



This is a graded discussion: 10 points possible

due Jan 31

## Week 1 Questions and Graded Discussion

15 87

### Week 1 Questions

Choose two questions to answer:

1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?

3. Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?

Due: January 31, 2021.

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[Lisa Bradbury \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949)

Jan 23, 2021



1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

Personally, my experience with second language learning was successful because I was highly motivated to learn it. While living and working in Cairo, Egypt, I attended many Arabic classes and was able to practice on a daily basis for two years. Most of my friends were Arabs who did not know English at all or just a little. Most of my English speaking friends found the language difficult and so they relied on me to be the translator. According to John H. Schumann in the "Interactional Instinct, The Evolution and Acquisition of Language" (2009),

there is an 'interactional instinct' which we are born with; a natural tendency to attach and bond with our caregiver. This is the motivation for our first language learning. He states that motivation for the second language acquisition varies. After much study of the brain and neurobiology, he concludes that there are two motivations. One is integrative (first language learning), which is more practical, and the other is instrumental (second language learning). Most times in second language learning, there is a mixture of both motivations. For me, it was a mixture of both.

2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?

In order to learn a second language, first and foremost, the motivation must be there. Without it, language learning will not take place. It also helps if you have a teacher who makes learning fun and interesting. As teachers of ESL, we must know our students well, be creative, exciting and make learning fun. We need students to be motivated and we must give them good reasons for learning the language. Of course, it helps tremendously if they come already motivated but it is the job of the teacher to create the atmosphere in the classroom that is conducive to learning.

Edited by [Lisa Bradbury \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949) on Jan 23 at 2:13pm

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 24, 2021

Hi Lisa,

It is impressive that you learned Arabic in 2 years! Although you were able to practice Arabic on a daily basis when you were in Cairo, I know through my personal experience, it is hard to acquire a second language in a relatively short period of time once you become an adult.

The two types of motivation for the second language acquisition was interesting. It is true that to learn a second language, having motivation is critical. I teach Japanese at a high school currently and some students are not motivated to learn. The only reason that they are placed in my class is that their parents told them to, but they are not even interested in learning Japanese. When students are not interested or motivated, it is extremely hard for them to learn. I try to support them by introducing the benefits of learning a second language as well as movies, songs, or pop culture so that they will start being interested in

the language. However, I haven't found an effective way to motivate them yet, and I'm still looking for a better way to encourage them.

Thank you for sharing the great idea!

Chiaki

Edited by [Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607) on Jan 24 at 5:18pm

[← Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731)

Jan 29, 2021

Chiaki, The lack of motivation that you encounter with your students of Japanese appears with ESL students, particularly when teaching abroad and parents or schools systems require students to learn English. You mentioned some fun activities that definitely help, but maybe setting some small goals and rewarding students for achieving the may also help.

[← Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Viktorija, piggying back on Chiaki's comment on Lisa's experience, your suggestion about setting some small goals and rewarding students for achieving rings so true. Duolingo's huge success owing to its gamification aspect comes to my mind. Breaking up lessons into small, manageable chunks, turning it into a game that you advance through skills, creating a point system with rewards for streaks, and the optional use of leaderboards to create engagement for the competitive types of learners, all create the effect of what you suggested. TESOL teachers can learn a lot from there!

Edited by [Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) on Jan 31 at 10:25am

[← Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731)

Feb 3, 2021

Yoko, You are right about Duolingo being one example of both chunking and gamification in language learning. I keep my reviewing my Spanish using Duolingo and during the pandemic my husband started learning French using the same app. He is very competitive and it works great for him - when he gets a message that he's dropped below the place he was holding, he gets back to learning again. On the other hand, I am making Duolingo happy by responding to their "take five minutes a day".

← [Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\)](#) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480>)

Jan 25, 2021

Hi Lisa,

Everything you said about motivation is spot on. For me, I lose motivation more times than I can count. It's truly a struggle to learn any new language when it's an option, rather than a necessity. I'm very impressed with how you chose to stick with learning Arabic. So inspiring!

← [Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan](#) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731>)

Jan 29, 2021

Lisa, It is impressive that you learned Arabic in such a short time. However, you had the best possible conditions - you were taking classes and at the same time you were immersed in the language. You were also highly motivated and you were meeting your friends need to be their translator.

← [Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara](#) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025>)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Lisa,

On Question#1, I was struck with the quote you made about the motivation for the first language being a natural, interactional instinct to bond with our caregiver, and your conclusion that most times in second language learning, there is a mixture of both motivations. I could see how your condition that most of your friends were Arabs who did not know English could have triggered your interactional instinct to bond with your

"caregivers," a common trait of the first language learning. I hope you made great and long-lasting friendships there.

It is impressive that you learned Arabic in just two years of immersion. I wanted to have at least advanced beginner to lower intermediate fluency in all the U.N. official languages, but gave up on Arabic and Russian after five lessons with Duolingo :) How much, if any, did you study Arabic before you started living there?

Yoko

← [Reply](#)

○



[https://](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 24, 2021



### Week 1 Questions:

1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

My personal experiences with second language acquisition were not as successful as I hoped when I came to this country 20 years ago. Acquiring English is one of the biggest challenges of my life since I started living here, but it didn't improve as much as my first language skills in all areas.

I came to the U.S. for the first time when I was seven years old, living in Los Angeles. I had no understanding of English when my family moved here from Japan, but my proficiency improved quickly to the level where I was able to understand most of the classroom instruction. Sadly, I forgot most of it when I returned to my country.

After graduating from college in Japan, I moved back to the U.S. I was close to 30 when I started working on teaching credentials. Since I received my education in another language, I felt it was unrealistic for me to study in English at the college level with regular students, even though I took an ESL class for a year.

Comparing my childhood and adulthood experiences, I didn't have any knowledge of the English grammar when I was seven and immersed in an English-speaking environment, but I learned to understand naturally in a short period of time, while my adulthood experience is very different.

As in this week's resources, Language and Linguistics on National Science Foundation, "but most scientists think children and adults learn language differently. While they may not do it as quickly and easily as children seem to, adults *can* learn to speak new languages proficiently.

However, few would be mistaken for a native speaker of the non-native tongue. Childhood may be a critical period for mastering certain aspects of language such as proper pronunciation.”

Although I passed a critical period, I'd like to keep learning as there is a possibility that adult English learners can learn to speak English proficiently according to the article. Also, as a language teacher, I hear from my students that they are too old to acquire a second language, but I should encourage them that it is possible.

2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?

I currently teach at a public high school with a diverse student body in the Los Angeles area. I am a world language teacher, but have EL students in all classes I teach. Although I don't teach an EL class, in terms of teaching a second language, it is the same.

Through my experience, students can best learn a second language when they feel safe and accepted in the classroom. In order to create such a welcoming atmosphere, designing a classroom environment based on culturally responsive teaching is crucial. It benefits all students, but especially for students in EL classes as they may have circumstances that differ from the majority such as: having a different home culture, speaking a different language at home, and may follow different customs or social norms based on their own culture. When their own culture is accepted, they will feel comfortable and can learn a new language well.

Building a good relationship between a teacher and students is another vital element. I believe students learn best when the teacher tries to get to know them personally and to have rapport. When the students feel more comfortable being with a teacher, it is easier for them to use a second language and be less afraid of making mistakes.

← Reply



**Russell Fung (He/Him/His)** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480>)

Jan 25, 2021

Hi Chiaki!

You probably get this question a lot: what kind of students do you get in your high school classroom? I'm confused at why some students would be less motivated when they CHOSE to take the class, given OTHER OPTIONS such as Spanish, French, etc. I remember that most people's motivations for learning Japanese are: 1) To understand popular Japanese media content such as anime, manga, films, J-pop music etc. 2) To travel to Tokyo and live that weeb dream 3) To get in touch with their culture if their family,

friends, relatives, spouses are Japanese. Anyway, thanks for sharing all of your experiences!

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 27, 2021

Hi Russell,

Thank you for the post! I teach two language tracks, the Japanese immersion track, and the foreign language track currently. Half of the students in the immersion track are Japanese Americans or Japanese students, and the rest are regular American students who started taking Japanese when they were in 1st grade. The students in the foreign language track have diverse racial, language, and cultural backgrounds.

As you mentioned, I couldn't understand why some students are unmotivated to learn Japanese although they could have chosen other options. After a while, I realized that their parents forced them to take my immersion track. When I talk to my students in the foreign language track, they tell me all the 3 reasons you shared.

Encouraging students who are unmotivated to learn is not easy, but I'd like to keep on looking for ways to support them.

