and left the room, as I felt that speaker 2 would be hesitant to answer the telephone if he knew he had to speak in English to the caller in my presence. This conversation also lasted over 5 minutes, however 1.5 minutes of the conversation was satisfactory for this dissertation.

After the recordings had taken place, the participants were told that their conversations were recorded. This came to them as a surprise as they had not expected it. The recordings were then transcribed into Standard English and also

into the International Phonetic Alphabet so that a detailed analysis could be taken place.

5 Results and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

After analysing the transcriptions of both speakers (see appendices), it is clear at first glance that speaker 2 had more difficulty communicating in English far more than speaker 1. Even though each transcription is 1.5 minutes long, we can see that speaker 1 speaks a lot more than speaker 2. Even though it is clear that speaker 2 speaks less than speaker 1, we can also see that the transcription of speaker 1 has a lot more *'umm's'* and *'uhhh's'*, this shows that he is less confident and hesitates to speak in English and has difficulty thinking of what to say next. He fills his speech with *'umm's'* and *'uhhh's'* otherwise known as fillers so that is gives him time to think of what to say next. The conversation of speaker 1 is more flowing than that of speaker 2; he does not take much time to think about what he needs to say and also feels comfortable suggesting topics to talk about and asking his caller questions. Speaker 2 only answers what he is asked and does not ask his caller any questions.

5.2 Distinguishing characteristics of Indians learning English (Indian English)

Indians learning English is a distinct variety of the English language. Many Indians claim that it is very similar to the British English, but after analysing the recordings of the two Indian participants, I would disagree with this opinion. There are many differences which are discussed below.

Many interesting differences seemed to be happening within both speakers, not only differences between the two speakers, but also differences in comparison to the British Standard English Language.

5.3 Hindi influenced terms and expressions in Indian English

When Indians use English, it is often a mixture of English, Hindi, and other languages. Many Indian terms slip in frequently when speaking English. Some expressions such as general *neh* and *huneh* (in general) are common in Indian English. These Hindi terms are the equivalent as to when a British youngster says *innit* to confirm what he has said with the person he is speaking to. Mixtures such as *neh* and *huneh* come quite naturally when one is acquainted with two or more languages. We see this happening with both speakers as they occasionally mix a Hindi term with what they are saying in English, for instance speaker 1 says /He?/ rather than 'what?' and says /hʌne?/ as a general Hindi term. Speaker 2 says /ʌlhʌmdʊ lɪlæh/ when he is asked how he is, this is an Arabic term, that Muslims tend to use to say they are well.

5.4 Phonology

The phonological systems of Hindi and of English differ in important ways,

mainly in the very different distinction between the vowels and the distinctions

between the consonants. While English has 22 vowels and dipthongs and 24

consonants, Hindi has only ten vowels, but 40 consonants.

According to Shackle (1987):

> *'the features of Indian languages which give rise to an 'Indian accent' in English are:*
> - *Tenser articulation than English, with vowels produced further forward, leading to the loss of some distinctions between different vowels.*
> - *The pronunciation of the voiceless consonants /p/, /t/, /t ʃ/, /k/ without aspiration in all positions.*
> - *A different intonation system from English.'*

5.4.1 Vowels

i‿		E	Æ	eɪ	aɪ	ɪ
‿		‿		**a**		ɪ
u‿	**Λ**	**Ŏ**		**eə**	**ə**	**aɪə**
						a ə

The phonemes in red have equivalents or near equivalents in Hindi, and should

therefore be perceived and articulated without serious difficulty, although some

confusions may still arise. Unshaded phonemes may cause problems:

For speaker 2 /e/ and /æ/ are often confused. In the transcription we can see that

he has this problem, when attempting to say 'aswell' he fails to pronounce the /æ/

and instead says /eswel/, he also has this problem when saying 'and', instead he

says /end/. Speaker 1 does not seem to have this problem as we can see from his

pronunciations of 'man' and 'Maz'.

5.4.2 Consonants

P	**B**	f	v			t	d
S	Z			t	**d**	k	**g**
M	**N**		l	r	**J**	w	**h**

The phonemes in red have equivalents or near equivalents in Hindi, and should therefore be perceived without serious difficulty, although some confusions may still arise. Unshaded phonemes may cause problems:

The fricative consonants / / and / / are replaced by the aspirated dental /th/ and the unaspirated /d/ respectively, so when speaker 2 attempts to say 'the' he actually says /dΛ/

There is only one Indian phoneme in the area of /v/ and /w/, and the distinction between these two sounds is a major difficulty for Indian learners, for example speaker 2 pronounces 'very' as /weɾi /. Speaker 1 does not seem to be encountering any of the above difficulties.

