Learning What I'll Teach

Connections Between Language Acquisition and Community

By

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Abstract

This experiential learning project came from my linguistics education to formulate a personalized Spanish learning plan tailored to my individual needs. As a student in WOU's Teaching English as a Foreign Language program (TEFL), understanding Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory is incredibly important to adequately teach any language, so to further my understanding I wanted to experience SLA as a language learner. By undergoing the language learning process with Spanish, I understood L2 acquisition at a personal level and furthered my journey toward SLA expertise.

The "experience" portion of this project occurred over the summer of 2024 as I both studied Spanish and taught English to adult Spanish speakers in Valle Dorado, which is a small neighborhood district of Puerta Vallarta, Mexico. I was teaching on a volunteer basis at a community center run by YWAM (Youth With A Mission) Puerto Vallarta. The English classes were open to anyone in the community, and I taught English twice a week with adult learners. By putting myself in both roles of language student and teacher, I better empathized and understood student's needs because I was experiencing similar struggles. The recommendation portion of this project was requested by the mission leaders; they asked for suggestions regarding curriculum, learner assessments, and teaching resources for current and future volunteers. Through a combination of my education in WOU's TEFL program and the teaching resources provided through my

practicum at Chemeketa Community College, I created a crash course about language teaching for the volunteer teachers in the community center. It was incredible to participate in a community grown language education program, and my time was rich with learning experiences.

Introduction

Some interests and passions are like Nescafe coffee—instantaneous. Others take time, like hot water filtering through coffee grounds, one drop at a time into a pot. My interest in the field of language acquisition formed in the manner of the latter, built up over years of random circum-chance. I was disinterested in learning languages until my late teens when I experienced understanding a foreign language outside the classroom. The moment is crystalized in my memory; I was seventeen and standing in a Walmart checkout line when I overheard (and understood) a short discourse spoken in Spanish between a father and his daughter. It felt like I'd sprouted a second pair of ears. This was the first drop of personal interest in the process of language learning, and many drops came over the following years.

The deluge came when I was a volunteer English teacher in Thailand for about two months. I was nineteen, and at a loss for my personal talents or passions, but I loved the Thai people. Cooking and exchanging language with friends became a near daily occurrence; we would patiently parrot words and communicate with what little language we mutually understood.

Teaching English was difficult but fun; I had no idea what I was doing, but the students were always excited, listening intently, and we would learn together. The classrooms I volunteered in were with primarily lower elementary children and I'd learn better teaching practices while they'd practice English. In those Thai classrooms, I gathered interest in learning language and the about Thai people, their culture, and perspectives. Their lives filled me with wonderment as I realized the immense and inherent value of human beings. As I engaged in community with people who spoke a different language than mine, I realized that language as a general concept is communal. Engaging in relationships provided more opportunities to participate in language exchange, and accompanying language exchange gave a greater level of language acquisition.

After my experiences in Thailand, I became aware of the inherent relationship between language and community. I couldn't unsee that people and their language(s) are extension of their community. I observed that my English students learned quickest and most engaged through interaction with each other, the content, and myself. Interaction allowed them to practice foreign sounds and forms and receive real-time corrective feedback. I realized that because language is a social construct, language learning must also occur in a social context because language is a communication tool. Therefore, it requires humans to be utilized, learned, shared, and expounded upon. Shared language empowers individuals to interact and form community. Humans are undoubtedly relational, and communication a key factor for building relationships.

Language is a primary form of communication. People can use many sorts of semiotic resources to communicate meaning, such as art, music, symbols, architecture, etc., but language is how we interact in and with the world. Throughout a life, people grow the little dictionary in their mind (called a lexicon) that associates the things in their world with labels. And that's why language barriers are *barriers;* it's difficult to partake in community with people you can't understand, yet all languages are attached to the same world, and that commonality is an allowance for secondary language acquisition. In over simplified terms: different groups of people have different spoken codes for interacting with their world.

An anecdotal example of this comes from my time in Thailand. It occurred to me while cooking dinner with my friend, (let's call her Mow), who barely spoke English and I didn't know any Thai. She would point to many objects and say their Thai name, and I would repeat best I could, and give her the English word. For example, I call garlic, *garlic,* but Mow taught me the Thai term—which I've unfortunately forgotten now, but the lesson remained. Garlic is a common food around the globe, and different peoples with different languages assign it a different name. This example is limited; it's obvious that some things are people/region specific and have unique terminology, but there is more than enough universal experience that allows people to learn new languages.

By the end of my two months in Thailand, my curiosity for language, culture, and the world had ballooned into multiple dreams, but I chose to pursue teaching English as a foreign language. I was very aware that my English teaching skills where rudimentary,

underdeveloped, and often misinformed. I wasn't trained or given tips before starting volunteer work, and whenever asked to lead a lesson, I taught based on my intuition. I needed training.

Enter the picture, Western Oregon University. I had already completed my freshman year at WOU but left without plans of return. With renewed direction and purpose, I enrolled in the TELF program and declared an English major. My metaphorical coffee pot of language learning interest was brimming over, and by winter term of that school year I chose to compose this project.

I decided to use my education in SLA to formulate a language learning plan tailored to my individual needs. It was an experiential learning project geared to enrich my understanding of L2 acquisition at a personal level and instructor level. The mission was simple; I wanted to learn a foreign language and experience teaching a foreign language. I chose to study Spanish, with a starting proficiency of A1, but I audaciously attempted to reach the proficiency level of an early/emerging B1 speaker. (This was not the result, as I only reached an A2 level of proficiency; however, my failure was an important way to experience certain struggles of language learning. My failure was important personal experience of certain SLA theories, and I learned what it would take for successful L2 language acquirement.)

During the planning of this project, I hypothesized that community was a driving force in language acquisition due to the many SLA theories that address SLA social dynamics and my experiences in Thailand. As I dove into current and past SLA research,

I gathered that language is a social construct with an implicature that it's a vital component of community. And because language is a social construct, then learning a new language entails interaction with speakers of the target language. SLA researchers have deeply studied the community/social factors that are interconnected with language acquisition, and their theories and research has shaped foreign language education.

I pulled from widely accepted SLA theories and research pertaining to Motivation, Interaction, implicit & explicit instruction methods, Anxiety, and much more. These main umbrella topics were my guide in the creation and execution of this project, which occurred between March of 2024 through September of that same year. I decided two major experiences needed to happen simultaneously: I would undergo the learning process of a foreign language (Spanish) and teach my first language (English). Furthermore, this paper is organized by addressing each of these major umbrella SLA topics that impacted my planning and execution of this project. Accompanying each topic is an example from my learning experience.

Motivation in SLA

Motivation is a fundamental aspect of second language acquisition as it contributes to a learner's engagement and persistence to continue learning a language. The following brief descriptions are from three theories that informed this project. Many theoretical facets of motivation are not listed, but the lack of their presence makes them no less valuable. I pulled from research regarding SLA motivation, Gardner's Socio-

Educational Model (1985) which introduced two primary types of motivation: integrative motivation, where learners seek cultural and social integration with the target language community, and instrumental motivation, where learners pursue a language for practical benefits (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985). This model describes two large reasons why a person decides to engage in language learning— but it must be noted that languages are expressions of specific peoples and their cultures, so regardless of your reason for learning a language, a person will have to engage with the culture for a greater pragmatic and semantic understanding. The social reality of language also must be highlighted because without a community of speakers the language has little usage.

An important detail on integrative and instrumental motivation is they are dynamic orientations and not either/or constructs. Learners' experiences can vary depending on their learning environments during a term, week, or class period. However, it's possible to say that people are generally more oriented toward one or the other.

