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Multistory Construction

Carol Gaab explains the relevance of teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling to modern teaching

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Carol Gaab has been providing teacher training in CI-based strategies for (inter)national schools and universities since 1996. In addition to organizing the annual international Multi-cultural Conference, she also presents for the Bureau of Education and Research. Carol has more than 21 years experience teaching second languages, including Spanish at all levels and ESL for various Major League Baseball clubs. Her clients have included the San Francisco Giants, Oakland A's, Colorado Rockies, Arizona Diamondbacks and Milwaukee Brewers. She is the author of readers and teaching materials available through TPRS Publishing, Inc.

TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) is an input-based approach to teaching language that focuses on the systematic instruction of vocabulary in a highly comprehensible, personalized and contextualized manner. Its framework and philosophy are based not only on classroom-proven strategies, but more importantly, on research into second language acquisition. The method is based on the following underlying principles: In order for language to be acquired, it must be comprehensible. (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) Overt grammar instruction and/or correction has little impact on language growth. (Krashen, 1998; Gray, 2000; Truscott, 1996) Reading has a profound positive effect on language development. (Krashen, 1998, 2004; Rodrigo, 2009) Context is a powerful tool for enhancing SLA. (Fuller, 2002; Fleishman & Roy, 2005; Krashen 2002) It is much easier and more enjoyable to acquire a language than it is to learn a language. (Krashen & Terrell, 1983)

TPRS instruction is laden with dozens of strategies that provide an abundance of repetition that is highly engaging and comprehensible, but that is not obviously predictable or repetitious. This allows the teacher to remain in the target language 95-98% of the time. The goal is to scaffold language so that it remains completely comprehensible and accessible to students, resulting in successful and relatively rapid acquisition of the language. A constant flow of scaffolded input ensures that students will understand every message and be able to respond successfully, whether it is with a simple 'yes' or 'no', one word or an entire phrase or sentence. Input may take the form of graduated questions, circling questions, personalized questions, cooperatively created stories, mini-stories, short stories, fairy tales, sequences, songs, poems, rhymes, chants and a wide variety of readings.

Comprehensible input, in any form, revolves around the core structures of a TPRS lesson. Although most proponents of TPRS tend to base instruction on high-frequency words and phrases, the method is also used to effectively teach content area and culturally-based lessons, which might (also) require instruction of less common, more complex vocabulary. Regardless of educational outcomes (language learning vs. subject area learning), instruction focuses on vocabulary that is most useful for communication and/or for understanding/ learning the topic at hand.

While there is a predictable order of the acquisition of specific grammatical structures (statistically speaking), TPRS practitioners use this knowledge as a guide for instruction versus a rule for planning curriculum or the order of instruction. It is understood and accepted that learners will naturally and more easily acquire certain grammatical structures before others, regardless of the amount of and the order of instruction that is given. Therefore, lessons are not generally driven by a grammar syllabus, nor are they grammatically-based. Rather, they are grounded in language structures that will help students learn content and/or communicate accurately and appropriately, considering the age and the level of the learner. At any level, lessons should progress or spiral, as they gradually introduce new vocabulary structures and continuously reinforce recycled (previously learned) vocabulary.

A more holistic approach to language teaching, TPRS lessons are not based on lists of isolated words that are topically or grammatically organized. On the contrary, most TPRS lessons are broken down into learnable 'chunks' of language, typically no more than 3 'target language structures' (TLS) for every 60 to 90 minutes of instruction. A TLS could be any word, phrase or sentence that naturally occurs in written or spoken communication, and its complexity is dependent upon the age and the level of the learner. For example, a beginning kindergarten structure might be 'Billy runs', or 'the strong man', while a beginning high school structure might be 'the woman ran quickly' or 'the strong man wanted to cry'. Regardless of the level, structures are prioritized according to their frequency of use or their usefulness to the learner and are generally organized in groups of three, according to their relevance to a topic, discussion, story or subject.

Since the method itself is founded on the notion that comprehensible input is a critical component of SLA, the first step of any lesson is to establish the meaning of new vocabulary structures. Although most TPRS teachers use mother tongue (L1) translations to establish meaning, using a variety of techniques for establishing meaning is not only more brain-compatible, it is necessary if students are pre-literate, illiterate or visually impaired and if they do not share a common L1, as is the case in the ESL classroom.

Introducing new vocabulary and establishing meaning should include as many of the following strategies as possible: Write the structure in the target language (TL). In a different color, write the meaning (literal and figurative) of the structure in L1. Post an illustration or photo that depicts the meaning of the structure. Verbally tell students what the structure means and when appropriate, explain appropriate contexts or settings for use. Use props and realia to convey meaning. Use skits and re-enactments to demonstrate meaning. Attach a specific gesture (TPR®) to make a kinesthetic and a visual connection to the meaning. Use video, technology and anything else that will help students create their own mental image of the meaning of the structure.

