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### Putting the Fun in Foreign Language: Defining and Justifying Leisure Language Learning and the Implications for Foreign Language Educators and Students

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# **SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL**

This Honors thesis entitled

**“Putting the Fun in Foreign Language: Defining and Justifying Leisure  
Language Learning and the Implications for Foreign Language Educators  
and Students”**

written by

**Graca Webster**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for completion of  
the Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

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## I. Introduction

In a world where learning a foreign language has never been more accessible than it is right now, many people believe that the endeavor is beyond their capabilities and an unworthy use of their time. In western civilizations, there has been a serious decrease in true hobby/leisure activities over the last 15 years. With technological innovations like social media that provide endless hours of scrolling, media streaming services such as Netflix, and even regular cable TV, we have access to endless entertainment that decreases the desire to have a hobby. In March 2020, worldwide lockdowns due to Covid-19 kept most people inside their homes, and extreme boredom struck. Many people took the opportunity to learn a new skill purely for their own personal development. In the early stages of the pandemic, people found themselves with abundant access to technology with connections to billions of other people around the world as well as abundant amounts of time. People who previously had limited time for leisure due to their strenuous work or school lives suddenly had an overwhelming amount of time to use, so they turned to the internet to self-educate and learn a new hobby or skill. While there are lengthy lists of the harms that come out of our dependence on technology, in this historical moment, addiction to screens became a saving grace. Inspiration from online social media fed new obsessions with houseplants, jigsaw puzzles, and even the infamous bread baking, creating a lockdown microculture in which hobbies flourished. Some people turned to independent language learning apps like Duolingo, one of the world's leaders in self-taught language learning technology, which saw an exponential spike in usership of 30 million people in the weeks following the lockdowns that began in March 2020 (Blanco 2020). As it is now three years past the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, our society is learning to adapt to life in a post-pandemic world, returning to life as it was before, while also recognizing the necessity for



change in certain areas. The evidence from the 2020 Duolingo Language Report shows us that people are interested in language learning as a hobby and that there is the possibility for its coexistence on lists with woodworking, knitting, and cooking. Language learning is emerging as a hobby; it's time that we start to categorize it as such.

This contemporary model of language learning as a hobby is of specific interest to educators and scholars within the field of Second Language Acquisition. Already there is substantial research on students' motivations, methods for teaching and learning, and predicting foreign language success; all these areas of research are usually regarding a traditional classroom setting. Increasing amounts of research have emerged in recent years on language learning outside of the education system. There may appear to be a natural gap between the worlds of "traditional classroom" and "learning as a hobby." It is tempting to place them in opposition - the educators versus the hobbyists. As different as these worlds first appear, Leisure Language Learning (LLL) may be the bridge that is needed to connect the two for mutual benefit in each area.

'Leisure Language Learning' is a term that will be used throughout this thesis to describe the person who pursues a foreign language out of their own volition rather than out of necessity, to fulfill an educational requirement, or for a job requirement. This person primarily learns the foreign language independently, that is, outside of a classroom setting, and for the primary purpose of pleasure and self-fulfillment, seeking the intrinsic reward of the language learning experience. LLL can be shown to be beneficial for everyone, no matter your experience level, goals, age, education level, place of residence, or occupation. In a world where a hobby is an arguable necessity, language learning deserves a place alongside bread baking, cycling, and reading. Furthermore, foreign language educators ought to be concerned with students' outcomes

beyond the classroom, and LLL can inform the way that they prepare students for individual and personal success in a foreign language. This work seeks to provide a complete definition of leisure language learning, discuss applications of this concept in the university-level foreign language classroom, and present a layperson's guide to becoming a leisure language learner.

## II. Literature Review

This literature review provides an overview of relevant literature on subjects such as motivation, language learning strategies, and language learning theories. The selected works for this review include a report on foreign language study in higher education institutions that provides justification for LLL, helpful overviews of the hypotheses which would ground the practice of LLL, evidence of the effectiveness of similar practices, and suggestions for the execution of the concept in a classroom setting as well as for individual learners.

