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## USEFUL EXPLANATIONS IN LEARNING LANGUAGES

**Abstract:** The article illustrates that language learners seem to need a number of things beyond simply listening to explanations. Amongst other things, they need to gain exposure to comprehensible samples of language (not just the teacher's monologues) and they need chances to play with and communicate with the language themselves in relatively safe ways. So the article is primarily aimed that Methodology, such as we discuss here, is what a teacher uses to try and reach that challenging goal.

**Key words:** Methodology, exposure, chances, challenging, comprehensible

**Language:** English

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### Introduction

How useful are explanations? Language learning, especially, seems not to benefit very much from long explanations. If the explanation is done in the language being learned, then there is an immediate problem; learners have by definition limited understanding of this new language will be likely to be more difficult for them than the thing being explained. And even if the explanation is done in their native tongue, explanations about how language works, while of some value, seem to be most useful in fairly brief hints, guidelines and corrections; language learners do not generally seem to be able to make use of complex or detailed information from lengthy 'lectures', not in the same way that, say, a scientist might make active use of understanding gained from a theoretical talk. Ability to use a language seems to be more of a skill you learn by trying to do it (akin to playing football or riding a bicycle) than an amount of data that you learn and then try to apply.

### Materials and research methods

"Education is what remains when one has forgotten everything he learned in school." (Albert Einstein) Language learners seem to need a number of things beyond simply listening to explanations. [1.19] Amongst other things, they need to gain exposure to comprehensible samples of language (not just the

teacher's monologues) and they need chances to play with and communicate with the language themselves in relatively safe ways. If any of these things are to happen, it seems likely that classroom working styles with in number of different modes and not just an upfront lecture by the teacher. Of course, a lot of teaching work will involve standing and talking to (or with) students, but a teaching style that predominantly uses this technique is likely to be inappropriate.

Learning, as we have said, consists of something else beyond understanding comprehensible input, and in this sense the two modes offer a pathway for acquisition, as they make frequent use of what we term 'formulaic language'. [2. 21] These linguistic chunks, which are listened or read by students within a meaningful context, can later be recalled through rote learning. That is to say, they may be memorized, stored and later remembered and used by the prospective listener-reader when the situation demands its use, either because of processing restrictions or as a result of an automatization of the cognitive demands involved in producing a language. Thus, it is not only comprehensible input that students receive, but also *correct linguistic models* -although that depends on the type of film or book- they can memorize and use.

Moreover, both versions have the potential to create a very wide linguistic and extra **linguistic**

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**context** that provides a relevant schema background, making language relevant and comprehensible. For example, in the written mode we can see not only isolated words and sentences, but also discourse and textual elements such as reference, lexis, time and place clauses. They might offer difficulties for the students' comprehension, but with the help of the linguistic context students may be able to understand or infer unknown words and structures, or even acquire –incidentally- some specific vocabulary. On the other hand, the paralinguistic features of the filmed version allow learners to see and understand how discourse elements link all the parts of the text, specially with the use of images, music, movement, and the like. These contextual cues enrich or at least improve the students' comprehension, and probably can also improve their competence, and even though the realization of both modes is obviously different, they still constitute part of a context for comprehension and, hopefully, learning.

### Results and discussions

Furthermore, if students are familiarized with the story line of the book or film, they can concentrate their efforts on the linguistic features. In particular, we can take advantage of the universality of mass media both to develop cultural awareness and foster an

interest in reading for pleasure **the written version** of that story they have seen on TV or in their classroom.

Also, the comparison of both modes can evoke a critical analysis: how the film maker conveys metaphors and descriptions, figures of speech, in short, how he makes it possible to 'see' rather than to 'read'. And most important of all, how the director makes it possible to spend one hour and a half 'watching' a story that has taken many long hours, and days, or even weeks, to read.

### Conclusion

Students need to talk themselves; they need to communicate with a variety of people: they need to do a variety of different language-related tasks; they need feedback on how successful or not their attempts at communication have been. And video materials have plenty of advantages in English **explaining how to write** for learners. It can also be included that strategic competence is an ability to compensate lack of language knowledge, social and speech practice in order to communicate effectively. In other words, we can give explanations as keeping up the conversation when there are some barriers to do them.

So, what's a teacher for? Short answer is that a teacher helps learning to happen. Methodology, such as we discuss here, is what a teacher uses to try and reach that challenging goal.

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