

March E-News from Elizabeth Claire:

Hello All, and welcome, New Readers!

(I hope you have been enjoying these emails, but in case you are doing spring cleaning of your inbox, and we have not been of use, you can unsubscribe at any time. Click here:

<http://elizabethclaire.us1.list-manage.com/unsubscribe?u=c65c6ca9b67d5cf8db2ae20a4&id=4264841f87&e=&c=22333c7c37>

This month's E-News Contents:

What do your students crave when learning English?

Website Special: Spring Cleaning Bargains!

Coming Attractions in March's *Easy English NEWS*

What do your students crave when learning English?

I crave relevance, patience, hands-on activities...variety, music, drama, fun, and **big print**.

Two years ago, I bought two levels of the Rosetta Stone program for Arabic. I liked the fun aspect of it in the demo I saw and was intrigued with the potential of this technology.

I'm a language lover, as are most ESL teachers, and am already bilingual in Spanish, with a reading knowledge of French, and a smattering of oral Japanese and Slovak. I've taken a few weeks each of Dutch, Swedish, and Italian and a weekend of Mandarin. After not playing in any new language for 20 years, I was curious if, at "my advanced age," I would have trouble absorbing and remembering, as the experts say. I also wanted to deliberately pay attention to my strategies to see what methods might work with older brains.

I was absorbed in *Easy English NEWS*, and in creating the *ESL Phonics for All Ages* Series, so the Rosetta Stone packages sat unopened on my shelf for two years (as my brain got even older).

Finally, last month, Arabic called to me, and I installed Level I on my computer.

I soon learned that Arabic is distinct from English in more than its beautiful artistic script. In these past few weeks, I've gotten a lot of insight into the variety of difficulties our Arabic-speaking students face when learning English. Arabic's writing system is cursive, with connected letters, running from right to left, written without short vowels. So reading in reverse direction and spelling the 21 vowel sounds in our non-phonetic match of sound to symbol has to give them great frustration.

For me, the reverse frustrations: There are different forms for each Arabic letter depending on its

position in a word. The sound system is a formidable challenge to the back of the throat for English speakers, with nine sounds that English speakers never use, plus word order and sentence structure not similar to English at all.

The Rosetta Stone program was designed to be patient...a great requirement for all learners, but especially older ones. It provided spoken phrases as often as I clicked the mouse, without making me feel like a dummy.

Yet in spite of hearing the sentences or phrases dozens of times, it still felt as though the sounds were not leaving any traces in my brain. They quickly faded from memory. A lesson with 10 four-part segments was far too much for me. I wanted the phrases to be useful, not just examples of vocabulary or structure.

Yet later, in taking the test following each lesson, I was surprised to demonstrate to myself that I had learned to distinguish the Arabic phrase for "the girl jumps" from "the boy jumps." Distinguishing "the girl jumps" from "the girl runs" did not come as easily.

After a week of very short lessons each day, reviewing conscientiously, many Arabic phrases were in my head *alwelad taqfiz; albint yezhuri, almur'a yarqof* (as best as i can transliterate them).

Sadly, the phrases swimming in my head were not always connected to their meanings. The lack of context in the lessons had lost me, although a younger language learner might have made the connections. With no translation either in the program or in the textbook (written entirely in Arabic, ha ha) I could only guess the meaning of the phrases from the sometimes ambiguous pictures.

After a while, the tests got easier for me, and I truly enjoyed Rosetta Stone's allowance for choice as to which language functions to work with and "permission" to go through a long silent period.

I am still in that silent period. I can feel a sense of strange humiliation rising to my throat to stifle speaking when I attempt to shape sentences...even though no one is around! The sounds in my head do not trip easily off the tongue, especially those k,q, kh, gh, and glottal stop sounds made in the back of the throat and the "emphatic S, T, and D", which I cannot distinguish from ordinary s, t, and d. The "judge" in me silences me...and "it is easier to learn, as Stephen Krashen (guru of gurus for ESL teachers) says, when the anxiety level is lowered." Of all the language skills, speaking causes the most tension.

I've quickly renewed my great sympathy for older students, who have more pride in doing things right than youngsters, and thus are so much slower to venture into speaking.

After a week, I realized that Rosetta Stone was not going to be a stand-alone teaching device. Having gone through ten lessons, I still had not encountered "Hello, how are you?" or other things I might want to say should I bump into an Arabic-speaking person here in Virginia Beach. (It's very hard to start a conversation with "The boy jumps. The man throws a ball." "Is the fish swimming?")

