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My experience of L2 Acquisition – a Success or Failure?

Before I moved to Canada, the subject that gave me the hardest time was English because of how mechanical the classes were. I was told to memorize thousands of sophisticated vocabulary and complex grammatical rules for class exercises and exams, but I do not remember having a single proper conversation in English with any of my teachers. After having learned about Krashen’s Acquisition-learning hypothesis—which distinguishes **acquisition** from learning **as an intuitive and subconscious acceptance of knowledge**—I now understand that a learning-focused approach was the reason for the failures of my English education in Korea. On the other hand, the **experiential learning** opportunities I gained through establishing good **rapport** and being around teachers who were **enablers** allowed me to enjoy a **successful L2 acquisition experience** in Canada.

When I first arrived in Edmonton, I was just **a high beginner**. Luckily, I spent my first three years in Canada at a homestay that welcomed me as family. The host family had an elderly couple and her son, all naturally sociable people. In terms of the **Input Hypothesis**, they helped me take the first steps of L2 acquisition through the consistent **comprehensible** **input** they gave me during our everyday interactions. For example, I learned the expression “I’m off to work” from their morning greetings, which confused me in the beginning because I had only heard of “I am going to work” from studying grammar back in Korea. Another great example was our first Christmas together, when my host family taught me a lot of cultural terms such as holiday greetings and names of holiday dishes that I had never saw before in my textbooks. In terms of teaching styles, they were **the enabler,** being knowledgeable about the subject, creating a learning environment that made me enjoy the process of acquisition, but not being overly involved in my learning process.

Meanwhile, I took English classes at ELTC, a small ESL academy that had **high beginner**-level students from all across the world. Because of the linguistic ability of its students, the academy used a textbook-based education that focused on grammar, listening and speaking skills. I wasafraid of speaking at first because I didn’t want people to think I used incorrect English. Looking back, I was a **rule-former**, a slow, hesitant speaker who is concerned about making errors.Fortunately, our class tutor Christine ran a **modern classroom**, acting as our **manager** more than our instructor. She involved us as **active participants** by using a lot of **activities** **and group work** such as word puzzles and icebreakers. She also made sure to involve her students outside of class by taking us to group dinners and teaching us the names of different foods. I am confident that Christine’s teaching methods helped my L2 acquisition more than any textbook I studied at ELTC.

I moved on to Grant MacEwan college after ELTC, where I had a similar experience. I took a lot of courses in early learning and child care, but the professor held a very **traditional classroom** filled with **passive students**. She was an **explainer** who gave lectures and expected assignments from students. I learned a lot of child care theories in these classes, but they did not help my L2 acquisition at all.

What actually helped my L2 acquisition more was my part-time job at Kernels Popcorn. Taking orders from customers helped me focus on my listening abilities. For example, I remember one customer once asked for buttered popcorn on top with ketchup on the bottom, but I wasn’t familiar with the expressions and mixed up the order. Though he was nice and kindly explained to me what he wanted, I never wanted to get another order wrong. After that day, my part-time job became **an internally motivated, self-directed learning experience**. It helped me focus on learning everyday English.

Overall, my experiences in Canada helped me understand how valuable **experiential learning**, **good rapport** and an **enabler** teaching style are for L2 acquisition. Outside of Christine’s class, most of the positive influences on my L2 acquisition were from everyday interactions, and the people I talked to were **enablers** who helped me feel more confident in my English skills. Going forward, I want to teach in a way that my future students can see their classroom as a part of their everyday life. Just as everyone else did for me, I want to help them feel comfortable being active and confident speakers of English.

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