

Comments on Johanna Haver, *Structured English Immersion* (2003)

Stephen Krashen

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Haver's *Structured English Immersion* (Haver, 2003a) is described on its back cover as "a guide that ... explains what SEI is and how it works in the classroom." We are told that those who read it "are taken through a process that guarantees success for ELL's (English Language Learners) at any level." I do not share this enthusiasm. There are many, many serious problems in this volume.

My review consists of the following topics and subtopics:

Haver on Language Acquisition:

- Should children "learn" naturally?

- Haver's approach

- Haver's personal theory of language acquisition

- Haver on reading

The role of the first language

- Haver and the principles of bilingual education

- Heritage language development

- Structured immersion versus bilingual education

- What controlled studies say

- Haver on recent testing in California

The age question: English as early as possible?

The time issue: How long should it take?

- The case of David Ho: Six months with de facto bilingual education

A biased bibliography

HAYER'S VIEW OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Should children "learn" naturally? (Haver on Krashen)

Haver characterizes my position as follows, referring to Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach, originally published twenty years ago, in 1983. Missing the entire point of the book, Haver claims that I think that language is acquired "through free conversation."

This is not accurate. I have hypothesized that we acquire language by comprehension, not by language production. This point is hard to miss, as it dominates The Natural Approach and has dominated nearly all my writings since the early 1980's. I have hypothesized that conversation helps only insofar as it provides comprehensible input; in other words, we acquire from what others say to us, not what we say to them. We also acquire from other forms of comprehensible input, eg listening to stories and reading.

Haver is correct in part of her characterization of my work: "language acquisition does not result from grammar drill, repetition of patterns, or from listening to incomprehensible speech" (p. xii). Haver, however, feels that students "can ... be taught the basic structure of language systematically ..." (xii). I am sure some students can consciously learn some of the basics of the structure of language. The question is whether it does them any good.

Haver says it does, and in addition to her own experience, she cites Larsen-Freeman (1995) who in turn cites others who claim that "grammar is not acquired naturally and does have to be taught" (xiii). Haver is particularly interested in Canadian immersion programs and studies that claim to show that systematic instruction in grammar is of benefit in this situation. I have examined these studies.

Briefly, I argue that studies claiming to show a positive effect for the study of grammar typically show a small effect for grammar teaching on tests in which grammar use is possible (there is plenty of time) and encouraged (students are focused on form) and that are given a short time after the instruction. In all studies, students practice the rules extensively (Krashen, 1995, 2003). In my view, these students show only that grammar study makes a very peripheral contribution to second language competence. In addition, Haver does not cite the many research studies showing a superiority of comprehensible-input based classes over traditional classes, at both the beginning and intermediate levels (Krashen, 2003).

Haver's Approach

Haver's approach to teaching ESL is a mixture of nearly every teaching technique that has ever been used. Despite her apparent rejection of the principle of comprehensible input, she recommends the use of Total Physical Response, Natural Approach and some aspects of sheltered subject matter teaching methodology, all based on or at least highly compatible with the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1991). She specifically allows for a silent period and periods of reduced output. In fact, her

suggested activities in chapter two of Structured English Immersion are nearly identical to those suggested in Krashen and Terrell (1983), chapter four.

After this, however, comes a deluge of techniques: Error correction of speech (p. 37), error correction of writing on the board, expansions, students' reading aloud after the teacher, students reading aloud to each other, sounding out words, sounding out words backwards (p. 46), identifying parts of speech (p. 46; see especially pp. 61-62 in which students are required to draw lines under the prepositional phrase, put a box around the verb and circle the subject), dictation (p. 46), constructing or retelling stories based on a word list (p. 47), journal writing (p. 48), sentence-combining (p. 48), transposing stories from present to past tense and vice-versa (p. 64), etc..etc. We are provided with little evidence that these activities are of value, primarily the author's word that she has used them and thinks they are worthwhile. There is great value in experienced teachers informing the field about what has appeared to be effective for them in their classes; it is important, however, to point out that research has cast serious doubt on the efficacy of many of the activities Haver recommends: For research on the limits of correction, for example, see Krashen, 1994; Truscott, 1996. For studies showing the lack of effect of output activities and the limits of grammar teaching, see Krashen (1994, 2003).¹

