

Podcast 442: Cultivating Language Arts in Another Language, Part 2

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: If I were to undertake learning a foreign language, I would spend as much or maybe even more time copying the alphabet and then copying little selections. And I would even try to start doing it so I could copy things from memory.

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So, Andrew, last week we did a cliffhanger, kind of unintentionally, because I introduced a new idea that I wasn't sure we were able to unpack a little further. So I'm going to start with a letter that came from someone who is wanting to know how she can apply our concepts of IEW, our Structure and Style to her own environment, and she's from South Africa.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, okay. Interesting. Let's hear it.

Julie Walker: Hi, we are using several of the IEW programs, and she spells it the English British

Andrew Pudewa: M M E. Yeah, I think that's cute.

Julie Walker: I think so too. “We're using several of the IEW programmes with our son of 11 years and are finding it very valuable.” She actually has very good writing, I'm very impressed. “We are a bilingual household and have been exposing our son to both languages, English and Afrikaans from birth. We are from South Africa. I would like to use the IEW programs in our language studies in Afrikaans, particularly in English. For writing and grammar. I was wondering what advice and suggestions you have for adopting these programmes to other languages.”

Andrew Pudewa: Okay. Well, the easy, fast answer to that question is, Watch the TWSS, understand the system, and do it in whatever language you want to. Because there's nothing really English specific about the ideas of Structure and Style. Particularly the structural models.

Julie Walker: Yep. Structure

Andrew Pudewa: And the key word outline idea and all that. The grammar could be a little technical. We've run into some challenges in putting the stylistic technique stuff into Spanish, Russian, Mandarin. So there are grammatical things. But I might back up just a little bit and

say, okay, so let's say that you do want to learn to read and write better in a language that is not your primary language. And that could be people coming to an English-speaking country, and English is their second language.

Julie Walker: Or third or fourth.

Andrew Pudewa: It could be people living in a foreign country who want English as a foreign language. It could also be English-speaking people wanting to learn a foreign language. And so the cross application there is great.

And I think last week we talked about the importance of auditory input on the listening side, as well as poetry memorization or memorization of anything as a way to reinforce vocabulary and create grammatical pattern templates that allow for more sophisticated communication than you could come up with just kind of using sentence structures from the grammar books.

Julie Walker: Right. Right. And let me just insert this, listening, speaking, reading, writing, that's kind of the way that we're addressing the language arts.

Andrew Pudewa: The arts of language, from the *Cultivating Language Arts: Preschool through High School* talk.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: So, if we were to now look at the reading idea, there's a few things here. One, which I mentioned last week, would be the idea of getting something which you have a recording of and that you could also see the text. This could be something that was commercially available, or it could be something that you could produce yourself, maybe with a little help as I did with my "Jack and the Beanstalk" book and my Japanese teacher. He recorded the book into the tape player so that I could learn it and I was listening to it, but I could also watch the characters go by and become more familiar,

Julie Walker: Well, and let me just insert something here about that idea of reading a book while you're listening to it. We did this with our youngest son who did have some visual tracking problems, who's very smart, still is as far as I know. It was just hard for him to read those really hard books. I knew that he was mature enough and capable of understanding, but he couldn't follow the words. And so I just had him do both, listen and read. And it really catapulted him to now be able to read anything

Andrew Pudewa: And that can help at any level. That can be helpful for young children who are just learning to read, and it can be helpful for older people who, maybe they're young teenagers, but the dyslexia is just slowing them down. Or it can be helpful for adults in a foreign language. And that's not entirely a reading program, but it is a way to oil the gears, so to speak.

And you do talk to people who say, "I didn't really teach my kid to read. I was just reading to them and they were watching the words on the page and then pretty soon they could read it

too.” And so that's a nice thing. It's not the way to teach people English reading, but it's nice when it happens. But I'd like to focus really on a kind of counterintuitive way of improving character and word recognition in children, either in their own language or others, and that is copying stuff, writing stuff.

Now, when I was in Japan, I'll go back to this, I hit a point where I thought, If I'm really going to understand this language, I am going to have to learn to read and write it. And most of the things designed for English speaking people in particular to learn Japanese are using a Romanized version. So, that you're reading words in the pronunciation as close as you can get, but they're in Roman characters.