As referenced in the 2020 Duolingo Language Report, there has been an increasing trend toward language learning as a hobby. However, there appears to be an opposite trend. Looney and Lusin, authors of the report from the Modern Languages Association titled "Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Summer 2016 and Fall 2016: Final Report," disclose a 9.2% decrease in the number of students enrolled in foreign language programs in higher education institutions. They offer several influencing factors that could be the cause of this downward trend, including the removal of foreign language courses when the university-mandated minimum enrollments are not met and a loss in government funding for international education programs. While these potential causes can be further researched and debated, what is clear is that this downward trend calls for a response from not only foreign language educators but universities themselves. This formidable report



shows that something about the foreign language education that is being offered in universities is not inspiring learners to continue. If the opposite trend is really occurring in independent learners, such as Duolingo users, then the question remains: what can foreign language educators do to counteract this academic disinterest in foreign language learning? LLL remains to be a compelling effort towards positively influencing students' dispositions within and beyond the classroom.

The first piece of theory to ground LLL comes from Stephen Krashen's 1982 work, entitled, "Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition," an extensive, multichapter work for which several sections are pertinent. Krashen presents five hypotheses regarding second language acquisition, two of which support LLL. The most fundamental hypothesis described first in this book is the "acquisition-learning distinction." This hypothesis distinguishes the two manners of gaining competency in a second language: language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition is the manner of gaining second language skills in a way that is similar to developing a first language. Krashen (1982) defines language acquisition as "a subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication." On the contrary, language learning is a process of increasing your "conscious knowledge of a second language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them" (Krashen 1982). (For the sake of clarity within this paper, Krashen's 'language learning' concept will be henceforth referred to as 'explicit learning,' a synonym offered by Krashen) The significance of this distinction in regards to LLL is not only that the majority of activities conducive to LLL will fall under the language acquisition label rather than explicit learning, but furthermore, language acquisition efforts are argued by Krashen to be more effective than explicit learning efforts.

The second hypothesis asserted in Krashen's 1982 work is the "affective filter" hypothesis, which "states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process." Krashen gives three categories of factors that affect the language acquisition process: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. That is, language acquisition is greatly improved when learners have high motivation, high self-confidence, and low anxiety. The affective filter is described as being on a spectrum from high to low, with high meaning that there are many factors impeding the learner, and low the opposite. The affective filter hypothesis supports LLL by recognizing that forced, high pressure-environments are typically hindrances to the acquisition of a foreign language. For individuals independently pursuing LLL, the affective filter is good news. Leisure language learners will be, by nature, more highly motivated because their learning is self-directed. LLL inherently comes with no pressure, and therefore the anxiety related to performance is lowered, if not eliminated. Because of the lowered pressures and anxieties that come with LLL, leisure language learners may experience higher levels of self-confidence, having been empowered by this positive and pleasurable learning process. By incorporating aspects of LLL into classroom environments, educators can assist in lowering these external filters for their students, thus improving both the students' experience and students' classroom outcomes.

A relevant, later hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1994) is the 'pleasure hypothesis,' which he defines as: "those activities that are good for language acquisition are usually perceived by acquirers as pleasant, while those activities that are not good for language acquisition are not consistently perceived as pleasant, and are, in fact, often perceived to be painful." He argues that comprehensible input—which is linguistic input at a level slightly higher than the learner's current ability—and literacy development are good for language acquisition and are positively



perceived by most language acquirers. In contrast, he argues that forced speech, correction, and grammar study are not beneficial for language acquisition and are perceived to be unpleasant by students. This hypothesis from Krashen directly supports the philosophy of LLL.

In three distinct sections, Krashen's 2004 publication summarizes the Comprehension Hypothesis, discusses common controversies in the field in light of this hypothesis, and suggests practical applications for the foreign language classroom. The Comprehension Hypothesis asserts that "we acquire language when we understand messages, when we understand what people tell us and when we understand what we read." (Krashen 2004) The idea here is that language acquisition is achieved when the message is understood. This kind of language acquisition distinguishes itself from language learning because when you understand the input you are receiving, it doesn't feel like the rigorous learning that is typically associated with foreign language study. Krashen suggests that instructors apply the Comprehension Hypothesis through the implementation of a reading plan that proceeds in 6 levels, from graded readers to comparative literature, foreshadowing some of Mason's works on a "Guided Self Selected Reading Plan" (GSSR) which will be discussed in the following section.

