

Language Learning Strategies

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Summary

This book lists strategies language learners can use to make the language learning process successful for them. The strategies are listed by the main function they help to achieve and are linked to specific techniques that implement them. This information can help you become a more effective language learner by helping you plan your activities effectively.

Contents

OVERVIEW: Language learning strategies

OVERVIEW

Language learning strategies

Introduction

Developing good language learning strategies is one way you can become a better language learners. Research has shown that good language learners use a variety of strategies and use strategies appropriate to the task or situation. This book can introduce you to various kinds of strategies and show you how to use them in everyday life.

In this module group

Here are the modules on language learning strategies:

- What is a language learning strategy?
- OVERVIEW: Comprehension strategies
- OVERVIEW: Memory strategies

- [OVERVIEW: Production strategies](#)
- [OVERVIEW: Communication strategies](#)

See also

- [Keywords: learning strategies](#)

What is a language learning strategy?

Definition

A language learning strategy is something you decide to do in order to learn a language better. Different strategies can be used for specific aspects of language learning. They are based on language learning principles. Many language learning techniques and activities are ways of implementing strategies.

Examples

- You associate words with pictures to help you remember them.
- You mentally rehearse what you are going to say in a given situation.

Kinds

Here are some kinds of language learning strategies:

- [OVERVIEW: Comprehension strategies](#)
- [OVERVIEW: Memory strategies](#)
- [OVERVIEW: Production strategies](#)
- [OVERVIEW: Communication strategies](#)

See also

- [Keywords: learning strategies](#)

OVERVIEW

Comprehension strategies

Introduction

Comprehension strategies are those that help you understand what you hear and thus take in new information. You do this by understanding messages and inferring meaning of new bits of information from the context. Language you can understand is what Stephen Krashen calls comprehensible input.

To make sure you are getting comprehensible input, choose activities that cause you to actually process language meaningfully, but where there is a new piece of information. Here are some specific strategies you can use when taking in new information.

In this module group

Here are the modules on comprehension strategies:

- Selective Attention strategy
- Inference strategy
- Top-down Processing strategy
- Deduction strategy
- Analysis strategy
- Transfer strategy

See also

- Keywords: comprehension

Selective Attention strategy

Description

The Selective Attention strategy involves selecting just one aspect of a discourse to pay particular attention to at a given time.

Benefits

The benefits of selecting just one aspect of a discourse to concentrate on at a given time is that you can focus on both the form and meaning of that aspect without having to pay attention to everything else that is going on, which might be overwhelming. In this way, you can focus on a particular structure or skill.

Example

You decide to listen to someone listing items and concentrate only on the intonation.

You notice that the voice seems to go up at the end all of the items but the last, where the voice goes down. You decide to listen for other lists and just concentrate on the intonation.

See also

- Keywords: selective attention

Inference strategy

Description

Inference is filling in the blanks from the pieces you understand. In a way, it is a kind of principled guess at the meaning of something, which can be confirmed or disconfirmed by what comes next. When you use context, physical or linguistic, to help you understand something, you are probably using inference.

Benefits

Inference is one of the very best and most useful language learning strategies. It forms the basis for learning from what Stephen Krashen calls "comprehensible input." Developing your skill at using this strategy wisely will pay big benefits.

Example

You are in a restaurant or a train and see a sign saying *defense de fumer*. The word *fumer* reminds you of *fume* in English and what's more you notice that no one is smoking around you. You infer that *defense de fumer* means "no smoking" even though the word *defense* sounds like something else in English.

See also

- Keywords: inference

Top-down Processing strategy

Description

Top-down processing is a strategy whereby you use what you know of the topic or the general subject of a discourse to figure out the meaning of a particular utterance within it. It involves inference, using the big picture as the context.

Benefits

Learning to use the big picture to help us interpret details is a skill we use every day. It takes the burden off us of listening carefully for every detail, because once we know the big picture we can predict most of the details. Of course, it takes time to build up an idea of the big picture in a new language and culture. The more different the new culture, the longer it takes to become good at top-down processing in our new language.

Example

Once I know that someone is talking about the weather, I have a lot of advantages in understanding what is being said. For one thing, I can guess that there will be vocabulary like rain or snow or wind or hail or lightening rather than chairs and tables and sofas. Also, I can assume that they will be talking about something I have probably experienced. I may assume that they are talking about today's weather or recent weather or tomorrow's weather, although that isn't always the case. At any rate, I have a better chance of guess words I don't know than if I didn't know the topic.

Deduction strategy

Description

Deduction is a strategy whereby you reason from a known principle to an unknown, from the general to the specific, or from a premise to a logical conclusion.

Benefits

Sometimes knowing a general rule you can apply can be a big help in figuring out specific cases. It saves you for having to consider every case individually.

Example

If I know that regular verbs in English form the past tense by adding *-ed*, and that *walk* is a regular verb, I can deduce that the past tense of I walk is *I walked*.

Analysis strategy

Description

Analysis involves examining something and discovering the meaningful parts. You can use analysis in many ways in your language learning program, from analyzing discourses

to words and even analyzing your learning style. As a comprehension strategy, analysis is applied to language at different levels, from sounds, to words to discourses.

Benefits

Since language is systematic, if you can analyze the system and find the meaningful parts you can relieve your memory of a great burden and give yourself the ability to recombine the parts.

Example

You see the word hypertension for the first time. You don't know exactly what it means, so you start to analyse the word. You recognize the first part of the word hyper- as being the same as in the words hypersensitive and hyperactive, both of which you know. You figure out that hyper mean "too much." The second part of the word is tension. You think the word must mean too much tension.

Note: Your analysis is correct, even though it hasn't taken you all the way to understanding that the word hypertension is used to refer to high blood pressure. Combining analysis with other strategies, such as inference and top-down processing might help you figure out that part, but from your analysis you have gotten part way.

See also

- Keywords: analysis

Transfer strategy

Description

Transfer involves using knowledge about one language to help you understand another. It can be very helpful in learning a new language, especially one related to a language you know, but it also has its dangers.

Benefits

Transfer can be very helpful in learning a new language, especially one related to a language you know, as it can help you guess the meaning of words and understand grammatical structures.

Warning

Transfer can also cause problems, because sometimes words related to words you know

in another language can have developed a different meaning in the language you are learning. Cognate words with meanings different from those you expect are sometimes called *false friends*. Always be sure to check the meaning of a word you guess by transfer from another language.

Examples

You hear the word *refrigerador* in Spanish and guess that it must mean "refrigerator."
You are transferring this knowledge from English to Spanish, and you are right!

You hear the word *embarrasada* in Spanish and guess that it must mean "embarrassed."
You are again transferring your knowledge from English to Spanish, but this time you are wrong! *Embarrasada* means "pregnant." (Aren't you embarrassed?)

See also

- Keywords: transfer

OVERVIEW

Memory strategies

Introduction

Memory strategies are those used for storing information for later retrieval.

In this module group

Here are the modules on memory strategies:

- The Word Association strategy
- The Visual Association strategy
- Action Association strategy
- The Grouping strategy
- The Imagery strategy
- The Contextualization strategy
- Repetition strategy
- Recombination strategy
- The Structured Review strategy

See also

- Keywords: memorization

The Word Association strategy

Description

The Word Association strategy involves creating mental links between one word you are learning and one or more others.

Benefits

Some sets of words often occur together and learning them together can help you remember them better. Making associations helps you build up networks of words in your mind.

Kinds

Here are some kinds of Word Association strategies:

- Associating a word with its opposite

Example: Hot and cold

- Associating a word with another word it is commonly used with

Example: Bread and butter

- Associating a word with other words in the same semantic domain

Example: Paper, pen, stamps, envelopes

The Visual Association strategy

Description

The Visual Association strategy involves associating a word or phrase you are learning with something you can see: a picture, an icon, or a written representation.

Benefits

Associating new words with a visual stimulus gives a concrete image to attach the sounds of the new word to and creates a mental image of the new word. Some learners

particularly find this kind of association helpful.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques that implement this strategy:

- The Look and Listen techniques
- The Semantic Map technique
- The Color-coding technique
- The Symbol Association technique

Action Association strategy

Description

The Action Association strategy involves associating a word or sentence you are learning with an action.

