*Give your experience of learning English and explain how it might affect how you will teach English in the future.*

**Helping Students to Learn a Language I Naturally Acquired**

I was born in South Korea, but moved to England when I was three years old. I was unable to speak English until I started attending primary school at the age of five years old. Though my first language was technically Korean, I quickly lost fluency and became increasingly comfortable with English. I started relating to the world around me in English and held only onto the most rudimental expressions in Korean. Since I could only practice Korean at home, English became my primary mode of relating with others and to my own thought processes.

As with all young children, however, I did have to learn the English language as an orthographical written system. I remember learning phonics at a young age through constant repetition and image association; similar to what Jim Scrivener described as the audio-lingual method (31). Based on my elementary grasp of phonics, I remember connecting letters into words. At the time, my teachers focused more on raising self-confidence and fluency rather than accuracy. They encouraged the class to write words based on what they could hear and gave minimal corrections. Yet, I do remember my teacher in Year 2 correcting my spelling of castle as ‘carsle,’ which has left an indelible memory.

The British education system strongly emphasizes intensive reading at a young age. I was an avid reader and frequently went to public libraries where I devoured book after book. I naturally acquired English through constant exposure and the need to practice all my receptive and productive language skills. I did study the basic components of grammar, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns and prepositions, but they were merely classifications of principles that I was already instinctively familiar with.

Over the past six months while teaching English, I found it very helpful to recall how I acquired English as my first language to teach Korean elementary school students. Especially with younger children, I emphasized the different phonological sounds in English vocabulary words. I encourage them to try to write and memorize the words based on their own independent use of phonics. I would help them pronounce the different letters in English words. For the higher-level students, I also incorporated questions about the grammatical categories of certain words. For example, if the word ‘exaggerate’ occurred in their textbook, I would help them transfer that word into a noun (‘exaggeration’) and make sentences for each form (e.g.: ‘I exaggerated my story,’ ‘My story was an exaggeration’). In this case, I employed the grammatical language system with the productive language skills to ultimately help the students expand their lexical range.

Arriving in Korea and improving my grasp of Korean has also helped me understand how people acquire a secondary language. I have the benefit of being constantly exposed to Korean, which demands me to use all my language skills. However, I also “learn” Korean through conscious effort by accumulating vocabulary words and testing them in real-life situations (Stephen Krashen). The way I train myself to expand my Korean lexis influenced me in how I taught my students. As I studied alone, I would write the Korean words, the English definition, example sentences, say them out loud and then find ways to use them in day-to-day situations. (However, a crucial difference I have discovered between learning Korean and English words is that while Korean is a phonetically-devised orthographical system, English is not consistently so. There are often letters in English words that are ‘silent’ and it is not always possible to ‘hear’ the sound and distribution of emphasis in English words merely by looking at them. Consequently, I have found it necessary to encourage students to speak and repeat the English words rather than merely to write them down.)

With respect to both English and Korean, I have had the benefit of living in a country where it was the primary mode of communication. It took much less effort, or what Krashen would describe as ‘conscious learning,’ to gain fluency in the language. This is something that I need to struggle to understand with my own students. I have an impatient personality and often felt that I needed to slow the pace of my classes down. I found it difficult to understand why some students couldn’t grasp certain elements of the language or follow the speed of my class. My sociable personality, however, meant that my students became very strong in the language skills of speaking and listening. I believe that I will need to balance a class environment where English naturally occurs *with* patience and understanding. My students will not have the same privilege I have had of being constantly exposed to the language on a daily basis. In fact, their practice time will be limited to the classes and, in some ways, I will always have to help them readjust to re-using the language each time they enter the class.