

Individual Differences in Successful Second Language Learning: The Roles of Working Memory and Intelligence

Brendan McCarthy

University of Illinois at Chicago

Mandy Faretta

University of Illinois at Chicago

Francis Wong

Northwestern University

Patrick Wong, Ph.D.

Northwestern University

Kara Morgan-Short, Ph.D.

University of Illinois at Chicago

Abstract: Individual Differences in Successful Second Language Learning: The Roles of Working Memory and Intelligence

B. McCarthy, M. Faretta, F. Wong, P. Wong, & K. Morgan-Short

Poster Abstract

Learning a second language (L2) in adulthood is notoriously difficult. Some learners, however, seem to learn with ease. In order to understand the characteristics of successful learners, research has explored the role of individual differences. The current study examines the role of two individual cognitive abilities: working memory and intelligence. Participants complete a battery of cognitive tasks, including a listening span test and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test. They subsequently learn an artificial language, which is meaningful, productive and consistent with natural languages, over the course of four training sessions. Language proficiency is assessed within subjects at the end of the first and final session, and a multiple regression analysis is conducted to probe the contribution of working memory and intelligence to successful L2 development. Implications for theories of L2 learning and for L2 learners are discussed.

Words (137)