Julie Walker: Left to right, just like we're comfortable reading. My mother-in-law is Japanese. And so that was part of what I wanted to teach my children, at least some knowledge of Japanese in our homeschool. And yes, basically four different alphabets they had to know, Romanji, which they already knew, Kanji, Hirakana, and Katakana.

And oh my goodness, it's like, Andrew, did you learn all three of the new alphabets?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I did, but what I did was I went to the bookstore and I bought the first grade Japanese book, and I, like a six year old, just started copying these characters. I got very interested in it, so much so that I would get up early so that I can have at least an hour or two. To study Japanese. Once I got into it, I thought this is going to require a major effort here. And I actually looked forward to waking up in the morning. And the first thing I would do is I would just write out from memory, the Hiragana alphabet, the Katakana, and then starting in on the characters. And it's very organized in Japan. Like there is a list of Chinese characters that every third grader must learn, and you can buy the book.

And once I knew all those and I developed this system for testing myself, so I had the pronunciation and the meaning. And then the Chinese character or combination of Chinese characters that would make that word. And then I would test myself by looking just at the pronunciation and trying to recall the meaning and write the characters, or I would test myself by just having the meaning and try to recall the pronunciation and the characters.

So I had this system self testing myself every morning. It was a long haul, and I put hundreds and hundreds of hours into it, but here's the thing which I noticed. As soon as I could write the character, I would recognize it anywhere, on a sign, in a brochure, on a menu, in a book, or anywhere I would see this character, I would say, I know that character. I might not know the word that it is part of, but I would clearly recognize the character. And knowing that would give me a good hint as to what that word might mean because a lot of words in Japanese are a combination of a kanji character plus a hiragana or katakana. Well, hiragana for the endings, it's an inflected language, or two Chinese characters together, sometimes even three, but two.

So I might know one of them and I could guess the other one and then I would be inspired to, okay, I hope I learn that pretty soon. But I was really going according to this kind of way that

they'd obviously been doing for dozens or hundreds of years, which is here's the tried and true path to writing and reading Japanese. But probably 15 years ago, maybe not quite that far, 10 plus years ago, I was doing some research for my talk, *Paper and Pen: What the Research Says*.

And I was collecting up research about the efficacy of learning how to read and write on paper as opposed to screens. And so there's a lot of research on this. I got lots of papers, and I won't say I read all of the whole papers, but I was extracting from this research things to put in this talk. And one of the really interesting things I found was that if children can write a letter by hand, they will recognize it more quickly wherever it comes.

Julie Walker: Just exactly what you found.

Andrew Pudewa: And what's interesting is that we have different fonts,

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And we have a stylized way of writing. And that was part of the challenge. The problem was in Japan, you'd see a sign, but it would be in this kind of stylized font kind of thing. And it would look different than the way it might look in the children's book. But once I could write it, I could see it. And then I found some more research, very interesting. If children can spell a word, they will recognize it more consistently and more quickly. And you can even learn to spell words before you can read them, because we have letters and you can do it all verbally and auditorily.

And so this writing of characters, I found a huge breakthrough. And now we see that when children do copy work, they may not understand everything they're copying, but they're putting in through not just the visual pathway, but the full motor sensory pathway. They're copying, and that is creating this familiarity you can't get just by looking at it again and again and again and again.

And, if you can write something, you kind of own it. And Mrs. Ingham also talked about the tremendous power of letting children try to write out on paper the poems they had already memorized.

Julie Walker: I love that.

Andrew Pudewa: ...and building the connection. Of course, for her, it was all about integrating blended sound-sight, like let's hear it and see it and feel it and write it and read it and do all of these things.

So my advice to someone like our friend in South Africa would be to start, of course, with copying the target language. And as I have said, in terms of children copying English in order to prove their abilities in all this way, you'd like to start with something that's good, something that is a beautiful example or selection from that language. So again, scripture, poetry, aphorisms, or proverbs, things that are not only good in terms of the variety of

grammar and vocabulary, but also in that they just sound beautiful. They strike you as being, that is a lovely thing in our language. And it's a foreign language, you don't know if it's lovely or not.

Julie Walker: All right.