Another model for motivation that is presented by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), is their Process Model of L2 Motivation, as it adds further understanding of motivation by expanding upon goal-centric language learning. They propose three dynamic stages: pre-actional (goal setting), actional (engagement and perseverance), and post-actional (evaluation and reflection). It's important for students to be encouraged by progress, and goal setting is integral; Dörnyei and Ottó specify that "goals are not only outcomes to shoot for but also standards by which to evaluate one's performance. Thus, goal setting refers to establishing quantitative and qualitative standards of performance that can help

guide and regulate action better than distal, vague, or 'do-your-best' kind of goals" (Dörnyei and Ottó 1998). In this model, goals set standards, and it's best to promote a positive environment even if goals are not met.

Dörnyei and Otto focused on the individual learner and the impact of self-regulatory strategies in an action sequence. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) expanded on Gardner's Socio- Educational Model that cited social variables, and a learner's disposition toward them, to create motivation to 'join' target language speakers. When creating a language learning model the social variables must be accounted for. But Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) theorized that Gardner's theory didn't allow for the full breadth of contributing factors to motivation, so they proposed a slightly different view of motivation with three main contributing factors in their L2 Motivational Self System:

Ideal L2 Self – The learner's aspired image of themselves as a competent speaker of the language.

Ought-to L2 Self – External pressures and obligations that drive language learning.

L2 Learning Experience – Immediate classroom and social environment affecting motivation.

This model doesn't exclude the other models listed, but it simply allows for a more individualized view of motivation in which the learner's context and reason for learning is accounted for, but it also includes personal mindset with the 'ideal' or imagined self,

external reasons for learning, and the immediate classroom environment that impacts students.

Additional terminology that clarifies motivation pertains to the Intrinsic and Extrinsic factors contributing to a learner's acquisition. Intrinsic motivation refers to a learner's self-generated interest (likely through exposure of some sort) to learn the target language, and it is closely related to Self Determination Theory. Extrinsic Motivation refers to motivational factors outside of the learner that they adhere to, for example, a language learning requirement at an educational institution (Ellis 2019). These hold similar perspectives as the previously stated L2 Motivational Self System in which external and internal factors are considered.

Personal Anecdote

Of all the factors that contribute to a person's success to language acquisition, Motivation is one of the most precious ingredients. In some research, the effect size of motivation has been determined to be as significant as the construct of Aptitude, which studies show accounts for 15-35% of the difference in outcomes of L2 learners (Oretga 2009). The above-mentioned theories exemplify that motivation can come from numerous circumstances that change pending person to person. During the execution of this project, I took note of the factors and circumstances that contributed to my motivation, or lack thereof, to learn Spanish. It was largely location and community dependent.

In May of 2024 I created a strategy to begin my Spanish acquisition with full knowledge that I was doing so in a foreign language environment. Because Spanish is not the primarily language used in my community, I planned to 'fill' my environment with linguistic input—something I'll highlight later in the section on Interaction—and apply myself to the study of Spanish grammar and vocabulary. This was solely for the purpose of experiencing language learning in a foreign context and gaining firsthand experience of a language learner's needs. I knew I'd be teaching English in Mexico where English is a foreign language, so this prior language learning experience was vital to this project.

To increase my chances of success, I used the Process Model of L2 Motivation from researchers Dörnyei and Otto (1998) that revolves around the important concept of goal setting. Their model follows a 'pre-actional, actional, and post-actional' order in which the learner sets goals, takes action to complete said goals, and then reflects on the outcome. My pre-actional goals were to engage in Spanish learning related at least three times a week to get a sense of the form and function of Spanish, and this framework continued into my stay in Mexico. Once the original pre-actional phases weas completed, I toggled between actional and post-actional phases for the remainer of this project. I'd spend time studying Spanish and when I felt ready, I'd take a placement test on Duolingo to check my progress; then I'd reflect on my struggles and successes and continue studying.

I started with the gamified language learning app Duolingo, which is one of the widely available gamified learning apps that include Spanish. I read from a collection of

A1 level short stories in Spanish once or twice a week and watched films in Spanish with the subtitles. I completed a contrastive analysis between Spanish and English grammar, which was more academically substantial than Duolingo because I found Duo to be repetitive and therefore tiring. On the bright side, Duolingo was accessible and easy to practice with, which is probably why it's so popular.

This sounds like I did a lot, but I was doing the bare minimum to learn a language. It was constantly a struggle to force myself to sit down and learn. I was also missing person to person interaction, which is a huge factor in language acquisition—more on that later.

During my post-actional reflections I realized that a major influence on motivation is context driven. My motivation was high when paired with social accountability, but I was seriously lacking in this aspect because of my foreign language learning context and my independent study. I didn't need the language to live my ordinary everyday life, and as a result my motivation wasn't based on communicable needs. This ties directly into Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985). It identifies two main types of motivation for language learning: integrative motivation, which involves a desire to connect with the culture and people of the target language, and instrumental motivation, which focuses on achieving practical goals, such as career advancement (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985). I had a mix of both, but while in Oregon my motivation was primarily instrumental—I wanted the language learning for this project, not necessarily to join my target language community. I didn't need Spanish to communicate so I didn't use Spanish. When in

Mexico, this changed dramatically, and my motivation became integrative. I needed Spanish to communicate, so I doubled down on learning Spanish. In Gardner's model, he highlights that language is inherently tied to the culture and identity of its speakers, so language acquisition inevitably involves cultural engagement. I experienced this firsthand in Mexico. The need to communicate with Spanish speakers to navigate daily mundane activities (such as going to the grocery store, or buying *Agua Fresca* with friends), and my desire to befriend my Spanish speaking students, motivated me to engage at a cultural level because I was in *their culture.*

This experience demonstrated the social nature of motivation in language learning—without a community of speakers, a language holds limited practical value, and motivation is tied to a communicable need. The effort I afforded my language learning had a direct correlation with the communicable need I experienced.

Communicable needs vary situationally depending on the language learner, so to address language teaching methods it's important to keep in mind why a student is learning a language, and where they are learning the language. Before my arrival, I had briefly put myself in the shoes of my students, so I understood potential barriers they'd experience on a personal level. Moreover, when I was teaching English in Mexico, I was highly aware that I was teaching students learning in a foreign learning context. Their daily communicable needs for English were low (surprisingly none of my students worked in the tourist industry), but most of my students wanted to learn for job related reasons. (In Gardner's model, this would be an example of instrumental motivation).

To address their desire to learn English, and taking their learning environment into account, I chose to shape my first few lessons around the L2 Motivational Self-System Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011). It proposed that motivation is based on an 'imagined self'; in other words, the motivation is essentially an attainable dream, and because the students weren't in an immersive environment, they were essentially learning because of their 'dream' to communicate in English. It is also based on two other large factors: the Ought-to L2 Self and the L2 learning Experience. The former describes whatever external factors drive language learning, that being work, family, location, etc. The later describes the actual environment in which the learner studies, that being a classroom, individually, immersivity, etc.

When planning my lessons, I took these factors into consideration. To address the 'imagined self' I determined that ownership of the dream and steps necessary for attainment must be made explicit. I started class with questions about their day and if they'd used English outside of class. I figured that if they were encouraged to be on the look out for opportunities to practice English, then they would be encouraged to "imagine" for the next time they practiced English. For Motivation inside the classroom, I tried to incentivize output and normalize utterance mistakes, in fact I encouraged mistakes. In this way, their motivation slowly became to participate rather than to avoid embarrassment, especially as they got to know me and each other.

Input and Output

The Input Hypothesis was proposed by SLA researcher and professor Stephen Krashen and is widely known throughout the field of SLA. The theory is concerned with how language is acquired, and according to Krashen this is best summed in the formula (i+1); whatever previous knowledge the learner has plus information just outside of the current understanding. According to Krashen, the previous assumption before Input Hypothesis was that learners learn structures first and while practicing their knowledge fluency develops. In other words, knowledge of grammatical forms proceeds language usage. But Krashen explains that “the input hypothesis says the opposite. It says we acquire by "going for meaning" first, and as a result, we acquire structure!” (Krashen 2009). He also specifies that Input does not need to be explicitly taught for (i + 1) to occur; rather, the learner will unbe participating in (i+1) regardless of explicit instruction while there is comprehensible L2 input. Comprehensible input is represented as “(i+1)” because if learners are given structures that are “(i+2)” or higher, they won’t comprehend enough to enable acquisition of the structures.