5.4.3 Influence of spelling on pronunciation

Hindi scripts are for the most phonetic parts, so that spelling is largely an accurate guide to pronunciation. Indian pronunciation of English words is consequently often as they are written, and sometimes pronounced incorrectly.

/r/ is pronounced wherever *r* is written, including positions where it follows a vowel. The quality of the preceding vowel is not neutralised as in RP, and some common false rhymes are created. Speaker 1 appears to have this difficulty, when saying 'for' he pronounces is as /f   r/ and also when saying 'before', he says it as /bɪ′ f   r/. the emphasis is put on the 'r'. Speaker 2 does not seem to have this

problem when saying 'paperwork'. This is not to say that he does not have this

difficulty at all, there is not enough evidence to say whether he does or does not.

The written –s of a word may be pronounced as /s/, even after a long vowel. This

is noticed in the transcription on speaker 2 when he says /eswel/ rather than

/ezwel/. We draw our attention to the /z/ and /s/ and notice how the speaker

pronounces the word as it is written. Speaker 1 does not seem to have this

difficulty as we can see from his pronunciation of /eɪd ɪz/, rather than /eɪd ɪs/.

5.4.4 Consonant clusters

The range of consonant clusters occurring at the beginning and end of English

words is much wider than in Hindi. Many such clusters are simplified:

Speaker 2 simplifies the final cluster by the omission of a consonant, we can see

this when he says / 'rΛɪ/, rather than saying the /t/ as is / 'rΛɪt/. Speaker 1

appears to have the same problem when saying / 'rΛɪ/ rather than / 'rΛɪt/,

/sɪrɪn/ rather than /sɪtɪn/,/w / rather than /w t/ and /Λn/ rather than /Λnd/

Speaker 2 also breaks down clusters by inserting a short vowel to assist him with

the pronunciation, in this case he adds /i / when saying the 'cricket', he

pronounces it as /ki ri ket/.

5.4.5 Rhythm and stress

As distinct from English, which is a stress-timed language, in which word stress is

both heavily marked and not always predictable, the Hindi language is syllable-

timed, and stress is secondary to the rhythm, which is based primarily upon the

arrangement of long and short syllables. Word stress in them accordingly tends

to be weakly realised, and is always predictable.

The appropriate stressing of syllables in English words and compounds is

therefore an area of great difficulty for speakers of Indian languages:

Full vowels tend to be retained, even in unstressed syllables so that the *e* of *cricket*

(speaker 2) retains its value. Many common words normally pronounced as

reduced 'weak forms' in English like '*and'* similarly keep their 'strong form'

values in all positions, and receive a relatively strong stress. We see this

happening in with both speakers, for instance speaker 1, when he says /d ʌs mi‿

ʌn ɪm ðas/ and speaker 2 when he says /mʌɪ 'pepərwɜrk **end**, ŏ hh..   lso / and

also when he says /'ki ri ket **end** ŏ , ʌhh/.

5.4.6 Intonation

The typical rising intonation of questions in English is reserved for expressions of

surprise in Hindi. Their characteristic inquisitive pattern, in which the end of a

question is marked by a rise that is followed by a fall in the intonation, is unlike

the English standard, and can easily cause misunderstanding. After listening to the

conversations of both speakers, it was apparent that speaker 2 still follows the

Hindi intonation pattern, we can hear the rise and fall when speaker 2 says

/hʌlo w?/ however when speaker 1 asks his caller a question, he rises, and does

not then fall in intonation, we can notice this from /ha z θɪŋz 'enɪweɪ?/ and /ju‿

bɪn ðeərr?/

5.5 Grammar

The 'parts of speech' of English and Hindi are broadly similar. Hindi is, however, a more highly inflected language. It has singular and plural noun forms, adjectives placed before nouns, a generally regular system of verb patterns, which includes past, present and future tenses. Unlike English, Hindi distinguishes masculine and feminine nouns, has common forms for all pronouns and has as normal word order of where the verb is placed finally in a sentence. Some of these differences, as well as some of these similarities, constantly cause problems for Indian learners of English.

