

Popular Beliefs on Learning and Teaching English

By Dr. David Shaffer

Over the years, numerous beliefs about how languages are learned and how they should be taught have coalesced among laymen and foreign language teachers alike. Everyone considers themselves to be an expert on language learning – after all, they have all managed to master at least one language and quite possibly more. As such, popular views on first and second language learning arise and many are accepted by the general public without question, and in many cases, without foundation.

The aim of this presentation is to question over a dozen such popular opinions and show how much they are or are not supported by present second language acquisition research and theory. The popular opinions to be dealt with include: Languages are learned mainly through imitation. Parents usually correct young children's grammatical errors. Highly intelligent people are good language learners. The best predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation. The earlier a second language is introduced in school programs, the greater the likelihood of success in learning. Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language. It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language. Once learners know roughly 1,000 words and the basic structure of the second language, they can easily participate in conversations with native speakers. Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practice examples of each one before going on to another. Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones. Learners' errors

should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits. Teachers should use materials that expose students only to language structures that they have already been taught. Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error. Students learn what they are taught. (For more, see on page 3.)

THE PRESENTER

David E. Shaffer, PhD (Linguistics), has been an educator in Korea for over three decades and is a long-time KOTESOL member. He is a professor at Chosun University teaching linguistics, teaching methodology, and skills courses in the graduate and undergraduate programs. In addition, he is a teacher trainer, graduate dissertation advisor, materials designer, and program developer.



Dr. Shaffer is the author of books on learning English as well as Korean language, customs, and poetry. His present academic interests include professional development, English loanwords in Korean, CBI, and cognitive linguistic constructs for effective teaching techniques. Dr. Shaffer is active in numerous Korean ELT associations and in Asia TEFL, and regularly presents at their conferences. Within KOTESOL, he is presently Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter President, a KOTESOL publications editor, and a 2011 and 2012 International Conference committee member. He can be contacted at: disin@chosun.ac.kr

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Dr. David E. Shaffer
Chosun University
English Language Department
Email: disin@chosun.ac.kr



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Dept. of English Lang. & Literature
Email: ynell_alpha@yahoo.com



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Sunchon National University
ffishley@hotmail.com



Treasurer

Vivien Slezak
Chosun University
Language Education Institute
vivianslezak@gmail.com



Chapter Email Address

gwangju_kotesol@yahoo.com

Chapter Website

<http://www.koreatesol.org/GwangjuJeonnam>



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- Bank transfer to **KOTESOL**, Korea Exchange Bank account number: 630-006952-841
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Some Popular Beliefs on Learning and Teaching English

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Presented here are several of the more than a dozen popular views held by laymen on how languages are learned and on how they should be taught. These beliefs are discussed and how they may be mistaken is pointed out.

Parents usually correct young children's grammatical errors.

The amount of caretaker correction of a child's language is sure to vary considerable depending on the caretaker's social, education, and linguistic background as well as the child's age. When children are young, their linguistic errors are very rarely corrected. It is when children near elementary school age that adults become more concerned and begin to correct children's mistakes. However, the mistakes that are most often corrected at this time are meaning-related mistakes rather than purely grammatical mistakes. Semantic errors rather than syntactic errors are considered to be of more importance.

Highly intelligent people are good language learners.

People with high IQs are good at learning about things, and they are good at taking tests. Therefore, they will be good at taking tests about language. Learning a language, however, is much different and involves much different skills than those measured on an aptitude test. There is not a close relationship between intelligence and language learning ability. Some students who are good at school subjects struggle with learning a language and vice-versa. Students with high IQs often have good study habits and this may transfer to learning a language also.

But students with a wide variety of abilities may be good at language learning, especially conversational skills.

Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.

First language interference does account for a certain amount of language learners' mistakes, but the first language may also have many positive effects on language learning. For closely related languages, language transfer is often positive. Many of the mistakes a language learner makes are due purely to the language learning process. Second language learners make many of the same mistakes that first language learners make, such as overgeneralizations in irregular verbs (*go – goed – goed*), which are inherent in the language learning process. The majority of inter-language mistakes are not first-language influenced.

Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.

If asked, the majority of language learners will say that they want to be corrected immediately and explicitly when they make an error, but experience shows that a considerably smaller number of students are comfortable with the teacher doing so. Excessive error correction can have a negative effect on motivation. It is true that if an error goes uncorrected over a long period of time, "fossilization" may occur. But the conscientious learner self-monitors and self-corrects even without having their errors corrected by others.

About Korea TESOL and the Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter

Korea TESOL, also known as KOTESOL, is a professional association of teachers of English to speakers of other languages. The nationwide organization has been serving English teachers, administrators, and interested individuals in the field of English education since 1992. KOTESOL has ten active chapters across the nation and holds annual national and international conferences. The Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter has monthly meetings, usually the second Saturday of the month, which contain two one-hour presentations or hands-on workshops on topics related to English language teaching, such as classroom methodology, activities, and management. Meetings are presently being held at Chosun University in Gwangju. Admission to Chapter meetings is free, but we encourage your participation as a full member. (Membership information on page 2.)

Gwangju-Jeonnam KOTESOL November Chapter Meeting

- Time: Saturday, November 5, 2011, 1:30 p.m.
- Place: Chosun University, Main Building (본관), Gwangju

Schedule

- 1:30 pm:** Registration and Welcome
- 2:00 pm:** PRESENTATION 1: **Connecting Reading and Writing with YLs**
Keumju Cheon (Chapter Member; KEREAF Founder)
- 2:50 pm:** Refreshment Break
- 3:00 pm:** Chapter Elections
- 3:20 pm:** PRESENTATION 2: **Popular Beliefs on Learning and Teaching English**
Dr. David Shaffer (Chosun University; Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter President)
- 4:10 pm:** Teaching Ideas & Activities Share Time (Everyone. Bring and share your ideas.)
- 4:30 pm:** Announcements
Drawing for Prizes
Closing

(Admission is free. Membership is encouraged.)

Upcoming Chapter Events

December 10, 2011. Chapter Meeting

- *Let's Play: Games for English Class*
Billie Kang (Taebong Elementary School)
- Chapter Swap-shop Hour

January 14, 2012. Chapter Meeting

- Presentation: TBA
- Intro to Language Acquisition for Teaching
Dr. David Shaffer (Chosun University)

Upcoming KOTESOL Events

November 12, 2011.

**The 16th Jeonju-North Jeolla Chapter
National Drama Festival**
Jeonju University Arts Hall, Jeonju, Jeonbuk

November 26, 2011.

**The 8th Daejeon-Chungcheong Chapter
Symposium & Thanksgiving Dinner**
Namseoul University, Cheonan, Chungnam

Upcoming Korea ELT Events

21st Japanese/Korean Linguistics Conference
October 20-22, 2011; Seoul Natl. University, Seoul

ALAK 2011 Annual Conference
Cognition and Practice in Applied Linguistics
November 12, 2011; Seoul Natl. University, Seoul

Cambridge Day XI 2011
November 12, Sookmyung Women's Univ., Seoul
November 13, Pusan University of Foreign Studies

ELLAK International Conference
*Looking at Cultural Studies from the 21st Century
Perspective*
November 17-19, 2011; Asan, Chungnam

DisCog 2011 Conference
*Discourse Analysis & Cognitive Linguistics and
Language Education*
November 19, 2011; Kyunghee University, Seoul

GETA 2011 International Conference
*Extensive Reading and Listening:
Why, What, and How*
November 26, 2011; Chosun University, Gwangju

For KOTESOL, Korea & Intl. ELT Events:
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