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Language Acquisition

FROM 40 YEARS OF STUDYING, STUDENTS, 4 LANGUAGES AND CURIOSITY

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Raise Your Hand.... If...

- ▶ You took a foreign language in high school?
- ▶ In college?
- ▶ In both?

- ▶ What would happen if I magically dropped you off in a land in which that was the only language spoken???

- ▶ It isn't just the USA, major international studies have shown the same results in most countries (when trying to "teach" a new language).

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Spain

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- ▶ “A pesar de dedicarle muchas horas y dinero, hablar inglés sigue siendo una asignatura pendiente para los españoles.

¿Cuestión de genes, de falta de motivación o, quizá, de una estrategia educativa equivocada?”

Psychologies Magazine, N67

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Why should "I" care???

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- ▶ If you want to learn useful and functional skills a new language yourself...
- ▶ For the language learners you serve and evaluate...

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The vast majority of what most people believe/know is wrong...

Primary reasons for the ongoing misinformation

- ▶ Most classes are still grammar focused, even though the research and evidence shows that DOES NOT WORK well, or maybe not at all...
- ▶ Many “experts” are monolingual...
- ▶ Many “experts” are simultaneous bilinguals (or early sequentials)... Zero experience learning a new language that improves understanding...

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Learning Objectives

- ▶ 1) The participants will know and be able to name key aspects of building a foundation for language acquisition.
- ▶ 2) The participants will know and be able to name key aspects of building a successful path to functional language skills.
- ▶ 3) The participants will have numerous sources for further investigation and learning regarding language acquisition.

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Bilingual rates – Muddy and confusing...

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- ▶ Nobody knows for sure, estimated slightly over 50% worldwide
- ▶ Switzerland highest in Europe at 68%
- ▶ US at 20-23%
- ▶ Great Britain at 38%

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Need (with environment) is the key factor, only replaced by huge desire...

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- ▶ Switzerland --- Population greater than the state of Washington, four official languages, physical size is dramatically smaller than Washington.
 - ▶ Officially – German (Hoch Deutsch), French, Italian, Romansh, Unofficially English and Swiss German
- ▶ USA --- The second largest country on earth (tied with Canada), speak the most used language on earth, have over 400 languages in our schools, but largely seen as monolingual
- ▶ **Warning about grouping students (or yourself)...**

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Languages are acquired, not taught

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- ▶ Acquisition --- “To get as one’s own, to come into possession or control of by unspecified means.”
- ▶ Synonyms – Cultivate, develop, form
- ▶ **We have 3,500-10,000 grammar rules and 400,000-1,000,000 words in English!!!**
- ▶ **Children under 5 in home country versus college studies...**
- ▶ **Olly Richards – Quantity over Quality**

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What we have been doing....

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- ▶ Around the world, people are trying to teach language through grammar.
- ▶ The results, regardless of country, are extremely poor, unless...

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What we should be doing!

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- ▶ Creating environments that make acquisition easy
- ▶ Helping the learner gain key knowledge that makes acquisition easier, faster, more compelling
- ▶ Helping the learner find a path to something they love doing, will do every day and that serves to provide comprehensible input

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Evidence Regarding Methodology

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- ▶ **Spanish readers and next slide... The rest of you...**
- ▶ **If you Googled this or the like, don't ruin it for the others, please.**

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Caution: Is it useful....?

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- ▶ We learn what we understand.... But, is it useful? We can learn all of the tenses, but why? Especially if we aren't speaking...
- ▶ Warning about popular "programs"

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Grammar Instruction in developmental stages (and as little as possible...)