The Output Hypothesis specifically deals with practicing and producing language as part of the acquisition process. According to Krashen, output is simply the outpouring of already understood knowledge, which indirectly assists in the learning process, as demonstrated in the below table:

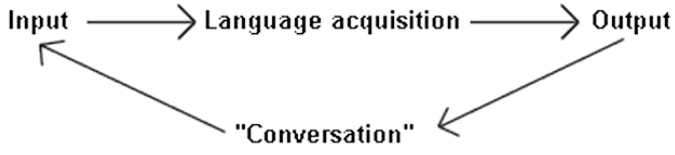


Fig. 3.1. How output contributes to language acquisition indirectly.

(Krashen 2009).

This is a visual example of Krashen's perspective. Output results in interaction (a conversation with a target language speaker) and from that conversation a learner gains input and acquires more knowledge. According to Rod Ellis, Krashen was missing the importance of "forced output" and Ellis goes onto cite Swain's (1985, 1995) Output Hypothesis "which proposed that acquisition is not just driven by input but also output" (Ellis 2019). The output hypothesis is founded in the necessity for output because it forces learners to produce and test their knowledge, and in doing so, learners might consciously notice their errors, or reaffirm correct production, through bottom-up processing (Ellis 2019). To tie Input and Output hypothesis back into Interaction, Ellis also highlights that "interaction involves feedback on the learners' attempts to express their meaning often results in modified output which constitutes one kind of pushed output"; in other words, while the language learner negotiates meaning by attempting to express themselves, they will use their current knowledge to communicate something that might be beyond their current L2 knowledge. Furthermore, acquisition happens in pushed output, or (o + 1).

Personal anecdote:

An unexpected boon came during the first month of volunteer teaching in Puerto Vallarta. I met a language teacher from Montreal, Canada who taught online and in person classes for English, Spanish, and French. Joan was on summer vacation and sought out the community center I happened to volunteer at. We became quick friends,

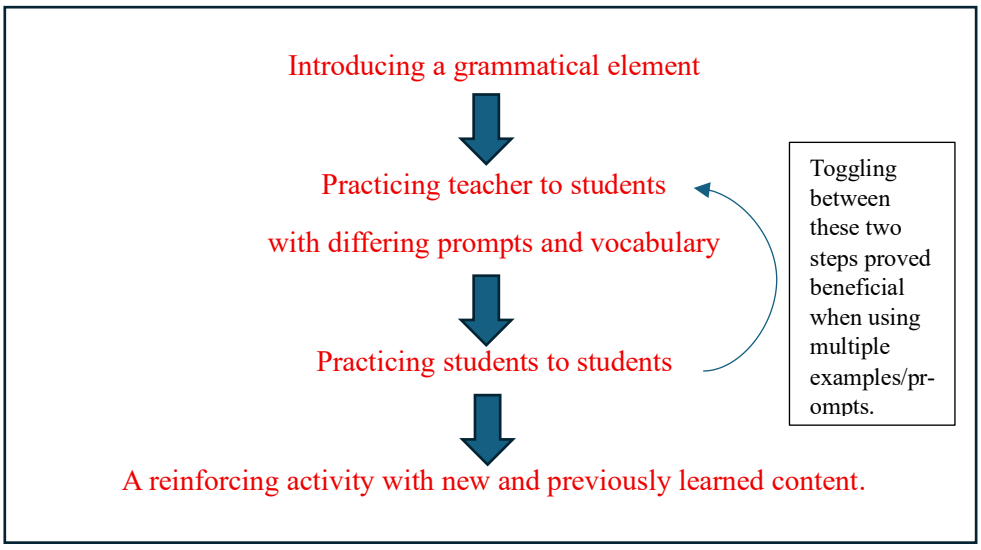
and she offered mentorship once a week. Our arrangement was a casual version of student teaching: I would plan lessons, and five minutes after class's intended start time (but ten minutes before students came), Joan and I would talk. She'd give me pointers, and I would take notes. When students arrived, we'd co-teach, and after class she'd give me feedback.

Most of Joan's pointers were on 1) practical input providing and output prompting strategies, and 2) how to facilitate interactive activities. She and I would often talk about comprehensible input as (i+1) in relation to lesson planning and strategize what needed to be taught in a beneficial learning progression.

For instance, after our first class when the students filtered out, she grinned at me and said, "you need to work on speaking in a consistent verb tense and limit the aspects you use. The students can't keep up with you!" I was stunned. I hadn't considered that my own speech production was just as instructional as the lesson content. Sometimes the most obvious things are lost in the details. Once Joan pointed this blind spot out to me, I intentionally focused on speaking in an (i+1) manner for my students. I would use sentence constructions and vocabulary that they more-or-less understood (varies depending on the learner), plus a new thing occasionally. Initially, I worried about 'foreigner talk' (which is inconsiderate of a person's intellect) but Joan assured me that making my speech comprehensible was vital for students—and she was right. I would limit my verb tense, aspect, and specific moods—such as the past tense, progressive aspect, and the subjunctive mood—until we covered it in class. My habit was to

complement the lesson with my speech and speak to be understood. As a result, the confused looks I received from students dwindled the more I tailored my speech for their benefit.

Joan also walked me through the 'I do, we do, you do' progressive model of teaching, which is laid out in the below illustration plus some practicle steps to follow. While I learned about this in my TEFL courses at WOU, Joan demonstrated that multiple interactive examples and prompts of one new concept was vital. Repetition of the same concept in multiple fashions gave the students opportunity to revisit and broaden their understanding, and I came to recognize this as a practical demonstration of (i+1). But more importantly, the students grew in confidence because the prompts were at a level they could understand but new enough to challenge them.



Joan also stressed the importance of output opportunity in student-to-student conversation practice. During (o+1), a learner engages in meaning-making by drawing on their existing linguistic resources to articulate their thoughts, and my job was to expose

them to new resources so they could communicate beyond the limits of their current proficiency. So, after demonstrating and practicing a grammatical form, I'd write out a word bank of new and old vocabulary and conversation prompts for the students to practice with each other. Then we'd share as a class. Through this interactive model, linguistic structures, sounds, and meanings were reinforced during conversation, and as a bonus it built class comradery.

Negotiation of Meaning: Learning with People or Software

Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), claims that during the 'negotiation of meaning' a learner undergoes a process to make meaningful connections in their L2 interlanguage, which is defined by Rod Ellis as

"the mental system of a second language (L2) that a learner constructs and that is different from the target language system… we can also talk about the interlanguage continuum—that is how the interlanguage is constructed and reconstructed as acquisition takes place" (Ellis 2019).

Furthermore, the interlanguage phenomenon occurs during interaction with the target language and its speakers (Ellis 2019). Meaningful interaction between interlocutors (two people conversing) can result in interactive opportunities for a negotiation of meaning, and those interactions provide the learner with a chance to make corrective changes to their language production (Long, 1996). Furthermore, through

receiving comprehensible input, a learner reenforces or corrects their ever-developing L2 interlanguage and language production. There are many avenues for interaction with an L2, such as language classes, learning software, or simply learning in an immersive environment, but interaction with living speakers provides a more robust interaction as opposed to language learning software such as Duolingo.

