

## Prepare for Language Learning

by Carol J. Orwig

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### Summary

This book gives you information on how to get ready to learn a language. It describes some of the main tasks involved in learning about language, about the language acquisition process and about yourself as a learner. The information in this book can be valuable in preparing you to make the most of the language learning opportunities you have.

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Preparing for language learning

OVERVIEW: Information about language and language learning

Preparing for language learning

Introduction

Even before you start learning a language there are some things you can do to prepare yourself to be a better language learner by studying the task ahead of you and by understanding characteristics of yourself that may affect your language acquisition.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you prepare for language learning:

- Learn about language.

See: Learning about language

- Learn about language acquisition.

See: Learning about language acquisition

- Learn about yourself.

See: Learning about yourself

Learning about language

Introduction

The more you know about language, the better conceptual framework you have for language learning. You won't be as surprised by features in a new language that are different from yours, you may have some ideas of what kinds of characteristics certain language families have. In short, will be better prepared to take on any particular language you may encounter.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn about language:

- Read Principles about language in general.
- Read Three views about the nature of language
- Take an Introduction to Linguistics course.

See also

- Keywords: characteristics of language

Learning about language acquisition

Introduction

The more you understand about the language acquisition process the more actively you will be able to participate in your learning. There is a wealth of books and articles on second language acquisition currently in print. Some of these are mentioned in our bibliography. The language learning bookshelf also contains brief discussions of some of the most important language learning principles.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn about language acquisition:

- Read Principles about language acquisition.
- Read Information about language and language learning.
- Read books or articles about language acquisition.

See: Bibliography of language learning resources for ideas on books to read.

See also

- Keywords: second language acquisition theory

## Learning about yourself

### Introduction

Personal characteristics, including attitudes and learning style, may have a big effect on your language learning. The better you understand yourself, your motivations, anxieties and preferences, the better prepared you will be to make wise choices about language learning materials and activities.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn about yourself:

- Discover your learning style.

See: How to discover your learning style and create a learning style profile

- Check your attitudes.

See: Checking your attitudes

See also

- Keywords: attitudes

## How to discover your learning style and create a learning style profile

### Introduction

The Language Learning bookshelf provides you with a set of learning style instruments to help you discover your style. The computer will keep track of the results of these instruments and will record them in a personalized learning style profile you can refer to later. The bookshelf also contains language learning tips based on the results of the instruments, and suggestions as to approaches to language learning that may fit your style.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do to determine your learning style, using the tools in the Language Learning Bookshelf:

### The Brain Dominance Inventory

- Read the description of the Brain Dominance Inventory.
- Take the Brain Dominance Inventory (PC version) (Mac version).

### The Learning Type Test

- Read the description of the Learning Type Test.
- Take the Learning Type Test (PC version) (Mac version).

### The Sensory Preference Inventory

- Read the description of the Sensory Preference Inventory.
- Take the Sensory Preference Inventory (PC version) (Mac version).

## Personality Type

- Read about Your personality type.
- Decide on your Myers-Briggs Type and record it using Understanding Your Personality

Type (PC version) (Mac version)

## Learning Style Profile

- Click on the Learning style profile (PC version) (Mac version) to review the results of the instruments.

See also

- OVERVIEW: Implications of your learning style for language learning
- OVERVIEW: Four approaches to language learning based on learning style
- Keywords: learning style

Checking your attitudes

Introduction

Your attitudes toward yourself as a language learner, the language you are learning and the way you are learning, and the people who speak the language you are learning can have important effects on your language learning success. Being aware of your own attitudes gives you the opportunity to cultivate helpful ones.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you check your attitudes:

- Take the Language Learning Attitude questionnaire. (PC version) (Mac version)
- Read Principles about learner attitudes and motivation.

See also

- Keywords: attitudes

Information about language and language learning

OVERVIEW

Information about language and language learning

Introduction

In this module group

Here are the modules on information about language and language learning:

- OVERVIEW: Three views about the nature of language
- What is a language learning approach?
- What is a theory of language learning?
- What is a process-oriented language learning theory?
- What is a condition-oriented language learning theory?
- What is a language learning method?
- What is a language learning technique?

Three views about the nature of language

OVERVIEW

Three views about the nature of language

Introduction

There are many possible theoretical positions about the nature of language. Here are three different views which explicitly or implicitly are reflected in current approaches to language learning.

In this module group

Here are the modules on three views about the nature of language:

- The structural view of language
- The communicative view of language
- The interactional view of language

The structural view of language

Introduction

The structural view of language is that language is a system of structurally related elements for the transmission of meaning. These elements are usually described as

- phonological units (phonemes)
- grammatical units (phrases, clauses, sentences)
- grammatical operations (adding, shifting, joining or transforming elements)
- lexical items (function words and structure words)

Areas of research drawn on

Here are some of the areas of research in this view of language:

- linguistic analysis
- textual discourse analysis

Target of language learning

The target of language learning, in the structural view, is the mastery of elements of this system.

Methods based on this view

Some of the language learning methods based on this view of language are:

- the Audiolingual method
- Total Physical Response
- the Silent Way

Source

Adapted from Richards and Rodgers 1986

The communicative view of language

Introduction

The communicative, or functional view of language is the view that language is a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning. The semantic and communicative dimensions of language are more emphasized than the grammatical characteristics, although these are also included.

Areas of research drawn on

Here are some of the areas of research in this view of language:

- sociolinguistics
- pragmatics
- semantics

Target of language learning

The target of language learning is to learn to express communication functions and categories of meaning

Approaches and methods based on this view

Some of the language learning approaches and methods based on this view of language are:

- communicative approaches
- functional-notional syllabuses
- The Natural Approach

Source

Adapted from Richards and Rodgers 1986

The interactional view of language

Introduction

The interactional view of language sees language primarily as the means for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and for performing social transactions between individuals.

Areas of research drawn on

Here are some of the areas of research in this view of language:

- interactional analysis
- conversational analysis
- ethnomethodology

### Target of language learning

The target of language learning in the interactional view is learning to initiate and maintain conversations with other people.

Approaches and methods based on this view

Some of the language learning approaches and methods based on this view of language are:

- Strategic interaction
- communicative approaches

Source

Adapted from Richards and Rodgers 1986

What is a language learning approach?

Definition

A language learning approach consists of the following three elements:

- views about the nature of language
- beliefs about language learning, and
- ideas about how the above should be applied practically to language learning and teaching.

Examples

Richard and Rogers (1986) cite the following examples of approaches:

- The Oral Approach
- The Structural Approach
- The Natural Approach
- The Communicative Approach

See: A brief survey of approaches and methods for more on each of these approaches.

Sources

Brown 1994, p. 159, Richards and Rogers, 1986

What is a theory of language learning?

Definition

A theory of language learning is an account of the psycholinguistic and cognitive processes involved in learning a language and of the conditions that need to be met in order for these processes to take place.

Kinds

Here are some kinds of theories of language learning:

- Process-oriented theories, and
- Condition-oriented theories

What is a process-oriented language learning theory?

Definition

A process-oriented language learning theory is a theory built on describing learning processes, such as the following:

- habit-formation
- induction
- inferencing
- hypothesis-testing
- generalization

What is a condition-oriented language learning theory?

Definition

Condition-oriented language learning theories emphasize the human and physical context in which language learning takes place.

## Examples

Charles Curran's Counseling- learning theory focuses primarily on the conditions necessary for learning, as does the theory behind Gattegno's Silent Way. (both described in Stevick, 1980 and Stevick, 1990)

What is a language learning method?

Definition

Examples

What is a language learning technique?

Definition

A language-learning technique is an explicit procedure or strategem used to accomplish a particular learning objective or set of objectives.

Examples

See: Techniques for self-directed language learners for descriptions of a variety of specific techniques.

Managing Your Language Learning Program

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[Keywords: goals (proficiency), managing language learning]

Summary

This book gives extensive information on how to manage your own language learning program. It advises you on how to set goals, to make plans, to monitor the learning process, to evaluate progress, and to identify and solve language learning problems. The information in this book gives you detailed information that can help you be a self-directed language learner.

Contents

How to manage your language learning program

OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting proficiency goals

OVERVIEW: Information to help you make a strategic plan

OVERVIEW: Information to help you check your progress

How to manage your language learning program

Introduction

Most people do not give much thought to the management of a personal language learning program. In traditional language school situations the language learner lets the curriculum designer and teacher set goals, plan, and evaluate the program.

By learning to manage your own program, you can

- take charge of your own learning
- make sure your program will meet your goals
- increase your motivation, and
- increase the likelihood of continuing to learn after any formal study is over.

Steps

Follow these steps to manage your language learning program:

1. Set your language learning goals.

See: How to set your language learning goals

2. Make a strategic language learning plan.

See: Making a strategic plan for language learning

3. Monitor the language learning process as you implement your plan.

See: Monitoring the language learning process

4. Check your progress.

See: Checking your progress

5. Identify and solve problems.

See: How to identify and solve your language learning problems

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning program, managing language learning, motivation

How to set your language learning goals

Introduction

Steps

Follow these steps to set your language learning goals:

1. Make a detailed list of the situations and activities where you will use the language.

Tip: If you are going overseas to work with an organization, ask specific questions about what you will do. You might be in a situation in which you will need to use more than one language.

In that case, you will need to go through each step for each language.

2. List the basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading or writing) you need to develop to handle situations and activities.

Tip: In most cases you want to develop all four skills, but in special circumstances you might concentrate only on reading or listening comprehension. If you only need to read articles or books in your new language, then you can concentrate only on the written language form. If you are going to live in a place where your new language is spoken, you will need listening and speaking skills in order to communicate. If the language is written and the population is literate, reading and writing skills will also be important.

3. Decide on a proficiency goal for each basic skill you need to develop.

See: Guidelines for setting proficiency goals for suggestions on the proficiency level that will meet your needs.

See also

When you have set your goals, you will be ready to make a plan for reaching them. See Step 2:

- How to manage your language learning program
- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language skills (4 basic)

Making a strategic plan for language learning

Introduction

Now that you know where you are headed (see How to set your language learning goals), how do you get there?

For most adults, the fastest way to achieve real fluency is exposure to the language in a combination of both structured and unstructured settings. Graded material, a structured setting, and the availability of a teacher or Language Associate to provide comprehensible input and correction can help novice learners get off to a good start.

As learning progresses, however, informal language exposure becomes more and more valuable, and formal lessons become relatively less important, but a systematic exploration of topics and cultural themes can be helpful at any stage.

This module will lead you through a series of steps to make a strategic plan that includes both structured and informal components to help you achieve your language learning goals.

Steps

Follow these steps to make a strategic language learning plan:

1. Size up the situation.

See: How to analyze the situation

2. Choose an approach to language acquisition that you think will work for you.

See: Choosing a language learning approach

Structured component

3. Decide on a strategy for structured language learning.

See: Deciding on a strategy for structured language learning

4. If you decide you want to create your own language learning program, then design it.

See: How to design a language and culture learning program

Informal component

5. Decide on strategies for informal practice.

See: Deciding on strategies for informal language practice

See also

When you have made your strategic plan, you are ready to implement your plan. See step 3:

- How to manage your language learning program
- Keywords: formal language learning, goals (proficiency), informal language learning, language learning plan, objectives (instructional)

How to analyze the situation

Introduction

In order to make a really effective strategic language learning plan you need to find out some information about the learners, the resources, the time frame, and the learning situation.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you analyze the situation:

- Review what you learned about your learning style and personality factors.

See: How to discover your learning style

- Determine how much time is available to devote to learning the language.
- Determine what other constraints there are on the learning situation.

Choosing a language learning approach

Introduction

People have differing views about the language acquisition process and prefer to go about it in different ways. The approach you take to language learning depends on your beliefs about language learning, your learning style and personality, and on the program you find most congenial.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you choose a language learning approach:

- Read as much as you can about second language acquisition and the kinds of activities and conditions that favor it.

See: Language Learning Principles

- Decide what your own beliefs are about language learning.

See: Language learning beliefs questionnaire (PC version) (Mac version)

- If you haven't already done so, investigate your learning style and its implications for language learning.

See: How to discover your learning style and create a learning style profile

- Familiarize yourself with several approaches to language and culture learning

See: Ways to approach language learning

- Choose one of these approaches or some other approach to language learning that fits your beliefs and learning style.

See also



- Keywords: Language Learning Beliefs Questionnaire, approaches to language learning, objectives (instructional), second language acquisition theory

Deciding on a strategy for structured language learning

Introduction

Most people find that they benefit from some structure in their language learning. There are different ways to structure the learning and different options for kinds of programs. Remember that informal practice is also extremely important to language acquisition and complements a structured study program

Steps

Follow these steps to decide on a strategy for structured language learning:

1. Read descriptions of the different options.

See: Structured language study options

2. Make a list of resources available for the study of the target language; for instance, language schools, correspondence courses, books, multimedia materials, computer programs.

3. Decide which of the options available to you best fits the approach you have decided to follow, your situation and interests.

4. If you decide to go to language school, then choose what language school to attend.

See: Deciding on a language school

5. If you decide to do independent study with commercially available materials, then choose the materials to use.

See: Choosing language materials for independent study

6. If you decide to hire a tutor, then make yourself a set of guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor.

See: Drawing up guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor

7. If you choose a do-it-yourself strategy, then design your program.

See: How to design a language and culture learning program

See also

- Keywords: formal language learning

Deciding on a language school

Introduction

Once you've decide to go to language school, how do you decide which one to attend? The choice can depend on a number of factors, which you must weigh carefully against each other.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you decide on a language school:

- Find out which schools your organization recommends or requires.
- Weigh the cost of each school.
- Find out about the instructional approach used in each school and see which one fits your preferences.

- Look at the daily timetable of each school and see if it fits your family's needs.

- Find out what the teacher-student ratio is.

• Investigate what kinds of resources are available at the school: language labs, media resources, organized activities or outings.

See also

- Keywords: language schools

Choosing language materials for independent study

Introduction

Independent study materials vary from terrible to excellent. It is important to find out as much as you can about

- when materials were developed and by whom
- the methodology they use, and
- the scope of the material.

#### Guidelines

- Do not use courses based exclusively on grammatical explanations, vocabulary and translation to and from English or your own language.

Reason: They give you no situational context and very little real comprehensible input.

- If you have written materials, and no audio component, you will be unable to develop listening skills and have no model for correct pronunciation.

Tip: Using a book by itself may help if you are only interested in developing reading (and perhaps writing) skills.

- Use a phrase book and cassette tapes in combination with other materials. On their own, they are useful only if your ultimate goal is High Novice; enough to get around in a very limited way as a tourist. To go further you have to recognize the meaningful parts of the utterances and recombine them, rather than just memorizing phrases and sentences as wholes.

- Provide an opportunity to work on comprehension and speaking skills.

Example: Some cassette and book courses (e.g. The Learnables, by Harris Winitz) are designed specifically to give you comprehension skills in a new language.

- Check the dates of full-blown audio-lingual courses.

Tip: Some commercial courses are quite dated, having been developed about 20 years ago. Older courses can be useful, but tend to rely on a lot of pattern practice and mimicry.

- Provide a situational context.

Example: Some newer computer software programs claim to enable you to get to High Novice level in just a few weeks of full-time study. They are multimedia and interactive, and combine audio, video, and computer technology to give you immediate feedback and situational context. They tend to be quite expensive, but you might be able to find a copy at a university or at a public library.

- Find materials interesting enough to hold your attention and to keep you motivated to use it long enough to make real progress.

Example: Some courses based on a continuing story line were developed by the British Broadcasting Company and by Public Broadcasting Stations in the United States. These programs, available on a series of videos, are both entertaining and pedagogically sound.

See also

- Keywords: independent language study

#### Drawing up guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor

##### Introduction

Before you go out to hire a tutor, it is a good idea to have some guidelines in place for yourself, so that you know what kind of tutor you want are are looking for.

##### Steps

Follow these steps to draw up guidelines for hiring and working with a tutor:

1. Decide whether it is advisable to hire a man or a woman

Note: Depending on the cultural framework you are learning in, it might be advisable to hire a tutor of the same sex as you.

2. Decide how much time per week you would like to work with the tutor.

3. Decide how much money you are willing to pay per hour or session.
4. Decide whether you want the tutor to follow a particular book or course you have chosen or whether you want the tutor to make up the course of study for you.
5. Decide on the period of time to propose to the tutor for working together.

Note: It is best not to commit yourself to a long contract with a tutor until you see how it well you can work together.

See also

- Keywords: tutors (language)

Deciding on strategies for informal language practice

Introduction

Very few of us spend the entire day in a language school program. But if you are living in a setting where the language you want to learn is being spoken you can take advantage of opportunities to practice informally. In fact, trying to use what you know in real conversation situations is an important part of developing true proficiency in a second language.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you decide on strategies for informal language practice:

- Look for places where people congregate and talk where you could go and listen or get into a conversation.
- Look for shops or restaurants where you could go and buy something inexpensive, and have a chance to interact with the waiter or salesperson.
- Look for clubs, interest groups, associations, choirs, etc. that you could join.
- Look for speakers of the language you want to learn who want to learn your language and would agree to conversation practice exchange.
- Look for adult education courses in some subject you are interested in or for a person who would be willing to teach you some skill.
- Look for someone interested in learning some skill you have.
- Look for media resources or public libraries (if these exist for the language you are learning) where you can borrow or rent videos and books.

See also

- Keywords: informal language learning

How to design a language and culture learning program

Introduction

Would you know how to go about designing a program for yourself or another person to learn a second language and culture? This set of modules contains suggestions on what to do.

Prerequisites

Before you design a language and culture learning program you need to know about the audience for whom you are designing the program and other factors about the learning situation .

See: How to analyze the situation

Steps

Follow these steps to design a language and culture learning program:

1. Set instructional objectives.  
See: Setting instructional objectives
2. Decide what kind of language learning syllabus to develop.  
See: Choosing what kind of language learning syllabus to design
3. Design a language learning syllabus  
See: How to design a language learning syllabus
4. Develop a language learning program, based on your syllabus

See: How to develop a language learning program based on your syllabus

5. Make unit plans

See: How to make a Unit Plan

6. Make daily lesson plans.

See: How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan

7. Prepare your own language learning materials, if needed.

See: How to prepare your own language learning materials

See also

- Keywords: language and culture learning program

Setting instructional objectives

Introduction

You cannot design language learning lessons for yourself until you know what your instructional objectives are.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you set instructional objectives:

- Review your long-term goals.

