
From Established Beliefs and Traditions to Innovation and Technology in Language Learning

Dan Manolescu
ESL Instructor and Award-Winning Author, USA
Email: Dan.manolescu@att.net

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Abstract

The present article approaches the concept of language learning from a teacher's perspective, but also from the standpoint of a language learner. A thorough analysis of recent language research has shown that competence, accuracy, and fluency can be achieved if students understand the complexity of the learning process, and build their knowledge using traditional and/or innovative methodologies brought about by the 21st advancement in science and technology. A quick overview of historical data makes research a rich source of information and delivers good news about new ways of language learning strategies that are made available by the computerized world of today. Motivation, creativity, and curiosity are valuable components of the current approach, to which we might add humor and music. The practical examples and the opinions presented here are corroborated by solid language research and minute study of this relatively new and unexplored realm of linguistics.

Keywords: Curiosity, Creativity, Motivation, Knowledge, Imagination

1. Introduction

Language has been used to preserve old traditions and customs, and simultaneously foster new ideas. The objective of this article is to approach these two aspects: established beliefs and tradition on one hand, and the innovation brought by the new world of technology and its impact on language learning, on the other hand. The study of current strategies points to the inestimable value of the student motivation, compounded with the endless resourcefulness, ingenuity, and vision of those who are curious and creative in the learning process. The main point of the whole process is focused on learning and teaching as a voyage of discovery. The new information will satisfy the student's thirst for knowledge, practical hints will stimulate their curiosity, and in time the new language skills will make them better writers, better speakers, and eventually better thinkers. We learn a language through language acquisition; we go through an interesting process and in time we acquire abilities, or skills, so that we can understand, produce, and communicate with each other. Language is that special form of communication which provides a method of ordering, simplifying, and making the indigestible digestible for the mind. We should never forget that we need language to communicate and build knowledge. The learning process and the acquisition of language can be described as an individual or collective accumulation of life experience and, by the same token, a transmission of knowledge. Besides language, teaching and learning also include academic skills that develop a student's ability to accumulate knowledge, and in the process, enhance their curiosity and cultivate their imagination.

2. Discussion

2.1. Imagination and Creativity in Language Learning and Teaching

The fascinating computerized world of the 21st century has brought a series of new sources of information available to anybody who might be curious or interested in learning new things, or getting new knowledge. Simply by going online, asking questions, filtering through what you can find available, or by comparing and contrasting opinions, ideas, and similar findings. And one of the best findings would be a new approach to language learning. As touted by Scott Alkire (2008) in his Introduction to Kato Lomb's *Polyglot: How I Learn Languages*, "a language learner's success is primarily determined by motivation, perseverance, and diligence—and not by innate ability" (p. xi). The same author lays emphasis on the language learning as challenging and adds that "imagination plays a greater role in language than is commonly understood" (ibid.). Among the established beliefs of language acquisition we find Lomb's metaphor: "A foreign language is a castle. It is advisable to besiege it from all directions: newspapers, radio, motion pictures which are not dubbed, technical and scientific papers, textbooks, and the visitor at your neighbor's." (ibid.) Lomb goes even further when she re-iterates that good methods play a more important role in language learning than the concept of innate ability.

Generally speaking, a traditional way of language learning involves certain skills necessary to understand and communicate properly in another language. When we consider the great challenges in learning a new language, as explained by Bodmer (1987), "One great obstacle to language learning is that usual methods of instruction take no account of the fact that learning any language involves at least three kinds of skill as different as arithmetic, algebra and geometry. One is learning to read easily. One is learning to express oneself in speech and in writing. The third is being able to follow the course of ordinary conversation among the people who use a language habitually" (Bodmer, 1987, p. 11). The best advice, therefore, would be to concentrate on reading, writing, and speaking—without paying too much attention to defective grammar and pronunciation. The basic needs would include a relatively small number of words and a precise knowledge of the essential language requirements. All of the above-mentioned obstacles can easily be avoided if we remember that there are strategies based on the concept of *creativity*.

