Text and Dialogue Memorization in English Language Learning

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Introduction

There are three dichotomies often discussed and debated in the field of second language acquisition. One of these is the role of input vs. output, with much theory and research concerning the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1981) and Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985). Another dichotomy, or distinction, is the notion of *focus on form* (Long, 1991) vs. exclusive focus on meaning (i.e. no overt attention to form), the latter sometimes found in certain implementations of communicative language teaching. A third dichotomy can be found in the debate over whether language learning is primarily conscious or unconscious, the former exemplified by such concepts as *noticing* and *paying attention* (Schmidt, 1990). The purpose of this article is to explore the usefulness of memorization of stories and dialogue by second language learners, particularly as it relates to the three theoretical issues mentioned above. Also discussed is the acquisition of formulaic speech and its role in the language learning process.

Second language learners are sometimes required to memorize dialogues (or even narrative passages), either from a textbook or self-written. This author has had personal experience with this (in university Japanese language courses), and was required to memorize a number of dialogues, including several co-written and performed in class with a classmate. In addition, while studying abroad in Germany as an undergraduate, the experience of enrolling in a theater course and having to memorize lines for a role in a play, performed over two successive evenings for the local community, proved to be a very powerful and effective method of language acquisition. In addition to memorizing and delivering lines, merely participating in the production and interacting with the other actors contributed noticeably to acquisition and development of fluency.

The impetus for this article came from the recent realization, while engaging in self-directed extensive reading in French in order to improve proficiency, that even in cases of almost 100% comprehension (and therefore ample comprehensible input), it became increasingly clear that there were specific forms and structures (preposition choice, phraseology, etc.) that I did not seem to be "absorbing" adequately for use in subsequent production. One test of this is that in attempting to retell (aloud to myself) a story I had previously read, I was aware that many of the forms to which I had been exposed, even those well within my developmental level, did not appear in my production. Clearly, such forms had not yet made the transition from passive recognition ability to active productive ability. Of course, active ability invariably lags behind passive ability in second language learning, but in this case, it seemed that there ought to be some way to speed up the process. Recalling my experiences with memorization years earlier while learning Japanese and German, the thought occurred to me that I might attempt to memorize verbatim one of the stories I had read, and thereby "store" the forms in my memory, within the context of the story. I had been reading *Le Petit Nicolas*, a book of short stories from the popular series by René Goscinny, and I selected one story (*Je fréquente Agnan*) that I found particularly humorous and which seemed especially conducive to memorization. It consisted of approximately 1700 words, of which there were less than twenty that had been entirely unfamiliar to me prior to reading the story. (There were also a few words whose meaning was made clear by the context, but which I might not have recognized or remembered out of context.) High school students in many countries are often required to memorize textual passages in their own language, and I was no exception, having been required in English class to commit poems to memory, as well as monologues from Shakespeare's plays. Interestingly, however, few second language learners are required to memorize passages of such length, and I had never before attempted to memorize such a large "chunk" of text in a second language. To my surprise, I was able to accurately memorize the entire story quite quickly and enjoyably, and I believe that my success was partly due to the manner in which I approached the task of memorization, making use of a variety of strategies (some overtly and some unconsciously), which will be explained in detail later. Memorizing the text did indeed serve the purpose that was intended: in the process of memorizing, I was aware of *noticing* (and retaining) specific forms to a much greater degree than when merely

reading for comprehension. In addition, collocations and formulaic sequences (language "chunks") proved to be a major theme. They facilitated the memorization process, and conversely, the act of memorizing resulted in my *noticing* and retaining them. Significantly, the degree of *awareness-raising*, through intensive examination of and engagement with the text, proved to be as valuable as the actual storage of language in memory.

One specific example concerned the use of the preposition *de* ("of") in the clause *il m'a dit de le suivre* ("he told me to follow him"), which is the only French word that does not have a counterpart in the English translation. (The actual word order of the French is: "he me has told of him to-follow." The morphological form "has told" equates semantically to the single English word *told*, and the French infinitive form of the verb is a single word encompassing the two-word English infinitive beginning with *to*.) I realized that when merely reading, I had not fully noticed this *de*, probably for two reasons. First, it was not necessary to the meaning and, as mentioned above, has no counterpart in the corresponding English. Indeed, there is evidence that, for adult learners, paying attention to form may be not only helpful but even *necessary* for acquisition of "redundant and communicatively less important grammatical features" (Schmidt 1990: 145, 149). Second, my proficiency in Spanish is much higher than in French, and in Spanish a conjunction would be used here instead of a preposition: *(Él) me dijo que lo siguiera* (literally, "he told me that I [should] follow him"). If I had tried to produce this sentence in French, I would likely have begun the sentence with *il m'a dit que je*, with obvious language transfer from Spanish.

The outcome of my admittedly very small-scale, subjective experiment finds support in existing research on *focus on form* (Long, 1991) and conscious learning, including the concepts of *noticing* and *paying attention* (Schmidt, 1990). Evidence for inadequacy of comprehensible input alone, as well as the potential value of some type of focus on form, can be found in studies of immersion and naturalistic language acquisition that indicate that when learning is exclusively "experiential and meaning-focused, some linguistic features do not ultimately develop to targetlike levels" (Doughty & Williams, 1998: 2). This includes a study of Canadian students who had experienced years of

comprehensible input through meaning-focused instruction in French immersion programs and exhibited native-level listening skills, but whose speech, while fluent, contained numerous grammatical errors and was still far from native-like idiomaticity (Swain, 1991). There is considerable disagreement over whether *focus on form* is *necessary* in order to achieve or approach native-like proficiency, but even if not, it may be the case that it can contribute to rendering the language acquisition process faster and more efficient (Doughty & Williams, 1998), which is precisely what I was seeking in my French memorization experiment.