A study conducted on the effectiveness of learning Turkish with Duolingo, concluded that the program is best used as a "learning supplement" because it lacked "key affordances for language learning" (Isbell, Rawal, Oh, Loewen 2017). The lack of variety within realistic interaction was specifically linked to the "primary reliance on decontextualized grammar-translation exercises and audiolingual drilling"—in short, the program offered little linguistic interaction beyond vocabulary learning (Isbell, Rawal, Oh, Loewen 2017). The decontextualized grammar translation exercises don't replicate genuine L2 interactions because language is a communication tool for expressing and understanding *thoughts* and the software doesn't imitate that complexity. In addition, the limited amount and type of feedback and language interaction was a major drawback, as Duolingo could only supply direct feedback (right/wrong answers, with the correct grammatical form included) due to its preprogrammed nature.

Corrective feedback is essential to language learning because it reinforces appropriate language forms through comprehensible input and output promotion. According to researcher Rod Ellis, there are several corrective feedback prompting strategies: clarification requests, recasts, repetition of error, elicitation, and metalinguistic

clues and these strategies can mix between implicit or explicit (Ellis 2015). So, in relation to Duolingo, it doesn't encapsulate the corrective feedback that in-person learning does have. While learning platforms are great for grammatical learning, they lack outside resources for sufficient interaction to gain fluency. Furthermore, I suggest that language learning platforms like Duolingo be used as a supplement alongside other interactive input and output prompting contexts, along with a strong commitment to goal setting and maintenance.

Personal Anecdote

I personally experienced the drawbacks of Duolingo, but also, it's great value. For instance, I could practice basic grammatical forms easily and learn simple phrases. It was bite size language practice, and in combination with further input from movies in the L2, reading, and interaction with speakers I benefited from the app. But the app hardly replaced the valuable 'negotiation of meaning' that takes place during an interaction with comprehensible input and output promotion.

I have a treasure trove of examples of this from my stint in Puerto Vallarta, most of which are quite humorous. For example, during my first week in Mexico I became friends with a bilingual English and Spanish speaker who volunteered his help with my language learning. We'd practice conversation forms and then he'd assign me something to order or say to a shop clerk, and I'd typically fail—much laughter would ensue. He'd then recast or lead me through figuring out the correct production and I'd try again. I learned quickly that failure, and the correction of those failures, were an important

reinforcement of language forms. In addition, because we'd practice within the community, the social stakes seemed higher and successful interactions were extremely rewarding, while the failed interactions were burned into my memory. The language learning apps held low social stakes, while real-person interaction held high stakes, and this made a huge impact on my motivation to practice and my recall of linguistic forms.

A funny example from my first week in Puerto Vallarta was when I tried asking an ice-cream clerk's name. My friend and I approached the clerk, and I shyly asked, "¿cómo te ama?"

My friend busted up laughing while the clerk's facial expression went blank. Through laughter, my friend explained that I'd said, "how he loves" rather than my intended question which would be "¿cómo te llamas?" He recasted the correct utterance for me and I turned to the clerk with the correct phrase. The clerk's face lit up and they kindly responded.

That was the moment that I learned the pronunciation difference between [ʎ] and [ʌ] with English—specifically my American NW English accent--and Spanish. In IPA, [ʎ] is the /ll/ sound in Spanish and [ʌ] is the /ah/ sound in English; to my untrained ears, "ama" and "llama" were pronounced the same, but they are obviously not. "Ama" is one way to congregate *love* in Spanish, and "llama" is the noun for *name.*

I had a very similar experience learning the difference between /n/ and /ñ/ in Spanish words. For example: One time someone asked my age and I replied, "Tengo veinte anos" which means *I have 20 buttholes* rather than *I am twenty years old.* This

would be correctly said, “Tengo veinte años.” The people around me hid their smiles best they could as they corrected my pronunciation, but due to that embarrassing moment I’ve never forgotten the difference. In addition, I will never live that moment down with my friends in Mexico.

The least embarrassing interactive negotiation of meaning was with another friend as he directly practiced my /r/ rolling—this lesson was done while waiting for food in a McDonalds. The lesson began with direct imitation of the sound, and associating words. Then we practiced through translation; he’d say something simple in English, and I’d have to translate into Spanish, but he wouldn’t explicitly correct me and instead would use implicit ques to indicate my error. For example,

Friend: I have an expensive car.

Sophia: uh… Tengo un caro carro.

Friend: *raises eyebrow and waits for correct response*

Sophia: Tengo un carro caro.

In this example, my friend was mixing corrective feedback strategies between directly eliciting Spanish output from me, but also implicitly correcting me through a metalinguistic clue; he used a facial expression to indicate an error. My friend didn’t directly correct my form but instead allowed me to correct myself with the knowledge I already had. This example highlights a major drawback from language apps: the nuance of communication goes beyond words and sounds; it is also in non-verbal ques like body

language or gestures. My personal conclusion from each of these examples was twofold; I needed to practice Spanish phonemes through personal study and real-time interaction with speakers because that's where a combination of corrective feedback, negotiation of meaning, (i+1) and (o+1) happens. Learning alone is good as far as it goes, and although learning with people is sometimes embarrassing, daunting, and uncomfortable, it is necessary in the learning process.

CAF Trade-Off

Communication Strategies are common for both native and foreign language learners, but to the degree and necessity of the strategies depends on language proficiency. Language learners use Communication Strategies when communicating in their target L2 but lack the linguistic knowledge to perform target L2 output (Ellis 2015). Communication Strategies are also indicative of the CAF (complexity, accuracy, fluency) trade off, and as a result we can identify which strategies aid whichever factor of CAF. The CAF trade-off theorizes that a learner cannot equally focus on complexity, accuracy, and fluency at once while language learning (Ellis 2019). If the learner is focusing on complexity in their language studies, then the accuracy and fluency of their production will lower and same goes for accuracy and fluency. Focusing on one will entail the other two lowering. Furthermore, Communication Strategies are the ways learners find alternative routes to communicate their messages, and this can occur verbally or non-verbally, with and without interlocutors.

In his chapter on implicit instruction within the book "Understanding Second Language Acquisition," Rod Ellis discusses a fellow linguist Peter Skehan's theory called Trade-off Hypothesis, and exemplar-based system. Ellis continues to explain Skehan's observation of CAF (complexity, fluency, accuracy) when learners prioritize one form of production over the others. The CAF tradeoff is one of the complex contributors to Communication Strategies, and Ellis goes on to explain that whenever learners talk about familiar topics after learning the associating lexical content, memorized words, or phrases, they can formulate simple and accurate sentences (Ellis 2015). When earners have difficulty formulating a response simply due to limitations within the mental lexicon, they respond using Communication Strategies.

Skehan's work suggests that learners have limited capacity and thus will have trouble on focusing on form and meaning at the same time and thus will need to prioritize one form or an another at different times by accessing either their rule based-system, (when concerned primarily with form) or their exemplar- based system (by focusing on primarily on meaning.) Skehan distinguishes three aspects of language production: complexity, accuracy, and fluency which lead to his Trade-Off Hypothesis that learners will prioritize one aspect of production over others (Ellis 2015).

Personal Anecdote

Learning about and applying the CAF Trade-off hypothesis had a huge impact on my personal study of Spanish. It took the pressure off because it entailed that perfection wasn't possible—I couldn't expect to perform well in complexity, accuracy and fluency

all at once. For an over achiever such as myself, this was a comfort, but it also gave me scaffolding to plan my personal investigation of the form and function of Spanish. While I realize the CAF Trade off goes on regardless of a learning setting (alone, in a classroom, with friends in a street market, etc.), I noticed the trade-off during individual study and planned accordingly. However, I wasn't particularly strict and would take any progress or practice as a win—so if I intended to focus on Accuracy, but the activity led me to practice fluency instead, I'd roll with it. While in Mexico, I spent on average 6 hours a week studying alone, and I considered in-person Spanish interactions as informal tests.

