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Edited and Published by

Tarun Patel

Bhaskar Pandya

Kaushal Kotadia

Rajesh Bharvad

Newsletter Contents

Word of the week: Direct method	3
Video: Shaping the Way We Teach English: Module 13, Peer Observation in Teaching Practices	4
Susan Ryan's Tip: Three Strategies for Listening to Spoken English	5
Advertisement: Station-e Language Lab	8
Research Paper: 'Forgetting vs. Remembering: Implications in Language Teaching' by Laleh Fakhraei Faruji	9
Article: 'Using texts constructively 2: intensive input-output work' by Michael Swan	21
Opinion: Do Teachers Have the Right to Blog?	22
GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS	23

Word of the week: Direct method

The direct method of teaching was developed as a response to the Grammar-Translation method. It sought to immerse the learner in the same way as when a first language is learnt. All teaching is done in the target language, grammar is taught inductively, there is a focus on speaking and listening, and only useful 'everyday' language is taught. The weakness in the Direct Method is its assumption that a second language can be learnt in exactly the same way as a first, when in fact the conditions under which a second language is learnt are very different.

Example

The teacher explains new vocabulary using realia, visual aids or demonstrations.

In the classroom

Aspects of the Direct Method are still evident in many ELT classrooms, such as the emphasis on listening and speaking, the use of the target language for all class instructions, and the use of visuals and realia to illustrate meaning.

[retrieved from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk>]

Video: Shaping the Way We Teach English: Module 13, Peer Observation in Teaching Practices

Classroom observation can take different forms. The two most common are: 1. Summative observation, in which another teacher or an administrator observes the class. The purpose for this is evaluative and may result a rating of some kind.

2. And, formative observation, in which two teachers, or “peers,” do a “friendly” observation of each other’s classes. The purpose is to improve teaching practices and to engage in a systematic form of professional development.

The focus in this module is on formative or peer observation. Formative observation can benefit both the observed teacher and the teacher doing the observation. In order to do so, it must be carefully organized. We will follow a teachers through the three phases of a successful observation: * First, preparing for the observation. * Then, observing in the classroom. * And, finally, the post-observation debriefing.

An innovative offering from the Office of English Language Programs, Shaping the Way We Teach English, is a 14-module teacher training video series developed and produced in cooperation with the University of Oregon.

Watch the video at <http://www.eltweekly.com/elt-newsletter/2011/02/82-video-shaping-the-way-we-teach-english-module-13-peer-observation-in-teaching-practices>

Susan Ryan's Tip: Three Strategies for Listening to Spoken English

Many people tell me that they sometimes have trouble understanding American English speakers.

In response to this concern I will describe three listening strategies you can use to increase your understanding of spoken American English.

But first, you need to remember that written English and spoken English are very different. English is not a phonetic language. That means that there is not always a one-on-one relationship between the letters in the English alphabet and spoken sounds.

In fact, the 26 letters in the English (Roman) alphabet make many different sounds in spoken American English. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, American English has 25 consonant sounds and up to 18 vowel sounds (the exact number of sounds may vary from region to region).

Given that, here are my three listening strategies:

1. Anticipate and predict what may be said.

Before going into a situation where you will be communicating with a native English speaker predict how the conversation might proceed. Depending on the context you should be able to anticipate many of the words and phrases that the speaker will say. Review those words and phrases in your head or even write them down. This way you will be ready to hear these words and phrases should they occur.

2. Listen for the main idea. Don't try to understand every word!

Don't listen for every word! American English speakers pronounce content words and focus words with more emphasis than the other words in a sentence or phrase. That's because content and focus words are the most important for meaning. The other words, called function words, are reduced in the spoken language. Listening for content and focus words reduces the amount of information you have to comprehend. It will help you focus on the most important words.

3. Practice listening to native English speakers using online resources

One of the best online resources for practicing listening comprehension is <http://www.esl-lab.com/index.htm>.

This is how I suggest you use the listening exercises you'll find on the above site.

A. Anticipate and predict-Look at the title of the lesson and make some predictions about what words and phrases you might hear.

Then look at the vocabulary words in the pre-listening exercises and make a few more predictions.

B. Listen for the content and focus words-Next, listen to the audio without looking at the text. Focus on the words articulated with the most emphasis. These are the content and focus words.

C. Check -Next, check your comprehension by listening to the audio while you read the text. Notice which words and phrases you didn't hear or understand and make a note of them.

Continue using the audio and text together and separately until you feel you can get the meaning of the story. Remember, you don't always have to get every word; you just need to understand the meaning.

