

Monologue in *Polyglot, How I Learn Languages* by Kató Lomb: Still a Viable Language Learning Strategy?

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Abstract

This empirical study examined the usability of monologue for improving oral expression in foreign language learning following the stance of Kató Lomb in her book: *Polyglot, How I Learn Languages*. Consequently, the study is a descriptive survey on the usage of monologues by university foreign language students who are currently undergoing a French language immersion program in an inter-university center. The essence was to ascertain whether they consider monologues as a useful strategy in developing oral expressive skills in French as a foreign language (FFL). The findings revealed that many of them depend on monologues for developing their oral expression. It was concluded that monologue should be expressly taught in the foreign language classroom as a strategy for developing oral expression skills.

Keywords: monologue, foreign language learning, oral expression, Kató Lomb

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Introduction

Strategies for language learning appear to be invaluable considering how foreign language educators are constantly seeking ways to develop the language skills of learners in the target language. The essence of language is basically for communication, hence language learning should be pragmatic (Lomb, 2008). Whilst the oral and written comprehension as well as the written expression of the target language are also important in language development, the oral expressive skill also known as speaking, is more glaring and evidential that language learning is taking place. Usually, the high usage frequency and spontaneity linked to speaking make many language educators pay rapt attention to developing it. Moreover, the development of oral expression can also develop other communication skills. Learners can benefit from their speaking to better sift/identify sound, rhythm, intonation, liaison and other characteristics of the language for better oral comprehension. Through the development of oral expression, learners can achieve better pronunciation and understanding when they read. Plus, the conception and structuring of ideas that precede speaking can aid learners in developing their written expression.

In foreign language learning, many strategies are taught by teachers and learned by students in order to make the language learning process more concrete and practicable within and outside the classroom. Some of these strategies involve activities of quiz, repetitions, singing and debate, while some others explore dialogues and varying types of narrations during dramatization and role-playing activities. Clearly, the essence of these strategies and activities are geared toward making learners actively participate during learning activities while interacting more confidently in the target language with colleagues and teachers. Dramas and role playing observably rank very high in strategies and activities that develop oral expression because they promote verbal exchange in the classroom especially through dialogues. Consequently, dialogues are highly considered a drama/role play characteristic that greatly helps language learners develop their oral expression. Even though monologues also greatly help language learners with confidence, accuracy and fluency especially during personal preparations for oral production in class activities/presentations, little or no attention is given to its teaching or usage during class activities. It is often neglected as a language learning strategy, perhaps because it is mainly used in private. Still, some learners are seemingly oblivious that they get involved in it from time to time. Also, some other learners may need to be aware of monologues and how they can use it in improving their oral expression skill.

Often in foreign language learning classes, when learners are preparing for individual presentations, they are encouraged to rehearse on their own and before peers who can make meaningful contributions to the successful presentation. When learners do this, they are involving themselves in some form of monologue as they are solo speakers speaking to themselves or to a few persons. As Abishova (2022) puts it, "... A monologue is an organized type of speech, which is the product of an individual utterance of one person addressed to the audience in order to achieve the necessary impact on the listener ..." (p. 215). Thinking, rethinking, organizing and rehearsing formal or informal speech before the delivery day may be a general human activity that has found its way into foreign language learning. The goal of this is often for precision, accuracy and confidence in delivery of the presentation. For some people, practice with self, especially before the mirror is all they need to do for an excellent presentation delivery while for some others, they will require a small audience of a few persons. For instance, Kató Lomb in her book: *Polyglot, How I Learn Languages* (2008), talks about spending time tinkering with the target language every day and if time is short, at

least a 10-minute monologue could be done. Hence, “Monologues are manifold in their nature” (Pavliková, 2019, p. 89). Learners may therefore be involved in varying types of monologues without even being aware of it. It is observed that even though many foreign language educators are aware that learners practice the target language on their own, neither them or the learners may necessarily call this activity a monologue of some sort. The purpose of this study therefore is to know if and how learners of French as a foreign language consciously and consistently explore monologues with the aim of improving their oral expression in the target language.