Once meaning has been established, context is built into each vocabulary structure. Context is essential for development of word-concept. (Vadim-Deglin quoted in Wilkinson, 1993) Unlike other approaches that utilize 'contrived arrangement' (Stern,1982) or a 'situational context', TPRS practitioners develop context through various activities/strategies that naturally and enjoyably provide a platform for instruction. During the initial phase of instruction, the most common strategy is personalized questions and answers (PQA). PQ's are level-appropriate questions that are personally relevant to specific learners (or learner groups) and that revolve around the TLS. The teacher uses PQ's to elicit an engaging conversation that will provide the context and repetition that language learners need as they begin the acquisition process.
An example of a typical PQA session based on the TLS 'The strong man wanted to cry' might look something like this:

[Show a picture or video of a strong man from the target culture or any well-known strong man.]

T (Teacher): Is Popeye strong?
C (Class): Yes.
T: Yes, Popeye is strong. Popeye is a man, right?
C: Yes.
T: So, Popeye is a strong man?
C: Yes.
T: Yes! Popeye is a strong man! Is Olive Oil a strong man?
C: No!
T: No, Olive Oil is NOT a strong man! Olive Oil is a strong WOMAN! What about Bruce Willis?-- Is he a strong man?
C: Yes.
T: Yes, Bruce Willis is a strong man! Are Bruce Willis and Demi Moore divorced?
C: Yes!
T: WOW! Demi divorced a strong man like Bruce!?
C: [laughter]
T: Did Bruce want to cry (when they divorced)?
C: Maybe... no... yes... [This will incite a wide range of responses.]
[Pause: Show a 5-10 second video clip of Die Hard (or another B.W. movie) in which B. Willis gets punched.]
T: Ooooh... Did Bruce want to cry?
C: Maybe... no... yes... [Again, a wide range of responses will ensue.]
Etc.

If the class is fully engaged and enjoying the conversation, then the teacher continues by asking additional PQ's in a manner that will furtively and efficiently provide repetition of the TLS: *Do (strong) men cry? Do (strong) women cry? When/why do men cry? When/why do men WANT to cry? When do YOU want to cry? When does (the president, your sister, your dad, your mom, a baby, etc.) [want to] cry? Etc*. The goal is to keep the conversation so comprehensible, engaging and compelling that the learner is completely distracted from consciously trying to learn or memorize vocabulary. Student answers are confirmed (and sometimes selected), as the teacher uses appropriate voice inflection to *conversationally* reiterate the answer with a complete-sentence response, which is another discreet way to disguise repetition.

T: Did Bruce want to cry?
C: Maybe... no... yes...
*T: **Yes**, Bruce wanted to cry. [Teacher selects 'yes' as accepted answer.]*

Woven throughout PQ's are differentiated questions, which when asked in a specific pattern (yes, either-or, no & interrogative), are referred to as 'circling' questions. Circling is a scaffolding technique that involves asking systematic questions that progress from low level to higher level questions. When done artfully and efficiently, a teacher can achieve 20+ *camouflaged* repetitions of a TLS by circling all parts of the sentence. Using the statement *'Bruce wanted to cry'* as an example, the circles would look like this:

So, **Bruce** wanted to cry?**-Y**
Did **Bruce** want to cry or did **Mary** want to cry? **-OR**
Did **Mary** want to cry? **-N**
WHO wanted to cry?

Did Bruce **WAIT** to cry? **-Y**
Did Bruce **wait** to cry or did he **want** to cry? **-OR**
Did Bruce **wait** to cry? **-N**
WHAT did Bruce do?

Bruce wanted to **CRY**?! **-Y**
Did Bruce want to **cry** or did he want to **dance**? **-OR**
Did Bruce want to **dance**? **-N**
WHAT did Bruce want (to do)?

When PQA/discussion wanes, the teacher moves on to a new activity that will provide additional compelling, contextualized, comprehensible repetitions of the TLS. As stated earlier, there should be a variety of activities and strategies that are used to provide CI. In a typical TPRS classroom, one such activity is referred to as story-asking. Story-asking, which is step #2 of the method, is an interactive process by which the teacher leads the class through a story creation process by asking countless questions that revolve around the TLS. Unlike traditional storytelling in which students passively listen to the storyteller, story-asking engages students by involving them in the story creation process and giving them a sense of ownership in the story. Asking questions elicits sustained enriching brain activity (Jensen, 2000) and it also allows the teacher to achieve more repetitions than simple storytelling affords. In a nutshell, story-asking provides a natural platform for context and an endless stream of camouflaged repetitions.