The one exception to her failure to provide empirical evidence for the recommended techniques is dictation: Haver cites Morris and Tremblay (2002) as evidence supporting the efficacy of using dictation (p. 46). Morris and Tremblay's students were students of English as a second language in Quebec, and took dictations and corrected them in groups one hour a week for 15 weeks. The dictations were actually cloze tests with unstressed function words deleted. Morris and Tremblay claim "stunning" gains on a writing test given at the end of the semester. A close look shows that the gains were not stunning at all: On the third person singular, students improved from 43% correct to 64% correct, a modest improvement (from about a D to a C). No teacher would be pleased to see these kinds of results after 15 hours of intensive practice. (Morris and Tremblay found a high level of statistical significance because their comparison group made no gains at all, which they attempt to convince the reader is normal for ESL students.) In addition, the test used was written, and students had been focused on these forms all semester, factors that maximize the amount of conscious grammatical knowledge used (Krashen, 2003).

Haver's Personal Theory of Language Acquisition

Haver does not specifically state how she thinks language is acquired or how the activities she recommends build competence, except to say that she thinks that

children learn language best "when they are integrated with other children who speak that language with native-speaker ability" (p. 1). This explanation does not tell what children need to do when they are together in insecure language acquisition occurs. It does not tell us how language is acquired.

One has the impression that Haver feels that initial fluency is not the result of comprehensible input, but is the result of using patterns from the native language, and that correctness is the result of the application of consciously learned grammar rules (see e.g. pp. 36-37): "New English learners cannot rely on their intuition to speak English correctly because they will inadvertently use the patterns of their native language unless taught otherwise" (p. 38). Elsewhere she maintains that students who speak languages in which verb tense is not marked commonly "ignore the entire concept of tense and ... always use the present-tense verb forms if not taught otherwise" (p. 63).

With these statements, Haver ignores the last thirty years of research, research repeatedly confirming that second languages are acquired naturally in the same way first language acquisition occurs, research showing the profound limitations of conscious knowledge in language performance, arguments denying that consciously "learned" language ever becomes subconsciously "acquired" language, research showing the efficacy of comprehensible-input based methods, and data showing that much of first language "interference" gradually disappears as language acquisition proceeds. (Much of this is contained in Krashen and Terrell (1983), which Haver cites. Krashen (2003) updates some of this research.) Haver is free to disagree with this mountain of research but she is not free to ignore it.

At other times, she inexplicably accepts the reality of language acquisition in the second language acquirer: "Many prepositions can be learned only through frequent use because there is often no logical explanation for why one preposition is used rather than another" (p. 56).

Haver on Reading

Haver enthusiastically endorses the recommendations of Reid Lyon on reading, recommending "systematic phonics programs that have proven invaluable in teaching all children" (p. 42). Haver is apparently unaware of important critiques of Lyon's position. Lyon's view is based on the National Reading Panel's report (National Reading Panel, 2000). Garan (2002) has pointed out that the National Reading Panel (NRP) itself provided only weak support for systematic phonics: Systematic phonics was shown to be more effective than less intensive approaches

to phonics only on tests in which children read lists of words in isolation. On tests of reading comprehension given after grade 1, the effect was extremely weak. In addition, Coles (2003) has pointed out that many of the studies "demonstrating" the effect of systematic phonics compare heavy phonics instruction to doing nothing at all, treatments in which children have no exposure to any written language. (It is important to point out that critics of the NRP do not exclude the teaching of phonics; rather, they argue against the over-teaching and over-emphasis of phonics.)

As noted above, Haver recommends a wide array of activities and does not indicate whether they are supported by any evidence. Some are (e.g. TPR) and many (e.g. sentence-combining, dictation, error correction) are not. Haver neglects to mention one activity that has overwhelming support in the research: reading itself. There is massive evidence that self-selected recreational reading has a powerful impact on language development for students at the low intermediate level or higher in first and second language situations (e.g. Krashen, 1993, 2001).