Best,

Chiaki

← [Reply](#)



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203)

Jan 27, 2021

I appreciated your discussion of the importance of classroom environment in language acquisition, Chiaki. Two things were particularly striking for me: the high value you place on cultural competency and acceptance of differing values, experiences and perspectives and the importance of developing a rapport with learners. Do you feel the latter is valuable specifically because of the affective barrier that may accompany language learning, or is it more of a general principle of teaching/learning for you?

Like Russell, I'm also curious to hear more about the kinds of experiences your students in particular bring to the classroom.

Christian

← Reply



**Chiaki** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607>)

Jan 27, 2021

Hi Christian,

Thank you for your comment! I think for both reasons. I used to think that building a good relationship is necessary for teaching any subject, and I was trying to talk to my students for that reason. However, after learning about affective filter and second language learning acquisition, I try to communicate with my students more to lower the affective filter, especially when I have students who are struggling.

Best,

Chiaki

← Reply



**MaryAnn Wilson** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764>)

Jan 28, 2021

Hi Chiaki,

I am interested to hear what you do specifically to show respect for a student's culture. Do you have them speak about their home culture and language in class?

← Reply



**Chiaki** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607>)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Mary,

Although I teach 100% online currently, I decorate my classroom with posters, artwork, photos, etc, that reflect students' cultural, racial backgrounds. Also, when I teach culture lessons such as a festival, I ask students if they have a similar festival in



their home culture or in their community and have the students share their home culture and heritage.

← [Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731)

Jan 29, 2021

Chiaki, Even though adults in most cases won't achieve that perfect pronunciation, they can achieve native-like proficiency in other skills. In the classroom, adults are considered to be better language learners than children because they are better motivated and they have an idea how a language functions. Positive classroom atmosphere an enthusiastic teacher are elements that work for everyone.

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 31, 2021

Hello professor Lejko-Lacan,

It is encouraging to know that adults are better language learners than children in different ways. Your post reminded me of my first teaching job that I almost forgot. I taught Japanese to adult learners a long time ago. Thinking back now, the students were all motivated to learn more than young students.

← [Reply](#)



[Lisa Bradbury \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949)

Jan 30, 2021

Hi Chiaki,

Your experience in language learning is so remarkable. I think that because you were immersed in English as a child, your brain remembered so much more that you thought which makes it easier for you to pick up the language now that you are an adult, as opposed to someone who was never exposed to the language as a child. I'm not sure how old you were when you lived here but it is said that a child can pick up over 26 languages proficiently before the age of seven. We need to be teaching language in elementary school, not the start of high school or middle school.

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Lisa,

I was 7 when I came to the U.S. for the first time, so as you mentioned, I may have an advantage in learning English over someone who started learning English later in life.

It is amazing that a child can pick up over 26 languages before the age of seven!

Thank you for sharing the interesting information.

← [Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Chiaki,

It's great that you have both childhood and adulthood learning experiences with the same language. As a language teacher, you have a deeper, personal understanding of both types of students.

On Question#2, you suggested culturally responsive teaching where students can learn a second language feeling safe and accepted in the classroom, which I strongly agree with. One of the examples you mentioned was understanding different customs or social norms based on their own culture, which I think is often overlooked in the classroom.

For instance, in East Asia, including Japan where you and I came from, classroom teaching is often focused on lectures and not so much on interactive discussions. While students gain a great amount of written language knowledge, their presentation skills are not cultivated. As such, when I moved to the U.S. for the first time and took college courses, even though I did fine at exams, I didn't know what to say in the classroom discussions. It wasn't because I didn't have anything to say, but I simply wasn't used to that learning style and didn't have public speaking skills. While good teachers would give me some guiding questions and made conscious efforts to include me in positive, nonjudgemental ways, a few called out on me, saying "you're so quiet!" each time without actual guidance to help me. I wasn't exactly a quiet person back home in Japan, so being told this repeatedly by one particular professor intimidated me, and undermined my self-confidence at that time.

So the key is understanding dominant teaching styles in the students' countries of origin, in addition to their cultures. I can't agree with you more that when their own culture is accepted, they will feel comfortable and can learn a new language well. Thank you for the thoughtful discussion!

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Yoko,

Thank you for sharing your experience at college. I had the same experience when I was in college, so I can relate to you.

I'm glad that you had some good teachers who are supportive. I was mostly ignored during a discussion and didn't know how to participate as I never had a discussion in class in Japan.

I hope to get to know you and learn from you through discussions!

← [Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731)

Feb 3, 2021

Yoko, I understand what you are talking about. When I was teaching at Extension's American Language Center, I had a few students from Japan who came here as doctoral students, but had hard time conversing, so they enrolled in beginning or low intermediate course levels, just to improve their speaking skills. They had years of formal English classes behind them. That just shows that you learn what you are being taught.

← [Reply](#)



[Diana Burga \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/118042\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/118042)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Chiaki,

I really appreciate your vulnerable share about the struggles of language learning! I think it's very relatable. The big take away that I get is that most all kids that are learning a second language and \*need\* for work or school are really aware that they don't speak the way native students do. I think it's essential that we create a normalized environment about learning multiple languages! That way EVERYONE understands how difficult it can be to master a second or third language!

Diana

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Diana,

Thank you for your post! I like your idea that creating a normalized environment about learning multiple languages. Although I don't teach English, I have a lot of ESL students in my program. They all have different cultural and racial backgrounds but tell me about their struggles. I'd like to provide a positive atmosphere in my classroom and acknowledge their efforts to support them.

← [Reply](#)



[Melinda Cavalletto \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/150435\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/150435)

Jan 31, 2021

Hello Chiaki,

Well said! I, too, believe that students should feel safe and accepted in all classroom environments. You seem to have great understanding and compassion for your ESL students even though you are not an ESL teacher...yet. Since you are so relatable to your students, I am sure you are a great asset to the school. Do you think this is where descriptive grammar would be best suited as a form of learning?

← [Reply](#)





[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480) (https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)



Jan 25, 2021

**1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?**

I made several attempts at learning Mandarin Chinese as a second language. First try, I took two semesters at a community college. I didn't retain any of it. Years later, I got a screenwriting job in China, and I helped a company write English language dialogue. Most of my co-workers didn't speak English, and so that motivated me to learn Mandarin again. So I took a couple of months of Mandarin classes at a language center, along with using my Duolingo app. Again, I didn't retain it because I didn't practice or use it. I feel like I would have to live in China for a year, or have full immersion every day in order for me to retain Mandarin.

**2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?**

The best way to learn a second language is through immersion in the correct environment. Listening to the music and watching shows in other languages help a little bit, because there is context, but are no substitutes for full immersion. In a classroom, the teacher is the most influential person that can guide second language acquisition. The teacher must fully engage with students. In a large classroom setting, it may be hard to give students the proper individual attention. I think that if the classroom environment has posters, decor, actual items to interact with, and people to talk to, then language acquisition becomes much easier. I don't think sitting and listening to lectures work. Students must physically and vocally engage with the language through activities designed by the teacher.

Edited by [Russell Fung](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480) (https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480) on Jan 27 at 7:50pm

[← Reply](#)



[Valeria Barrera](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473) (https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473)



Jan 26, 2021

Hi Russell,

Congratulations on daring to learn Mandarin! That must be a very difficult language to learn. I'm interested in asking, how would you rate your Mandarin today? I'd like to bet that, though you may not be fluent, you have managed to retain important vocabulary and phrases. And, if someone were to speak to you in Mandarin, would you be able to understand some of the conversation?

When I was early in my French journey and a francophone would speak to me, I'd instantly forget everything I had ever learned. It took a lot of mistakes and awkwardly paused conversations to get comfortable. When I was learning English, I was much younger and being embarrassed wasn't a problem for me. I agree that, although movies and other pop culture media may enhance our learning, they are at best only a supplement and not the pillars of ESL education. An engaging teacher and lots of guided conversation are ideal to motivate the student past the difficult curves of language learning.

Are you almost done with all the core courses? Best of luck in the program.

Valeria

← Reply



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)

Jan 27, 2021

Hi Valeria!

Thanks for your post! My Mandarin today is basic level 2. I can listen to some conversation and pick out a few words. However it's mostly in the context of Asian Americans asking if I understand their parents. I originally learned Cantonese growing up in a household with my grandparents. I can easily understand what Canto speakers say. However, I can't speak except to say "I'm hungry" or "I need to use the bathroom."

Your French and English journeys are very interesting to me. Which language are you more comfortable with?

To answer your last question, I'm halfway done with the core courses. I have two more, plus the portfolio class. Thanks for asking!

-Russell

← Reply



[Michelle Akamine \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/153411\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/153411)

Jan 26, 2021

Hi Russell,

I agree with what you wrote in regards to the second question. I think, especially with language learning, there needs to be a lot of active participation and interaction. Sometimes full immersion is difficult to get but creating a comfortable classroom environment can make a world of difference.