See: How to set your language learning goals

- Determine your current language proficiency.

See: Testing your language proficiency

• Review the instructional objectives listed in *Developing Oral Communication Skills and Guidelines for a Language and Culture Learning Program* for suggestions as to objectives appropriate for each Stage of learning in developing both linguistic and pragmatic competence in the four basic language skills.

- Make a list of instructional objectives you want to include in your program.
- If you are having trouble deciding on instructional objectives, do a Needs Analysis.

See: How to do a Needs Analysis

See also

- Keywords: objectives (instructional)

How to do a Needs Analysis

Introduction

Suppose you are sitting down to write objectives for yourself. How do you know where to start? How do you get more specific? You cannot work on everything at the same time. What should your priorities be?

One way to work out your priorities is to do a needs analysis for yourself, in which you analyze your own language learning needs.

Warning

You may find some items with high ratings on your list that are inappropriate for your current stage of learning. For example, it may be important and urgent to you to be able to persuade someone to adopt a certain course of action, but this is not an appropriate goal to include in a lesson plan for a beginner.

Worksheet

There is a worksheet available to help you do a needs analysis: (PC version) (Mac version)

Steps

Follow these steps to do a Needs Analysis:

1. Think of situations in which you want or need to use the language:
  - at home
  - in work situations

- for pleasure
  - for socializing
  - in learning situations
2. For each situation, list specific things you need to do using the language.
  3. Rank each need on your list from one to five according to three criteria:
    - The frequency with which the need arises
    - The urgency of the need
    - Its importance to you personally
  4. Add the three ratings to get a total.
- Result: The items with the highest totals represent what you most want to include in your learning program.

#### Sources

This method is adapted from Dickenson, 1987.

#### Choosing what kind of language learning syllabus to design

##### Introduction

You need to have an idea of the overall plan of your language learning program before you start to develop it. This overall plan is called a language learning syllabus.

##### Prerequisites

Before you decide on a syllabus type you need to have set your language learning goals. It also helps to have discovered your learning style.

##### Steps

Follow these steps to choose what kind of language learning syllabus to design:

1. Read about the different types of language learning syllabuses you could choose from.
2. Consider which kind of syllabus best fits your learning style and personality.
3. Consider which type of syllabus best fits your purposes for learning the language.
4. Weighing all these factors, decide on the kind of syllabus to develop for your language learning program.

#### How to design a language learning syllabus

##### Introduction

A language learning syllabus consists of a list of the learning objectives for your language learning program and the sequence in which you intend for them to be learned. Writing a syllabus for yourself helps

##### Prerequisites

Before you develop a language learning syllabus you need to choose which kind of syllabus you want to develop

##### Alternatives

Here are alternative ways to design a language learning syllabus:

- A. Design a structural-lexical syllabus  
See: How to design a structural-lexical syllabus
- B. Design a functional-notional syllabus  
See: How to design a functional-notional syllabus
- C. Design a situational-topical syllabus  
See: How to develop a situational-topical syllabus
- D. Design a mixed syllabus  
See: How to develop a multi-focus syllabus

#### How to design a structural-lexical syllabus

##### Introduction

A structural-lexical syllabus is one where the principle objective is for the learners to acquire the grammatical structures and vocabulary of the language they are learning.

#### Benefits

The benefits of a structural-lexical syllabus are as follows:

- The learner moves from simpler to more complex structures and may grasp the grammatical system more easily
- If learners are also doing grammatical analysis, it may fit in well with what they are discovering about the language.

#### Warning

The potential disadvantage of the structural-lexical syllabus is that it does not address the immediate communication needs of the learner who is learning a language within the context of a community where the language is spoken. In fact, the sociolinguistic aspects of communicative competence are not in focus at all in a strictly structural-lexical syllabus. It is therefore more useful in a context where the language learner does not have immediately communication needs.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to design a structural-lexical syllabus:

1. Decide on a set of structures to be learned and arrange them in increasing complexity, from simple clauses to complex sentences and discourses.

See: Chapter 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for a suggestion of a progression of structures and activities that can be used to learn them.

2. Decide on categories of vocabulary to be learned

See: Chapter 4.1 of *Kick-starting your language learning* for suggestions on categories of vocabulary to include in your language learning.

Note: If you are designing a program to learn a language you do not know, obviously you won't know the specific vocabulary words to include here. You will have to elicit or discover them as you do your lessons.

3. Sequence the vocabulary categories, putting what you think will be the more commonly used and more concrete vocabulary earlier, and the more abstract and less-commonly-used later.

4. Fit the sets of structures and vocabulary together into sets of learning objectives, on which to base the units of your syllabus.

#### How to design a functional-notional syllabus

##### Introduction

A functional-notional syllabus is based on learning to recognize and express the communicative functions of language and the concepts and ideas it expresses. In other words, this kind of syllabus is based more on the purposes for which language is used and on the meanings the speaker wanted to express than on the forms used to express them.

##### Benefits

The benefits of a functional-notional syllabus are as follows:

- The learners learn how to use language to express authentic communicative purposes.
- Learners may be motivated by the opportunity to use language to express their own purposes, ideas and emotions.

##### Warning

Here are some potential disadvantages of the functional-notional syllabus:

- functions and notions are quite abstract and some learners may have difficulties thinking of communicative functions outside a specific context.

- different kinds of structures are often used to express the same communicative function, so that it is difficult to follow a progression from simpler to more complex structures.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to design a functional-notional syllabus:

1. Make a list of communication functions you want to include in your syllabus.

See: Common Purposes or Functions of Language for suggestions of communicative functions to use.

See also: Guidelines for a Language and Culture Learning Program for suggestions as to what functions might be appropriate for different stages of learning, and Chapter 4.3 of Kickstarting Your Language Learning for Thomson's list of communication functions.

2. Make a list of the semantic notions you want to include in your syllabus.

Note: Since notions deal with meaning, and not the specific way that meaning is realized in a given language, it is possible to make a list of general notions that should hold for any language. Specific notions, however, will differ from language to language, because they are based on the cultural framework and the kinds of distinctions people in each culture need to make.

3. Group the functions and notions together into sets of objectives that will form the basis for your units.

#### How to develop a situational-topical syllabus

##### Introduction

A situational-topical syllabus is based on the communication situations you need to operate in and the topics you need to discuss. It is similar to a functional-notional syllabus in that it will usually contain communication functions and notions, but in this syllabus the choice of functions and notions depends on the situational or topical context.

##### Benefits

The benefits of a situational-topical context are as follows:

- It provides for concrete contexts within which to learn notions, functions, and structures, thus making it easier for most learners to envisage
- It may motivate learners to see that they are learning to meet their most pressing everyday communication needs.

##### Warning

The potential disadvantage of the situational-topical syllabus is that functions and notions may be learned in the context of only one situation, whereas they may be expressed in a variety of situations. Also, although some situations have a predictable script, unforeseen things can happen in any situation, requiring a change of script or topic.

##### Steps

Follow these steps to develop a situational-topical syllabus:

1. Make a list of the communication situations you want to be able to operate in, and order them from
2. Make a list of topics you want to be able to discuss, and the associated categories of vocabulary.

Note: If you are designing a program to learn a language you do not know, obviously you won't know the specific vocabulary words to include here. You will have to elicit or discover them as you do your lessons.

#### How to develop a multi-focus syllabus

##### Introduction

A multi-focus syllabus is one which includes a variety of elements, specifically structures, functions and notions, situations and topics.

## Benefits

The benefits of a multi-focus syllabus are as follows:

- Some of the limitations of the other types of syllabuses are avoided, because there are a variety of elements addressed.
- It can allow for a two-pronged approach, in which one prong emphasizes working systematically on structures and vocabulary to build up general linguistic knowledge, and the other prong concentrates on meeting immediate communicative needs and on building up sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence.

## Warning

Here are some potential disadvantages of the multi-focus syllabus:

- Since there are more elements to weave together into a syllabus, it might take more planning time and "book-keeping".
- It might be harder to sequence than a structural-lexical syllabus.

## Steps

Follow these steps to develop a multi-focus syllabus:

1. Make a list of structures to be learned and arrange them in increasing complexity, from simple clauses to complex sentences and discourses.

See: Chapter 4.2 of Kick-starting your language learning for a suggestion of a progression of structures and activities that can be used to learn them.

2. Make a list of categories of vocabulary to be learned

See: Chapter 4.1 of Kick-starting your language learning for suggestions on categories of vocabulary to include in your language learning.

Note: If you are designing a program to learn a language you do not know, obviously you won't know the specific vocabulary words to include here. You will have to elicit or discover them as you do your lessons.

3. Make a list of communication functions you want to include in your syllabus.

See: Common Purposes or Functions of Language for suggestions of communicative functions to use.

See also: Guidelines for a Language and Culture Learning Program for suggestions as to what functions might be appropriate for different stages of learning, and Chapter 4.3 of Kick-starting Your Language Learning for Thomson's list of communication functions.

4. Make a list of the communication situations you want to be able to operate in, and order them from

5. Make a list of topics you want to be able to discuss, and the associated categories of vocabulary.

6. Decide how you will combine the various elements of your syllabus into units.

How to develop a language learning program based on your syllabus

## Introduction

Once you have designed a syllabus for your language learning program you can develop it by writing specific lesson plans aimed at achieving your instructional objectives. You can organize your daily lesson plans into Units of lessons that seem to fit together well. Your lesson plans will include not only your objectives, but also the specific techniques, activities and materials you will use to achieve your language learning objectives.

## Prerequisites

Before you can develop the details of your language learning program you need to have a syllabus.

See: How to design a language learning syllabus.



## Steps

Follow these steps to develop a language learning program based on your syllabus:

1. Make Unit plans based on the sets of objectives you have grouped together

See: How to make a Unit Plan

2. Check that the units are arranged in a sequence from less complex to more complex and from more common to less common.

3. Make daily language learning plans for each unit

See: How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan

How to make a Unit Plan

## Introduction

Once you have set instructional objectives for yourself and decided on a criterion for organizing our program into units (see How to design a language and culture learning program), the next step is to make unit plans. Your plans should include the following elements:

- Objectives
- Techniques and Activities
- Resources
- A projected time frame
- An evaluation criterion

## Steps

Follow these steps to make a unit plan

1. Review the set of objectives you have decided to base your unit on.

2. Decide on the techniques and activities you will use to meet these objectives.

See: Techniques for self-directed language learners

3. List any resources you will need to carry out the techniques and activities.

4. Decide how long it will take to do all the techniques and activities.

5. Decide how you will determine whether or not you have met your objectives.

See also

When you have made a Unit plan, you will want to divide it up into daily plans.

- How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan
- Keywords: unit plans (language learning program)

How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan

## Introduction

The Daily Language Lesson Plan is normally part of a set of lessons making up a Unit. It therefore has all the same basic parts as a Unit Plan, but just enough for one day.

## Worksheet

There is a worksheet available to use when you make daily lesson plans (PC version) (Mac version).

## Prerequisites

You need to have identified some learning objectives before you can make your lesson plan

## Guidelines

- Be as specific as possible and write objectives in such a way that you will know whether or not you have achieved them.

Example: If your objective is learn common vocabulary, it is too vague. Be able to name at least 20 common animals is a specific objective because you can test yourself by naming 20 animals.

- Write out what you intend to do during the lesson in as much detail as possible at first. The tendency is to be too general, which leaves you fumbling around, trying to decide what to do when you implement the plan.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to make a Daily Language Learning Plan:

1. List the particular objectives you want to achieve in this lesson.
2. List one or more activities or techniques which will help you meet each objective.

See: Techniques for self-directed language learners

3. List the materials you need to do each technique.
4. Allot a certain amount of time to each activity.
5. List evaluation criteria for the lesson

See also

- Keywords: daily plans (language learning program)

How to prepare your own language learning materials

#### Introduction

If you are designing your own program or supplementing a program you may want to prepare some language learning materials to use with a language helper. Here are some suggestions on what you can do.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do to prepare your own language learning materials:

- Make a picture book plus recordings

See: How to Make a Picture Book Plus Recordings

- Make a photo book for language learning

See: How to make a photo book for language learning

- Make a language learning kit

See: How to make a language learning kit

How to Make a Picture Book Plus Recordings

#### Introduction

This module describes how to make your own Picture Book Plus Recordings if one is not available in the language you are learning.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you make a Picture Book Plus Recordings:

- Make your drawings as simple as possible and focus on the chosen topic. Make certain the drawings are suitable (and not offensive) to the culture.
- Use the drawings initially to learn single words, later returning to the same drawings for sentences, finally using the same drawings for collections of sentences that make up a story. Draw your pictures so as to include sentence types listed in Brewster and Brewster 1976:322-349, or mentioned by Thomson in Chap 4.2 of Kick-starting your language learning.
- Use lots of repetition and review a new word at least five or six times in the next drawings.
- Reintroduce old vocabulary throughout the book.
- Record each session and review it several times before moving on to new material.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to make a Picture Book Plus Recordings:

Before your session

1. Prepare your drawings.

During your session

2. Demonstrate the technique to the language associate (LA) using your common language.
3. Allow the LA time to look at the drawings for a while. Then record the LA's description of the drawings.

After your session

4. Listen to each tape two or three times while looking at the pictures before going on to the next one.

See also

- Keywords: Picture Book Plus Recordings technique, audio recordings, comprehension, pictures and picture books, resources, vocabulary

Example: Make a (Market Scene) Picture Book Plus Recordings

Steps

Follow these steps to make a market scene picture book plus recordings:

1. You prepare drawings of a market scene, including various activities of vendors hawking wares, selecting produce, bargaining for a price, paying for the produce, wrapping the produce to take home.
2. You use the drawing of a vendor hawking wares to demonstrate to the LA what you want him or her to do.
3. You let the LA study the drawings, and then you record the LA's description of the actions taking place in the drawings, the vendors hawking wares, selecting produce, bargaining for a price, paying for the produce, wrapping the produce to take home.
4. You listen to the tape several times and look at the drawings as you hear the LA describe the market scene happenings.

How to make a photo book for language learning

Introduction

Photos can be a great help in language learning at various stages of learning. They are particularly helpful in the initial stage at providing a visual context to associate with the new words the learner is hearing and trying to remember.

You can set up a photo book to use with various language learning techniques, particularly the Look and Listen techniques. Photo books can be organized in various ways, depending on how you want to use them.

Guidelines

- Use a non-permanent means of sticking the photo into the book, so that you can rearrange the photos for various purposes.
- Think about the kinds of vocabulary, topics and/or structures you want to learn about and include them when taking your pictures or looking for pictures.

Steps

Follow these steps to make a photo book for language learning:

1. Decide what you want to use your photo book to learn about
2. Take the photos, or cut out pictures from magazines, advertisements, or other picture sources.
3. Arrange the photos in a way that fits the activity you want to do.

See also

Use of a book of photos in initial comprehension

How to make a language learning kit

Introduction

A language learning kit is a collection of simple props you can use in initial language learning sessions, particularly to aid in comprehension. You can make your kit as you go along, depending on the kinds of vocabulary and topics you want to learn.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to make a language learning kit:

1. Make a list of the topics you want to learn about in the coming weeks.
2. For each topic, list the props you could make to help you learn about the topics.
3. Collect materials such as cardboard, magazines with pictures, construction paper, glue, scissors.
4. Make the props you think you will need.

Example: How to make a language learning kit

#### Steps

Follow these steps to make a language learning kit:

1. You list the following topics you want to learn about in the coming weeks: days of the week, telling time, months of the year, basic colors, numbers from 1-100.
2. You list the following props you could make to help you learn about the topics: a calendar, a set of cards of different colors, an abacus.
3. You collect cardboard, brads, markers, construction paper, glue, scissors and a child's abacus.
4. You make a clock face, a calendar for this year (with the month names and names for days of the week missing), a set of small cards of different colors.

Monitoring the language learning process

#### Introduction

When you monitor the language learning process you are both learner and observer of your own learning. Paying attention to what you are doing enables you to see if your learning is effective and if you are progressing toward your goals.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you monitor the language learning process:

- Keep a language learning journal.

See: Keeping a daily language learning journal

- See how the language learning techniques and activities in your program relate to your objectives.
- Use the Guidelines for a language and culture learning program to monitor your learning.

See: Using Guidelines for a Language-Culture learning program to monitor learning

See also

As you implement your plan and monitor your learning, you may eventually wish to check your progress. See step 4:

- How to manage your language learning program
- Keywords: progress (language learning)

Keeping a daily language learning journal

#### Introduction

One of the most valuable things you can do in your language learning program is to keep a journal. Some of you have never kept a journal and do not want to start now. It is up to you, but why not give it a try?

#### Benefits

Here are some benefits of keeping a journal:

- It serves as a record of your first impressions of the country and culture. As you go around the community you will be seeing it with fresh eyes. Later on, everything will become familiar and you will not even notice some things. It is both interesting and valuable to record what you saw and felt when you were just becoming acquainted with the language and culture.
- You keep track of what you do every day as you use the language in both structured and unstructured settings. This is helpful when you evaluate your program and see what changes you should make, if any.
- You record how you feel about what you do every day. The whole area of feelings is very important to language learning success. You might find it helpful to check your attitudes by taking the Attitudes questionnaire. Writing your negative emotions can help you determine what is causing them and can help you resolve the problems. Writing positive emotions can encourage you and keep you going.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you keep a daily language learning journal:

- If you are using a notebook, number the pages and date every entry.
- If you are using a word processing program on your computer, set up the document so that you number and date every entry.
- In your journal record what you do every day, both in formal and informal settings. Put in as much detail as you can.
- Write how you feel about what is happening, especially noting particularly positive or negative emotions.

See also

- Keywords: attitudes, journaling, progress (language learning)

Using Guidelines for a Language-Culture learning program to monitor learning

#### Introduction

The Guidelines for a language and culture learning program list objectives for each area of communicative competence. They also list strategies, techniques and activities you can use to help meet those objectives. The Guidelines are particularly aimed at people who have to design their own lessons.