Based on our previous language structure *"The strong man wanted to cry,"* the initial story-asking process might look like this:
There was a strong _?_. (Guide students to the answer you want or accept any answer that you feel is appropriate.) *Was there a strong man or a strong elephant?*
[student response: strong man] Right, there was a strong man. Was he really strong or just a little strong? [really strong] Yes, he was really strong! Was he stronger than an elephant? [yes] He was stronger than an ***elephant?!*** *WOW! Was he stronger than (a) ...? (proper name, cognate, etc.) What was the strong man's name? [Sparky, Jimbo, Goliath, etc.]*

The teacher listens and acknowledges students' suggestions/answers by modeling their one-word answers and utterances in sentence form as naturally and conversationally as possible. *What is the strong man's name* ***[Sparky]*** *Oh, the strong man's name was Sparky?- Maybe****.*** ***[Jimbo]*** *The strong man's name was Jimbo... hhhmmm... it's possible.* ***[Goliath]*** *You think the strong man's name was Goliath?*

The teacher continues to receive student answers, and once all student contributions have been acknowledged, the 'correct' or accepted answer is selected. The best or 'correct' answer is generally based on the level of student laughter or engagement that is elicited. The teacher persists in getting student input for each detail and event in the story until a coherent sequence of events has unfolded and an abundance of repetition has been provided. As the story develops, student actors bring it to life by acting out the events and details of the story, according to student input and teacher directives. The key to the process is to focus on story ASKING, which results in a higher level of student engagement and facilitates sustained interaction in the target language.

Once the story has been created, the teacher may opt to review the story with the class by using spatial memory skills to recall the events of the story. The teacher visually indicates the specific location where each event occurred and asks students to recall each event/detail, which in turn compels them to also recall the TLS needed to describe each event/detail. Higher order thinking skills are developed as students learn to retell and embellish stories and extend plots beyond where they finish in the class or the text.

The last step is to read a narrative that contains the TLS. The reading may be a concentrated reading specifically based on the curriculum or lesson, a news article, a poem, song lyrics, a fairy tale, story or any other level-appropriate narrative that focuses on the TLS. The purpose is to provide students with more repetition and exposure to the TLS in another context and format. Since written sentence formation is different from typical speech patterns, reading also provides students with additional CI that contains unique phrases and new combinations of the same TLS. It also allows students to visually parse sentences and make meaning of words in isolation, within phrases and embedded in new combinations of words.

Beginning students, who are in the process of learning new vocabulary, are generally led through the reading process, as the teacher reads aloud in the TL and then has students chorally decode the meaning into L1. The idea is not to translate; rather it is to help students link the written word to the spoken word and then link meaning to that word. Decoding the text allows the teacher to evaluate just how well students have internalized the TLS. If students have a great deal of difficulty linking meaning, then more time will be devoted to teaching the TLS until they have been thoroughly acquired. In the case of classes where a common L1 is not shared (as in ESL classes), meaning is connected to words through gestures and actions. This leaves more room for confusion and miscommunication, but short of using a dictionary, it is the best alternative to using the mother tongue to decode text for meaning. As students progress in the language and internalize more vocabulary structures, they are weaned off of decoding every single word. Decoding text (via gestures or L1) is generally used in future readings only when students encounter new words whose meaning can not be ascertained from context, visual clues or discussion in the TL.

There are some who argue that L1 should NOT be used to explain the L2's new word form-to-meaning link. However, studies show that the initial form-to-meaning link consists of the new L2 word form being attached to a representation of the corresponding L1 word that already exists in long-term memory (Hall, 2002). Consequently, an L1 translation is a natural vehicle for achieving this cerebral match (Sousa, 2011). There are some TPRS practitioners who implement reading strategies that require a great deal of decoding into L1, and there are others who do not use L1 in reading at all. Regardless of one's viewpoint on using L1 to decode for meaning, reading should not be overlooked as a powerful tool for enhancing acquisition, and each teacher should determine what mode of decoding should be implemented in his/her respective classroom.

There is fear associated with TPRS, because the method condones the use of L1 for L2 instruction, and it goes without saying that it sometimes leads to the over-use (and abuse) of L1 in the language classroom. However, many experts agree that L1, if used **judiciously** by teachers or students, makes a positive contribution to the learning process (Carless, 2001; Schweers, 1999; Tang 2002). Unfortunately, there is no definition or exact measure of 'judicious', and teachers have their own perceptions of how much L1 would be considered 'judicious.' This leaves many educators with the impression that (all) TPRS teachers use too much L1 and that TPRS as a whole is a translation-based methodology. However, if implemented effectively, there is little use of L1 in the TPRS classroom.

