

III

In the first two parts of the book I focused on the mature brain when describing the language network. In the third part I will put my focus on the relation between language acquisition and the brain. In the discussion of language acquisition that either takes place early in life for our native language or later in life for a foreign language, we will see that the age-of-acquisition is an important issue.

This has already been discussed since Eric Lenneberg (1967), who was the first to claim that there is a critical period for language acquisition. The critical time window during native language acquisition is still being debated and so is the critical time window for second language acquisition.

In the following two chapters we will see that language acquisition proceeds according to a fixed program independent of the modality of the language input, be it auditory (as in a typical language acquisition condition) or visual (as in a sign language condition). This holds as long as sign language is provided as input early. The acquisition of a second language proceeds native-like only when the age-of-acquisition is early.¹ I will review in chapter 5 the relevant data and discuss the issue of critical and sensitive periods of language acquisition. In chapter 6, which is devoted to the ontogeny of the language network, I will describe the relation between language development and brain maturation from birth to childhood and, at the end, propose a model of the ontogeny of the language network covering these data.

