

## **TRANSFER EXAM**

**Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literature, NTHU, July 11, 2017**

**Read the two passages below and answer the following essay questions.**

### **PASSAGE ONE**

#### **Learning in Children versus Adults**

(from *Second Language Acquisition Myths* by Steven Brown & Jenifer Larson-Hall)

The fact that children are more accurate language learners in the long run with large amounts of input has caused some researchers to posit that there is a critical period for learning a language. If there is a biologically determined time when learning a language results in better outcomes for humans (a critical period), then there must be a biological mechanism for this difference. Many researchers have assumed that the biological reason for the difference in ultimate language outcomes was that children's brains are still pliable and plastic while adults' brains have hardened and cannot change. This is commonly reflected in the phrase "children's brains are like sponges" that accompanies the idea that children are able to learn information much more quickly than adults and without any effort. In fact, as shown in this chapter, children do not acquire a language more quickly than adults and that with lots of time to devote to language acquisition, adults can learn a second language to a high level of proficiency in the same amount of time it takes a baby to learn its first 20 words.

Current brain research is showing that adults' brains are still malleable and can physically change in response to input. Macquire et al. (2000) studied the brains of London taxi drivers who memorized voluminous amounts of spatial information in order to navigate the city. This study found that the size of the hippocampus, where spatial information is stored, was substantially larger in these taxi drivers than in the normal population. Since the drivers presumably learned this information about the roadways of London as adults, we can conclude that adults' brains are plastic enough to grow and change in even radical ways in response to information and experience.

Another study (Kwok et al., 2011) found that adults' brains can change so quickly in response to learning that in a matter of only two hours of practice associating Mandarin color words with the colors themselves, adults had developed additional gray matter in an area of the cortex associated with learning and memory.

One study done with young and old rats showed that the results of exposure to a new environment result in actual physical growth of areas in the brain, but of different

types depending on the age of the rat. Briefly, if the rats were young, then structures in the brain increased in number but not density, while if the rats were older, the structures got longer and denser. If we are justified in translating this research to the human brain, it is clearly not accurate to say that children's brains are ready to learn while adults' brains have hardened—it appears that our brains are set up to learn and grow at any age, although there may be different kinds of growth when the exposure occurs at different ages.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. What are the authors trying to say in this passage? Using your own words, summarize the passage in 150 words. (20%)
2. Many people believe that children learn languages quickly and effortlessly while adults are ineffective in comparison. Do you agree? Explain your answers in 250-300 words. (30%)

### **PASSAGE TWO**

#### **Shakespeare's Sonnet 130**

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Please paraphrase the poem above using your own words. (25%)
2. Please analyse the poem; discuss its subject, theme, and what makes it exceptional and remarkable in a well-organized and coherent essay (25%)