

SOME LANGUAGE & CULTURE LEARNING STRATEGIES

GENERAL APPROACHES

Community “classroom” – Practice the language with mentors, family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and strangers in a variety of settings. Language acquisition is more a social activity than an academic discipline.

Cultural immersion – Live amongst people who speak the language in their own culture. Language is one of several inter-related, cultural, signal systems.

Exploration *in situ* – Find your language and cultural usage in actual, cultural events, where the language is used by native speakers, especially in places and at kinds of events where you desire to gain competence in the use of language and culture.

Learning cycle – Practicing a daily plan of (1) assessing your learning need, (2) eliciting material from helper, (3) memorizing a new dialogue, (4) practicing repetition of phrases, (5) using new phrases with live persons in the community, and (6) evaluate the usefulness of your learning. This is a discipline that can balance having fun hanging about.

Peer support – Learn at the same time as several friends or colleagues, providing mutual accountability and sharing recent insights. A sense of shared adventure and discovery strengthens confidence and enhances motivation.

Relevant material – Elicit from a language helper what you need or want and use it in ways that you need or want. When you find ways of saying useful words and phrases that work for you, then you are not likely to forget them from one day to the next.

SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

Attend a faith community – Whether you believe their religion or not, unless you sense spiritual danger. Listen for whatever you can understand without frustration.

Attend life cycle events – Unique vocabulary and cultural values may be expounded at rituals of passage that one will not hear at other times and places.

Collect literary genres – From texts and recordings, discover the phrases, structures and intonations that characterize various discourse styles. Use those that you can recall when appropriate, and incorporate these in translations you may later make in the language.

Collect true stories – Life histories provide a rich supply of language in a narrative style, and will center on things that reflect cultural values and expectations.

Diagram word associations – Build “semantic trees” of related words and phrases. You are much more likely to remember such words than by memorizing vocabulary lists.

Draw kinship charts – Let language helpers diagram their own families, providing the native terms for each kind of relationship. Family systems in different cultures have their own ways of naming relatives. Later learn about their marital and inheritance custom and common exceptions to the rules.

- Draw maps – Seek the native terms and expressions for places and things. Let natives draw the maps and explain them, while you note what they believe to be the important details. Later learn about the history, functions and beliefs that natives attribute to places.
- Draw simple pictures – With a language helper, elicit their speech about settings, times, persons, events, activities...
- Hang about with local friends – Do enjoyable things together without violating your own conscience.
- Have fun – Nuts to the prudes and spoil-sports who believe language learning should hurt.
- Jot and journal – Make little notes about cultural traits that you observe, and words or phrases that you hear, and transfer these to a journal. Make tentative interpretations of these to check against your language helper and to share with your peers.
- Laugh at your own mistakes – It will make it easier for others who want to laugh but fear offending you or appear embarrassed.
- Live with a family – hear and practice the language as it is used amongst intimate persons in their daily routines and family events.
- Marry a native – If you are single, want to be married, and wise counselors approve.
- Mimic native speakers – Repeat phrases as you hear them from helpers and recorded texts or public speakers. Let native-mastery speakers correct you until they are satisfied with your pronunciation. Try not to generate language that you have not heard from natives.
- Observe signal systems – As people employ any of the twelve human signal systems, jot down what they did, who did it, with whom, using what, as well as when and where. Check out with your language helper what each of them might mean.
- Read popular literature – Buy and read comic books, magazines, and books on topics that interest you, that are written at a level that you can understand with a little language help. Start with materials written for children, for they are usually simple and idiomatic.
- Record short texts – Make tape recordings on chosen topics. Ask when, where and with whom such a text might be used by natives. Transcribe the text, figure out as much as you can, and note things that your helper can explain to you next time.
- Relax and listen – Seek to hear the language in use for long periods of time, perhaps as background to tedious activities. The purpose is not to understand, but to distinguish word and phrase breaks, in addition to intonation. Radio, TV and videos help.
- Repeat routine behavior – If you can purchase items in quantity, consider buying them one at a time by making repeat visits. If you can send an helper to perform a routine duty, consider going yourself, after practicing the needed speech and customs with your helper.
- Respond physically – As your language helper issues common commands, respond accordingly. Stand up. Sit down. Leap West. Stop. Go. Slow down. Speed up.
- Take tours – Visit the places where natives go, watching them and listening to their speech and that of officials or guides.
- Walk a daily circuit – Briefly visit several persons whom you can approach daily, speaking with them the phrases you have learned and practiced with your language helper.