Developing Oral Expression in Foreign Language Learning

Oral expression is a basic language skill that cannot be ignored in language learning. Though Pavliková (2019) says a vast majority of conversations is through oral communication, in this paper it is seen that it is actually a vast majority of spontaneous and simultaneous conversations that is exclusively done through oral expression. Speaking is the ability to convey messages using verbal and non-verbal means with accuracy and fluency to listeners in order not to distort the meaning and understanding of the message transmitted. To Mohamed et al. (2020), accuracy involves using good grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary when speaking. While fluency is speaking smoothly with normal speed, without unnecessary pause, hesitations, repetitions or self-corrections. For learners to attain this level of accuracy and fluency, they must have mastered the linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of language. In the linguistic aspect is where grammar and vocabulary are domiciled and in the sociolinguistic aspect, how the target language interacts with the society and culture where it is used becomes the focus. To Mohamed et al. (2020), as learners speak the target language, they learn the appropriate socio-cultural codes for each communicative situation. For some learners, acquiring all of these knowledge before speaking can be said to take place may seem daunting. Clearly, developing the speaking skill can be challenging due to these different elements of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, communicative/interactive ability, speech styles, language function and sociocultural norms (Karpovich et al., 2021; Mohamed et al., 2020). For this, foreign language educators consistently seek strategies to engage learners in many speech situations within and outside of the classroom. Clearly, the more learners participate in speech acts, the more opportunity they have to practice the knowledge they have acquired as well as gain new knowledge from who and what they are interacting with.

Speaking is done in a variety of situations and foreign language learners may not always be pre-informed about small talks or conversations that may come their way regularly. In other words, not many speaking scenes are planned for. Hence, language learners expose learners to many speech circumstances for them to practice, as well as to learn and unlearn misconceptions. However, in some of these speech situations, monologues may be missing because it does not quite give opportunity for verbal exchange. To corroborate this, Karpovich et al. (2021) reiterate that speaking skill needs much practice and exercise to be mastered. And, in a bid to encourage speaking, “teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues” (Mohamed et al., 2020, p. 2). As important as drills and dialogues are in improving oral expression, they can hardly tackle the persistent challenges of speaking the target language outside the learning space. Learners can participate in the drills and dialogues in class but become unable to express themselves outside of the classroom structured dialogue arrangement. Major challenges of oral expression to foreign language learners are usually lack of confidence, anxiety and insufficient background knowledge of the language, (Pavliková, 2019). Even though Mohamed et al. (2020), assert that learners gain confidence when in any communication

circumstance, they are able to speak, monitor and control their speech, getting learners to the level where they can monitor and control their speech to gain confidence may not be effectively done outside without teaching and encouraging learners to engage in monologues before coming for lessons. To Lomb (2008), monologue may seem simple or obvious, but it is rarely incorporated into the foreign language learning program.

Monologue for Language Learning

Monologue is a term largely associated with drama and whilst drama has for a long time been recognized and openly used as strategy for foreign language learning, some of its characteristics like intrigue, characterization, narration and dialogue have equally been except for monologue. It appears that many language educators are silent about using monologues for language learning even when they perceive that some learners rely on it when preparing for lessons and class activities. A monologue means many things and can be part of conversations as stories, speeches, reports or lectures (Abishova, 2022; Pavliková, 2019), and it could be that some learners may not be aware that they even use it in their independent and private study. Karpovich et al. (2021) define monologue as:

the individual oral work of students with the aim of practicing all the areas of the language system, which enhances both the language skills and the student's self-confidence. They require a clear task and time for preparation, which is followed by the performance. (2021, 3)

Whenever learners practice what to say or do with the target language before the real action, they are engaged in a monologue. The practice time may serve as an opportunity for the learners to take care of the linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of the language, organize their thoughts and properly articulate them through oral expression. Abishova (2022) corroborates this by adding that through monologues, formulation of thoughts can take place. And these thoughts can become speeches. To Pavliková (2019), a monologue can be very helpful as it aids learners in all areas of the language system. In a research with adult learners of a foreign language, it was discovered that through monologues, the learners had sustained conversations, had no recourse to the mother tongue and could even think in the target language. They also broadened their knowledge on varying topics in the target language. Karpovich et al. (2021) also found monologues very helpful at improving first year students' use of the target language. However, the class presentations, where the product of monologue was displayed, was time consuming and some learners who had earlier presented became bored when ongoing presentations seemed unending (Pavliková, 2019).

Due to the benefits that accrue from monologue, it is now considered a strategy worth developing openly in the classroom. To Karpovich et al. (2021), a monologue speaking task where learners can systematically and independently work with language materials in order to receive information, process it, then produce and deliver their own thoughts orally from it in a logical and coherent manner is key. In achieving this, an up-to-date list of key vocabulary retrieved for each monologue is required. For Karpovich et al. (2021), these activities produce worthwhile and interesting successes within a short time because challenges bordering on shyness, fear, anxiety, lack of confidence and motivation on the part of the learner are largely eliminated. Abishova (2022), advocates retelling of materials read or heard as very helpful in developing monologue speech. Here, the learners listen to short and simple texts. Thereafter, they ask questions about each sentence, receive responses from themselves in full sentences and at the end, they retell the entire text. To Abishova (2022), the retelling

can also be a creative one where the learners listen to the beginning of a text and come up with an ending, tell the whole text and come up with a title for it. Consequently, whereas a monologue is an individual activity, also considered as an inner monologue (Karpovich et al., 2021; Pavliková, 2019), it can equally take place within a small group (Abishova, 2022).

