My failure learning Japanese in my university

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word-count (991)

Who told me that Japanese was really easy and fun for Koreans to learn before I chose my major? Since most Koreans think that Japanese is similar to our language systems, we tend to learn it more than any other language. However, I realized that it could be a definitely misunderstanding. Learning Japanese can be tough and hard work depending on teachers. My tragedy of learning Japanese got started from when I was a freshman.

I failed to learn Japanese in my university because my professor did not consider individual learning differences, the second language acquisition theory, and the characteristics of adult learners.

First, all students are various. For example, each student has different previous learning experiences. I had never learned Japanese and knew hiragana and katakana slightly before the first class. However, some peers were already fluent in Japanese because of studying in high school or in Japan. Very few of them were near native speakers. Still others were beginners like me. Surprisingly, my professor selected a high-intermediate textbook. He argued that if students dealt with the challenging subject, the ability of language skills would be improved. Even though I stayed up all night studying, looking up the dictionary, reading the kanji and hiragana, translating Japanese into Korean, and memorizing vocabulary and expressions, I could not follow the lecture easily. I did almost the whole thing before the class, until I got bored with it. It took me tons of time and I was really frustrated. Contrary to my expectation, my Japanese and language skills were not progressed and finally got a low grade on the exam. Next, each student has different knowledge and interests of Japan. The professor was immersed in Japanese politics. Beginning the class, he continued to speak about the history, and systems of politics, the general election results, each party reviews, and the effects on Korea. I did not have any information and was indifferent from politics. His repeated message distracted me for the whole class. Third, each student has different sensory preferences and multiple intelligences. Some of my friends who are visual learners like me were crazy about watching Japanese soap operas and Japanese cartoons, but auditory learners of them often listened to Japanese music (J-pop) and sang karaoke. However, the professor gave us the very odd individual assignment that we had to choose one of the J-pop or karaoke, type all lyrics, explain what it means and sing it in front of the class. I tried to hear a song and sing many times as much as I could. It was not really effective. As I was a visual learner, I got too much stressed and my progress of learning Japanese actually slowed down. It is certain that the teacher’s role is to respect unique differences.

Second, the emotional barrier plays a prominent role in language acquisition.

According to Stephen Krashen’s theory of how adults learn a second language, anxiety, self-esteem, and motivation become crucial in the process of language acquisition. It can heighten or interfere with a student’s ability to progress. So, it is important to encourage good rapport between teachers and students. For instance, Krashen shows that entering a learning situation with a low level of anxiety is much more likely to be successful language learners. However, we were not allowed for any jokes and relaxed conversation at all during the class. The professor always seemed to be angry and dissatisfied. It created the negative classroom climate and we were reluctant to share ideas and answers for a fear of being wrong. Moreover, students who have a high self-confidence can acquire more knowledge. Although the professor believed that the oral correction was generally effective, I lost my confidence when the professor corrected me orally right away. He did not praise the students when we gave a presentation and report. I felt the feeling of failure and fear. Finally, students who are highly motivated can progress quickly. Teachers should provide activities that are interesting and intriguing due to this factor. On the contrary, the professor persisted in GTM(grammar translation method) without any activities. I felt terribly bored and unbearable. Cleary, students can build motivation and confidence in a comfortable circumstance.

Next, adult learners have their own traits. For example, adults need to be shown respect. Carl Rosers, psychologist showed that empathy, authenticity and respect are crucial factors to be effective teachers. When the professor checked the attendance, he did not call students’ name and checked the seat number instead. Whenever I encountered him, I reminded him of my name, but he did not recognize me until I finished the course. In addition, adults are goal-oriented . Teachers must show students how the class will help them reach their goals. My purpose of learning Japanese was to become a translator and I wanted to deal with the social issues and focus on the useful expressions. However, these expressions from the textbook were too much formal and rarely used in Japan. This course did not help me achieve my goal and I felt frustrated. Lastly, adults have life experiences and knowledge.

The teacher should draw out students’ experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic, related theories and concepts to students’ and recognize the value of experience in learning. Most of the students who were interested in Japanese culture including me already knew kimono, samurai, sumo, onsen, cherry blossom, famous festival and ceremonies, he kept explaining all those stuffs without any materials and spent the whole class.As I already knew Japanese culture, I could comprehend the article better. If he had given us opportunities to talk about our experiences or knowledge, it would have facilitated the motivation of learning. Definitely, the university students are adult learners, not children.

Therefore, if you want to be an effective teacher, you should regard a variety of students, emotional wall, characters of adult learners of great importance.