This Comprehension Hypothesis is the foundation for GSSR, according to Mason and Smith (Mason & Smith 2021). Although Krashen argues in many of his works that grammar instruction is still helpful and necessary, this argument asserts that the Comprehension Hypothesis (referred to here as the Input Hypothesis) is sufficient on its own for language acquisition, an assertion that the authors support by referencing evidence of learner success via input alone. Mason's and Smith's application makes emphases similar to Krashen's in the previously discussed works (Krashen 1994 & 2004), listing things such as narrow reading, recommending graded readers, no expectations of mastery, no targeted vocabulary, and no



exercises or forced discussion. Distinct from the prior articles mentioned in this review, Mason and Smith recommend that the role of the language teacher is to curate a collection of level-appropriate books which are interesting to the reader, set student reading goals, and reduce classroom anxiety by explaining this pedagogy and affirming the students' progress. The concept of GSSR alludes to LLL by creating a pressure-free environment in which students can encounter the target language and where language acquisition occurs naturally and in a pleasurable manner.

While the suggestions from Mason and Smith (2021) are helpful, the work lacks detailed procedures for creating free voluntary readers in L2, a void that is filled by Mason's solo article from 2019. Mason (2019) argues that GSSR ought to proceed in stages and a key feature of this publication is the sample reading programs for both rapidly and slowly progressing students, proceeding in stages of increasing challenge. The importance of GSSR is not that teachers need to teach students how to select books, Mason notes, because students are naturally able to discern whether a book is interesting to them. It seems that the value of GSSR is not in actively teaching something new to students but in creating a classroom environment that promotes free voluntary reading. Mason says, "With Guided Self-Selected Reading, the teacher eventually convinces the students that they are actually good at reading and that reading can be fun." (Mason 2019)

A final element of support for LLL comes from Noels' (2016) ideas regarding the motivations of language learners. Noels writes about the "Self Determination Theory" and argues that:

"...students who invest in learning because it is meaningful to them personally (that is, those who have a self-determined orientation) are more likely to actively

engage with the language and its associated community and in turn they are more likely to become communicatively and culturally competent” (Noels 2016).

Noels goes on to further explain that this self-determined disposition can be nurtured “in a social environment that is responsive to learners’ need to be active, competent agents who have mutually satisfying relationships with others” (Noels 2016). Individuals that pursue LLL bear this self-determined orientation. This Self-Determination Theory validates the proposition of the benefit of LLL within university-level foreign language classrooms, so that educators may seek to develop self-determined learners.

Unfortunately, it is quite common for students enrolled in a foreign language course to lament the vocabulary lists and grammar instruction that is imposed by their professors. Although the argument here is not that all traditional language learning should be eliminated, the evidence presented in this literature review is sufficient to demonstrate that the implementation of a leisure language learning philosophy would benefit university students' learning and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom as well as student outcomes after completion of the course. There is hope for a result similar to this anecdote that Krashen shared: “she has a classroom library for her second-semester college Spanish students that includes light reading, such as comics and magazines. About a third of the students regularly take selections from the collection home to read on their own. This reading is completely voluntary.” (Krashen 1994) This free-voluntary reading dream as a leisure pursuit is not out of reach; on a small liberal arts campus, this reality can be created with the guidance of these authors and researchers who have laid the foundation for the work of this paper.



### III. The Framework of Leisure Language Learning

It's essential to begin this work with a definition of leisure language learning. This concept is not a new idea, nor is it a theory to be postulated. Rather, it is a conglomeration of ideas already existing in the literature of second language acquisition that deserves to be brought into clarity and open the door to explore this world. Leisure itself is the time you have outside of work, school, or mandatory obligations, which you use to pursue activities for the purpose of relaxation, and emotional satisfaction. Leisure time can be filled with the pursuit of a personal hobby. However, leisure time is misused, or daresay, wasted, when spent mindlessly scrolling through social media feeds or choosing to numb your brain by binge-watching your favorite TV show. These activities deceive our brains into feeling productive by employing our best neurons and giving them input to consume when in reality we receive no substantial emotional fulfillment from those hours we give away. The importance of taking time to rest and unwind from the pressures of life is widely discussed in philosophy, religion, and psychology. The Christian faith holds the notion of a weekly Sabbath free from all work, and even Aristotle himself wrote extensively about pleasure, which for him would have been comparable to our idea of leisure. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes Aristotle's conception of leisure in this way: "he also wants to say that the highest good is a pleasure...that at which all things aim" (Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics"). Although Aristotle's stance on leisure is far too extreme for this instance, it's becoming clear that our modern society has lost the art of true leisure pursuit. In a world full of pressures and obligations, hobbies and leisure can serve as relief for our minds and souls.