The concept of *focus on form* has been the subject of considerable confusion, misunderstanding, and controversy, so it is of paramount importance to adhere to a precise definition. *Focus on form*, according to Long (1991: 45-46), "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" and this incorporates a "fundamental assumption . . . that meaning and use must already be evident to the learner" prior to attention being drawn to the form (Doughty & Williams, 1998: 4). Since memorization of a text or dialogue is generally a solitary task completed by learners outside the classroom and away from teacher supervision, the word *lessons* in the definition above can be changed to *activities*, and in this case it is not the teacher that draws learners' attention; rather, it is the task of focusing on the material that performs this function. The French story I memorized was one that I already understood in its entirety, and the task of memorizing it was first and foremost a meaning-based activity (albeit not communicative). My noticing of the use of the preposition *de* was indeed the result of it arising incidentally in the course of memorizing the meaning-based content in which it appeared. Memorizing a text verbatim could be regarded as a form-based activity, but the meaning is of course primary and the form secondary. In contrast, committing a list of verb conjugations to memory would be an example of primarily form-based memorization. As will be elaborated below, one of the most useful strategies for memorizing a story or dialogue is to first analyze it from a top-down perspective, visualizing and internalizing the general content and meaning before focusing on the specific words and forms themselves.

The Memorization Method

One potential concern for some learners or educators might be the perception of "rote" memorization as tedious, mindless, or boring. However, this need not be the case. A typical approach to rote memorization might be described something like this: learner looks at text on paper (or computer screen), then away (often while repeating aloud or silently the chunk of information to be remembered), then back at paper or screen again, then away, ad infinitum, with little or no variation, in an attempt to gradually get the text to "stick" in memory. A common activity found in puzzle books requires the solver to stare at a page for one minute before turning the page and trying to remember as much as possible about what was there. In the absence of any specific techniques for memorization, a person will likely stare at the page with furrowed brow, hoping that the words or images will stick in his or her mind. The "looking *at* the paper, then *away*, then *back*" approach described above amounts to a repetitious cycle of storing a manageable amount of information in short-term memory, testing for recall, then confirming accuracy and storing the next chunk of information. This is repeated until the information makes the transition to relatively long-term memory. This attempt to mechanically "put" the material into one's head through sheer sweat, concentration, and repetition could be considered the "brute force" approach to memorization because it involves no actual "thinking" or processing—no creativity, no imagination, no analysis, no logic, no thinking *about* the material. It consists only of conscious exposure to the material, mental concentration, and of course repetition, the very nature of which is often tedious. Individuals have varied success with this approach, and some find memorizing a text extremely difficult.

A far better investment of time and energy is to use the complementary approaches of *logic/analysis* and *imagination/visualization* to "process" the text before even beginning to try to remember it. Learners will vary in their preference for one or the other depending on learning style, but using both is generally preferable, and when one approach proves insufficient for successful memorization, learners can then rely more on the other. The basic idea is to *not* approach the material from the standpoint of trying to "memorize" it, but instead to focus on *leisurely* and *enjoyably* analyzing and examining

the content from *every* conceivable angle without the thought (and accompanying feeling of pressure) that it has to be remembered. The very process of *engaging* with the material, analyzing it, visualizing it (and imagining it with any of the other four senses, as well as with emotion), literally *bathing* oneself in it, naturally leads to remembering it. Some of the material will end up in memory without even actually trying to memorize it, and when actively trying to store the remainder in memory, the process will be easier and will require less time and effort. The idea is to enjoy the process of becoming intimately acquainted with the material and making it into a familiar friend. Fortunately, it is generally much easier to memorize a story or dialogue than a list of individual vocabulary words or phrases, due to the cohesive nature of a narrative or conversation. Each part of the content provides context for other parts of the content, creating what could be called *mutually reinforcing context.*

In addition to employing various strategies and techniques for memorization, it is important to begin by selecting material that is conducive to memorization, and there are various criteria for making this judgment, including (1) appropriate level of difficulty, (2) interesting, stimulating, memorable content, (3) concrete content and clear writing, (4) a natural, logical flow in the text, and possibly even (5) the presence of rhythm and/or rhyme. The text used here for illustrative purposes was chosen, based on the first four criteria above, from a graded reader designed for extensive reading, a fairly low-level selection (Level 2) from the *Penguin Readers* series. The book, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Trimble *et al*, 2007), is based on the popular 2003 Walt Disney film, and the text chosen is one of the shortest of the fifteen chapters in the book (*Chapter 8: Dinner with Barbossa*, pp.17-18). Since the graded reader is an adaptation of an adventure film, there is a wealth of concrete action and drama from which to choose, and this chapter is a particularly good example thereof; in fact, it is a key dramatic scene in the film. A young woman, Elizabeth Turner, has been taken prisoner aboard a pirate ship, the *Black Pearl*, and is sitting alone at a table with the captain of the ship, Captain Barbossa. This scene represents a major turning point in the plot of the story because it is here that Elizabeth discovers that the pirates who have captured her are no ordinary pirates. All members of the crew of the *Black Pearl* are the victims of an Aztec curse, which has rendered them "undead" (they appear in skeletal form when