Benefits

Actions, like visual images, help you form meaningful associations with the sounds of the words you are learning. Some learners, particularly those with a kinesthetic or tactile sensory preference find action association particularly helpful.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Physical Response techniques

See also

- Keywords: action association

The Grouping strategy

Description

The grouping strategy involves grouping words in a way that helps you remember them. The groups can be based on various kinds of similarity. Here are just a few:

- Grammatical function
Example: Nouns of the same gender
- Topic
Example: Words about weather
- Communication function
Example: Apologies, requests, thanks
- Similar meanings
Example: Hot, warm, tepid, scalding

Benefits

Grouping words together gives you more associations for each word and helps you remember them. Find whatever kinds of grouping work best for you.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Semantic Map technique

The Imagery strategy

Description

The imagery strategy involves relating new language information to a mental image. The image can be of an object, a symbol, a situation, or the letters of a word.

Benefits

This technique, like the Visual Association technique, makes use of images, but these images are in your mind, instead of on paper. The benefit is that you are not restricted to what you can draw or find pictures of, but only limited by the extent of your imagination.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Mental Image technique

See also

- Keywords: mental images

The Contextualization strategy

Description

The Contextualization strategy involves putting a new word or phrase into a meaningful context, such as a sentence, a conversation, or a story, that makes the word easier to remember.

Benefits

This strategy takes advantage of similar processes as those you use in the inference strategy: you use what you know to help you remember what is new. Putting a new word into context helps you use it properly in other contexts.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Flash Cards technique

See also

- Keywords: context

Repetition strategy

Description

The Repetition strategy involves doing or saying something over and over again until it sticks in your memory. You can use this strategy with almost any technique.

Benefits

Every time you repeat something meaningfully you are strengthening the association between the new word and its meaning. Meaningless repetition is not helpful.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are some language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Physical Response techniques

- The Look and Listen techniques
- The Production Practice techniques
- The Memorized Routines techniques
- The Pronunciation Practice techniques

See also

- Keywords: repetition

Recombination strategy

Description

The Recombination strategy involves taking words you have encountered in one context or combination and combining them in different ways, thus strengthening the memory links.

Benefits

Recombining words in different contexts gives you flexibility and the ability to be creative with words. Every day we recombine the words in our first language in almost infinite combinations, and doing that in a second language helps us become truly proficient and also reinforces our learning

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Physical Response techniques
- The Look and Listen techniques

The Structured Review strategy

Description

The Structured Review strategy involves reviewing the same material first at short intervals and then at increasingly longer intervals. This seems to help get material into long-term memory, so that it becomes automatic.

Benefits

The way memory seems to work, new items stay for only a short time in our short-term memory. In order to get them into long-term memory we need to review them frequently at first. Once they are in long-term memory, we need to remind ourselves less often.

Techniques using this strategy

This strategy is not fundamental to the following techniques, but can be used effectively with them:

- The Memory Reinforcement techniques
- The Structure Practice techniques
- The Pronunciation Practice techniques

OVERVIEW

Production strategies

Introduction

What can you do, not only to remember what you have understood, but to be able to retrieve it and use it productively? You need, at some point, to practice saying things in the language, as well as comprehending it. Production requires more detail than comprehension, because in comprehension you can filter out all the redundant information, whereas in production you need to put in all the details. Production strategies are those used for retrieving and using stored information.

In this module group

Here are the modules on production strategies:

- Mimicry strategy
- The Rehearsal strategy

See also

- Keywords: production

Mimicry strategy

Description

The Mimicry strategy involves

- repeating what you hear a native speaker say
- monitoring yourself to see how closely you approximate the native speaker, and
- looking for feedback from the native speaker.

Benefits

When you start to try to speak a language you may find that even though you can recognize a word and know its meaning, you still don't know exactly how to pronounce it. Mimicking a native speaker helps you to concentrate on the sounds of the language and to compare your pronunciation with the native-speaker model.

Techniques using this strategy

Here are the language learning techniques which implement this strategy:

- The Pronunciation Practice techniques
- The Production Practice techniques
- The Memorized Routines techniques

See also

- Keywords: mimicry

The Rehearsal strategy

Description

The Rehearsal strategy involves practicing what you want to say before you try to use it in real communication.

Benefits

Although you can never tell exactly what will happen in a real communication situation, there are some things that are more likely to happen than others in certain places. For example, if you are going to buy something in a shop you can rehearse the transaction so that when you get to the shop you are more confident and can come up with what to say more readily.

Techniques using this strategy

You can use this strategy any time you have time to prepare, but here are some language learning techniques which specifically implement this strategy:

- The Memorized Routines techniques
- The Dialogue techniques

See also

- Keywords: rehearsal strategy

OVERVIEW

Communication strategies

Introduction

Communication strategies are those used to communicate in conversation to make sure that the intended message is conveyed.

In this module group

Here are the modules on communication strategies:

- Circumlocution strategy
- Message Adjustment strategy
- The Code-switching strategy

See also

- Keywords: communication strategies

Circumlocution strategy

Description

The circumlocution strategy involves describing a concept in other words, sometimes a whole phrase. It is used especially when you have limited vocabulary in a particular area.

Benefits

The principal benefit of circumlocution is that you get your message across. A secondary benefit is that you may learn the vocabulary you are searching for, because your conversation partner supplies it.

Example

One English-speaking woman was talking to a German car mechanic and couldn't think of the German word for tires. She said "I need those round things my car rolls on." She knew she had gotten her message across because the mechanic said, "Tires, Madam?" in English! It may have been a relief to my friend to know that the mechanic spoke English, but if he hadn't spoken English, and had supplied the word for her in German, it would have been even better for her language learning.

See also

- Keywords: circumlocution

Message Adjustment strategy

Description

The Message Adjustment strategy involves simplifying or omitting something you might like to say because you do not know how to say it in that way.

Benefits

The benefit of the message adjustment strategy is that you can keep talking about *something*, instead of just stopping because you don't know how to say what you really want to say.

Example

You don't know the word for *filly*, so you just say *horse*. Or if you don't know the word *horse*, you say *animal*.

The Code-switching strategy

Description

The Code-switching strategy involves changing to your own language or another

language you and your conversation partner know, for a word or phrase.

Benefits

The benefits of the code-switching strategy are similar to those of the other communication strategies in that it helps you get your message across and may also elicit from your conversation partner the word you are looking for.

Example

You can't think of the word for plate in Spanish, so you say, " Por favor, traigame un *plate*." The other person may say, "Si, un plato."

See also

- Keywords: code-switching

Language Learning Troubleshooter

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Summary

This book gives advice on how to identify and solve your language learning problem areas. There are two ways to approach your problem areas: by identifying the problem or by describing how you feel about it. You then are given some suggestions that may help solve your problem. This information can help get you past obstacles that may have stalled your language learning and help to get you back on track.

Contents

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OVERVIEW: Lack of motivation

OVERVIEW: Lack of plan

OVERVIEW: Common feelings in language learning

OVERVIEW

Start here to troubleshoot

Introduction

This troubleshooter is designed to help you identify problems you may be experiencing in your language learning and give you advice on how to overcome them. Please keep in mind that language learning is a very complex task involving many factors that contribute to its overall success. This troubleshooter tries to probe those many factors.

Answer a question by following the link that matches your answer. Use the Back (or Backtrack) button to return to the previous question in the troubleshooter.

Question

The following are common types of problems language learners may encounter. Which of them best describes your situation?

- I'm not satisfied with my rate of progress.
- I'm not getting enough meaningful exposure to the language.
- Something is blocking the learning process.
- There is a mismatch between my learning style preference and my learning situation.
- I do not have enough encouragement or accountability.
- I'm lacking motivation.
- I don't have a good plan.
- I'm not quite sure what the problem is. Let me tell you how I feel.

See also

- Keywords: troubleshooting language learning

OVERVIEW

Project rate of language learning progress

Introduction

You may be discouraged because you have unreasonable expectations about how quickly you can learn a language. There are a lot of factors that can affect your rate of progress.

In order to know if you are making reasonable progress it helps to have points of comparison. In this section you can

- see how long it takes people in a *very* favorable situation (the U.S. Foreign Service Institute) to learn different languages, and
- project how long it may take you to reach your goals based on your progress to this point.

