

The importance of psychological and social factors in adult second language learning

In the context of mobility and migration, many adults face the challenge of learning a new language. Adult second language learning is characterized by a large amount of individual variation. It is assumed that a range of psychological and social factors help explain such variation. Previous research suggests that cognitive abilities are important, just like exposure to the target language, yet, so far, studies have typically included a limited number of factors. This study contributes to this research by taking a multifactorial approach. We investigated the relationship between proficiency in Swedish as a second language and language aptitude, personality, acculturation, reported language use, and social networks, among French-speaking long-term residents in Sweden. We measured second language proficiency through a collocation test. Collocations are conventional word combinations and are known to be a challenge in a second language. The psychological and social factors were measured through tests and questionnaires. We found that a combination of psychological and social factors predicted second language proficiency in Swedish.

What the researchers did

- The participants were 59 French long-term residents in Sweden with a mean age of 42. They had started learning Swedish at the age of 12 or later and had lived in Sweden for at least 5 years at the time of the study.
- We measured Swedish second language proficiency through a collocation test (conventional word combinations, such as *give birth* and *make a decision*).
- We measured language learning aptitude through a computerized test and personality, acculturation, reported language use, and social networks, through questionnaires.

What the researchers found

- Positive effects were found for language aptitude (phonetic memory and the ability to form associations between sounds and symbols), reported language use, and length of residence.
- The personality variable Open-mindedness also had an effect on language proficiency, but the relationship was negative.
- Together, these variables had a relatively large effect on language proficiency compared to other studies.

Things to consider

- The study lends support to earlier findings on the role of both language engagement and aptitude as important explanatory factors for second language proficiency and collocation knowledge in particular.
- The study suggests that personality and length of residence are also important.
- The findings suggest that a multifactorial approach is needed when accounting for second language proficiency in the context of mobility and migration.
- The relatively limited number of participants needs to be considered.

Material, data, open access article: The data was considered to contain sensitive personal information by the Swedish Ethical Review authority, hence data cannot be openly published. Please contact the corresponding author for questions related to the data.

How to cite this summary: Forsberg Lundell, F., Arvidsson, K., & Jemstedt, A. (2022). The importance of psychological and social factors in adult second language learning. *OASIS Summary* of Forsberg Lundell et al. (2022) in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* <https://oasis-database.org>

This summary has a [CC BY-NC-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) license.