

Ask a Scholar with Dr. Beniko Mason

A Summary from our 12/09/2018 Live Facebook Chat



What is Story Listening?

Story Listening (SL) method for second (foreign) language learners is that a teacher tells many stories to provide samples of language as rich comprehensible auditory input for Second (Foreign) Language Acquisition (SLA). It uses existing text, in my case, fairy/folk tales, legends from the world, and classic novels (fiction). The method used is not only to tell stories well, but also to make the auditory input more comprehensible using different supports for the language students. SL is not just to develop listening skills and increase the vocabulary size, but also it is intended to lead the students to reading in the target second (foreign) language. The teacher finds a story. The language used in the naturally told stories is much richer and interesting than the artificially created language in textbooks guided by the school syllabus. Then, she prepares a lesson, and tells the story to her students in class. The input used in SL comes from a written text, and not from spoken oral conversations.

It seems simple, but how much and how do you prepare for an SL lesson?

There are a few steps for the preparation. First, the story has to be very interesting for the teacher to want to tell it to her students. The story has to be appropriate for her students in the areas of the language levels, their interests and their maturity levels. Then, the teacher makes a prompter to tell the story so that she will not forget to use those interesting words and phrases used in the text to introduce to the students. This way they will be exposed to the language that is at their next level to reach.

When you mention a prompter, do you mean that you target certain vocabulary, and put them on cards or a sheet of paper ahead of time?

Yes, we prepare a list of the words for the teacher, but not for the students.

The Prompter is a list of the words for me [the teacher] to guide me to tell the story. It includes known words and unknown words for students. I need a long list of words as I tell a long story. The students are not accountable for acquiring the words on that list through that story. When you spend more time on words, then they will remember at the end of the lesson, but they will forget easily. When the words are associated with images they will remember. Flash cards are good at the end of the SL to review the story. Not before the SL lesson.

Prompters include the words that we want to introduce to make the story more interesting and the content rich. You can call it targeting vocabulary if it makes it easier to understand. When we want to prepare our students for academic language, we might want to target those words, but we don't have to be so conscious about teaching targeted words. When they are not ready to acquire the words, they will not acquire them anyway. When we are interested in telling the story in full excitement, we use those particular (targeted) words and we want the students to know what those words mean, so we use them and explain to them what they mean. We concentrate on telling the story more than teaching the words.

We avoid “teaching vocabulary” which is targeting 1.

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What are the definitions of Targeting 1 and Targeting 2?

These are the two types of targeting according to Dr. Krashen

(<https://skrashen.blogspot.de/2016/11/three-options-non-targeted-input-and.html>)

Targeting 1 (T1):

1. The goal is full mastery of the rule or vocabulary in a short time, so complete that it can be easily retrieved and used in production.
2. The source of the items to be targeted is external, from a syllabus made by others (not the teacher). The teacher's job when doing T1 is to find a story or activity that will provide extra exposure to and use of the target items. Thus, Targeting 1 is a way of "contextualizing" grammar or vocabulary.
3. T1 consists of "practice" in using the target items. "Practice" generally consists of skill-building, first consciously learning the new items, and then "automatizing" them by using them in output, and getting corrected to fine-tune conscious knowledge of the rule or meaning of the word. "Automatizing" means converting explicit, or consciously learned competence into implicit, or acquired competence. It has been argued that T1 does not result in the automatization or acquisition of language (Krashen, 1982, VanPatten, 2016). The best we can hope for with T1 is highly monitored performance.

Targeting 2 (T2):

1. Unlike T1, the goal of T2 is comprehension of the story or activity, not full mastery of the targeted item in a short time. It can be done in a variety of ways, e.g. via visual content (e.g. pictures), translation.
2. The source of the items to be targeted is internal; e.g. the story.
3. This kind of targeting generally results in partial acquisition, enough to understand the text. Full acquisition of the targeted item develops gradually, when the item appears in the input again and again, in other stories or activities, assuming that the targeted item is at the students' $i+1$.

Do you prefer to use well-known stories or new stories with familiar vocabulary for beginner SL? What if the story is 30+ minutes, should I add a break ?

I recommend 15 minute story for beginners. Not 30 minutes. that is too long for the beginners. It is also best to use familiar stories at the very beginning. We use many supports including L1 to make input comprehensible. Look at the tools in the tool kit.

[Please refer to handout *The Tool Kit* at <http://storiesfirst.org/index.php/knowledge-base/what-is-the-toolkit/>, also downloadable under classroom resources]

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Do students ask questions or indicate when they do not understand during the story?