Leisure language learning is the pursuit of acquisition of a foreign language free from obligation, and in a manner that is pleasurable for the learner. Oftentimes, language learners are naturally externally motivated by their circumstances. Obligations to language learning include

but are not limited to: people that move to a new country and their ability to survive and thrive in a different culture is contingent upon acquiring a foreign language, young professionals seeking out a coveted career which necessitates fluency in a foreign language, and – important for our context – students whose school or university requires a certain number of foreign language credits. These obligations to language learning are not inherently negative; all of them are honorable motivations for pursuing a foreign language. However, these motivations are antithetical to the idea of leisure. The leisure language learning experience is detached from the external and internal pressures of perfection and the desire for ultimate fluency. The motivation for the pursuit of leisure language learning is internal and personal. You pursue this hobby in hopes of finding inner fulfillment through the satisfaction of acquiring the ability to speak to, understand, and connect with members of another language community. This activity holds intrinsic value for the learner. The philosophy of leisure language learning holds that you can create value in the world and yourself without the pressure to achieve, earn, or perfect your skills at conjugating verbs.

#### IV. Why Language Learning as Leisure

The natural question remains: why ought one consider language learning when choosing a leisure pursuit? Because LLL requires the motivation of finding inner fulfillment, relaxation, and joy, the rewards of language learning that you receive shouldn't be the motivating factor behind your language learning endeavor. However, the resulting factors of language learning can influence the decision to embark upon your own personal LLL journey. The benefits of language learning as a leisure activity are not only numerous but also evidence-based.



### A. Cognitive Rewards

If you dread the day when you must maintain mental sharpness by doing sudoku puzzles and gardening, you'll be pleased to learn that language learning has been shown to not only significantly fight against cognitive decline due to aging but also to improve cognitive performance (Wong, et al. 2019). In an overview of recent research regarding neuroplasticity and language learning, Li et al. (2014) discuss the linguistic challenge of new and novel input from a second language that triggers neural changes within the brain. One of the major results of the many studies reviewed by Li et al. revealed that language learning, even short periods of language training, increases gray matter density and white matter integrity. The best news from these research findings is that these cognitive benefits are not exclusive to one generation or age group; neuroplasticity is improved in children, young adults, and the elderly, and though the results are affected by proficiency levels, age, and individual characteristics, all types of language training bring these physical changes to the brains of all kinds of individual persons (Li et al. 2014). LLL brings massive, tangible rewards that improve brain functioning, regardless of your age and level of proficiency in a second language. It is especially important to recognize that even extremely low proficiency levels are not a barrier to receiving the cognitive benefits of LLL.

### B. Social Merits

Language is defined in part, as a social tool. It follows naturally then, that acquiring a second language would carry significant social benefits. A surprising but well-established and widely researched benefit of language learning is its power to increase your empathy for other people (Guiora 1972). In learning a new language, you are entering into the lived experience of another person; you gain access to their manner of thinking about and describing the world. That

alone is a huge agent of developing empathy. Furthermore, when you learn a new language, you gain access to a whole new group of conversation partners; the potential for meaningful relationships with people different from you majorly increases with each language you acquire. These two factors are key influences in the power of language learning to develop greater empathy in the learner.

Many researchers write about the importance of self-identity when pursuing language learning. Learning a foreign language is an excellent way to explore the limits of who you can be and the communities to which you can belong. Culture is inextricably tied to language, so when you learn a language, you must also learn the culture. Language learning opens the door to experiencing new cultures; you may find a particular sense of belonging through a specific culture that you wouldn't have had access to without the language-learning experience. This stretching of your own identity teaches the complexity of an individual, the vast potential for growth, and gives you a newfound self-confidence from finding a new place to belong. Learning to belong to a new group of individuals is a valuable catalyst for personal growth. Thus, LLL maintains huge social merits in an increasingly globalized society.

