

# Reading response 11

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Reading Response on “ WORKING MEMORY AND SLA” by John N. Williams and “ AGE EFFECTS IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING” by Robert DeKeyser

The chapter on working memory (WM) explores its relation with first and second language acquisition. With the help of WM one can store information for a temporary period in order to accomplish certain tasks. There are many instances like remembering a phone number for dialing it or retaining in memory placement of chess pieces while planning subsequent moves. These activities require both short term memory and control of information.

Therefore the author has defined WM as “ a system that is used for the temporary maintenance of task-relevant information whilst performing cognitive tasks” (Williams, 2013, p. 427). Every individual differs in ability to perform easy and difficult tasks which means it is the variation of WM that differentiates one person from the other. Numbers can be remembered by storing in phonological short-term memory (PSTM), and since such storage can rapidly decay therefore rehearsal process is adopted which is hindered by similar sounding items or long length of words. Short-term memory is enhanced through repetition of words known and the maximum ability to do so in correct order is known as digit span which again depends on articulation rate. In order to assess the capacity of PSTM, one needs to repeat nonsense words, and if long length of such words can be remembered it means PSTM’s capacity is strong. In digit span and nonword repetition, one has to remember not only the items but also the correct sequence. The composition of WM is important for language learning provided the learning process is explicit which means it is intentionally controlled.

In another chapter, DeKeyser explores the age effects in second language

(L2) learning. It is a common phenomenon that children brought up in a foreign country grow up to speak the native language in their true essence while the parents retain accent of their own language. Researchers have suggested that starting to learn L2 at early age is more convenient since brain plasticity decreases in later age. Although adults can easily learn L2 but still this theory is not opposed for three reasons. One is that adults already have the experience of leaning a language which means they are aware of the basics of learning. Secondly, adults have more cognitive power and so can easily learn specific facets of L2. Finally in spite of learning L2, adults fail to reach the native standard of pronunciation. There are other factors attached to the critical period hypothesis. Studies have shown that children invariably attain native standard L2 which however does not mean that they learn faster than adults. In early stages of L2 learning process, it is seen that adults are ahead of young learners but eventually in the long run the latter remains well ahead. These results reveal the fact that impact of age is on pronunciation rather than on grammar or vocabulary. Due to difficulty in distinguishing between “ speed of learning and ultimate attainment, and between various aspects of language” (DeKeyser, 2013, p. 446), it has not been possible to find out the exact period when learning capacity declines.

Future study should focus on learners’ integrity during learning process in order to relate PSTM with language learning. Regarding age effect, more studies are required to learn levels of language difficulty in different ages. Moreover, specific time period like ten years of learning process should be investigated to differentiate between speed of learning and ultimate

attainment.

#### References

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