THE ROLE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE

Haver and the Principles of Bilingual Education

An active critic of bilingual education, and a strong supporter of Arizona's Proposition 203, which dismantled bilingual education in Arizona, Haver appears to at least partially recognize and partially accept both of the classic arguments for bilingual education: Those with a better education in their primary language will have an easier time acquiring English because (1) the background knowledge they obtained in their primary language makes the English they hear and read more comprehensible, and (2) developing literacy in the primary language is a short-cut to English literacy. In support of (1) she notes that in helping students deal with complex problem-solving in mathematics, those who "fortunately" have learned basic concepts in their native language will have less difficulty, and "for those who just cannot understand, it may be necessary to find someone ... to explain the concept(s) in the native language" (p. 50). In support of (2) she states that "some students who are literate in their first language develop literacy quickly and easily" (p. 42). Haver qualifies (2), however, by noting that in some cases "decoding skills" do not transfer adequately. No details are provided for this statement, which is counter to research in this area (e.g. Krashen, 1996, 2002).

Haver recommends, however, only limited use of the first language in the second language classroom (p. 32), for brief explanations. Haver is thus not against the use of the first language; apparently she is against what she considers excessive use of the first language. But where does one draw the line? How much is excessive? A reasonable stance is to provide help in the first language when input cannot be made comprehensible in other ways. This is precisely what bilingual programs intend to do: Subject matter is taught in the second language as soon as it can be made comprehensible (Krashen, 1996).

Heritage Language Development

Haver supports the continued development of the primary language after children have acquired enough English to have "moved beyond SEI (structured English immersion) and totally into the mainstream" (p. 104). Haver agrees that "knowledge and proficiency in more than one language can benefit children as they enter a global world where good communication is essential for increasing cooperation and trade among nations" (p. 104). There are other reasons to continue the development of the heritage language: there is good evidence that bilingualism has positive effects on cognitive development (e.g. Krashen, 1998), and higher levels of competence in the heritage language insures better relationships with family, both with those living in the US and with those who live in the country of origin (Wong-Fillmore, 1999; G. Cho, 2000).

Structured Immersion versus Bilingual Education

Arguing for the superiority of Structured English Immersion, Haver states that "Two years after the passage of California's Proposition 227, reports appeared in several leading newspapers that LEP students had improved in all subjects due to the elimination of bilingual education and the implementation of structured immersion in California's public schools" (p. xi).

Haver mentions that "bilingual education advocates interpret the data differently" but does not present the counterarguments correctly: She claims that "bilingual education advocates" attribute the gains to smaller class size and changes in reading instruction (p. xi). Not this advocate: There are several much more compelling arguments:

Proposition 227 took force in 1998, at the same time the new SAT9 test was introduced. Research (Linn, Graue, and Sanders, 1990) has shown that after new tests are introduced, test scores rise, which is why commercial tests need to be recalibrated every few years. Typical test score inflation is about 1.5 to two points per year, which accounts for a great deal of the gains seen in California. "Test inflation" is especially prevalent in California where punishments for lower scores are severe, and rewards for higher scores are generous. This pressure has resulted in districts using unusual and extraordinary means for raising test scores, some of which have nothing to do with increased competence.

Among the bogus means of increasing test scores are extensive training in certain test-taking skills and selective testing, i.e. excluding low scoring children from taking the test. Asimov (2000) suggests that selective testing may have occurred in California. She reported that in many cases in which SAT9 scores increased from year to year, the number of students tested decreased. According to Asimov, "questionable pairings" appeared in 22 San Francisco Area school districts. And of course some test-taking skills will raise scores without an increase in competence: If there is no penalty for guessing, for example, simply encouraging guessing will raise scores. Use of these means to raise scores is like claiming to raise the temperature of the room by lighting a match under the thermometer.