According to editors Jones and Richards (2015), there are a few principles regarding creativity in language teaching and learning. First, creativity is not an "optional" component. Instead, "creativity is seen as central to successful teaching and learning." For teachers and learners alike, real creativity "brings about valuable and concrete outcomes that are linked to the pedagogical knowledge and plans of teachers and the goals of learners" (Jones and Richards, p. 5). The same authors assert that the second principle will take creativity in language teaching beyond "creative language." While acknowledging the value of the old concepts of creating literary, poetic, or dramatic texts, they are also focusing on "*using* language in creative ways to solve problems, to establish or maintain relationships, and to get people to act, think or feel in certain ways" (ibid.). Language creativity is thus appraised for its prowess in problem solving, human relationships, as well as practical ways of building trains of thoughts, including the learners' actions and sentiments.

The fact that creativity in language teaching cannot be accomplished alone brings us to the third principle, as presented by Jones and Richards. They also argue that creative teaching skills cannot be developed in isolation. Pennycook (2007) is also mentioned along the same lines to explain that "creative language use and creative language teaching are often a matter of refashioning, re-contextualizing, and building upon the words and ideas of others" (p. 7). Furthermore, successful teaching and language learning should start from the traditional methodologies and build on them using innovation and new technologies.

The Grammar-Translation Method (translation and memorizing grammar rules), the Direct Method (speaking and listening in the target language), the Audio-Lingual Method (based on drills and practice), the Communicative Language Teaching (focused on real-life situations), and the Total Physical Response (related to physical actions) method are the traditional methodologies. They all have the same goal: to create learning building blocks that, in turn, generate new knowledge.

According to Bloom's Taxonomy (1984), learning a language through a cognitive process involves certain steps, all related to the idea that we deal with knowledge, and that we need to remember, understand, then apply, analyze and evaluate, and finally create. When we go from *Remember* to *Create*, we find our way to knowledge through recollection, discovery and analysis plus evaluation, and finally invention. Knowledge, in this vein, can be achieved when the process of education in general, and the learning process in particular, can provide the much-needed abilities and cognitive skills.

With several skills necessary to succeed in the classroom and in the working place as well, several linguists have considered teaching and learning outcomes from the students' perspectives. In order to overcome the difficulties presented by various factors, including culture, personal experience, prior knowledge, and proficiency levels, researchers have proposed several beneficial approaches. Almarode and Vandas (2018) relied on their classroom experience and from similar research, which led them to believe that clarity in teaching and learning would definitely increase the classroom performance and the obvious results coming from such endeavors. They argue that there are several essential practices that empower students and teachers:

... teacher clarity makes many of the other effect sizes in the Visible Learning research possible. For example, when teachers are clear on what the students are learning, they can better select learning experiences that specifically target the necessary learning. Similarly, when teachers know why students are learning what they are learning, they can better design learning experiences that are authentic and relevant to learners. (Almarode and Vandas, 2018, p. 5)

Authenticity, clarity, and relevant learning experiences can only enhance the classroom performance, and in doing so, encourage students to use their own personal experience and prior knowledge to set a good example to the whole class, gain confidence in themselves, and empower others to do the same.

Better communication skills are developed if language learners become aware of the power of imagination and creativity. Research shows that imagination and creativity are boundless, and teachers and students should choose the best learning experiences that bring the best benefits to language learners. What we need is to find the best ways to build the most efficient tools necessary to attain a certain level of accuracy that eventually leads to fluency and competence.

2.2. *Effective Learning Language Strategies*

The need for effective learning language strategies has become a reality, but, to begin with, we must face the new realities. Wyner (2024) makes a startling confession about himself (some of us might also be included): “We feel more isolated and have shorter attention spans than we ever have before. We live in algorithmic bubbles that we don’t know how to escape, and we’re drip-fed stimulating content in such an effective way that many of us struggle to reach our long-term goals. Language learning provides an escape route from modern isolation” (Wyner, 2024, p. xvi). The author goes on and postulates that this route has to be more engaging and more effective than ever before.

The advent of new technologies, personal computers and mobile devices, has brought a new perspective to language learning. As editor Mark Dressman (2020) avers, “Advances in access and speed on smarter and smarter phones, tablets, and laptops provide an almost limitless array of sources of the language of your dreams, spoken and written by people who ‘speak your language’ metaphorically as well as linguistically across written, audio, and video platforms” (Dressman, 2020, Introduction, p. 1). What happens as a result is that “Through constant exposure and a bit of effort, you absorb and then understand and finally, in fits and starts, speak and read and write a new language, if not effortlessly, then with an ease and grace that surprises even you” (ibid.). The same statement implies that language acquisition has reached new horizons and language instruction must be assessed and appreciated not only from the educator’s point of view, but also from the language learner’s standpoint as well.

