

A decorative border of various flowers and greenery surrounds the central text. The flowers include red roses, purple daisies, yellow daisies, blue daisies, and orange daisies. The greenery consists of eucalyptus leaves and other small green leaves.

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Language Acquisition Barriers: A Linguistic Perspective Based on: George Yule and other linguists

Biological Barriers – Critical Period Hypothesis

According to Yule and supported by Eric Lenneberg, the Critical Period Hypothesis suggests that there is a biologically determined window for language acquisition typically before puberty. After this period, the brain's ability to naturally acquire a language decreases significantly. This explains why adults often struggle more than children to learn a second language or to recover full language ability after brain injury.

Neurological and Cognitive Limitations

Yule notes that certain neurological conditions, such as brain damage or developmental disorders, can act as barriers to language acquisition.

Cognitive impairments may delay or prevent the understanding and production of language. For instance, children with language delay or aphasia may face challenges in vocabulary development, sentence construction, and comprehension due to impaired brain function.

Affective Factors – Motivation and Anxiety

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, emotional states such as anxiety, lack of motivation, or low self-confidence can block language input from being fully processed.

Yule emphasizes that learners who are relaxed, motivated, and encouraged tend to acquire languages more effectively, whereas emotional stress creates a psychological barrier to learning.

First Language Interference (Transfer)

Yule and other linguists highlight L1 interference as a key barrier in second language acquisition. When learners apply the grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary rules of their first language (L1) to the second language (L2), it often results in errors. For example, a Spanish speaker may say “He has 25 years” instead of “He is 25 years old” because of direct translation from Spanish.

Input Barriers – Lack of Exposure

Yule explains that for effective language acquisition to occur, learners need rich and meaningful input. A lack of sufficient exposure to the target language whether spoken, written, or social limits vocabulary growth, comprehension, and grammatical development. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, learners need exposure to language that is slightly above their current level ($i+1$) to progress.

Educational and Environmental Barriers

Jim Cummins distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Many learners develop conversational skills quickly but struggle with academic language due to poor schooling, limited resources, or unsupportive environments. Yule supports the view that school context and teaching quality play a critical role in acquisition success.

Cultural and Social Barriers

Cultural misunderstanding and social exclusion can severely affect language learning. If learners feel culturally alienated or face discrimination, they may resist engaging with the target language community. Yule implies that language is tied to identity, and when learners' identities are not validated, their willingness to use the language may decrease.

Time Constraints and Learning Conditions

Adults often face time limitations due to work, family, and responsibilities, reducing consistent language practice. Unlike children immersed in natural environments, adult learners may rely on formal instruction, which lacks real-world interaction.

Yule acknowledges that limited practice time slows down the internalization of grammar and vocabulary.

Summary – Overcoming Acquisition Barriers

Language acquisition can be hindered by a range of biological, psychological, educational, and social barriers.

Yule, Krashen, and others emphasize the importance of rich input, emotional support, cultural inclusion, and time for practice.

While some barriers (like age or neurology) are fixed, others (like anxiety, exposure, or teaching methods) can be managed with the right strategies and environments.



Thank
you