One professional modus operandi reinforced for me was that vocabulary ought not to be taught in pairs

or categories as Rosetta Stone does. All the action verbs have gotten mixed up in my brain, as have the colors and the numbers. There needs to be a context for each, and no need for them all to inundate the learner at once...The system of teaching vocabulary in categories had been put aside as outmoded and inefficient (I had thought). Vocabulary needs to be taught in a useful context, not in lists. It's sad that "Language Lab" technology has advanced but is coupled with an older, less useful set of ideas about language learning. I crave meaningful communication, story, drama, relevance, cultural relevance, excitement, and voice variety and emotional emphasis in lessons to make sure 1. they stick and 2. I stay motivated. And please, some phonics practice with 24 point typeface or larger. In short, I wanted tender-hearted ESL methodology, with hands-on meaningful activities, and not mere lists of sentences illustrating grammar and vocabulary.

Remembering how I had learned French (60 replays of *Le Petit Prince* while reading the novel in French with the English translation at hand) and how I had made some progress in Japanese via Walt Disney's *The Sleeping Beauty* in Japanese, I sent away for a classic movie in Arabic so I could bathe myself in the sounds repeatedly. I also sent for CDs of popular Arabic songs, a dictionary and phrase book, and two simple books that promised to help me learn to read and write.

I see that my writing skills will also have a "silent period." Writing cursive, from right to left feels like mirror writing. "Trace the words rather than try to write new words" admonishes one book. However, the size of the letters is about 14-point type...way too small to see the distinctive features of letters. I did find that a CD of Nancy Ajram "*Ah w Noss*" is great to do morning exercises with.

If you haven't taken on a new language lately, do it, for the sake of your students.

Website Special: Spring Cleaning Bargains!

To celebrate Spring, we are doing some Spring Cleaning. *Easy English NEWS* goes to press 2 weeks before the first of the month and we have to estimate the number of copies we'll need based on the previous month's sales, last year's sales for that month and our expected growth. If we don't print enough, reprinting is very costly, as there is a 5,000 minimum print run. So we try to err on the high side. Some months that leaves us with an excess of papers...with stacks of them lining our hallways.

Spring Cleaning means you can get 20 different back issues for \$10 (a \$70 value).

Or 50 copies of a single back issue for \$10 (a \$55 value).

These prices cover shipping and handling only. We won't be able to cover the costs of processing purchase orders. Prepayment only, by check.

Take advantage of our Spring Cleaning Sale today!

Click here: <http://www.elizabethclaire.com>

Preview: *Easy English NEWS* for March 2010

- March's current events feature article is "**Get Ready for the Census.**" Many newcomers are among those who don't get counted...and thus their needs are not reflected in federal funds to the states they are in...such as funds for your school's ESL programs.
- Life in the U.S.A. **Buying meat**-- Types of meat and which animals they are from; cuts of meat; varieties of labels on meat, chicken, eggs, milk, and cheese.
- **Events in March covered in *Easy English NEWS* are:**
 - Women's history month, featuring Dolley Madison
 - St. Patrick's Day
 - Read Across America
 - Spring Begins
 - Daylight Saving Time begins
 - Palm Sunday
 - Passover

Ask Elizabeth explains in simple English the purpose of Schedule A on the income tax return.

Your Health: Dr. Majid Ali writes about "the Diet Myth"--why people gain weight after losing it, and the misleading ads by the diet industry.

America the Beautiful "Help for Haiti" has superceded America the Beautiful. We try to tell the complex story with a series of pictures.

Heroes and History: This time it is the reader's own family history that is featured: how to interview elders and record those precious stories and events in the family's history.

Plus our regular features: **This Is Your Page** (readers' stories), **Funny Stuff, Idioms, the Crossword Puzzle, Let's Talk about It,** and **Word Help.**

Not a subscriber? The larger your class, the less it costs per student! Yes, you can still start your subscription with March...or last September for that matter.

Click here to learn more about Easy English NEWS: <http://www.elizabethclaire.com/een/eenmain.html>

Did you miss our previous E-News? They are archived for your convenience at our website. Click here: <http://www.elizabethclaire.com/news.html>.

Subscribers to our 12-page monthly newspaper, *Easy English NEWS* receive a monthly teacher's guide with background information on the stories and three reproducible quizzes.

Click here for this month's Teacher's Guide:

<http://www.elizabethclaire.com/een/teacherspages.html>

Also available free at the website is a printable

24-page HOW TO Use Easy English NEWS in your ESL Classroom.

This is a comprehensive guide, showing techniques to use with beginning students, intermediate, and advanced, and with 10 reproducible, generic student activity sheets including self evaluations that you can use each month. Click here for the HOW TO:

<http://www.elizabethclaire.com/een/eenmain.html>

Your comments are most welcome. Send a message to ESL@elizabethclaire.com.

Hoping your March goes out like a lamb, till next time,

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