There are several critical success factors that help TPRS teachers to maintain instruction *comprehensibly* in the TL and to facilitate a language-rich environment that is conducive to developing lasting fluency. These same success factors will help *any* language teacher, regardless of methodology:
1) Use L1 only as a means to help you stay in the TL or as a tool for assessment. Clearly establishing meaning before you begin instruction will help you stay in L2 once instruction has begun.
2) Go slowly! Beginners need extra time to process and make meaning of new language structures. Speak slowly and clearly.
3) Satisfy literate students' craving to see written words. Keep the words posted until students have internalized them.
4) Implement wait-time strategies to prevent fast processors from answering questions too quickly and subsequently interrupting the processing/learning of others.
5) Limit the amount of language (vocabulary) you teach at one time.
6) Provide repetition of those TLS! Providing repetition of a *managed* amount of vocabulary will help to keep input comprehensible.
7) Teach COMMUNICATIVELY. Use gestures, voice inflection, body language, context, pictures, props, re-enactments, and other visual clues to keep things comprehensible in lieu of resorting to use of L1, which should be used as a last resort. Keeping input comprehensible will reduce/eliminate the need for L1.

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How well do junior high TPRS German students do on the AATG level 2 exam? Answer: Not bad!

by *Michael Miller*

Michael Miller has been a German and Spanish teacher for 23 years, the past 19 at Cheyenne Mountain Junior High in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He has been teaching with TPR Storytelling® since 1996. He is the author of the Sabine und Michael textbook series in German. He is also the author of the Charo y Lee textbook series in Spanish. He has a Masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction and a BA in German and Spanish.

This paper presents the results of 13 years of TPRS German study in grades 7 and 8 in a junior high school in Colorado, using the AATG (American Association of Teachers of German) national German exam, a test designed for high school students. (http://www.aatg.org/NGE) All students in the junior high school classes started as beginners and had taken one and a half years of German, approximately 200 hours of class (45 minutes per day, for 270 days = 202.5 hours). None had spent more than two weeks in a German-speaking country.

The AATG level 2 exam was used in the 8th grade year, which is designed for students, usually sophomores, in high school, who have had one and a half years of high school German, about 225 hours (50 minutes per day, for 270 days = 225 hours).

It is widely assumed that two years of foreign language in middle school is the equivalent of one year of study in high school, a result of the fact that older students generally proceed more quickly, at least at beginning stages, than younger students (Krashen, Long, and Scarcella, 1979).

The AATG exam includes sections on Listening Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Grammar (fill in the blank).

The NGEs are divided into the following sections:

- I A, B, C: Listening comprehension (brief interchanges and connected discourse),
- II A:Situational questions (testing reading and conversational skills),
- II B:Structure (grammar) and idiomatic forms in context (no conscious grammatical knowledge is needed),
- II C:Comprehension of connected passages of appr. 200 words each.

The difficulty within the sections of the NGE does not show a continuous increase. Easier and harder items are mixed in a 'wave pattern' to encourage students to finish the entire test rather than abandon it at some point because it has become "too hard.

- http://www.aatg.org/files/Interpretive-Data-2011.pdf

About 75% of the students in the German TPRS classes take the AATG exam voluntarily each year. According to their instructor (M.M.), those who took the test were representative of all the students in the class. There was, in other words, no obvious tendency for only the better students to take the test.

In the Meaning of the Scores and Percentile Tables for 2010-2011 National German Examination, however, AATG writes:

Since the high end of the test is very difficult, demanding extremely consistent performance across a wide range of language, the average raw score is about 70.

It depends on your grading standards as to what grade you would attach to each raw score, especially when you consider that German frequently is a college preparatory subject not known for its simplicity and that many teachers elect to have only their better students participate in the test.

It may be that nationwide the students who have taken the NGE in the past 13 years have been generally stronger students in German.

Students at this Colorado school are of higher SES and typically score above state norms. In 2008, for example, 75% of students scored at or above the proficient level in content examinations, compared to 56% for the state of Colorado as a whole. Fewer than 8% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2008, compared to the state-wide average of 35%. Students in the TPRS German classes were typical of the larger school population.

Table one presents the percentile ranking for each year, that is, how TPRS students scored relative to the entire group of students (approximately 20,000) who took the test nationally. The AATG German test is slightly different each year; for this reason, percentiles rather than mean scores are presented in the table.

On the average, TPRS students scored at the 41st percentile, doing better than 40% of the high school students who took the exam. The standard deviation of the mean percentage was 10, which means that about 2/3 of the TPRS students scored between the 30th and 50th percentile of high school students.

