

Language Acquisition for Language Teachers A new column on language acquisition

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Most occupations require workers to continue professional development throughout their careers. Teachers receive ongoing training about many aspects of education. Among language teachers, non-native speakers of the language they teach often struggle to keep their language skills up; they need as much focus on professional development in language acquisition as in other areas of education. Those who do not live near native speakers need to find creative solutions.

We will continue an ongoing occasional column on ways to improve advanced language skills in many languages, although our primary focus is Spanish acquisition.

Comprehensible Input is what leads to language acquisition for our students. As teachers, perhaps self-conscious about our language ability or wanting to acquire a new language, we often forget to apply the same rules to ourselves. Comprehensible Input leads to language acquisition at all levels.

Here are some options:

1. **Take a class.** Not any class. A class that uses TPR Storytelling® and Comprehensible Input to teach. [Fluency Fast Classes](#) are one option. We primarily teach Spanish. Classes this year are in Denver, Colorado; Olympia, Washington; Norman, Oklahoma and Boston, Massachusetts. (This is my company.)

2. **Immersion.** Not just any immersion. Immersion with a home stay and sheltered subject matter classes are ideal, but classes with a particular CI/TPRS focus are the best. Avoid classes that focus on teaching grammar. One travel option is the [International Forum of Language Teaching](#) taking place over a 3 week period in Cuernavaca, Mexico. This is specifically for Spanish teachers wanting to improve their Spanish. Dr. Stephen Krashen will also present on language acquisition theory. Information is also on their [Facebook page](#).
3. **Read.** Not just any book. Look for books that are designed for language learners. If you are learning a new language, look for low word counts with glossaries in the back. If you are trying to improve a language you are already proficient in, go for quantity. Instead of choosing books that are time-consuming and difficult to read, choose many easy books with few new words and plots that are compelling. (You will find advertisements in this journal for [Command Performance Language Institute](#). Mike Peto also maintains a [blog](#) with a list of new and independently published readers. He is also the author of easy readers available on that page. Two other publishers of easy readers for language learners are TPRSBooks (Formerly Blaine Ray Workshops) and Fluency Matters (Formerly TPRS Publishing). In all cases, we recommend ordering books directly from the authors or publishers rather than distributors whenever possible.
4. **Take an on-line class or video.** Alina Filipescu, a Spanish teacher in California, is a polyglot, determined to add more languages to her repertoire and to improve each language she knows. She teaches Spanish, although her first language is Romanian. She is now acquiring French and recommends the videos of [Alice Ayel](#). She contributed [a blog](#) on her French journey to TPRS for Chinese.
Fluency Fast also has pre-recorded on-line videos of previous classes in Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic and German. The French class is new, recorded this summer, with [Donna Tatum-Johns](#).
5. **Netflix.** Television. Movies. TV shows. Binge-watching. I personally am trying to improve my own Spanish. While I am reading and taking TPRS classes to learn beginning French, all French television is too advanced for me. For Spanish, though, it is my number one resource for improving my advanced Spanish. I started with El Internado. I have also watched El tiempo entre costuras, Velvet, El Barco, El ministerio de tiempo, La embajada, Las chicas del cable and Gran Hotel. Other recommendations have been Ingobernable, La Niña and Juana Inés and Bala Loca. Some of these are not available in the U.S. I downloaded them onto my iPad while I was traveling in either Mexico or Spain. When I returned, I did not reconnect to the internet in the U.S. until I had finished watching as many episodes as I had downloaded. This will work

when leaving the U.S., also. (Once Netflix re-connects to U.S. internet, programs downloaded in other countries will no longer play.) For all episodes, I use the subtitles in Spanish and listen and read simultaneously.

6. **Make a friend.** Whether in person by going to meet-ups or local events with native speakers or on-line in a conversation exchange, keeping up and improving your own language ability in the language you teach Alina Filapescu also has a Skype friend with whom she practices English for 30 minutes and Spanish for 30 minutes weekly. I took up Salsa and Bachata dancing and slowly changed by social group to primarily Spanish speakers.

These are not light recommendations. As non-native speakers of the languages we teach, continuing to improve our language skills is critical. All of us need to continue to spend time exposed to comprehensible input in the language we wish to learn. As teachers, this is a job requirement and we don't all live in places where we have easy access to native speakers.

In future articles we will address more in-depth language acquisition at the advanced and beginning levels. Links are included in this article. If you know of more, please forward them to us.

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