You can also use the Guidelines to monitor how your daily activities and lessons contribute toward meeting your objectives.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use Guidelines for a Language and Culture learning program to monitor learning:

- Write down the techniques and activities you are using in your language learning program (either in language school classes or independent learning).
- For each technique or activity, write down the objective(s) you think it is meant to help you achieve.
- Look at the Guidelines for the stage of learning you think you are currently in and list the objectives you think are important, but which do not seem to be covered by your current program.

Tip: Most language school programs will expose you to the basic sounds, grammatical structures and vocabulary of the language. They may be short on chances to use language in natural settings. For this reason the section of the Guidelines on Functions may be particularly helpful to you.

- Write down techniques or activities you could use to meet the objectives you have listed.

See also

- Keywords: communicative competence, culture learning, guidelines, objectives (instructional), progress (language learning)

Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you check your progress:

- Monitor the objectives and content covered in formal lessons, and rate how well you met the objectives.

Tip: You can use the Self-Assessment Questionnaire to help. (PC version) (Mac version)

- Familiarize yourself with the ACTFL Proficiency guidelines. Use them to make a global evaluation of your proficiency in any of the language skills at a given time.
- Assess your current proficiency level in each of the four basic language skills at regular intervals. Use Checklists based on the Proficiency Guidelines.
- Assess your current proficiency level by setting up tests for yourself, based on how well you can perform certain language tasks.

See: Testing your language proficiency

- Record your proficiency in each skill and plot your progress across time.

Worksheets

There is a worksheet available to help you assess how well you are meeting the objectives in your formal lessons. The worksheet includes the following things for you to do:

- Keep track of the objectives for each lesson
- Rate yourself on how well you think you have met the objectives
- Judge your weak points
- Discuss your assessment of yourself with a fellow learner, teacher, or consultant

Click on the Self-Assessment Questionnaire button above to see the worksheet now.

See also

To evaluate your rate of progress, see:

- OVERVIEW: Project rate of language learning progress
- Keywords: evaluating proficiency, progress (language learning), self-assessment,

worksheets

Testing your language proficiency

Introduction

You can set up tests for yourself to help you gauge your language proficiency more realistically. You can also ask a consultant or fellow-learner to set up such a test for you. You can base these tests on the kinds of tasks a learner can typically perform at a given level according to the ACTFL guidelines.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you test your language proficiency:

- Decide on the skill you want to test yourself in: listening, speaking, reading, or writing.
- Look at the list of tasks representative of that level under What you can do at different proficiency levels.
- Choose a task representative of a level that might describe you.

Example: If you have been Intermediate for awhile and think you might have reached Advanced, choose a task under Advanced.

- Do not just ask yourself if you can perform the language task; actually do the work.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

Reason: In that way your performance will more accurately reflect your actual overall ability.

- Record yourself doing each speaking task, and listen to the tape later.
- After you do the task, read the ACTFL guidelines descriptions of the skill you are testing.
- Decide which level describes you most accurately.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you test your language proficiency:

- Test your listening proficiency.
- See: Testing your listening proficiency
- Test your speaking proficiency.
- See: Testing your speaking proficiency
- Test your reading proficiency.
- See: Testing your reading proficiency
- Test your writing proficiency.
- See: Testing your writing proficiency

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency

#### Testing your listening proficiency

##### Introduction

You can test your listening proficiency by choosing a comprehension task to perform and comparing your performance to the descriptions of different listening proficiency levels in the ACTFL Guidelines.

##### Guidelines

- Choose a task that is appropriate for what you think is your current proficiency level, or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

Reason: The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency, not to memorize something.

##### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you test your listening proficiency:

- Choose a listening task representative of the level you think you have reached. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know that you can do.
- Listen and demonstrate your understanding of what you heard to a language associate.
- Ask the language associate what parts you misunderstood.
- Reread the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

##### Examples

Here are examples of how to test your listening proficiency:

- Example: Using comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency
- Example: Using television or radio to test your listening proficiency
- Example: Using a map to test your listening proficiency

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency, listening proficiency

Example: Using comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency

##### Introduction

One way to test your listening proficiency is to ask someone to compare and contrast two objects or persons, while you note the important points of similarity or difference.

### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency:

- Use this technique if you think you might be Advanced Proficiency.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use comparisons and contrasts to test your listening proficiency:

- You think you might be at Advanced level so you ask a speaker of the language to choose two things or people to compare or contrast.
- Listen and note the important points of similarity or difference.
- Tell the speaker later what you thought were the main points of comparison or contrast, and see if he or she agrees.
- Reread the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which guideline level matches your performance.

Example: Using television or radio to test your listening proficiency

### Introduction

You can use television or radio to test your overall level of proficiency in the target language. This is a good technique if resources are available, since the news broadcast is different every day and you cannot rehearse in advance.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use television or radio to test your listening proficiency:

- Watch a television or listen to a radio news broadcast. Audio tape or videotape the broadcast if that is an option.
- After the broadcast, note the main stories, and describe them in detail to someone who understands the language well.

Note: You can use either the target language or your own to describe what you heard.

This is a test of listening comprehension, not of speaking or writing.

- Ask the person to tell you if you got something wrong.
- Go back and read the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.

- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

Note: If you can only understand people talking about events you already knew about, you are not at Advanced level.

If you can understand most of the international news, you probably are at Advanced level, even if you cannot understand all the national or local news.

If you understand almost everything, you are probably Superior level.

### See also

- Keywords: media, radio, television

Example: Using a map to test your listening proficiency

### Introduction

You can use two copies of a town or city map to test your listening proficiency.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use a map to test your listening proficiency:

- Use this technique if you think you are at Intermediate proficiency.
- You can use this technique to learn to understand directions as well as to check proficiency.



Tip: When testing yourself,

- ask a speaker other than a language associate (LA) to test you, or
- ask the LA to direct you to a place you have not already used in practice activities.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use a town or city map to test your listening proficiency:

- You choose understanding directions as a task appropriate to Intermediate level. Give a speaker of the language one copy of a town or city map and ask for directions on how to get from one place to another.

- Listen to the directions and trace the path on your copy of the map.
- Check with the speaker to see if you arrived at the right place.
- Reread the description of the different levels of listening proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.

guidelines.

- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

Note: If you got where you were supposed to most of the time, you are probably at Intermediate level.

See also

- Keywords: directions

Testing your speaking proficiency

Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by choosing a speaking task to perform, recording yourself, and listening to your performance later. You can compare your performance to the descriptions of different speaking proficiency levels in the ACTFL Guidelines.

Guidelines

- Choose a task appropriate for the proficiency level you think describes you, or ask someone else to choose the task.

- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

Reason: The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency, not to memorize a speech.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you test your speaking proficiency:

- Choose a speaking task representative of what you think is your current level. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know you can do.

- Record yourself doing the task.
- Reread the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.

guidelines.

- Listen to the tape and decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

Examples

Here are examples of how to test your speaking proficiency:

- Example: Using a wordless book to test your speaking proficiency
- Example: Giving directions to test your speaking proficiency
- Example: Describing a process to test your speaking proficiency

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency, speaking proficiency

Example: Using a wordless book to test your speaking proficiency

Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by telling a story from a picture book where almost all of the events are depicted, but which has no words.

Tip: These books can sometimes be acquired in children's bookstores.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you test your speaking proficiency using a wordless book:

- Use this technique when you think you are at Intermediate level or above.
- You can use the same book more than once, but do not look at it between tests.
- Use a book that fits the culture of the language you are learning.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do to when you use a wordless book to test your speaking proficiency.

- You decide to do storytelling and choose or make a storybook with pictures but no words.
- Record your version of the story as you look at the pages with a language associate.
- Listen to the recording, then reread the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

#### See also

- Keywords: pictures and picture books

Example: Giving directions to test your speaking proficiency

#### Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by directing someone to a place familiar to you.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you give directions to test your speaking proficiency:

- Use this task if you think you are at Intermediate level.
- Ask the language associate to choose the place for which you are giving directions.

Reason: If you are not able to rehearse, your performance is more likely to reflect your actual proficiency.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do to test your speaking proficiency by giving directions:

- Ask a language associate (LA) to choose a place to which he or she wants you to give directions.
- Record yourself giving the directions. Ask the LA to follow along on a map or to draw a diagram, indicating what you have said.
- Listen to the recording, then read the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

#### See also

- Keywords: directions

Example: Describing a process to test your speaking proficiency

#### Introduction

You can test your speaking proficiency by telling someone how to do a task familiar to you.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you describe a process to test your speaking proficiency:

- Use this task when you think you are at Intermediate level or higher.
- You can use the same procedure more than once, but do not practice in between testing.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you describe a process to test your speaking proficiency:

- Choose a process to talk about that you have not rehearsed or memorized.
- Record yourself telling someone how to do this procedure.
- Go back and read the description of the different levels of speaking proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Listen to the recording, and decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

See also

- Keywords: Series method

Testing your reading proficiency

Introduction

You can test your reading proficiency by choosing a reading task to perform and then comparing your performance to the descriptions of different reading proficiency levels in the ACTFL Guidelines.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you test your reading proficiency:

- Choose a task appropriate for the proficiency level you think describes you, or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

Reason: The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do to test your reading proficiency:

- Choose a reading task representative of the level you think you are at. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know you can do.
- Read the passage and do something that shows you understand what you have read.
- Reread the description of the different levels of reading proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

Example

Here is an example of how to test your reading proficiency:

- Example: Using a newspaper to test your reading proficiency

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, evaluating proficiency, reading proficiency

Example: Using a newspaper to test your reading proficiency

Introduction

You can use a local newspaper to test your reading proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use a newspaper to test your reading proficiency:

- Get a copy of a current newspaper. Look through it and read as much as you can.
- Ask someone who reads the language well to read the same edition of the newspaper, and discuss the contents with that person.
- Read the description of the different levels of reading proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.
- If you can understand only a few words here and there, you are probably at Novice level.
- If you can only understand the headlines, you are probably at Intermediate level.

- If you can understand most straightforward news stories that do not require a lot of specific cultural knowledge, you are probably at Advanced level.
- If you can understand stories, editorials, and political commentaries that do require specific cultural knowledge, you are probably at Superior level.
- If you can read the entire newspaper almost as easily as you could in your first language, you have achieved Distinguished level.

See also

- Keywords: newspaper

Testing your writing proficiency

Introduction

You can test your writing proficiency by choosing a writing task to perform and then comparing your performance to the descriptions of different writing proficiency levels in the ACTFL Guidelines.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you test your writing proficiency:

- Choose a task that is appropriate for the proficiency level you think describes you, or ask someone else to choose the task.
- Do not rehearse the specific task ahead of time.

Reason: The point is to see if you can perform a task that represents your overall proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you test your writing proficiency:

- Choose a writing task representative of the level you think you are at. Even better, ask a friend to choose a task for you so you will not choose something you know you can do.
- Show what you have written to someone who reads and writes the language well and ask for corrections.

See: The Write and Rewrite technique

- Reread the description of the different levels of writing proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.

Example

Here is an example of how to test your writing proficiency:

- Example: Writing descriptions and summaries to test your writing proficiency

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, descriptions, evaluating proficiency, writing proficiency

Example: Writing descriptions and summaries to test your writing proficiency

Introduction

If you think you are at Intermediate proficiency, you can test your writing ability by describing a place you have visited, or writing a short summary of something you have heard or read.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you write descriptions and summaries to test your writing proficiency:

- Decide what to write about. Choose something you have not written about before.
- When you have finished, show your writing to someone who reads and writes the language well, and ask for corrections.

- Reread the description of the different levels of writing proficiency in the ACTFL guidelines.
- Decide as honestly as possible which level of the guidelines your performance matches.
- If you are able to write a description or summary that a mother-tongue speaker can understand, you are probably at Intermediate level. You may have to look up some words in the dictionary and may still make quite a few mistakes.
- If you are able to write a description or summary fairly easily, you may be at Advanced level. You may have to look up just a few words in the dictionary and may make just a few mistakes.
- If you are able to write a description or summary easily without using a dictionary and making almost no mistakes, you may be at Superior level.

See also

- Keywords: descriptions

How to identify and solve your language learning problems

Introduction

If you are not making the progress you would like to make or are not satisfied with your language learning program, you can get help in identifying the problems or obstacles facing you and in trying to solve them.

Introduction

You may be frustrated, or feel you are not making the rate of progress you would like in your language learning. If so, you can try to identify your problems and do something about them. There are resources in the Language Learning Workshop that can help.

Things to do

Here are the things to do to identify and solve your language learning problems:

- Consult the Language Learning Troubleshooter.
- Review your language learning journal.

See also

- Keywords: troubleshooting language learning

Guidelines for setting proficiency goals

OVERVIEW

Guidelines for setting proficiency goals

Introduction

What do you mean when you say you want to learn a new language? What do you want to be able to do in the language? Maybe you just want to be able to buy things in a shop or ask directions. Maybe you want to feel comfortable living in a country and making friends. Or will you need to use the language to communicate subtle distinctions in your work as well as in your everyday life?

The answers to these questions will help determine your language learning goals. The more specific you can be about your goals, the better you will know whether or not you have met them.

To help you decide on your goals, there are discussions of the levels of proficiency in each language skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These guidelines use a five-level proficiency scale to represent the major divisions of the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages Guidelines, the ACTFL Guidelines and the corresponding levels of the Interagency Language Roundtable scale (Foreign Services Institute), the ILR (FSI) scale. To set

goals, the five major divisions give a sufficient fine-grain scale. For evaluation, the subdivisions of each level are helpful.

In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting proficiency goals:

- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting listening goals
- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting speaking goals
- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting reading goals
- OVERVIEW: Guidelines for setting writing goals

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, ILR proficiency scale, goals (proficiency), language skills (4 basic)

Guidelines for setting listening goals

OVERVIEW

Guidelines for setting listening goals

Introduction

You can read discussions of the different levels of listening ability to help you decide which level you should reach. Bear in mind that your listening proficiency should normally be at least the same as your speaking proficiency, if not higher. When you ask for directions, for instance, you need to understand the answer.

At the end of each module, you will find a reference to another module listing the kinds of things you will understand at that level.

In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting listening goals:

- Novice (L 0): Prefunctional Proficiency listening
- Intermediate (L 1): Survival Proficiency listening
- Advanced (L 2): Limited Working Proficiency listening
- Superior (L 3): Professional Proficiency listening
- Distinguished (L 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency listening

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), listening proficiency
- Novice (L 0): Prefunctional Proficiency listening

Discussion

This is the level you will go through on your way to a truly useful proficiency in a language. At this level you will build up the ability to recognize vocabulary words in isolation or in simple sentences. You will probably need a lot of repetition. You will also have trouble understanding enough to cope with real communication situations in communities where the language is spoken.

See also

- What you can understand people say at Novice level
- ACTFL guidelines: Listening—Novice
- Keywords: listening proficiency

Intermediate (L 1): Survival Proficiency listening

Discussion

This is the minimum level you will need to survive on your own in a country where your new language is spoken. At this level you can deal with a limited number of survival situations in your immediate surroundings and where there is a lot of context or shared knowledge.

See also

- What you can understand people say at Intermediate level
- ACTFL guidelines: Listening—Intermediate
- Keywords: listening proficiency

#### Advanced (L 2): Limited Working Proficiency listening

##### Discussion

If you want to study, work, or live in a country for any length of time, you will need this level of proficiency. In a limited way, you can

- understand most face-to-face conversations as a participant
- get along pretty well socially, and
- understand basic information relating to your work.

##### See also

- What you can understand people say at Advanced level
- ACTFL guidelines: Listening—Advanced
- Keywords: listening proficiency

#### Superior (L 3): Professional Proficiency listening

##### Discussion

The superior level learner can function at a full professional level in another language and understand what is happening in situations where people do not come out directly and say what they mean. You will have to spend some time in a country where the language is spoken before your understanding reaches this level. You will have to experience language use in a variety of real communication situations.

##### See also

- What you can understand people say at Superior level
- ACTFL guidelines: Listening—Superior
- Keywords: listening proficiency

#### Distinguished (L 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency listening

##### Discussion

If you want to understand your new language almost as well as your own, you will have to get to this level. It will probably take years to attain this proficiency. At this level you can understand

- all forms and styles of speech, including
  - plays
  - films
  - academic and professional meetings
  - debates
  - jokes and puns.
- the nuances of meaning and the background knowledge that native speakers bring to

listening situations

##### See also

- What you can understand people say at Distinguished level
- ACTFL guidelines: Listening—Distinguished
- Keywords: listening proficiency

#### Guidelines for setting speaking goals

##### OVERVIEW

#### Guidelines for setting speaking goals

##### Introduction

Read the discussions of each level of speaking proficiency to help you decide which level will meet your needs. At the end of each module, you will find a reference to another module listing the things you would be able to say at that level.

In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting speaking goals:

- Novice (S 0): Prefunctional Proficiency speaking
- Intermediate (S 1): Survival Proficiency speaking
- Advanced (S 2): Limited Working Proficiency speaking
- Superior (S 3): Professional Proficiency speaking
- Distinguished (S 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency speaking

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), speaking proficiency

Novice (S 0): Prefunctional Proficiency speaking

Discussion

You have to start somewhere and this is the level you will have to pass through to being able to really communicate in the language. Unless you have just a few weeks to get ready to go and will be in a country for just a week or two, you should not make this level your goal. You will have a hard time even being on your own as a tourist at this level of proficiency.

On the other hand, this is a very valuable and necessary stage in your learning. Here you lay the foundation for the higher stages of proficiency by building vocabulary and familiarizing yourself with the most basic structures of the language. In real communication situations, you may become frustrated. You will have only isolated words or a few memorized sentences to get you through every day survival situations. You probably will not be able to put many words together to make new utterances that people can understand.

See also

- What you can say at Novice level
- ACTFL guidelines: Speaking—Novice
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

Intermediate (S 1): Survival Proficiency speaking

Discussion

This is the minimum level if you are going to use the language on a regular basis. If you plan regular visits to a country or area where a language is spoken, you need to use the language mostly to get around, to ask directions, to shop, and to get basic food and services, this level will probably do. At this level you would probably feel pretty comfortable as a tourist. You will speak hesitantly at times, will get some grammatical constructions mixed up, or will find yourself wanting to say things you do not know how to say.