bathed in moonlight). They cannot be killed in the conventional sense or even wounded in the same way as humans (which works to their advantage in battle), but they are also unable to satisfy their hunger, thirst, or other physical desires, and this insatiability is a torment to them. Elizabeth also discovers why she was abducted: her blood is one of the things the pirates need in order to lift the curse, or so they believe at this point. The scene includes a great deal of dialogue, accounting for over half (59%) of the text (246 of 415 words), and the remaining 169 words consist of narrative. (Barbossa has the preponderance of lines, at 204 words to only 42 for Elizabeth.) The content of the dialogue is concrete, dramatic and interesting, often describing action, and there is also actual action in the scene. The following example illustrates the degree to which the language has been simplified from the actual screenplay of the film. Compare this with the actual lines delivered by Geoffrey Rush in his role as Captain Barbossa in the film. (Particularly difficult words and expressions are shown in bold, along with non-standard English usage like the "pirate-speak" use of the verb *be*.)

graded reader

"We found the gold on the *Isla de Muerta*," said Barbossa. "We took all of it. We bought food and drink with it. But then, suddenly, we couldn't eat and we couldn't drink. When we took the money, Miss Turner, the curse came with it."

original film

"Find it, we did. There **be** the chest. Inside **be** the gold. And we took 'em all. We spent 'em and traded 'em and **frittered 'em away on** drink and food and **pleasurable company**. The more we gave 'em away, the more we came to realize . . . the drink would not satisfy, food **turned to ash** in our mouths, and all the **pleasurable company** in the world could not **slake our lust**. We are cursed men, Miss Turner. **Compelled by greed**, we were, but now . . . we are **consumed** by it." (transcribed during a viewing of the film)

If possible, before analyzing a text for memorization it is advisable to physically rearrange it into individual sentences, ideally one per line. This increases legibility

(analogous to cutting food into smaller, more manageable bites), and allows one to see at a glance which sentences are longer and which are shorter. Of course, this is easily accomplished if the text is stored in a computer document. If not, then scanning it into electronic form using optical character recognition software (and "cleaning up" the text by correcting any scan-related errors) may be faster than retyping the text, depending on its length.

In this case, there are also three distinct *types* of sentences: narration, lines uttered by Barbossa, and lines uttered by Elizabeth. A simple method for making these three types easier to distinguish at a glance is to make them different colors by, for example, marking them with highlighter pens. (If the text is stored in a computer document, the color of the actual text can be changed directly on the computer.) Since this article is not printed in color, the three types will be distinguished here as follows: Barbossa's lines in **bold with underlining**, Elizabeth's lines in ***bold italics***, and narration as normal text. Here is how the first fifteen sentences appear in their original format in the book:

> Elizabeth sat at a table on the *Black Pearl*. There was a lot of food on the table—bread, fruit, and meat. Captain Barbossa sat at the other end of the table.
>
> "Are you hungry?" he said. "Please eat."
>
> Elizabeth was very hungry. She took some bread and some meat and started to eat.
>
> "Have a drink," said Barbossa.
>
> Elizabeth drank. Then she looked at the captain.
>
> "You're not eating!" she said. "Is something wrong with the food? Are you trying to kill me? You eat it!"
>
> She gave the captain some bread, but he didn't take it.

Here are the same sentences reformatted for easier memorization.

> Elizabeth sat at a table on the *Black Pearl*.
> There was a lot of food on the table—bread, fruit, and meat.

Captain Barbossa sat at the other end of the table.

"**Are you hungry?**" he said.

"**Please eat.**"

Elizabeth was very hungry.

She took some bread and some meat and started to eat.

"**Have a drink,**" said Barbossa.

Elizabeth drank.

Then she looked at the captain.

"You're not eating!" she said.

"Is something wrong with the food?

Are you trying to kill me?

You eat it!"

She gave the captain some bread, but he didn't take it.

General tips for memorization enumerated by Winter & Winter (1997: 102-105) include (1) those concerning the material to be remembered, such as: organization of information, breaking things into smaller chunks, dividing into categories of related items, making associations, and use of cadence (e.g. music, rhyme), as well as (2) one's approach to memorization: intention to remember, paying attention (entailing sufficient study breaks to maintain concentration), using all five senses (including visualization), speaking information to be remembered aloud, and exercising memorization ability on a daily basis in order to improve one's memory over time. Regarding "intention to remember," we tend to remember what we are interested in and what is important to us, so cultivating these feelings is helpful. As many of us have likely observed, "the driver who must concentrate on the . . . road will remember [the route] better than the passenger . . ." (p.116). Winter & Winter do not specifically mention *rhythm* in their reference to cadence, but as Crystal (2008: 129) observes, in his discussion of Shakespeare's writing, a "steady recurring rhythm makes it easy to memorise . . . lines." In particular, "a line of iambic pentameter is within an easy memory span." Like a good filing system, there are two goals of successful memorization, involving the two aspects of memory (i.e. storage and recall): storing information in memory as reliably and unshakably as possible, and making it as easy as possible to retrieve quickly.

The following systematic approach for analyzing a text for memorization was created on the basis of insights gained from my small experiment with the French story, as well as an analysis of the English text used here for illustrative purposes. Although I do not find the systematic application of most of these techniques necessary when memorizing, I am aware of employing some of them some of the time, even on a more or less unconscious, "instinctive" level, and my goal was to develop an example of a comprehensive approach that could be taught to students and from which they could pick and choose what works for them.