Spoken English involves the use of the schwa vowel in weak forms and reduced syllables, linking and sound assimilation. All feature that are not apparent in the written language. This can make it difficult for non native speakers to understand what native English speakers are saying. Using the three strategies described here can help you improve your listening skills.

Susan Ryan is an American English pronunciation teacher and accent reduction coach. She currently lives in South Florida. Read more articles by Susan at <http://www.confidentvoice.com/blog/>

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Research Article: 'Forgetting vs. Remembering: Implications in Language Teaching' by Laleh Fakhraei Faruji

Laleh Fakhraei Faruji is a Ph.D Candidate in TEFL, Tehran Azad University, Sciences & Researches Branch, Faculty of Literature & Foreign Languages.

Abstract

If asked, most of us would probably say that our biggest memory problem is forgetting things we want to remember. Due to the importance of forgetting, and implications of theories of forgetting in language teaching, the researcher in this paper provides a brief account of forgetting and its definitions, and then explains the relationship between rote and meaningful learning and forgetting. Forgetting is always referred to in negative terms, and described as a state or condition where memory does not work normally and seems to be faulty. However researcher argues that forgetting is not always negative; rather, in some occasions, it may be the most efficient thing one can do in order to retrieve memories.

Introduction

According to Cubelli (2010, p. 35), etymologically, the word “to forget” derives from the Old English word *forgytan*, which is composed by *for-* (passing by, letting go) and *gietan* (to grasp).

Why do we forget? This question was once one of the most prominent topics of research on memory. The original work in this area was done by Ebbinghaus

(1885, as cited in Levy et al. 2010, p. 135), who carefully documented the rate at which he forgot nonsense syllables.

Different scholars provided various definitions of forgetting. Tulving (1974) defined forgetting as “the inability to recall something now that could be recalled on an earlier occasion”. Davis (2008 as cited in Roediger et al., 2010, p. 2) defined the strong form of forgetting as complete loss from storage, by saying that forgetting is “the theoretical possibility that refers to a total erasure of the original memory that cannot be recalled, no matter what techniques are used to aid recall”. Roediger et al. (2010, p. 3) referred to the weak form of the concept of forgetting and stated that all events that have been encoded and stored from age 7 persist in the nervous system, and the inability to access them now is due to retrieval failure.

Different theories of forgetting has been developed over the previous years. However, as Wixted (2004) argued it is still debated whether forgetting is an active process (e.g., it occurs via interference in the acquisition of new information) or a passive one (e.g. it occurs as a result of decay of information over time).

Systematic forgetting

Ausubel (1968, as cited in Brown, 2000) provided a plausible explanation for the universal nature of forgetting. He argued that rote learned materials do not interact with cognitive structure in an effective way. These materials are learned through the laws of association, and their retention is influenced primarily by the interference effects of similar rote materials which have been learned immediately before or after the learning task. Lefrancois (1988), and Roediger et al. (2010)

referred to these processes as proactive and retroactive interference. According to Roediger et al. (2010, p. 10), proactive interference refers to the negative effects of prior learning on retention of new information, whereas retroactive interference refers to the negative effects of encountering new information on remembering old information. You can see the process of rote learning and retention in figure 1.

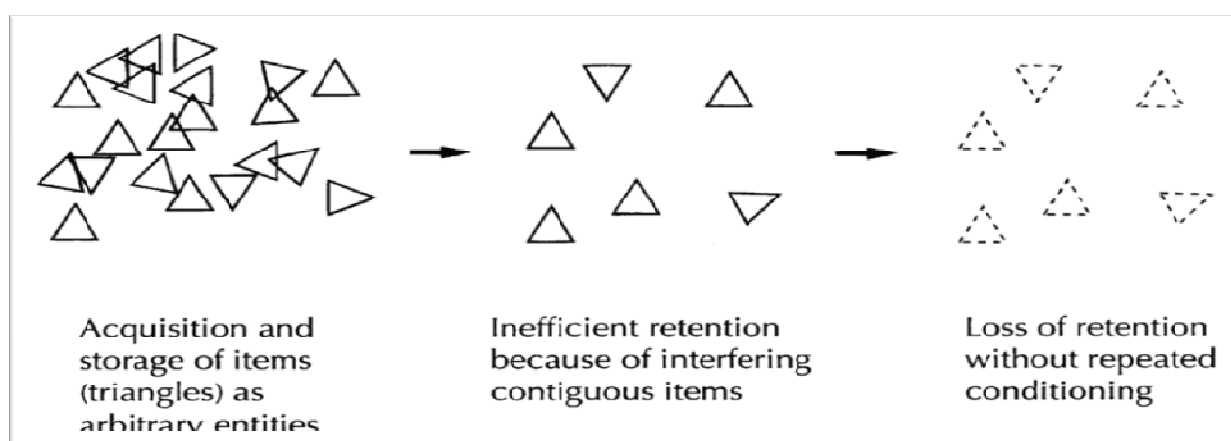


Figure 1. Schematic representation of rote learning and retention (Adapted from Brown, 2000, p. 84)