If you want to make significant relationships with speakers of the language or need to use the language regularly in your work, you should aim higher. You probably cannot keep up a conversation with a native speaker for very long, especially on a complicated or abstract topic. People who are not used to foreigners might find you hard to understand.

See also

- What you can say at Intermediate level
- ACTFL guidelines: Speaking—Intermediate
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

Advanced (S 2): Limited Working Proficiency speaking

Discussion



This is the first stage where you will feel comfortable living, working or studying in a country where the target language is spoken. It will allow you to meet people, to socialize with them and to take care of your basic job requirements, although in a limited way.

People will understand you without much difficulty and you will be able to deal with most face-to-face conversations on concrete topics with slight complications. You will probably be understood by people not used to dealing with foreigners, although they (and you) might find communication tiring after some time. You would still grope for words at times. Usually, this is the highest level you can expect to attain without spending time living in a community where the language is spoken.

See also

- What you can say at Advanced level
- ACTFL guidelines: Speaking—Advanced
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

Superior (S 3): Professional Proficiency speaking

Discussion

You should aim for this level if you

- plan to live for some years in a country
- need the language to carry out fully your job responsibilities
- have a very strong interest in the language
- are interested in the country where the language is spoken, and
- want to make close relationships with people who speak the language.

If you get there, you will speak fluently and rarely make grammatical mistakes that bother native speakers. You may still have to search for a word occasionally, but will be able to come up with another way to say what you want. You will be able to talk about a full range of topics and deal with people on a professional level.

You can expect to spend months or even years in the language community before you reach this level, as it involves sociolinguistic competence. This proficiency can only be developed by experiencing language in a large number of social situations.

See also

- What you can say at Superior level
- ACTFL guidelines: Speaking—Superior
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

Distinguished (S 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency speaking

Discussion

If you want to speak the language almost like a mother-tongue speaker, you will

- need many years in the speech community, and
- have to work at learning after you can communicate the basics.

Very few people achieve this goal unless they emigrate to another country relatively early in life, but it is possible and is a worthy goal. You need this proficiency if your job requires

- diplomacy
- the ability to express sophisticated nuances of meaning
- the ability to hint at things not directly expressed.

See also

- What you can say at Distinguished level
- Keywords: speaking proficiency

Guidelines for setting reading goals

## OVERVIEW

### Guidelines for setting reading goals

#### Introduction

Read the discussions of each level of reading proficiency to help you decide which level will meet your needs. At the end of each module you will find a reference to another module listing the things you will be able to read at that level.

The discussions refer primarily to languages with literary traditions, used by a highly literate society. If you are learning an unwritten or newly-written language, you will be in a very different situation. You will have a different set of goals for reading, which are discussed under a separate submodule.

In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting reading goals:

- Novice (R 0): Prefunctional Proficiency reading
- Intermediate (R 1): Survival Proficiency reading
- Advanced (R 2): Limited Working Proficiency reading
- Superior (R 3): Professional Proficiency reading
- Distinguished (R 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency reading

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), reading proficiency

Novice (R 0): Prefunctional Proficiency reading

#### Discussion

If all you need to read are signs and menu items on a trip to another country, you can probably function at this level. If you study a language that uses the same writing system as your own or a system you know, you can probably learn in a fairly short time.

#### Unwritten languages

Your reading and writing goals will probably mirror your listening goals in this situation. Aim to write the words you learn in the International Phonetic Alphabet and to read them afterwards. If you study a language with a recognized orthography, you will want to use the script as soon as possible.

See also

- What you can read at Novice level
- ACTFL guidelines: Reading—Novice
- Keywords: reading proficiency

Intermediate (R 1): Survival Proficiency reading

#### Discussion

This is the level to aim for if you want to read material with common words and simple grammatical constructions. You may get only the main ideas, unless you rely a lot on the dictionary. You will probably have to reread a lot. If you need to read the language in order to do your work, you will need to aim higher than this level.

Languages like Chinese or Japanese with writing systems of many elements take a lot longer to learn to read than to understand and speak. If you study a language related to your own, you may get to this level quickly. You might get some main ideas from texts at the next higher level, especially if the topic is familiar.

#### Newly-written languages

If you have a working orthography in the language and can teach a speaker to read and write, you can expand your own reading goals a lot. You will not be the only one doing the writing. As you learn, ask a language associate to record and transcribe some simple texts for you.

### Intermediate level texts

- Simple, connected texts about predictable subjects
- Short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things for a wide audience
- Basic written directions
- Written descriptions of what a place or a person looks like

### See also

- What you can read at Intermediate level
- ACTFL guidelines: Reading—Intermediate
- Keywords: reading proficiency

### Advanced (R 2): Limited Working Proficiency reading

#### Discussion

This level is the minimum you will need if your job requires some reading ability in the new language. At this level, you should understand at least the main ideas and some of the details in clearly presented prose material. These can be several paragraphs which use familiar sentence patterns and a lot of basic vocabulary. More abstract topics and complicated grammatical structures may be beyond you.

#### Newly-written languages

As your listening comprehension advances, you will understand and write longer and more authentic texts. Try to collect oral literature, accounts of the history of the people, and descriptions of how they perform complicated procedures. If you are involved in a literacy program and are encouraging new authors to write, you will need to read and understand their stories.

### See also

- What you can read at Advanced level
- ACTFL guidelines: Reading—Advanced
- Keywords: reading proficiency

### Superior (R 3): Professional Proficiency reading

#### Discussion

At this level you can read at nearly normal speed. You can understand almost everything in most texts intended for educated, mother-tongue speakers of the language. You will rarely consult a dictionary. If you do, it is to find definitions in the target language. You will have to know a lot about the target language culture to understand some of the texts at this level.

#### Newly-written languages

You need to be at this level to check materials translated from other languages for accuracy and naturalness. You will need a control of grammar, vocabulary, and culture. In addition, you will have to spend quite a while in a culture to be able to read and understand some traditional texts.

### See also

- What you can read at Superior level
- ACTFL guidelines: Reading—Superior
- Keywords: reading proficiency

### Distinguished (R 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency reading

#### Discussion

At this level, you will read anything published for the mother-tongue speaker audience without using a dictionary. You will understand all styles and forms of the language, including texts that are intellectually challenging. It will take years of living in the culture, but you will be able to

- follow unpredictable turns of thought
- understand aesthetic nuances

- understand cultural and literary allusions and associations, and
- appreciate humor and irony in what you read.

#### Newly-written languages

At this level you will understand anything mother-tongue authors write in the language, including all cultural and historical allusions. Your reading ability will probably be more characterized by cultural knowledge than linguistic knowledge.

See also

- What you can read at Distinguished level
- ACTFL guidelines: Reading—Distinguished
- Keywords: reading proficiency

#### Guidelines for setting writing goals

##### OVERVIEW

#### Guidelines for setting writing goals

##### Introduction

People learning a second language usually have more limited writing goals than they do for the other three skills. Achieving these goals can still be important. Read the following descriptions and decide what level will meet your writing needs in the target language.

In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for setting writing goals:

- Novice (W 0): Prefunctional Proficiency writing
- Intermediate (W 1): Survival Proficiency writing
- Advanced (W 2): Limited Working Proficiency writing
- Superior (W 3): Professional Proficiency writing
- Distinguished (W 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency writing

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, goals (proficiency), writing proficiency

#### Novice (W 0): Prefunctional Proficiency writing

##### Discussion

At this level you are mostly practicing the writing system, rather than using it for functional purposes.

#### Unwritten languages

Your reading and writing goals will probably mirror your listening goals in this situation. Aim to write in the International Phonetic Alphabet the words you are learning and to read them afterwards.

See also

- What you can write at Novice level
- ACTFL guidelines: Writing—Novice
- Keywords: writing proficiency

#### Intermediate (W 1): Survival Proficiency writing

##### Discussion

At this level, you can meet limited practical writing needs by recombining vocabulary and structures you have learned into simple sentences. You are likely to make a lot of spelling and grammatical mistakes.

#### Newly-written languages

As you continue to learn words and structures in the language you will probably want to be able to represent them in a practical orthography, to help you remember them and to aid in your learning.

See also

- What you can write at Intermediate level
- ACTFL guidelines: Writing—Intermediate
- Keywords: writing proficiency

Advanced (W 2): Limited Working Proficiency writing

Discussion

At this level, you should be able to meet most practical writing needs in work or study situations in another country. You can use a fairly good range of vocabulary and structures. You will still make some grammatical errors at this stage, and words will not be idiomatic.

Newly-written languages

If you are involved in a literacy program mother-tongue authors are developing, you want to encourage them to do most of the writing. In some instances, you might have to write first drafts of texts and check them with mother-tongue speakers for accuracy. A written style will begin to emerge in time, so any materials you first publish will probably have to be revised periodically.

See also

- What you can write at Advanced level
- ACTFL guidelines: Writing—Advanced
- Keywords: writing proficiency

Superior (W 3): Professional Proficiency writing

Discussion

This is the level you need to write for professional purposes. Your writing will show good control of a full range of grammatical structures and vocabulary that will enable you to state and support your opinions. You still need to have a mother-tongue speaker check your writing for errors and style if it is important to have everything just right. In general, any errors you make should not bother mother-tongue speakers or cause miscommunication.

Newly-written languages

If there are no mother-tongue language authors, you might have to write drafts of materials for publication. It is still important to check these materials with mother-tongue speakers for accurate grammar and vocabulary. This is the level you need if you are in a situation where you need to draft translated materials.

See also

- What you can write at Superior level
- ACTFL guidelines: Writing—Superior
- Keywords: writing proficiency

Distinguished (W 4): Near-Mother-Tongue Proficiency writing

Discussion

To write like a well-educated mother-tongue speaker, and to publish material that is linguistically and intellectually complex, you have to attain this level. Good luck! Most people do not reach this level, even in their mother-tongue!

Newly-written languages

It is probably unrealistic to talk about a distinguished level of writing proficiency (as distinct from superior) in a newly-written language. Mother-tongue authors have not had time to develop specific written genres.

See also

- What you can write at Distinguished level
- Keywords: writing proficiency

Information to help you make a strategic plan

## OVERVIEW

Information to help you make a strategic plan

### Introduction

Here are some of the concepts and other information that you need to understand to help you make a strategic plan for language learning.

See also: Making a strategic plan for language learning

In this module group

Here are the modules on information to help you make a strategic plan:

- Conditions for language learning
- The best of both settings
- From goals to objectives
- How long will it take to reach my goals?
- What is a language learning plan?
- What is a Language Learning Program Plan?
- What is a Language Learning Unit Plan?
- What is a Daily Language Learning Plan?
- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Learning in an unstructured setting
- What is an approach to language learning?
- What is a language learning program?
- What is a language learning resource?

See also

- Keywords: planning

Conditions for language learning

### Introduction

The conditions necessary or helpful for second language acquisition depend on your goals and your beliefs. Though theories differ, most experts would agree on certain conditions.

### Conditions

ALL learners need the following conditions to reach Superior proficiency or greater in a second language:

- Lots of comprehensible input
- A chance to observe and participate in language use in a wide range of communication situations where common functions of language are expressed
- A chance to understand the values and presuppositions of the speech community and to absorb the way people think and the knowledge they share
- An opportunity to engage in meaningful communication and negotiation of meaning with mother-tongue or fluent speakers of the language

Many learners find the following conditions helpful or necessary:

- Accountability
- Conscious focus on rules of interaction and conversation
- Interpersonal support and encouragement
- Making a plan and consciously monitoring progress
- Memorized survival expressions at the beginning
- Some conscious focus on structure, and application of knowledge of rules

Look at the characteristics of learning a language in both formal and informal settings, including the special considerations of using a tutor, and see how they compare with these lists of conditions.

Source

Gregory Thomson

See also

- Keywords: principles of language learning, second language acquisition theory

The best of both settings

Introduction

Options

Combine structured and unstructured learning with formal study before you go to the country or area where the language is spoken. Plan to attend language school in a country where the language is spoken.

It is possible to get to High Novice level by using computer-assisted language learning programs, self-study programs, or formal language classes. This may be particularly helpful if the target language is unrelated to other languages you already know. One reason to do this is that it tends to ease the stress of adjusting to a new culture. If you can communicate from the start, it helps you get around in a new country.

Another factor to consider is that it is often cheaper to start language study at home than living and paying tuition in another country. You might be able to find speakers of the language in the community where you live. They may be willing to give you conversation practice or to exchange practice in English for practice in their language.

When you get to your new language community, you may continue part-time formal classes, or spend a lot of time in informal interaction. It will depend on your ultimate goals, the availability and quality of language school programs, and other responsibilities you have.

Even if you develop your own program, you need both structured and unstructured time. You need structured time when you work with a language resource person to explore new areas of the language systematically. You need unstructured time to experience and use the language in communication situations.

See also

- Keywords: computer-assisted language learning , formal language learning, informal language learning, language schools

From goals to objectives

Introduction

So far, you have decided on your long-term language learning goals and on a general strategy for getting there. Now you need a more detailed plan, including specific objectives.

Definition

An objective is a specific statement of the outcome you aim for in a learning activity. You want to state your objectives in a measurable way, so that you can evaluate whether you have met them.

Isn't setting objectives the job of the teacher or language curriculum designer? In a way it is.

Anyone who designs a language course or a set of language learning materials has some objectives in mind for the learner. Teachers and tutors also have objectives in mind. But are the teacher's or course designer's objectives the same as yours? Being an independent language learner means that you have taken responsibility for your learning. You need to set objectives for yourself and make sure that you meet them.

Kinds

What kinds of objectives can you set for yourself? Here are different areas of communicative competence:

Linguistic competence:

the ability to control the phonology, grammar, and vocabulary of the target language.

Discourse competence:

the ability to construct and interpret connected speech in various genres of discourse.

Sociolinguistic competence:

the ability

- to use language to perform various communication functions
- to recognize the social meaning of different varieties of speech and use them

appropriately, and

- to follow the rules of conversational interaction.

Cultural competence:

the ability

• to interpret what is said according to the cultural frame of reference of the speech community, and

- to communicate your own ideas within that frame of reference.

Strategic competence:

the ability

• to use communication strategies to compensate for lacks in your communicative repertoire, or

- to repair misunderstandings arising from any source.

Procedure

You need to set objectives in each area of communicative competence. The objectives should fit your current stage of proficiency, and your needs and long-term goals.

At the beginning, your objectives will probably be the same as those of most other people learning language. All language learners need to master

- the sounds
- the grammatical structures
- the core vocabulary
- survival situations, and
- basic courtesy functions.

As you progress through Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior levels, your objectives will differ from other students. Objectives depend on the tasks you need to do using the language:

- the topics you want to discuss
- the situations you encounter, and
- the communication functions you want to express

At these levels you start to specialize and decide what you want to learn first.

Once you have achieved Superior level and are working toward Distinguished level, your objectives will become more like those of other language learners. You work toward being able to understand everything.

See also

- Setting instructional objectives
- Keywords: communicative competence, goals (proficiency), objectives (instructional),

planning

How long will it take to reach my goals?

Introduction

The time it takes to reach your goals depends on a number of factors:

- How closely related the target language is to your first language or other languages you know



- The areas of complexity in the language
- How many hours a week you devote exclusively to language learning
- The number and quality of language learning resources available
- The motivation you have

Estimating a time frame

The Language Learning Troubleshooter contains a tool that helps you estimate how long it might take to achieve different levels of proficiency, given favorable conditions. You may go there now.

See also

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

What is a language learning plan?

Definition

A language learning plan is a course of action the language learner chooses to achieve language learning goals. A plan may be more or less detailed, ranging from a top-level strategic plan to a low-level daily lesson plan.

Kinds

Here are three kinds of language learning plans used in the Language Learning workshop:

- Language Learning Program Plan
- Language Learning Unit Plan
- Daily Language Learning Plan

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning plan

What is a Language Learning Program Plan?

Definition

A language learning program plan is a top-level plan to develop a personal language learning program to meet your language learning goals. It consists of your decisions regarding the language learning program you choose or develop and the major resources you use to achieve your goals.

Generic

A Language Learning Program Plan is a kind of:

- language learning plan

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning program

What is a Language Learning Unit Plan?

Definition

A Language Learning Unit Plan is a subdivision of your language learning program made up of a series of daily lesson plans. The Units may be determined in various ways, depending on the overall approach to language learning being followed.

Parts

- a set of specific language learning objectives
- the techniques and activities planned to achieve the objectives
- the resources necessary to do the techniques and activities
- the time frame envisaged to achieve the objectives
- criteria for determining whether or not the objectives have been achieved, and
- a set of daily lesson plans into which the above are distributed.

Generic

A Language Learning Unit Plan is a kind of:

- language learning plan

See also

- How to make a Unit Plan
- Keywords: objectives (instructional), unit plans (language learning program)

What is a Daily Language Learning Plan?

Definition

A Daily Language Learning Plan is a subdivision of a Unit Plan within your overall language learning program. It consists of your language learning objectives for a given day and the strategies, techniques, and activities you decide to use to achieve them.

Generic

A Daily Language Learning Plan is a kind of:

- language learning plan

See also

- How to make a Daily Language Learning Plan
- Keywords: daily plans (language learning program), objectives (instructional)

Structured language study options

OVERVIEW

Structured language study options

Introduction

Most adults seem to learn a second language more quickly if they include a structured study component with informal practice. Structured study doesn't necessarily mean language school, although that is one of the options. In this section you will learn some of the characteristics of structured study programs in general, as well as information about the different options.

In this module group

Here are the modules on structured language study options:

- Learning in a structured setting
- Language schools
- Independent language study
- Tutors
- Could I or should I develop my own program?

See also

- Learning in an unstructured setting
- Keywords: choosing between language study options, formal language learning

Learning in a structured setting

Introduction

A structured or formal language learning setting is one set up especially for the purpose of learning the language. Although we usually think of a language classroom and a teacher when we think of a structured setting, there are various possibilities.

Options

Here are some options for learning in a structured setting:

- Attend a language school.
- Do independent study with prepared language learning materials.
- Hire a tutor.
- Structure your own language program.

