My Success Story of Leaning English in College

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I would like to share my story on how I learned English when I was in college. Back in mid-1980, when I started my college life in local city, there weren’t any good materials or tools available to learn English, not to mention the difficulty of finding a native English teacher. Even though English requires 4 different language skills, reading, listening, speaking and writing, all of my junior high and senior high school educations were primarily focused on reading only, based on school textbooks. Until, I enrolled in college, I hadn’t had any chance of listening, writing, or speaking in English. As I was full time working and full time student at the same time, I had to squeeze as little as time possible to study and maximize hours in those 4 years. So, I would like to share my story on how I overcame some of the barriers and what methods I used to acquire English as a second language.

The methods which I took to study were primarily traditional methods. In college, I took the first English lab course which required using listening and speaking skills. The teacher who taught English lab was a very traditional teacher. All students sited on lab in a raw and listened pronunciations, dialogues, conversations (series of discourse) coming out of tape recorder. We listened and repeated whenever we were given instruction to follow. Time to time, the teacher demonstrated how to pronounce each word and explained lexis and grammar on the whiteboard. We took notes in class. Now that I am learning TESOL, I recall not enough interaction took place with the teacher due to large class sizes (about 40 ~ 50 students) and limited time (50 minutes per class).

Not satisfied with lab class itself due to limited exposure of English, I tried to go further. I purchased the cassette tape recorder and I listened to repeatedly English lab materials until I fully understood words and meanings and tried to mimic the sounds until I memorized it. So often, I combined listening with reading materials to better understand the contexts. As I had limited time to study, I turned on the tape recorder whenever I was free and wherever I was. When I woke up every morning, turning on the recorder was the first thing to start my day. I turned on the tape recorder to repeat and rephrase what I learned for 5 or 10 minutes daily before I went to bed. When I cleaned the house, I always played the tape recorder so that I listened while I was cleaning. At the same time, I wrote it down words which were difficult to memorize and hung words and idioms along with pictures, sometimes graphs on the wall at home so that I could look them up at any time until words and language became internalized. I also put wrote words/idioms in a little note pad so that I could carry them with me and memorized as much as possible. Even though my learning method was pretty much focused on audio/visual, I was able to make progress one by one with repetition, rephrasing using visual added by auditory modes.

Looking back, I really enjoyed and was motivated to learn English. At the same time, I was very much goal oriented; learn to speak English. At this day, listening and reading are major tools I keep practicing to improve my English. Somehow, having an experience taught by a very traditional teacher has lessened me what is needed to be a better teacher if I chose teaching in the future. I will continue my journey of improvement of English using the sensory methods which work best for me.