When my focus was complexity, I would choose to study Spanish grammar through a workbook I purchased from Speak Broad Academy's catalogue *Learn Spanish Fast for Adult Beginners*, my contrastive analysis, or Duolingo grammar lessons. In addition, I read a series of short stories that progressively increased in complexity, and I would use the books to improve my comprehension and vocabulary of newer and more complex language.

Movies like *Argentina, 1985* or *Pacto de Fuga,* were my material for focusing on Accuracy—in both comprehension, and production. Comprehension is to accurately understand received input, so I turned the movies into quizzes by viewing an entire film (or particular scenes) multiple times with different intentions. Initially, I'd watch with English Subtitles, then again without subtitles, and finally with Spanish subtitles to assess my accuracy. I'd also write pieces of dialogue to practice out loud; I'd pause the scene, say the line, and replay it to confirm accuracy. I found that English movies dubbed in

Spanish were annoying because the lips didn't match the sounds, and I realized that visually seeing word placement an important addition to listening.

Fluency was my largest struggle because I was afraid to say things incorrectly (despite knowing that failure during interaction typically leads to corrective feedback). I considered Fluency as the amount and ease of my output, regardless of its accuracy or complexity… which is terrifying because it was riddled with errors. I had to silence the perfectionist in me and allow myself to make mistakes. So, I'd practice with friends in low pressure environments. They'd laugh at me, but I knew it was good natured. I would also practice fluency with freewrites in my journal, and although I didn't do it daily, it was a frequent occurrence.

Communication Strategies

I read a case study from Professor Muhammad Sukirlan, who also researched the effect of Communication Strategies on L2 learners and their comprehensibility when taught Communication Strategies. He found a high frequency of avoidance, time stalling, and assistance, but as learners progressed in the L2 these Communication Strategies decreased, while other self-correctional types increased (Sukirlan 2014). This was attributed to the learners gaining larger lexical understanding of the L2 and could work through their mistakes during self-reflection. Sukirlan concluded that all Communication Strategies are vital to language acquisition, and that Communication Strategies are not a sign of communication failure, but problem solving. "The more Communication

Strategies students have, the more opportunities they have to solve communication problems" (Sukirlan 2014). He concludes that explicit Communication Strategies are necessary to help students communicate when their linguistic knowledge of the L2 is lacking.

Time Stalling is a communication strategy that Sukirlan discusses, and I found it very prevalent during this experiential learning project. Time stalling is used when L2 learners don't know the word or phrase in their target L2 when communicating with an interlocutor (Sukirlan 2014). This phenomenon is identifiable when a learner begins to divulge their message but stops mid utterance because they don't know the needed linguistic criteria. This strategy is characterized by "a silence or filler" until the learner can think of either a) the target linguistic form, or b) another communication strategy to convey their message (Sukirlan 2014).

Maryam Azarnoosh professor at Islamic Azad University did a study on the impact of Communication Strategies in the classroom. After presenting an account of different typologies of Communication Strategies and the teachability of these strategies, Azarnoosh suggested a framework for training EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in Communication Strategies, and some possible implications for classroom practice have been offered (Azarnoosh 2009). One strategy she detailed that I chose to highlight is Circumlocution.

Circumlocution is when learners communicate a word/phrase with associating words that lead up to an approximate equivalent definition. This occurs because the

learner cannot perform or recall the target language utterance. Maryam Azarnoosh defines the process of circumlocution this way: “Learners analyze the components and features of the concepts they intend to communicate, select those aspects they consider most representative, and combine them into what they assume to be a comprehensible target language utterance” (Azarnoosh 2009). This phenomenon is not unique to L2 learners, as this is a process anyone sometimes does to communicate a message, but what makes it recognizable is that L2 learners do not always accurately combine words into a target utterance by leaving out or confusing morphological information.

Personal Anecdote

At first, my students in Puerto Vallarta were very shy to speak English beyond the few phrase chunks they’d memorized. They obviously wanted to learn to communicate in English, but they seemed to be intimidated by their lack of ability, which I was experiencing myself. Through hesitant Spanish, I shared my insecurities and as a class we came to share an understanding that mistakes were apart of progress, and therefore not to be feared. After this heart to heart, the students became willing to engage and struggle with content. Communication Strategies like Time Stalling and Circumlocution would often appear when students were prompted to speak beyond their current understanding of English, and vice versa when I’d try to communicate beyond my understanding of Spanish. It was negotiation of meaning on steroids, and communication strategies became like training wheels. I wasn’t with them long enough to truly graduate from the training

wheels, but there was evident progress. When students produced accurate L2 forms without a communication strategy when previously they had, we counted it as progress.

My examples of Time Stalling and Circumlocution come from the English classes I'd teach at the community center twice a week. Coupled with whatever grammatical concept we were learning, I'd tell a story and ask comprehension questions/interactive prompts for the reinforcement activity. 'Special' vocabulary in the story was reviewed beforehand, typically in sentences using the grammatical construction we'd learned or reviewed that day.

When I'd tell the story and ask comprehension questions, the students often struggled to produce the new linguistic information; this was when students would problem solve with Communication Strategies. One such time, I remember asking a comprehension question about the "magic" in a story I'd told, and one student was enthusiastic to answer, but struggled to remember the English word "magic." In this example both Time Stalling and Circumlocution were used. It's an abstract word and she used the filler "em" many times while she stalled to try different phrases; she finally settled on the words "big power," which is a brilliant example of circumlocution.

Form and Function

Language is a code used to communicate messages between people, and at the same it is an emotional, psychological, and relational phenomenon that is intertwined with the speakers and their cultures. The topic of this investigation surrounds the concept that community as an essential component of language learning, but to truly achieve

fluency, an adult learner must learn the target language's form and function—grammar! 'Form' is the production of patterns of phonemes, morphemes, words and phrases that can be heard or seen. 'Function' is the usage of linguistic forms which varies depending on context; for example, a farewell between close friends might be, "later, dude", "see ya later.", or "bye". Yet, a farewell between strangers would be said with more formality, such as "have a nice day" or simply, "goodbye." The linguistic forms in these examples function based on their context.

Furthermore, because language is a social construct, the study of form and function requires (at some point) social interaction between the learner and speakers of the target language. Stephen Krashen and the Douglas Fir Group both emphasize the importance of social interaction in learning form and function in their varies perspectives. Krashen also advocates for "'applied transformational grammar' which featured materials directly based on current work in theoretical syntax and phonology' rather than drilling grammar and phonology from the audio-lingual method. Krashen goes into detail in his Input and Noticing Hypothesis, and the Douglas Fir Group proposes a transdisciplinary framework that embeds language learning at "all levels" of multilingual experience: cognitive, cultural, ideological, material, and emotional dimensions (Krashen 2009, DFG 2016). In simple terms, these linguists are recommending that language learning should take place within a community setting. Moreover form and function played a large role in both my own investigation of Spanish, and teaching English. To teach, I had to demonstrate form and function in an applicable and accessible manner for students to use.

They needed grammar, but it became increasingly clear that they needed to practice English grammar in a social environment where a negation of meaning, form, and function takes place. The information stuck best when it was practiced with people. Grammar is the packaging of meaningful sounds into meaningful patterns that communicates a message—so to learn a new form of communication with someone who will receive and respond to messages is essential to the learning process.

Personal Anecdote

My personal study of Spanish grammar began with an analysis of the word classes in Spanish and how the grammar compared/contrasted with English. It wasn't my idea but was an assignment from a TEFL class. We had the option to study any language, and I chose to take advantage of the opportunity to incorporate it into this project. It was a fantastic introduction and foundation for learning Spanish grammar, but it didn't stick. I attribute this to the fact that language learning is ultimately for the purpose of communication, and I never used what I learned to communicate. Awesome input—but I lacked sufficient output until I went to Puerto Vallarta where interaction in Spanish happened frequently. There I practiced the Spanish forms I'd learned with the contrastive analysis and Duolingo.