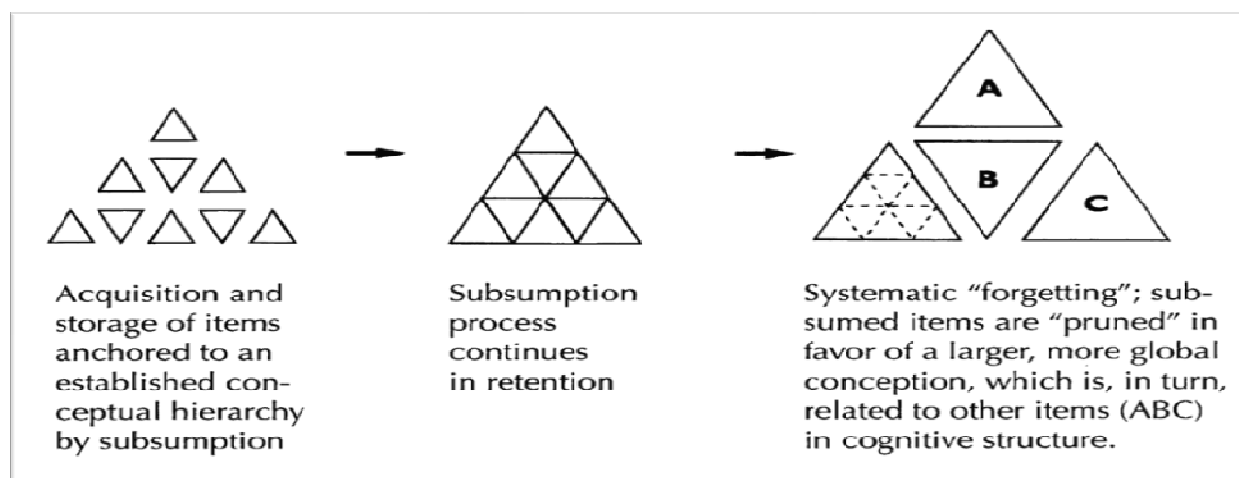
According to Brown (2001, p.86) interfering effects have little influence on meaningful learning, and the amount of retention for meaningfully learned materials is highly efficient. For example, addresses can be better retained as part of a meaningful set, compared to phone numbers, which are isolated entities, and can easily be forgotten.

It does not mean that meaningfully learned material is never forgotten. But in the case of such learning, forgetting takes place in a much more intentional and purposeful manner, because it is a continuation of the process of subsumption by which one learns; According to Ausubel (1963, as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 86) forgetting is really a second or "obliterative" stage of subsumption. It means that it

is a "memorial reduction to the least common denominator". In other words, it is more economical and easier to retain a single inclusive concept than to remember a large number of more specific items. Therefore, the importance of a specific item is incorporated into the generalized meaning of the larger item. In this obliterative stage of subsumption, the specific items become gradually less identifiable as individual entities in their own right, until they are no longer available and eventually be forgotten. It is this second stage of subsumption that operates through what (Brown 1972, as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 87) has called "cognitive pruning" procedures.

Pruning is the removing of unnecessary material and clearing the way for more material to enter the cognitive field. This is analogous to pruning a tree, which leads to its greater and fuller growth. You can see the process of meaningful learning and retention in the building blocks analogy of Brown (2000) in figure 2:

As you saw subsumptive forgetting, or pruning, is not haphazard or chance; rather, it is systematic. Therefore, as Brown (2000, p. 87) argued, "By promoting optimal pruning procedures, we have a potential learning situation that will produce retention beyond that normally expected under more traditional theories of forgetting".



Schematic representation of meaningful learning and retention (subsumption) (Adapted from

Brown, 2000, p. 84)

Explicit memory: "Remembering" and "knowing"

Several theories of recognition memory distinguish between experiences of "remembering", and "knowing" (Gardiner & Java, 1993; Jacoby, 1991; Mandler, 1980; Rajaram, 1993).