Structured Programs

Here are some of the usual characteristics of structured programs:

- Grade language material, and add new items only as fast as you can reasonably be expected to learn them.
- Provide for you to learn in a controlled sequence.
- Give a lot of practice to develop automatic control (drill and practice activities).
- Add specific grammatical structures and vocabulary lists to language material.
- Put an emphasis on accuracy.

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, drills, formal language learning, grammar

Language schools

See also

For other structured language study options, see

- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options

Independent language study

Introduction

Independent language study refers to following a language instruction program someone else developed, without a teacher and other students. You do it at your own rate of speed, and at the time and place you choose.

Comparison

Here are some ways independent language learning is like learning in a classroom:

- A lot of practice may be given to develop automatic control (drill and practice activities).
- Language material is generally graded.
- Language material may be accompanied by presentation of specific grammatical structures and vocabulary lists.
- Learning is structured.
- There is often an emphasis on accuracy.

Materials

More and more materials are available for people who want to study foreign languages on their own.

The possibilities include:

- Courses combining written materials and audio recordings.
- Correspondence courses, where a teacher is available to correct work and assess progress via mail.
- Video courses, often with accompanying workbook.
- Computer-assisted language learning materials (CALL). These may include programs using
  - compact discs
  - videodisks.
- Books with no accompanying video or audio materials.

Caution

Be skeptical of any courses that promise you can learn to speak German in three weeks or three months by listening to a recording for thirty minutes a day. Whatever these courses promise, they cannot deliver communicative competence with that amount of exposure in that amount of time.

Self-instruction

There may be no classes in your area that teach the language you need to learn. Your schedule may not permit you to attend classes that do exist. In these cases, self-instruction may be your only option.

See also

For other structured language study options, see

- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Keywords: computer-assisted language learning , independent language study, media

Tutors

Definition

A tutor is a speaker of the language who works with you individually. Instruction from a tutor may be more or less structured, depending on the tutor and on your needs.

Characteristics

Here are some characteristics of working with a tutor:

- There is more flexibility and opportunity to tailor instruction to meet your needs than in a classroom, where there are other students to consider.
- A tutor often works with you on specific problem areas, rather than presenting a whole course of instruction.
- There is more opportunity to ask questions and get personal feedback than in a classroom.
- You determine the number of classes and the rate at which new material is presented.
- You may be able to find a tutor who can teach you at times that fit your schedule better than classes.
- It may be difficult to get someone to teach you enough hours to make rapid progress, if this is your only source of language instruction.
- It will probably be more expensive per hour than attending a class.

See also

For other structured language study options, see

- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Keywords: tutors (language)

Could I or should I develop my own program?

Introduction

It IS possible and sometimes necessary to develop your own language learning program.

Example: There are no language schools or independent study materials available.

If you have a choice of doing it yourself or following a program somebody else has prepared, what should you do?

Benefits

Here are some benefits of developing your own program:

- You are in control of what you learn so it should be both relevant and interesting.
- You can use an approach that fits your personality and learning style.
- You can go at your own pace.

Disadvantages

Here are some of the disadvantages of developing your own program:

- You may need to allow as much time to plan daily activities as you will need to do the activities. In effect you are having to make your own lesson plans for each day.
- You may be wasting your time by developing your own program if there are good materials available which are effective in helping people learn.
- You do not have a teacher available to give you feedback and evaluation.

## Resources

Here is what you need when you develop your own program:

- A clear model to follow

Note: It is possible to design your own program without following a model, but if you know enough to do that you probably do not need this book .

- A clear idea of the principles underlying the model and the guidelines
- Access to speakers of the language, preferably a speech community
- Time for planning and developing your program, as well as for doing language activities

See also

For other structured language study options, see

- OVERVIEW: Structured language study options
- Keywords: choosing between language study options, language learning program,

planning

Learning in an unstructured setting

Introduction

An unstructured or informal language learning setting is one where you immerse yourself in a speech community where the language you want to learn is spoken. You learn through the everyday experiences of life.

Characteristics

Here are some characteristic features of learning in an unstructured setting:

- There are many fluent speakers around.
- People talk to you to communicate with you, not to teach you their language.
- The learning takes place in open, unconstrained areas, with lots of physical context.
- The language is normal and uncontrolled (not bookish): there is a wide range of natural styles and registers.
- There is no systematic approach to new material; learning tends to be uneven and unstructured.
- Learners may not be aware that they are learning or aware of what specifically they have learned.
- Learners go through stages before learning to communicate.
- Communication is not organized around the learner's needs.
- Language is experienced in a variety of natural social contexts, therefore it is possible to learn a lot about the nature of interaction and appropriate ways of speaking.
- Opportunities for practice are unlimited.
- Some learners may learn to speak fairly fluently but continue to make grammar mistakes.

These eventually "fossilize" and resist change thereafter, even when a deliberate attempt is made to work on them. This is attributed by some people to the fact that the learners had no correction when learning.

See also

- Keywords: context, informal language learning, register, speech community

What is an approach to language learning?

Definition

An approach to language learning consists of the techniques and activities you decide to use to learn a language, based on

- your beliefs about language and how it is learned
- your learning style preferences
- the constraints of the learning situation

## Examples

Several approaches to language acquisition are included in the Language Learning Bookshelf.

There are four approaches based on learning style preferences:

Approaches to language learning based on learning style preferences

- The Relational Approach to language learning
- The Analytical Approach to language learning
- The Structured Approach to language learning
- The Energetic Approach to language learning

See: For discussion of these four approaches, see Approaches to language learning based on learning style.

See also

- Keywords: approaches to language learning

Ways to approach language learning

Essays on Field Language Learning

What is a language learning program?

Definition

A language learning program is a detailed plan of action to help you achieve your language learning goals. A program consists of

- language learning objectives
- strategies to achieve the objectives
- things to do to implement the strategies, and
- resources to help you meet the objectives.

Discussion

You can be in charge of your own personal language learning program, even if you go to language school or use commercially-available materials. Keep your goals in mind and see how each resource and activity helps you achieve them.

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language learning program, objectives (instructional), strategies

What is a language learning resource?

Definition

A language learning resource is any person, program, or object that helps you achieve your language learning goals.

Examples

Here are some examples of language learning resources:

- Audiotapes and videotapes of language material
- Dictionaries and other reference books
- Independent language study materials
- A language associate
- Language learning computer software
- Language school
- A language tutor
- Radio, television, and videotapes

See also

- Keywords: computer-assisted language learning , dictionaries, language associates, language schools, media, resources, tutors (language), video

Information to help you check your progress

## OVERVIEW

Information to help you check your progress

### Introduction

Here are some of the concepts and other information that you need to understand to help you check your language learning progress.

See also: [Checking your progress](#)

In this module group

Here are the modules on information to help you check your progress:

- [Can I really evaluate myself?](#)
- [What is a Proficiency scale?](#)
- [The ILR \(FSI\) proficiency scale](#)
- [Correspondence of proficiency scales](#)
- [OVERVIEW: What you can do at different proficiency levels](#)
- [Self-assessment checklists based on proficiency guidelines](#)

See also

- [Keywords: evaluating proficiency, progress \(language learning\)](#)

[Can I really evaluate myself?](#)

### Introduction

If you are not an expert in the language, how can you assess your own proficiency in it? Self-assessment does have its limitations, but it can also be very useful.

### Limitations

The disadvantage of doing self-evaluation is that it is hard to assess the accuracy of your own writing or speech. Some people judge themselves too gently, and some judge themselves too harshly.

### Benefits

Here are some benefits of self-evaluation:

- You see areas in which you made progress and those in which you need more work.
- If your progress in a certain area does not satisfy you, you can make changes in your program.
- You can encourage yourself by seeing how much progress you have made!
- If no teacher is available to evaluate you, self-assessment is the only way to know how you are really doing.

### Scope

Here are the kinds of things you should evaluate:

- Try to decide how well you control the material in your lessons or self-structured program.
- Look at your overall proficiency level in each skill.
- Try to decide your rate of progress.

See also

- [Keywords: evaluating proficiency](#)

[What is a Proficiency scale?](#)

### Definition

A proficiency scale is a set of descriptions of what you can do in a language. Each level in the scale describes a stage in your development of competence.

### Benefits

Proficiency scales are beneficial when

- setting language learning goals, or

- evaluating your progress.

Instances

Here are two Proficiency scales:

- ACTFL Guidelines
- ILR (FSI) scale

Uses

Proficiency scales are useful in the following ways:

- to decide what to aim for
- to know when you achieve your goals.

The ILR (FSI) Scale

The five-level ILR scale was originally developed by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the United States government. The scale describes the language proficiency needed by the diplomatic corps to carry out their duties in embassies and to carry out other official business. Eventually, other U.S. government agencies adopted the same scale, so it is now called the Interagency Language Roundtable scale, or ILR scale. The scale describes overall proficiency from 0 (no proficiency) to 5 (mother-tongue speaker).

Although very useful and widely referred to, this scale has two drawbacks for language learners and teachers:

- It refers principally to speaking ability and does not directly mention the skills of listening comprehension, reading, and writing.
- There are only five steps in the scale and the distance between them is very large. Also the steps are not the same size.
  - It takes much longer to get from Level 1 to Level 2 than it does to get from Level 0 to Level 1.
  - It takes even longer to get from Level 2 to Level 3.

Most language learners would be happy to achieve Level 3: working professional proficiency. This level represents quite a high achievement and is as far as most organized language study programs can take you. Therefore, many educators feel it is helpful to have more divisions in the lower proficiency levels.

ACTFL guidelines

In 1982 the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) set out to develop a scale compatible with the FSI scale. The scale describes all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and has more divisions in the lower levels. It was better defined in 1986 and that is the scale used for reference here.

See: Correspondence of proficiency scales to see how the ACTFL guidelines correspond to the FSI scale.

See also

- Keywords: ACTFL proficiency guidelines, Foreign Service Institute (FSI), ILR proficiency scale, evaluating proficiency, language proficiency, language skills (4 basic)

The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale

Description

The Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale is a set of descriptions of abilities to communicate in a language. It was originally developed by the United States Foreign Service Institute, and is still widely known as the FSI scale. It consists of descriptions of five levels of language proficiency.

Levels

Click on the level for which you would like to see the definition:



- Elementary proficiency (S-1)
- Limited Working proficiency (S-2)
- Professional Working proficiency (S-3)
- Full Professional proficiency (S-4)
- Native or Bilingual proficiency (S-5)

#### Sources

These descriptions are a product of U.S. Government grants and are in the public domain. They are cited here from Higgs 1984, Appendix B.

See also

Much of the material in the Language Learning workshop about developing your proficiency has been built around a slightly different scale called the ACTFL Guidelines. For a comparison of the ILR and ACTFL scales, see

- What is a Proficiency scale?
- Correspondence of proficiency scales
- Keywords: ILR proficiency scale, language proficiency

#### Correspondence of proficiency scales

##### Introduction

The following chart gives the relationship between levels of the ACTFL and ILR proficiency scales.

##### Comparison Chart

ILR Scale	ACTFL Scale	Definition
5	Native	Able to speak like an educated native speaker
4+		
4	Distinguished	Able to speak with a great deal of fluency, grammatical accuracy, precision of vocabulary and idiomaticity
3+		
3	Superior	Able to speak the language with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal conversations
2+	Advanced Plus	Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics
2	Advanced	Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements
1+	Intermediate - High	Able to satisfy most survival needs and limited social demands
1	Intermediate - Mid	
	Intermediate - Low	Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands
		Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements
0+	Novice - High	Able to satisfy immediate needs with learned utterances
0	Novice - Mid	
	Novice - Low	
0		Able to operate in only a very limited capacity
		Unable to function in the spoken language
		No ability whatsoever in the language

See also

For more information about these scales, and about checking your progress against them, see

- The ILR (FSI) proficiency scale
- The ACTFL guidelines
- Checking your progress
- Keywords: language proficiency, levels of language proficiency

What you can do at different proficiency levels

OVERVIEW

What you can do at different proficiency levels

In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can do at different proficiency levels:

- OVERVIEW: What you can understand people say at different proficiency levels
- OVERVIEW: What you can say at different proficiency levels
- OVERVIEW: What you can read at different proficiency levels
- OVERVIEW: What you can write at different proficiency levels

See also

For an official description of the ACTFL proficiency levels, see

- The ACTFL guidelines
- Keywords: levels of language proficiency

What you can understand people say at different proficiency levels

OVERVIEW

What you can understand people say at different proficiency levels

Introduction

You can get an idea of your listening proficiency level by comparing what you understand with the lists below.

In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can understand people say at different proficiency levels:

- What you can understand people say at Novice level
- What you can understand people say at Intermediate level
- What you can understand people say at Advanced level
- What you can understand people say at Superior level
- What you can understand people say at Distinguished level

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency

What you can understand people say at Novice level

Novice

Here are some of the things you can understand people say at Novice level:

- Names of common objects
- Names of common food and drink items
- Words for common actions
- Common greetings and farewell expressions
- Basic warnings and commands, such as Stop!, Watch out!, and Be careful!
- The most basic words describing size, color, or age
- Simple questions and statements that use words from the categories above

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can understand people say at Intermediate level

Intermediate

Here are some of the things you can understand at Intermediate level:

- Basic directions on how to get somewhere
- Greetings and other very commonly occurring social routines
- Questions about your personal background, family, and why you are in the country
- Questions about your personal interests and activities, such as hobbies, sports, and subjects you know a lot about
  - Short, routine telephone conversations, well enough to be able to take a simple message for someone
  - Bits and pieces of radio or television announcements and news reports dealing with familiar topics or events
    - A description of a place or a person
    - Locations and times, if making arrangements to meet somebody later
    - Prices and amounts of money you need to pay in a shop, store, or market
    - Questions the shopkeeper might ask you about what exactly you want
    - Familiar words in conversations between mother-tongue speakers (If the topic is familiar, you might get the main ideas, but might not understand all they are saying )
      - Enough to carry on short conversations on concrete topics with friendly mother-tongue speakers used to dealing with foreigners, if they make an effort to help you to understand

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines), radio, telephones, television

What you can understand people say at Advanced level

Advanced

Here are some of the things you can understand people say at Advanced level:

- An account of an event that happened in the past
- Events someone expects will happen in the future
- A description of a simple process
- A brief summary of facts about a subject
- Oral instructions on how to do something
- Advice
- The advantages and disadvantages of a course of action
- A description of a place you have never visited
- Someone comparing or contrasting two objects or places
- Familiar topics beyond your immediate situation
- Most news broadcasts and factual reports on television and radio
- Information someone asks you in an interview
- Short lectures on familiar topics

See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines), radio, television

What you can understand people say at Superior level

Superior

Here are some things you can understand people say at Superior level:

- Unspoken emotional nuances of speakers in most communication situations
- A detailed description of a complex object or procedure
- A discussion of an abstract professional topic
- Hypotheses about what might happen in a certain situation
- Debates on both sides of an issue
- Personal points of view on a controversial subject

- Reasons someone gives for acting in a certain way
- Unspoken messages, when people hedge, evade an answer, or try to get out of a commitment

- Speeches or academic lectures
- The dialogue in films
- Media coverage

See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can understand people say at Distinguished level

Distinguished

Here are some things you can understand people say at Distinguished level:

- Fine points of the issues debated at meetings of local government agencies, such as city councils or town councils
- Plots of dramatic presentations and the artistic merits of the script and the presentation
- Dialogues in films, including slang
- Editorials on the radio or television
- Different points of view expressed at symposia
- Points of view in academic debates
- Public policy statements
- Literary readings
- Most jokes and puns
- General conversations you overhear between mother-tongue speakers

See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can say at different proficiency levels

OVERVIEW

What you can say at different proficiency levels

Introduction

You can get an idea of your speaking proficiency by comparing your ability with the lists below.

In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can say at different proficiency levels:

- What you can say at Novice level
- What you can say at Intermediate level
- What you can say at Advanced level
- What you can say at Superior level
- What you can say at Distinguished level

See also

- Keywords: speaking proficiency

What you can say at Novice level

Novice

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Novice level:

- Greet people politely
- Thank people politely
- Say "yes" and "no"
- Use memorized phrases to order a cup of coffee or food
- Count to 100
- Say good-bye politely

- Give your name
- Tell where you are from
- Name concrete objects, such as
  - furniture
  - plants
  - animals
  - tools
  - machines, and
  - food items
- Name classes of people, such as
  - men
  - women
  - boys
  - girls, and
  - babies
- Name colors
- Name sizes of objects or age of people, such as a big boat or a small child

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can say at Intermediate level

Intermediate

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Intermediate level:

- Introduce yourself, giving your name and basic personal information
- Give directions on how to get from one place to another
- Describe your health problems to a doctor or nurse
- Tell about your family, giving names and simple information about them such as their occupations or what they look like
  - Arrange to meet someone at a particular time and place and date in the near future
  - Describe typical routine activities, such as what you usually do on the weekend
  - Request items, discuss prices, and handle currency in a situation involving a purchase
  - Ask questions about menu items, order food, and ask for and pay a bill at a restaurant
  - Describe in detail a particular place, such as a school, park, or store
  - Talk about things you like to do, such as leisure activities, favorite hobbies or pastimes
  - Talk about things you expect to do in the future, such as a planned trip or activity

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can say at Advanced level

Advanced

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Advanced level:

- Describe a sequence of events that happened in the past
- Describe things that used to happen in the past, such as things you used to do when you were younger, or people and places you used to know or visit
- Compare and contrast two objects, customs or places
- Talk about your future plans or goals
- Explain a simple process you know how to do, such as making a cake or repairing a tire

- Give instructions about what you would like someone to do, explaining the steps involved in carrying out an activity, such as when telling a housekeeper how you would like her to wash the clothes

- Give a brief, organized, factual summary of what happened in an event you attended
- Give advice to someone faced with making a decision, giving reasons for your advice
- Lodge a complaint, giving the reasons and details of why you are dissatisfied
- Express personal apologies clearly and appropriately to someone you have offended
- State the advantages and disadvantages of a situation or a decision
- Tell someone what you would do in a hypothetical situation, such as if you suddenly

received a lot of money

- Answer the telephone at home or at work
- Describe your job and the organization you work for
- Direct people to the right building or office
- Handle simple job-related inquiries

See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can say at Superior level

Superior

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Superior level:

- Persuade people to do something they do not want to do or to stop doing something you do not like
- Describe a complex object, such as a car or bicycle or computer in detail, using the correct vocabulary
- Present arguments on both sides of a familiar issue or topic and evaluate the merits of the arguments
- Discuss a professional topic at length
- Explain in detail a non-routine, complex process, such as how to do grammatical analysis or how to perform an operation
- Present a talk at a professional meeting
- Tell someone in detail the possible consequences of a certain situation, for example, if the price of coffee were to rise suddenly
- Express what you think might happen if something unexpected occurs
- Propose a course of action and defend your proposal in such a way that people might be persuaded to accept your idea
- State a personal point of view on a subject, including controversial issues, explaining why you hold your beliefs
- Handle formal business situations
- Talk to dignitaries or influential people
- Discuss issues in the news

See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can say at Distinguished level

Distinguished

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to say at Distinguished level:

- Do informal interpreting
- Take part in mediating or negotiating between two parties
- Discuss in detail highly abstract or unfamiliar topics

- Tailor the style and content of your presentation on the spur of the moment to an audience different from the one you had expected

See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can read at different proficiency levels

## OVERVIEW

What you can read at different proficiency levels

Introduction

You can get an idea of your reading proficiency level by comparing what you can read with the lists below.