← [Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Jan 27, 2021

Hi Russell,

Your experiences with learning Chinese was interesting. You are lucky to have had a chance to work in a Chinese-speaking environment. I was hoping that my daughter would learn Chinese from her grandparents since they speak Cantonese, but I couldn't provide any opportunity for her.

I agree with your idea that the best way to learn a second language is through immersion in the correct environment. I think it is most effective when learners are in K-6 or 8th grade, but it must be beneficial for older learners as well. I teach a Japanese immersion class where all the students learned all subjects mostly in Japanese from K-5. Even when students' home language is not Japanese, most of them can communicate well with me in the target language when they get to 9th grade. I'm always amazed at their language skills. Thank you for sharing your great idea!

Chiaki

Edited by [Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607) on Jan 27 at 3:37pm

← [Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)

Jan 27, 2021

Thanks for your response, Chiaki!

I actually grew up learning Cantonese from my grandparents who lived in the same house as me. My dad and grandparents spoke to me in Canto, while my mom spoke to me in English. For some reason, English was the dominant language. I can understand when I listen to Cantonese speakers, but I have trouble speaking. I think it really helped that I lived with my grandparents and they only spoke Canto. It wasn't

until they passed away that I forgot everything. I tried learning Mandarin, and everyone says I mix up accents and words with Cantonese. It's a mess.

Your Japanese immersion class sounds so dope. Are you saying you taught grades K-5? Or are you saying you teach Japanese K-5 levels to people? Are these classes available virtually during the pandemic? Sorry for all the questions. It's very interesting to me.

Russell

[← Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731)

Jan 30, 2021

Russel, Actually, your parents took the best possible approach to bring up a bilingual child. Research says that having one parent speak to the child in one language and the other in another is the most efficient way. It is possible that language acquisition of both languages will be a little slower, but the child will catch up. Like any other skill, language is going to diminish if not maintained.

[← Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)

Jan 31, 2021

Oh wow, that's interesting! It certainly was easier to split language-learning between different family members in the same household. That is so true that language is going to diminish if not maintained.

[← Reply](#)



[Chiaki \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/112607)

Feb 1, 2021

Hi Russel,

You had the same kind of language learning environment as my husband. He learned Cantonese at home, but mostly lost it as he grew up. He learned



Mandarin at a Saturday school, but Mandarin and Cantonese are too different, and it didn't really help him retain his Cantonese.

I teach 9th-12th graders, but some students in my class took the Japanese Immersion program in K-5. The immersion elementary school and my high school are all offering online courses currently, but it is challenging to teach immersion courses online.

← [Reply](#)



[Lisa Bradbury \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/146949)

Jan 30, 2021

Wow! I'm impressed that you tried to learn Mandarin. It is a tonal language and seems quite difficult. Maybe one day you will live in China for a year or two and with full immersion, learn it much faster. I agree with you that full immersion is the best way to learn a second language. It helps to have a caring and compassionate teacher who is skilled at teaching, as well.

← [Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Russell,

I, too, learned Mandarin Chinese with Duolingo. I did finish the Chinese tree and am happy to report that I was able to travel using only Chinese (albeit basic) on a few trips to Mainland China.

Your interesting experiences with Cantonese and Mandarin reminded me of uniquely complex situations of Chinese learners, with Chinese text being an ideogram. I actually made a short video about this for my self-introduction project we did in the Intro class, which may be topical for this Linguistics class :) [Yoko Intro \(screencast-o-matic.com\) \(https://screencast-o-matic.com/watch/crVXVuPAMf\)](https://screencast-o-matic.com/watch/crVXVuPAMf)

I'm Japanese, and many people have a misunderstanding that Japanese was derived from Chinese or is related, as it uses *kanji*, or Chinese written text in one of the three writing systems used to construct Japanese sentences. However, spoken Japanese had already existed without any relation to Chinese since a couple of thousand years ago, and when the concept of standardized written text arrived in Japan, it came from China who already

had a sophisticated writing system. So the written Chinese characters, being ideogram with each symbol having a meaning, were slotted into the existing spoken Japanese at vocabulary level and were given the existing Japanese pronunciations that are totally different from the Chinese equivalent, but not at the sentence structure level.

Because of this, to this day, even though they can't speak a word of Chinese, many Japanese can visit a Chinese restaurant and recognize basic words off the menu, knowing at least if you're ordering a chicken vs. beef dish, etc. This could not have happened if written Chinese wasn't an ideogram- it's not like romance languages having the same Latin roots.

So, for the Japanese learners of Chinese, it's easier in a way that they recognize basic written text, but can be very confusing as 1) the pronunciation is completely different; 2) the current use of certain Chinese characters mean different things in Japanese kanji, and 3) today's simplified Chinese characters are similar yet different from the Chinese characters used in Japanese; and 4) the sentence structures and grammars are completely different; Chinese structures are much closer to English than to Japanese. I think this calls for a different learning experience, like the different tracks Chiaki mentioned that she does in her post.

It's so great that you had a screenwriting job in China- would you continue to pursue it while teaching ESL elsewhere?

← [Reply](#)



**Russell Fung (He/Him/His)** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480>)

Jan 31, 2021

Thank you for the explanation of Chinese and Japanese characters. I didn't know how different they are. As for the screenwriting job, if I get another opportunity and the timing is right, I would pursue it while teaching ESL elsewhere. Btw, thank you for sharing your intro video! Especially your demonstration of the mountain kanji.

← [Reply](#)



**Raquel Armendariz (She/Her/Hers)** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028>)

Jan 31, 2021

Russell, I agree! When I was learning English, movies and music were my most motivating teachers. HA! I remember telling my parents that I dreamed of one day speaking in full sentences about music like an MTV VJ - They were my journalistic idols. But nothing is as

motivating as needing to speak the language everyone else around you is speaking. The need to understand and be understood is a great motivator.

And you are absolutely correct in pointing out the role of a great, engaging teacher. I was fortunate enough to have several along the journey; they fanned the flames of my motivation and were extremely supportive and patient.

Mandarin is not an easy language to learn. Be patient with yourself.

:)

Edited by [Raquel Armendariz \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028) on Jan 31 at 7:47pm

← [Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)

Jan 31, 2021

Thank you for your response, Raquel!

← [Reply](#)



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203)

Jan 25, 2021

*1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?*

I've studied a few languages in my life: Portuguese, which is my family's heritage language; Spanish and Latin, which I took in high school; and Korean, which I tried to learn when I was teaching in Korea. I found Portuguese, Spanish and Latin relatively easy, though since Portuguese is first (and probably got hard-wired into my brain from an early age), when I try to speak Spanish I find there's a lot of linguistic bleed.

Korean was incredibly difficult. I think I did a good job - I was the go-to speaker and translator for the other English-speaking teachers in my district after a few months - but I never achieved anything like proficiency. I could make myself understood, but it was hard, and I could neither communicate with any nuance nor understand any nuances in the language. It felt like trying to paint a picture with a spray can.

3. Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?

\*Sorry for the long response!\*

I was struck by the distinction being made here, as it speaks directly to an ongoing controversy in teaching writing. So much of the work of teaching composition lies in helping students recognize how rhetorical tools must be applied differently in different situations. You have to write differently for different audiences, right? Yet, many colleges - mine among them - set the use of "Standard American English" or some similar form of the language as an objective or requirement for writing classes.

This summer I read a new book from April Baker-Bell, *Linguistic Justice*. She made the case - to use these two new terms that I've learned - that we teach writing with an underlying emphasis on prescriptive grammar; in doing so, she argues, we hurt Black students who speak AAVE. I thought this was a great point: if we insist that students use one set of prescriptive rules to produce one type of English, we will alienate those who are already fluent in another type of English. This is a big problem because "Standard" English is standard precisely because it's the version used by elite white speakers.

I think the descriptive/prescriptive dyad is a great way to think about this problem in the context of learning language. If we try to use prescriptive grammar in our teaching, we will likely harm not just students who speak AAVE, but also those who are learning English. While it seems to me that there is value in providing learners with rules or guidelines to follow as learning tools, I think we have to make it clear that these are learning tools - training wheels, almost. We shouldn't - as, admittedly, I have in the past - insist that a grammar text provides universal rules. If we do, isn't there a potential for instilling in them the same sense of "Standard" English hegemony, which might impair their learning, confidence, and growth as English speakers? How do we balance providing the needed guidance to learn language patterns with the needed socio-linguistic context to understand that English is really Englishes?

← [Reply](#)



[Valeria Barrera \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473)

Jan 26, 2021

Hi Christian,

I'm fascinated by your response to the question regarding prescriptive and descriptive grammar. I chose to answer the same two questions. Understanding that when we teach English, we're not just teaching a new way to communicate but also a culture, a way of living and being, tied to a variety of independent communities, is a daunting task. How we communicate with one another and, thus, how our peers perceive us is directly linked to

our knowledge and experience of the language based on our environment. The weight of knowing between right or wrong English falls on the teacher's shoulders.