Watch Kathrin's video. Teachers have asked me whether there is any interaction between the teacher and the students. We do well known stories first for easier predictability. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mvh4AUXtF_Y Students are not forbidden to ask a question, but they usually do not ask questions, because the teacher makes sure that the story is comprehensible through the use of the tool kit.

How does the Tool Kit relate to the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis?

Input is necessary for language acquisition, but input alone is sometimes not sufficient. Input often needs assistance for better comprehension especially for beginners. The beginning level language students need the most assistance when they hear the foreign language. Several forms of supplementary instruction can be helpful and are, at times, necessary. (Krashen, 1985: Inquiries and Insights, page 27). The first kind of supplementations are:

1. Procedures designed to aid comprehension. They are simplification, and the use of common vocabulary, shorter, less-complex sentences.
2. Background information. This can take the form of pictures, additional verbal information, and the use of familiar topics.
3. Use of the students first language

Notice that these supplementation are fundamentally different from the kind of supplementary activities such as: 1) preteaching of the vocabulary; 2) teaching the rules of the language first before telling a story; 3) having the students consciously drill the targeted items; 4) force the students to output in L2; 5) asking students to answer the questions using the target words, and 6) giving them the corrective feedback. The second form of supplementation is:

4. Low Affective Filter
Some activity to lower the affective filter.

If we are true to the Input Hypothesis, we will do a great deal toward lowering the Affective Filter. Providing activities that supply comprehensible input on topics of real interest, not forcing early speech production and not insisting on high levels of accuracy in early stages, will help reduce anxiety in the classroom, anxiety built up by negative experiences in incorrectly taught language classes. (Krashen, 1985: Inquiries and Insights, Page 29).

Where would you advise starting SL with an AP class?

Story Listening and Story Reading can be adapted up to high levels. Also the focus is on rich academic language. Kathrin Shechtman has an intermediate group and still started them with beginner stories.

Listening is a skill that needs to be developed. (The students were new to SL), within 5 classes (10 stories) they were up to 30min stories and much more complex texts with more low frequency words.

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How would I begin with SL? I teach novice to grades 9&10 high school.

You have 15 to 16 year old high school kids. You can tell a short story (15 minutes) in multiple lessons using tools from the tool kit. Have them write a summary of the story in L1, and then give them the list of the words that you used to tell the story and check the translation of the words together with them. Then give them a post test on the vocabulary at the end of the class.

Give them the rewritten text, ask Kathrin how she does it [*this is also a focus at our workshop in Erlangen, Germany on May 5th/6th 2018, registration here: <http://storiesfirst.org/index.php/2017/08/22/erlangen-germany/>*] and read the text together. You can do flashcards to review the story. Soon you will not have time to do such activities once you start telling a longer story, and the students will not like to do all the conscious activities, but at the beginning for several times I think it is helpful. It will give them an idea how to review the lesson if they wanted to do it later at home.

How do you do pure SL if stories are only 15-30 mins long, but class periods are 60-90 minutes long?

You cannot start with 40 minute long SL from the very beginning when they are not used to listening to stories that long. It takes a while to get them used to listening and then we start 30 and 40 minute stories. It depends on the level and age of the students. When SL is short, we can do the following procedure until a story becomes longer:

1. tell a story
2. give them a sheet of the vocabulary list and do the vocabulary check (test)
3. feedback=answer check
4. teacher read aloud the text
5. summary writing in L1
6. flash cards to review the story with the whole class
7. vocabulary check (test) again.

Claire Walter's intermediate learners can read for 30 min. and listen to a story for 30 min. but obviously it takes time to develop that level of language and sustained attention. Kathrin Shechtman tells two stories in 60 min., a short and a long one. My college classes have always been 90 min. long with a combination of Story Listening and Story Reading. [*Story Reading was not a focus of this Q&A session, we will get back to it in a later session*]

Here is an example of how a Story Listening and Story Reading correspond

The Sweet Porridge/Der süße Brei, Brother Grimm story adapted by K. Shechtman for Beginner German
Story Reading Text:

http://storiesfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/der_su%CC%88%C3%9Fe_brei.pdf

Story Listening in class:

<http://storiesfirst.org/index.php/resources/videos/>

Kathrin adapts the text for each level and then uses it to build a prompter. The point of the SL session is to include the background knowledge and key concepts/ targets that make reading easier. In the video you can see how she brings the same story in the text to life.

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What are some recommendations for stories I can use in class?