Question

What would you like to do?

- Look at charts of the FSI data.
- Compare my progress to the FSI data.
- Project how long it will take me to reach my goals.

See also

To read about what you can do at each FSI level, see:

- The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale
- Keywords: Foreign Service Institute (FSI), progress (language learning)

OVERVIEW

Progress charts based on FSI data

Introduction

The progress charts in this section are based on data from the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). The data are cited by Judith E. Liskin-Gasparro in "ETS oral proficiency testing manual," Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1982.

Questions

The FSI has classified the languages they teach into four groups based on their records of the average time it takes their students to meet their goals. Group 1 are the easiest languages and group 4 are the hardest. (The languages in each group are listed in the charts.)

Which chart would you like to see?

- Group 1 languages
- Group 2 languages
- Group 3 languages
- Group 4 languages

The FSI has also classified learners into three levels of aptitude based on how quickly they learn a new language. The data in the above charts are presented again with reference to learner aptitude.

Which chart would you like to see?

- Low aptitude learners
- Average aptitude learners
- High aptitude learners

See also

For help in comparing your rate of progress to these charts, and in setting realistic expectations, see the following:

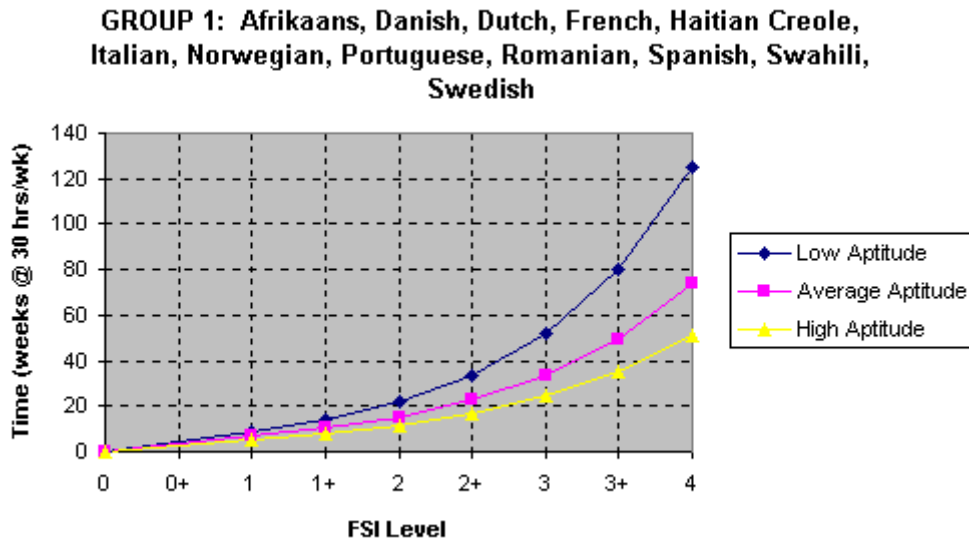
- OVERVIEW: Compare progress against the FSI data
- OVERVIEW: Project rate of language learning progress
- Keywords: Foreign Service Institute (FSI), aptitude, charts, difficulty, progress (language learning)

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 1 languages

Advice

This is how long it typically takes to learn group 1 languages:



See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

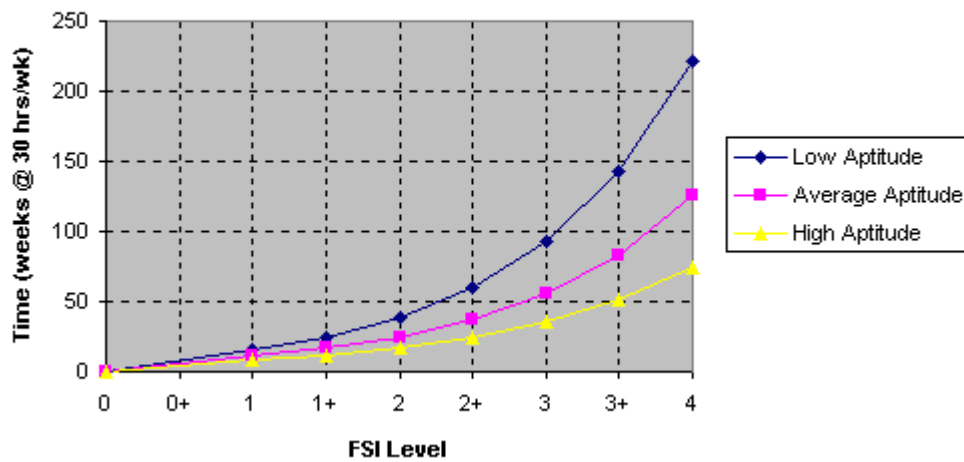
OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 2 languages

Advice

This is how long it typically takes to learn group 2 languages:

GROUP 2: Bulgarian, Dari, Farsi, German, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Malay, Urdu



See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

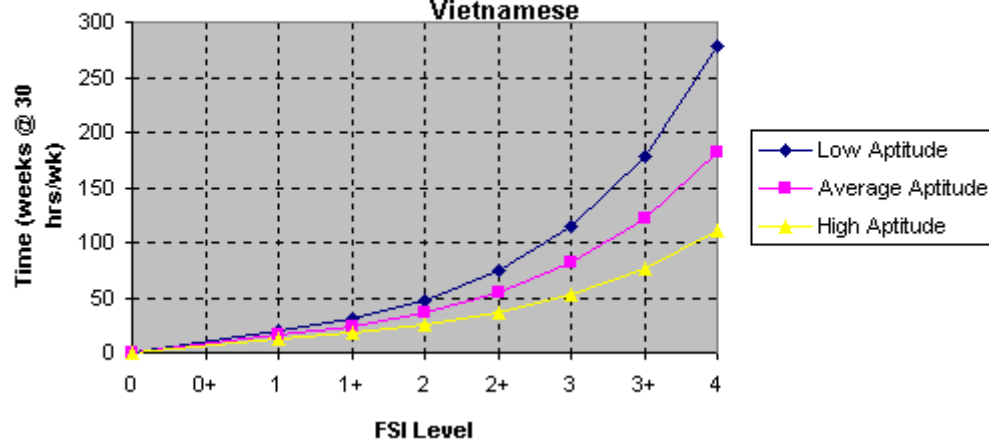
OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 3 languages

Advice

This is how long it typically takes to learn group 3 languages:

GROUP 3: Amharic, Bengali, Burmese, Czech, Finnish, Hebrew, Hungarian, Khmer, Lao, Nepali, Pilipino, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Sinhala, Thai, Tamil, Turkish, Vietnamese



See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

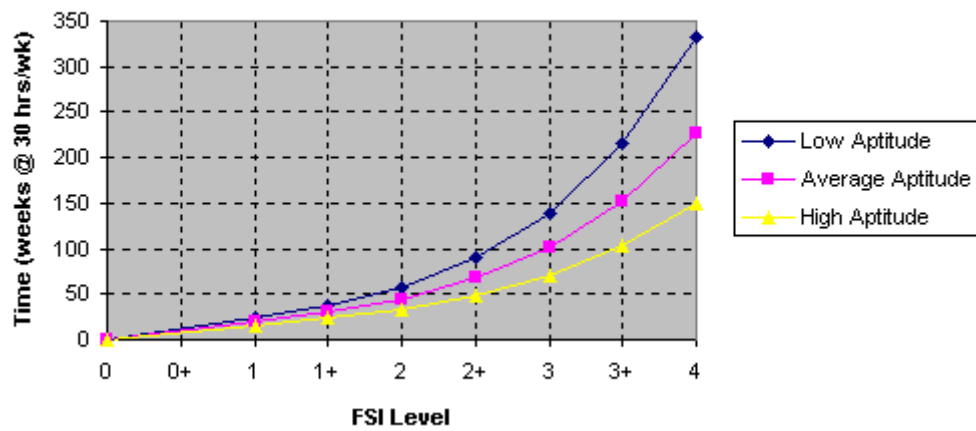
OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 4 languages

Advice

This is how long it typically takes to learn group 4 languages:

GROUP 4: Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean



See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

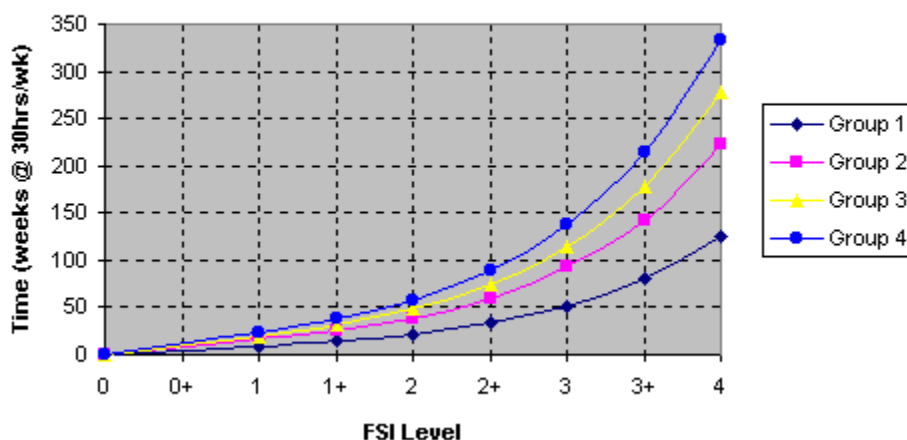
OVERVIEW

Progress chart for low aptitude learners

Advice

This is how long it typically takes low aptitude learners to learn a language:

Low Aptitude



Note: The four groups refer to language difficulty, group 4 being the most difficult.

See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

See also the progress charts for each of the four groups of languages:

- OVERVIEW: Progress charts based on FSI data
- Keywords: aptitude, progress (language learning)

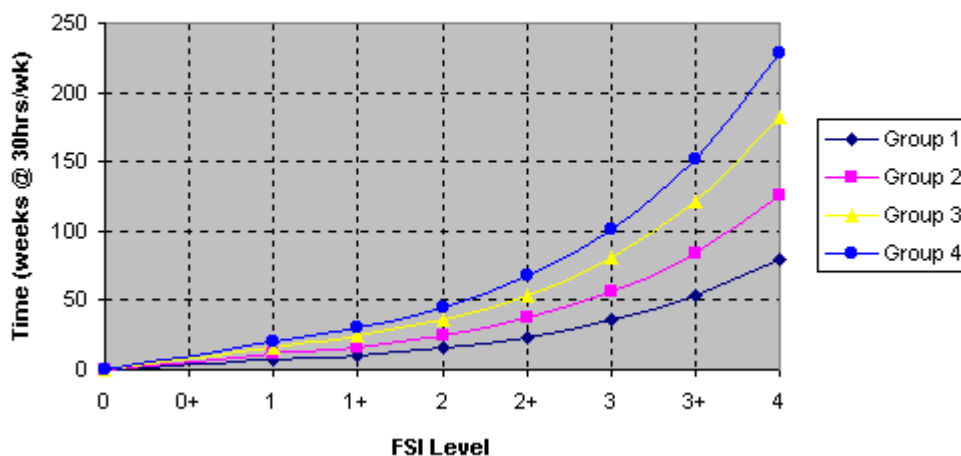
OVERVIEW

Progress chart for average aptitude learners

Advice

This is how long it typically takes average aptitude learners to learn a language:

Average Aptitude



Note: The four groups refer to language difficulty, group 4 being the most difficult.

See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

See also the progress charts for each of the four groups of languages:

- OVERVIEW: Progress charts based on FSI data
- Keywords: aptitude, progress (language learning)

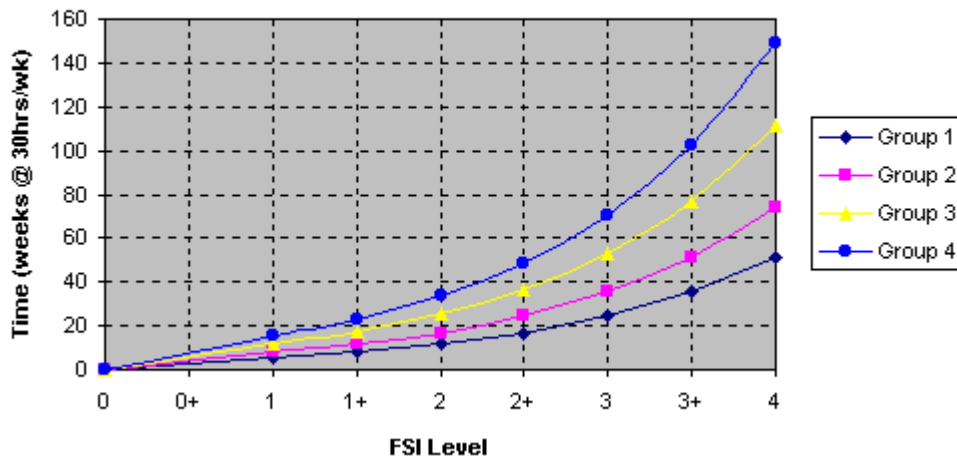
OVERVIEW

Progress chart for high aptitude learners

Advice

This is how long it typically takes high aptitude learners to learn a language:

High Aptitude



Note: The four groups refer to language difficulty, group 4 being the most difficult.

See: For information about the FSI levels, see The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale.

See also

See also the progress charts for each of the four groups of languages:

- OVERVIEW: Progress charts based on FSI data
- Keywords: aptitude, progress (language learning)

OVERVIEW

Compare progress against the FSI data

Advice

Follow these steps to compare your rate of progress against what the FSI data predict:

1. Consult the FSI proficiency scale to determine your current level of proficiency.
2. Read the lists of languages on the charts for the four language groups to determine which group the language you are learning falls in. If your language is not listed, then make a guess based on what you know about the difficulty of that language compared to other languages that are listed.
3. Figure out how many weeks you have been working on learning the language.

4. Estimate how many hours per week (on average) you have actually been engaged in language learning activities. If it is less than 30, then decrease your count of weeks proportionately. That is, multiply your count of weeks by your hours per week divided by 30. For instance, if you are spending only 15 hours, then multiply your count of weeks by 15/30 or one-half.
5. Do you think your aptitude for language learning is high, average, or low? After you have finished reading the following instructions, click one of the preceding links to read the chart for the appropriate level.
6. Find the point on the graph where the curve for the language group you have chosen intersects the vertical line for the level of proficiency you have reached. Look at the scale on the left-hand side of the chart to estimate the number of weeks it typically takes to reach that point.
 - If your adjusted number of weeks is less than this number or near to it, then it looks like your rate of progress is fine.
 - If your adjusted time is significantly more than what the chart predicts, have you overestimated your aptitude or the time you are spending? Have you underestimated the difficulty of the language? If so, then perform this procedure again with new estimates.
 - If your actual progress is still significantly slower than what the charts suggest it should be, then carefully go through this troubleshooter in an effort to discover what may be holding up your progress.

See also

For help in setting realistic expectations for reaching your goals, see the following:

- [OVERVIEW: Project time to reach goals](#)
- [Keywords: Foreign Service Institute \(FSI\), aptitude, progress \(language learning\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Project time to reach goals

Introduction

This method for developing a projection is for people who have not yet started learning the language, or have not yet reached level 1 proficiency. If you have already reached level 1 proficiency (or at least wonder if you may have), try the other method as well.

Advice

Follow these steps to use the FSI data to project how long it will take you to reach your language learning goal:

1. Consult [How to set your language learning goals](#) to determine the level of proficiency that corresponds to your ultimate goal.
2. Read the lists of languages on the charts for the four language groups to determine which group the language you are learning falls in. If your language is not listed, then make a guess based on what you know about the difficulty of that language compared to other languages that are listed.
3. Estimate how many hours per week (on average) you plan to engage in language learning activities.
4. Do you think your aptitude for language learning is high, average, or low?
5. On the graph for the language group you have selected, find the point where the curve for the aptitude group you have chosen intersects the vertical line for the level of proficiency you want to reach. Look at the scale on the left-hand side of the chart to estimate the number of weeks it typically takes to reach that point.
6. If the number of hours per week you plan to spend is less than 30, then you need to increase the estimate of weeks proportionately (since the charts are based on 30 hours-per-week of language learning activities). That is, multiply the projected number of weeks by 30 and divide by your estimate of hours per week.