By teaching "Standard" English, we tell our students that there is one correct way of speaking said language, and any development thereafter is not supported in an academic or elite setting. However, the minute they leave our classroom, the conversation adapts to its ever-changing settings, creating space for linguistic conflict. So, to answer your question, "how do we balance providing the needed guidance to learn language patterns with the needed socio-linguistic context to understand that English is really Englishes", we have to teach English, or Englishes, in a variety of contexts and encourage the use of them in the classroom in order to create space for growth and exploration. Providing the guidelines of a "standard" English can help the student grasp a general use of the language but it should not create conflict between descriptive and prescriptive grammar. Just like you shared, these rules and guidelines should be perceived as training wheels. The development of the student's English post-classroom will depend mainly on their outside interactions --the teacher can have no control over it.

← [Reply](#)



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203>)

Jan 27, 2021



I like the emphasis you've placed on teaching language in context, Valeria. Indeed, I think that's what frustrates me so much about this insistence on "Standard" or academic English. As you point out, the way we communicate varies based on culture, context, and purpose; part of our work, then, has to be helping impart that sense of "right or wrong" English (based on context) you refer to here. Like you say, we can provide something like training wheels or guidance tracks, which are helpful, but it's important to emphasize how contextual these rules are.

← [Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731>)

Jan 30, 2021



Christian and Valeria, Great discussion of prescriptive and descriptive grammar. I hope the idea of Englishes gets more embraced here since it's already been accepted in global TESOL community. There is of course the need to teach rules to English learners, but as Christian said, they should be understood as "training wheels" to be taken off as students' proficiency increases. Classroom environment

should be such that students can feel confident to use the language or dialect they speak.

[← Reply](#)



**Michelle Akamine** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/153411>)

Jan 26, 2021



Hello Christian,

I thought your response on the third question was very intriguing. I lived in Hawaii for a few years, where many locals speak Hawaii Creole English. Although now it is recognized as a separate language, it is still looked down upon. A lot of my friends in Hawaii joke about how bad their English is because they can't speak "Standard English". This is another example of how prescriptive rules can be harmful to students who speak a different type of English.

Thinking about your last question, I thought that maybe introducing readings and books that celebrate different Englishes would help to bring awareness and build self-esteem in those speakers. Students would be able to see that there are writers who use their English and feel inspired. I feel that this would also help students to recognize prescriptive grammar as tools rather than rules.

[← Reply](#)



**Christian Aguiar (He/Him/His)** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203>)

Jan 27, 2021



It's striking how often Englishes that have emerged from colonization get marked as "bad" in an American context. Your post reminds me of many of my colleagues who speak Caribbean English, and who are often called upon (implicitly or explicitly) to explain themselves or justify accent, diction, etc. in the face of Standard English. I would agree 100% about the value of bringing a range of Englishes into the classroom as exemplars.

Christian

[← Reply](#)



[MaryAnn Wilson \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764)



Jan 27, 2021

I think it's important to respect whatever version of English a person speaks; on the other hand, I wouldn't want to prevent someone who speaks another form of English from attaining success in a standard-English society. I'm new to this, but I wonder if it would be helpful to create an exercise in which students write/recite two essays on the same topic--one written in the English which s/he speaks and the other translated to standard English.

[← Reply](#)



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203)



Jan 28, 2021

That's such a good point, Mary Ann. I think there's this constant ethical question as educators: some of our education practices (I would think also of testing, potentially grades, certain behavioral policies) clearly mirror/reproduce inequities in society. Should we participate in them, knowing that students may benefit in some tangible ways from them, or resist them, knowing that students may also suffer in tangible ways from them?

I think your approach would help students see the issue while still preparing them to navigate it, which seems ideal.

[← Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)



Jan 27, 2021

Hi Christian,

The controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars is a tough thing to reconcile for me. I'm so happy you brought up the alienation of Black students who speak AAVE. That's something I've wondered about for a very long time.

I'm the prescriptive kind of person. I'm that kid who always had to correct other people's grammar. Imagine a Chinese-American boy correcting White, Black, and Hispanic people on the way they spoke. It's no wonder people thought I was a nerd, nazi, or a jerk.

There has to be a standard set of rules for the written English language. There has to be structure. Even though I can understand what people say in message boards, comments, letters, etc., it's very jarring for me when I read incorrect grammar. It makes things confusing, and I have to use extra brain power to stomp on the brakes and decipher the message.

On the other hand, I have to leave room for variations in speech communication. I can't just interrupt someone telling a story in order for me to correct their grammar. That's kind of a rude thing to do. So that's where descriptive grammars come into play. The social and human aspect of language is something I have to account for. So I'm learning to let things slide.

One last point: It really bumps me when people say "anyways." It drives me up the wall, and every time I correct people (playfully now), they always argue that "anyways" is going to be grammatically correct in the future because enough people say it that way. Anyway, that's like your opinion, man. Lol. Gotta add the "lol" or else people think I'm speaking aggressively. Lolz.

Russell

← Reply



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203>)

Jan 28, 2021



I appreciate your response, Russell. I wouldn't disagree with the value of a standard - having a common set of rules helps make communication possible. My concern is that the rules we currently have, the prescriptive grammars for English, tend to be produced based on the patterns of those in power, like this week's video describes. They're not an objective, agreed-upon set of rules, but rather a set of rules imposed from above that create a linguistic hierarchy. When we apply those standards as individuals, that's a matter of individual choice, but when we do so as teachers working on behalf of society, then we're tying the use of one version of the language to success, and I think that's an ethical question we really need to sit with and reflect on.

BTW, I was that kid, too, and it got me thinking later in life: Why were teachers and adults so upset when I corrected them?

Edited by [Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203>) on Jan 28 at 7:09am

← Reply





**Valeria Barrera** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473>)

Jan 30, 2021

Hi Russell,

I laughed while reading your post. I could read the frustration and disappointment you hold towards people who make grammatical mistakes. I don't think you're alone. We've been taught that having 'excellent' grammar is highly praisable. And, I'll bet that your career in copywriting has only highlighted the importance of grammar. How can you not when it's your job?

This is a question that pushed me to reflect more on Hollywood writing. Although we may be diving into a specific sector, this same sector can give us some insight as to how we can cement "Englises" as our true English. Have you watched the TV show "Atlanta" on FX? This was a show conceived by Donald Glover, AKA Childish Gambino, the creator of the much-discussed song and video "This Is America". Based in Atlanta, the show follows Earn and his cousin Alfred as they try to establish themselves in the rap scene. The show, in which the main dialect is AAVE, was nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding writing twice. I would like to know if, in the writers' room, many an argument were had about AAVE grammar and correctness, foregoing all established rules of "standard" English.

Here's a link to an article I found online about (arguably) one of the best linguistic scenes in this show:

<https://www.languagejones.com/blog-1/2017/2/13/why-you-probably-didnt-understand-that-one-guy-from-atlanta> (<https://www.languagejones.com/blog-1/2017/2/13/why-you-probably-didnt-understand-that-one-guy-from-atlanta>)

Side note: I appreciate the "The Big Lebowski" quote.

Valeria

[← Reply](#)



**Russell Fung (He/Him/His)** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480>)

Jan 31, 2021

Valeria, you have no idea how much I love Atlanta! It's one of my favorite shows and I am stoked for season three coming in the future. That show deserved an Emmy, but got robbed. My favorite episode was the Fubu one. Oh, and the Drake episode. Had me laughing.

Anyway, that link you posted. Holy moly. That was an amazing analysis. I'm blown away. Thank you for sharing that!

Russell

[← Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Christian,

Question #1, you mentioned that as a heritage Portuguese speaker, you found Portuguese, Spanish and Latin relatively easy, but when you try to speak Spanish you find there's a lot of linguistic bleed. I also remember Russel's post about trying to learn Mandarin as a heritage Cantonese speaker and he is told he mixes up accents and words with Cantonese.

I speak Spanish pretty fluently, and when I started studying Portuguese, I didn't have many mix-ups. Spanish has a very close pronunciation system to that of my native tongue, Japanese (most words ending in one of the same 5 vowels or an "n"; very regular pronunciation in relation to the spelling, etc.), so it may have been a factor. I tried learning Italian while my Portuguese, whose pronunciation system is not as similar to Japanese as Spanish is, is still at an advanced learner to an early intermediate level, and I really keep mixing up the two.

I find it really interesting how the ease of language acquisition is different for the same student even within the same romance language group, based on the combination of the student's native tongue and pronunciation conventions that the native language dictates, among the other factors!