5.5.1 Questions and negative; auxililaries

There is no equivalent of the auxiliary *have* in Hindi. Where no specific enquiring word is used, a question is marked only by its intonation and the word order is unaltered. For example speaker 1 says /ju‿ bɪn ðeərr?/ rather than saying 'have you been there?'

There is also a common question tag in Hindi, or reinforcer for all questions, regardless of the subject. Speaker 1 *says /si‿ w ɪts laɪk **hʌne?/**,* even though *'huneh'* is a Hindi term, if he was to say it in English, he would probably say *'isn't it?'*

5.6 Time, Tense and aspect

5.6.1 Past time

There is no true reported speech in Hindi, which usually preserves the original tone after past reporting verbs. Speaker 2 has difficulties when referring to the past, he tries telling the caller what he was doing yesterday and has problems between the past and the present tense, he says: / m 'dʊ ɪng sti l 'dʊ ɪng m

'pepərwɜrk end, ŏ h,　lso　w tʃɪŋ 'ki ri ket/, but what he should have said was '*I was doing my paperwork and also watching cricket.*' '*I'm still doing*' and the omission of '*was*' gives the listener the impression that he is talking about the present time.

5.6.2 Present time

The present progressive is used inappropriately by analogy with the Hindi simple present, formed with the present participle and present auxiliary, for example speaker 2 says: /d　Λs 'dʊ　mΛɪ 'pepərwɜrk end, ŏ hh..　lso　dΛ, 'li təl bi t　v (xx) 'ki ri ket end ŏ , Λhh. i t n　s fʊ d 'eswel/. From this sentence we cannot tell which tense he is referring to, because I have heard this speaker talk many times I know that he is referring to the present time, however if a person who did not know him heard him say the above sentence, it would cause great confusion.

5.6.3 Future time

There is a full set of future tenses in Hindi, and these are used much more freely than in English to express the notion of probability. Speaker 2 has problems when talking to his caller about what he will be doing tomorrow: /tə'mɑro　w ŏ h. 'dʊ ɪng 'li təl bi t DIY d ɑb end. ŏ hh.. ɑ lso　ŏ h 'emti　ŏ h, Λ 'w　dro b 'eswel. Λrh, n t 's ri　'w　dro b, bΛ mΛɪ bed ŏ h, bed 'jʊ ni t/.

5.7 Syntax

Certain verbs are used in Indian English in the same way they are used in Hindi. Indians use *kholna* and *bandh karna* when asking someone to turn a light on or off; the literal translation is retained, so some Indian English speakers say "open the light" and "close the light." Having spoken to both speakers on previous occasions, it can be said that they would say 'open/close' the light rather than 'turn the light on/off', however further research would be needed to show this.

5.8 Modal verbs

Hindi has either direct equivalents or quite closely similar constructions to most English modal verbs. The most serious confusions involve the inappropriate use of, or even the lack of the use of, an English modal verb, usually *will* or *may.* We see this happening in the transcription of speaker 2, when he talks about what he will be doing tomorrow, he fails to use *will*, he says: 'tə'mɑro w ŏ h. '/dʊ ɪng 'li təl bi t DIY d ɑb end. ŏ hh.. ɑ lso ŏ h 'emti ŏ h, ʌ 'w dro b 'eswel/.' What he is supposed to say when he is planning to do something in the future is: *'tomorrow I **will** be doing a little bit of DIY and also I **will** be emptying the wardrobes.'* So, on two occasions he fails to use a modal verb.

Speaker 1 does not appear to have this problem as we can see when he says: '/B m'beɪ.. l bi_ 'go ɪŋ ðeərr ʌm/' we can see from this transcription that he uses *'I'll'*.

5.9 Word order

Although Hindi differs from English in having postpositions in place of prepositions, and place the verb at the end of the sentence, this is not an area of serious confusions, except in direct and reported questions. We cannot see this

problem with either speaker, maybe because there is not enough transcription, however from what evidence is shown it is not apparent that either speaker would have the problem of ordering of words. Even though speaker 2 tends to miss out words, he does seem to have the problem of sentence structure in terms of word order.

