Essay 1: My foreign language learning experience

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My first experience of learning foreign language goes a; long way back into my early past.

I was in my 1st year in the middle school as I met English for the first time. The language seemed very strange in every aspect. The letters were strange and the pronunciation felt like a tongue twister. Moreover, the pronunciation of my teacher who himself learned English from a Japanese teacher was very terrible. The Japanese is notorious for their bad English pronunciation because they have very few and limited vowels. And since my teacher was a very old traditional man, we had to learn English only by drill. He was neither an explainer nor an involver or an enabler. He was only an old and outdated traditional teacher who had no idea of a method. We had to learn vocabulary and memorize their meanings and had to translate by using of grammar. The only method which we used was ‘the grammar translation’. Also, at that time, there were almost none learning devices such as audio-visual equipments, so it was impossible for us to gain extra help besides from school. What we had was only a small dictionary, and even not everybody had one because it was expensive. But those phenomena were not teacher’s fault. It was just more or less ‘normal’ in that time.

After middle school, I entered high school and I began to learn a new foreign language as second foreign language. It was German. In comparison with English, German was more difficult, especially the grammar. To begin, we had to memorize the definite and indefinite article of nouns. There were three different nouns with grammatical genders, and the nouns were divided into male, female and neutral nouns too. All the three nouns had different articles according to each case. We had to make sentences based on these rules. Our teacher, then, made us read out our sentences in class, and told us to use them in a conversation with our partners. I probably used many wrong sentences, but it was important that we actually spoke in German and that we had fun. Although German was more difficult than English, I liked German more. Also the teacher encouraged us and motivated us to learn with joy. He was always friendly and understood our concerns.

By the time I graduated high school, I was able to make a small talk in German. However, in English, I could only read books and understand them if they were not too difficult. But a communication in English was still very difficult and almost impossible.

After graduation of university, I went to Germany to study further. For the first year I had to learn German and I had to pass a test, in order to indicate that I’m linguistically able to study at a German University. In this time, I learned German in many interesting ways: Grammar, discussion about a current theme, more free conversation, writing a small text in free atmosphere etc. Also we had to learn in four language skills which were speaking, hearing, reading and writing. I didn’t know which teaching methods the teachers had applied, but they worked for me just right. Also, in this time, I developed my own learning method. When I learn first a word, I tried to use it in a proper context. Also I learned a word, not separately from its context, but always in and with context. By doing so, I could memorize the words easily and could finally get to use them in real life!

The current environment in which we can learn foreign language is completely different from the time I had. These days, we have many well designed books, audio-visual materials, foreign films and native speaker teachers. Moreover, we can go abroad to learn a new language without any restrictions. What we had dreamed of 50 years ago has become now a reality!

In conclusion, there is no royal road to learn a foreign language. Of course it is important to meet a great teacher and use various learning materials. However, it is most important that one finds the ‘best method’ for himself. In that way, we can maximize our abilities and became to understand the true joy of learning a new language.