Even if we accept SAT9 scores as valid, there is no evidence linking test score increases to dropping bilingual education. Stanford professor Kenji Hakuta and his associates found, in fact, that test scores rose in districts in California that kept bilingual education (because of waivers), as well as in districts that never had bilingual education (Orr, Butler, Bousquet, and Hakuta. 2000; Hakuta, 2000). A more recent study (Linguanti, 2002) compared schools that kept bilingual education and those that dropped bilingual education, and found no differences in gains from grades 2 to 5. This study is not perfect: More students were tested at grade 5 than grade 2, and there was evidence that many "immersion" schools still utilized a great deal of instruction in the students' primary language.

In summary: ordinary test inflation explains the rise in test scores in California, the result of introducing a new test. In addition, there is no empirical evidence that increases were due to the introduction of Structured Immersion.

What Controlled Studies Say

The only valid way to determine the effect of bilingual education is to perform controlled studies. In these studies, programs are compared in which the only

difference is the use of the first language. SAT9 test score comparisons are not controlled studies. SAT9 comparisons often include English learners who are not in bilingual programs, and such comparisons do not consider a host of other factors that impact performance, such as poverty.

Scientifically valid controlled studies have been done, and they consistently show that students in properly organized bilingual programs acquire at least as much English as comparison students in all-English programs, and usually acquire more. The most recent review of this research is Greene (1997) (see also Willig, 1985), who used statistical tools far more precise than those used in previous reviews. Greene concluded that the use of the native language in instructing limited English proficient children has "beneficial effects" and that "efforts to eliminate the use of the native language in instruction ... harm children by denying them access to beneficial approaches."

Studies from other countries are very consistent with results from the United States. Children in well-organized bilingual programs acquire as much of the second language as those in "immersion" programs or more. Studies confirming this have been done with Turkish and Urdu speaking children in Norway, Punjabi speaking children in England, Turkish and Arabic speaking children in the Netherlands, Finnish-speaking children in Sweden, Gapapuyngu speaking children in Australia, and Tzeltal and Tzotzil speaking children in Mexico (Krashen, 1999a).

The most recent study of the effectiveness of bilingual education was done by a research team headed by Oller and Eilers (2002). At grade five, students in a bilingual program (60% English, 40% Spanish) did as well as comparisons in an all English program (with an optional 10% of the day in Spanish) on tests of English literacy, and did far better on tests of Spanish.

Haver on Recent Testing in California

In a letter to the editor published in the Arizona Republic (Haver, 2003b), Haver maintained that CELDT(California English Language Development Test) results from California show that immersion students outperformed students in bilingual education. This is not correct.

The California report (<http://celdt.cde.ca.gov>) compared students tested in both 2001 and 2002. Because children with more English are typically placed in English-only programs rather than bilingual education, those in bilingual education began at lower levels. In 2001, 3% of those in bilingual education were rated as proficient,

increasing to 16% in 2002. For all-English ESL, the improvement was from 9% to 30% proficient. Subtracting 2002 scores from 2001 scores, English-only looks better (21% gain versus 13%). But children in bilingual education increased their scores fivefold and English-only children improved only three times as much.

Both of these methods are wrong. The scientific way is to do studies in which groups start at the same level, or studies in which initial differences are statistically controlled. As noted above, children in bilingual education do very well in these studies, acquiring at least as much English as children in all-English programs, and usually more.

THE AGE QUESTION: ENGLISH AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE?

Haver quotes a magazine article (Brownlee, in U.S. News and World Report, 1998) as support for the claim that there is a "window of opportunity" until age 6 for language acquisition. After this age, she asserts, "the ability diminishes with each passing year" (p. xi). This supports the view, according to Haver, that "it makes sense to immerse LEP children in English as early as possible" (xi). A closer look at the actual studies shows that this is inaccurate: the decline is real, but it starts later and is not nearly as dramatic as the closing of a window of opportunity.

The research cited is that of Elissa Newport, who indeed claims that there is a decline in language acquisition ability with age. In her research on second language acquisition (Johnson and Newport, 1989), no differences were found between native speakers of English and those who began exposure to English between ages three and seven on an aural test of English grammar. Those who began exposure to English between ages eight and ten did not do as well, but Johnson and Newport report that the differences were "very small" (p. 78). (Differences were a bit larger in Johnson, 1992, but were still modest and were restricted to just a few points of grammar.)