Andrew Pudewa: But you're copying it, and someone who gave it to you knows it's lovely. So that would be the first step is just get into copywork. And if I were to undertake learning a foreign language right now, that is exactly what I would do. I would spend as much or maybe even more time copying the alphabet until I could do it, and then copying little selections of things I was already familiar with, so that those words would be more and more engrained, and I would even try to start doing it so I could copy things from memory. And then I would try to get recordings of those things so that I could hear it, read it, copy it, and then try to imitate also the speaking of it.

Julie Walker: So, I just have to insert here, because what you're describing, Andrew, is my Duolingo course that I'm doing in Spanish. And one of the things that they recommend, or if you're not familiar with Duolingo, one of the things that they recommend is that, at the end of a lesson, write down. Write down what you remember, and that's a good strategy, but there's lots of listening. Can you hear? Can you understand what they're saying? They give you the option of slowing it down.

Andrew Pudewa: And we have no financial relationship with Duolingo.

Julie Walker: Not at all.

Andrew Pudewa: This is is not a sponsored podcast in any way, but it's your experience.

Julie Walker: It's my experience, and I love that. And kind of what you said earlier, it's not teaching grammar. It's really teaching grammar at the point of need. The only time...I'm in the imperfect tense right now, and I'm like, oh my gosh, how did I get up this far? I have no idea. It's also a game, and I'm totally gamifying it because I'm very competitive, and I'm probably further along on the path than I should be. I probably need to go back. But it's the listening. It's the speaking. It's reading. It's reading. But I'm not doing enough writing, and I think that would really help

Andrew Pudewa: We need to send you to some of our little homeschool groups that we know and some Spanish speaking countries.

Julie Walker: It's true.

Andrew Pudewa: You should go to Central and South America.

Julie Walker: Well, I don't have to go very far, Andrew, because, as and as we mentioned last week, we are working on translating some of our materials in Spanish. So all I have to do

is listen in on those meetings, and they are speaking Spanish, and it's really kind of fun to be able to catch some words.

Andrew Pudewa: Which is why I am not listening in on those meetings because I have very, very little. But I think that's the starting point for our friend from South Africa. And then what would be the next step? So in my talk on copywork and composition, I explained that first step is copy whole sentences, and just do that, and do that a lot. And then, the next step is get a source text, and instead of copying a whole sentence, copy three key words from that sentence. And of course, use something which is at, or preferably below, in this case, below definitely below reading level so that it's going to be pretty easy to get going. And then you are in Unit 1, copy the keywords, try to verbalize it back. Unit 2, copy the keywords, tell it back and write sentences.

And then the idea is, especially for an older child, you're going to need some control of error system in place. In our world, that's an editor. Right? Who will read what you wrote and know if there's an incomplete sentence or a missing word or the wrong word or the wrong tense or an extra -s or a missing -ed or.

Julie Walker: Or you use the feminine, the, instead of the masculine, the, and it's plural and singular and, oh

Andrew Pudewa: That gendered language business is tough, but it is.

Julie Walker: And you forgot to put the accent. Oh my goodness, I got this word wrong because I forgot the accent over the letter

Andrew Pudewa: yeah, And in Latin we have that too, because you have to match your adjectives with your nouns. And now in her case, in Afrikaans, she is bilingual in this way. So she probably would have the ability then to edit the Unit 2 writing, which came from a source text, is going back into text, but wouldn't be matching exactly because the child is trying to wrestle with it in the words and ways they own.

But you want that control of error so that you can fix yourself. I did this in Japan. I didn't use source texts because I didn't know this idea, but I kind of did because what I did was I would attempt to write little stories that I would make up, right, that were things I did or I think I might have even tried to write some Aesop fables because they've been in my brain forever. And so it's something I didn't have to think too hard to come up with the content. But I would write that. I remember writing a letter and saying, "I wrote this letter to you, but what I really want you to do is fix it up, correct it, and give it back to me. So I'll know where I erred." And I'm working as an adult who's trying hard to learn the thing An eleven year old might not be quite so excited about being corrected. That idea of being able to communicate just by examples, not by lecture, not by grammar book, but that needed to be this way. That word doesn't actually mean what you thought it did. This is a better word. And as I say in *The Four Deadly Errors* talk, just hand it back with a smile.