Edited by [Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) on Jan 31 at 12:41pm

[← Reply](#)



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203)

Feb 1, 2021

That's very interesting, Yoko. FWIW, I had zero issues with Portuguese slipping into Latin - of course, we were just reciting Latin sentences, grammar-translation style, rather than speaking it, so that may have been part of it.

Christian

[← Reply](#)[Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Christian,

Question #3, thank you for the thought-provoking discussion. I, too, chose the same question, without first reading my classmates' posts so I wouldn't be influenced by what they write while I write my initial response to the subject, and then would learn about their views afterward.

I agree with Valeria that when we teach English, we're not just teaching a new way to communicate but also a culture, a way of living and being, tied to a variety of independent communities. Christian, your comment about English being really Englishes is so true. Just like "histories" instead of "History" are being taught these days, I would introduce "englishes" in the classroom.

However, while I understand the power hierarchy issue, I also wouldn't dismiss prescribed grammar, as it's helpful to have a simple and reliable framework to refer to if you are just starting out. It's important to communicate to students that "standard" English is a useful tool but the other "englishes" are just as important, alive, and respected.

In the classroom setting, I suggested a few things in my own post (guest speakers from the speakers of those "non-standard" englishes, and introducing drama or movie clips with those elements). Your discussion thread gave me another idea of giving homework to students to see if they can actively go and find the instances where those descriptive englishes are used in a real-life setting, and/or in music lyrics and literary or media work.

Edited by [Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) on Jan 31 at 12:43pm

[← Reply](#)[Valeria Barrera \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473)

Jan 26, 2021

**What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?**

A lot of credit should go to my parents for this answer. They wanted my siblings and me to learn English from a very young age. And, we did, despite our constant complaining and false excuses for not wanting to go to English (and eventually French) classes on Saturday

mornings. I was 6 years old when I started learning English and 13 when I started learning French. What was so effective in my language learning was having a very supportive environment. It appeared our whole house had turned its efforts towards learning the new language. My mom stopped buying translated copies of movies and we started watching movies and TV shows in English (without subtitles! Oh, the pain!). We also had constant exposure to native speakers thanks to my parents' involvement with the Rotary Club. My parents made friends with the other Canadian or American Rotary members who would periodically stay in our home to visit their humanitarian efforts in El Salvador. I even went on to live 1 full year with Bob and Charlene, one Canadian couple that we still keep in touch with today.

Similarly, my fluency in French has been due largely to exposure. Nonetheless, the start of that language was not easy. Early into my learning journey, when I was 11 years old, my teacher told my mom that the grasp of my native language was not developed enough to understand grammar in another language. So I came back two years later to continue learning. Quite frankly, I think I was just struggling with the new language at 11 because French was as challenging at 13 years old. My fluency really flourished when I chose to pursue my undergraduate degree in France forcing me to dive into the cultural and social aspects of the language.

### **Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?**

Absolutely. Two acronyms come to mind when I think about the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars in teaching: BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Though they may not be directly connected by definition with descriptive and prescriptive grammar, these 2 acronyms give us an insight as to how our minds can process a new form of communication. We start learning a language by memorizing words, phrases, and expressions that are specific to our social setting. Albeit incorrect to a prescriptive grammar devout, descriptive grammar can allow us to connect to a more current version of English --or the "English" around us. BICS, or the skills that I associate with descriptive grammar, the language we create and adjust with social development and cultural setting, are essential towards learning a new language. They can provide a temporary fluency that can be improved (and "perfected", if necessary for each student's context) through time with prescriptive grammar. As an ESL instructor, I'm aware that a student may arrive at my classroom with a more colloquial/everyday speech that has been acquired from "local" resources (TV, movies, Youtube, friends) rather than a structured/academic English base. I believe it's important to validate their knowledge and skills and encourage the learning of other forms of English.

Edited by [Valeria Barrera \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/160473) on Jan 26 at 8:12am

 [Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480>)

Jan 27, 2021

Valeria, your post has given me a lot to chew on and think about.

Regarding the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars, I wrote a long response to Christian's post about how it's hard to reconcile the two. I lean towards a prescriptive way of teaching, but after reading several posts, I'm leaning the other way. You suggest validating students' knowledge and skills from other forms of English. That we have no control how they use English outside of classroom. That's a really good point.

The best we can do is give them training wheels, like you said. That there is no "right way" or "correct" way to speak English. Looking into it, I realized that it's very true. Who made up these rules? Elites? Who gets to dictate what's "proper?" Also, yes, I've noticed that the ones who get picked on are the "lower class" people. So I guess it's very classist to insist on a certain way to speak.

Anyway, I enjoyed reading your French and English journeys. I think I mentioned that to you in an earlier post. Here, you really went deep into your backstory. It's so fascinating, because I don't know that world. Thank you so much for sharing!

Edited by [Russell Fung](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480>) on Jan 27 at 8:55pm

[← Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025>)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Valeria,

Question#1; You were so fortunate to have such involved parents! I had very laissez-faire parents, who didn't try to stop us from anything (unless it was morally wrong) but also did not particularly try to give us more rigorous structures that would have forced us to learn something we wouldn't have on our own.

While complete immersion obviously is ideal for second language acquisition, such an environment is simply not attainable for ESL learners living in a non-English speaking country. Your experience of watching movies and TV shows in English without subtitles was probably the next best alternative to simulate an immersive environment.

It reminded me of an experience when I was on an exchange program in Colombia. I met a number of young Colombians who spoke English with such a perfect, very American accent, even though their English itself was not perfect. I was so surprised to find that none of them had ever been outside of Colombia, but all of them said they watched

American TV shows all the time. While it itself might be viewed as having some "colonizing" effect, it definitely created an ideal environment for language acquisition!

← [Reply](#)



[Diana Burga \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/118042\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/118042)

Jan 31, 2021

I enjoyed reading your response. I think that you must have gotten along pretty well with your parents as a child! Many families (myself included) find it difficult to listen to our parents even though they have our best interest in mind, many times! My mom was a French teacher and she always signed me up for French classes but since we had a complicated relationship as a kid, I think I rebelled against it and didn't learn. (I'm very sad about this now).

← [Reply](#)



[MaryAnn Wilson \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764)

Jan 26, 2021

1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

Although I majored in Russian as an undergrad, I was not successful. I always felt intimidated in class, and was afraid to speak up and make mistakes. The closest I came to gaining fluency was when I was in a summer intensive language program. After five-six hours a day of instruction, I spent the rest of the day studying. I was happy there because the instructors were fun. We had a party every Thursday night consisting of vodka and bumbling in Russian. I actually forgot some words in English. And I even wrote a poem in Russian. Woo-hoo!

I also had to take two years of a second foreign language, and I chose French. My first quarter was a complete disaster; out of 21 students, the professor failed 19 of us, including me. (Luckily, I managed to get my F changed to an incomplete.) Everyday, the professor would call upon us to write on the board, and then proceed to criticize and mock us. It was the worst experience I've ever had as a student.

When I transferred to another university, I sat in the back of French class, fearing the worst. I remember how intimidated I felt when my new professor made me sit with the others in the front two rows of the classroom. But he turned out to be friendly and kind, and that made all the difference. I did well, even though I tended to think in Russian during French class, and

vice versa. But I didn't come close to fluency in French either. I would have to spend a year fully immersed in any language to accomplish that.

2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?

The instructor should create an atmosphere that allows students to make mistakes without feeling judged. I lived in Vienna for three months, and noticed that Austrians hardly spoke English to me because they were afraid of not speaking perfectly. I had no background in German, and learned by memorizing words and phrases from a comic book. Everyone was compassionate toward me and my efforts. From this experience, I realized that most new language learners are fearful of being judged, while most fluent speakers are compassionate toward them. To encourage learning a second language, the instructor should be an authentic and non-judgmental listener. That doesn't mean an instructor shouldn't correct mistakes, but it's critical to do so with kindness.

I also believe that it's more effective to learn bite-size chunks of grammar and vocabulary at a time, and learn those chunks deeply and well. In my experience, if I have too much material to study, I could cram well enough for a test, but would forget it soon afterward. I took a couple Spanish courses through UCLA Extension, and in my last class, I took a midterm that covered a whole bunch of irregular verbs, and decided during the break to go home. I never returned. It was just too overwhelming.

When I used to help my niece study for a French test, I would have her write down new vocabulary words on index cards (French on one side, English on the other), and then we'd go through one small group at a time, over and over again, before moving on to the new small group. That was far more effective than having her memorize all the words at one time.

← [Reply](#)



[Christian Aguiar \(He/Him/His\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/130203>)

Jan 27, 2021



Your point about minimizing the volume of content resonated with me, Mary Ann. I have definitely been guilty both of assigning way too much content as a teacher and, on the other side, of being so overwhelmed by content as a student that I just try to memorize enough to pass rather than really learn from the material. What do you think drives this desire to pile on content, especially in exams?

