

Story Listening and Story Reading

by Beniko Mason



How Language Acquisition Takes Place

Research over the last four decades has shown that:

1. We acquire language when we understand what we hear and read, that is, when we get “comprehensible input.”
2. Students need to receive a massive amount of rich compelling (highly interesting) comprehensible language input in order to make good progress in acquiring a language.
3. Second language learners go through similar stages as first language acquirers.
4. Acquiring a language and learning about the language are not the same thing.
5. Consciously learned rules of the language are not helpful in real communication; they are only helpful when we take a written grammar or vocabulary test, and sometimes in editing our writing.
6. Students should not feel defensive, anxious and threatened in a language classroom.

Comprehension-based Methods

Our foreign language program uses methodology based on the current language acquisition theory:

the methods used are comprehension-based, that is they emphasize providing students with rich, highly interesting comprehensible input, messages that are so interesting that students even “forget” they are listening to or reading in another language. Study after study has confirmed that students who use these methods acquire far more language than students in traditional classes, and enjoy it much more. There are different ways to give lessons using comprehensible language input, but here we will explain about the two of them: Story-Listening and Story Reading.

Story-Listening and Story-Reading

In a **Story Listening lesson**, a teacher tells a story, usually fairy/folk tales which have stood the test of time. The teacher makes the story comprehensible with the help of many different kinds of support, such as drawings and other visual aids, written words on the board, occasional use of the students’ first language, and taking advantage of the students’ knowledge of the world. Use of this kind of support

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ensures that the students will understand the content of the story easily.

Again, *language acquisition is only possible when students understand what they hear or read.*

Story-Reading is introduced gradually and gently, using texts of high interest, so that students find the reading comprehensible and enjoyable. Our goal is to establish a pleasure reading habit, which will ensure continued progress in the language after their school program ends and they are on their own.

In order to achieve this goal, we need to help students develop their language competence to the high intermediate or low advanced level while they are in school, so they can understand at least some “authentic” aural and written input in the language afterwards.

In other words, *our aim is not to lead students to become perfect users of the language while in school, but to help them become autonomous acquirers of the language, so they can improve on their own.*

No Cost for students

Story Listening does not cost students any money. There are no textbooks or worksheets to purchase for Story Listening lessons. Also, reading is done from texts the teacher creates from the story, and from books checked out from the school library.

What else is done in class?

Language lessons should be fun, but this does not mean that the class is filled only with songs and games, because they often do not contain the rich input needed for optimal language acquisition. However, occasional games, songs, art work, writing, and other activities can bring some variety into a classroom.

Speaking and Writing

According to current research, the ability to speak and write beyond a few phrases, and beyond some memorized poems, is the *result of language competence developed through comprehensible input*. To reach the level in which students can produce language easily and spontaneously, students need to hear and read a great

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deal of the language. Our classes may contain speaking and writing activities, but rich, interesting input (listening and reading) is the core of the program.

Evaluation

Students will be asked to write a summary of the story they hear by drawing pictures or writing in their first language. Samples of these summaries serve as formative evaluations, or progress reports. We have discovered that as their competence in the new language improves, students gradually start writing the summary of the story in the target language.

Evidence

Research findings have demonstrated that providing comprehensible input is not only effective for developing language skills but is also highly efficient: students acquire more per unit time (e.g. per classroom hour) than in traditional methods. The positive effects of Story-Listening as a method for increasing vocabulary have been repeatedly confirmed. Similarly, study after study has confirmed the superiority of pleasure reading for developing competence in reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar, as well as performance on standardized tests.

Much of research can be found, free of charge, at:

<http://ks-cho.net/> (Kyung Sook Cho);

<http://web.ntpu.edu.tw/~lwen/publications.html> (Sy-ying Lee);

<http://ksmith.bravesites.com/> (Ken Smith);

<http://beniko-mason.net> (Beniko Mason);

www.sdkrashen.com (Stephen Krashen).

<http://storiesfirst.org> (Non-profit organization Stories First)

Wishing you and your students stressfree classes,

Beniko Mason

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