In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can read at different proficiency levels:

- What you can read at Novice level
- What you can read at Intermediate level
- What you can read at Advanced level
- What you can read at Superior level
- What you can read at Distinguished level

See also

- Keywords: reading proficiency

What you can read at Novice level

Novice

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Novice level:

- The letters in an alphabet or syllabic writing system or a few characters in a system that uses characters

- Menus
- Timetables
- Maps
- Road signs
- Signs above shops

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can read at Intermediate level

Intermediate

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Intermediate level:

- Simple, connected texts about predictable subjects
- Public service messages or instructions
- Short, straightforward descriptions of persons, places, and things written for a wide audience

- Newspaper headlines
- Basic written directions
- Questions about your personal background, your family, and why you are here in the country

- Written descriptions of what a place or a person looks like

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can read at Advanced level

Advanced

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Advanced level:

- Short stories
- News items
- Encyclopedia entries
- Short biographies
- Personal correspondence
- Routine business letters
- Simple technical information for the general reader

See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can read at Superior level

Superior

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Superior level:

- Expository prose on a wide range of subjects, including unfamiliar material
- Newspaper editorials
- Personal and business correspondence
- Technical reports
- Political commentaries
- Official documents
- Academic texts
- Professional papers
- Literary texts

See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can read at Distinguished level

Distinguished

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to read at Distinguished level:

- Sophisticated editorials
- Specialized journal articles
- Novels
- Plays
- Poems

See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can write at different proficiency levels

OVERVIEW

What you can write at different proficiency levels

Introduction

You can get an idea of your writing proficiency level by comparing what you can write with the lists below.

In this module group

Here are the modules on what you can write at different proficiency levels:

- What you can write at Novice level
- What you can write at Intermediate level
- What you can write at Advanced level



- What you can write at Superior level
- What you can write at Distinguished level

See also

- Keywords: writing proficiency

What you can write at Novice level

Novice

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Novice level:

- Information for hotel registration forms
- Information for travel documents
- Simple fixed expressions
- Words or sentences you have learned
- Dates and numbers

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can write at Intermediate level

Intermediate

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Intermediate level:

- Short, simple personal letters about your personal preferences, daily routine or everyday events

- Telephone messages
- Postcards
- Short synopses
- Class or lecture notes on familiar topics
- Simple descriptions
- Simple paraphrases of things you hear or read
- Short essays about your life, work, or experience

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can write at Advanced level

Advanced

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Advanced level:

- Routine social correspondence
- A discourse of at least several paragraphs on familiar topics
- Stories or anecdotes about things that have happened to you
- Straightforward, informal business correspondence
- Concrete facts about special interests or fields of competence
- Lecture notes
- Cohesive summaries and resumes of things you have read or heard
- Descriptions of persons, places, and activities

See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can write at Superior level

Superior

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Superior level:

- All types of social and business correspondence
- Memos
- Short research papers

- Statements of your position in areas of special interest or in your professional field
- Essays

See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

What you can write at Distinguished level

Distinguished

Here are the kinds of things you should be able to write at Distinguished level:

- Letters to the editor
- Articles for professional journals
- Short stories
- Poetry
- Plays
- Lyrics to music

See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Self-assessment checklists based on proficiency guidelines

Introduction

You can use checklists to help you evaluate your proficiency in each of the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). These checklists include things a person at a given level can typically do in the target language. There are checklists for each of the four basic language skills, with a separate list for reading and writing if you are learning an unwritten or recently-written language.

You can click on any of the items listed below to see the checklist and print it out. You have permission to photocopy the checklists for your own use.

Checklists

Here are the checklists based on proficiency guidelines:

- Self-assessment checklist for listening (PC version) (Mac version)
- Self-assessment checklist for speaking (PC version) (Mac version)
- Self-assessment checklist for reading (PC version) (Mac version)
- Self-assessment checklist for reading unwritten languages (PC version) (Mac version)
- Self-assessment checklist for writing (PC version) (Mac version)
- Self-assessment checklist for writing unwritten languages (PC version) (Mac version)

Warning

It can be hard to have a realistic view of your own ability in a language. Many people overestimate their ability to perform certain tasks, while others underestimate themselves. If you are using these checklists, you may want to talk over your evaluation of yourself with a speaker of the language or a language learning consultant. It would also be a good idea to use other proficiency-testing methods as a check.

See also

- Keywords: checklists (language learning), evaluating proficiency, language skills (4 basic), self-assessment

Developing Oral Communication Skills

by Carol J. Orwig

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## Summary

This book gives a detailed analysis of the tasks involved in developing listening comprehension and speaking ability in a second language. It breaks down each composite skill into the sub-skills involved for each level of proficiency in speaking and listening comprehension and suggests techniques and activities you can use to develop these skills. This information can be helpful in planning a self-directed language learning program.

## Contents

Developing your oral communication skills

Developing your oral communication skills

## Introduction

This section of the Language Learning bookshelf is intended to help you develop your oral communication skills to your desired level of proficiency. Whether you are in a language school program or studying independently, knowing what knowledge and skills you are aiming for and what strategies, techniques, and activities help to build those skills can help you achieve your goals.

Note: A companion to this book, called *Developing written communication skills*, is planned for the next release of *LinguaLinks*. Meanwhile, refer to *Guidelines for a language and culture learning program* for recommendations about developing reading and writing skills.

## Overview

The suggestions given here are based on the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and on the kind of proficiency-oriented approach to language instruction presented in Omaggio 1986 and Higgs 1984 and other sources. For each major skill, we present the abilities characteristic of each level of proficiency and suggest things to do to develop these abilities. From among these Things to do, you can choose the ones that best fit your learning style, your needs, and your language learning situation.

## Prerequisites

When you set out to develop your language skills, you need to have your ultimate goals clearly in mind. Which of the integrated language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) do you want to develop? All of them or just some? How proficient do you want or need to be?

See: How to set your language learning goals

## Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you develop your oral communication skills:

- It will help you greatly in developing your language skills if you understand the principles of language acquisition.

See: Language Learning principles

- You need to have exposure to the language to develop your skills. It will help you if you make a strategic language learning plan in which you decide on an overall strategy of how and where to get the exposure you need.

- language school
- using purchased language materials
- hiring a tutor, or
- following a program you design for yourself.

Some possibilities are

See: Making a strategic plan for language learning

- The approach to language learning you choose may determine whether or not you choose to concentrate on developing listening skills for a period of time (sometimes called a silent

period) before you try to speak. In general, the receptive skills, listening and reading, tend to develop more quickly and to a higher extent than the productive skills, speaking and writing.

- It can be a big help to you to be aware of the learning process as you progress in developing your skills.

See: Monitoring the language learning process

See: Making a strategic plan for language learning

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you develop your oral communication skills:

- Develop your desired level of listening comprehension.
- See: How to develop your desired level of listening comprehension
- Develop your desired level of speaking proficiency.
- See: How to develop your desired level of speaking proficiency

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language proficiency, oral communication, skill-building
- How to develop your desired level of listening comprehension

Introduction

Here are the stages you go through in reaching your desired level of listening proficiency. For each level, you will find the objectives you will need to achieve in order to reach that level, along with recommendations as to what you can do to reach your objectives.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you develop your desired level of listening comprehension:

- Part of making a strategic plan is choosing an approach to language learning that fits your learning style and situation. The approach you choose will determine which techniques to use from among the recommendations given.

See: Choosing a language learning approach

- Each step will take longer to achieve than the previous one, so you have to have patience!

Steps

Follow these steps to develop your desired level of listening comprehension:

Stage One

1. Reach high novice listening proficiency.

See: Reaching high novice listening proficiency

Stage Two

2. Reach intermediate listening proficiency.

See: Reaching intermediate listening proficiency

Stage Three

3. Reach advanced listening proficiency.

See: Reaching advanced listening proficiency

Stage Four

4. Reach superior listening proficiency.

See: Reaching superior listening proficiency

Stage Five

5. Reach distinguished listening proficiency.

See: Reaching distinguished listening proficiency

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency

Reaching high novice listening proficiency

## Introduction

The objectives listed below are abilities characteristic of high novice listening proficiency, according to the ACTFL guidelines. For each objective, you will find recommendations about techniques or activities that can help you reach the objective.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach high novice listening proficiency:

- Some language learning activities can help you to achieve many of these objectives simultaneously. For example, you learn to recognize vocabulary and sentence structure and the sounds of the language simultaneously when using the Physical Response techniques or the Look and Listen techniques. You will want to have lots of activities where you try to put it all together and get the gist of what is being said.
- At early stages of language acquisition, however, it is sometimes helpful to set apart times to focus on one aspect of listening proficiency and to try to develop that aspect.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached high novice listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach high novice listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Novice level

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

### Phonology objectives

- Learn to differentiate contrasting sounds within words.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds within words

- Learn to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation

### Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand statements, questions, and commands.

See: Learning to understand statements, questions, and commands

### Vocabulary objectives

- Learn to understand common words.

See: Learning to understand common words

### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to interpret basic survival situations.

See: Learning to interpret basic survival functions

### Interactional objectives

- Learn to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations .

See: Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds within words

## Introduction

In order to understand what someone is saying in a language new to you, you need to learn to distinguish the sounds its speakers use to communicate meaning. If the speakers of a language show the difference in meaning in two words by using two different sounds, those sounds are said to be contrasting or in contrast. For example, we make a difference in the words "bid" and "bed" by using different vowel sounds, so in English those are contrasting vowels.

The kinds of sounds that may contrast in a language include consonant and vowel sounds as well as pitch and stress patterns. Here are some recommendations about what to do to learn to distinguish these important sounds.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to learn to distinguish contrasting sounds within words:

- Learn to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels

- If a tone language, learn to differentiate contrasting tones.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting tones

- Learn to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns

See also

- Keywords: stress (linguistic), tonal languages, vowel quality

Learning to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels

#### Introduction

You cannot learn to pronounce a language correctly unless you can hear the differences in the sounds the language uses to differentiate words. For example, in English we have lots of sets of words like "beat" and "bit" and "peel" and "pill" where the only difference in the pronunciation of the words is the difference in the sound of the vowels. Speakers of Spanish and other languages that do not distinguish words with these vowels often have a hard time hearing the difference. Similarly, English-speakers need to learn to distinguish pairs or sets of sounds in languages they are learning. In Korean, for example, the words for "arm" and "foot" sound very similar to English speakers at first.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels:

- The natural tendency of language learners is to fit any new sound into the sound framework of their own language. A course in articulatory phonetics can be a big help in training your ear to hear differences in sounds.
- When you start to learn a language, listen carefully and try to build up in your mind an auditory image of what the language sounds like.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels:

- Use the IPA tutor to learn to distinguish some of the speech sounds in the world's languages.

See: How to use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds

- When you start learning new vocabulary, pay attention to words that sound the same to you or which native speakers correct you when you try to say. Practice distinguishing these words, using the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Make a Phonetic Work Chart to record the sounds you hear.

Note: This is particularly relevant to learning an unwritten language.

See: The Phonetic Work Chart technique

- Use the Sound Checklist technique.

Note: This technique is particularly relevant to learning an unwritten language.

See: The Sound Checklist technique

- Use the Single Sound Drill technique.

See: The Single Sound Drill technique

- Use the Sound Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Sound Contrast Drill technique

How to use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds

Introduction

The Language Learning bookshelf contains a program that can help you learn to discriminate and produce sounds symbolized by the International Phonetic Alphabet. The language you are learning will not have all the sounds in the IPA, but learning the IPA will help you feel better prepared to learn any language.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds:

Associating symbols with sound

- Click a symbol and hear the corresponding sound.
- Test yourself by choosing hear under the Drill menu. You will then hear sounds in random order and should click the symbol you think represents each sound.

Associating sounds and symbols with their technical names

- Click a symbol to hear the corresponding sound and see the technical name
- Test yourself by choosing read under the Drill menu. You will see a technical name displayed and you should click the corresponding symbol.

Learning to distinguish contrasting tones

Introduction

Although all languages use pitch in a meaningful way, some languages use pitch to differentiate the meaning of words. For example, in Thai, the word for "dog" and the word for "horse" both have the same consonants and vowels: maa. But they have different pitch contours, or tones, and that is how Thai people tell these words apart.

If you are learning a tone language like Thai, you too will need to learn to distinguish the different tone patterns of the language. They are every bit as important as consonants and vowels.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to distinguish contrasting tones:

- When you hear the language being spoken, listen to whether or not the pitch pattern seems to be changing on every word or whether it seems to stretch over the whole sentence. If it seems to change on every word, it might be a tone language.
- When you are trying to distinguish tones, it is important to use a tone frame to hear the relative pitch of the different tones in relation to the same word.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting tones:

- Use the Tone Checklist technique.

See: The Tone Checklist technique

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Learning to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns

Introduction

Stress is the emphasis put on a particular syllable of a word. In English, stressed syllables are also usually longer than unstressed syllables and have a higher pitch. Say the following two words:

- present (as in Christmas present), and
- present (as in "The principal will present diplomas at graduation.")

These two words have contrasting stress patterns. Notice that the first word is a noun and the second is a verb. We have a number of such pairs of related words in English, which are distinguished by stress.

Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns:

- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

Learning to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question, a statement, or a command.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation:

- Listen to a recording of someone giving a series of commands, as in Physical Response techniques, and hum the "tune" after each command.
- When listening to question-answer sets, hum the "tune" after each utterance.
- Use the Intonation Drill technique.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

See also

- Keywords: intonation

Learning to understand statements, questions, and commands

Introduction

Every language arranges words in meaningful ways in sentences. The first kind of structures you might be able to understand are statements that

- identify people and objects
- describe people and objects
- tell the location of people and objects, and
- tell about people doing something.

You can also usually understand simple commands and questions that might be answered by the statements listed above.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand statements, questions, and commands:

- Set up your comprehension techniques to include the kinds of sentences mentioned above.
- While you are actually using the techniques, concentrate primarily on the meaning of the sentences, but also try to notice how the words are arranged.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand statements, questions, and commands:

- Read about different sentence types in the introduction to Section 4.2 and Section 4.2.2 of

Kick-starting your language learning.

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.



See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

Learning to understand common words

Introduction

Nobody can learn to understand a second language without learning lots of vocabulary. A good place to start is learning the names of objects and people you can see. Here are some of the kinds of vocabulary to learn first:

- Names of common objects
- Names of common food and drink items
- Words for common actions
- Basic warnings and commands, such as Stop!, Watch out!, and Be careful!
- The most basic words describing size, color, or age
- Simple questions and statements that use words from the categories above

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand common words:

- Plan your comprehension techniques to include various categories of words.
- Remember that there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between words in one language and words in another language.
- Remember that you only really understand a word in relationship to other words in that language.
- Use physical context to help you understand the meanings of words.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand common words:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early in Section 4.1 of Kick-starting your language learning.
- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Keep lists of different categories of vocabulary and look for relationships among them.

Learning to interpret basic survival functions

Introduction

Language functions is a term used to refer to the purposes for which people use language and the way they get things done, using language. Here are some of the most important functions to be able to understand in the beginning:

- Common greetings and farewell expressions
- Basic warnings and commands, such as Stop!, Watch out!, and Be careful!
- Expressions of thanks

Guidelines

- Analysis  
Identify the most common and widely-accepted ways to perform basic survival functions.

Keep a list of functions and the ways to express them in the language.

- Practice

Use interactive techniques that require you to understand the communicative intent of the speaker and respond in some way that shows you understand.

- Observation

Pay attention when you are in the community to the ways people perform basic communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interpret basic survival functions:

- Read about basic language functions in Section 4.3 of Kick-starting your language learning.

- Use the listening phase of the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Dialogue Strip technique.

See: The Dialogue Strip technique

If you are living where the language is spoken

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

See also

- Keywords: communicative functions, survival phrases

Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations

Introduction

Learning to communicate means learning how to interact appropriately with other people in everyday situations.

Objectives

Here are some objectives for learning to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations:

- To recognize the ritualized expressions that frame common conversation situations, such as greetings at the beginning and leave-takings at the end of a conversation
- To recognize the gestures, facial expressions, and words that accompany polite greetings and leave-taking expressions

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations:

- Selective attention

Be observant of gestures and facial expressions that accompany what people say in performing common communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations:

If you live where the language is spoken

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Reaching intermediate listening proficiency

Introduction

Now that you have made a start, you can continue toward your goal of being able to understand what people say in most straightforward social situations. Each level of proficiency takes longer to achieve than the one before, but is rewarding, because you can understand so much more!

Prerequisites

You need to make a start by reaching high novice listening proficiency, before you can reach intermediate proficiency.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach intermediate listening proficiency:

- Remember that as you do any language learning activity which helps you process messages in the language, you will develop many skills simultaneously. It sometimes helps to focus your attention on particular objectives and to choose activities specifically focused on helping you achieve that objective.
- Remember that you can achieve the same objectives by using a variety of approaches to language acquisition.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached intermediate listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach intermediate listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Intermediate level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to differentiate contrasting sounds in connected speech.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds in connected speech

Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand different sentence types.