5.10 Gender, number and case

Hindi nouns are either masculine or feminine, gender being determined by natural case of lifeless, by the form of the noun. Pronouns are not distinguished for gender, and the third person pronouns, *he, she* and *it* are represented by words also meaning *that* or *this.* There are also some differences between Hindi and English in their idea of what makes a plural noun, and this may cause confusion in English. Words like *scissors* or *trousers*, are singular in Hindi, whereas some other nouns are treated as plural. Speaker 1 does not seem to have this confusion, as we can see from his transcription: '/ə' ba .. θri_, f r **'nʌɪts/'** and '/ə ɪn 'to əl tu_ **wi_ks/'**, whereas speaker appears to have minor confusions about what is plural and what is singular, we do not have enough evidence to confirm this situation, however looking at one phrase that he says in his transcription, gives us reason to believe that he may have this problem: '/'li təl bi t v (xx) 'ki ri ket/'. He refers to cricket as 'a little bit of' whereas in English we would not say this we would simply say '*we watched cricket.'*

6 Conclusion

Looking at the results we can see clearly that speaker 2 appears to have more problems and difficulties when communicating in English.

We must take into consideration that social groups play a major factor in second language acquisition. Speaker 1 is only 25 years of age and also unmarried, because of his early migration to the UK he will have made friends who are born in England and will have aided him in practising his language learning. As for speaker 2, he was 41 when he came to the UK, he will not have made friends as easily as speaker 1 as he came to England for marriage and work, his social group would have been his family, and friends he made at work, the majority who have also migrated from India, so he would not have had the opportunity to practise his English language as much as speaker 1 would have. We can also say the same about the accent, speaker 1 was surrounded by friends and people who were British born and so he would have picked up their accent, whereas speaker 2 will have picked up the accent of his friends and family who were mostly from India. As Lightbown & Spada (1993) says, 'learners in informal settings in the target language environment usually have more time to devote to learning language, and they often have more opportunity.'

Ease in acquiring a second language has also been linked to a low level of anxiety. The anxiety barrier might explain why older learners, are less successful at second language acquisition than younger learners. Self-conscious adults, fear of failing or looking and sounding foolish may create an affective filter that blocks performance of which they would be capable in a relaxed state.

Self-confidence may also work as a filter or barrier. Younger learners stand to perform with more self-confidence than older learners because of the extent to which age influences their assertiveness in the face of authority. In spite of his higher anxiety, speaker 1 would be less likely to project his own identity and try a more elaborated code than speaker 2. Speaker 1 would have had to learn for banking, shopping, and other community involvements, whereas speaker 2 would have his wife and her fluent English to support him.

Generically, a "Critical Period" is considered to be the period of time during which an organism displays a heightened sensitivity to certain environmental stimuli. The idea of "Critical Period" was first introduced by Penfield & Roberts. According to Penfield & Roberts (1959):

> *a child's brain is more plastic compared with that of an adult, and before the age of 9, a child is a specialist in learning to speak, he can learn 2-3 languages as easily as one. However, for the purpose of learning languages, the brain progressively becomes stiff and rigid during the age span of 9-12.*

Penfield hypothesises that the child's brain plasticity makes for superior ability especially in acquiring units of language. He goes on to recommend the teaching of a second language at an early age in school.

Though the exact extent of the "Critical Period" during which learners learn a second language with relative ease and are more likely to reach a success varies slightly from different theoretical perspectives or individual researchers, most theorists and a number of researchers do agree that there is an advantage to an early start in second language learning. This dissertation along with previous studies shows that early exposure, even when it is minimal and there is little or no productive use of the second language, may be of importance to ultimate success

and may produce a qualitatively different type of language learning even when later learning takes place in a formal classroom setting.

The consistent evidence from the more recent empirical study of Birdsong & Mollis (2001), combined with the earlier experimental study of Johnson and Newport (1989), which have studied the effect of age of arrival to the L2 country and the attained L2 proficiency, indicates that earlier learners acquire L2 more proficiently over a particular age range, with a declining trend. Learners follow a generally downwards age-related trend. The findings of the study, in addition indicate that the later the arrival is, the lower the incidence of native-like performance will be. Birdsong (2002, p.38) claims:

> *…age entails a loss of ability to learn a second language. It is clear that the sensitivity decline persists over the age spectrum: it is more a case of progressive losing than eventual loss. L2 learning appears to involve not a single monolithic faculty, but distinct neural and cognitive components with differential susceptibilities to the effects of age.*

Birdsong & Mollis (2001) indicate that even in the "Critical Period" there is an age related decline and that there is a maximum age limit to the "Critical Period" of 15 years approximately.

I concur with the supposition that "earlier is better" has validity, since the data from my research agree with this statement.