Kató Lomb's Monologue for Learning Languages

Kató Lomb (1909-2003), an enthusiast of monologues, who endorses inner monologues, is the author of *Polyglot, How I Learn Languages* was indifferent to foreign languages in secondary school and studied Chemistry at the University. She did not believe in the innate ability to learn languages. Rather, she believed that language learning is time-intensive, deliberate and born out of genuine interest as well as dedication. Her learning of foreign languages started off as an adult with English in 1933 when she wanted a job as a teacher. Afterwards, she learnt Russian and soon learnt about 16 languages in total. In these languages, she could do interpretation and translation jobs for business and state concerns. In the 1950s, she became one of the world's simultaneous interpreters. Even though she agreed to not having the same level of ability in all 16 languages and translation in some of them require more time and effort than the others, her achievements are enormous and many language researchers, educators as well as learners believe they would learn some strategies to language acquisition.

To Lomb (2008), “an excellent means to avoid failure in language learning is to practice monologues” (p. 125). As a suggestion for successful language learning, she suggests that learners produce a 10-minute monologue in the morning hours if time was short “tinkering with the language daily” (p.159). Among the many benefits of monologue, Lomb discovered she was able to learn vocabulary and their synonyms often competing with herself. Also, in the course of her learning, she would set her grammar right because “one learns grammar from language and not language from grammar” (p. x). Lomb practiced monologues as an individual activity. She enjoyed talking to herself a lot and prescribed silent/inner monologues to avoid learning bad pronunciation from self and worry of drunkenness from passers-by. To her, with willpower and self-discipline, discussing experiences with self in a foreign language can effectively take place and be a habit. Lomb (2008, p. 65) had some challenges practicing target languages with native speakers because she could rarely find them. Many times, even when she found native speakers, they were impatient with her and one time, the patient person she found was a Buddhist only willing to discuss Buddhism. Clearly, discussions with self can fill the void where nobody appears to be available to speak the foreign language with. Consequently, knowledge of languages can equally be preserved using inner monologue.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What activities for improving oral expressions do learners of FFL engage in?
2. How do learners of FFL prepare for presentations that require oral expressions?
3. What are the techniques learners of FFL use in preparing for oral expressions?

Research Methodology

A descriptive survey was embarked upon using a google form questionnaire as instrument for the study to elicit data from the 630 students from 33 universities in Nigeria who are

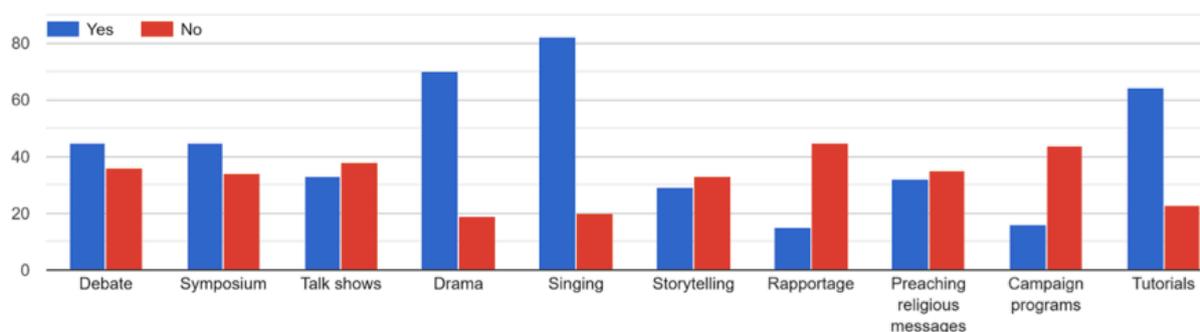
currently in their 5th out of 7 months French Language Immersion Program in a Nigerian Inter-University French Language Immersion center. All of these students have done at least 2 years' French study in their respective universities and the Immersion Program serves as the third year/penultimate year for all of them. Upon their return to their universities, they are expected to resume the final year of their French studies. The google form was sent to the students' WhatsApp platform that hosts about 620 of them. Following a sensitization on responding to the questionnaire once and anonymously, as well as a window of 3 weeks for responding, a total of 141 responses were retrieved.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What activities for improving oral expressions do learners of FFL engage in?