The system outlined here involves approaching the text from two opposing angles or perspectives: (1) top-down, involving examination of the overall content, transcending the specific words or language used, and (2) bottom-up, involving careful analysis of the lexical level and how the individual words combine to create meaning. Beginning from a top-down perspective, it is helpful to put oneself in the position of the screenwriter and each of the actors (or the author and each of the protagonists, in the case of a narrative), and to ask the following key questions:

Screenwriter: What is the purpose of this scene? Why include it at all?
Actor: What is my motivation here? What are the emotions involved?

In the original film (and therefore in this adaptation), there is a need to explain to the audience about the gold, the curse, and why the pirates have abducted Elizabeth. This could be done through a narrative voiceover, but that would be unimaginative and less interesting. Doing it this way is more dramatic, and involves a typical narrative device: by Barbossa explaining it to Elizabeth, he is indirectly explaining it to the audience. Another point of interest is how he begins his explanation. He could just sit Elizabeth down and say, "Okay, here's the situation," but again, that is far less dramatic and interesting. The whole purpose of the food scene is to give Barbossa a reason to explain about the curse, and if we keep that in mind, it makes the memorization much easier. The food scene naturally, logically, and inexorably leads into the explanation of the gold and accompanying curse. Barbossa offers food to Elizabeth, who eats, but Barbossa himself does not eat, to which the suspicious Elizabeth emotionally demands

an explanation. Rather than immediately explaining himself and resolving the suspense, Barbossa mysteriously pulls a gold medallion from his coat and starts the dramatic delivery of his story with this prop, only eventually explaining why Elizabeth was taken prisoner, thereby maintaining the suspense (and the interest of the audience) until then. The final "reveal" (that the entire crew of the Black Pearl are "undead" who appear as skeletons when bathed in moonlight) is saved for the very end. Regarding the actors' motivations and emotions, Elizabeth is angry, defiant, frightened, suspicious, hungry, curious, and wants to escape the pirates' clutches if she can. Barbossa is alternately unhappy then happy (as explicitly stated in the text), menacing, chronically deprived of the pleasure of eating and drinking (and bitter regarding the curse on himself and his men), triumphant and gloating at having captured Elizabeth (and lording this over her), and he ultimately wants Elizabeth's blood in order to free himself and his crew of the curse. It is also helpful to vividly visualize the scene from the actors' points of view, incorporating imagined sensations of the other four of the five senses whenever possible —in other words, to actually *be in* the scene.

The following is one way to systematically approach a text from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives, respectively.

TOP-DOWN

First, read through the entire text, noticing three things, each of which facilitates memorization:

1. Main idea of text, purpose of scene (already discussed above)
2. Sequence: in what order are events (or topics of dialogue) presented, and more importantly, *why*?
3. Flow: this goes beyond sequence—a shopping list has a sequence, but not normally a connected flow. How are the events (or topics of dialogue) connected?

The next three steps involve the concept of "divide and conquer," starting at the highest level and chunking down into smaller parts. The goal here is to treat the overall structure of the text or dialogue as a framework onto which to "hang" the actual sentences, and to establish "quantifiable parameters" (i.e. number of sections, number of

sentences) in order to better "contain" the task of memorization.

1. Start with the main idea of the entire text (as above), which transcends the specific words, meaning that it can be paraphrased in different words, and can even be expressed in the L1. The focus here, as mentioned earlier, is solely on *meaning*, not on form.

2. Establish the structure: break the text into manageable sections and determine the purpose or main idea of each. Remembering the *number* of sections creates a quantified target: each section is like a box waiting to be filled with content from memory, but to do this one must first know how many boxes there are. It is a good idea to memorize the general content of each section (again, independent of the actual wording) and quiz oneself on it. Remembering the number of sentences in each section is not normally necessary or realistic, but can be helpful in particular cases. However, noticing and having a general awareness of the varying length of sections (in terms of number and length of sentences) can be helpful.

3. Analyze each sentence for general content and main idea, optionally represented by one or more appropriate keywords from each sentence, which establishes a connection with the lexical level. How does each sentence contribute to the section as a whole? Quantifying can sometimes be helpful here, as well: How many words in a sentence? Are words long or short? Again, the key is actively *noticing*.

BOTTOM-UP

Here, sections and sentences are analyzed at the *lexical* (and grammatical) level.

1. Examine each section and sentence for any patterns, common threads, coincidences, symmetries, asymmetries, "sandwiches" (explained later), lists, rhymes, rhythms, and any other serendipitously "built-in" mnemonic aids.

2. As with the top-down level, look at sequence and flow, this time on a "micro" level: How does each sentence connect to the next? How does one topic segue to the

next? The idea here is to identify or *create* logical connections and associations between each sentence. Ideally, through a chain of associations, each sentence should automatically stimulate recall of the next, greatly reducing the burden of remembering: "Speaking of X, what logically or naturally comes next?"

3. Identify meaningful word groups, some of which will of course be collocations or other formulaic chunks, as discussed below. The goal is to memorize chunks rather than individual words, as much as possible.

4. For each sentence, identify *concrete* core words (not necessarily the same "keywords" as earlier, however). For example, this is the 24th sentence in the text: *We bought food and drink with it.* Probably the best keyword from a top-down perspective is *bought*, which expresses the general idea that the pirates spent the gold, but the most concrete core words from a bottom-up perspective are *food* and *drink* (i.e. *what* was bought), or more appropriately, the common and useful single collocation *food and drink*. Of course, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections will generally be excluded when identifying the most concrete words.

5. These "core" words should then ideally stimulate recall of prepositions, articles, and other "filler" words (the "mortar" between the "bricks"), with syntactic relationships logically dictating word choice as much as possible, again reducing the burden on memory.

