Keon Harn

TESOL 103

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

English is my native language and learned it as just as any person would learn theirs. To be a little bit more specific, I learned both Korean and English as a child. Even though I was living in America, coming from a Korean descent, my parents taught me Korean as well. It was more like I acquired them through constant listening and speaking instead of actually learning them with a text book. I basically learned English first by listening to what my parents told me and gradually improved my speaking skills. As I attended school, I learned more about the vocabulary and the meaning of it as well as the spelling of the word. Eventually, I did learn grammer to improve my writing skills but that’s after learning the basics. Speaking and listening was an unavoidable part of everyday life and this is the first thing anybody should learn before anything else. Later on in the future, I’d like to teach students in Korea on how to acquire listening first and then learn speaking.

I believe listening is the first step in learning English. In Korea, most students at a young age learn the abc’s and the vocabulary of many words. Not much different from children that live in America. The only difference is that in Korea, they are not fond of English at a young age. It is not their native language. I learned English by listening to parents or at school as they would in Korean. When I was young, teachers used to watch short movies or animations in class and used to make a play. We would watch the film and have conversations. This helped me improve my listening skills a bit more. If I’m given the opportunity to teach, I would teach the students by making them become familiar with English through repetitive listening. It’s better and faster to learn at a young age but for older students, it might take a while. As I got older, my ability to speak Korean decreased rapidly and this was due to the English speaking environment. I barely spoke a word of Korean but the interesting part was that I had no problem understanding it. Of course, I had difficulties writing it, let alone my name. But I barely had any problems listening to it. Listening skills were there in my head and I remembered them at a young age.

Speaking came naturally to me at a young age and I was bilingual in both Korean and English. I didn’t have any problems until I stopped using Korean at some point. I never spoke a word of Korean and I started to speak only English whether it was in school or at home. Because of the environment, I started to speak English everywhere I went and gradually improved as I went up a grade. Now that I think about it, the more you constantly speak and maintain the fluency in English, the better you get. At some point, I stopped using Korean and I forgot how to say anything. I believe in order to maintain several languages, you must be able practice all of them so you don’t forget. These days, students in Korea learn to speak English at a very young age. The problem is it’s not continuous. Their pronunciation would be native and they may learn at school or at and English academy but after an hour or so they start to speak in Korean. As they get older, they start to study grammer and when they get into college, that’s when students start to realize it’s too late for speaking another language. Well, it’s never too late to learn though it would take a significant amount of time. I remember as a child, I spoke broken English but through practice I eventually got better. I feel like there isn’t much the teacher can do here but to encourage the student to have a conversation or at least try to have one even though he/she is incorrect but through practice, it’s only a matter of time the student will overcome.

To wrap this up, no one is perfect. 8 years ago I came to Korea and learned Korean again from the start. I improved my listening skills a bit more by listening to the radio, television and by communicating with one another. When you start to communicate, that’s when you start to speak whatever is on your mind. For me, you learn the basics of language more from speaking and listening than you do with reading and writing. To improve listening skills for the students, repetitive listening is required through visual activities and speaking through constant conversations with one another. I can’t remember exactly how I learned English but these days, students tend to learn English because they have to, not because they want to. In the future, I prefer the opposite.