Example

Q: I want to reach FSI level 3 proficiency in Nepali. I have an average aptitude for language learning and plan to spend about 20 hours per week in language learning activities. How long is that likely to take?

A: Nepali is in Group 3 of languages. On the Group 3 chart, it takes an average language learner about 80 weeks to reach level 3 proficiency. Since you will be spending only 20 hours per week at language learning activities, you need to multiply this estimate by $30/20$ (that is, 1.5). This gives an estimated time of 120 weeks, or approximately two-and-a-half years.

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), progress (language learning)

Project time to reach goals after level 1

Introduction

If you have already reached level 1 proficiency, you can project how long it will take to reach other levels based on how long it took you to reach level 1. With this approach you do not need to estimate the hours per week you are spending, your aptitude, or the difficulty of the language. Rather, the assumption is that whatever was true of your situation as you learned to reach level 1 will continue to be true as you learn further.

At level 1, you are able to satisfy routine travel needs and minimum courtesy requirements. The following is a detailed description of level 1 as defined by the FSI:

- Can ask and answer questions on very familiar topics
- Within the scope of very limited language experience, can understand simple questions and statements, allowing for slowed speech, repetition, or paraphrase
- Speaking vocabulary inadequate to express anything but the most elementary needs
- Errors in pronunciation and grammar are frequent, but can be understood by a native speaker used to dealing with foreigners attempting to speak the language
- While "very familiar topics" and "elementary needs" vary considerably from individual to individual, any person at level 1 should be able to order a simple meal, ask for shelter or lodging, ask and give simple directions, make purchases, and tell time

Note: If you have not yet reached level 1, you will need to try an alternate method of projecting the time it will take to reach your goals.

Advice

Inspection of the progress charts shows that for high and average aptitude learners, the time to reach a given level of proficiency can be roughly estimated from the time to reach level 1 as follows:

- Level 1+ takes 1.5 times as long as level 1
- Level 2 takes 2 times as long as level 1
- Level 2+ takes 3 times as long as level 1
- Level 3 takes 4 times as long as level 1
- Level 3+ takes 6 times as long as level 1
- Level 4 takes 8 times as long as level 1

You can, therefore, use the following method to estimate how long it will take you to reach your goal:

1. Refer to the description of level 1 proficiency given above to determine the approximate date at which you reached that level.
2. Count back to the date you began learning the language to determine the number of months it took you to reach level 1 proficiency.
3. Multiply the number of months to reach level 1 by the factors listed above to project how many months it will probably take to reach each of the higher levels.
4. For low aptitude learners, the learning rate appears to be a bit slower. If you think you are a low aptitude learner, add another 25 percent to the estimates.

Example

Q: It has already taken me six months to reach level 1 proficiency. How long will it take me to get to level 3?

A: It takes about four times as long to reach level 3, thus you can expect it to take about two years (or another 18 months) if you keep the same pace. If your aptitude for language learning is low, it will take even longer, perhaps 2.5 years.

See also

For more information on evaluating your rate of progress, see the following:

- [OVERVIEW: Project rate of language learning progress](#)
- [Keywords: goals \(proficiency\), progress \(language learning\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Meaningful exposure to the language

Introduction

In order to develop full competence in a second language, you need lots of exposure to messages you can understand and a chance to interact with speakers in authentic communication situations.

The following links will take you to questions that can help you evaluate whether or not you are getting enough meaningful exposure to the language and give you some advice about things to try if you're not.

Question

The following are factors that make for meaningful exposure to a second language. Which of them would you like to investigate now?

- Comprehensible input
- Conversations with native speakers
- Exposure to authentic communication situations

See also

- Keywords: meaningful exposure to language

OVERVIEW

Comprehensible input

Introduction

In order for language learning to progress properly, you need to understand what you hear and read. Messages you can understand in a second language constitute comprehensible input. They are "comprehensible" because you can understand them. They are "input" because you acquire the ability to understand and use the language by taking in such messages.

Questions

If you answer one of the first choices on the following questions then you are probably not getting enough comprehensible input. See Thomson's *Kick-starting your language learning* for a fuller description of comprehensible input and why it is important for learning.

In class or during formal language learning sessions, how do you feel?

- I'm lost most of the time.
- I generally follow what is going on.
- I understand almost everything.
- I'm bored because it's going too slowly.

When you hear native speakers engaged in real-life communication situations, how much can you understand?

- I understand almost nothing.
- I understand some of what's going on.
- I understand almost everything.

What is it like when you read material in the language?

- I don't have anything to read.
- I stop frequently to look up words in a dictionary or ask someone what they mean.
- I often don't know a word, but can usually guess the meaning from context.
- I seldom encounter a word I don't know.

When you listen to the radio or watch television or a film, how much do you understand?

- I understand almost nothing.
- I understand a little of what is going on.
- I follow most of what is going on.
- I understand almost everything.

When you are working with language resource persons, are you doing activities that require you to understand and respond to what they say?

- No, not very much.
- Yes, frequently.

See also

- OVERVIEW: Comprehension strategies
- Keywords: comprehensible input, meaningful exposure to language

OVERVIEW

Usually lost in formal study sessions

Advice

What you are doing may be too advanced for your current proficiency. If so, in order to make more progress, you need to take smaller steps. Talk to your teacher or tutor about slowing down or going into another class. If you are working on your own, you should go

back and review previous units until you understand most of what's going on.

OVERVIEW

Generally follow what is going on in formal study sessions

Advice

In this situation you can learn a lot if you use good guessing strategies and infer meaning from what you know about the topic or situation. Don't worry if you find yourself getting lost when the conversation turns to unfamiliar topics; just keep listening for familiar words or structures.

OVERVIEW

Understand almost everything in formal study sessions

Advice

Great! It sound like you are getting enough comprehensible input in your structured activities.

OVERVIEW

Usually bored during formal study sessions

Advice

You may be in a class that is not advanced enough for you. Talk to your teacher about moving up to a more advanced class. On the other hand, you may be too anxious to move ahead without fully understanding the current material. Accuracy is important if your ultimate aim is Superior or Distinguished proficiency.

If it is not possible for you to move to a more advanced class, you might try one of the following strategies:

- Ask your teacher for a course outline. Negotiate with the teacher to see if you can incorporate projects or topics you are interested in.
- See if you can cut down the number of hours you spend in the course and supplement

the class with a tutor or informal learning activities.

OVERVIEW

Understand almost nothing when native speakers talk together

Advice

Don't be too discouraged. You have to do a lot of vocabulary building before you can follow native speakers talking to each other. On the other hand, you can learn a lot by observing gestures, intonation, and other cultural cues.

Here's an observation that may encourage you: most people slow down and make other accommodations when talking to language learners, so you will probably find it easier to understand when they are talking to you than when they are talking to each other.

If you know the topic of a conversation, you will be able to follow it better. Sometimes you can ask a friend, "What are they talking about?" and get enough context to follow the main idea.

OVERVIEW

Understand some when native speakers talk together

Advice

Some communication situations have a more predictable sequences of events and have set expressions that are commonly used. For example, in a restaurant setting in Western cultures, you pretty much know what questions you will be asked and what to answer. A predictable sequence of events and dialogue is called a script.

Situations with predictable scripts will be easier for you to understand than others. The closer the culture is to your own, the more predictable the scripts of everyday encounters are likely to be. Look for people talking about familiar topics or following predictable scripts. You may be surprised by how much you can understand.

It helps to know the kinds of topics certain groups of people often discuss with each other. For example, in some cultures men may more often talk about topics such as politics, the weather, sports, or business while women may have other favorite topics. Find out what topics the people you want to talk with typically talk about and then learn some of the vocabulary associated with that topic so that you will be able to pick up the key words in a conversation.

See also

- Keywords: scripts

OVERVIEW

Understand most of what native speakers say to each other

Advice

Congratulations! Once you have reached the point where you can understand most of what people are saying, your learning can really take off. Take advantage of this opportunity by spending lots of time interacting with people.

You can continue to expand your understanding by discussing new topics and participating in a broad variety of communication situations. There is always more to learn.