### C. Flexibility

LLL is a remarkably achievable activity to incorporate into one's life simply because it bears no limits on the ways it can be customized to fit an individual's goals, interests, schedule, values, current hobbies, etc. Because language accompanies many of our activities of daily living, LLL can easily be incorporated. The cognitive and social benefits of LLL make it a compelling way to steward our leisure time. The only requirement is that it is pleasurable and relaxing for the specific individual, meaning that you decide what kind of language learning



activity will add the most enjoyment value to your life, whether that be movies, books, podcasts, or even cooking. The possibilities for LLL are endless and exciting!

## V. Application

### A. Suggested Activities for Personal Leisure Language Pursuit

As previously mentioned, LLL is not a new idea, and as such, the opportunities for incorporating this leisure pursuit into your life are numerous and continue to grow daily. Keep in mind that because the activity chosen must be pleasurable and leisure-oriented for the learner, what works for one person as LLL may not work for another. Just as your motivation will impact the learning activities you pursue, the learning activities you chose can also positively or negatively impact your motivation. The easiest way to choose a pleasurable LLL activity is by incorporating a foreign language into hobbies you already hold. The following are only suggestions for LLL activities; there will be other activities that fall into this vast category. Don't be afraid to experiment with different language activities to find something that meets your own needs, and remember that you can choose multiple different avenues of LLL if that is what you prefer.

- Avid readers have a natural advantage because their hobby is inherently language-oriented. Reading is an especially helpful LLL activity because it is adaptable to your language level and easily progressive. Beginning learners can seek out children's stories or read familiar books in L1 in their L2, eventually moving towards higher-level reading material. This hobby is not limited to books either; read the news, read magazines, or read street signs if you find that interesting.
- Many new tech companies produce gamified language learning platforms, such as Duolingo, the world's leading language education platform. In addition, Babel,

Memrise, Musuu, HelloTalk, and Linguado are all worth exploring. These platforms are often entertaining and effective ways to gain specific language skills if that is your goal.

- If you like to cook, watch cooking videos and follow familiar and/or new recipes in the target language. There are recipe websites specifically designed for this purpose, including recipes in two languages so that you can opt to primarily read in the target language, but have the safety net of a first language. A bonus to this activity is the opportunity to try new foods and cuisines, deepening the cultural experience that LLL offers.
- Music lovers could consider listening to their favorite genre and exploring new genres in the target language. Creating a playlist full of songs in your target language(s) is a fun way to create space for LLL in your music library. Music is another window into the life of another culture, further justifying the sociocultural impact of LLL.
- TV and movie streaming platforms continue to increase the variety of languages of streaming content that they offer. On Netflix, 45% of the content offered is in languages other than English. Leisure language learners will find that there is no shortage of entertainment in their target language. Netflix is not the exception in the world of streaming; many other streaming sites offer plenty of foreign language content and offer dubbing and subtitles for a myriad of languages. Lingopie is a relatively new streaming service specifically designed for foreign language learners. They offer titles in many languages, with the option to quickly see translations of specific vocabulary words within dialogue, and the ability to create flashcards as you watch the TV show or movie.

Whatever hobby you should choose, keep in mind that LLL is not about perfection, fluency, or even comprehension. Remove the pressure to learn, and remove the fear of not



understanding. It's okay to watch a movie in the target language and not understand 80% of what is being said. The important thing is that you are giving your brain the opportunity to learn something new while giving your brain the opportunity to relax in an enjoyable manner. Remember that the goal is not fluency, as such, anything you do only has to meet the two requirements of leisure plus learning.

#### B. Implications for Educators

Although the philosophy of leisure seems contrary to a classroom setting, university-level foreign language educators should seek to incorporate and develop LLL in their students. However, it is important to distinguish that LLL is not a language-learning pedagogy, or classroom theory like the audiolingual method, grammar-translation method, total physical response (TPR) method, etc. If you choose to pursue LLL in the classroom, it would be paradoxical to orient your entire course around the idea. However, LLL is an activity, a mindset, and an essential element to a classroom with successful student outcomes. An educator's overall goal and purpose ought to extend beyond the classroom. For example, it would be of little value to instruct students in a math class without equipping students to apply their arithmetical skills in the real world. Similarly, foreign language educators (particularly of beginning levels of foreign language) should be concerned with equipping their students to apply their language skills to the real world. LLL is a practical tool that educators can give to their students to allow them to experience a foreign language in a new way.