The basic paradigm for exploring the role of conscious recollection in memory involves requiring people to make judgments regarding the nature of their memories for recalled or recognized items (Gardiner, 1988; Tulving, 1985, as cited in Rajaram, 1993), instead of assuming the involvement of conscious recollection on the basis of successful memory performance. Rajaram (1993) identified two types of experiences: One type of experience, which subjects judge as "remember," refers to those items for which they have a vivid memory, a subjective feeling of having seen the item during the study episode, and a conscious recollection of it occurring on the study list. The other type of experience, which subjects judge as

"know," refers to items for which they can tell (usually with certainty) were on the study list, but cannot recollect the actual occurrence. It is assumed that this judgment is made on some other basis because the subject does not remember actually seeing the item on the study list, and does not have a conscious recollection of it. For example, while describing a recent visit to a national park, one may recall all the details and mentally relive the events that took place. This would be an example of a "remember" judgment. On the other hand, there are times when we meet someone on the street whom we met at a party a few days ago. Although we know that we met this person at the party, we may not remember actually meeting the person, or his/her name. In this case, the recognition of this person would be classified as a "know" judgment, not a "remember" judgment.

Goal directed forgetting

Forgetting is always referred to in negative terms, and described as a state or condition where memory does not work normally and seems to be faulty. However, according to Johnson (1994, as cited in Van Hoof et al., 2009) efficient memory functioning involves both the successful remembering of previously learned material, and the successful forgetting of irrelevant, invalid, or out-of-date information. For example, according to Anderson, et al. (1998, p. 104) "to avoid disability emotions or dysfunctional personal relationships, we may want to forget past events in our lives that are painful or embarrassing". Markovitch & Scott (1988) put it this way: Learning and forgetting are complementary processes which construct and maintain useful representations of experience.

Anderson et al.(1998, p. 104) provided some cues to forget as: implicit cues, and explicit cues.

Implicit cues

In both real world situations and analogous research paradigms, cues to forget, although clear, are typically implicit (Anderson et al., 1998, p. 104). As we park our car in the morning, for example, we do not tend to instruct ourselves to forget the event of having parked our car in a different spot the preceding morning, nor do there tend to be signs posted that instruct us to do so.

Explicit cues

In other real world and laboratory situations the cue to forget can be more direct (Anderson, et al., 1998, p. 104).; for example, we have probably all been told something like: “forget what I just said. I was reading the wrong number, here is the correct one”, or “forget those directions; it is hard to get there that way. Here is the way you should go instead”. Similarly, a defining characteristic of directed forgetting research paradigm, at least with human subjects, is that the cue to forget is explicit. Subjects are instructed at the beginning of such studies that on occasions they may receive an instruction to forget some of the material previously presented to them for study and, if so, their memory for that material will not be tested later. Or subjects might be later unexpectedly told that materials they had just been studying for a later memory test will not be tested after all. For example they might be told that incorrect materials had been presented by mistake, and they are then presented with the current material to study for a later memory test.

Retrieval Induces Forgetting (RIF)

Many details of the events take place during a day are only a little different from details of the day before. For example, you may park your car in the same lot

every day, but the location of your car may vary from day to day. With many memories linked to your car's location in the lot, how are you able to recall the current spot? Green & Kittur (2006) argued that to retrieve today's parking spot, your memory system must discriminate that target memory from many related, competing memories. According to him such discrimination is facilitated by the inhibition of competing memories. This idea which was first proposed by Anderson et al. (1994, 1998, 2000 and confirmed by others like Ciranni & Shimamura, 1999; Dunn & Spellman, 2003; Jakab & Raaijmakers, 2009) suggests that the very act of remembering may cause forgetting. Veling & Knippenberg (2004) provided the example that retrieving information from a particular category (e.g., retrieving the phone number of an old friend) can induce forgetting of related information within that category (e.g., the phone number of a family member), compared with information about an independent category (e.g., one's groceries).

Teaching implications of theories of forgetting

Lefrançois (1988, p. 74) provided some implications of the theories of forgetting in teaching as follow:

Regarding the issue of interference, Lefrançois (1988, p. 74) referred to the idea of transfer as the effect of new learning on old learning and claimed that transfer can be either positive or negative. Positive transfer occurs when previous learning facilitates new learning. Negative transfer occurs when previous learning interferes with current learning. One of the obvious ways of teaching for positive transfer, while at the same time eliminating negative transfer is, to relate new material to old material, and to emphasize similarities and differences. The similarities should facilitate positive transfer; and knowledge of differences should minimize negative

transfer.

Lefrançois (1988, p. 74) also listed a number of memory aids, or mnemonic devices which make use of specific retrieval cues. Rhymes, patterns, acronyms, and acrostics are some of common mnemonic devices.