Table one: Scores on AATG level 2 test

year	N	percentile
1998	9	13
1999	14	38
2000	10	43
2001	15	33
2003	22	40
2004	15	44
2005	23	36
2006	18	42
2007	13	48
2008	18	50
2009	11	43
2010	16	48
2011	16	54

This is an encouraging result. Even more encouraging is the finding that percentile scores increased between 1998 and 2011 ($r = .76$).

Conclusion

Junior high school TPRS German students did nearly as well as typical high school students after an equivalent amount of study on a standardized test of German, contrary to the expectation that junior high school students will progress at half the rate of high school students. The TPRS students, however, were from a higher SES background, a factor that affects all school achievement. Unfortunately, the comparison AATG data did not allow us to make comparisons with SES controlled.

This study is not a controlled true experiment. There was no local control group of students with similar backgrounds and the performance of the students was compared only to national norms based on older students. This data shows, however, that TPRS students can perform reasonably well on standardized tests intended for all German language students, regardless of methodology, confirming that language acquisition, including grammatical competence, is possible from comprehensible input, with little or no grammar study.

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Meaning of the Scores and Percentile Tables for 2010-2011 National German Examination http://www.aatg.org/files/NGE-Scores-Percentiles.pdf

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Personal Language Acquisition Reflections

The Monitor Model and Me: A Story of Successful Adult Foreign Language Acquisition

by Alex Poole, PhD

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Introduction

In the last issue of *IJFLT*, I wrote an article (Poole, 2011) that described how aspects of Krashen's *Monitor Model* (Krashen, 1982) were present in the autobiographies of successful English language learners' (ELLs). While several aspects of it were discussed—i.e. the input hypothesis, the acquisition vs. learning hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis—there were other elements of it that were not mentioned. This incomplete description is problematic for, as many high school foreign language teachers have told me, there is little written about how native speakers of English can apply each of its hypotheses. Such examples would not only help future teachers better understand it, but also show students how they can independently acquire a foreign language. Fortunately, as an applied linguist and student of Spanish for the last 12 years, I am in a unique position to demonstrate the utility of the Monitor Model.

The Acquisition vs. Learning Hypothesis

Before I started acquiring Spanish, I was an eager, yet unsuccessful, language *learner*. In the *Acquisition vs. Learning Hypothesis*, Krashen (1981, 1982) explains that language learning is the conscious study of the rules of language, leading to knowledge about it rather than the ability to appropriately use it. Instruction frequently revolves around decontextualized grammar drills, direct error correction, and memorization exercises that do not account for the complexity of grammar and cannot impart an understanding of the exceptions to traditional rule presentations.

Such a mode of instruction had disastrous effects on my early foreign language efforts. I took two years of high school Spanish, during which time I dwelled on memorizing algebraic charts about the differences between 'ser' and 'estar', correctly conjugating the subjunctive, and distinguishing between masculine and feminine nouns. Obviously, I couldn't speak or understand any Spanish. During my junior and senior years of college, I independently studied one of my heritage languages, Biblical Hebrew. The rabbi in my hometown gave me a book and told me to "master" each chapter before going on to the next. I remember a few nouns (e.g. bread, house, land) and many things *about* verbs such as the presence of gender differences, infixing, and circumfixing. However, I struggled to comprehend even the most basic texts.

These experiences caused me much anxiety. Two generations ago, many of my family members could speak at least three languages. Why was I such a failure? Why did I make so many mistakes? Why couldn't I understand those languages after so much effort? I also felt guilty because, in comparison with my ancestors, I possessed material comforts and educational opportunities they couldn't even have imagined. These thoughts led me to believe that I had no facility for foreign languages, so I abandoned them.

In spite of my feelings towards foreign languages, my love of English and its grammar was still present. Thus, I embarked on a career in applied linguistics and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). It was then that I met my future wife—a native speaker of Spanish from Colombia—and started to study Spanish. By this time,

I had studied second language acquisition theory and thus decided to *acquire* the language. According to Krashen (1982), acquisition occurs when one is not focused on learning the rules of language, but rather on understanding the messages being communicated with it. Second language acquisition, thus, is like first language acquisition in that the conscious understanding of grammatical rules (e.g. the Spanish subjunctive is used to discuss hypothetical situations), the production of speech and writing that are error free, and the memorization of vocabulary lists do little to help one become a socially and scholastically successful bilingual.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

I also learned that all of the stress and anxiety I had previously felt impeded my ability to acquire those languages. My lack of proficiency likely had nothing to do with my intellectual abilities, but rather my emotional state. In Krashen's terms, my *Affective Filter* was raised. According to the *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982), stressful teaching and learning conditions can inhibit second language acquisition. This runs counter to the traditional idea that anything worth learning must by definition be unpleasant. Practically, such anxiety can decrease one's confidence and desire to keep studying the language. In my case, I stopped all language study for two years.

