**My successful experience of acquiring Japanese**

**By Mary Yuh**

 When I first went to Japan in the year of 2007, I did not know any Japanese. Thus, I had to begin by learning the very basic Japanese such as ‘Hiragana’ and ‘Katagana’. Though it was the fundamental Japanese, it was very difficult for me in the beginning. It took me almost a week to just memorize the ‘basic’ Japanese. To me, Japanese looked very alien especially ‘Katagana’ and ‘Kanji’. In other words, some of the Japanese letters confused me a lot and made me to stress. That is the reason I decided not to memorize Japanese but use the ‘natural’ method to acquire Japanese language. To think back, I used the following four methods in learning Japanese language; *trial and error, by experience, by preparing for tests and by trying to speak with many locals.*

First and foremost, trial and error method was the most useful and effective when learning language. ‘Learning naturally’ usually does not give too much stress and don’t put too much pressure. Also, by adopting this method, one can know how to use the vocabulary learnt. When I was about 12, I first began learning English in Australia. At that time, I did not know any English even the basic phrases. However, I was very young and thus it was easy for me to make friends. When I did not know how to speak, I would use gestures to explain myself and then my friends would help me learn the new vocabulary. However, when I was learning Japanese, this method did not work that well as I was already at University. Thus, it was more of a ‘trial and error’ method that I used. In other words, I was ‘involver’: I was able to interact with many locals and learnt by speaking and doing actual activities. Rather than being ‘passive learner’, I was ‘active learner’ in that it was both way communication between learner and teacher. I can say that my friends were my great teachers in this aspect. Because the learning process was dynamic and fun, I was interested in learning Japanese and was able to grab the basic of the language.

In addition, I thought learning language effectively requires the process of learning by experience. To put it differently, I can say that it was sort of ‘enabler’ method. I was engaging in many different part time jobs in Japanese restaurants, hotels and schools. By working together with both international students and Japanese students, I was able to grab the ‘real Japanese’ that locals used in an en everyday basis. In other words, I learnt by ‘peer teaching’ through experience. As learnt in TESOL class, in this kind of setting, teacher’s role is very simple; just to provide the atmosphere of the learning and allow a room for student’s discussion. Likewise, I was given natural environment in which I could discuss and learn by active discussion among Japanese peers. This method was very powerful as I could learn fast and never forget what was learnt.

Next, I also learnt Japanese language quite effectively by preparing for tests. Though natural method is recommended when learning a language, some pressure is necessary. I had to take Japanese proficiency tests and many level tests as well as presenting power point to other students all in Japanese to pass my University. Thus, I memorized lots of vocabulary, sentences and practiced so many times that I almost remembered the whole speech. In other words, this is kind of adopting ‘explainer method’; based on Japanese lecture, I acquired knowledge and self-taught myself. Along with the lecture and review, I also did numerous practices so that the knowledge acquired won’t be forgotten.

 Last, I tried to speak with many locals as possible so that I can understand the concepts and golden rule of Japanese. In other words, I wanted to know some useful phrases that locals use, idioms and vocabularies so that I sounded more natural and fluent. I believe speaking is the most important aspect when it comes to learning a language. By listening to local Japanese people, speaking skills also improved tremendously. I mainly focused on listening to Japanese people so that I can speak ‘real Japanese’. Also, when I made mistake, I asked locals to fix the error for me so that I do not make the same mistake again and learn from my mistake. In other words, learning from locals can be also said that it is kind of ‘interactive method’ as it involves the learner and requires room for debate and discussion.

To conclude, I used four different methods such as *trial and error, by experience, by preparing for tests and by trying to speak with many locals.* All of these methods were useful in learning Japanese language. If I had only focused on one method, learning Japanese won’t be of successful experience. I believe it is very necessary to well-balance different methods when learning language. Most importantly, having ‘confidence’ and ‘passion’ is important when acquiring second language. Many people are often shy or worried about making mistake. However, this is not necessary as we learn from our mistakes. Thus, in order to effectively learn a new language, being ‘self-confident’ and having powerful ‘passion’ is a must! Along with these criteria, one should carefully use various methods such as trial and error, learning from experience, learning from preparation of tests and by speaking with the locals so that they can effectively learn a new language. I hope my experience of learning English as well as Japanese would come in handy as I learn TESOL. Furthermore, I also hope that my experience along with the new knowledge gained by taking this course would help me when I start teaching students.

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