The processes that adults use to acquire language give them a good start, but ultimately limit their final level of mastery. According to the biological hypothesis, adults who become language learners have less possibility of achieving native mastery. When a person cannot be distinguished from a native speaker by another native speaker, then he has mastered the language.

There is strong evidence of the existence of a "Critical Period" for L2, and there is

evidence to show that even in this period there is an age effect, clearly demonstrating the value of early exposure to the second language. From the point of view of educational practice, allocating second or foreign language resources to younger learners has pedagogical credibility and cost-effectiveness. In today's society with much more global movement of people and more accessible worldwide communication, L2 is much more of a survival necessity rather than a school subject.

 A number of factors have been discussed here that may help us understand why language learners seem to have varying degrees of success at different age levels. Research is being actively conducted in these areas, and language educators who keep on top of this research are more likely to devise effective systems for language teaching that are sensitive to the needs and potential of individual learners.

7 Summary of results

The information obtained on the basis of the recordings reflected this community's features mainly on speaking strategies to overcome communication problems. The interpretation was made through qualitative approach to support their responses in various ways. Other than the strategies and difficulties, that made the recordings more significant and consistent to a great extent. A few areas of speaking strategies and difficulties were explored outside the set targets in this dissertation that have added novelty to it. Useful ways to overcome communication difficulties that were recommended by the participants are also invaluable in communicative language practice.

7.1 Some useful features of this dissertation

From the two recordings of this dissertation, some distinctive new features have emerged as to the difficulties and the possible use of strategies in the target language communication. During phone conversation sometimes, it is better to jot down the necessary points for a good comprehension. Talking to children is a great source of communication adjustment and strategy use as low amount of inhibition and anxiety work there. Reading children's books can play an effective role as they are written in a simplified way with much more useful vocabulary of the target language use. Some advertisements and signpost messages can provide many useful ways to deal with the colloquial expressions in communication. Listening to the sports commentaries is probably very suitable for fairly advanced learners to cope with fluency in utterance. Speaker 2 admitted that a great deal of

anxiety, hesitation and inhibition played a negative role as he is not relatively fluent in conversation.

Gender, culture and motivation issues often have influential role in the language acquisition for the non-native speakers. This dissertation found some important features as additional information. Settling in a new society, one might find the issue of cultural adjustment more important rather than language adjustment. However, the results found in this dissertation show that these participants have high positive motivation towards the target language and its culture which can give a renewed drive to their communicative language proficiency.

7.2 Limitations and further research

The results of this dissertation are based on a small number of subjects. So, the information obtained here is inadequate and there is likely to be less possibility to draw a strong recommendation from it. However, being a member of the same community, I had the advantage to recognise and identify the difficulties in communication that helped in interpreting them. It was also much easier to draw a variety of information assuming their significance and relevance to the research questions of this dissertation. Though the sample size restricted the scope of huge data gathering and broader discussions, the results and analysis presented here can be considered a general overview of this community's communicative language features. The interpretation of the results might have some practical constraints because of its descriptive nature. Considering all these limitations and constraints, further studies with a larger population can be carried out by more than one researcher in the same area to show more convincing results which might be

useful for the curriculum developers and the language policy makers for the adult migrant English programs.

7.3 Pedagogical implications and conclusions

Many studies show that strategies of communication in teaching learning context can help learners improve their skills in the real life language use. Speaker 1 in this dissertation did not strongly recommend formal language courses for improving communicative skills though he did not ignore its value. Speaker 2 realised its importance. Therefore, consciousness focused strategies seem to be important in the learning situation so that they can use these effectively in communication. Recent studies in many cross-cultural situations e.g. Dadour and Robbins (1996) in Egypt and Japan, Yang (1996) in Taiwan and Flaitz and Feyten (1996) in Spanish and French language contexts found positive effect on the use of strategies in communication. This kind of strategy training through consciousness raising for communicative language use may help raise cultural awareness in recognising the strategies and their possibilities for communicative language practice.

In situations where language curriculum and course contents are to be designed for the non-native speaking background learners, strategies of communication can be taught for effective use in real life. This will improve learners' confidence in selecting and implementing appropriate strategies in communication. Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) and Dornyei (1995), Corder (1983) and Bialystok (1981) all strongly suggest the introduction of these strategies in a language teaching curriculum.