Language education, therefore, must be viewed from a new perspective within the fields of applied linguistics and language pedagogy, but also the new unprecedented opportunities offered by the Internet. In the introduction to a special issue of *The Modern Language Journal*, a publication of the MLA, Kramersch (2014) noted that

There has never been a time when language teaching and learning has been more interactive and more imaginative than today. Communication pedagogies have made the classroom more participatory, electronic chatrooms have loosened the tongues and the writing of even the shyest students, video and the Internet have made authentic materials available as never before, tele-collaboration and social networks have increased students’ access to real native speakers in real cultural environments—and yet there has never been a greater tension between what is taught in the classroom and what the students need in the real world once they have left the classroom. (Kramersch, 2014, p. 296; Quoted in Bell and Pomeranz, 2016, n.p.)

Interaction, communication pedagogies, and imagination can therefore strengthen the process of teaching and language learning with outstanding results in our students’ abilities to function in the new world of Internet and social media of today.

Considerable changes in the 21st century that have affected the education system have also brought with them the realization that language teachers might need to know how to prepare their students to function properly in real world situations. Whether we are talking about learning English or some other foreign language, being able to share meaningful messages with everybody else will also lead to better ways of self-expression, thus language learning becoming a benefit for the individuals and our society. To do so, we need to understand how language teaching, as well as language learning, has changed over the years and has become such a powerful communication tool, making language itself a meaningful target. The caveat is, according to Lonsdale (2006), that there are many problems that we have to deal with in today’s day and age, and that is because of poor communication. “You’ve probably heard the old joke about the British and Americans being separated by a common language. Even those who speak the same tongue have problems communicating!” (Lonsdale, 2006, p. 11) Such things happen because of poor communication skills, or simply because we sometimes miss important pieces of information and, in the act, we disregard different perspectives, ideas, or opinions. We must also mention that “with any language there is a need to use it or lose it. It’s like a muscle. You can even lose your mother tongue if you don’t use it for a long period of time” (ibid. p. 17). Language awareness, practice, and active use are obviously some of the necessary learning ingredients.

In a quick overview of the prowess of language and its components, researchers have rightfully assessed several relevant language definitions, the tools necessary to accomplish competence, the skills that accompany teachers and students alike, as well as viable strategies to adapt pedagogy to the present-day requirements.

According to Lems et al. (2017), “Language is a system that contains many small elements that can be combined in an infinite number of ways in order to make meanings. Human language has four universals: phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. These can be combined into the overall term *grammar*. Each language has its own grammar, and although some of the elements of one language can be found in other languages, the full inventory of characteristics is unique to that language” (Lems et al., 2017, p. 3). Learning a new language involves all of the above and includes skills related to listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Teachers and linguistic research may find that communicative competence can be a tall order, but competence—accuracy and fluency included—is necessary if we expect our students to be able to exchange opinions and ideas, ask and answer questions, debate and argue, in such a way that all language requirements increase communicative competence in a natural way. Language learners should be able to speak, read and write in a new language but also demonstrate their abilities when interacting in different social settings. To accomplish this, we need tools, and in this case they are called language learning tools.

2.3. *Language Learning Tools*

From the plethora of powerful language learning tools available—if curiosity is still fully active—would be to learn pronunciation first, to avoid translation, and to use a spaced repetition system (SRS). Trained memory, an essential component of learning, might also play an important and decisive role.

When we look at conservatory training we discover that singers learn how to pronounce in a new language before acquiring the vocabulary or the grammar rules, which appears to improve listening comprehension and speaking abilities more quickly. From various sources, including the Berlitz Immersion programs, we find that beginner classes can be held in the target language without the sometimes burdensome need to translate every word. Context and body language—among other things—can replace all that because learners are empowered to think in a new language to make themselves understood. The power and the value of SRSs, according to Wyner (2024), “create a custom study plan that drives information deep into your long-term memory. They supercharge memorization, but they have yet to become the go-to tool for language learning” (Wyner, 2024, p. 7). Students can benefit from the established beliefs regarding memory and the science of mnemonics, simply by resorting to trained memory.