The Input Hypothesis

When I returned to language study, I avoided focusing my efforts on fruitless memorization exercises and understanding the minutia of Spanish grammar. Instead, I sought out *Comprehensible Input*. As stated in the *Input Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982, 2000), people acquire the forms and functions of a language by being exposed to input (i.e. language) that is challenging, yet still intelligible. This input should largely consist of information (i.e. grammar and vocabulary) that students already understand, thereby allowing them to pick-up new language from context. Materials that are too difficult to understand can potentially raise their Affective Filter and/or bore them.

My search for input that is simultaneously comprehensible and interesting has not taken me far from my reading routine in English. As a life-long newspaper fanatic, I am usually aware of key current events and so the information contained in Spanish-language newspapers is usually interesting and comprehensible. Tennis, for example, is one area that I am well-informed about since I have played the sport my entire life. My familiarity with the topic makes the content easy to understand.

My main source of written comprehensible language, however, comes from English-language books translated into Spanish. Classics such as *Bless Me, Ultima*, *Animal Farm, The Outsiders,* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are challenging, yet intelligible because I first read them in English. The same can be said of more popular literature such as Frank McCourt's memoire about teaching English in New York City Public Schools. Perhaps my favorite genre of popular literature is action/adventure; more specifically, James Bond. I have read every Spanish-language James Bond novel that I could get my hands on. I have moved on to the graphic novel versions of them. These texts are comprehensible to me not because I read the original English-language versions, but because I have seen all of the movies multiple times.

I not only obtain input though the written word, but also orally through interaction with native speakers, most notably my mother-in-law. We have spent long amounts of time together, during which I have asked her about topics such as food, politics, her childhood, and the family farm. I have found that patient monolinguals such as she are the best source of quality language for two reasons: First, they do not mind answering questions and repeating themselves, thus allowing me to control the conversation so the content is familiar to me, and therefore more likely to be comprehensible. Second, monolinguals cannot switch to English, so I'm guaranteed to get input in the target language.

A second source of oral input comes from the nightly news. During my morning commute of 20-25 minutes, I religiously listen to the news and familiarize myself with the latest in sports, politics, economics, and culture. When I arrive home, I watch Spanish-language news, which usually covers the same topics, thereby making it easy to understand.

I should note that I do not torture myself with

unpleasant materials. According to Krashen (1994), successful foreign language acquisition does not have to be painful. Thus, I avoid difficult texts that use archaic language, such as *Don Quixote*. Such texts can also raise one's Affective Filter due to the stress of deciphering archaic grammar and vocabulary. Since I work on my computer for much of the day and also associate it with stress, I generally avoid using it to acquire Spanish. Finally, if a text or program does not maintain my interest, I abandon it. For example: I was reading a biography of tennis player Rafael Nadal which turned out to be a summary of his grand slam wins. Seeing as though I already know about such things and did not care to review them, I only read one-third of the text.

The Natural Order Hypothesis

The fourth hypothesis in the Monitor Model which has helped me acquire Spanish is the *Natural Order Hypothesis*. Before examining second language acquisition research, I naively believed that I could--and should be able to--understand and produce any structure that I encountered. If I couldn't understand it, I would become frustrated and feel like giving up--i.e. my *Affective Filter* would be raised. After learning about the Natural Order Hypothesis, I realized that certain grammatical forms can only be acquired in a certain order and that some may not be acquired until others have been. While I never found out what the natural order of acquiring Spanish forms was, knowing that it exists calmed my nerves when I was unable to understand and use certain forms. For example: For years, the Spanish subjunctive was a mystery to me; however, I knew that I would acquire it someday. Today, I probably use it with 80% accuracy.

The Monitor Hypothesis

The fifth and final component of the Monitor Model is the *Monitor Hypothesis*. It states that one can use his/her learned language to edit the acquired system, which may not be target-like. One can only monitor in writing and speaking situations in which adequate time is given. Public presentations and formal exams would be obvious places where one could monitor. I feel frustrated because sometimes I over use my monitor, which, according to Krashen (1982), diminishes one's ability to effectively communicate due to slow speech, self-correction, and general lack of fluency. For example: Last December, my wife and I were in a cab in Bogota, Colombia listening to a comedy program in which they were making fun of actors who had undergone cosmetic surgery. I wanted to comment, but made sure that my statement would be error-free and intelligible to the cab driver. However, by the time I was ready to speak, he already had started asking my wife about another topic, thus eliminating my opportunity to speak.