(Willing, 1993: 92) says, 'In any case, the development of learning strategies should be based on whatever resources the (adult) learner brings to the learning situation'. Awareness of this existing foundation is as important to the learner as it is to the teacher For teachers and curriculum developers it is equally important to identify those occurrences which are embedded in cultural, ethnic and religious beliefs as these elements might have great influence on the learning pattern of interaction and its difficulties along with strategy use in the target language situation. The findings found here are mainly based on the practical experience of communication in real life situations and so, there might be many threads that need to be pulled together to make an authentic connection between the contents of language learning, teaching and practicing. Thus, the outcome of this study may benefit designing proficiency programs for the multicultural immigrants and language tutoring for individuals.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Speaker 1

A direct transliteration in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and word for word transcription

Rɪzwæn
Rizwan

'æm, 'æm   'rʌɪ mæn ha   ju_?
I'm I'm alright man how you?

Je.. w   ju_ seɪɪŋ?
yes what you saying?

aɪv n , n   si_n ju_ f   , eɪd ɪz
I've not not seen you for ages

je?.. ha z θɪŋz 'enɪweɪ?
yes how's things anyway?

He? [Hindi filler] 'nʌθɪŋ d ʌs tʃɪlɪn r   na   d ʌs kʌm 'da n Mæzɪz
r   na ,
heh? Nothing just chilling right now just come down Maz's right now

wi_ d ʌs.. ðeɪ d ʌk 'sɪrɪn ɪn ðə; rʊːm 'dʊ_ɪŋ, ɑ_l ðə; 'rʌbɪʃ θɪŋz æz
'ju_ž əl,
we just they just sitting in the room doing all the rubbish things as usual

 pleɪjɪŋ 'fla 'pa ə
playing flower power

je je wi_ 'redɪ f   r ɪ, d ʌs 'g rə dʊ_ mæ pak_ ʌ 'fl   ɪŋ 'a
tə'm ro w
yes yes we're ready for it just got to do my packing, uhh flying out
tomorrow

æftə'nu_n ə' ba _ je tə'm , wel wi_ 'liːvɪŋ lestər ə' ba .. ə' ba   tu_ɪʃ
Ŏ 'fl   ɪŋ

afternoon about yes tomorrow well we're leaving Leicester about about
two-ish uhh flying

æ eɪt ɪn ðə; ʻi_vnɪŋ...
at eight in the evening

je.. næ næ d ʌs mi_ ʌn ɪm ðas I, kɑz hi_ ʻhæz bɪn plænɪŋ f   r eɪd ɪz
ʻhæzən
yes no no just me and him that's it because he has been planning for
ages hasn't

hi_? ʌn hi_z.. hi_z bɪn wɑntɪŋ tə_ hi_z ʻnevə bɪn ðeərr, hæz hi_? bɪʻ
f   r so _
he? And he's he's been wanting to he's never been there has he? before
so

næ aɪv ʻnevə bɪn ðeərr.. næ aɪv ʻnevə bɪn ðeərr so   ɑː θo les go   tʃek ɪ
ra
no I've never been there no I've never been there so I thought lets go
check it out

si_ w   ɪts laɪk *hʌne?*[Hindi filler]
see what it's like huneh?

ju_ bɪn ðeərr?
you been there?

   m ʻgo ɪŋ B m'beɪ..   l bi_ ʻgo ɪŋ ðeərr ʌm.. tʃ ʻprɑbəbli_   n ə'
ba   sɪksθt
I'm going Bombay I'll be going there umm, chuch probably on about sixth

deɪ wen æ læn
day when I land

 Je..   m ʻgo ɪŋ Ŏ , ʌm, ʻgɑnə steɪ f   r ə' ba .. θri_, f   r ʻnʌɪts ʌn
ðen go
yes I'm going ur um going to stay for about three four nights and then go

bak tə ʻGo ə ɪn ʻto əl tu_ wi_ks.
back to Goa in total two weeks.

ʃʊ_d bi_ gʊ_d mæn ʃʊ_d bi_ gʊ_d

should be good man, should be good

 ju_ no w ði_z gʌız 'dɪnt plæn 'nʌθɪŋ mæn, ʌðəw z ju_ no w
wi_ l l
you know what these guys didn't plan nothing otherwise you know
what we all all

 w d av 'endɪd ʌp 'sʌmweər laɪk 'sʌmweər 'di sənt
would have ended up somewhere like somewhere decent

 je, je, je w d av dʌn 'sʌmθɪŋ 'lo kl tu bi 'ɑnest wið ju ..
yes yes yes would have done something local to be honest with you

 æ no ði z gʌız 'd ʌs left ɪt 'tɪl tu leɪt tu bi 'ɑnest
I know these guys just left it till too late to be honest

 'neə maɪnd
never mind

9.2 Speaker 2

A direct transliteration in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and word for word transcription

hʌlo w?
Hello?