In fact, it is only in recent years that linguists have been able to find any differences in language competence between those who begin second language acquisition before puberty and native speakers; the differences are very subtle, and are not noticeable unless special tests are used. Most of those who begin second language acquisition before puberty perform at native or very close to native levels on tests of grammar (Patkowski, 1980) and listening comprehension (Oyama, 1978), and feel that most people do not think that they have a foreign accent (Seliger, Krashen, and Ladefoged, 1975).

Thus, the research does not show that there are serious consequences in delaying English. But this argument is irrelevant: Bilingual programs do not delay English at all. In fact, they introduce English on the first day, and begin teaching subject matter in English as soon as it can be made comprehensible. It is certainly permissible, and in fact more efficient, to delay foreign language instruction to later in childhood, eg. Spanish in the elementary school in the US, English as a foreign language in other countries, because it is well-established that older children acquire faster than younger children do (Krashen, Long, and Scarcella, 1979). But the importance of English dictates that we begin exposure to English immediately in public schools in the United States.

THE TIME ISSUE: HOW LONG SHOULD IT TAKE?

Haver feels that those who begin school in the US should know enough English to do work in the mainstream in two to five months. For those starting in grades two to six, her estimate is from one to 1.5 years, noting that "It is possible, but unusual, for students who start SEI 1 [SK: the beginning level] to be able to exit the SEI classes in less than one school year" (p. 115).

Haver's estimate for older children is longer than the limit imposed by anti-bilingual education initiatives she supported (Proposition 227 in California, Proposition 203 in Arizona). Her estimates in general are also in conflict with the empirical research.

For English learners in New York City's all-English program who started school in the US at kindergarten, only 44% were ready for the mainstream after one year. This confirms that one year is simply not enough for many children, no matter what kind of program is used and when they begin school (New York City, 2000).

Even two years is not enough for many children. A University of California at Riverside study (Mitchell, Destino and Karem, 1997) reported that English learners in an English immersion program only improved from 2.18 to 3.4 on a 1-5 scale in after two years, where 4 = sufficient proficiency to survive in the mainstream. Ramirez (1992) reported that children in immersion were nowhere near ready for the mainstream after two and even three years, even though 70% knew some English before they started school. At the end of first grade (two years of exposure), only 21% reached the redesignation standard, and at the end of grade 2, only 38% achieved this level.

The Case of David Ho: Six Months with De Facto Bilingual Education

Haver presents the case of David Ho, who came to the US at age 12 without any knowledge of English. After six months, he was able to get along in English in school, and eventually went on to become Time Magazine's Person of the Year in 1996 for his work in molecular biology. Haver notes that this is a "rare" case, but it must be pointed out that Ho had the benefit of "de facto" bilingual education: He was a good student in Taiwan before he came to the US, and noted in an interview that there was "a great deal of emphasis on scholarly endeavors" in his family (Ho, 1998). Ho also came from a very academically inclined family: His father was an engineer who had done graduate studies in the United States. Ho had both of the advantages of bilingual education: He had a great deal of subject matter knowledge and was very literate in his primary language. These advantages helped make the English curriculum comprehensible and accelerated his English language development. It is possible that he also received extra help from family and friends using the first language. His case, and others like it (Krashen, 1996; Tse, 1997; Ramos and Krashen, 1997) provide strong support for bilingual education.

A BIASED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Haver ends her book with a biased bibliography of recommended readings, one that gives the reader the impression that there is a vast amount of uncontested evidence supporting her view.

She describes Baker's 1998 paper in the Phi Delta Kappan as a "convincing case for the superiority of structured English immersion over bilingual education" (p. 117). She does not mention my response to Baker, published in the same journal (Krashen, 1999b). She cites Carter's No Excuses, but does not cite Bracey and Biddle's response. She describes Eckman, Highland, Lee, Millham and Weber (1995) as a book containing studies that show that grammar teaching improves immersion education. Not so. Only one paper in this volume mentions this literature. The other 18 are on a wide variety of topics, including mine reviewing the evidence for free voluntary reading. She cites Rossell (2000), but does not cite any of the many critiques of Rossell's conclusions (e.g. Krashen, 1996, Greene, 1997). Readers should know that there is more than one point of view in the scientific literature.

