

Story-Listening: A Brief Introduction

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In traditional foreign language classes, the vocabulary and grammar used in stories are deliberately placed there; the story is a way of helping students learn these items. Vocabulary lists and definitions are usually provided before the actual stories are presented or read, and exercises are provided after the stories are presented or read to help students remember the words and “master” them.

In contrast, in Story-Listening (SL) the focus is on understanding and enjoying the story. The teacher makes the story more comprehensible by selecting words from the story that she thinks the students may not know, and she makes the meanings of these words clear as she tells the story using what we call Comprehension-Aiding Supplementation (Krashen, Mason, & Smith, 2018) (e.g. drawing a picture, paraphrase, brief translation, and providing helpful linguistic context). Her goal is to make incomprehensible items in the story comprehensible and also to add interesting detail.

Comprehension-Aiding Supplementation (CAS) is not aimed at helping or encouraging students to remember or “master” the new words, but our studies thus far indicate that using CAS results in better and longer-lasting vocabulary acquisition than traditional methodology. Even if the goal is vocabulary knowledge, time is better spent listening to stories enhanced by CAS. Attempting to consciously “learn” new words while listening or reading distracts from comprehension and can slow down acquisition.

In SL, there is no attempt to make sure that certain words appear in the story; the story is not “seeded” with words we want to teach students. Rather, we tell the story. Given enough stories presented with CAS, part of what we call “optimal input,” (Krashen, & Mason, 2020) all the frequent as well as infrequent vocabulary the students are ready to acquire will be present, and in sufficient

quantity to support acquisition (for evidence, see Walter, 2020; McQuillan 2019).

Full acquisition (complete meaning and the ability to produce the newly acquired language easily) does not happen after only one exposure, but gradually builds up. Each time acquirers see or hear a new word or expression in a comprehensible context, a small part of it is acquired. With a sufficient amount of input, however, this small increase is enough to lead to substantial acquisition.

References

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