However, leisure does not come easily to the classroom setting. Many educators will find that despite outwardly dreading deadlines, assignments, and tests, university students feel uncomfortable in a classroom that is absent of such things. Therefore, this leisure mindset toward language learning will not be naturally apparent in students. It is the critical role of the educator

to develop this leisure disposition in their learners. At the university level, it is not uncommon for students to have had prior foreign language classes. This can be unfortunate since many students retain negative feelings towards foreign language learning as a result of a negative experience in high school. These lingering negative feelings cause students to dread the foreign language classes required by their university. Many students feel that the beginning level required foreign language class is a fruitless endeavor; they believe that they will not acquire a usable level of language and therefore choose to disengage from the classroom, losing the potential benefits that are at their fingertips. When educators recognize this predisposition in their students, they can tailor their classroom instruction and environment to counteract that expectation. LLL is a way to fight against this distaste towards foreign language learning by offering pleasant and relaxing low-pressure opportunities for interacting with the target language.

If you are a foreign language educator that chooses to incorporate LLL into your classroom, heed this warning: not every student will buy into LLL because of the negative bias that some students bring to the classroom. After recovering from your disappointment, choose to meet your student where they are at. Find activities that they actually enjoy and encourage LLL in the classroom and in the student's free time. One exciting component of LLL is its flexibility; if one manner of LLL doesn't feel like leisure for one group of students, you can try many other methods until you find what works. Leisure exists in a variety of forms and because language is constantly present throughout all of life, educators have the opportunity to express their own creativity in how to develop leisure activities.

Learning a foreign language is a distinctly different experience than learning a subject such as biology or US history. Language is a human skill; people carry the instinct of language with them from birth in a manner that is not shared by other major academic disciplines. The



inherent skill of language acquisition isn't a disposition to be created; it's a resource to be used. Therefore, teachers of foreign languages ought to intentionally create a classroom experience that considers the multifaceted nature of second language acquisition. As Krashen explains in "Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition,"(1982) there is a distinction between learning a foreign language and acquiring a foreign language and this is often ignored in the university classroom environment. LLL comports with this idea of promoting acquisition above learning (or grammar study) because according to Krashen, the ideal environment for acquisition is a low-pressure, low-anxiety, pleasurable environment.

Ultimately, LLL is a helpful classroom tool to use to motivate students and improve student outcomes. It's important for a foreign language educator to contemplate the goal or the purpose of their classroom; how do you define a successful student who completes the course? A successful student in a foreign language course that is purposed to equip learners with achievable levels of fluency and practical language tools is not always going to be the one that makes A's. Those successful students are those that maintain confidence in the language and a positive disposition towards language learning. A successful student in a classroom that maintains LLL as a course objective will be equipped with resources for the personal pursuit of LLL and a mindset that understands that foreign language learning can be experienced in a pleasurable way.

### C. Suggestions for Engaging Leisure Language Learning in the Classroom

Given that LLL is a beneficial and enriching addition to the university-level foreign language classroom, here are some suggestions for how to incorporate leisure activities in the class and to develop the LLL disposition in students. Although LLL exists contrary to mandated activities, you can allow the philosophy to accompany both graded and non-graded classroom assignments. When an assignment that is graded is truly pleasurable, students can find enjoyment

in the learning process despite the obligation. The following items are suggestions and are free to be modified or adjusted to suit the needs of specific classrooms.