The contrastive analysis also included my thoughts on how to teach English to Spanish speakers, and I used this to later develop lesson plans while volunteering. The contrastive analysis examined what I considered the most basic word classes and grammatical phenomenon, along with a teaching application. As I previously stated, this

analysis contained lesson ideas, and I used it as a reference to teach English in Puerto Vallarta. In blue is a sample:

1.0 Gender Pronouns and Formality

Subject Pronouns within English and Spanish are similar except for three main features: 1) formality, and 2)grammatical gender. The plural 'they' and 'we' in English have no gender suffixes, but in Spanish both indicate gender. Spanish also indicates formality within its pronoun for 'you' ('usted'/'ustedes' is formal and 'tú' is informal).

The informal *tú* 'you' and formal *usted/ustedes* 'you' in Spanish grammar is the only subject pronoun form that changes according to the required interpersonal relations between the interlocutors (Speak Broad Academy 2024). Spanish speakers will refer to strangers, bosses, older people, and new acquaintances with the formal form *usted* (2sg) or *ustedes* (2pl), but refer informally to friends, family, children, animals, and people they tend to insult with *tú* (2sg). Examples 1 and 2 demonstrate the difference between formal and informal Spanish pronouns.

1) ¿Cómo está usted?
How *be.sg. pres* you?
'How are you? *(formal)'*

2) ¿Cómo está-s?
How be-2sg.*pres*
'How are you? *(informal)'*

Note that in Example 2, the informal pronoun is not typically used because the verb word communicates the information about who the subject is Spanish verb inflection is further discussed in Sections 4.0 and 5.0.

In the below example 3, there are two gendered pronouns: 'we' (masculine) and 'them' (masculine). If it were to reference females, the suffix would be (-as, or -a) rather than (-os, or -o). The gendered subject 'we' (masculine) determines the grammar for the following sentence—because 'we' is masculine, the following content words, beside verbs, must be masculine. In groups of only females is the suffix -as used, in mixed groups or only male groups the default form is -os (Speak Broad Academy 2024).

3) Nosot**os** compram**os** est**o** para **ell-os.**
1pl bought.*pst* *dem.* *prep.* 3masc-*pl.*
'We bought this for them.'

3.a) Nosot**as** compram**os** est**o** para **ell-as.**
1pl bought.*pst* *dem.* *prep.* 3*fem-pl.*
'We bought this for them.'

Teaching strategy for English learners:

English historically has formal pronouns (thou, thee, thy, etc.). However, these forms are irrelevant to EFL learners since they are not likely to encounter them beyond old English literature and medieval movies. Beyond that note, I'd prefer to teach pronouns by focusing on person and number. The lessons in a series would go over each pronoun according to its number, person, and possessive forms (I, you, they, we). An interactive 'get to know you' activity would provide good verbal language production. Going in a circle, students share their names and the name of the person who previously spoke (e.g., I am Sophia, he/she is [name]). This activity's difficulty can increase by having students introduce all the people who spoke before them. (I am Sophia, he/she is [name], he/she is [name]…etc.)

Recommendations for the Community Center

The community center run by YWAM Puerto Vallarta is designated to support and provide services to the community, like English classes, youth events, or projects like park renovation. It also acts as a hospitality house and Bible school. I volunteered there during the summer officially as an English teacher, but I helped with whatever projects or events were happening, such as park renovation, or hosting church volunteer teams. However, the English classes were my main purpose, and I loved working with the other volunteer teachers. The directors (a lovely couple by the names Kerry and Ryan Ast) gave me an opportunity to help address the English program's needs. I observed that the adult classes were largely conversational and without direct grammatical instruction, and the children's classes were mostly audiolingual drilling. The English teachers were like me in only staying for a few months, but they typically had little to no training in lesson prep and no curriculum to follow. The directors asked if I could recommend any fresh solutions, specifically pertaining to rushed lesson prep, learner level placement, and teaching without standards (also known as Can-Do Statements).

A month before my arrival, I'd just finished the TEFL classes at WOU and was equipped with teaching resources and strategies, so I decided to compile a resource for the volunteer teachers. My goal was accessibility; a volunteer should find it helpful whether they have teaching experience or not. It's meant to provide information on the concepts students need to learn given their level, student level placement, and lesson plan

scaffolding. It also includes suggestions on how to teach a lesson with a learning progression.

The class atmosphere was chaotic, and there was no solving it because it was one large room containing all three levels taught simultaneously. There were three main groups divided by proficiency level: beginner, intermediate, and advanced, however this was largely skewed. I recognized this based on what I'd been taught about the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR scale) during the TEFL course at WOU, and from interacting with learners of different levels at Chemeketa. The "beginner" level was for the children (regardless of their proficiency), the "intermediate" level was adults with beginner proficiency, and the "advanced" level was either students with intermediate proficiency—or who'd simply been attending the longest. For example, one old man had a beginner level proficiency but stubbornly remained in the advanced group and didn't understand the lessons. Or a young girl was stuck with the beginner level content despite her intermediate proficiency level. It's a wonderful strategy to mix levels so that students can help each other, but it obviously wasn't intentional and made a nightmare for the volunteers trying to prepare for lessons.

I ran the idea of a 'placement test day' by the directors, but they turned it down because they didn't want to split up the friend groups—which is fair because the English classes had a walk-in and non-committal type of casualness. I didn't press the issue and instead chose to suggest a level placement for newcomers, rather than tackle the old groups. Through that experience I learned that changing a classroom system is difficult,

but the situation and commitment level required should determine the formality of classes.

YWAM PV English Classes

Some ideas, thoughts, and advice 😊

Level Standards & Can-Do Statements

Level	Can-Do Statements	Grammatical concepts … that learners should know before moving up to the next level.	When should learners level up?
Beginner	*Can **understand** basic instruction/conversation about a predictable/familiar topic. *Can **understand** basic notices/instructions, and **shared vocabulary, syntax, and morphology between English and Spanish.** *Can **produce** basic statements (opinions, observations, questions) in response to a predicable/familiar prompt.	*Learning common spelling rules *Phonetics *basic vocabulary *Surface understanding of foundational function words: -pronouns -BE verbs -basic prepositions -articles -**plurality markers? *Learning common vocabulary used in every day life. *Basic adjective and adverb use in simple sentences.	*Learners can level up one they demonstrate understanding of the grammatical concepts. *It is totally normal if learners remain in the same level for a long time; the level reflects what the student needs and progression does not always look like "leveling up."

Intermediate	*Can **hold a short discussion** consisting of limited abstract opinions and ideas surrounding a familiar topic. (With decent fluency and accuracy; complexity is not expected in conversations.) * Can **understand** routine/familiar English constructions and gather the general meaning of unfamiliar constructions. *Can **produce some written responses** and demonstrates a developing knowledge of English syntax and vocabulary.	***Lots of repeat from beginner *Negation *ALL preposition formulations. *Conjunctions *Determiners *Adverbs *Adjectives *nouns, proper and common *Verbs: tense and aspect within a sentence. *Comparatives and superlatives *independent and dependent clauses *Can produce and identify the subject, verb, and object within a sentence. *Growing understanding and accuracy of plurality	

Advanced	*Can **hold a conversation** about a variety of topics with good fluency, accuracy, and a decent level of complexity. Can also hold casual conversation and understand make some jokes in English *Can **read** written discourse of varying length and topics; they can also **discuss** the written discourse of varying length. *Can **produce written responses and stories;** demonstrates knowledge of English syntax and vocabulary.	*Practicing correct verb tense and aspect *Types of clauses; independent, dependent; adverbial, and relative. *Nominalization (what the suffixes of words indicate. -tion, -ate, -tive, ect.) *Future tense modal verbs. *More determiners *1st, 2nd, 3rd conditionals	

IMPORTANTIf you don't know a grammatical concept listed use the following websites:

Chat GPT

Google Gemini

http://partofspeech.org

https://www.grammar-monster.com

https://www.englishbix.com

*Advice for AI generators**:*** they often get the grammatical concepts mixed up, so double check if something seems fishy. When creating a prompt tell the generator *who or what* it's role is. For example: "you are an expert ESL teacher who is teaching adult learners."