Lorayne, H. and Lucas, J. (2012) lay stress on the memory techniques and systems that enabled people over time to remember the essentials of life, thus making trained memory a vital component of learning. To prove their point, the authors provide the following examples from history:

King Francis I of France used memory systems, as did England’s Henry III. Shakespeare is held to have used trained-memory systems—his Globe Theater was called ‘the memory theater.’ Philosophers of the seventeenth century taught memory systems (Francis Bacon has one in his book *The Advancement of Learning*), and some scholars insist that Leibniz invented calculus while searching for a memory system that would aid in memorizing numbers. (Lorayne and Lucas, 2012, p. 19)

With these historical examples in focus, we are reminded that language learners need to organize and process new information. They have to look at the acquired new things and put them in a certain order so this new information becomes available for recall in the future. The key word is *order* and students should be aware that the new information is stored in the brain, which works like a filing cabinet. One of the first steps in learning another language is to realize that the accuracy, the fluency, and the competence do not depend on the teacher, but on the learner. The language learner, exposed to a second language, should remember that there are certain mental, emotional, and practical strategies that are needed to approach a specific task. Successful language learners quickly apprehend that “The more we study language, the more it becomes possible to accept that people are hard-wired to learn language. In the same way that pigeons are programmed to find their way home, we may be born with an inbuilt ability to learn language” (Lonsdale, 2006, p. 23). The subsequent realization is that it all depends on how much content a learner can process, store, and retrieve in an orderly manner.

2.4 Innovation Brought by Technology

From established beliefs we now switch to innovation and its assets brought about by technology. With so many sources of information available online today, choosing the right resources is obviously necessary. Language Apps like Babbel or Memrise offer fun and engaging structured lessons; podcasts and Audiobooks can be used to improve listening skills and pronunciation; YouTube channels provide valuable lessons on grammar, vocabulary and culture; websites like Tandem or HelloTalk can help learners connect with native speakers (*Words Trivia*, 2025, n.p.).

When language learners are able to maintain their motivation and discover strategies to track their progress, structuring their studies can help them reach their goals. The resources are there. According to Kaufman (2005), “Today the Internet provides a vast range of interesting and authentic second language content for learners to choose from, in both audio and electronic text formats. With the text in an electronic format the reader can access instant dictionary software and create personal databases of new words and phrases that are linked to meaningful contexts, not learner language. A wealth of foreign language books and magazines that used to be difficult for a language learner are suddenly accessible and can serve as the core content for learning. What is more, the Internet itself can serve as the hub for a community of learners and native speakers” (Kaufman, 2005, p. x). The communication made possible by the new language tools will undoubtedly give learners the opportunity to become acquainted with the intensity of international exchange and, in the process, also learn about other cultures.

Listening comprehension, pronunciation, and vocabulary come first when language learners look at the long list of necessary skills to acquire a new language. In this context, immersion in a new culture and language helps people avoid forgetting. Kaufman also reminds us that “Immersion is a wonderful experience, but if you have steady work, a dog, a family, or a bank account in need of refilling, you can’t readily drop everything and devote that much of your life to learning a language (p. 9). That being said, we definitely need to look at other sources of information regarding the way people think and act in a new language.

Depending on the context of each situation, we have to develop a whole new approach to investigating which words should come first, and how to remember whole chunks of set phrases or idiomatic expressions and collocations. Idioms have a figurative meaning what is not easily guessed, while collocations are words that have a literal meaning.

If we really want to improve our vocabulary range and our accuracy in a foreign language, we should start with those groups of words which make up a natural combination and are called collocations. Examples of collocations—which are estimated at thousands, and are basically words that naturally go together— would be salt and pepper, cloak and dagger, cause and effect, fast food, hardly ever, quite often, run fast, etc.