- Provide resources within the classroom that students can use for extracurricular language learning. Recall the anecdote from Krashen about the teacher who keeps a classroom library of interesting and level-appropriate books that her students actually utilize (Krashen 1992).
- Although the required reading of literature, even if it is pleasurable, is contrary to the LLL idea, incorporation of a GSSR plan can lead students to better understand the LLL idea. Mason's suggestions for a GSSR plan can be helpful in the process of creating your own plan (Mason 2019).
- Teach students where to find fun, pleasurable ways to learn a language. Present a wide variety of options so that diverse individuals may encounter something that is pleasurable and rewarding for themselves. There is no one way to experience leisure; therefore LLL must be the same.
- Consider incorporating fun short videos to be watched during class time. Youtube is a wealth of free resources. There are creators on Youtube who produce foreign language dialogues, vlogs, and entertainment at a variety of levels for the purpose of learning a language. Exercise caution when choosing a video, because although a video may be extremely educational, it may not be interesting for students. The purpose is to allow students to relax while watching the video without being concerned with learning a specific concept or being tested over the information later.
- An especially engaging way to incorporate LLL is through games in the target language, without targeting specific vocabulary or grammar concepts. These could be board games,



group games like charades, or even video games/computer games. A provocative example of a language learning game comes from Sébastien Dubreil for students of French. Dubreil's game is an academic project produced by an interdisciplinary team. The purpose of the game is to engage learners with the French language, history, and culture in a way that is entertaining, empowering, and beneficial for language acquisition.

- Provide a variety of perspectives on language learning. Be clear with students that pursuing language learning does not mean pursuing perfection in the language. Not everyone will go on to read Borges or Cervantes in the original language, but many will encounter foreign language speakers in restaurants, work environments, and emergency situations. As an educator, you are able to equip students for these encounters, but you also have the opportunity to equip students to find enjoyment in the subject; you can remind them that it is a rewarding and virtuous hobby.
- Another significant practice of LLL involves planning and/or making students aware of cultural events or opportunities to interact with the target language. Specifically, emphasize events that are not centered on language learning, but rather have an alternative focus. Events like these create valuable contextual associations for new and novel vocabulary for students and reinforce the LLL mindset by adding positive, relaxing, and enriching memories and associations with language learning. Examples of such events are movie nights, potlucks, cultural celebrations, etc.

#### VI. Importance of Foreign Language Education in a Christian Context

Since the primary audience and context of this paper is a Christian liberal arts university, it is essential to emphasize the specific biblical importance of foreign language learning, both in an academic setting and as a leisure pursuit. Choosing your own leisure pursuits is a challenging

decision, requiring a close evaluation of interests, values, and what you find to be relaxing.

Language itself is a gift from God given from the moment of man's creation, a creative means of reflecting God's own image. LLL is of particular interest to followers of Christ because it is an inherently communal and humble act of love for our fellow image-bearers.

Although foreign language learning seems to be a relatively quiet subject in Christian academia, the Bible speaks abundantly about the presence of diverse languages in the world and what the believer's role is in relation to them. In chapter one of *The Gift of the Stranger*, David I. Smith and Barbara Carvill write an in-depth description of the narrative of foreign languages within God's world, beginning with God's command to Adam to name the animals, to the Tower of Babel, Pentecost, the early Pauline church, and finally ending with Revelation 7:9, where multitudes "from every nation, tribe, and tongue" join voices in their diverse languages to give praise to the returning Savior (*Christian Standard Bible*, Rev. 7:9). Smith and Carvill interestingly note that the multiplying of diverse languages at Babel was not the result of the Fall. The true result of the Fall was the attempt to glorify oneself and deny the commandment of God to go into all the earth, multiplying and being fruitful. Babel was the work of God to redirect his people back to his intentions for humanity's flourishing.

Babel is a significant instance in which the power of a language is displayed as a tool utilized by humanity for both good and bad purposes. Although language functions as a pragmatic tool, its role in humanity is much larger, and the subject of this work is leisure, not pragmatics. Language is an essential means of connecting with people and acknowledging their value as a person, a fellow image-bearer. By learning someone else's language, you show them that you care about them, their story, where they come from, and the other components of their identity. Your decision to learn their language shows that you acknowledge their identity as a



speaker of that language. Language is inextricably tied to identity, and by learning a foreign language you can literally step into their shoes, becoming like Paul when he writes about becoming “all things to all people” (*Christian Standard Bible*, 1 Cor. 9:22) Smith and Carvill share words from a speech of Calvin Seerveld; echoing this idea he says “to learn a different language is an act of love” (*The Gift of the Stranger* 65). This act of love is fueled by a desire for the already arrived and the still yet-to-come Kingdom of Christ, building up the body and inviting others to receive the free mercy and grace of God for all people. We reflect the sacrificial nature of Christ’s care for his people when we choose to step outside of all that is comfortable for ourselves and enter the unfamiliar world of a foreign language. Smith and Carvill describe this learning experience in this way:

“Learning a new language is a joyful gift one gives to oneself and to the other. By studying the language of the host country, one says to its people: “I want to meet you, to connect and communicate with you; I want to hear your voice; I want to know what it is like to be you in your culture. I’ve already started to walk toward you; I’ve gone through some of the rigorous and demanding discipline necessary to acquire your language; and I’ve begun to learn about your ways. Even though my steps in your direction are clumsy and faltering, I’m on the way, eager to engage you. I’d like to participate in and learn from the many different conversations carried on in your culture” (*The Gift of the Stranger* 65).

This humble experience of entering a foreign language as a learner bears a certain kind of submission to those for whom that language is their first language, the language of their heart. In a podcast episode from “The Why Europe Podcast,” John Robinson describes this experience from the framework of servanthood, the calling of all believers. He proposes the situation of two

speakers, both English speakers, one being a native speaker and the other for whom English is a second language. Robinson says:

“[W]hoever is speaking in his first language is always going to be in a position of superiority in the exchange, just because they’re more...It’s more fluid...It’s more comfortable. They’re having the comfort level higher, and the other person, even if they’re really fluent in English, is at a slight, or great disadvantage, depending on the language gap. And we would say as missionaries: our role is to serve the people, so we take the subordinate position, and give them the primary position in the exchange and let them speak their first language. I’ll speak my second language, I’m gonna make mistakes, but I can communicate what I need to say in the heart language of the people, so I have honored them and I have served them. And as missionaries, this is part of our calling. We’re serving the people to whom we’ve been called.... Because we are called to serve, we need to be servants in all things, including culture, including language” (The beauty of heart languages with John Robinson, 00:19:41-00:21:13).

When you choose to speak a non-native language with someone who is a native speaker of that language, you take the submissive role in the conversation and are forced to work harder to listen and understand the speaker than if you were communicating in your own native language. In this way, language speaks to the heart; rather than being a purely pragmatic tool, it also communicates your care and respect for your conversation partner.

In a post-Christian culture, the Gospel moves at the speed of relationships, and language is the fundamental means we use to pursue relationships with people. Taking the humble position as the lower proficiency speaker reflects the humility of Christ, and causes people to wonder why



a person would ever choose to take the difficult path of learning the language to which their heart beats, the one that shapes their thoughts and feelings. These opportunities to connect with people different from ourselves serve as reminders that the Gospel transcends race, ethnicity, nationality, and heart language.

This discussion of LLL in the context of Christianity leads back to Aristotle's discussions on leisure and pleasure (Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics"). Kraut writes, "Aristotle's discussion of pleasure thus helps confirm his initial hypothesis that to live our lives well we must focus on one sort of good above all others: virtuous activity;" in this context, LLL meets this requisite of virtue for human pleasure by giving deeper purpose to a leisure activity.

In the context of a Christian university, we ought to orient foreign language classrooms around this idea of love for our neighbor in the pursuit of a foreign language. Smith and Carvill write, "[Foreign language education] must be shaped by respect for the other as an image bearer of God; it must be eager to hear the other; and it must be driven by love for God and for one's neighbor" (The Gift of the Stranger 65) More than just training up people who find enjoyment in LLL, foreign language educators have the opportunity to teach students profound biblical empathy for our neighbors through the process of acquiring vocabulary and grammar.

## VII. Conclusion

Grounded in research and theory, LLL is an exciting prospect for laypersons and foreign language educators. This idea is extremely relevant to this cultural moment in history, where access to other cultures abounds and the necessity for an escape from the demands of day-to-day obligations to jobs and academics is ever-increasing. LLL is not new; professionals within the field of Second Language Acquisition have been discussing this type of mindset for decades. However, this exploration of the hobby world in conjunction with the world of foreign language

education sheds light on the potential of LLL to increase interest in foreign language learning for individuals and to improve the outcomes of university-level foreign language students. With rapidly changing and improving technological innovations, there is no doubt that we will continue to see an increase in leisure language learners. The end is not in sight for LLL; there is abundant potential for further work and research now that the door is open and the category is clarified.



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