

## Language Learning

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Perhaps nothing strikes fear into the heart of a missionary faster than the word "language." Few, if any, of us approach learning a language without misgivings. Many times, as missionaries, we know that we should learn the language, but feel guilty about taking time away from real "missionary" work to study the language.

At AIT, we are committed to helping people approach language study with a positive mindset. Without language ability, communication will not take place between foreigners. So, language acquisition is necessary. Learning the language is also legitimate ministry because it involves communication with native speakers. We carry our commitment to your foreign language ability even further by giving you a strategy for learning language, and we help you to practice the method we teach by taking you to Mexico for a week where you actually get to try it with non-English speakers. If that sounds helpful to you, read on to learn a little more about language learning.

Our focus at AIT is learner-oriented language acquisition. There are four dimensions or aspects of language proficiency that fall into two categories:

# Academic Skills: Reading and Writing. The first foreign languages taught in western universities were Greek and Latin. Both languages were "dead" languages (that is, no living people spoke them as a heart (native) language. A classroom is a good place to learn to read and write a foreign language.

# Motor Skills: Understanding (comprehension) and Speaking. Modern languages (in the west - French, German, English) were added to the courses of study in schools much later. Teachers of the modern languages adopted the teaching approaches that had worked well for Greek and Latin. The result was that students learned to read and write the foreign language well, but often failed to become proficient in understanding and speaking.

Most people are familiar with language learning in an academic environment which lends itself to developing the skills of Reading and Writing. At AIT, we introduce interns to a community-based language learning system which lends itself to developing fluency in Understanding and Speaking. Each intern entering a ministry assignment which requires the ability to speak in another language is encouraged to examine his language learning skills and goals. Interns also plan to make the most of their language learning opportunities

Thomas and Elizabeth Brewster developed the language acquisition method we use at AIT. The Brewsters are well known in the mission community for their contributions to both Bible translation and to the cause of missionary language learning. Our language textbook, Language Acquisition Made Practical (LAMP), was written by the Brewsters during their time on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ in the 1970's ([Click here for information on ordering the LAMP book from the Lingua House website](#)). The following is an outline of the book's content. Instruction and practice during the internship focuses on Chapter One.

# Chapter One presents the LAMP methodology. It covers the tools for learning to speak and understand a foreign language.

# Chapter Two contains hundreds of topics for you to discuss with a native speaker during your language practice. These topics are a great source for cultural study as well as language learning.

# Chapter Three contains special materials to help improve understanding (comprehension) of your new language.

# Chapter Four contains a basic overview of Phonetics - the science of how sounds are produced.

# Chapter Five contains instruction and ideas for learning the grammar (structure) of a new language

# At the end of the book, are several helpful tools to keep track of your progress toward the goal of speaking your new language well.

We must say that language learning is far more than good techniques and tools. It is an issue of the heart. Why am I learning this language? How does learning a foreign language fit into God's will for me to be a missionary? The Brewsters tackle some of these heart questions in the article Language Learning is Communication...Is Ministry (which we will give you if you come to AIT). Too often, missionaries regard the time spent studying language as a barrier between them and their desire to evangelize and disciple people. AIT will help you to develop a more positive attitude toward the time you invest in language study. When accompanied by a learners' attitude, and done in the context of social interaction with the national people, language learning becomes an essential part of ministry.

You can learn to speak a foreign language well. You can overcome the dreaded disease, mono-cultural myopia. The Brewsters define mono-cultural myopia as "a disease of the mind that affects the tongue". What they mean is that human beings tend to love their own culture and language so much, they fail to appreciate the languages and cultures of others as much as they should. Our love for our own ways can lead us to minimize the importance of learning another's language and culture in order to share God's Good News with them.

There are five factors that underlie successful language learning. Of the five, the first three are the most important.

### **Motivation**

- You must have sufficient motivation to sustain you through the long process of learning another language. Ideally the motivation is internal (you want to do it) as well as external (your boss wants you to do it). Opportunity.
- Opportunity means that you have been given permission by your leaders to spend time in language learning, and that it is possible to learn the language in the situation you are in. Discipline.
- There is no way that the average person will learn to speak a foreign language well without the discipline to stick with it, even when the task seems impossible. Know-how.
- Lots of people around the world have learned a second, a third and sometimes a fourth language without attending a school or knowing a method for language learning. They

simply moved to an area where a different language was spoken and learned it. However, knowing something about what is involved in learning a language and the learning tools that are available will give you a strategy to improve your efficiency in learning. Aptitude

There are certain motor skills which relate to effective language learning: Imitation of Sounds, Hearing Different Sounds, Short Term Memorization and Remembrance of Sounds and Words, Long-Term Memorization and Remembrance of Sounds, Sound/Symbol Association, etc. God has given each of us different strengths in these areas, and there is little we can do to change our innate abilities. The difference between a person with a low aptitude for language learning and a person with a high aptitude is the speed with which either will learn a certain amount of language, and also perhaps the fluency with which they speak. It does not mean that the person with low aptitude will not succeed. You can't change your aptitude, so relax and don't compare yourself with anybody else.

Anyone can learn a foreign language — if he is willing to pay the price to learn. Each language student must take responsibility for his own speaking and listening ability. Investing time in language learning does not mean that you are not involved in ministry. Language learning in the community means that you are building relationships and bridges over which the gospel will cross as you model the servant nature of Christ. Begin praying today for God to lead you to people who will be your helpers in learning the language of the culture to which you are going.