When there are things you do not understand, you might jot down questions to ask a culture friend later rather than interrupt the conversation to ask at the time.

OVERVIEW

Reading material is needed

Advice

As you learn the language, you can produce written materials for yourself by transcribing recordings of native speakers or by teaching native speakers to write stories and texts.

Kinds of texts that provide easy reading material are:

- Instructions on how to do basic procedures
- Short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things
- Simple stories about something that happened in the past (especially if you were present at the event)
- Basic written descriptions of how to get somewhere

OVERVIEW

Your reading material is too difficult

Advice

You are probably reading something too hard for you. Look for reading material on a familiar topic or with more vocabulary you already know.

When you spend your time looking up words in a bilingual dictionary, you are translating instead of inferring meaning. It is important to work on building your vocabulary so that you will have more clues from which to infer the total meaning.

If the language you are learning has an established literature, try reading children's books. Not only is the vocabulary easy, but you will be learning what people in the culture learn as children.

If easy reading material is not accessible to you, you can work with a teacher or language associate to produce some. Ask a native speaker to write out for you everyday activities or experiences.

OVERVIEW

Good level of reading material difficulty

Advice

It sounds like you are reading material at about the right level for your current stage of learning.

Guessing from context is a good way to learn vocabulary. As you read, make a list of words you do not understand so that you can study and review them later, but do not stop to look them up unless you get completely lost.

When you do look up the words, try using a dictionary written completely in the target language if one is available. You can also ask a native speaker to explain the meaning of some words.

If you need more reading material, you can work with a teacher or language associate to produce some. You can produce written materials for yourself by transcribing recordings of native speakers or by asking native speakers to write stories and texts.

OVERVIEW

Reading material may be too simple

Advice

Congratulations! You can concentrate on the content of what you are reading without being slowed down by unfamiliar vocabulary. However, you might want to look for some more challenging reading material in order to keep building your vocabulary.

When reading more challenging material, make a list of words you do not understand so that you can study and review them later, but do not stop to look them up unless you get completely lost.

When you do look up words, try using a dictionary written completely in the target language if you are not currently doing so.

OVERVIEW

Unable to follow radio and TV dialog

Advice

You have to do more vocabulary building before TV, films, and radio will provide much comprehensible input for you. On the other hand you can observe gestures, intonation, and other cultural cues.

The more you can find out about the program (who the characters are, what typically goes on, and so forth) the easier it will be to make sense of what you are seeing and hearing. Ask a native speaker to give you an overview ahead of time if possible or have them give you a running summary from time to time during the program.

OVERVIEW

Limited ability to follow radio and TV dialog

Advice

News reports and other factual information will probably be easiest for you, along with programs that follow a predictable script.

Try these tips:

- Listen to an all-day news channel where the same stories are repeated over and over.

If you don't catch on to a story the first time, you will get other chances.

- Listen to the news in a language you already know then listen to it in the target language.
- If there are programs you are familiar with that are dubbed into the target language, you will probably find the dialogue easier to understand than unfamiliar programs.
- Ask a native speaker to give you a summary of what's going on.
- Ask a native speaker to explain to you ahead of time what the program is about or is likely to be about. This will help you to understand more of the program when you see or hear it.

OVERVIEW

Able to follow radio and TV dialog

Advice

Good! You are probably learning lots of vocabulary by filling in the blanks from context. Watching and listening to a variety of media is a good language learning strategy at your present stage.

OVERVIEW

Easily able to follow radio and TV dialog

Advice

Congratulations! You can not only learn a lot of language but also about rules of social interaction and other cultural information through the media. Beware, however, of the fact that some programs may not actually be representative of the way most people in the society typically interact. Check with native speaker friends to confirm your observations.

OVERVIEW

Infrequently using the language with the resource person

Advice

In order to gain real proficiency in speaking and understanding a language, you need to spend lots of time actually processing messages in it. (It's not enough to just learn about the language.) Try using more techniques and activities that are built around using the language for communication. For instance:

- Total Physical Response
- Photo book
- True/false comprehension
- Simple question and answer
- Picture descriptions
- Shared experiences
- Familiar stories

OVERVIEW

Frequently using the language with the resource person

Advice

Good! These kinds of techniques give you lots of practice in actually processing messages in the target language, which is one of the fastest and best ways to build listening and speaking proficiency.

OVERVIEW

Conversations with native speakers

Introduction

In order to acquire a language, you not only need to understand what you hear, but you also need to use the language to express what you want to say. In two-way conversations you negotiate meaning by alternately expressing yourself, checking to see if you are understood, and trying to understand what your conversation partner is saying.

In the beginning it is hard to sustain two-way conversations for more than a minute or so (or even less!) but these brief encounters are essential to developing speaking ability.

As you gain more proficiency in the language and it becomes easier to talk to people, you

can look for even more opportunities to converse with speakers of the language.

Question

Which of the following best describes your ability to speak the language?

- It's hard to say anything I haven't memorized.
- I manage to get my message across.

OVERVIEW

Hard to converse

Introduction

At this stage it is pretty tiring to try to talk to people but it will do a lot to help develop your speaking ability.

Advice

One danger when conversing with people at this stage is that you will soon find yourself trying to say things you do not know how to say and may make up your own way to say them. This is a good communication strategy in that it helps you keep in conversations with people. But be sure you are also getting lots of exposure to the way native speakers would say these things so that your mistakes do not start sounding right to you and become bad habits that will be hard to break.

It may be helpful to make note of things you find yourself needing to say. Later you can refer to these notes and ask someone the right way to say them.

OVERVIEW

Able to converse

Introduction

At this stage, lots of two-way conversation with people is about the best thing you can do to progress in your language learning. Try to find ways to do more of this.

Advice

Put yourself in situations where people are likely to talk to you. Don't wait for them to

come to you.

People are more likely to talk to you if:

- there is some benefit to them as in a business transaction or an exchange of favors

Tip: Instead of doing all your shopping at one place and time, make it into several trips to different shops. You can spend about the same amount of money. It will take more time but that's okay if it's language learning time.

- you have some mutual interest such as a hobby, career, etc.

Tip: Find associations or organizations of people with like interests to your own, such as a choir, soccer team, camera club, etc.

- they are friendly people who just like to talk

Tip: Make friends with talkers and discover their main interests. For example, ask about their grandchildren every day.

OVERVIEW

Exposure to authentic communication situations

Introduction

It is important that you observe and participate in language use in a wide range of communication situations where common functions of language are expressed.

Question

How often do you have chances to observe and listen to native speakers?

- I don't even live in a place where the language is spoken.
- Even though I live where the language is spoken, I still have a hard time observing and listening to native speakers.
- I often observe and listen to native speakers.

OVERVIEW

Limited access to language community

Introduction

It is much more of a challenge to achieve real fluency in a second language if you have little or no access to a community of speakers. This is because you need to observe and participate in a wide range of communication situations in order to develop sociolinguistic and cultural competence.

Advice

You may be able to get as far as Advanced proficiency in such a situation, but if your goal is to reach Superior proficiency you should try to arrange to spend a period of at least several months in a community where the target language is spoken.

OVERVIEW

Authentic communication is essential

Introduction

A chance to observe and participate in a wide range of communication situations will help you to develop sociolinguistic and cultural competence and is probably necessary to reach superior proficiency in a second language. Make the most of this opportunity!

Advice

Here are some ideas for increasing your exposure to native speakers even more:

- Try to arrange to live with a family.
- If it's impractical to live with a family all the time, see if you can arrange for a weekend visit.

OVERVIEW

Possible causes for limited exposure

Question

Something is limiting your exposure to the language. What does it seem to be?

- People don't seem very open to strangers.

- I don't know where to go to observe people.
- Family responsibilities keep me too busy.
- Something inside me resists this sort of contact.

It's important to try to figure out why you are not getting enough exposure to authentic communication and to try to come up with strategies for getting more. If none of the statements above seems to fit your situation, you may find help by investigating other topics from the starting menu.

OVERVIEW

Contact strategies when people don't seem friendly

Advice

Here are some strategies you may be able to use to get to know people who seem reserved.