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- ▶ Examples of what we don't "know," and we have acquired
- ▶ Stephen Krashen example with bomb, bomber, chamber....
- ▶ Frederick Bodmer example I need, you need, we need, she _____, he _____

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Instead.... For Grammar

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- ▶ Developmental Stages --- Little kids as they learn past tense – ran, not runned, ate, not eated
- ▶ Language learners --- **Focus on present tense**, then the easiest “future” tense or substitution (e.g., later or tomorrow for English, Voy a for Spanish) and the easiest “past” tense or substitution (e.g., earlier or yesterday, he ___ido/ado for Spanish)
- ▶ **Remember the 5-year-old... And allow grammar to be acquired!!!**

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My Journey

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- ▶ Spanish, the journey until meeting Stephen Krashen
- ▶ Currently progressing in my fourth language
- ▶ Over thirty years of learning, studying, researching this topic

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The Key Steps to Success

- ▶ What, How and Why, then ...
- ▶ Key things needed to acquire a language, how to do them, and why to do them
- ▶ Then, finding Joy and Passion for Success

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The What- short version

- ▶ Master most Frequently used words
- ▶ Use technology as a tool
- ▶ Focus on Present Tense (then build logically and developmentally)
- ▶ Read – Comprehensible and Compelling Input
- ▶ Create Cheat Sheet --- Letter sounds, present tense example, “tricks” like German da words (no memorizing, just awareness), yesterday, today, tomorrow (and how to utilize these to expand your speaking)
- ▶ Get talking, conversations, **not staged** (once you have 700-1000 words)

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How – Short Version

- ▶ Search most frequently used words (or buy a book on this)
- ▶ Use something like Rosetta Stone (Exposure and Awareness)
- ▶ Make cards not represented or known (from above)
 - Don't memorize, use a spaced repetition approach (1-2 minutes per day)
- ▶ Finding books (Kindergarten looks like and 1st and 2nd grade material that is **compelling**...)
- ▶ Wyzant or trading time websites for conversations, for example

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Why

- ▶ First 100 words is 50%
- ▶ First 300 words is 70% (Fry Words)
- ▶ First 1,500 words is 85-95%
- ▶ Rosetta Stone
- ▶ Present tense with helpers can create success, success creates more success, then voy a, then he comido for Spanish example for success
- ▶ The Cheat sheet reduces frustration, and frustration is a recipe for failure, success is a recipe for success! **Exposure then experience**
- ▶ **Early speaking to avoid paralysis often created by Grammar focus**

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Reading (comprehensible input)

- ▶ Elementary students read 100-200 words per minute
- ▶ Adults read 200-300 words per minute
- ▶ 30 minutes per day for a child is $100 \times 30 \times 365 = 1,095,000$ up to $200 \times 30 \times 365 = 2,190,000$ words read per year **Harry Potter combined is 1,084,170 words)**
- ▶ 30 minutes per day for an adult is from the 2,190,000 to 3,285,000 words read per year **(for growing and maintaining additional languages)**

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Reading...

- ▶ **Massive repetition, given 1500 most frequently used words is 85-95% of all written work**
- ▶ **Goes where you go!**
- ▶ **You can pick whatever you enjoy!**

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A Positive Spiral

- ▶ Numerous language acquisition experts– Large quantities of comprehensible **input creates output.**
- ▶ Multiple sources; yet quoting Massachusetts DOE – “Oral language is often called a “bedrock” of reading and writing. Students’ comprehension of **spoken language is a defining factor for their reading comprehension.**”
- ▶ Positive Spiral – Reading comprehensible input, increase oral language, increase oral language, increase reading comprehension, increase reading comprehension, increase oral language.....

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The bigger why

- ▶ **The better the foundation, the sooner we can access Compelling Content**

**The golden ticket is
daily enjoyable,
comprehensible,
compelling input.**

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How long does it take to learn..... A new language?

- ▶ The burning questions, that only leads to more questions!!!!
- ▶ Methodology (Poor methodology = never)
- ▶ Meaningful time on task (NOT passing of time, e.g., LTELS)
- ▶ Previous Language(s) learned
- ▶ Similarity/Difference to previous language(s)

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Fun, Relevance, Usefulness

- ▶ The spiral for ongoing success
- ▶ You enjoy it, so you do it more.
- ▶ It is relevant and useful for you, so you are more motivated to do it more.
- ▶ It becomes part of your life!

