What I Learned from the Failure of Learning a Second Language

Name: Sophie Kim

Class: 147th Weekend Class

Date: Jan 14th, 2017

Teacher: Jayme

Learning a second language is being a newcomer in the different world just like Mowgli from Jungle Book when he goes to the human world from the animal world. It is somewhere between nervousness and adventurous. It has been 20 years since I started learning English as my second language, as I began learning in Elementary school. And yet, learning English as a second language remains difficult for me, especially in the passive Korean education environment. I would say that my English course experience during University years was a failure. Now I will discuss what made it so ineffective and how to improve on these teaching skills.

The first reason I believe my professor teaching style was ineffective was because she was an explainer type, who only focused on delivering knowledge and information, rather than enabling students to learn for themselves. Most homework and tests were based on memorization and fill-in-the-blanks which limited students from thinking further or using the language in the real life. When learning science, for example, one must memorize complex formulas and equations, however, this traditional ‘jug and mug’ process, in which the knowledge is being poured from one into others is ineffective in teaching a second language. I lost my interests for the class because I was only listening to the long lecture and the memorization brought both boredom and burden.

Second, she missed the most essential part of learning a second language, which I believe is being able to communicate with others. The Teacher Talking Time took up the dominant part of the class period, and Student Talking Time was almost non-existent. Since there were no group discussion activities and no question and answer time, I lost the chance to speak and engage with the professor or the other students. As a language professor, it is important to limit the amount of time you speak and encourage the student to speak just as much if not more. In addition, for effective learning, the class should offer an environment that balances both receptive skills - reading and listening and productive skills - writing and speaking.

Lastly, she was not a patient teacher who rarely listened to the students and ignored students’ questions and criticized their mistakes. I believe that there is no stupid question in the language class. A teacher should encourage students to fall over more and get up without any fear. If Mowgli from Jungle Book was neglected in the human world, he would only want to stay in the animal world speaking only the animal language. For effective teaching, a teacher really needs to respect students and give clear and positive feedback.

From the failures I encountered in my second language learning, I believe I can make improvements in my own teaching. I will always remember the three important characteristics of empathy, authenticity, and respect when I teach English to second language learners. Furthermore, a teacher should become a student as well to develop oneself into a better teacher by adopting new teaching methods and utilizing them to make better progress. If I make an environment where students become enthusiastic and confident about their second language learning experience, I will be successful in introducing them to the broad world and broader perspectives.