6. As an optional step, it can also be helpful to note the first word(s) of each sentence, which can serve to jog the memory, analogous to the first bars or notes of a song.

7. Fine-tuning: extra attention should be given to any parts that are not intuitive, logical, or natural, and are therefore harder to remember. Here again, quantifying can be helpful: counting words provides a target number against which to check recall. Acronyms can even be created from the respective first letters of a sequence of words in order to create a more compact bundle for memorization, which can then serve as a prompt for the full sequence. As with counting words, the letters of the

acronym provide something against which to check recall.

8. Finally, identify or *create* a logical connection/association between the final sentence of each section and the first sentence of the next, in order to link the two sections together for a natural, smooth transition.

Regarding step 3 above, grouping words in this way provides an ideal opportunity to *notice* and memorize formulaic language, referred to by a bewildering variety of names: formulae, prefabs, patterns, sequences, lexical strings, chunks, and clusters. Included in this more general category of recurring word combinations are more specific types, such as collocations, idioms, and frames. There is a broad consensus (Ellis, 1996; Cowie, 1992; Howarth, 1998) that such formulaic language is one of the primary factors that distinguishes native-like usage. While cautioning against spending a disproportionate amount of classroom time on formulaic chunks and expecting all students to strive for native-like proficiency, Swan (2006) agrees that it is advisable for learners to "pay attention to and memorise instances of formulaic language," and this is precisely what memorization of texts allows for. Moreover, all of the formulaic sequences are memorized *in meaningful context*, which is certainly far more effective than learning them in isolation, say, in a list. Sequences like "a lot (of)" are best treated as if they were actually one word, and memorized accordingly. Regarding the notion of a "word," Pinker (1994: 148) observes that in addition to "a linguistic object that . . . behaves as the indivisible, smallest unit with respect to the rules of syntax" (i.e. the conventional notion of a "word"), there is also a very different definition, namely a "rote-memorized chunk: a string of linguistic stuff that is arbitrarily associated with a particular meaning, one item from the long list we call the mental dictionary." This is echoed by Swan (2006): "Researchers differ in their analysis and classification of formulaic language, and the storage and processing models they propose . . . . It is, however, generally agreed that these chunks behave more like individual words than like separately constructed sequences."

It will now be demonstrated how the general strategies described above can be specifically applied to the text chosen here for illustrative purposes. In this case, the text

(a total of 60 sentences) can be broken up into 8 sections mostly of roughly equivalent length. (See Appendix A for full text of the 8 sections.)

1. Setting the scene
2. Elizabeth eats & drinks
3. But Barbossa can't eat
4. Explanation of gold & curse (The "bad news")
5. The "good news"
6. Explanation of why Elizabeth was abducted
7. Action
8. The big "reveal"

Suspense is maintained after section 3 because it is still unclear exactly *why* Barbossa is unable to eat. This is revealed in section 4 (the curse is the reason), but still not fully explained, maintaining the suspense. (What specifically is the problem? What happens when he tries to eat?) The answer is finally revealed, or rather implied, at the very end of the scene. The pirates are "undead," so in the same way that they cannot be killed, they likewise cannot satisfy their physical desires. (In the film, Barbossa, revealed as his skeletal self in the moonlight, yanks the cork off a bottle with his teeth, takes a huge swig, and we see the liquor trickle down behind his exposed rib bones, obviously not going into his nonexistent stomach.)

Longer sections can be broken up into even smaller sections. For example, the longest section (number 4) can be divided in half, the first five sentences discussing the gold, Aztecs, and curse (less personal), and the last five sentences concerning the crew of the *Black Pearl* (more personal: the subject of each sentence is "we"). The first half provides general background information, and the second half clarifies how the pirates are directly involved. Section 4 can even be further subdivided, into a total of five subsections:

1. The gold medallion (2 sentences)
2. Background information: origin of gold & curse (3 sentences)

3. Pirates find & take gold (2 sentences)
4. Pirates spend it (2 sentences)
5. Final sentence completes and clarifies the explanation: by taking the gold, the pirates are now cursed.

Section 1 will be used here to illustrate the application of bottom-up strategies at the lexical level. Even a section of text as short as this (the shortest of the eight sections) is rich with possibilities for analysis and development of mnemonic aids.

SECTION 1: SETTING THE SCENE

Elizabeth sat at a **table** on the *Black Pearl*.
There was a lot of food on the **table**—bread, fruit, and meat.
Captain Barbossa sat at the other end of the **table**.

A careful look at this first section immediately reveals a common thread running through all three sentences and tying them together: the word *table*. Elizabeth is at one end, Barbossa is at the other, and the food is between them. This provides a powerful visual image for the imagination and the first step is to take a moment to vividly internalize it. Moreover, there is a natural flow here from one end of the table to the other, as though a movie camera is panning from Elizabeth to Barbossa, so this is how the visual image should be committed to memory. If this "panning" image is vivid and solid in the memory, the text will naturally and logically follow.

Carrying the analysis deeper, there is a natural symmetry present in the actual wording employed in this group of three sentences. The first and last sentences begin with parallel words and syntax, both involving people (the only two characters in the scene): "Elizabeth sat at . . . table . . ." and "Captain Barbossa sat at . . . table." There is exactly one sentence between these two, involving *things* rather than people, creating what could be labeled a sentence "sandwich": two similar, parallel pieces of "bread" with something different in between. Moreover, the middle sentence appropriately and conveniently happens to describe the "middle" of the table, creating a link between text and visual image. The fact that *food* is what comes in the middle of the sandwich is

also a fortuitous "built-in" mnemonic. One potential burden on learners is to remember that the people sit "at" the table, whereas the food is "on" the table, but this again is logical: the people are not on top of the table. Another important point is that in the first sentence (not just of this section but of the entire chapter), the indefinite article is used: *a table*. This is logical, since the table is being introduced for the first time. Thereafter, in the subsequent two sentences, it is logically *the table*.

