*2nd Essay : Second Language Acquisition Environment*

*Wonjun Yoo*

*Prof. Ben*

The importance of total immersion when learning language is often, especially at first, underestimated and unnoticed. Many students in S. Korea, either by their parents’ will or of their own, go to English speaking countries to learn English and they tend to continue their education in those English speaking countries. Some of them may hope to live and pursue career opportunities after their study in wherever countries they chose and fortunate ones do actually end up in those English speaking countries. Whether or not they feel more promising and financially stable in terms of living in those countries, one thing is sure: It is always better to remain in English speaking countries if you want to keep your English skill oiled.

 I myself was one of those students who left S. Korea to the United States to learn English. The environment where I acquired English allowed me to experience the total immersion in language learning. I was fortunate that for more than six years of living in English speaking countries, the U.S. and Australia, I hardly had chance to speak Korean. I was absolutely immersed by English speaking environment and culture. Although there had been various English acquisition environments in where I studied, worked and culturally and socially assimilated, I want to highlight one experience which worked the most practical and effective in acquiring English; thus most enjoyable and memorable.

 When I became a junior high school student, the second year in the United States, my friend’s family was kind enough to allow me to stay with them for a year. During the home-stay with the Murphy’s family, I experienced everything from American values, richness and diversity in culture to education and family holiday traditions. What fascinated me the most as I enjoyed more and more living with the Murphy’s was realizing the fact that I was communicating with them in English. Every morning, I had breakfast with my friend Mikey and his mother Mrs. Catherine. After school, Mrs. Catherine would pick me up from school and take me to grocery shopping so that I can choose what I want to have for dinner. On the way home, we would stop by at McDonald’s and she would encourage me to order what I want for snack. Even ordering a simple meal at a fast food vendor can only be taught by doing. Every night, we had dinner together and shared stories of our lives. I was experiencing the total immersion of a new family, culture, atmosphere, custom and, of course, language.

 Everything was in English, and I slowly but consistently was becoming familiar with the language. As listening skill improved quickly, speaking ability also improved with a slower pace. Surely, no one in the family coerced me to speak English, but I was living in an environment where I was so pleasantly and actively learning English with very little stress. There, I rarely sat in front of a table, and studied English with pen and note unless there was school assignment. I preferred talking and asking questions with an English-Korean dictionary in my hand. As months went by, the dictionary was substituted with English-English dictionary. Home-staying was not a classroom experience, but a truly authentic and distinctive experience that provided me with day-to-day basic, essential English skills that are fundamental to everything else to come in learning English.

 Everyone in the family, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy and three sons, was English teacher to me. Whenever I had trouble understanding anything about anything, they were quick to explain both verbally and kinesthetically, and would normally correct my pronunciation as I repeat new terms and words. I especially remember the second oldest son in the family. Matthew was born prematurely with a serious sight disability and he walked with noticeable limp. He always liked taking me to convenient store and taught me different kinds of dairy products. On the other hand, Mrs. Murphy was always there to stimulate and encourage my interpersonal English skill, and patiently listened and communicated with me. Everything from A to Z was taught hands-on, and it was as real and thorough as it got. I was learning and digesting raw English within the culture.

 Of course, there were many different English learning and acquisition environments as I moved on to higher education and career field. I was a college student and also was a university student. I worked with numerous people whose mother language was English. The way I want to apply the English skills and English acquisition techniques I have gained so far to my class would involve active participation, direct association with English, and questioning mind during/after class. As much as I realize the significance of teachers’ knowledge and teaching methodoloiges of English, I also want myself to be an enabler for my students. Many can teach English, I assume, but less than few can make students remain questioning minded. Based on my personal experience of home-stay, I want my students to experience English in an environment where they can “five-sense” English, because that is the best way of enjoying English. I believe that is the first and foremost step forward when experiencing English.