Christian

← [Reply](#)



[MaryAnn Wilson \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764)

Jan 27, 2021

Hi Christian,

I believe there is an academic expectation of X amount of material that must be *mastered* at any given level. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like anyone has done research on whether that amount leads to long-term retention. While I learned how to pass exams, I only retained a fraction of that material.

Mary Ann

[← Reply](#)



[Yoon-Jung Cho \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222)

Jan 30, 2021

Hi Mary, I totally agree with your idea. As a foreigner, I am still afraid of making mistakes and being judged by native English speakers. Whenever I speak English, I am so nervous and I try to avoid speaking English. That is why I am not as successful as I hoped. I know if I want to be a fluent speaker, I should try repeatedly, but I feel intimidated whenever I say English. After completing this course and getting a certificate, I want to be an instructor who encourages students like your new French professor. Thank you for sharing your experiences!

Edited by [Yoon-Jung Cho \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222) on Jan 30 at 2:29pm

[← Reply](#)



[Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025)

Jan 31, 2021

Hi Mary Ann,

Thank you for sharing your personal experiences and suggestions, a lot of good thoughts here. I liked how you mentioned that you realized most new language learners are fearful of being judged, while most fluent speakers are compassionate toward them. Your comment about the teacher's kindness playing a vital role in creating a safe, comfortable learning experience is so true.

I appreciate you clarifying that it doesn't mean a teacher shouldn't correct mistakes but it's critical to do so with kindness, as it reminds me of the famous quote by Maya Angelou,



"people won't remember what you said or did, but they will remember how you made them feel." While as teachers we would actually want students to remember what we said :), it's important to deliver it with kindness and an open mind to motivate students.

Edited by [Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) on Jan 31 at 1:21pm

[← Reply](#)



[Michelle Akamine \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/153411\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/153411)

Jan 26, 2021

### **What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?**

Personally, I went through a lot of ups and downs learning Japanese. I attended a Japanese Immersion Elementary School, that being, of course, my parents' decision. We only spoke English at home so I could not to understand the why it was necessary to learn in another language. However, after visiting Japan, I came to appreciate the country and culture a lot more. I became motivated to learn Japanese for my self-improvement rather than by the will of my parents. Although I had struggled to keep up with my classmates in elementary school, by the time I reached high school, people were asking me for help.

One of the perks I found about learning a language this way from a young age is that things come naturally. I have pretty good pronunciation and I could learn certain grammatical structures by listening to others. However, on the flip side, I find some of the errors that I made are harder to fix because they sound right and ingrained in my mind that way. For this reason, I still study Japanese when I have time.

### **Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?**

I believe that this is deeply related to the purpose or motivation behind why students are learning a second language. Teachers may need to adjust their teaching methods according to their student's motivation. For instance, from my knowledge of the Japanese education system, there is large emphasis on grammar-translation method when teaching English. Students memorize vocabulary and grammatical structures mainly for the purpose of passing a test (like a college entrance exam). For cases like these, the emphasis on prescriptive grammar might be more beneficial for the students. On the other hand, immigrants learning English to get accustomed to their new environment, might find an approach that stresses descriptive grammar more helpful. That being said, I do not think that teachers should solely focus on one or the other. EFL students, even if they are learning for a test, may want to travel to English speaking countries eventually. Similarly, ESL students would find it helpful to learn

prescriptive rules for academic or professional purposes. Having a balance, or even just an awareness, between prescriptive and descriptive grammars will have a positive effect on students.

← [Reply](#)



[MaryAnn Wilson \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764)

Jan 27, 2021

Hi Michelle,

I agree that TESOL instructors should not focus solely on descriptive vs prescriptive grammars, but take into consideration the goals of their students. Instructors should also use an approach that builds students' confidence. Perhaps a student's ultimate goal is to learn standard English, but is a relative beginner who is easily overwhelmed, embarrassed, and flustered when corrected. The instructor could acknowledge that student's ability to communicate and be understood, or ask a clarifying question (without judgement) in order to prompt the student to express him or herself in another way.

Mary Ann

← [Reply](#)



[Juan Ochoa \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/163772\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/163772)

Jan 27, 2021

1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

As a young child only knowing Spanish I can remember that it was fairly difficult acquiring a new language in the beginning. I grew up in the U.S in a strictly Spanish speaking home and it was hoped that I would learn English when I began kindergarten. While I did learn some English I remember that there were some gaps in my understanding, especially when it came to remembering the alphabet. There were no dedicated ESL programs so I had to figure things out on my own, which slowed the learning process. Now as an adult I found that I had similar troubles when I learned the Russian Language. reading constant grammar rules never felt natural to me and it was only when I felt the confidence to talk to natives, is when I found my skills in the language greatly improved.

2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a

second language?

During my undergrad at UCLA I had the opportunity to work with Extension students through the language partner program. It was a great opportunity to not only practice the language I was learning (Russian) but to also meet people from different cultures. Everyday after class I would meet up with my language partner and we would practice. I found that all of the people that I had met from this program (5 in total) speaking was the most difficult while reading and writing were much less difficult. None of the students really practiced speaking outside of the classroom and would typically only socialize with people that spoke the same language. When I asked why, most told me that they were intimidated to talk to someone who is a native English speaker. Based on this and my experience learning Russian I believe that the best way of acquiring a second language is to apply it outside of the classroom and if possible, speak with a native speaker. I saw a great improvement in both confidence and speaking abilities when I made my language partners speak with students on Bruin Walk.

← [Reply](#)



[Yoon-Jung Cho \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222)

Jan 30, 2021

Hi Juan, your answer made me think of my experience in the US. "None of the students really practiced speaking outside of the classroom and would typically only socialize with people that spoke the same language." It was, and is me. I know "the best way of acquiring a second language is to apply it outside of the classroom and if possible, speak with a native speaker", but it is really hard to try. When I was in San Diego, I mostly spent time with my Korean friends, using Korean. It was 10 years ago, but I am still intimidated to talk to native English speakers. In the light of my own experience, I would like to develop methods to encourage students to use English in their daily lives. Thank you for sharing your experience!

← [Reply](#)



[Simiry Cuadra \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/123594\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/123594)

Jan 31, 2021

Hello Juan,

Great post! Many of my students also face the issue of learning the alphabet or sounds. I think much of this has to do with L1 not producing certain sounds the English language has. The fact that you overcame your language barrier on your own is great. I struggled

speaking English as a second language myself. Are you fluent in speaking Russian now? That's amazing! The fact that you are multilingual. Once I have more time, I am also planning to learn a third language myself.

← [Reply](#)



[Raquel Armendariz \(She/Her/Hers\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028>)

Jan 31, 2021



Hi Juan,

Your response made me reflect on my experiences and it prompted me to ask my daughter about her experiences learning the language. I'm an immigrant and my daughter was born in the U.S. but we (her father and I) decided to speak Spanish to her and in the household EXCLUSIVELY from birth until she entered Kindergarten. I remember fearing I had made a huge mistake when she looked a little lost in the classroom. Her teacher actually met me after school one day, week one of school, and asked me if she had an auditory processing disorder. UGH! I almost cried, "No, I don't think she does, but she is learning English. This is week one for her."

But she seemed to adapt extremely quickly. I began doing homework and school-related activities with her in English and switched from a monolingual household to a bilingual household.

You are absolutely right, Confidence and Practice are key. We can't put on and take off a language like a jacket or a hat if we really want to acquire it.

← [Reply](#)



[Simiry Cuadra](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/123594) (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/123594>)

Jan 27, 2021



What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

Growing up, I was enrolled in a dual immersion program speaking Spanish/English. I had more Spanish exposure than English, so I remember struggling with English for quite some time. Being part of a community where Spanish was mainly spoken, I remember beginning to feel

discouraged and frustrated with myself. With enough support from teachers and other resources, I was able to become a fluent speaker.

Later on, in high school, I was enrolled in French classes. Even though I was a novice, I loved learning it. I took French for three consecutive years, and though I do not consider myself to be sufficiently capable of speaking it, I think I can still read some of it and understand it. One thing that helped my learning in French was the resemblance it has to Spanish.

2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?

An insight I can give someone to learn a second language best is to become exposed to the language. As a second language learner, listening to the language will allow one to listen to the sound of words and how often you hear certain words. For example, if I go to France and listen to people say “Bonjour” or “Salut” every time they see each other, I will realize that it is a type of way of greeting them. This can also include watching tv shows or listening to stories.

