Old dogs, new tricks: A dialogue about ‘senior’ language learning

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Learning Bangla

- Strong motivation
- Complete new graphic system
  - e.g. ঈদ মোবারক!
  - ঈদ আমাদের সবার জীবনে বয়ে আনুক অনাবিল আনন্দ!
- No textbooks – multiple teachers
- Complexities of transliteration
  - Bhai/ vai
- Need to evolve understanding of language structures/ grammar from perceived evidence
- Facilitates my awareness of Bangladeshi students’ use of English
  - Interpreting their choice of English word
  - Unpacking a given Bangla word
Learning te reo Māori

- New language family – no cognates
- New sound categories very similar to existing ones
- Silent period compounded by perceived protocols
- Limited input
- Limited opportunity for output
Challenges for the older learner

- Memory
- Brain plasticity
- Time for study
- Opportunity to interact with speakers of the TL
- Hearing loss
Advantages of age and experience

- Between us we have learned multiple languages before, through choice and necessity
- Older learners may have less self-consciousness
- We are Good Language Learners (Rubin 1975)
  - The GLL is a willing and accurate guesser.
  - The GLL has a strong drive to communicate.
  - The GLL is not inhibited.
  - The GLL pays attention to form.
  - The GLL practises.
  - The GLL monitors her own speech and the speech of others.
  - The GLL attends to meaning.

Learning as an ‘L2 user’

Need to evaluate L2 user as someone who speaks 2 or more languages not as inefficient native.

L2 users:

► exploit all their linguistic resources for real-life purpose
► constantly code switching and translate
► recognise presence of interlanguage
► have different mind form monolinguals (incl language awareness & structures of cognition)

Conclusion

- It’s not impossible!
- Older learners may have multiple language learning experiences to draw on, but may find it harder to justify spending time working on a new language
- Opportunity to use the language learned will impact on the long-term retention of the language for all learners
He taonga ngā reo katoa

ALL LANGUAGES ARE TO BE TREASURED