

Excerpts from Most Often Asked Questions in  
Learning Another Language Through Actions (7th edition)  
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**Q. "Crazy English" is the latest frenzied approach to learning another language. What do you think?**

**A.** The originator of "Crazy English" is 39-year old Li Yang in Beijing, China who describes himself as a "real loser" in school. After taking English classes for 14 years, he still could not speak it.

He hit upon a strategy of overcoming inhibitions to speak English by shouting it. My speculation is: Li Yang may have stumbled upon another way to brainswitch from the left to the right brain. According to an account from Renee Schoof of the Associated Press (6/15/99), "Li mimics how not to say it " I have-a-heard-a so much-a about-a you." Then naturally, with pauses and dramatic punch: I...have heard...SOOOO much ...abouwwwt-choo."

Shouting, along with whispering, singing, and storytelling may be another effective brainswitch from the left to the right brain. Note that TPR is also a brainswitch from left to right. So shouting may be still another valuable tool in your box of linguistic tools. Please be alert: Often when people stumble upon a linguistic tool, they imagine they have a panacea. They imagine this is "The Answer" to all problems in learning another language. They soon discover that reliance on one tool to "teach" a language results in "adaptation." For example, if an instructor relies on storytelling hour -after-hour and day-after-day, students will mutiny with comments such as, "If I have to hear one more story, I will wretch in the wastebasket." I have often said that although TPR is the most powerful tool in your linguistic box of tools, using it as your only tool will result in adaptation.

**Update on Crazy English**

The New Yorker (April 28, 2008) ran a piece entitled, Letter from China: Crazy English written by Evan Osnos. In preparation for the 2008 Summer Olympics, Li Yang is using Crazy English to prepare doctors in city hospitals to treat visitors to the games who may become sick. The doctors in their thirties and forties "like millions of English learners in China...have so little confidence speaking (English) that they have spent years studying by textbook." Li "routinely teaches in arenas, to classes of ten thousand people or more...The list price (for seats) is two hundred and fifty dollars a day---more than a full month's wages for the average Chinese worker." The meetings remind one of the fervor in an old-fashioned tent revival.

**For graduate students**

For your thesis, I urge graduate students to conduct pioneer experimental studies using shouting or whispering or singing or storytelling as your **independent variables**. If your work is careful, thoughtful, and thorough, I guarantee your

project will be welcomed for publication in academic journals, . If you need help with the research design or the data analysis, let me know.

**Q. You opened up a Pandora's box with your offer to help graduate students plan an experimental research design to assess independent variables such as whispering, shouting, singing or storytelling, Give us an example.**

**A.** First, the graduate student needs at least an introductory course in research statistics that enables one to apply basic procedures such as correlation, the t-test, and chi square. My book, **A Simplified Guide to Statistics for Non-Mathematicians**, is a helpful resource.

Second, experimental research with language learning is more complex than the typical medical research study that uses, a placebo-controlled, double-blind study to evaluate, for example, Fosamax, which is prescribed to increase bone density. Double-blind means that neither the physician nor the patients know whether they are taking Fosamax or a placebo. I have never encountered a language learning study that had the luxury of a double-blind. As an aside, the finding for Fosamax was that adverse experiences with the drug were less than one percent. It would be informative to know how bone density changed after two years of taking the drug.

Since most language students do not have the statistical background to plan and evaluate language research, there are not many published experimental studies. Without "hard data," practitioners jump from innovation to innovation based on testimonials (i.e., "I tried it. I love it.") and the bandwagon effect (i.e. "Everybody's doing it. It must be good".). As a rule of thumb, you can expect a "bump up" in student motivation with any novel procedure, but interest will tend to disappear in time because of "adaptation." For example, if you continue with one tool such as shouting hour-after-hour and day-after-day, you can expect students to mutiny with, "If we hear her shout again, I will run pell mell out of this room screaming!" This holds true for any tool in your box of linguistic tools including TPR.

### **Classroom teachers are sitting on a gold mine**

Since classroom teachers have access to multiple classes of students year after year, this is like having in your backyard a Klondike Gold Field that goes undiscovered and unexplored. So, let's play with a possible research design with your students for talking, whispering, singing, and shouting. I visualize four groups of students, randomly selected, wearing wireless headphones. The task is to acquire a list of twenty vocabulary words with a simple paired associate procedure. For example, they hear a voice through the headphones utter with normal talking or whispering or singing or shouting: "Tate" (slight pause) "Stand," "Suware" (slight pause) "Sit," and so forth. After hearing the foreign utterance, if the student responds with the appropriate English twice in a row, that item is eliminated from the list.

Each group randomly will acquire four lists either through normal talking, whispering, singing, or shouting. To ensure that the task is not overwhelming, I think I would try only one list a day for four days. My hypothesis is that students who experience whispering, singing or shouting the foreign words will have faster

learning and better short and long-term retention compared hearing someone talking.

The **dependent variables** can be: (a) number of times, on the average, items must be presented before learning, (b) short-term retention at the end of four days, (c) long-term retention after one week, one month, etc., and/or (d) student preference for normal talking, whispering, singing or shouting.

### **Data analysis**

For simplicity, just look at the averages or percentages. Averages or percent usually tells you the whole story (i.e., For example, with Fosamax, less than 1 percent of patients had an adverse experience.) Then follow-up with t- tests for correlated groups to decide whether the results were "real" (the result of the independent variable) or due to chance. A little more sophisticated procedure might be analysis of covariance.

Note 1. - To bump the project up to the next level of difficulty, try replicating by reversing the task. With four sets of twenty items, students hear the English such as "window" (slight pause) "mado," then "chalkboard" (slight pause) "kokoban," and so forth. The task for the student is to utter the foreign word immediately after hearing the English. They will hear the foreign word either spoken, whispered, sung, or shouted.

Still another innovation in the research design would be to ask students to respond by speaking the foreign words or whispering or singing or shouting.

Note 2. - For many alternate ways to conduct successful research into language learning, see my **Prize-winning TPR Research CD**. (To order this product and other books mentioned, visit <http://www.tpr-world.com/>.)