A classroom implication I have about how someone learns a second language has to do a lot with the teacher. A teacher who is willing to get to know the students, meet their learning needs, and challenge or change their lesson plan last minute, if needed, to accommodate students will succeed with teaching learners. I believe that the teacher should also promote and embrace student diversity in the classroom. Acknowledging student differences and cultural backgrounds will allow students to feel comfortable in the classroom and encourage student participation. If students are actively engaged and participating will result in learning the language.

[← Reply](#)

○



<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025>

Jan 27, 2021



**1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?**

This is my first post on the topic, so I will focus on the early stage of my English learning experience as a teenager.

I'm a native speaker of Japanese and grew up in Japan without any opportunity to interact with native speakers of English in daily life when I was starting out. English was one of the mandatory subjects from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and on in Japan at that time, but the English classes

were taught by Japanese teachers with strong Japanese accents, so it was never even close to an immersive environment in the classrooms. The exams were largely based on grammar and reading comprehension.

Despite having no connection to native speakers, I was always able to do very well in the subject as a child (not that I attained near-native speaker level skills, which I didn't, but as a Japanese student in Japan). I think motivation is the key, though it was not facilitated by parents or teachers in my case. As a child, I was always curious about the outside world and dreamed about exploring the world. I looked forward to starting the 7<sup>th</sup> grade so I could start learning English. I was probably a rare child in that sense, as most of my classmates didn't care much.

I was so excited that I got up at 6 am by myself every day in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade to tune in to a short, daily English learning program on the radio in my bedroom. I think I was a more auditory, rather than visual or kinetic, type of learner for language acquisition, so the radio program was effective for me. For non-language subjects, I was more of a visual learner, but for English, reading and listening at the same time distracted me from active listening. Maybe it was because I am a music lover.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I became a British music fan and started a band with my friends, copying British bands. This was long before Google, so there was no way to download the lyrics. I listened to the songs repeatedly and wrote down the lyrics, or what I thought they were, for our band's singer to be able to sing.

This may have helped me acquire the rhythm or musicality of the English language while I was still relatively young. I was able to recognize and connect chunks of meaning together in my mind. I gained auditory memory even though I wasn't provided opportunities to speak with native speakers. Auditory learning is probably one of the most effective components of early-stage learning, just like babies do, so it worked in my favor. Of course, I wasn't aware of it at that time.

Many teenagers are studying Korean these days because of their love of K-pop, and I can relate to that. Again, motivation is the key. As a teacher, it works to tailor the content to the students' personal interests and learning styles, whenever possible.

For written English, I used to always have to translate English into Japanese to be able to understand a sentence. Since the sentence structures are so different and almost opposites (S+V+O in English would be O+V in Japanese), I would have to read the entire sentence first and then translate backwards. A turning point came at high school when I purchased a learning program that used a simultaneous interpreter training technique. It provided a recorded tape of MLK's "I have a dream" speech and a written script that had each chunk of meaning separated by a slash, without any explanation in Japanese.

As an auditory learner, I would play it, then “shadow” it, or repeat the sentences immediately, phrase by phrase, copying cadence and emotions, through the entire speech with MLK. I would pause where he would pause and restart where he did. I got so into it and even started using gestures. This training helped me understand English as is, in its natural order, without having to first translate into Japanese. Even though this training method is auditory, because I was able to start understanding English as is, my reading comprehension and composition skills had immediate and significant improvements afterward.

In writing, too, what worked for me was to not translate between the two languages, but to “borrow” the already existing whole sentences in your brain’s memory bank and just change out the vocabulary. The exposure to the authentic speeches really helped me in this aspect.

I copied and repeated the “I have a dream” speech so much at ages 16-17 that I can still recite a lot of it without seeing the text to this day. If I had had an American neighbor back then, they would’ve thought I was such a young freedom fighter as I was reciting it passionately every morning (to study English).

Edited by [Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) on Jan 27 at 11:57pm

← [Reply](#)



[MaryAnn Wilson \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/94764)

Jan 28, 2021

Hi Yoko,

Your journey in learning English is such a fascinating one! It's true that as babies we spent all of our time listening, so it would make sense that listening to a foreign language should take up a huge chunk of the time invested in learning. Unfortunately, I invested most of my learning time to writing things down, over and over again, in order to memorize them. I got better at constructing sentences, but the most frustrating thing for me has been my inability to understand the spoken language. And it's striking that, although I spent the least amount of time learning Spanish formally, that's the foreign language I understand the most. In fact, when I have traveled to Mexico, I felt comfortable using my little bits of Spanish to get around. The reason for this is because I hear so much Spanish here in L.A., so it's familiar to me. You really got me thinking: spending a lot of time listening and learning by speaking, and in your case, reciting a speech that inspires you, is such an effective method. Thank you!

← [Reply](#)



[Yoon-Jung Cho \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222)

Jan 30, 2021



1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

As an ESL student myself, I have a lot to share. I have been studying English my entire life, and my major is English Literature in grad school, but I still feel hungry. Whenever I read articles or write papers in English, I am frustrated.

My major was media/communication in my undergraduate, and I did not need English so badly. But after staying in San Diego in my early twenties, experiences in San Diego made me love English, and I made up my mind to study English Literature. I memorized scripts of sitcom <Friends> and studied TOFLE writing. That's when my English improved a lot than before, but now I can see what was wrong with my way. Even though I was in the US, I mostly spent time with my Korean friends and used Korean a lot. English was my aim as a study, not my tool to communicate with others. I should have used English as a tool, not my objective.

Sadly, now I "can" speak, but I "do not" speak English. Still I am studying, but I know I need a lot of effort.

3. Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?

From my perspective, these two sides should complement each other. I do not think there is only one answer, like math, to learn a language because language is about communication. We should remember that grammar is a tool to communicate, not an objective. If various people have their own effective ways to communicate, they can choose their own ways. However, I think there is a common tendency. It is best to learn a language through natural, descriptive ways in childhood. I think if someone knows a nuance or feeling of a certain language, it is unnecessary to be prescriptive because one can "communicate" with others without prescriptive grammars. If adults want to learn a language, on the other hand, they should be prescriptive because they do not know what is natural or unnatural when they speak a second language. In this respect, most ESL students who already missed a chance to acquire English in childhood need prescriptive grammars until they speak English naturally.

Edited by [Yoon-Jung Cho \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222) on Jan 30 at 1:35pm

[← Reply](#)





[Juan Ochoa \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/163772\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/163772)

Jan 30, 2021



Hi Yoon, Thankyou for sharing your experiences with English. I like when you mentioned that "English was my aim as a study, not my tool to communicate with others" It seems that you focused only on the grammar and didn't apply it as much outside the classroom. I had a similar experience learning Russian. I would spend so much time studying and practicing the grammar. No matter how much I studied or tried I never really seemed to improve and my grades would reflect that. It wasn't until I began to apply what I learned outside of the classroom, when I started seeing improvements. Natives speakers may seem intimidating but I believe talking to people is the best way to use what you have learned in the classroom and apply it in a very meaningful way.

[← Reply](#)



[Yoon-Jung Cho \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/151222)

Feb 4, 2021



Hi Juan, thanks for encouraging me. I will keep your advice "talking to people is the best way to use what you have learned in the classroom and apply it in a very meaningful way" in mind. Thanks again! :)

[← Reply](#)



[Raquel Armendariz \(She/Her/Hers\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028)

Jan 30, 2021



**1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?**

3 months shy of my 12th birthday, my parents decided to move our family from our native Mexico, to the United States. This was in the mid-80s, pre-internet, pre-globalization of social media, etc. I did not understand more than 3 words in English when my parents put me on the school bus and sent me on my first day of Junior High School. At that age, and under those circumstances, learning English was not a cool second language I could pick up in my spare time, it became the most important thing I needed to do in order to survive. Surviving junior high school with only minor scratches and bruises is one of my biggest accomplishments, to this day; and I owe it all to learning to speak English thanks to the help of a handful of

teachers. 7th grade was rough, probably the roughest year, but 8th grade, 8th grade became the year of redemption. Not only did I put forth so much effort to learn the language, I somehow managed to graduate with honors and the top of my class. How easy was it? I don't know. I really can't recall whether it was difficult or easy, I can only recall that learning English was the only thing on my mind 24/7.

**2. What insights can you give in terms of how someone can best learn a second language? What are the classroom implications for your current beliefs about how someone learns a second language?** Personally, I can share that full immersion with some genuine caring, encouraging support (from teachers) along the journey was the way I learned the language. My parents initially enrolled me in all General Education (English language only) classes, but when my self-esteem started to become damaged beyond repair, one teacher suggested a blended day of certain academic subjects taught in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes and others, like P.E., Art. , Music, and Computer Science in English only classes. Again, this proved very successful for me. I'm sure that many individual circumstances have to be factored in from person to person. But from a teacher's/classroom perspective, patience, cultural humility, enthusiasm, sincere encouragement, and unwavering support, must be at the heart of any attempt to teach a second language.