In addition to a symmetrical sentence "sandwich," there is another distinctive lexical phenomenon to be found here, namely, a list: *bread, fruit, and meat*. The presence of the list is logical, as it provides more detail regarding the "food" mentioned earlier in the sentence, but the content and order of lists is often arbitrary, meaning that there is no logical sequence or flow, so special attention is necessary when memorizing them. An effective technique is to *manufacture* a sequence and flow, where one is not already naturally present. In this case, it turns out that the first letters of each word are already coincidentally in alphabetical order, which in and of itself could be helpful: *b*, *f*, and *m*. Initial letters like this can also be turned into an acronym (BFM) to be memorized, which can then serve as a "framework" for the list. In other words, the acronym is memorized as a single chunk or word, which is less of a burden than memorizing the individual words, and it then in turn acts as a framework by providing the first letters of each word as a prompt for remembering. If the acronym happens to coincide with an existing acronym or word, all the better. If not, the acronym can be rendered easier to memorize, if necessary, by creating a meaningful "backronym," a different phrase whose first letters also form the acronym. The random words "bread, fruit, and meat" have no logical syntactic relationship, but a phrase like "Barbossa's food mountain" is syntactically meaningful and therefore more memorable. Incidentally, the word "mountain" conveniently captures the meaning of "a lot," providing helpful reinforcement of the earlier part of the sentence. Mnemonics that serve a dual purpose in this way can be especially helpful, effectively "killing two birds with one stone." If possible, incorporating one or more of the original words, especially the first one in the list (or the one that is hardest to remember) into the new acronym is an efficient shortcut: "bread fresh [in the] morning." In this particular case, there is even a built-in mnemonic if one is familiar with the tropical fruit called "breadfruit," the flesh of which would naturally be referred to as

"breadfruit meat."

Imagination and visualization are also especially effective when memorizing lists. Rather than merely trying to remember the words, the key is to vividly picture the items and to make them as concrete, specific, and detailed as possible. What kind of bread? What shape? How much? What kind of fruit and meat? What kind of dishes are they placed on? Taking a moment to decide these details and visualize them is a much better time investment than repeatedly reviewing and quizzing oneself on the words alone. A small, simple list like this one can usually be easily and quickly memorized without resorting to any mnemonic techniques, but using detailed visualization promotes faster recall and is likely to result in more enduring long-term memory. This can also be combined with the acronym technique described above, by choosing a "backronym" that provides more detailed, concrete images for visualization. For example, "baguettes, figs, and mutton" is much more specific than "bread, fruit, and meat." When visualizing, it is also helpful to make images exaggerated, grotesque, absurd, taboo, and otherwise "unforgettable."

Returning to the three sentences, the next step in the analysis is to identify meaningful "word groups," which are best memorized as chunks, enclosed in brackets below and hereafter. There is obviously some degree of variation in the way the words can be grouped, but collocations and common frames are best memorized as groups in order to facilitate acquisition. Ultimately, however, the ideal criterion for grouping words is whatever makes them easiest to memorize.

Elizabeth sat [at a table] [on the *Black Pearl*].
[There was] [a lot of food] [on the table]—[bread, fruit, and meat].
[Captain Barbossa] sat {at [the other end] [of the table]}.

The list of food has already been discussed, and *Captain Barbossa* is of course a name. The remaining word groups are primarily prepositional phrases, including three contrasting phrases with *table* and *at*, *on*, *of*, respectively. *There is*/*are*/*was*/*were* functions as a single lexical unit, and *a lot of* . . . and *the other end* are best treated as

single chunks, rather than as individual words. Two of the chunks are further embedded in a larger chunk (*at the other end of the . . .*), worth memorizing verbatim for its own sake, since it is such a commonly occurring phrase. It is also important to account for each occurrence of definite or indefinite article, as was done with the word *table* earlier. Anything that does not make logical sense will be more arbitrary and therefore more difficult to retain in memory. In this case, there is only one ship called the *Black Pearl*, there is only one other end of the table, and the presence of both the ship and the table have already been established in the story. Thus, the definite article is the logical choice. In contrast, *a lot (of)* functions as a single formulaic unit ("a-lotta" in rapid speech), so the use of the indefinite article is fixed. The nouns *bread*, *fruit*, and *meat* are all uncountable here and mentioned for the first time, so of course no articles are used.