Other times, however, I am a monitor under-user. On such occasions, I don't care about form, accuracy, and the number of errors I make, but instead just allow my acquired system to take over. This can occasionally result in unintelligible speech. However, such under-utilization of the monitor only occurs when I am in Colombia and am fatigued from over-monitoring. After reassurances from my wife that my Spanish is fine, I calm down, my Affective Filter lowers, and I become an optimal monitor user, which involves using it "when it does not interfere with communication" (Krashen, 1982, p. 19).

Conclusion

While my use of the Monitor Model to acquire Spanish has not taken place in the context of a controlled scientific study, my current abilities are a testament to its validity. Clearly, my pronunciation and grammar are not perfect; it is highly unlikely that they ever will be. Likewise, I sometimes misuse words and frequently misinterpret idiomatic expressions. I cannot and probably will never pass as a native speaker.

However, I can carry on a conversation at informal and academic levels about topics ranging from food, feelings, and humor to politics, literature and education. When I go to Colombia, I do not need an interpreter when chatting with my wife's family. I imitate my mother-in-law's maxims about life, love, faith, and good nutrition; I advise my niece on how to develop better study habits; and I can talk with one brother-in-law about his future in light of his wife's recent death.

When I meet with Spanish-speaking colleagues, I feel comfortable conversing in both languages. In Spanish, I actually once gave a brief impromptu lecture to Colombian university students on the topic of reading strategies. I can also read professional books and academic articles in my area of specialization (applied linguistics). Finally, I enjoy the fictional works of noted authors such as

Gabriel García Márquez, and Isabel Allende, and the journalism of Jacobo Timmerman.

In short, I have a life in Spanish that is almost as rich as my life in English. Although I have received little formal instruction, I have managed to acquire quite a bit of Spanish on my own by applying the *Monitor Model*--and I have enjoyed myself in the process. My hope is that after reading this, foreign language teachers and students will realize that second language acquisition can simultaneously be enjoyable and fruitful.

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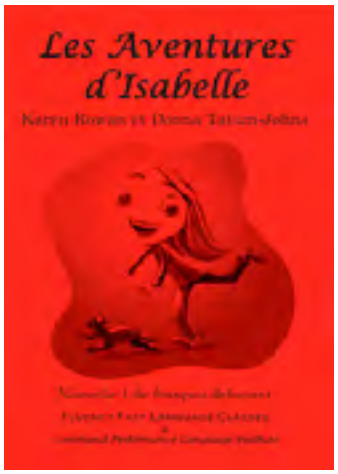

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Je visite la France avec ma mère. Nous voyageons en avion, nous voyageons en bus et nous voyageons dans le métro. Je préfère l'avion et le métro. Je déteste le bus parce qu'une fois j'ai vomi dans les toilettes du bus. Quand nous voyageons dans le bus et dans le métro, je joue avec ma Nintendo DS® et je dessine mais je ne lis pas. À Paris nous voyageons en métro.

À Paris, ma mère et moi, nous visitons Montmartre. À Montmartre il y a beaucoup d'artistes. Il y a aussi une église qui s'appelle Sacré-Coeur. Ma mère me regarde. Elle me dit : — Isabelle, assieds-toi pendant dix minutes, s'il te plaît. Ma mère entre dans un magasin pour poser une question. Je n'entre pas dans le magasin. Je m'assois sur les escaliers. Je m'assois pendant… une minute. Je prends des touristes en photo. Les touristes montent et descendent les grands escaliers. Je veux monter et descendre les escaliers comme les touristes. Je monte et je descends les escaliers très vite. C'est très difficile. J'ai du mal à respirer. Je suis presque morte. Ma mère sort du magasin. Elle me regarde. Elle regarde les escaliers. Elle rit. Je suis fatiguée parce que j'ai beaucoup couru. Ma mère me dit : — Pourquoi est-ce que tu ne peux pas t'asseoir comme une fille normale ?

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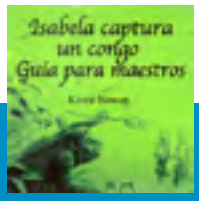

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Personal Language Acquisition Reflections

A personal journey into English through reading

by Leonie Overbeek

Leonie Overbeek currently holds an M.Phil in Value and Policy Studies from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, with qualifications in Chemical Engineering and Analytical Chemistry from Johannesburg University. She reads widely, in all fields, and about any subject. She is currently working as an English teacher in the Korean public school system, working at two rural schools in the Hwaseong City area of Gyeonggi province, South Korea. She has written some short stories, one of which won a prize in a nation-wide contest, and hopes to be finished with a full-length novel soon.

English is my second language. I am fortunate that I was born in a society where it was also an official language of the country, which made it easier to acquire through various media and social interactions, but if I compare my mastery of this second language of mine with the extent to which my parents and siblings have mastered it, I am now a native speaker while they are still only intermediate to upper intermediate at best.

