The key to successful learning of language

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I like traveling a lot and I traveled a lot in my younger days. To me, ideal type of travel is to stay at least 3 month in one place or at least in one country so that I can have the least time to explore the language and culture. I had chances to stay in Japan for 6 month and also in Mexico for the same amount of time. I learned both Spanish and Japanese but in different ways with different methodology.

The Japanese class I took was a traditional class which was a jug and mug, also chalk and talk. The teacher who was more of an explainer taught with two teaching methods. The grammar translation was used to teach grammar and reading as the Audio-lingual was used for listening and speaking skills. A lot of explanations for the target language and learning material were given in my first language as well as many drills and repetition of dialogues were done. I had very little student talk time compared to teacher talk time. As you can guess, the outcome wasn’t so good and I ended up with a few Japanese words in my head, being unable to speak it at all.

In Mexico, I chose to rely on my interpersonal intelligence for learning Spanish instead of going to school so I stayed with a Mexican family and blended into their everyday lives as a part of the family. I also hung out with many Mexican friends. My friends and host family took the role of involver and enabler with patience and affection.

Because I already studied English as a second language which has similarity with Spanish and also lived in California where lots of Spanish is used, I wasn’t a true beginner. I was a false beginner but I still had a lot of difficulties in basic communication so I started out with using linguistic intelligence to build up my vocabulary. When I talked to my friends, they repeated words and phrases for me using the audio-lingual method and it improved my listening skills and thus speaking skills. My Mexican friends loved fiestas and we got together every day without an exception. Being with natives all the time provided an excellent communicative language teaching environment and I started to pick up the language even in the natural approach. I learned Spanish so fast that my friends even believed that I was a Mexican in my before-life.

I learned that the key factors of successful acquisition of language are the teaching/learning environment and teaching methods from my experiences in Japan and Mexico. The adequate teaching methods in comfortable and encouraging learning environment made it possible for me to be fluent in Spanish within just 6 month of time.

I also learned that the rapport is what makes it all happen. Even with the perfect method if the learner doesn’t trust the teacher, the student wouldn’t get inspired to be eager and won’t enjoy the learning. I was fortunate to have such trusting and trust-worthy friends who opened up my eyes to the joy of learning a new language. Successful learning of Spanish was not only an acquisition of a language. It also was a successful adoption of culture and building intimate relationship with people on the other side of the earth. Language teaching is not only giving lessons. It’s all about being honest and yourself as it is for all human relations.

I hope I could be as patient, affective, passionate and trusting as my Mexican friends were so I could be a good friend to my students as well as a good teacher.