The next step is to identify concrete core words, which of course entails eliminating all pronouns, prepositions, articles, etc. Proper nouns can also be excluded, since they are arbitrary labels, and we can therefore temporarily substitute the concrete noun *ship* for the proper noun *Black Pearl*. Again, *a lot of* is treated here as one "word," the core of which is *lot*. This reduces the three sentences to the following skeletal outline:

sat, table, ship
a-lot-of, food, table
sat, end, table

These core words are all captured in the visual image created. The scene logically begins with the story's heroine, Elizabeth, and where she is: sitting at a table on a ship. The camera pans across, showing food on the table—a lot. Finally, at the (other) end of the table sits the only other character present in the scene: Barbossa. The other "filler" words can be easily plugged in once the core words are remembered. Who sat? Elizabeth. She sat *at a* table. Where? *On* a ship—*the* ship already named in the story: *on the Black Pearl*. What does a table remind one of? Food. Our internal movie camera continues to pan across the table: *There was* a lot of food *on the* table. The sentence logically begins with *there was*, and the remaining words *on the* are logically determined by the grammar of the sentence. Finally, the "sandwich" is completed with the only

other person present, *Captain Barbossa*, who "sat *at the other* end *of the* table." The only word not determined by the grammar of this sentence is *other*, but again, *the other end* is most appropriately treated and memorized as a single lexical chunk. As discussed earlier, the memorization of these formulaic sequences contributes to learners' language acquisition and development of fluency, and memorizing them *in context* in this way is easier, more meaningful, and likely more enjoyable than, for example, studying a list of such expressions.

An optional step, in the interest of approaching the text from every conceivable angle, even to the point of overkill, is to notice how each sentence begins. This can serve as yet another way to jog the memory, analogous to the opening bars or lyrics of a song.

Elizabeth . . .
There was . . .
Captain Barbossa . . .

This recalls the "sandwich" described earlier. The first and last sentence both begin with names (again, the only two people present), and the middle sentence announces the existence of something, which turns out to be food.

Finally, a connection must be forged between this section and the next section of the text, the theme of which is Elizabeth eating and drinking. The scene has been set, with a great quantity of food on the table, so eating is the next logical step, and with eating comes drinking. Always keeping in mind the purpose of the scene and each section in it, as well as the motivation of the actors, supplies a momentum that propels the scene naturally forward. The eating/drinking scene is vital in order to move on to the real purpose of the scene, namely the explanation of the gold and the curse.

Conclusions

Returning to the three dichotomies mentioned at the beginning of this article, it is clear that memorization tasks such as the one described here offer various opportunities

for *focus on form*, as well as potential confirmation of its usefulness in language learning. Unlike grammar drills, the task focuses learners on form in a holistic, whole-language manner, with meaning playing the primary role. In contrast to traditional "rote" memorization, the emphasis here is on a creative, problem-solving approach to memorization that encourages more active *noticing* of language forms and linguistic relationships. Of course, noticing can occur whether or not the learner is consciously paying attention. Schimdt (1990: 149) asserts that *paying attention* to language forms, as opposed to incidental learning (i.e. without conscious effort), is likely to be helpful in all cases and, more significantly, that "picking up target language forms from input when they do not carry information crucial to the task, appears unlikely for adults." To read and then paraphrase the content of a story might provide opportunities for *incidental* noticing of form, but the advantage of memorizing a text verbatim is that the task requires the learner to consciously focus very carefully on the form (being inherently "crucial to the task"), but not in any way to the exclusion of meaning.

Although committing a text to memory amounts to "inputting" the information into one's brain (similar to hearing the same song over and over until it "sticks" in one's head), it is of course not the same thing as receiving true comprehensible input, which will have already taken place when reading the text for the first time for comprehension. Memorization could therefore be seen as a follow-up to and reinforcement of (but not a substitute for) initial comprehensible input, a way of going deeper and engaging more intensively with the material than merely being exposed to it for the sole purpose of deriving meaning. This is also a very different approach from traditional *intensive reading*, and could be a very powerful combination: extensive reading coupled with occasional intensive examination and memorization of comprehensible texts *already read and comprehended*. As discussed earlier, a particular advantage of this approach is the excellent opportunity it affords for noticing and "inputting" formulaic chunks of language, which are critical to native-like competence. Even for learners not aspiring to that level of proficiency, it has been argued that fluency depends on chunks of language being accessed and utilized by learners through the use of their memory-based system (Skehan, 1995). In this view, fluent speech is made possible by rapid retrieval of prefabricated sequences requiring minimal processing capacity (i.e. application of rules)

precisely because they are retrieved from memory as whole chunks. Wood (2007), in particular, has found evidence for the use of formulaic sequences contributing to fluency in the speech of Japanese learners of English.

The focus of this article is primarily on the act of memorizing (i.e. "input"), but there is also the other side of the process: the act of recall or "output." Learners will of course engage in ongoing self-quizzing as a natural part of the memorization process until the entire content is memorized, after which each act of recall of part or all of the text will serve as a method of reviewing the material and retaining it in long-term memory. There are three forms this output can take: (1) reciting aloud, (2) writing out the text, and (3) reciting it silently (i.e. in one's head). Reciting aloud is preferable, partly because it exercises the speech organs, but also because it involves more of the brain. "When we read aloud . . . we use very different brain circuits than when we read silently. One of the earliest demonstrations of brain imaging clearly showed three distinct brain regions lighting up when the same word was read, spoken, or heard." Specifically, it was found that "speaking words activated the motor cortex on both sides of the brain as well as . . . the cerebellum. Just looking at words activated only one area of the cortex in the left hemisphere." (Katz & Rubin, 1999: 50). The advantage of writing out the text, even if only once, is that this written "record" allows for better checking of accuracy through comparison with the original text after the fact. The only practical option for confirming accuracy when reciting (aside from being quizzed by someone, which requires a willing partner) is to cover the original text and check one's recall against it while uncovering it a bit at a time, which is cumbersome and carries the risk of prematurely seeing bits of text that one has not yet tested recall of. It is also very easy to accidentally overlook deviations from the original text. The least desirable option is "reciting" in one's head, but of course the advantage of this method is that it can be done anytime, anywhere, even in public.