How to Place a New Student (just a few suggestions)

So, a new student just walked up the stairs and they need to be placed in a level? Good news, it's super easy to tell if they're beginner, intermediate, or advanced. As an English speaker you'll easily catch a new student's proficiency based on their initial comprehension and production. Here's a few suggestions to place someone quickly and without confusion/awkwardness:

1. Don't place students based on their age. A young person might have greater language proficiency than an adult and vice versa…
2. Don't focus much on pronunciation, focus more on accuracy/fluency of vocabulary and grammar.
3. Ask a short series of questions—these questions are eliciting certain language production that indicates the student's proficiency. Ask in English with steady and clear speech.
    a. What's your name?
    b. How are you?
        - If the new student doesn't understand, then they're beginner. If they do understand and respond with 90% accuracy (or more) they're intermediate or advanced.
    c. Next test if they're intermediate or advanced. Ask the following questions:
    d. What is your favorite animal?
    e. Why is [insert their answer] your favorite animal?
        - If they've answered these questions with 60% accuracy, they're intermediate, and to see if they're advanced as the following question:
    f. If you could be an animal, what animal would you be?
        - If they can understand and respond to this question with 70% accuracy, then they're advanced.

How to Teach Vocabulary to Beginners

Tips

a. **Show!** (I recommend creating a googles slides of pictures of your vocabulary words) **Don't tell**. Speak as little as possible and try to elicit responses from the class.
    - Use an object/visual representation of the vocabulary word you want students to learn.
b. Immediately practice the vocab word in a 'repeat after me' (ex: Teacher says, "shirt" and students echo.) Do this as a whole class. Finish with a sentence: (ex: I'm wearing a shirt.)
c. Identify parts of speech the word belongs to; (noun, adjective, verb, etc.) Color code parts of speech and keep it consistent throughout the lesson.
d. Teach lessons with vocabulary that coincides within a given theme.
e. Your goal is to get students to use sentence chunks, so when you plan lessons work backwards: Choose four or five questions that adhere to genuine English language conversations on a given topic.
f. Build up slowly.
g. Elicit everything.
h. KNOW YOUR GOAL: what language formulations do you want students producing by the end of the lesson?
i. Same Topic & same tense. Try not to switch between verb tenses as best as you can.

Lesson scaffolding:

Lesson Prep

Work backwards. **Choose the questions/answers** that you want students to produce at the end of your lesson—these questions and answers must be real English formulations that **coincide within a theme**.

Deicide Vocabulary students will need and organize by parts of speech and logical learning progression.

Get your visual aids!

Decide what application activity you want to do with students to practice the vocabulary and sentences.

Have an activity where students write the vocab and sentences.

Have an activity in which students interact with each other using the vocab and sentences in partners and groups.

Lesson Plan Skeleton

a. Teach and practice vocabulary; build up to questions, and responses. Review parts of speech as this activity goes on. (See tips).
   - Show don't tell!
   - This step should take quite a bit of time, so go slow.
b. Solidify Vocab with a written activity for students to practice spelling and sentence formulation.
c. Have some sort of activity where you have students identify, in the full sentence response, to a visual or auditorial aid. This could be in a short story, dialogue interaction… whatever. Do this as a class.
d. Have students practice the vocabulary/sentences/question& answers independently with each other.
e. Done… maybe… lol.

How to Teach Beginners English: 13 Fundamentals You Need to Use (youtube.com)

How to Teach English to Beginners: Teaching Vocabulary Tips (youtube.com)

How to Teach Intermediate (or advanced) Grammer Concepts:

Tips

a. Know the grammar point inside and out before teaching.
b. Don't go down irrelevant grammar-trails. Keep to the grammatical production you want from students so as not to confuse them.

c. Elicit responses; you want the students to do the work, so don't put all the info on a silver platter.
d. Slow down! Review and check student comprehension often.
e. Do NOT start class with a grammatical point. DO start with relevant examples containing the grammatical construction.
f. Use the grammatical point in the 'study' and activities throughout the entire lesson beyond the grammar teaching.

Sample of 'Tip e'

- Grammer point: Present perfect verbs in English. (TEACH CONJUNCTION FORMS TOO. Do this by asking your students what is another way to say 'I have' or 'we have' etc.)

I **have** (I've) **traveled** to the Dominican Republic 3 times in my life.
She **has** (She's) **sailed** once before.
We **have** (We've) **been** to Canada twice.

More How-To(s)

1. Teach function of grammatical point, *then* structure.
2. Elicit learning responses through asking around the grammar point. (Example from above sample: Did these statements happen in the past? The Future?... Get students to respond)
3. Check student comprehension with review questions repeatedly.
4. Don't ask a question unless you have the correct answer in mind.
5. Guide students to the correct answer, don't serve it on a silver platter.
6. Save time by prewriting the terminology, examples, and vocabulary.

Teach Any English Grammar Point In 10 Minutes (youtube.com)\

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

Language, in its various communicable forms, is the distribution of information whether someone is giving or receiving information. In your lessons get your students to start communicating with each other in the target language through a three-step process:

1. I do. (Instructor produces target language grammar, vocab, etc. for the lesson.)
2. We do. (The instructor and students practice together.)
   -Depending on student's comprehension you might need to go back and forth between 1&2.
3. You do. (Students produce the target language for the lesson.)

The ACF Trade-off:

Be aware that language learning is a complex and dynamic process with many contributing factors. It's not just grammar and vocabulary; there are so many factors that go into a person's ability to learn a language. Motivation, anxiety, age, transfer from their 1st language, different aptitudes… and soooooo many more. Recognize that students have a lot going on their brains and **adjust your expectations** and **lessons** to **the target language forms that you want students producing.**

How? ACF Trade-off 😊

Accuracy: If the students are focusing on **precise** language production, then the complexity and fluency of their production will go down.

Complexity: If the students are focusing on **new** or **difficult** target language production, then their accuracy and fluency will go down.

Fluency: If the students are focusing on producing target language forms quickly and easily (in a casual conversation for example), their accuracy and complexity will go down.

Sample Lesson: prepositions

Level: Adult Learners (Beginner/Intermediate)

Lesson Target: Understanding and using prepositions of place, manner, and time.

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: Whiteboard/Projector, Markers, Pictures showing objects in different locations (house, classroom), Pictures showing actions (running, jumping), Sentence strips with blanks for prepositions (place, manner, time).

Procedure:

1. Warm-up & Introduction (10 minutes)

- Greet the students and ask them about their day. Elicit simple responses using "What did you do today?" and "What did you eat for lunch?" "What are you doing after class?" "What are your hobbies?"
- Review superlatives and comparatives quickly; same activity and review the same words as last time.
- Write the words "place," "manner," and "time" on the board and ask students what they think these words mean. Briefly explain that these words help us describe location, action, and timing.

2. Prepositions of Place (20 minutes)

- Show pictures of a classroom or house. Point to different objects and ask "Where is the...?" Students will answer (e.g., "The pen is on the desk").

- List the prepositions used (**in**, **on**, **under**, **behind**, **at**, **through** etc.) on the board.
- Play a guessing game. Show pictures with objects in different locations and have students ask questions using "Where is...?" to guess the location.
- Introduce the concept of "at" for specific locations (e.g., at the bus stop, at work).

