*1st Essay : English Learning Experience*

*Wonjun Yoo*

*Prof. Ben*

For some, learning language may come very easily and naturally. I have met few who are trilingual and most of them either have lived in different countries throughout their lives or grew up with parents who were able to speak at least two languages. They grew up in cultural-environment where they had to speak a couple of different languages except their mother language, and for them “the art of learning language” was an automatic survival practice as young kids. It is proven that when it comes to learning language, the earlier, the better. I personally have spent many years studying English and I would not hesitate to say it was a process of constant struggle. What is funny is that I do not mind struggling and am very much willing to learn through this struggle, for learning a language is nothing, but a pleasant struggle. So far, my experience of learning English has been a positive and successful one.

When I first became a high school student in the United States in 2001, my English was very poor. My English vocabularies were limited and so was comprehension. I was speaking something, but my friends had enormous trouble understanding my English; in turn, I was helpless and discouraged often. Communication was rare and it often turned into mime or gestures. Participating class with my classmates was virtually impossible because I could not keep up with reading, discussing topics and many other aspects of classroom learning activities. To make long story short, I lacked *basic language skills.* I was a *Beginner* who could function minimally, if at all, in English. Fortunately, the school decided to run an ESL program for me and I spent most of my time in a room called resource room where I had my personal tutors. From then on, I was able to really grasp and feel tangible value and characteristics of English.

Although I was not an adult learner when I first became an international student, I recall that I was an *autonomous and self-directed* student who, at that time, did not have a specific goal in life, but was certainly desperate to learn and speak English. As I was the only international student in my high school, the environment allowed me to experience a total *immersion* in English. Even when I went to college, I again was the only Korean student, and continued to experience the total immersion in English. Through my personal experience over the last six years of being totally immersed in English-speaking environment, I have become a firm believer that there is no better and ideal way of learning a language than an absolute immersion in whatever target language you are aiming.

My English improved slowly, but consistently. While basic language skills were automatically being developed, my understanding of American culture and its values also grew. Throughout my English development, I also have come to know good teachers with whom I still keep in touch. When I decided to take the TESOL course, I immediately thought of one teacher I respected. She was both great communicator and experienced educator. Although she was very different in character, teaching style and teaching field compared with many brilliant and captivating professors I met in college and university, she was the one who was *Explainer, Involver and Enabler.*

Sis. Karen was the first ESL teacher when I became a high school student in the United States. When we first met, we had difficult time communicating. There was no language we both could speak. I was there to learn English and she was there to teach the language, but whatever we spoke, nothing really worked because the language she was using was alien to me. Nothing was vivid. Nothing was helping. However, we both knew that we were trying our best as a teacher and as a student. That connection, the human connection, encouraged me and inspired me so much that I really wanted to learn English so I could communicate with her. She would explain words and often allowed me to use my dictionary to find out the meanings of words myself. This constant “looking up the dictionary” routine halted the tutoring session minute by minute, but she was patient and accepted as many questions as I asked. When school work burdened me too much, she would suggest that we “free-talk”. This was the best time because this allowed me to speak up and tell her whatever in my mind. She would hand over the entire control of the session to me and let me tell her about Korea and difficulties I was having at that time. Her teaching style was always balanced and I, as a foreign student, could feel the art of teaching. If I ever get a chance to teach one student or two at a time, Sis. Karen would be my role model.

For a long time, I have been studying English and I still strive to speak, read and write English better. I am glad to say that my pure interest in English is still lively and I wish to bring this interest and tirelessly continuing effort to better my English into education field as I wish to benefit and assist others through my previous experience and struggle in learning English. Throughout the TESOL course I expect to learn many useful, practical and hands-on teaching methodologies, and I wish to implement, tweak and adapt those to my students once I become a teacher.