Some popular Brother Grimm stories for High School are the stories where people suffer and die, ideally with some element of suspense, such as The Robber Bridegroom or The Juniper Tree. I do not just tell Grimm Stories. I gave the first 100 because they are copy right free. [The list of 100 First Stories for Story Listening can be found here: <http://storiesfirst.org/index.php/knowledge-base/handouts-and-resources/> with all titles in English, French, German and Spanish]

I tell stories from different folk tales and I could not share them on the net as they are copyrighted. There are many books with folktales. Plays and Operas work as well, such as Romeo and Juliet and La Boheme.

For Elementary teachers we have a file in the Story Listening Facebook group with suggestions. We would like to encourage you to share your suggestions here as well, we are all working on this together. Please, as a reminder to everyone, also join the *Great Story Reading Project* and share stories that worked well, you can tag them with “high school” etc. <http://storiesfirst.org/greatstoryreadingproject/>

Do you advise that we intentionally incorporate stories for their cultural significance as well as language-acquisition reasons? Or any stories at any point - because our goal would then be solely acquisition of language?

I think I misunderstood the question when I first responded. I am going to rephrase my response here. Because of the limited time that I have with my students (only about 18 hours per semester), I am more interested in providing rich language input than worrying about teaching cultural differences. I tell stories from different countries and do not specifically talk about English or American culture.

As I said in France this summer, I have no intention of changing the students’ beliefs or ideas or opinions in my language class. When I tell a lot of stories from different countries, cultural differences, that you are thinking about, may be covered naturally and may be conveyed to the students subconsciously. The different ways of thinking and different customs are explained in stories. The events in Chinese stories are different from the events in German stories. But I explain briefly how western people act and speak, when an opportunity arises, such as when my student sneezes loudly and doesn’t apologize for spreading his germs.

What are some ways you assess the student’s learning of the story?

I have them write a summary of the story. **No accountability is the best.**

I used to think that students had to take responsibility for their learning. I used to think that I should act like a policeman in class. There had to be rules, and the students had to obey them. There were rewards and punishments according to their behavior. Gradually, I began to realize from observing students that all I had to do was to provide interesting comprehensible input. When I tell a story that they fully understand and enjoy, there is no disruptive behavior in class. When the story ends, they keep writing the summary of the story, and want to write down everything that they understood. They act confident when they bring me the summary. They are proud of their summary. *(continues on next page)*

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How many stories do you tell your students until they reach a good level of

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What are some ways you assess the student's learning of the story? (cont.)

They feel good about achieving the goal of the lesson, and start building self-esteem. Then they start wishing to be better, hoping for more success, and start giving more effort. Once they start doing this, they develop better self-control, and they become accountable for their studying on their own.

I think that developing accountability is the result of developing high self-esteem.

How many stories do you tell your students until they reach a good level of speaking?

When the goal is to ask questions when they travel to a foreign country or answer some questions asked by a teacher, I think those goals can be achieved quite quickly. But what I am aiming at is to help my students to be ready to go into a business world as an apprentice or go to a college in an English speaking country, I think that such speaking ability will not be achieved until after they reach high intermediate level of listening and reading. That is what I have observed, and it will take a few years of reading (in my students' case) 6000 pages per year in a program with SL.

This amount of reading might seem like a lot, but Extensive reading means that they read a lot, at least 100 to 150 pages per week. Our colleagues in Turkey told us that the secondary school children in a comprehension-based language program in Turkey read 250 pages per week for English as a foreign language. My students do not read 100 to 150 pages from the very beginning. We lead them to reading using SL.

It seems evident to me that students are engaged in comprehending & interpreting a lot of input with SL. My question is: how would Dr. Mason suggest that teachers respond to admins/parents/fellow teachers who critique SL b/c of educational philosophy (ex, project-based learning) or other Second Language Acquisition theories (ex, interaction, output)?

It is hard to convince colleagues and administrators about the value of SL as it is fundamentally different from what they have been doing. I would show them the evidence from research papers. Better yet, do classroom research to evaluate on your own teaching using SL. That is what I did. I was doing input plus skill-based method, namely, the eclectic method using CI. But, Dr. Krashen told me that I was not doing "pure CI". So, I discarded (almost) everything else but input, and collected data and am totally convinced: Input alone is sufficient. [A letter addressed to parents of students in class taught with Story Listening can be found here: <http://storiesfirst.org/index.php/knowledge-base/handouts-and-resources/>]

** We would like to thank Dr. Mason for joining us for this Q&A. Please keep your eyes open for further Ask a Scholar Chats through Facebook. All information presented here is a recap from an online live chat, it is not a complete representation of the current research in SLA or Story Listening. For more information, please refer to Dr. Mason's website beniko-mason.net, Dr. Krashen's website <http://www.sdkrashen.com/>, and Stories First's website storiesfirst.org*

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