According to Muller (2008), “Collocation generally refers to the expression of words which are often used together such as bitterly cold, rich imagination, or close friends. If you hear the first word, the second can be expected, or at least you can have

an idea what it could be” (Muller, 2008, p. 4). Practice is the best way to memorize collocations by immersion in the new culture that can explain its language, but also by reading extensively, listening to native speakers, and actively noting down new collocations you encounter, then regularly practicing using them in context.

What that means is that language learners need to read and listen, build a vocabulary list, and even use a collocation dictionary, but the overall idea is that—if they want to be accurate—they need to focus on meaning and context.

Much the same suggestions go for the phrases and idiomatic expressions. There are so many idioms in any language, but the best way to learn them would depend on the individual and the context. One of the old ways of learning and remembering idioms would include identifying them, understanding their meaning, and finally using them in daily conversations. Novel ideas would include practice, context, and even trying to find out how certain idioms came to be what they are today. Etymology would add a special touch and turn language learning into a journey of discovery.

2.5. *Using Games, Playtime Activities, Storytelling, Role Play, And Humor in The Language Learning Process*

If we look at the learning process from a student’s point of view, fun activities would be one of their choices. We should always remember that language learners benefit from recreational activities combined with games and playtime activities. Online articles are replete with games that can be incorporated into learning:

One of the most effective ways to make language learning fun is through games. Board games, card games, and online language games can turn learning into a playful experience. Simple games like Bingo or Pictionary can be adapted to include vocabulary words or phrases in the target language. Additionally, interactive online platforms such as Duolingo or Quizlet provide gamified learning experiences that keep kids engaged. These games not only promote language skills but also foster healthy competition and teamwork among peers. (*Words Trivia*, 2025, n.p.)

Teamwork can also include other fun-filled activities like storytelling and role play. These two powerful tools can enhance the classroom experience and build practical knowledge. Kids of all ages can write, draw, or act to create their own stories; role play scenarios can also test the students’ imagination. “By immersing children in real-life contexts, they learn to use the language practically and naturally. This method not only enhances vocabulary but also builds confidence in speaking” (ibid.). When imagination and creativity are unleashed, all these fun activities will undoubtedly create a meaningful language learning experience and a “lifelong love for languages.”

Humor, among other things, can have “a large role to play when it comes to engaging students in a classroom environment. By facilitating student laughter with appropriate jokes, quips, and visual humor, a teacher can make the learning experience immensely gratifying for their students. Studies have shown that humor improves the in-class experience by diffusing the tension and can even serve as a mnemonic device to help learners prepare for tests” (Doshisha University, 2022, n.p.).

Along the same lines, in 2022 Prof. Peter Neff from Doshisha University, Japan, and Prof. Jean-Marc Dewaele from Birkbeck, University of London, UK, performed a study regarding students’ preference for humor strategies and concluded that “Students preferred spontaneous verbal humor along with cartoons and memes the most, while visual humor, such as making humorous faces and using props, were the least preferred humor strategies” (ibid.). The researchers found that students preferred spontaneity, and that form of humor should be characterized by “play, laughter, challenge, and experimentation.”

Going from culture to culture, we find Deniz Arslan and Ugur Sak from Anadolu University, Turkey, (2021), who argue that “Children with higher levels of general knowledge and verbal reasoning are better able to produce humor.” A new study along these lines has revealed that the cultural context is also important. This new study used the Turkish culture, and their findings point to the value of cultural norms, beliefs, and values. “A joke considered hilarious in one culture may not be funny in another. Likewise, a particular behavior may be considered a sign of high intelligence in one culture but other cultures may find such behavior inappropriate.” (SciencePOD, October 4, 2021) Humor, therefore, may be considered one of the most favorite teaching tools, if we remember that our goal is education, now entertainment.

The benefits of using humor in the classroom might start from the basic idea that “Humor connects teachers and students. It creates that sense of community, how we’re all in this together, how we all make stupid mistakes and need to laugh at our foibles. It keeps students interested and attentive. Some of us think it helps put students at ease—encouraging discussion and engaging exploration of topics and issues” (Weimer, 2016). The use of good humor can be extremely beneficial as an ice breaker at the beginning of a class, or any time during a lesson when we need good intuitive sense to deal with embarrassing moments or boring topics. In this vein, funny ice breakers are the most powerful tool that brings people together (students included), stimulates their brain, and creates an atmosphere where everybody might feel included. A good example would be sharing a joke from Mark Twain’s time:

During Mark Twain’s visit to Heidelberg he attended a play with a friend. During the intermission the bored friend said he was leaving and asked if Twain wanted to leave with him. “No,” said Twain, I think I’ll stick around and wait for the verb.” In many constructions in German, the main verb doesn’t appear until the end of the sentence.

