

ARTICLES REVIEW

“Story Time”

by Yunlin Shi and Stephen Krashen in www.languagemagazine.com July 2018

“Becoming a Dragon: Progress in English as a Second Language through Narrow Free Voluntary Reading”

by Kyung-Sook Cho and Stephen Krashen, originally appeared in *The California Reader*, 29(1), 1995, pp.9-10. www.californias.org/tcr/tcr_htm

“The Korean’s English Acquisition, and the Best Method to Master a Foreign Language, Guaranteed” in

<http://askakorean.blogspot.com/2010/01/koreans-english-acquisition-and-best.html>

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OVERVIEW

Readers will find the article review in this issue non-typical, as it is a review of three separate articles on the same subject. It is hoped that looking at the subject from different angles will result in more insight and a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.

These three articles all deal with acquiring a second language, but each article is looking at the topic through a different case, with differences in age, background, environment, and personality, just to name a few. The first two articles are research articles utilizing the Natural Approach of Language Acquisition by Stephen Krashen and Tracy D. Terrell, first introduced in 1980s. Krashen was and has been a prominent leader in language acquisition, ESL and EFL alike. Krashen is also noted as a renowned reading specialist.

To highlight some key points of Krashen’s natural approach to language acquisition, Krashen differentiates ‘acquisition’ from ‘learning’ and he believes

adults can acquire language like children acquire their first language. Learning is different from acquisition in a way that learning is conscious about grammar (Krashen, 1995, p.18) while in acquisition, grammar is internalized unconsciously. The natural approach calls for *comprehensible input* and learners are *not forced to speak* until they are ready and speech errors are not corrected if they do not interfere with communication.

The third article, on the other hand, presents another view, quite distinct from the first two. The author of this article is a young Korean American who moved to the U.S. with family at the age of 16, entering grade 10 with non-functional English. It only took him two years to master English, and when in his senior year, was appointed as assistant editor of the high school newsletter. In 2010, four years later, he created an English blog, a popular social media in this millennium, where he posted this article to narrate how he had made such rapid progress. Compared with the giant Krashen, the author is relatively

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anonymous but his success story in English language learning is astonishing and worth exploring. His method? Rote memorization!

REVIEWS

Article 1: Story Time depicts two kindergarten children, George and Michael. Both acquiring English as a second language. George was born in China, and came to the U.S. at the age of four while Michael was born and grew up in a Spanish-speaking household in Florida. It was obvious that George was far more proficient in English than Michael. In both cases, the parents did not speak English with their children. However, the parents of George had read stories to him in English since he was a baby, for about 8 hours per week. Both boys had ample opportunity to expose themselves to television and videos. Through comparison between the two boys, Krashen and his co-researcher clearly showed the effectiveness of storytelling, the initial phase of the Natural Approach of Language Acquisition.

Article 2: Becoming a Dragon details the case of Mi-ae, a 30-year old Korean female who came to Los Angeles. She has been living in the U.S. for five years and is reported to have difficulty understanding native speakers and television. She was afraid of answering phone calls and would try to avoid speaking with native speakers. She attended an English class but soon dropped out after six months, as the teacher over-focused on speaking. Krashen introduced ‘narrow reading’ to her as an experimental study project. Mi-ae was one of four subjects. It was confirmed that adults can enhance their second language skills from narrow reading (reading the works of one author or a few authors or in one genre, e.g. a series). Mi-ae read 8 books in 1 month from Bantam’s Sweet Valley Kids series, a series of short novels written at secondary level of difficulty. The study was carried out over a period of 7 ½ months. Mi-ae’s English improved

dramatically. Friends and acquaintances observed her speaking at length in phone calls and general conversation, in several every topics. Her English proficiency improved remarkably.

Article 3: The Korean’s English Acquisition is a case of a 16 year old Korean, not a genius (an A- minus student in Korea) who came to America with no practical English. He attended grade 10, second term in a high school in California and could not understand what the teacher was saying. For half of the 2.5 years he attended high school there, he could not speak English. He made up his mind to learn English in his own way—rote learning—a method he was accustomed to from the regular primary and middle schools he had studied at in Korea. He bought empty cards and wrote every word in sight from his homework and SAT diagnostic test. Within a year, he increased his vocabulary dramatically and by the time he graduated grade 12, he had memorized more than 30,000 words, a decent amount for a native speaker. He also revealed his strategies for reading and speaking. In just two years, he moved from basic skills to college-level English skills and had become the assistant editor of his competitive high school newsletter.

A few contrasting observations can be drawn from these three articles. First, in the natural approach, the target language is acquired with pleasure in both cases: George, who enjoyed storytelling by his parents and thus absorbed the language unconsciously and Mi-ae who had so much pleasure from reading the series that she would read it any moment she could. Thus, the language acquisition was done voluntarily and continuously. For the Korean teenager, on the other hand, his view in learning a language or learning anything is essentially a serious task which requires hard work. In his view, active learning is maximum effort of the learner. To him, one can hardly learn from passively sitting around listening to people talking and effortlessly memorizing words and sentences

heard. Enjoyment he assured will surely come after success. The Korean presents his learning model on the web and concludes two strong factors to move from basic to advanced levels of proficiency: motivation and rote memorization. He emphasized his utmost motivation to learn English as he knew that his father left all good things in Korea to settle in America and he could not fail him. It was a matter of life or death, as he put it.

Secondly, while the first two articles represent ‘the comprehensible input’, an initial phase of Krashen’s natural approach; the third article tackled all words and sentences he did not understand, looking them up in the dictionary and writing the word, its meaning and sample usage.

Third, all these three cases represent different age groups, backgrounds, and proficiency levels in language learning. In Story Time, George was exposed to English through storytelling since he was a baby while this was not the case for Michael. The other two cases, Mi-ae and the Korean, who started her reading at the age of 30, and his rote memorization approach when he was 16, respectively, were apparently at low to mid-beginner level from their Korean education. Mi-ae reportedly was a pleasure reader in Korean but she had not read any books in English while living in the U.S. as she felt that reading in English would be painful. Later in the study, she read 39 books in the series. Mi-ae was given a series written at grade four level.

As for the Korean, as an A minus student he could have been a mid or high beginner in English, high enough to continue to study independently on his own.

CONCLUSION

Despite being relatively short in length compared with books, reading these three articles or even one of them will be a good starting point for the reader, or any serious English learner who wishes to make progress in learning English. Find a way that sounds

suitable to your learning style and try it. It could also be helpful for parents to help their child or children to learn English naturally through bedtime stories. With the increasing demand for global communication in the modern world, English has become a must for everyone who does not want to be left behind. Not just the general public, but also English professionals, should find these three articles interesting and a testament to their theoretical standpoint as well.