Don't give too much explanation and the child or the student can internalize. "Oh, okay. That's not the best word. This is, Oh, I needed to put this extra thing here to make it legal." And that's the goal. Don't make it good. Just make it legal. And then we can get better gradually. So I would say really for our Afrikaans friend, do Unit 1 and 2 with a source text that you can find in your target language there and do it the same way, just the way the Spanish English transition teachers are doing it with the Spanish speaking kids in the public schools that use our program all over the place.

Julie Walker: When IEW first started, when I was introduced to this whole idea of Structure and Style the thing that you sold, Andrew Pudewa, that got me so excited enough that I eventually joined the team was the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*. That is the core of everything we do. It's a teacher training course.

And at that time, we did not have a lot of student materials. Very few. We had some source texts for Units 1 and 2. We had some pictures. We had some mini books. And you were just starting to develop this idea of theme-based books. You had just started doing some of the Student videos, now, 17 years later, we have lots of material written for the students that parents and teachers can use in teaching our system. We don't have that in any other language, but that doesn't mean that you still can't learn the idea.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, of course not. The other thing is there is a level of technology available right now that allows for translation to a very high level of natural fluency. So you could use a source text wherever you get it and have an AI translation function, put it into your target language and then use it the same way you would in our English speaking stuff.

And whether that's Aesop fables or encyclopedic information or whatever, if you understand our program, you really don't need to buy a big book of source texts and checklists. You can make that stuff yourself. Although, we are trying to help, particularly in the few languages we've had people asking. And once you do Unit 2, well then, Unit 3, if you understand it, take anything, any story in your language, and you can make a key word outline according to the story sequence chart.

Once you learn Unit 4, you don't have to have nicely little contrived source texts. You can pick up anything from a, whatever,

Julie Walker: Magazine article, encyclopedia articles.

Andrew Pudewa: Anything in any language you should be able to use. And, of course, pictures. The main thing is if you are the teacher, the facilitator, the coach, you've got to have enough fluency with the target language to know that that's a good source text, help the child do it, and then edit their summaries or rewriting.

So they learn the mechanics and grammar. And if you aren't yourself, well, then you got to find someone who is, but with international community being the way it is, I know people who are practicing a foreign language by having a zoom call A few times a week with

someone else on the other side of the world. So I think we have access to competency and mastery that should be available to almost anyone who wanted to teach almost any language to almost anyone.

Julie Walker: It's true. It's true. And something that you said compelled me to speak about the structural models versus the stylistic techniques. I think when people first learn about Structure and Style, they're kind of camping on the style because it's so easy.

Andrew Pudewa: It instantly improves writing so nicely. So, yes, I would say if you are wanting to use TWSS, learn our system, and teach it in a foreign language, just do the style techniques that work easily, that transfer across language pretty clearly, and don't get into the minutiae of how to do that. It's not nearly as important or as powerful as working through the structural models.

Julie Walker: Structural models are the spine.

Andrew Pudewa: And we've got, if you add up all the stylistic techniques, there's twenty-some. Pick the ones you like, don't worry about all of them. And a lot of them are automatically transferable. Parts of speech, strong verb, that's universal, quality adjective, that's universal, adverb, probably universal. You get into the minutiae of, is it a phrase or a clause, okay, well, maybe you give some slack and don't worry about that.

Julie Walker: Don't worry about that one, yep. The main thing is the structural models. When we talk about in our EZ+1 webinars that we teach every month to people that are new to IEW, what is it that you guys are doing? I want to know more. Our EZ+1, we equate the structure and style. The structural models are the framework of the car. It's what is a car. The style is just the paint and the wheels.

Andrew Pudewa: That can vary greatly.

Julie Walker: Yeah, and it can be a sweet little Tesla out there, or it can be just a beat up station wagon. But that's still, it's going to get you from A to B.

Andrew Pudewa: I have not seen a beat up station wagon in a very, very long time, but I get your point. Hopefully, we will continue as the demand appears or grows to have our TWSS available with more language subtitles, because I think that's the starting point.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: And then it would be useful for people for whom English is their second language. They want to learn it and teach English as a second language, or people for whom English is a second or not even a good language. But they can listen, follow along, read the subtitles, get the idea, and then teach that in a foreign language or their own language,

Julie Walker: It's possible, and we don't have to do it all.

Andrew Pudewa: No, we don't. And neither do our listeners. There are lots of resources.

Julie Walker: Well, thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Sure. That was fun.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.