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Fun, because....

- ▶ We are not trying to make it fun because we want everything to be fun...
- ▶ We are trying to reduce negative affect and distress, because that “reduction” greatly increases the likelihood of positive learning
- ▶ **Stress versus Distress**
- ▶ **Motivation, and the fake narrative...**

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Success – the “what”

- ▶ **Making it personal***
- ▶ **Joy/Enjoyment**
- ▶ **Daily practice – That is meaningful!**
- ▶ *Luca Lampariello “Best Method...” YouTube

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“Noise,” Mistakes, Correction

- ▶ What is “noise...?”
- ▶ We must set our own filter, yet we must push it a little
- ▶ We must accept making mistakes and honor it as part of the process
- ▶ **Reduce correction* of beginners... Balance!**
- ▶ [*What and How](#)

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Imagine this...

- ▶ An adorable baby looking into the eyes of their mommy or daddy, saying
- ▶ “up, up, up”
- ▶ And, mommy or daddy replying, “No, not until you say it in a complete sentence that is grammatically correct!”
- ▶ Some will say, “Oh, you want me to pick you up.” While, picking up said adorable baby.
- ▶ Comprehensible input leads to... “Pick up” “Pick me up” “Mommy pick me up” etcetera

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YouTube Videos

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- ▶ Level appropriate videos for listening
- ▶ Strategies for learning (make it personal) --- **Caution**
- ▶ Problem Solving (you aren't the first person with that question)
- ▶ Grammar*, if we must... **Grammar is not inherently evil, just useless to teach when the person is not developmentally ready. Paralyzing if focused on too early**
- ▶ Also, kids' movies and more

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Some great YouTube Videos!!!

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- ▶ Luca Lampariello – How to Learn Grammar
- ▶ Luca Lampariello – Why Immersion isn't a great ... for beginners
- ▶ Luca Lampariello – The Absolute Best Way to Learn a Language
- ▶ Canguro English – Adele Goldberg – Input vs Output
- ▶ Canguro English – Patsy Lightbown – How Languages are Learned
- ▶ Canguro English – Do you need to study grammar
- ▶ Canguro English – How many words do you need to be fluent
- ▶ Stephen Krashen – Polyglots and the Comprehension Hypothesis
- ▶ Stephen Krashen – The Power of Reading

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More Great YouTube Videos...

- ▶ Steve Kaufman – Passive Vocabulary: Why it Matters
- ▶ Steve Kaufman – How Polyglots Learn Languages
- ▶ Richard Simcott – The Man who Speaks 40+ Languages
- ▶ Olly Richards – Quantity over Quality
- ▶ Olly Richards – 7 big regrets about my language learning
- ▶ Olly Richards – 8 Ways Polyglots Learn Languages Fast
- ▶ Lydia Machova – Becoming an independent learner (shorter version)
- ▶ Lydia Machova- Don't teach me, make me learn (longer version)
- ▶ Lydia Machova – The Secrets of learning a new language

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Further Learning

- ▶ **Stephen Krashen**
- ▶ **Francois Grosjean – Warning on research**
- ▶ **Frederick Bodmer – Warning on “language”**
- ▶ **Noam Chomsky – Warning on “sleep...”**
- ▶ **Steve Gill and Ushani Nanayakkara – *Language Acquisition: Building a solid foundation and pursuing a new level of language mastery* booklet, with link at stevegillell.com**

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Conclusions

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- ▶ Learning a new language is a lot of work, but we can make it much easier, more fun, accessing success more quickly.
- ▶ Build the foundation, creating faster access to fun/compelling content, then create a personal path toward mastery
- ▶ Find what you enjoy, so that you do **every single day!**
- ▶ Reading is profoundly powerful

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