

Effortless English

dropping like flies: idiom.
quitting in large numbers and very quickly
dropout: n. quitting, leaving
less than satisfactory: not good, below average, low quality
proficiency: n. skill, ability
standardized: adj. uniform, fixed
proficient: adj. skilled, good at (doing something)
experience: v. be affected by
That is: in fact, actually
at all costs: idiom. totally, completely, no matter what happens
audio-lingual: n. a teaching method that uses mostly "repeat after me" and substitution drills
grammar analysis: n. a teaching method that focuses mostly on memorizing grammar rules
approaches: n. methods
wide use: n. used a lot, a lot of use
engaging in: v. doing
pattern practice drills: n.
repeating the same sentence patterns again and again
theoretically: adv. in idea only, abstractly
infinite: adj. without limit, having no end
TPR: n. Total Physical Response- a teaching method
TPRS: n. Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling
approximates: v. gets close to, imitates
acquisition: n. getting, learning
receptive: adj. open, receiving

TPR & Listen First

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Foreign language study has not been as successful as it should be. In fact, students are dropping like flies from foreign language programs. J.H. Lawson reports that the dropout rate in foreign language programs for American high school students is as high as 85% by the third year and 95% by the fourth year.

Another study by John B. Carroll found that students who had studied for two years had a less than satisfactory proficiency as measured by standardized tests, which means that the first two years did not allow the student to become proficient enough to hold a conversation in the language. L.A. Jakobovits also found that most students who study foreign languages will probably never become fluent. Not only will most students have low proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening-- they will actually experience negative learning. That is, they will learn to avoid the foreign language and culture at all costs. This is because of the many frustrations and failures they experience during their foreign language study.

Perhaps the major reason for the lack of success of foreign language programs is the method used. The audio-lingual and grammar-analysis methods are popular approaches that came into wide use after World War II. These methods consist of memorizing grammar rules and dialogues and engaging in pattern practice drills. These methods do not produce communicative skill because language is "creative" and therefore theoretically infinite. Consequently, it is logical to conclude that since language has infinite possibilities, the methods of language instruction should teach the student to communicate creatively. A number of powerful methods have been effective doing just that. These include TPR, TPRS, Focal Skills, ALG, The Natural Approach, and The Effortless Way.

The first of these, TPR, was created by Dr. James Asher. TPR stands for "Total Physical Response". Learning a language through TPR approximates the acquisition of your native language. This acquisition follows the order of listening first, and then speaking. Finally, the learner learns to read and write. In the receptive listening stage, the child hears different "sounds"

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respond: v. answer, react
far in advance of: adj. much higher than, much better than
developed: v. learned, improved, grown
approximate: v. get close to, imitate, copy
delayed: v. stopped, inhibited
extensively: adv. thoroughly, totally
internalized: v. learned subconsciously, learned instinctively
beneficial: adj. helpful, good
oral: adj. related to the mouth, related to speaking, speaking
comprehension: n. understanding

In Sum: prep. in conclusion, finally

focus: v. concentrate on
supplement: n. addition, extra thing
major: adj. important

go back to square one: idiom.
go back to the beginning, return to the first step
extensive: adj. a lot of, a large quantity of

such as "Pick up your truck", or "Drink your water". As the child hears these "sounds", they physically respond. After a period of perhaps 12 to 18 months, the child begins to speak. At this point, understanding is far in advance of speaking and it will remain that way for many, many years. In the acquisition of the first language, therefore, listening is the first skill to be developed followed by speaking. It seems reasonable, obviously, that foreign language learning should approximate first language learning.

In TPR speech and writing are delayed until comprehension has been extensively internalized. Research by Valerian Potovsky supports the theory that delaying speech is beneficial. The results of his research show that overall proficiency in Russian was significantly better when oral practice was delayed at the beginning of language instruction until comprehension of spoken Russian was extensively internalized. This learning method is often called a "listen first" approach. It has also been used successfully by the Thai language program at the American Alumni University school in Bangkok, Thailand.

In sum, research and educational experience show that traditional grammar-analysis methods fail up to 95% of the students who are taught using them. Natural methods, especially those that use a "listen first" approach, are much more powerful and effective.

Therefore, when learning English or any other foreign language, focus most of your energy on listening until you can quite easily understand native speakers using the language. Only after that should you change your focus to speaking or writing. As for reading, it is an ideal supplement to listening activity as long as listening remains the major focus.

If you are an intermediate or advance learner, but feel that your listening skills are weak-- its best to go back to square one and focus on listening for 6 months or more-- until you can understand native speakers well. Then you can return to extensive reading, writing, and speaking.

Learn More:

TPR

<http://www.tpr-world.com>

Listen First (ALG)

<http://www.algworld.com>