- See if you can find a "mediating person" (a member of the language community or an accepted outsider) who can introduce you.
- Find out as much as you can about cultural norms which you may be violating without realizing it, thereby offending people. This might include such things as dress, gestures, or being too direct or abrupt.
- Try to be patient and realize you may have to earn trust before you will be accepted. Members of the society may have good reasons for distrusting foreigners.
- If people see you as a foreigner, take advantage of the stereotypical tourist role and ask people to take you on a tour.
- Ask a language associate or friend to do things with you such as taking the kids to the park and going shopping with you.

OVERVIEW

Places to observe native speakers interacting

Advice

Try to find out through observation or by asking a friend about public places and events

where people meet to talk to each other and where you can listen and/or participate. Such places and events will vary with the culture but here are some possibilities:

- Sports
- Festivals or community events
- Clubs or interest groups
- Adult education classes (especially nonacademic activities such as crafts or manual skills)
- Parks
- Choirs or folk dancing groups

Here are some ideas for increasing your exposure to native speakers even more:

- Try to arrange to live with a family.
- If it is impractical to live with a family all the time, see if you can arrange for a weekend visit.
- Spend your summer vacation with speakers of the language at a camp or in a home.

OVERVIEW

Contact strategies for families

Advice

Try to find places or events where the whole family can participate or in which children can be a point of contact.

Try to distribute responsibilities among the family members so that every one has a chance to meet people and participate in the culture.

Look for help with housework or other routine tasks which may free some of your time for interaction with your family and with neighbors.

See also

- Keywords: family

OVERVIEW

Emotional blocks to language learning

Introduction

You may be struggling with learning the target language because of certain emotional blocks that commonly occur during the language learning process.

Question

Which of the following statements describe your experience? Follow the appropriate links for some advice and encouragement.

- My mind goes blank when I have to answer the teacher or talk to someone in the language.
- I'm embarrassed to speak around other expatriates who speak the target language better than I do.
- I don't like to use the target language with a native speaker who I know speaks my language well.
- I hate to make mistakes.
- I hate it when people laugh at my mistakes.
- I feel foolish since I am an adult and have to speak like a child in the target language.
- I'm hesitant to speak for fear that my motives will be misunderstood since I can't express myself well enough in the language.
- I freeze up when the teacher corrects me.
- I feel that my fellow students or my neighbors are overly critical, even hostile.

See also

- Keywords: childlikeness, corrections, criticism, emotions, mistakes, stage fright

OVERVIEW

Mind goes blank

Advice

This an example of a kind of performance anxiety common to language learners.

In class, try rehearsing the answer mentally ahead of time so that you feel better prepared when the teacher calls on you. Try to concentrate on the meaning of what you are saying rather than just reciting it.

You can also rehearse for real-life communication situations. For example, use Reverse Role-play to practice what is being asked of you and different ways of answering or just rehearse mentally before you go to the shop or market.

See also

- Keywords: reverse role-play, stage fright

OVERVIEW

Embarrassment

Advice

This is a common reaction. The easiest solution is to find opportunities to speak with native speakers of the language without other expatriates around. Eventually as your proficiency improves, this should become less of a problem.

Try to cultivate a sense of humor about yourself. Collect your own "funny mistake stories" to tell people, and try to take yourself less seriously.

OVERVIEW

Reluctance to use target language

Introduction

This is not surprising since communication tends to seek the easiest path, which in this case would be to speak your language. Speaking the target language in this situation may seem artificial to you (and in fact, it is), which is why you resist it.

Advice

Here are some ideas:

- Make some friends with people who do not speak your language at all so that the focus is on communication and the target language is the only possibility. Eventually as your proficiency improves you may find it easier to speak the target language with

anyone.

- With bilingual friends, decide you will try to speak only the target language for an hour to begin with. Then gradually build up to a whole day, a week, and so on. This will free you to use the target language.

OVERVIEW

Hate making mistakes

Introduction

Mistakes are inevitable in language learning and in fact can be very valuable if you take advantage of them. If you have a scientific mind, it may help to think of using the language as testing a series of hypotheses about how the language works. When you make a mistake, you have refuted a hypothesis and have a chance to come up with a new one. You are gradually refining your version of the language until it resembles the native speaker's version.

Advice

You can work on accuracy by making drills on any common mistakes you want to correct. Then ask people to correct you if they hear you making those mistakes.

A sense of humor doesn't hurt either! Learn to laugh at the hilarious things you say. You will have good stories to tell for the rest of your life!

See also

- Keywords: mistakes

OVERVIEW

Feeling foolish

Advice

Language learning is a developmental process. Although your frustration is understandable, you have to start with more concrete and easier expressions and work up to abstract and sophisticated ones. Try to accept that this is the way it is and cheer yourself up by going and doing something you know you can do well.

Remember that ridicule and shame have cultural patterns. Examine your expectations and compare to reality within the new culture. Seek out people who use ridicule or shame less often than the cultural norm.

Ask the teacher or language associate for cooperation and positive feedback when you say things correctly.

You might also ask your partner or family to give you positive reinforcement for every "I feel foolish, but...." success story.

OVERVIEW

Dealing with derision

Introduction

Nobody likes to make mistakes or to be laughed at because of them. It is an inevitable part of language learning, however.

Advice

Perhaps you need to try to desensitize yourself and to learn not to take laughter and criticism so hard. This is easier said than done since such reactions usually have a long history. It's easy for your self image and feeling of self worth to be threatened.

Try to do the following:

- Remember that you will be less a cause of amusement to others as you learn the language better.
- Try to laugh along with the others when you say something really funny. You will be telling the story for years to come.
- Focus on your goal: what are your reasons for learning the language?

See also

- Keywords: criticism

OVERVIEW

Fear of being misunderstood

Introduction

It certainly is frustrating when you cannot say exactly what you mean, especially when you feel your intentions have been misunderstood. Fortunately most people give language learners the benefit of the doubt and will not immediately assume that you are being deliberately offensive.

Advice

Try to find a culture friend who can help you repair misunderstandings, apologize when necessary, and avoid future misunderstandings. Recognize that you will be misunderstood sometimes and that even native speakers have misunderstandings.

Try to learn the expressions speakers of the language use to get clarification when they are not sure what is meant. Also learn the nonverbal cues that indicate confusion by the listener.

OVERVIEW

Teacher critical or derisive

Introduction

It is not surprising you feel bad about this. In some cultures this is much more the norm than in others, and students come to expect it.

Advice

Ask yourself if you are being particularly singled out or if the teacher is critical of all the students. If you feel you are being singled out, perhaps you should go talk to the teacher and talk about how you feel. If the teacher acts this way to everybody remind yourself that the corrections are probably not meant to be offensive. The teacher may just be pushing you to do the best you can do.

In some cultures the teacher may be held responsible for your learning, and in a sense you are his or her product. Being a foreigner may particularly bring extra attention. Privately explaining "I learn better (or faster) this way..." may help both you and the teacher.

OVERVIEW

Criticism or hostility

Introduction

Cultures differ in the extent to which open criticism and the underlying intention are expressed. In some cultures you criticize or tease your friends and are aloof and polite to people you do not like. It may be that what seems very rude to you is not intended to be nasty or overly critical.

On the other hand, there may be real hostility that has nothing to do with you personally but is directed at you because of your nationality, religious affiliation, or some other group with which you are associated. This kind of hostility is hard to take but it may help to realize that it is not a rejection of you personally.

Advice

If you are being rejected because of association with a particular group, you may want to make it a personal project to help them change their stereotype by letting them get to know you and your motivations. Also try to find some accepting friends.

You should also ask yourself whether something in your behavior is offensive to your fellow students and is the cause of the hostile reactions. Your fellow students may have different expectations of what constitutes appropriate behavior than you do. For example, sharing answers in class is considered cheating in American culture, and is thus negative, whereas in Russian culture it is seen as cooperation, and thus positive.

Examine how your own behavior and attitudes differ from the other students' behavior, or teacher's expectations. Example: In some cultures, anything of value is written with ink (not ballpoint pen) in a beautiful cursive script (not a computer printout).

Ask yourself, "Are there some external things I could change to conform?" For instance, you might buy notebooks at a local store, rather than using supplies that are more colorful or expensive.