(Adapted from M. Agar, *The Language Shock. Understanding the Culture of Conversation*, 1994)

It doesn’t matter what the reasons are, it’s always a good idea to make everybody feel good and ready to absorb whatever needs to be presented, tested, analyzed, or simply just discussed by a group of information seekers also called students.

2.6. *Music and Its Relationship to Language*

From humor, we can now segue to the power of *music* in teaching languages. The music-language relationship starts from the idea that their commonality is strikingly similar, because “both involve complex and meaningful sound sequences naturally” (Patel, 2010, p. 3). Since we have an unparalleled ability to make sense of sound, “Language and music define us as human. These traits appear in every human society, no matter what other aspects of culture are absent (Nettle, 2000). Consider, for

example, the Piraha, a small tribe from the Brazilian Amazon. Members of this culture speak a language without numbers or a concept of counting. Their language has no fixed terms for colors. They had no creation myths, and they do not draw, aside from simple stick figure. Yet they have music in abundance, in the forms of songs (Everett, 2005).” The human ability to communicate makes *music* a pleasant experience that makes language learners enjoy the classroom and online activities, and consequently add meaningful traits in the learning process.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines *music* as “vocal, instrumental, or mechanical sounds having rhythm, melody, or harmony.” As such, music can be described as “sound organized in time,” and is perceived by us as aesthetic experience. What makes music such a powerful force is that we use it to express our feelings with or without words. “It can be used to bond, form memories, and connect with others. Music can also help people learn to communicate more effectively.” (AI Overview) Like music, language is also used as a tool for communication.

According to Bauer and Calude, editors of *Questions about Language* (2020), “Language is a powerful tool that helps us think and make sense of the world, that we use to transmit our cultural histories, that we use to entertain, convince, seduce, inform and mislead.” Moreover, language has a unique capacity to “refer to things and situations arbitrarily distant from the speech situation in time and space, to things and situations that may not or do not exist.” (ibid.)

Since language has developed as a combination of words, phrases, and sentences, this complex communication system is essential in conveying meaning, which can be connected to a specific situation or context. Whether we learn a native language or whether we embark on a voyage to learn a foreign language, words are the basic units and we learn them when we read, write, listen, or practice new vocabulary in conversation.

Music, like language, is universal mostly because of its emotional power, but it has a special form of communication. Higgins (2012) acknowledges that “Once upon a time, music was said to be a universal language. Verbal languages varied from place to place, so the reasoning went, and speakers of different language could not understand each other; but music moved people across linguistic boundaries. Germans who spoke no Italian could still understand Italian music. In fact, they could do more than understand it. They could embrace it as speaking of their own inner life. They might not understand the words someone sang, but they could feel the emotion expressed.” (p. 2) This notion became international when people realized that music could speak to everyone and that everyone could understand it.

When music becomes part of the curriculum, students are the ones who benefit from the cultural understandings brought into discussion by practicing language learning as part of the community, its holidays, celebrations, and ceremonies. Kelly (2019) accurately describes the results when he posits that “Music education should be able to relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding” (p. 2). Since language originates in culture, we can safely say that learning a language through music can have added benefits in understanding *why* or *how* certain things need to be expressed in a way that they convey a meaningful purpose. Language acquisition is more than a set of tools, and music appreciation is just one of them.

3. Conclusion

We have come a long way from established beliefs and traditional methodologies, and the language teaching and learning have changed considerably over the years. If language learners are exposed to the target language and then get well immersed in it, there are more possibilities for them to become competent in the new language. Competence, accuracy, and fluency will become feasible depending on the individual and collective skills, the ability to remember and build knowledge using imagination, which in turn will help understand new strategies, practical methodologies, and fresh concepts. Motivation, curiosity, and creativity will also make language learning a wonderful life experience for everybody to enjoy and, at the same time, open a window to other cultures and ways of life.

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