← [Reply](#)



[Simiry Cuadra \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/123594\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/123594)

Jan 31, 2021



Hello Raquel,

Wow. You shared such a great and inspirational background with your post. I enjoyed reading it, and I am beyond happy and impressed that you graduated with honors and top of the class! It is such an accomplishment! I cannot imagine the experiences you underwent as a newcomer. The teachers you had, specifically the one that suggested blended classes, are great educators. I agree with you. In the classroom, there has to be patience, transparency, and enthusiasm.

← [Reply](#)



[Raquel Armendariz \(She/Her/Hers\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/129028)

Jan 31, 2021



Thank you for your feedback, Simiry. The reason I shared graduating with honors was that after a very tough year of feeling lost, unwanted, and quite frankly, dumb.. I needed to prove to myself that I wasn't either of those things and I guess I let that be my motivation. Truth-be-told, that was a great year academically, but as I became more comfortable with the culture and the language, my motivation to do well in school faded away.

But yes, my teachers were my saviors and champions that year.

← [Reply](#)



[Silver Park \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147686\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147686)

Jan 31, 2021

Hello Raquel, I cannot relate more than enough how you felt once you came to U.S. I was also around the same age when came here from Korea. "I can only recall that learning English was the only thing on my mind 24/7." This was me too!

← [Reply](#)



[Melinda Cavalletto \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/150435\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/150435)

Jan 31, 2021

Hello Raquel,

Your journey to learn English is impressive. I believe we have similar stories only backward. I was an adult when I was immersed in a foreign language. I can only imagine what it must have been like to learn as a 12-year-old. Do you feel like you are a better learner in all areas of study because of your experiences?

You had insightful teachers who were able to offer suggestions in order to give you more confidence and help your self-esteem.

← [Reply](#)



[Viktorija Lejko-Lacan \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/731)

Feb 4, 2021

Raquel, Thank you for sharing the determination which pushed yourself into mastering the language and academics. It seems you had to prove something to yourself and the world. And once you did your motivation was not as strong. I am sure your daughter's grateful that you made it possible for her to become bilingual.

[← Reply](#)<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025>

Jan 30, 2021



### 3. Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?

This is my second topic choice. I find the topic quite interesting and thought-provoking.

First and foremost, I see the merit in both. While prescriptive grammar is useful to reach a broader user base and to use as a frame of reference, descriptive grammars enrich your understanding of the cultural identities and linguistic beauties behind each vernacular that exists in the real world.

However, I do think these categories are also relative, and see some paradox in the controversy. For instance, I find it humorous that while the prescriptive Standard American English is regarded as the standard (and even elitist for its control and social stratification effects) here in the U.S., purists in England would probably think it is just one of the descriptive varieties of their one and only “proper” English.

Also, “descriptive” as they may be, African American Vernacular English, Creole, Singlish, etc., follow their own sets of prescriptive grammar rules within each vernacular (though not “imposed” by an academy). To me, the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. Add to that, languages are alive and are always changing.

In the classroom, when you teach prescriptive grammar to ESL students, it’s meaningful to also expose them to descriptive grammars, not only to celebrate diversity, but also for practical reasons, for the simple fact that they are alive and used a lot in the real world.

In my personal experience, there are still times when I don’t understand specific vernaculars and accents. When I was working in London, I needed to call clients in Scotland very often. Even though I was fluent in standard British English back then, I couldn’t understand the Scottish accent at all. After I moved to the U.S., even though there was a time when I was listening to Black music all the time, I still didn’t understand many African Americans in the real life. I seriously wished for an ESL class that would reflect the linguistic diversity of the real world.

As such, I'd like to deliver that as a teacher. I'd teach prescriptive grammar as a framework, but would also prepare students with the descriptive and provide context to accelerate the understanding.

I would bring in fellow teachers who speak one of those vernacular languages as “ambassadors” and have them interact with students in the classroom. I would facilitate conversations and communicate to students that vernacular is also part of the richness of English.

If that’s not possible, I’d introduce clips from a movie or a drama. For instance, for students at the upper-intermediate and above levels, I’d introduce movies like Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing*. It’s a movie from 30 years ago and I don’t have a more recent example here, but I feel it has all the elements. As many people may know, it’s a story on a hot day in Brooklyn, told by each ethnic group within the same colorful neighborhood, through the respective vernaculars with “descriptive grammars” of African Americans, Italians, Puerto Ricans, and Koreans, each having something strong to say to each other. You could also lead students to conversations around social issues that still hold true in 2020s, such as racial tensions, cultural stereotypes, and social justice. Although such topics are very serious and provocative, the film uses a lot of humor and the “vernacular” street lives are “translated” by the director for a larger, mainstream audience.

This was just an example. Again, the point is not to compartmentalize the descriptive grammars, but to encourage pluralism, which I believe will also help students boost their own self-confidence in front of the native speakers for not being “perfect.”

Edited by [Yoko Matsubara \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/161025) on Jan 30 at 11:50pm

← [Reply](#)



[Silver Park \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147686\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147686)

Jan 31, 2021

Hello Yoko, "I see the merit in both." I agree very much with what you said. We need moth system in order to learn a language.

← [Reply](#)



[Russell Fung \(He/Him/His\) \(https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480\)](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147480)

Feb 1, 2021

Hi Yoko,

I loved your thoughts on the AAVE space. I'm new to this, so you highlighted this perfectly for me. I recently watched Spike Lee's "Do The Right Thing" a few months ago, and wow. I loved that movie. It still holds up. Thanks for posting!

← [Reply](#)

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[https://](https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147686)**Silver Park** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/147686>)

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Jan 31, 2021

1. What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?

I would say my experience of second language acquisition has been enjoyable and fun yet also challenging at the same time. English has been my second language since I came to the States when I was fourteen year old. At first, it was difficult even to say a sentence in English. Absorbing the American culture around me played a huge role in learning the language because I was able to understand and adapt the culture first to able to listen and speak the language. It was a gradual process but promising because I was also being educated in schools with different subjects in English. It was frustrating sometimes not being able to accurately deliver your thoughts and feelings through English. Over time I learned that my sentences don't have to be perfect but delivering the message was the important part. It became more and more natural as I practiced and used it in my daily life.

2. Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?

In my opinion, both prescriptive and descriptive grammars are needed for language teaching. Students need to be educated and guided through a structure to be able to know and realize what they are presented with, but just that would not be enough because we need the practice and application which can be done through descriptive grammars. We can not lose one or the other.

← [Reply](#)

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[http](http://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/163772)**Juan Ochoa** (<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/163772>)

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Feb 2, 2021

Hi Silver, I like how you mentioned that your sentences dont need to be perfect so long as you get the message across. I think that is a great mindset to have, more often we are afraid of what other people will think when we try to talk to them. Personally I had this problem, I never really talked or express that I didn't understand something. Now that im older I feel that I have outgrown that feeling of insecurity but I think I would've benefited more if I had it from the beginning

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<https://my.uclaextension.edu/courses/32476/users/150435>

Jan 31, 2021



**What have been your experiences with second language acquisition/learning, either personally or professionally? How successful were you as a language learner?**

English is my first language, and my experience in learning a second language was not a steady climb. I was born and raised in a small farming town in California that was mostly Mexican, and Spanish was the predominant language. I was a white kid and by far the minority in school from kindergarten through eighth grade, so if I wanted to make friends, I had to learn Spanish. It was a struggle. I did my best to learn Spanish and my classmates did their best to learn English. And just to make things a little more complicated, our teachers were nuns straight from Spain. The school was an exciting microcosm of where California was headed as far as ESL learners. After high school, I moved to Puerto Villarta, Mexico. Immersion into Spanish was a lot different from what I was used to. Within three months, I learned and understood more Spanish than in my eight years of struggling in grade school. I have kept most of what I learned in Mexico, although I am not as sharp. Maybe I need a vacation to Cabo!

**Does the controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammars have any implications for language teaching?**

The controversy between prescriptive and descriptive grammar is interesting. On the positive side of prescriptive grammar, the student has structure and consistency by instilling directions. Negatively, I find this too structured. Elitist maybe? In my opinion, prescriptive grammar can lead to a classist and judgemental society. I lived in England for several years, which is a very classist society. The English are fast to judge their fellow citizens through dialect and grammar. Interestingly, The British could not easily place me into a class because of my American accent. I was living in an anonymous status. As I mentioned above, I was immersed in Spanish where I learned to speak in descriptive grammar. This allowed me the confidence I needed to continue opening myself up and allowing myself to make mistakes. Knowing these two types of grammar learning is essential when teaching an ESL class. I believe knowing which category a student falls into is imperative for their journey of learning.

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