NOTE

1. Haver provides three specific citations to research that, she claims, supports her assertion that grammar has to be taught, citing work by Harley, Day and Shapson, and Lightbown and her colleagues.

Harley's conclusion that "grammar instruction can help to promote lasting improvement in second language proficiency" is based on her study of English speaking sixth graders in an early total immersion French program in Canada (Harley, 1989). Her subjects received eight weeks of instruction focused only on two forms: the passé composé and imparfait, totaling about 12 hours of direct instruction. The final tests used clearly focused the students on the form they had been studying and was very similar to some of the activities they had done in class. There was no difference at all between instructed students and comparisons on a composition that forced students to use the targeted forms. Instructed students did a little better than comparisons on an oral test and on a cloze (fill-in-the-blank) test, but there was no difference between the groups on similar tests given three months later. Harley's study only shows that grammar teaching leads to modest short-term gains that disappear in a short time.

Haver cites Day and Shapson's conclusion that systematic instruction in grammar is helpful, especially with verb tenses. A closer look shows that this claim is based on weak evidence. In Day and Shapson (1991,1996), seventh graders in French immersion in Canada studied the French conditional for six weeks (17 hours total). They did somewhat better than comparisons on a grammar test and on a composition given 11 weeks after the instruction ended, but not on an oral interview. Even on the grammar test, however, gains were hardly spectacular after so much instruction. Instructed students improved from 19 percent correct on the pretest to 41 percent correct on both the posttest and delayed posttest. The grammar test had 27 items, which means that students improved from five correct to eleven. After 17 hours of instruction, this is disappointing. It would mean about a C+ in the average classroom.

The third source Haver cites is Lightbown, Halter, White and Horst (2002), who compared the impact of a comprehension-based method with traditional methodology in ESL for French-speaking children in New Brunswick, Canada. According to Haver, "the only difference between the groups was that one group was taught with little or no focus on form, whereas the other group received form-focused instruction and feedback on error correction regularly" (xiv). The differences were greater than this. The core activity in the comprehension-based classes was independent listening to English books on tape while following along in the text, for 30 minutes per day, starting in grade 3. In grades 5 and 6, students also watched video programs and followed the transcripts, and did some workbook activities. The comparison groups were described as audio-lingual.

Before discussing the results, it is important to note that it was not clear that the "comprehension groups" received high-quality comprehensible input. There was individual variation in involvement in the listening/reading activity. Lightbown et. al. note that "both teachers and program evaluators observed that students in the experimental program varied greatly in their approach to the listening-reading activity. Some students followed the words with their fingers, while others allowed their gaze (and their mind?) to wander around the

room. Students were encouraged to read each book at least twice, and some happily read the same book more than twice, while others chafed at this restriction and insisted on reading new books as quickly as they could..." (p. 454). In my view, the requirement that students simultaneously read the text while reading was quite unnatural. Lightbown et. al. insist, however, that the children really did get absorbed in stories (p. 457).

There was no difference between the groups on most measures. Haver states that the traditional group did "considerably better in writing" (xiv). Not so. Only one of the two traditional groups did better on the writing test. The measure used was the percentage of students in each group who used a form "at least once." The higher-performing comparison group wrote much more than all other groups, which guaranteed that more of these students would use a form "at least once." This group produced nearly double the verbs the other groups did on the writing test. The other comparison group did slightly better than the experimental groups, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Haver also states that the traditional group also did better on "some levels of oral production" (xiv). Only one of the two traditional groups took the oral test, a group that performed much better than the other traditional group throughout the study. They were better than the experimental students only in their greater use of one aspect of the plural morpheme and the pronoun "they."

In summary, this study used a doubtful measure of linguistic competence, at best a weakened form of comprehensible input, and nevertheless found practically no advantage for direct teaching of grammar.

In conclusion, the three sources of support for Haver's claim of the effectiveness of grammar instruction fade away when examined in detail. In fact, they provide evidence showing that grammar instruction has only a weak effect, at best. For discussion of additional studies, see Krashen (2003).

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