  ------7min interactive activity Ispy

3. Prepositions of Manner (15 minutes)

- Show pictures depicting actions (running, jumping, sitting). Ask students how the person/object is performing the action.
- How to use the preposition “with” In English to describe additional information about an action.
- Examples, “running **with** a baby” “Drinking **from** a water bottle” “eating **with** a fork” “walking around the pole” “walking **through** the door”

English phrase that they’ve never heard before: “going through it” = having a hard/difficult experience. For example: Sally’s boyfriend broke up with her and she’s crying and sad. She is “going through it”

- Game: have a sharades like game. One student is given a secret prompt that the student must guess the correct verb and preposition to describe what the person is doing.
- Walking around the board. Eating with a fork. Laughing with friends, turning the television off.

4. Prepositions of Time (15 minutes)

- Write common time expressions on the board (e.g., in the morning, at night, on Monday, etc.).
- Ask students when they typically do certain activities (e.g., "When do you eat breakfast?"). They will respond using time prepositions. “I eat breakfast **in** the mornings, I go to work **on** Tuesdays”
- “What are you doing **after** class?”

  Maybe…

- Introduce the concept of "for" and "since" for durations (e.g., I've lived here for 5 years, I've been studying English since January).

5. Interactive Activity (10 minutes)

Create an animal activity!

----------have students choose an animal and start describing its habitat and daily routine.

OR

- Divide the class into pairs.
- Distribute sentence strips with blanks for prepositions (place, manner, and time). Examples:
    - I go to the gym *(at)* night.
    - The cat is sleeping *(under)* the bed.
    - She walked *(slowly)* down the street.
- Students take turns completing the sentences with the correct prepositions.
- Pairs then share their completed sentences with the class, explaining their choices.

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

- Briefly review the different types of prepositions and their functions.
- Encourage students to practice using prepositions in their everyday conversations and writing.

Extension Activities:

- Students can create their own sentences or short stories using prepositions of place, manner, and time.
- Play a "Simon Says" game with instructions that involve prepositions (e.g., Simon says touch your head slowly).

Planning in advance:

In addition, friends, the table below is the lesson schedule I personally made for the intermediate class I taught. Please notice how the concepts build upon one another, review days, and specific activities; these were laid out with flexibility in mind but were extremely helpful for lesson preparation. You can steal this or use it as a template to build your own.

Date	**Lesson Content**
July 9	Taught comparatives and superlatives; introduced prepositions through a drawing (up, down, on, above, below, in).
July 11	Continue teaching prepositions of time, manner, and location.
July 16	Pronouns.
July 18	Articles and plurality; sentence subject and predicate (SVO). Students identify subject and object in their own sentences based on pictures or observations.
July 23	Review day / assessment: oral group assessment covering comparatives, superlatives, prepositions, pronouns, articles, plurality. Activity: storytelling and student oral summaries using question prompts.
July 25	Auxiliary verbs and BE verbs.
July 30	BE verbs and verb tense. Timeline activity: past tense with examples.
August 1	BE verbs and verb tense: present tense with examples; past tense review; articles and plurality review.
August 6	BE verbs and verb tense: future tense and present tense review; prepositions review.
August 8	Project day: students share about their favorite place they've ever been.

August 13	Verb aspect: -ing, -ed, or simple verbs. Timeline activity.
August 15	Oral exam: time-travel story. Students answer comprehension questions throughout the story or take notes and give a guided summary.
August 20	Sentence clauses and conjunctions: independent and dependent clauses.
August 22	Adverbs and adverbial clauses; review sentence clauses.
August 27	Adjectives and relative clauses; review sentence clauses.
August 29	Class Party??

Conclusion

The final class I taught at the community center in Puerto Vallarta was a cultural exchange. Two of the most consistent ladies in my group wanted to teach me how to make Tortillas and I gladly accepted their offer. In my teacher brain however, I was plotting to use the Tortilla party as an opportunity as an interactive English lesson; spoiler, it worked splendidly. We made tortillas and gorditas for everyone, and my class was applying the English we'd learned while making a meal together. They also gave me opportunity to practice Spanish, and through this exchange I realized that *giving and receiving* is the core of language learning. Learning happens somewhere between the receiving of comprehensible input and giving learned output, and this is best shared in community.

After the completion of this project, I've concluded that a vibrant language learning experience should be built upon student interaction and community building. Luckily, I'm not original in this thinking; many researchers and educators have developed theories and methods pertaining to community learning. I'm delighted to benefit from their work, and it's valuable to continue learning about SLA, especially for teachers. The

continuation of learning is what inspires new ideas, solutions to better old ones, or confirms a teaching practice as just fine. This project ultimately taught me to be a learner of whatever I do—especially in teaching—and because of my learning, I have something to give.

Glossary

L2: Second language.

SLA: Second Language Acquisition.

A Social Psychological Perspective: Gardner's perspective is that the social variables, and a learner's disposition toward them, create motivation to 'join' target language speakers.

Social Cognitive Approach: States that language learning is a participation between a learner's mind, body, and the world as they interact in specific language learning situations.

Social Interactionist Approach: Researchers sought to demonstrate how language learning takes place in the social interactions a learner has with others learning or speaking the target language. Social participation is key in this theory, and it pairs with Interaction Hypothesis which states that social interaction builds an interlanguage through triggering changes within the mind.

Interaction Hypothesis: Claims that the 'negotiation of meaning' a learner undergoes to process/make meaningful connections in their L2 interlanguage occurs during interaction with the target language and its speakers (Ellis 2019). These interactions give the learner a chance to make corrective changes to their language production and understanding as they receive comprehensible input through interaction.

Social Identity Approach: This approach involves examining the role of a learner's social identity in their "right to speak" ... social identity is defined as "the relationship between an individual and the larger social world", i.e. family, friends, workplaces, social services, etc. (Ellis 2019). This theory delves into language learning according to an individual's identity within their context.

Formal Language Learning VS Informal language learning: Formal language learning is best described as classroom settings in which students receive direct (or indirect) instruction on the target language. Informal language learning can be described as language learning outside the classroom, in 'non-instructed' contexts.

Language Socialization: defined by researchers Schieffelin and Ochs as language learners "in a community are socialized both to the language forms and through the language according to the culture in which its speakers belong to" (Ellis 2019). Furthermore, this is another way of describing language emersion, a learner learns the language through using it and can communicate with the community because they use the language.

Complex Dynamic System Approach: as defined by linguist Patrica Duff, a Complex Dynamic System Approach to language learning accounts for the whole learner. "… within cultural activity settings conceptualize the social as inseparable from the individual learner's embodied cognitive and emotional functioning. Thus, many theoretical approaches without the word "social" in their nomenclature are also considered social or social cognitive by their proponents" (Duff 2019).

Attribution theory: This theory refers to the subjective/relative reasons learners perceive their past failures and successes, and this affects the motivational disposition of a learner (Krashen 2009).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation theory: Intrinsic motivation refers to a learner's self-generated interest (likely through exposure of some sort) to learn the target language—it is closely related to Self Determination theory. Extrinsic Motivation refers to motivational factors outside of the learner that they adhere to, for example, a language learning requirement at a educational institution.

Self- determination theory: A major theory of motivation and personality that focuses on language learning choices learners make that are not influenced by external factors, and therefore 'self-determined'. In terms of motivation within SLA, much of this theory stems from Intrinsic motivation (Ellis 2019).

Natural Order Hypothesis: In which certain grammatical structures in the L2 are learned in a predictable order. There is no 100% accuracy with this hypothesis, but there are

clear patterns in research that indicate a natural order in both child and adult language learning. (Krashen 2009.)

CAF Trade-off: This describes the theory that a learner cannot equally focus on complexity, accuracy, and fluency at once while language learning (Ellis 2019). If the learner is focusing on complexity in their language studies, then the accuracy and fluency of their production will lower and same goes for accuracy and fluency. Focusing on one will entail the other two lowering.

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