If you are not of the same religion as the majority of people in the target language try to be especially sensitive to religious and cultural values as shown in dress, respect, honorifics. Many cultures do not give students the right to be individuals with their own styles, taste, and so on.

Create a safe place, perhaps one room, where you can relax and be yourself.

OVERVIEW

Mismatch between learning style and learning situation

Advice

You can use the learning style instruments to get a clearer picture of your learning style preference. You may then want to consult *Approaches to language learning based on learning style* for recommendations about approaches to language learning that should fit your style.

Question

What type of instructional program are you following?

- I'm going to language school.
- I'm doing independent study using commercially prepared materials.
- I'm developing my own lessons.

See also

- Keywords: learning style

OVERVIEW

Learning in a classroom setting

Advice

If you feel that your language class does not fit your learning style preferences and you are significantly bothered by this mismatch, you have three choices:

- Change classes. You may want to wait it out until the end of this class period and then look for another class more to your liking. Considerations in doing this are
 - cost
 - whether or not the new class will have significantly different conditions from the old
 - whether the new class will build on what you have learned in the old
 - type of instructional activities
 - whether or not your contract or visa allows you to change, and
 - whether a change would be considered offensive to authorities.
- Put up with the class as it is, but try to find ways to meet some of the conditions you prefer. Some possibilities are to cut back hours in class and add tutor or field trips.

- Stop taking classes altogether and work with a tutor or do your own program. Considerations in doing this are
 - the availability of a tutor or language resource persons
 - the cost of a tutor versus cost of a class
 - the time it will take to prepare your own lessons
 - the extent to which you want to or feel able to organize and manage your own program, and
 - whether or not you would lose privileges, prestige, visa, place of residence, or a legitimate reason for being in the country if you lose university student status.

See also

- Keywords: language schools

OVERVIEW

Independent study

Advice

If you feel that the program you are following does not fit your learning style preferences and you are significantly bothered by this mismatch, you have three choices:

- Change programs. Considerations in doing this are
 - cost
 - whether or not the new program will be significantly different from the old one, and
 - whether the new program will build on what you have learned in the old.
- Put up with the program as it is, but try to find ways to meet some of the conditions you prefer, following some of the tips given or your own ideas.
- Stop using commercial programs altogether and work with a tutor or do your own program. Considerations in doing this are
 - the availability of a tutor or language resource persons
 - the cost of a tutor versus cost of a commercial program

- the time it will take to prepare your own lessons
- the extent to which you want to or feel able to organize and manage your own program
- how much support and accountability are available
- potential cultural conflicts, and
- potential loss of prestige in community.

See also

- Keywords: independent language study

OVERVIEW

Your own language learning program

Advice

How to design a language and culture learning program can help you plan and manage your own language learning program.

OVERVIEW

Lack of encouragement and accountability

Question

What normally encourages you?

- Talking over problems with fellow learners
- Measuring my progress with a standard scale
- Being accountable to someone else
- Meeting specific goals I set for myself

See also

- Keywords: encouragement, loneliness

OVERVIEW

Share with fellow learners

Advice

You can get together with other language learners, either in person or by mail/phone. You don't even have to be learning the same language, but you can still share experiences. Remember the point of the exercise is encouragement—don't let it turn into a pity-party, but try to find solutions to each other's problems.

Ask a colleague, spouse, or children for encouragement. You might even make awards or give prizes to each other for reaching goals. One idea is to put a chart on the wall where you check off new accomplishments. Make language learning a family project.

See also

- Keywords: loneliness, support group

OVERVIEW

Use a standard or scale

Advice

Use the ACTFL guidelines or ILR (FSI) proficiency scales to evaluate your progress regularly. Encourage yourself by seeing what progress you are making.

You can also make your own charts to keep track of new vocabulary you have learned, new structures you have learned to use, new topics you can discuss. Try making a bar graph and putting it on wall, so others can comment on your progress and encourage you.

OVERVIEW

Be accountable for progress

Advice

Arrange to send regular reports to your supervisor or consultant. If you do not have a supervisor, find a teacher or friend in the target language who is interested in your

progress. Set your goals in consultation with this person and agree on a reward for meeting the goals, such as eating out or going on an excursion.

You can even be accountable to somebody back home who is interested in your progress. Ask them to look for helpful articles or ideas and send them regular reports in return.

See also

- Keywords: support group

OVERVIEW

Setting and meeting specific goals

Advice

Whereas some people are encouraged by praise from other people, others encourage themselves by reaching specific, small goals they have set.

It is important to set goals you can actually meet rather than being too ambitious. For example, you may decide to master one difficult sound in the new language or take on certain irregular verb forms.

As you progress, you may decide you want to be able to talk about certain subjects or handle certain situations. Congratulate yourself as you meet each new goal.

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency)

OVERVIEW

Lack of motivation

Question

Do either of the following statements describe you?

- I'm not really convinced of the importance or necessity of learning this language.
- I think learning the language is important, but when I try to do what I'm supposed to do, I end up feeling discouraged instead of encouraged.

See also

- Keywords: motivation

OVERVIEW

Not convinced of importance

Introduction

It is important that you be convinced deep down of the importance of learning the target language, or you will not get to your goal.

Advice

Here are some suggestions of things to do to resolve this problem:

- Make a list of reasons why it is important to learn the language. Be sure to consider the impact of knowing the language on the activities of everyday living and on relationships with people of the community.
- Make a list of reasons why you *do not* really think it is important.

If the second list is longer or more compelling, go talk to your supervisor, or whoever is requiring you to learn the language and ask why they think it is so important, and what the consequences of not learning will be. See if that changes your mind. If not you will probably struggle with this issue throughout your language learning program.

OVERVIEW

Get negative reinforcement

Advice

It would be good to try to figure out exactly how you feel and what triggers those feelings. A good way to do this is to keep a journal in which you write down what you do every day and how you feel about it. Look back over your journal and try to analyze what you feel and why. If you are not good at analysis, maybe someone else can help you.

Try to discover situations in which your motivation is

- increased, and

- decreased.

Try to think of solutions for the factors that decrease your motivation. Some possibilities you can try are

- different techniques or methods
- spending time with different people, and
- getting help in developing and building up skills.

Remember to allow for enough rest and relaxation that you can maintain a generally positive attitude. Consider rest and relaxation a need rather than a want.

See also [Something is blocking the learning process.](#)

See also

- Keywords: journaling

OVERVIEW

Lack of plan

Advice

The Language Learning bookshelf contains extensive advice and tools for developing a plan to meet your needs. See [Making a strategic plan for language learning](#)

OVERVIEW

Common feelings in language learning

Question

What seems to be the problem?

- I don't know what to do.
- I don't feel very motivated although I think I should.
- My mind goes blank when speaking.
- I don't like the way my program is forcing me to learn.

- People are too critical of my mistakes.
- It's embarrassing to make mistakes.
- I feel stupid.
- Nobody knows or cares how I'm doing.
- I'm not making progress fast enough.
- I'm just not learning.

See also

- Keywords: emotions

OVERVIEW

Developmental process

Advice

Language learning is a developmental process. Although your frustration is understandable, you have to start with more concrete and easier expressions and work up to abstract and sophisticated ones. Try to accept that this is the way it is and cheer yourself up by going and doing something you know you can do well.

OVERVIEW

Possible problem areas

Advice

There are a number of reasons why you may be making slower progress than you would like. Explore any of the following that seem to be relevant:

- Not enough meaningful exposure to the language
- Something is blocking the learning process
- Mismatch between learning preferences and actual conditions
- Not enough encouragement and accountability

- Lack of motivation
- Lack of a good plan

Another possibility is that your expectations are too high; language learning is a long and slow process! Check your own rate of progress against what language learning specialists have found to be typical rates of progress.

See also

- Keywords: progress (language learning)

Endnotes

1 (Popup - Popup)

Carol J. Orwig is an SIL International Trainer for language and culture acquisition. She served as the coordinator for language learning training within the Academic training section of Academic Affairs of SIL International (Dallas, TX 1992–1999). Prior to taking this position she did fieldwork in Mexico and Cameroon. She has been with SIL since 1973. She has frequently taught courses in second language acquisition in Dallas, Oregon, England, Cameroon and Mexico. She received an M A in linguistics from the University of Texas at Arlington in 1986.

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