This type of output, in all three cases, clearly differs from the communicative type described in the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) in that the learner is not forming original utterances and testing hypotheses. However, it is still language "production" and performance, albeit in a different sense. Improvement in fluency, resulting from practice,

is one distinct benefit of output (Swain and Lapkin, 1995), and surely this is not limited solely to self-generated output. Fluency in speaking is clearly one skill that cannot be developed through comprehensible input alone. Moreover, this "output" of memorized text need not be confined to the original narration or lines of dialogue. Once the material is successfully memorized and internalized, ideally to the point where it can be recited with no effort and has become second nature, the learner can ad-lib and improvise freely, just as actors often do, by plugging in different words, adapting the material in creative ways, and personalizing it.

In summary, memorization of texts and dialogues involves (1) conscious language learning, in the form of paying attention and *noticing*, and more specifically, (2) overt *focus on form*, as well as (3) input but also output, and in ways that differ from the types of input and/or output associated with, for example, extensive reading and communicative tasks. There are also at least two side benefits to such memorization. First, as with shadowing or reading aloud, reciting memorized text or dialogue exercises the speech organs and provides practice in uttering cohesive, meaningful chunks of the second language, without the burden of having to formulate original utterances or maintain a conversation. Second, memory is one of the crucial requirements for learning a second language, and more successful language learners generally have better memories, so any activity that improves the memory could be regarded as worthwhile from that standpoint alone. As with exercising any muscle, conscious remembering and memorization make future remembering and memorization that much easier, so the benefits of memorizing a text extend beyond the immediate purpose, amounting to memory training in general.

Most individuals outside the acting profession have never had the experience of having to "learn one's lines," but imagine for a moment if learners were to memorize even a fraction of the amount of text that many professional actors routinely do, and were to do it in their target language. How much of that language is then processed by the brain and truly acquired, and whether general rules are abstracted from the raw data, are questions to be answered by much-needed further research, but surely having all those chunks of authentic, prefabricated (and grammatically accurate) language stored

in memory is preferable to not having them in one's head at all. Part of performance in a second language is indeed *performing*, and there is broad agreement on the value of acting and role-playing in language learning. Reciting memorized language is no substitute for original, self-initiated output, but such "performing" may contribute to language acquisition in ways we have yet to discover. Playing scales on a piano usually involves no creative or original "output," in contrast to improvisational playing of music ("communicative" in a sense), but scales can play a vital role in development of piano-playing ability, and in ways that go beyond merely exercising the physical muscles involved. It is certainly true that text memorization is not a communicative activity, and it is doubtful that anyone would recommend spending an inordinate amount of time on it, especially at the expense of other activities. However, there would appear to be a useful role for some memorization of stories and dialogues in language learning (particularly self-learning), if approached in an interesting and creative way.

Appendix A

Chapter 8: Dinner with Barbossa *(60 sentences)*

SECTION 1: SETTING THE SCENE (3 sentences)
Elizabeth sat at a table on the *Black Pearl*. There was a lot of food on the table—bread, fruit, and meat. Captain Barbossa sat at the other end of the table.

SECTION 2: ELIZABETH EATS & DRINKS (6 sentences)
"**Are you hungry?**" he said. "**Please eat.**" Elizabeth was very hungry. She took some bread and some meat and started to eat. "**Have a drink,**" said Barbossa. Elizabeth drank.

SECTION 3: BUT BARBOSSA CAN'T EAT (10 sentences)
Then she looked at the captain. ***"You're not eating!"*** she said. ***"Is something wrong with the food? Are you trying to kill me? You eat it!"*** She gave the captain some bread, but he didn't take it. "**I can't eat it,**" Barbossa said unhappily. "**I'd like to. I'd love to. But I can't.**"

SECTION 4:
EXPLANATION OF GOLD & CURSE (THE "BAD NEWS") (10 sentences)
He took the gold medallion from his coat. "**This gold, Miss Turner, is very old. The Aztecs gave it to Cortes when he arrived in the Americas. There are many, many more of these. And the Aztecs put a curse on them.**" "**We found the gold on the *Isla de Muerta*,**" said Barbossa. "**We took all of it. We bought food and drink with it. But then, suddenly, we couldn't eat and we couldn't drink. When we took the money, Miss Turner, the curse came with it.**"

SECTION 5: THE "GOOD NEWS" (7 sentences)
The captain suddenly looked happier. "**But now we can end the curse. We had to find all of the gold. Then we had to put it back on the island and give some blood. For ten years we looked for the gold on every ship and in every town ...**" "***And now***

you have all of it, Elizabeth said. "**Yes. With this gold medallion, we have all of it. Thank you.**"

SECTION 6: EXPLANATION OF WHY ELIZABETH WAS ABDUCTED (7 sentences)

She thought for a minute. "***You have everything, and you're going to be free of the curse. So why am I here?***" "**There's one more thing. You're Elizabeth Turner, the daughter of the pirate Bill Turner. He was one of us, but he isn't with us now. We have to have your blood!**"

SECTION 7: ACTION (9 sentences)

Elizabeth didn't understand, but she was afraid. Her blood? She jumped up and tried to run. But Barbossa stood in front of her. She took a knife and pushed it into him. Then she ran outside. She closed her eyes. Her blood! What could she do?

SECTION 8: THE BIG "REVEAL" (8 sentences)

She opened her eyes and saw the pirates at work. Then she looked carefully. They weren't men—they were skeletons! Barbossa was behind her. "**Now, Miss Turner, you can really see us.**" He smiled. "**Yes, Miss Turner, we're all ghosts. You're in a ghost story!**"

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