According to Brown (2000, p. 88) the notion that forgetting is systematic also has important implications for language learning and teaching. In the early stages of language learning, certain devices (definitions, paradigms, illustrations, or rules) are often used to facilitate the subsumption process. These devices can aid meaningful learning at early stages. But in the process of making language automatic, the devices are just meaningful at a low level of subsumption, and at later stages of language learning they will be systematically removed.

Novak (1998) identified concept mapping as a powerful tool for the facilitation of meaningful learning. Concept maps are tools for organizing and representing knowledge. They include concepts, usually enclosed in circles or boxes of some type, and relationships between concepts or propositions, indicated by a connecting line between two concepts. Words on the line specify the relationship between the two concepts.

He believed that concept mapping serves as a kind of template to help to organize knowledge and to structure it, even though the structure must be built up piece by piece with small units of interacting concept and propositional frameworks. Many learners and teachers are surprised to see how this simple tool facilitates meaningful learning and the creation of powerful knowledge frameworks that not only permit utilization of the knowledge in new contexts, but

also retention of the knowledge for long periods of time (Novak, 1990; Novak & Wandersee, 1991, as cited in Novak, 1998).

Concluding remarks

One can conclude that knowledge of characteristics of long-term memory; the causes of forgetting, and also the knowledge of what can be done to impede the process of forgetting has considerable value for teachers in general, and for language teachers in particular.

Brown (2000, p. 89) stated that while we are all fully aware that our dependence upon devices like definitions, paradigms, illustrations, or rules, is gradually decreasing in language learning, Ausubel's theory of learning gives explanatory adequacy to this idea. He maintained that language teachers might help their students to "forget" these interim, mechanical items as they make progress in language learning and instead help them to focus more on the communicative use (comprehension or production) of language.

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Article: ‘Using texts constructively 2: intensive input-output work’ by Michael Swan

“This is the second of Michael Swan’s articles for TeachingEnglish, in which he looks at the role of texts in the learning process.

The need for intensive input-output work

I argued in the previous article that intensive input/output work is crucial for cost-effective language teaching and learning. This is particularly the case in learning situations where extensive input, and opportunities for extensive output, are limited. In these situations, intensive language activity has to carry more of the instructional burden. (If learners encounter fewer examples of high-priority words and structures, each example needs to make more of an impact.) Well-planned text-use can contribute importantly to this aspect of language learning. Ideally:

1. Students engage in depth with a short sample of spoken or written language. They work hard enough on this text to make some of the language their own: words, expressions and structures stick in their minds; perhaps whole stretches of the text are even memorised (as when a dialogue is learnt by heart)”.

Read the complete article at

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/think/articles/using-texts-constructively-2-intensive-input-output-work>

Opinion: Do Teachers Have the Right to Blog?

“One of our brethren has been released from his teaching position due in part to the reflective teacher writing that he posts anonymously on his teacher blog. Instead of being reprimanded, or even censured, he’s been fired. It seems so odd to me that anyone would look at this so important part of the teacher process as being anything other than a healthy and sometimes cathartic avenue towards working out our issues with education leading to the ultimate goal of being better and more effective teachers. To me, teacher bloggers, and anyone else who writes about improving teaching, are out on the cutting edge of education because we are actively seeking to grow in our craft personally, and to raise up our entire profession”.

Read the complete article at <http://theapple.monster.com/benefits/articles/7087-do-teachers-have-the-right-to-blog>

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

- 1. Papers / Articles:** All articles should be computerized using double-spacing, including tables, references and footnotes. Submission of manuscripts should be done in electronic more only. Electronic version of the article/research paper should be e-mailed to the Editor, ELTWeekly at info@eltweekly.com.
- 2. Abstracts:** An abstract in approximately 200 words should assist the article.
- 3. Abbreviations:** No stops are needed between capitals e.g. ELT, IELTS.
- 4. Figures and Tables:** Tables should be numbered sequentially with Arabic numerals.
- 5. Notes:** Notes should be consecutively numbered and presented at the foot of the page.
- 6. References:** References in the text should follow the author-date system. The complete reference list should be given at the end of the article. They should be in alphabetical order.
- 7. Book Reviews:** Book reviews must contain the name of the author and title / subtitle of the book reviewed, place of publication and publisher and date of publication.
- 8. For Event Submissions:** Please submit your event details at least 30 days prior to the event.
- 9.** For a **more detailed stylesheet**, please write to The Editor, ELTWeekly at info@eltweekly.com.