Figure 1

1. Please Tick the Speaking Activity/Activities That You Engage In



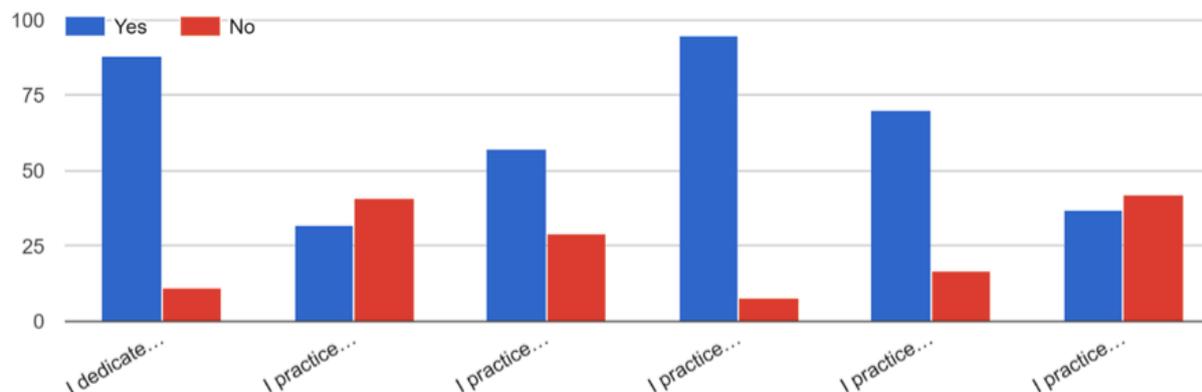
Out of the ten oral expression activities selected for the respondents to choose from, four (debate, symposium, drama and singing) are major socio-educative programs at the Immersion center. The other six are observed major Nigeria campus speaking activities that university students engage in. These data show that all the 141 respondents engage in at least one of the ten speaking activities listed. Only that they engage in varying levels. On a ranking of 1-10, the activities that learners of FFL engage in for improving oral expressions are: Singing, Drama, Tutorials, Debate, Symposium, talk show, preaching of religious messages, storytelling, campaign programs and rapportage.

In singing, 82 out of 102 respondents participate in it while 20 do not. Drama has 70 out of 89 participating in it, while 19 do not. 64 out of 87 respondents use French language for tutorials while 23 do not. The two activities of debate and symposium tie in the fourth position. Out of 81 respondents, 45 agree to participating in debate and 36 do not. In the same vein for symposium, 45 out of 79 participate in it, while 34 do not. In the sixth position for talk shows, 33 out of 71 respondents participate in it while 38 do not. For seventh position, 32 out of 67 respondents use French to preach religious messages and 35 do not. For eighth position, storytelling has 29 out of 62 participants who engage in it while 33 do not. And for ninth position, 16 out of 60 respondents use French for campaign programs, while 44 do not. Rapportage comes 10th in the ranking having 15 out of 60 respondents indicating that they participate in it and 45 saying they do not.

Research Question 2: How do learners of FFL prepare for presentations that require oral expressions?

Figure 2

2. How I Prepare for Presentations That Require Speaking French

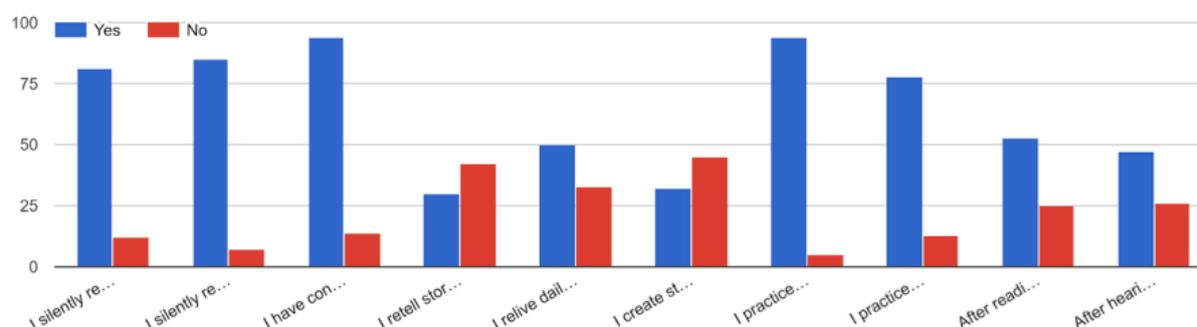


Six categories on how learners prepare for oral presentations were made for respondents to choose from and these data show that many of the respondents engage in at least one of the categories. In a ranking of 1-6, respondents who practice speaking French in front of friends who can correct them rank 1st with 95 out of 103 engaging in it while 8 do not. In the second position are respondents who dedicate some minutes/time every day to practice speaking French before stepping out. Here, 88 out of 99 respondents attest to doing it while 11 say they do not. Next are, 70 out of 87 respondents who practice speaking French in front of anyone willing to listen, while 17 do not. In the fourth position are 57 out of 86 respondents who practice speaking French privately in front of the mirror, while 29 do not. Followed by 32 out of 73 practice speaking French only during general rehearsals, while 41 do not. Finally, 37 out of 79 respondents practice speaking French only when they have oral presentation in class, and 42 do not.