ˈrʌɪ
all right

ɑ l de, ŏ , ʌhh. d ʌs ʻdʊ mʌɪ ʻpepərwɜrk end, ŏ hh..   lso   dʌ, ʻli təl bi t v
all day, urr, uhh, just do my paperwork and urr, also the little bit of

(xx) ʻki ri ket end ŏ , ʌhh. i t n   s fʊ d ʻeswel.
(xx) cricket and urr, uhh eat nice food aswell.

ʌlhʌmdʊ lɪlæh weri g d…
Alhamdulillah very good,

ŏ h,   m ʻdʊ ɪng sti l ʻdʊ ɪng m   ʻpepərwɜrk end, ŏ h,   lso w tʃɪŋ
urr, I'm doing still doing my paperwork and urr, also watching

ʻki ri ket..
cricket.

no   no, ŏ h tə'mɑro w ŏ h. ʻdʊ ɪng ʻli təl bi t DIY d ɑb end. ŏ hh..
I know, I know, urr tomorrow urr doing little bit DIY job and urr,

ɑ lso ŏ h ʻemti ŏ h, ʌ ʻw   dro b ʻeswel.
also urr empy uh wardrobe aswell.

ʌrh, n t ʻs ri ʻw   dro b, bʌ mʌɪ bed ŏ h, bed ʻjʊ ni t.
Urr not sorry, wardrobe but my bed uhhh bed unit.

9.3 Phonetic IPA symbols chart for the use in a Microsoft Word document

/ ʌ / as in "c<u>u</u>p"

/ ɑ: / as in "<u>a</u>rm"

/ æ / as in "c<u>a</u>t"

/ e / as in "m<u>e</u>t"

/ ə / as in "<u>a</u>way"

/ ɜr / as in "t<u>ur</u>n"

/ ɪ / as in "h<u>i</u>t"

/ i: / as in "s<u>ee</u>"

/ ɑ / as in "h<u>o</u>t"

/ o / as in "f<u>our</u>"

/ ʊ / as in "p<u>u</u>t"

/ u: / as in "bl<u>ue</u>"

/ aɪ / as in "five"

/ aʊ / as in "now"

/ oʊ / as in "go"

/ eər / as in "wh<u>e</u>re"

/ eɪ / as in "s<u>ay</u>"

/ ɪər / as in "n<u>ear</u>"

/ ɔɪ / as in "b<u>oy</u>"

/ ʊər / as in "t<u>our</u>ist"

/ b / as in "<u>b</u>ad"

/ d / as in "<u>d</u>id"

/ f / as in "<u>f</u>ind"

/ g / as in "<u>g</u>ive"

/ h / as in "<u>h</u>ow"

/ j / as in "<u>y</u>es"

/ k / as in "<u>c</u>at"

/ l / as in "<u>l</u>eg"

/ m / as in "<u>m</u>an"

/ n / as in "<u>n</u>o"

/ ŋ / as in "si<u>ng</u>"

/ p / as in "<u>p</u>et"

/ r / as in "<u>r</u>ed"

/ s / as in "<u>s</u>un"

/ ʃ / as in "<u>sh</u>e"

/ t / as in "<u>t</u>ea"

/ tʃ / as in "<u>ch</u>eck"

/ θ / as in "<u>th</u>ink"

/ ð / as in "<u>th</u>is"

/ v / as in "<u>v</u>oice"

/ w / as in "<u>w</u>et"

/ z / as in "<u>z</u>oo"

/ ž / as in "plea<u>s</u>ure"

/ dž / as in "<u>j</u>ust"

9.4 Tones and word accents

TONES AND WORD ACCENTS

LEVEL			CONTOUR		
é̋ or	⌐	Extra high	ě. or	∧	Rising
é	⌐	High	ê	∨	Falling
ē	⊣	Mid	e᷄	↗	High rising
è	⊣	Low	e᷅	↗	Low rising
è̏	⌙	Extra low	e᷈	⌐	Rising-falling
↓		Downstep	↗		Global rise
↑		Upstep	↘		Global fall