

I was taking an intermediate Japanese course several years ago when, in the midst of a writing lesson, I asked the professor the ideogram for her name. “Oh no,” she said, “that’s too complicated for you yet.” Frustration seethed under my skin. *Perhaps you are right*, I thought, *but how can I possibly learn what you will not teach me?* This moment is a minor example of classroom rhetoric, to be sure, but it is deeper than it first appears. There is her simply-stated surface message to me, there is possibly a plea not to disrupt the order of the lesson, and there is also likely a maxim in there that she acquired from her own studies about how to present the Japanese writing system to English speakers. Beyond that, there is a pedagogical paradigm of second language acquisition in general: learners must acquire things in a certain order and they are likely to be frustrated by items too far “beyond” their current level. This is not to say that such paradigms are unfounded or even untrue. It is not even meant to insinuate that she was a poor instructor—she remains one of my favorites—but I wonder if she had completely explored the reasoning behind her answer to me that day.

I began my Mason education in the anthropology department, fascinated by culture in general and intent on focusing specifically on Japanese culture, since that was my second language of choice. Somewhere along the way, I wandered sideways. While still pursuing the Japanese minor, I took beginning Russian. On my study abroad in Akita, Japan, I took Mongolian, solely because it was offered and I knew it was unlikely that I would have the opportunity again. On my own, I dabbled in several other languages—exploring not only linguistic variety, but methods of instruction and study. When I finally finished my bachelors, I was uncertain in what direction I wished to proceed. My love of Japanese was still firmly in place, though, so my developing interest in language from a more holistic point of view led me to look for options that would allow for both in my plans. The most obvious was a career teaching English in Japan, for which Mason’s graduate certificate in TESOL seemed perfect.

The classes I have taken toward that goal have only been fuel for my broader linguistic interests. Delving into the specific theories and shifting pedagogical patterns deepened a couple of different convictions. First, how we teach and are taught matters greatly. Second, the instructor stuck in the classroom has little leeway to innovate. Together, these opinions lead me to believe that I would rather begin by tackling the means. We use language to teach language—an obvious fact, but one I believe deserves more attention. Theories of acquisition and pedagogy often operate in slightly removed spheres. I want to look more closely at the rhetoric of *both*, and how they interact in the classroom: the language of language.

I believe that the Professional Writing and Rhetoric Masters has the flexibility to accommodate this interest and, moreover, that it will offer me a different toolset to use in my exploration of the field of linguistics. Rhetoric will help me hone in on the roles of audience and purpose while I assess the tendency to treat language as a body of

knowledge rather than a skill. Writing will, of course, increase my capacity to share my conclusions, aiding me in bringing change with me when I return to the TESOL trenches, as it were. I look forward to these broadening opportunities.