Research Question 3: What are the techniques learners of FFL use in preparing for oral expressions?

Figure 3

3. The Techniques I Use in Preparing for French Speaking



To enable the output of oral expression, learners usually develop a technique. 10 of such techniques were selected for the respondents to choose from. These data show that these techniques are well known and utilized by the respondents. In a ranking of 1-10, the techniques that learners of FFL use in preparing for oral expressions are thus:

Two techniques rank first: having conversations with self in French (94 out of 108 respondents) and pronouncing French words correctly to self before speaking out (94 out of 99 respondents). In the third position, 85 out of 92 respondents silently rehearse their speech before talking in French with their teachers and 81 out of 93 respondents silently rehearse their speech before talking in French with friends gets the fourth position. In the fifth position, 78 out of 91 respondents practice new French vocabulary correctly to self before speaking out and after reading a story in French, 53 out of 25 respondents ask and answer questions on it in French with self. In the seventh position, 50 out of 83 relive daily experiences in their thoughts using French and upon hearing a French recording, 47 out of 73 respondents discuss the issues raised in French with self. In the ninth position, 32 out of 77 respondents create stories using French in their thoughts and finally, 30 out of 72 respondents retell stories in French to self.

Discussion of Findings

Singing and drama rank higher than other activities for improving oral expression among the students of French as a foreign language in the immersion center perhaps because, of all the activities, they involve more participants at a time due to their compartmentalization in groups. Hence, during both rehearsals and presentations in either of the singing or drama groups, participants are usually not few. Another factor that could have influenced the ranking of singing and perhaps drama is the number of female respondents in comparison with that of the males. A total of 108 females and 33 males responded to the research questions. Singing and dramatizing are activities that usually have more female than male participants. In other words, the high number of females may have adversely given a boost to the rankings of singing and drama as first and second before all other activities for improving oral expression. The other activities of tutorials, debate, symposium, talk show, preaching of religious messages, storytelling, campaign programs and rapportage are usually on an individual basis during rehearsals and classroom presentation time.

It is an observable common practice in some University Campus settings where students who have a better grasp of course content take time to help other course mates learn course content at their speed and in a more relaxed atmosphere. As tutorials rank third, it is evident that many learners brought into the center from their various universities, this common practice. The students with better knowledge of the language and course content are very intentional about helping their struggling colleagues succeed in the program and by extension, in the foreign language learning venture. For individual students to teach specific course content to the understanding of colleagues, a lot of preparation would have taken place. Perhaps, the type of personal practice would equal that of those who engage in the other activities of debate, symposium, talk shows, preaching of religious messages, storytelling, campaign programs and rapportage. In all of these activities, the individual leading the conversation/presentation is alert and intentional about making a flawless delivery using the target language. Consequently, it becomes imperative to ascertain how the learners prepare to make such deliveries in order to advance reinforcements.

Even though some learners would not be bothered by any class presentation, a majority of the respondents are not only preoccupied with making excellent presentations in class, they are equally very interested in improving their oral expression in the target language to the extent that they not only practice before those that can correct them or before the mirror, but they also practice speaking the target language before anyone available to listen. This appears as a desperate move to work on good pronunciation, make use of vocabularies and expressions as

well as to work on many other aspects of oral expression. It equally reiterates a persistent challenge that learners of foreign languages have. They are in need of more opportunities to practice their oral skills (Lomb, 2008). The learners, knowing that they may sometimes not have people to speak the target language with, are undaunted. They still engage in many inner monologues to enable and improve their overall FFL oral expression.

Conclusion

The general human activity of monologue has found its way into foreign language learning. It is evidently practiced by learners whose consistent agenda is to keep developing expressive skills in the target language. This therefore makes monologue remain a viable tool for language learning that will remain in foreign language learning for a long time considering the few number of people that foreign language students can practice the target language with. Consequently, foreign language educators should consider the deliberate teaching of monologue tasks and features as a strategy for learning foreign languages in the classrooms.

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