Why and how did I develop this fluency while they, exposed to the same school system and methods of instruction, did not?

I would contend that my love of reading, and reading not only extensively but widely, in a variety of subjects, is responsible for this state of affairs.
I can recall that our home always had reading material on hand, since my father is also someone who enjoys reading, but neither my father nor mother spent a lot of time reading to me or to my sisters. The books were either Afrikaans novels, or English classics in their Reader's Digest abridged format.

My formal instruction in the art and skill of reading came during my first year of school, when I was taught to read and write Afrikaans. Two years later I was introduced to that dreaded language, English.
I say dreaded because of the political history between Afrikaners and English, stemming from the Boer war (I was born in 1953, a scant 40 years after that war) and feelings from my parents and grandparents regarding English people and English as a language were strongly negative.

However, in the two years after starting to read, I had discovered the world of books, and had been steadily working my way through the shelves of the local library. This love of reading was often actively discouraged by my parents, who wanted me to do chores, socialize with my peers and attend to homework rather than curl up with a book in a corner. Not to mention putting down books in time to go to bed and get a good night's sleep.

Despite the arguments and sometimes physical punishment that resulted from my disregard of their wishes, my love affair with books only intensified when I discovered that this new language, this terrible language that my family vilified so much, which started off with 'Run, Spot, run.' had an immense, nay toweringly huge wealth of books, books filled with stories of the future, the past, murder, mystery, people, animals, the world!

I can still recall one memorable afternoon when the reader we were to use in standard two (grade four in American elementary schools) contained not the stilted prose of graded readers, but an actual story, Jock of the Bushveldt, written by Percy Fitzpatrick, in which things I was familiar with – Africa, sunshine, the bush, dogs – were presented in clear, crisp prose.

I sat down on the school steps at the end of the school day and proceeded to devour the book. That is, until my mother arrived at school, as mad as ten nests of hornets, and tanned my hide all the way home, where all books were confiscated and my library privileges revoked for a month.
She was spitting into the wind, since I could sit in the library at school during lunch times and read, and indeed I did.
As I continued to read, my proficiency grew by leaps and bounds, and I was regularly the top scorer in tests and exams all through elementary school (primary school in South Africa) and high school (we have no junior high or elementary school – 7 years at primary school and 5 at high school is our system), and in that time I continued to discover the classics and the many modern writers in English.

Even now, many years later, I continue to devour books at an alarming rate. On a recent stay in hospital, where I expected to be there for two nights and a full day, maybe two, I packed four books. Malcolm Gladwell's book Outliers, Katherine Ramland's book on forensics, Beating the Devil's Game, The Collected Works of Arthur Conan Doyle, and Maskerade by Terry Pratchett. And I finished all of them, despite a period of being unconscious due to the operation.
Of course, when my children arrived in my life, one of the first things I did was read to them, and the hours we spent with me reading them Rudyard Kipling, Roald Dahl, C.S. Lewis, Saki, Enid Blyton, and many others were magical.

My daughter took to reading with no problem, and since my husband and myself spoke both languages with equal facility, and indeed conversed as much in English as in Afrikaans, she and her brother grew up with a head start in both languages and did not need reading to teach them the language. However, as she herself can attest, her skill with using both languages and her extensive vocabulary are due to her love of reading.
My son, however, while he loved the stories and the books, unfortunately suffers from a degree of dyslexia, and so reading was more difficult for him. For many years books were torture rather than relaxation. He came to reading when we watched a movie together that had a storyline that really intrigued him, and I could point him to the book. He was captivated with the fact that the book told so much more of the story, and since then he has steadily improved his reading ability to the point these days that he has a modest library of his own, which includes books by our favorite author, Terry Pratchett.

Naturally, as a teacher of English as a second language, whenever one of my students ask me the secret to successfully learning the language, passing the test, getting a high TOEFL score or any other sort of score, I have only one reply – read as much English as you can. Read magazines, read comic books, read science journals or sports pages or fashion advice, but read.

And as a current student, with my daughter, of Korean as another language, we are putting this into practice as much as we can, by reading Korean when we can. And soon we hope to be as fluent in that one as we are now in this one.

Note from the editor: This paper was not proofread or edited by IJFLT. We do generally proofread submissions, but felt that, in this case, the value of reading an unedited version of this well-written article and seeing the true extent of English acquisition had value.

"The heartbreaking difficulty in pedagogy, as indeed in medicine and other branches of knowledge that partake at the same time of art and science, is, in fact, that the best methods are also the most difficult ones."

Piaget, J. 1969. *The psychology of the child*, New York: Basic Books.

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