See: Learning to understand different sentence types

Vocabulary objectives

- Develop understanding of basic vocabulary words.

See: Learning to understand basic vocabulary

Discourse objectives

- Learn to recognize simple references to something or someone already mentioned.

See: Learning to understand simple reference

- Learn to understand sentence and phrase connectors.

See: Learning to understand connectors

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to interpret basic language functions.

See: Learning to interpret simple communication functions

- Distinguish formal versus informal pronouns.

See: Learning to distinguish formal versus informal speech

Interactional objectives

- Recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday survival-type encounters.

See: Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds in connected speech

Introduction

By now you can understand quite a few words in isolation and some simple sentences. When words come together into phrases and sentences, they sometimes sound different. Your goal at this stage is to recognize words in connected speech at least the length of whole sentences.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting sounds in connected speech:

- If a tone language, learn to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences.

See: Learning to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences

- Learn to distinguish contrasting sentence stress patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting stress patterns

- Get used to the rhythm of sentences in the language.

See: Getting used to the rhythm patterns of the language

- Learn to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns

Learning to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences

Introduction

Words with tone sometimes change when following or preceding other words in sentences. You need to learn to recognize tones not only on words in isolation, but also in connected speech.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences:

- Remember that tones are relative and that you need a frame (an adjoining word or phrase) to compare with the tone on the word you are concentrating on.

- Remember that in some languages the intervals between high and low tones decrease towards the end of a sentence, so that it is easier to hear distinctions toward the beginning of sentences.

Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences:

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Learning to distinguish contrasting stress patterns

Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting stress patterns:

- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

Getting used to the rhythm patterns of the language

Introduction

In English, stress and high pitch usually coincide. We also usually lengthen the stressed syllable of a word and rush through the unstressed syllables. Languages like English have been called stress-timed languages.

Some other languages, such as Spanish, are called syllable-timed languages, because every syllable is more or less the same length.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to get used to the rhythm patterns of the language:

- Listen to someone speaking the language and tap out the rhythm with your finger or a pencil. Note whether it is a regularly spaced rhythm or a more syncopated one.
- If the rhythm is syncopated, notice where the longer syllables fall; for example, whether they are on emphasized words in the sentence.

Learning to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question or a statement. It can also indicate information about the mood of the speaker: surprise, anger, emphasis, and so forth. To really understand the person you are talking to, you need to be able to understand the clues about how he or she feels about what is being said.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns:

- Listen to a recording of someone speaking the language and hum the "tune" after each sentence.
- Use the Intonation Drill technique.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

Learning to understand different sentence types

Introduction

You have made a start at understanding some basic types of sentences in your new language. Now you need to expand the kinds of sentences you can understand.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand different sentence types:

- Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- While you actually use the techniques, concentrate primarily on the meaning of the sentences, but also try to notice how the words are arranged.
- You may want to do some techniques where you pay selective attention to the form of the sentences, as well as the meaning.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand different sentence types.

- Read more about different sentence types in Section 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning*.

Using general comprehension techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

Using structure practice techniques

- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

Getting informal practice

- Listen to people talking to their small children.

Reason: They will usually use commands or simple sentence structures.

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to understand basic vocabulary

Introduction

You have learned some common words already, but you will keep learning new vocabulary as long as you actively use your new language. At this stage you want to keep working on basic vocabulary, especially words for people, things, places, and actions you can see.

Guidelines

- Plan your comprehension techniques to include various categories of words.
- Remember that there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between words in one language and words in another language.
- Remember that you only really understand a word in relationship to other words in that language.
- Use physical context to help you understand the meanings of words.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand basic vocabulary:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early, in Section 4.1 of *Kick-starting Your Language Learning*.

Using general comprehension techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

Reinforcing what you are learning

- Use the Memory Reinforcement techniques.

See: The Memory Reinforcement techniques

Getting informal practice

- Watch TV and try to pick up new vocabulary, even if you do not understand the gist of what is doing on.

Note: If you watch or listen to the news first in your own language, so that you know what is going on, you can pick up new words by listening to announcers talk about the same things in your new language.

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to understand simple reference

Introduction

In question or answer exchanges or when you are telling a story, you often refer back to something already mentioned. It is important to understand what or who is being referred to in a story or dialogue to make sense of it all. Here are some kinds of reference to learn to understand:

- Which person a pronoun refers to, when that person has been mentioned in a previous sentence.

Example: "I saw Bob downtown yesterday. He looked really tired."

- What general words may be used to refer to a particular thing or person already mentioned.

Example: "I threw out a bunch of papers and files yesterday. I did not need that stuff anymore."

- What words can be left out to answer a question if they have been mentioned in the question.

Example: "Where's Bob?" "Outside."

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand simple reference:

- Use selective listening to pay attention to different kinds of reference when doing comprehension activities.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand simple reference:

##### Using selective attention

- Use the Power Tools technique to ask simple questions about objects or people or pictures and listen to how a native speaker answers the question.

See: The Power Tools technique

- When doing language learning activities that involve question-answer sets, listen for words in the answer that refer back to something in the question.

#### Learning to understand connectors

##### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to understand connectors:

- Use Selective Attention to pay attention to connectors.

#### Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to understand connectors:

- In comprehension activities, work up from simple sentences to ones that require you to understand the connections between two parts of the sentence.

Example: In the Physical Response techniques, once you can understand, "Raise your right hand" and "Sit down," you can ask the language associate (LA) to string commands together. For example, "Raise your right hand and sit down" or "Raise your right hand, but do not sit down." The LA can also work toward using pronouns more naturally in these exercises: "Take a banana, but do not eat it."

#### Learning to interpret simple communication functions

##### Introduction

Communication functions (or language functions) is a term used to refer to the purposes for which people use language and the way they get things done, using language. In learning another language, it is important to recognize how people use language to get things done.

See: Common purposes or functions of language

##### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to interpret simple communication functions:

- Analysis

Identify the most common and widely-accepted ways to perform basic survival functions.

Keep a list of functions and the ways to express them in the language.

- Practice

Use interactive techniques that require you to understand the communicative intent of the speaker and respond in some way that shows you understand.

- Observation

Pay attention when you are in the community to the ways people perform basic communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interpret simple communication functions:

Understanding functions

- Read about basic language functions in Section 4.3 of Kick-starting your language learning.

Using techniques to learn functions

- Use the listening phase of the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Reverse Role Play technique.

See: The Reverse Role-Play technique

- Use the Limited Answer techniques.

See: The Limited Answer techniques

Getting informal practice

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to distinguish formal versus informal speech

Introduction

People in every society use different words and sometimes even different grammatical forms when talking to friends and family than they do in formal settings. To really understand formal versus informal speech, you need to learn about the society and its values, but you can begin to pick up on basic differences in pronouns or verb forms from the beginning.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to distinguish formal versus informal speech :

- Practice

Set up practice techniques of conversations or short exchanges between friends as well as more formal ones, so that you get practice hearing both sets of forms.

- Selective attention

Listen for the different forms in conversations between native speakers and in conversations people have with you.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish formal versus informal speech:

- Use the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

Note: Pay attention to the words people use when they ask you to do things. Ask them how they would direct their children or a stranger to do the same thing.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Simulations technique.



Note: Note the words native speakers use when taking a part in the role play.

See: The Simulations technique

Getting informal practice

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters

Introduction

Learning to communicate means learning how what people say fits into the context of what they typically do. Every culture has a way to greet other people, every culture has a way to conduct a business transaction, such as buying food. You don't really understand what "Hi, how are you doing?" means in American English until you understand that it is a greeting, not really an inquiry about health. You learn that by observing lots of encounters in which Americans greet each other with "Hi, how are you doing?" and hear the reply "Fine thanks" or "Not too bad" or some other short reply.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of learning to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- To recognize the ritualized expressions that frame common conversation situations, such as greetings at the beginning and leave-takings at the end of a conversation
- To recognize the gestures, facial expressions, and words that accompany polite greetings and leave-taking expressions
- To recognize how people typically act when they sell you something or when they buy something
- To identify how a driver and passengers typically interact on public transportation
- To recognize what people do when they visit others or when they invite other people into their home

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- Analysis  
Analyze the scripts for the most common communication situations you encounter.
- Practice  
Include interactive techniques in your practice activities.
- Selective attention  
Be observant of gestures and facial expressions that accompany what people say in performing common communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Eating Out activity.
- See: The Eating Out activity
- Use the Public Transport activity.
- See: The Public Transport activity
- Use the Shopping Trip activity.
- See: The Shopping Trip activity
- Use the Social Visiting activity.
- See: The Social Visiting activity

Reaching advanced listening proficiency

Introduction

Reaching advanced listening proficiency will allow you to understand quite a lot of what you hear in everyday life. You will be able to participate in most social situations and get the gist of much of what you hear.

Prerequisites

You need to have reached intermediate listening proficiency before you can reach advanced listening proficiency.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach advanced listening proficiency:

- Remember that it takes longer to achieve each level of proficiency than the previous one.

Keep going and you will get there.

- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached advanced listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach advanced listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Advanced level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs.

See: How to learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs

Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand complex sentences of various types, including those found in descriptive paragraphs, simple procedures, and narration of past events.

See: Learning to understand complex sentences of various types

Vocabulary objectives

- Expand your comprehension vocabulary to the point where you can get the general meaning of most of what you hear in routine social situations.

See: Expanding your comprehension vocabulary

Discourse objectives

- Learn to understand short connected discourses.

See: Learning to understand short connected discourses

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to recognize functions for managing conversations.

See: Learning to recognize functions for managing conversations

- Learn to understand social functions without complications.

See: Learning to understand social functions without complications

Interactional objectives

- Learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts.

See: Learning to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts

See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

How to learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs

Introduction

Although you have learned to recognize intonation patterns of individual sentences, you will find that there are over-riding intonation patterns when these sentences are put together to form paragraphs. Learning to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs will help you understand the important points of what is being said, and when the paragraph is coming to an end.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs:

- Different kinds of paragraphs may have different intonation:
  - Descriptive paragraphs
  - Narrative paragraphs
  - Procedural paragraphs
  - Paragraphs contrasting two items
  - Paragraphs summarizing an argument
- Lists of items often have a distinctive intonation pattern.
- Listen to examples from different speakers, including both men and women.

Steps

Follow these steps to learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs:

1. Identify different types of paragraphs from your Audio Archive.
2. If possible, make a transcription of the recording.
3. Listen to the recording and mark on the transcription the pitch contours, places where the voice speeds up or slows down, or where the rhythm changes.
4. Look at the meaning of those parts of the paragraph where the intonation changed and see if you can make any correlations.
5. Listen to several examples of each kind of paragraph to see if the intonation patterns are the same. If they are, you have probably identified a pattern typical of that kind of paragraph.

Learning to understand complex sentences of various types

Introduction

The kinds of sentences you encounter depends somewhat on the language. Complex sentences usually have more than one verb, and may be made up of two simple sentences linked by connecting words, called conjunctions. In English, such sentences might have the following conjunctions: after, and, but, although, since, who, that, when, or where.

Guidelines

- Analysis  
Identify basic clause types and include them in your language learning activities.
- Planning  
Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- Inferencing

Once you have set up activities to include a variety of sentence types, concentrate on the meaning of the sentences more than on the forms.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand complex sentences of various types:

Using Comprehension techniques

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

- Use the Picture Descriptions technique.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

Focusing on form

- Use the Structure Practice techniques.

See: The Structure Practice techniques

Expanding your comprehension vocabulary

Introduction

Learning vocabulary

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to expand your comprehension vocabulary:

- Analysis  
Keep lists of different categories of vocabulary and look for relationships among them.
- Planning  
Plan your comprehension techniques to include the following:
  - Practical topics: situations you find yourself in where you need to understand what is going on in order to get basic goods and services
  - Personal interest topics: concrete topics about which you are particularly interested in being able to understand what people have to say
  - Concrete topics of interest to people in the community: topics people want to talk about
- Practice  
Concentrate on the meanings of words when doing the activities.
- Inferencing  
Use familiarity with the topic or demonstrations to help you understand the meanings of words.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to expand your comprehension vocabulary:

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

Learning to understand short connected discourses

Introduction

In the previous stage you learned to understand a variety of sentences, but people do not usually speak in isolated sentences; they connect their thoughts into discourses. At this stage of language learning, you should be aiming to understand the following kinds of discourse:

- Dialogues
- Descriptive paragraphs about something you are familiar with
- Procedures, such as how to do something
- Short narrations about predictable content

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand short connected discourses:

- Analysis  
Work to discover the scripts for predictable communication situations.
- Top-down processing  
Use your familiarity with the subject matter or your knowledge of a situation to help you understand stories and descriptions.
- Repeated Attention  
Listen to taped stories over and over until you can understand them.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand short connected discourses:

- Use the Predictable Text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Picture Description technique.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

Learning to recognize functions for managing conversations

#### Introduction

Every language has ways to manage conversations—ways

- to know when it is your turn to speak
- to indicate that you want to introduce a new topic, and
- to indicate that you need to cut off the conversation.

It is important to recognize cues that speakers of the language give you about their desires or intentions as to how the conversation should develop, so you will know how to respond.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize functions for managing conversations:

- Read Functions for managing conversations to get some idea about how people manage conversations.
- Use the Dialogue techniques.

Note: Pay special attention to the way people perform the various conversation management functions.

See: The Dialogue techniques

Learning to understand social functions without complications

#### Introduction

At this level, you work toward understanding the language well enough to figure out what people mean in straightforward social situations. If people are too indirect (perhaps because it

would be socially embarrassing to come right out and say things flat out), you will probably have some problems understanding what is going on.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand social functions without complications:

- You need to spend as much time as possible watching and listening to native speakers engaging in communication situations to get a sense of how common social functions are carried on.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand social functions without complications:

- Read Social functions to get an idea of what kinds of functions to focus on.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

Note: Spend time observing as many social situations as possible, especially those where you can listen and observe without having to speak a lot.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts

#### Introduction

As we interact in various communication situations in a society, we develop a sense of what sort of script people typically follow in each kind of situation.

#### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts:

- You can only go so far toward achieving this goal if you are not living in a place where the language is spoken. Try to arrange for a stay of at least some months in a place where you can observe and participate in communication situations.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts:

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Script Analysis technique.

See: The Script Analysis technique

Reaching superior listening proficiency

#### Introduction

Achieving superior listening proficiency will enable you to understand what is going on in most social and work situations and to pick up on emotional nuances of what you hear.

#### Prerequisites

You need to have reached advanced listening proficiency before you can develop superior proficiency.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach superior listening proficiency:

- At this stage, you will benefit from getting lots of comprehensible input. Almost anything you do that gives you an opportunity to hear the language being spoken will be beneficial to you.

- Spend lots of time interacting with people and listening to radio, TV, and films, if these are available.

- Enroll in an adult education course in an area you are interested in (if available) to give you lots of comprehensible input and a chance to interact with people. The good thing about a course is that you usually listen a lot. Courses on crafts and handwork usually involve demonstrations, which aid understanding.

- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached superior listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach superior listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Superior level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to understand speech sounds at normal speed.

See: Learning to understand speech sounds at normal speed

- Learn to understand emotional nuances of speech.

See: Learning to understand emotional nuances of speech

Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech.

See: Learning to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech

Vocabulary objectives

- Broaden the range of vocabulary you can understand on social and work topics.

See: Broadening the range of vocabulary you can understand

Discourse objectives

- Expand understanding of complex discourses.

See: Expanding understanding of complex oral discourses

- Learn to understand abstract relationships between ideas.

See: Learning to understand abstract relationships between ideas

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to understand indirect speech acts.

See: Learning to understand indirect speech acts

- Learn to understand colloquial speech and idioms.

See: Learning to understand colloquial speech and idioms

Interactional objectives

- Learn to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude.

See: Learning to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude

See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to understand speech sounds at normal speed

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand speech sounds at normal speed:

- Do not concentrate on trying to understand every word. That slows people down to the point that they lose the thread of the conversation. Just let the language flow over you and try to get the gist of what is being said.
- Be sure to get lots of exposure to comprehensible input. Listening to mother-tongue speakers talking to each other live or via media will help you learn to process language at normal speed.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand speech at normal speed:

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

Note: When listening to your Audio Archive, radio, or TV, or when you overhear two native speakers talking to each other, pay attention to the intonation, rhythm, and other features of the texts.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Record the news from radio or television, or record people speaking at normal speed.

Listen to the whole recording several times, or to short clips (of normal speed) until you are able to handle long segments at normal speed.

• Listen to a radio news station that repeats the same news at regular intervals. If you do not catch the story the first time, you may get it the second or third time.

• Talk to a local friend about meanings of speech and nonverbal communication which are unclear to you.

#### Learning to understand emotional nuances of speech

##### Introduction

Language is used as much to express how we feel about issues or relationships as it is to transmit information. It is important to learn to recognize the cues about emotions carried by intonation, tone of voice, and other phonetic features.

##### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand emotional nuances of speech:

- Use cues from the story line of a film or TV program to help you understand the nuances of feelings shown by suprasegmental features.
- If you are not sure of the emotional tone of what you hear, ask a friend who speaks the language to help you identify the emotions.

#### Learning to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech

##### Introduction

The grammatical structures found in oral speech are often simpler than some of those found in written texts. In French, for example, the simple past tense is only found in written form, never in conversation. Sentence structures tend to be less strictly controlled and often have false starts. It is important to listen to various sorts of speech, from informal conversations to prepared speeches, to get a sense of the kinds of grammatical structures that occur in each genre of speech.

##### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech:

- Exposure to massive amounts of comprehensible input will help you infer the meaning of grammatical structures occurring in natural speech.
- Analysis of written texts may help you understand grammatical structures also used in oral speech, but sometimes there are forms which are only found in written texts, never in oral speech, and vice versa.

##### Things to do



Here are the things to do when you learn to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech:

Getting comprehensible input

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Interview techniques.

See: The Interview techniques

- Use the Text Analysis technique.

See: The Text Analysis technique

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

- Listen to radio, TV, and films, for fun, if available.

- Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you exposure to people speaking the language to you and to each other.

Broadening the range of vocabulary you can understand

Introduction

By this stage you have learned to recognize all the sounds of the language and most of the grammatical structures, but you will keep on learning vocabulary forever. The encouraging news is that you can now understand much of what you hear and can acquire new vocabulary quickly from the linguistic context.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can understand:

- One great way to learn new vocabulary is to set out to learn more about various aspects of the culture. Not only will you understand more about the people you talk to, you will learn lots of vocabulary in the process.
- Remember that words only have meaning in relationship to other words in the language. You cannot understand the word "goal" unless you know whether the conversation is about soccer or about managing a project.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can understand:

- Do a Needs Analysis to see what areas of vocabulary you want to concentrate on most.

See: Section 2.3 of Language learning in the real world for nonbeginners to learn how and why to do a Needs Analysis

Getting comprehensible input

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Interview techniques.

See: The Interview techniques

- Use the Discovering Categories techniques.

See: The Discovering Categories technique

- Listen to radio, TV, and films, for fun, if available.

• Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you exposure to people speaking the language to you and to each other.

- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

Expanding understanding of complex oral discourses

## Introduction

By now you can understand fairly straightforward, predictable discourses, but more complex discourses in which you have to keep track of the structure of the ideas, will take further work.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to expand your understanding of complex oral discourses:

- Use the Text Analysis technique.

See: The Text Analysis technique

## Selective listening

- Listen to people debating the pros and cons of an issue.
- Listen to someone describing what might happen in a hypothetical situation.
- Ask people why they acted in a certain way and listen to the answers.
- Ask your language associate (LA) to describe a complex object or procedure and you try to draw it or do the procedure.

Learning to understand abstract relationships between ideas

## Introduction

When you were a novice language learner, your understanding was restricted mostly to concrete objects and actions, but now at this stage you can work toward understanding more abstract relationships between ideas.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand abstract relationships between ideas:

## Selective attention

• When using comprehension techniques, such as the Series technique, listen for sentences expressing the purpose of various actions.

Example: I cover the pot at night so that the clay does not dry out.

- Listen for sentences explaining the reason for various actions.

Example: I stayed home last night because I was really tired.

- Listen for sentences explaining conditions under which something will take place.

Example: If Bill gets home from work in time, we will go to a movie.

- Listen for sentences explaining the result of an action or state.

Example: The temperature went down to 20 degrees Fahrenheit last night, so my plants froze.

See also

- What is an interpropositional relation?

Learning to understand indirect speech acts

## Introduction

Indirect speech acts are those where the purpose of the speaker is not overtly indicated by the words chosen, but where clues are given to the meaning of the speaker.

Example: If I would like you to open the window I might say, "It's really warm today, isn't it?"

People often use indirect speech acts to "save face," when it is thought that expressing a request or idea too directly would be impolite or cause embarrassment.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand indirect speech acts:

- When you hear something being said that you do not understand, ask your language associate (LA) or a culture friend what was meant.
- Ask your LA specifically how he or she might express some of the following:

- Request something politely
- Politely decline an invitation
- Hedge when asked to do something he or she does not want to commit to do
- Discourage unwanted advances

## Learning to understand colloquial speech and idioms

### Introduction

People use different vocabulary when they are socializing with their friends than when giving formal speeches. For one thing, they use idioms and expressions that show they are part of the in-group.

Examples: hanging with friends, what's going down

It is important to learn to understand colloquial expressions and to identify the group of people who use them, and the circumstances in which they are appropriate.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand colloquial speech and idioms:

- Pay attention to the person using an idiomatic or colloquial expression and the people he or she is speaking to.
- Pay attention to the kind of communication situation in which the expression is used.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand colloquial speech and idioms:

- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

- Use the Shortened Forms technique.

See: The Shortened Forms technique

- Watch films and television programs in which people are speaking to each other informally.

## Learning to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude

### Introduction

It is important to understand what is considered polite speech and when people are being deliberately rude or insulting. For one thing, it will help you to avoid being rude or insulting in your own speech—unless you want to be, of course.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude:

- Observation is one of the best tools to help you learn about polite and impolite varieties of speech.
- Native speakers of a language will often forgive grammatical errors more easily than speech that they see as rude.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude:

- Watch for behavioral cues and facial expressions accompanying speech to help you judge the intent of the speaker.
- Watch the reactions of native speakers to see when they perceive speech as being rude or impolite.
- Ask your language associate to point out to you when somebody is being rude.

## Reaching distinguished listening proficiency

### Introduction

Not many people ever reach this level of proficiency in a second language. If you get there, you will basically be able to understand the language as well as most of the educated native speakers.

#### Prerequisites

You need to have achieved superior listening proficiency before you can reach distinguished proficiency.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach distinguished listening proficiency:

- You will need to spend years in a language community before you reach this level as it requires a high degree of cultural knowledge as well as linguistic skills.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached distinguished listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach distinguished listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Distinguished level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you are aiming to achieve to reach this level.

#### Phonology objectives

- Learn to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation.

See: Learning to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation

#### Grammar objectives

- By this stage you should already understand the grammatical structures of the language.

#### Vocabulary objectives

• Build an encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary so that you can understand people talking about any subject you have knowledge of.

See: Building encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary

#### Discourse objectives

- Learn to follow the structure of all kinds of oral discourse, including
  - professional presentations
  - political speeches
  - academic debates, and
  - artistic productions, such as plays.

See: Learning to follow formal oral discourse

#### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to interpret variations in the style of discourses directed at different audiences.

See: Learning to interpret variations in the style of discourses

#### Interactional objectives

- Learn to recognize the rules of interaction that hold in any social situation.

See: Learning to recognize the rules of interaction in a social situation

#### Cultural objectives

- Learn to understand social and cultural references from within the cultural framework.

See: Learning to understand references from within the cultural framework

#### See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation

#### Introduction

As you learn to recognize variations in pronunciation, you can also learn a lot about the society and its attitudes toward different regions and people of different social status. Every society has some varieties that are considered standard or prestigious and others that are less prestigious. For example, in England they sometimes refer to the received pronunciation, or BBC English, or The Queen's English. But there are many other regional dialects spoken, and often people of a region cling to their pronunciation to identify with their roots.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation:

- Spend as much time as possible interacting with people from various areas of the country and of different status in society.
- Watch TV and films, noticing different accents and where people are from.
- Watch native speaker reactions as to which dialects are considered prestigious and which are looked down on.

Building encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary

Introduction

You will not really know every word in the encyclopedia, but you want to be able to understand people talking about anything except specialist vocabulary restricted to a profession or trade or subject you are totally unfamiliar with.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you build encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary:

- Get as much comprehensible input as possible from daily interaction with people and from the media. Watch nature programs, history programs, and educational programs for adults.
- Identify gaps in your knowledge and try to put yourself in an environment where you can learn about them, such as in adult education classes, or interest groups.
- Pick subjects that have unfamiliar vocabulary, read what you can find about them, then discuss them with people knowledgeable in that area.

Learning to follow formal oral discourse

Introduction

Some kinds of oral discourse are harder to follow than others, since they are like written discourse, and in fact, are often written first and then read aloud. Examples of this kind of discourse include

- papers read at professional conferences
- editorials on radio or TV
- political debates, and
- the scripts of plays, specially those with archaic speech.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to follow formal oral discourse:

- Read as much as you can about the areas you want to learn to understand orally.

Reason: Formal oral discourse is often harder to understand than written discourse, since you only have one chance to process it, and cannot go back. Learning the vocabulary of the field and getting used to written discourse should help you to process information orally.

- Use the Text Analysis technique to familiarize yourself with the structure of written discourses. This should make it easier to follow formal oral discourse.

See: The Text Analysis technique

- Listen for certain lexical phrases used to indicate the structure of the discourse.

Learning to interpret variations in the style of discourses

### Introduction

Native speakers unconsciously adjust the choice of words and their manner of speaking when addressing different audiences. For instance, a college professor will sound quite different when lecturing to his classes from the way he does when talking with a neighbor about the rose garden. Furthermore, he may sound quite different when teaching an undergraduate class and when he is addressing fellow scholars at professional meetings. Exposure to discourses aimed at a wide variety of audiences will help you learn to pick up on these differences.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interpret variations in the style of discourses:

- Consciously look for opportunities to listen to lectures aimed at different audiences, and pay attention to the style of presentation.
- Look for native speaker reaction to style of speaking or lectures that seem to be inappropriate to the audience.
- Ask native speakers which speakers have particularly good style or eloquence when speaking.

Learning to recognize the rules of interaction in a social situation

### Introduction

To achieve distinguished listening proficiency, you have to understand how people are acting in all the social situations you commonly find yourself in. This takes years, and is often just absorbed by watching interactions among native speakers. It is possible, however, to pay systematic attention to different communication situations and to learn some rules which you might not have noticed.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize the rules of interaction in a social situation:

- Follow the method for analyzing communication situations found in Saville-Troike's *The ethnography of communication*.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

Learning to understand references from within the cultural framework

### Introduction

You can understand all the words and structures of a language and still not know what people are talking about unless you tap into the shared knowledge bank of the culture. This is what everyone assumes you already know about and will understand if they allude to it. It takes years of living in a country to learn what everyone there already knows.

In most countries nowadays, popular culture is determined by, or at least transmitted by mass media. Watching TV is not a waste of time, in terms of culture learning.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand references from within the cultural framework:

- Read historical accounts of the country you are in.
- Ask older people to talk to you about what they remember happening during their lifetime.
- Watch television programs about anything and everything, noting especially jokes you do not understand. Ask native speakers about them, as they are often based on implicit cultural information.
- Listen to radio news programs and discussions in depth while you drive or ride the train.
- Find out what is in with the young people in the country—what they are talking about.

## How to develop your desired level of speaking proficiency

### Introduction

Here are suggestions for reaching your desired level of speaking proficiency. Note that if your ultimate goal is to reach superior proficiency, you must first achieve intermediate and advanced proficiency. If you are already at advanced proficiency, you should go directly to that step.

### Prerequisites

Normally you cannot develop a high level of speaking proficiency in a language without first (or simultaneously) developing listening proficiency.

Note: Listening proficiency usually develops more quickly and to a higher degree than speaking proficiency.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you develop your desired level of speaking proficiency:

- Part of making a strategic plan is choosing an approach to language learning that fits your learning style and situation. The approach you choose will determine which techniques you choose to use from among the recommendations given.

See: Choosing a language learning approach

- Each step will take longer to achieve than the previous one, so you have to have patience!

### Steps

Follow these steps when you develop your desired level of speaking proficiency:

1. Reach high novice speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching high novice speaking proficiency

2. Reach intermediate speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching intermediate speaking proficiency

3. Reach advanced speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching advanced speaking proficiency

4. Reach superior speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching superior speaking proficiency

5. Reach distinguished speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching distinguished speaking proficiency

See also

- Keywords: speaking proficiency

### Reaching high novice speaking proficiency

#### Introduction

At novice level you have to rely on memorized phrases for the most part to communicate whole ideas. You are acquiring important building blocks, however, that can help you begin to use language creatively at the next level.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach high novice speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Novice level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you are aiming for at this level.

#### Phonology objectives

- Learn to pronounce contrasting sounds within words.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting sounds within words

- Learn to produce question, answer, and command intonation patterns correctly in memorized phrases.

See: Learning to produce question, answer, and command intonation

#### Grammar objectives

- Learn to make short statements, questions, and commands.

See: Learning to make short statements, questions, and commands

Vocabulary objectives

- Learn to say common words.

See: Learning to say common words

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to perform basic survival functions.

See: Learning to express basic communication functions

Interactional objectives

- Learn to interact appropriately in survival situations.

See: Learning to interact appropriately in survival situations

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to pronounce contrasting sounds within words

Introduction

In order to speak a language so that people can understand you, you need to learn to make the sounds its speakers use to communicate meaning. If the speakers of a language show the difference in meaning in two words by using two different sounds, those sounds are said to be contrasting or in contrast. For example, we make a difference in the words "bid" and "bed" by using different vowel sounds, so in English those are contrasting vowels.

The kinds of sounds that may contrast in a language include consonant and vowel sounds as well as pitch and stress patterns. Here are some recommendations about what to do to learn to make these important sounds.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting sounds within words:

- Learn to contrast consonants and vowels.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels

- If a tone language, learn to pronounce contrasting tones so speakers can hear the difference.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting tones

- Learn to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns

Learning to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels

Introduction

You cannot learn to pronounce a language correctly unless you can make the differences in the sounds the language uses to differentiate words. For example, in English we have lots of sets of words like "beat" and "bit" and "peel" and "pill" where the only difference in the pronunciation of the words is the difference in the sound of the vowels. Speakers of Spanish and other languages that do not distinguish words with these vowels often have a hard time making the difference.

Similarly, English-speakers need to learn to pronounce pairs or sets of sounds in languages they are learning so that they can be understood. English speakers learning Korean, for example, find it hard to pronounce the words for "arm" and "foot" so that Koreans know what they are talking about.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels:



- The natural tendency of language learners is to fit any new sound into the sound framework of their own language. A course in articulatory phonetics can be a big help in learning to make sounds foreign to you.
- It is important, when you start to speak a new language, that you continue to listen carefully and try to build up in your mind an auditory image of what the language sounds like. Otherwise, the way you pronounce the language will start to sound right to you, instead of the way the native speaker sounds.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels:

- Use the IPA tutor to learn to pronounce some of the speech sounds in the world's languages.

See: How to use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds

- When you start learning new vocabulary, pay attention to words that sound the same to you or which native speakers correct you when you try to say. Work on mimicking these words after your language associate.

- Use the Sound Checklist technique.

Note: This technique is particularly relevant to learning an unwritten language.

See: The Sound Checklist technique

- Use the Single Sound Drill technique to practice saying sounds you have trouble pronouncing.

See: The Single Sound Drill technique

- Use the Sound Contrast Drill technique to practice making the difference between two similar sounds.

See: The Sound Contrast Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique to check your pronunciation against that of a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to pronounce contrasting tones

Introduction

In tone languages, the tone of words is as important to the meaning as consonants and vowels. Often speakers of tone languages have trouble understanding why those of us who do not speak tone languages have such a hard time making the difference between two words with different tones, since those words sound completely different to them.

If you are learning a tone language like Thai or Chinese, you too will need to learn to make the contrasting tone patterns of the language.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to pronounce contrasting tones:

- As with all sounds, you have to be able to hear the tones of a language before you can make them.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting tones

- It is helpful, when you are learning to speak a tone language, to know how many contrasting tones a language has. If you can find out this information in a text book or grammar of the language, great! If not, you can figure it out for yourself.

See: The Tone Checklist technique

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting tones:

- Listen carefully to the pronunciation of each word and mimic it; then use the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Learning to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns

Introduction

Stress is the emphasis put on a particular syllable of a word. In English, stressed syllables are also usually longer than unstressed syllables and have a higher pitch. Say the following two words:

- present (as in Christmas present), and
- present (as in "The principal will present diplomas at graduation.")

These two words have contrasting stress patterns. Notice that the first word is a noun and the second is a verb. We have a number of such pairs of related words in English, which are distinguished by stress.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns:

- Use the production phase of the Stress Pattern Drill technique to practice making contrastive word stress.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique to check your pronunciation against that of a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to produce question, answer, and command intonation

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question, a statement, or a command. It is important to be able to pronounce sentences so that people can understand you, and so that you fit in.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to produce question, answer, and command intonation:

- Use the production phase of the Intonation Drill technique to practice making each intonation pattern.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique to check your intonation against that of native speakers.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to make short statements, questions, and commands

Introduction

When you first start speaking a language, you usually make new sentences by fitting words you have learned into the patterns of sentences you have memorized. Some of the most useful sentence patterns to learn first are statements that do the following:

- Identify people and objects
- Describe people and objects
- Tell the location of people and objects
- Tell about people doing something

You also need to learn to ask simple questions and to make polite requests, which might come out as questions or commands.

## Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to make short statements, questions, and commands:

- The kinds of sentences you learn to make should be determined by two things:
  - Sentences you need to use to meet your survival needs. (These may sometimes be more complex than sentences you could construct for yourself.)
  - Sentences you learn to say to build up your overall ability to speak the language.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to make short statements, questions, and commands:

- Read about different sentence types in the introduction to Section 4.2 and Section 4.2.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning*.

- Use the Survival Phrases technique to learn sentences you can use to meet your needs, and use these sentences as patterns into which to substitute other words you are learning.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Clause Type Practice technique to practice basic sentence types.

See: The Clause Type Practice technique

- Use the production phases of the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique to concentrate on the form, as well as the meaning of sentences.

Note: It does not help a lot to recite the form of a sentence without being conscious of the meaning. Be creative in thinking of contexts in which you could say each sentence.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the production phase of the Structure Contrast Drill technique to practice the difference between two sentence types such as question and statement.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

## Learning to say common words

### Introduction

Nobody can learn to understand a second language without learning lots of vocabulary. A good place to start is learning to say the names of objects and people you can see. Here are some of the kinds of vocabulary to learn to say first:

- Names of common objects
- Names of common food and drink items
- Words for common actions
- The most basic words describing size, color, or age

## Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to say common words:

- Build your speaking on your comprehension techniques. You need to learn to recognize words and what they sound like before you can say them.
- When you say a word, ask your language associate (LA) to repeat it after you, so that you can hear the correct pronunciation in relation to your own attempt.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to say common words:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early, in Section 4.1 of *Kick-starting Your Language Learning*.

- Build on the Look and Listen techniques.

Example: If you have learned to point out apple and orange in a picture book, your LA could ask you, "What is this?" You answer, "An apple."

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Build on the Physical Response techniques.

Example: If you have learned to give your LA one-to-five pencils in response to a command, he could ask you, "How many pencils would you like?" You answer, "Two."

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Memory Reinforcement techniques to help you remember the words for future use.

See: The Memory Reinforcement techniques

Learning to express basic communication functions

Introduction

You have already learned how to express some basic communication functions, such as greetings and leave-taking expressions. Now you need to expand the kinds of functions you can express.

There are four areas of functions to work on:

- Social functions
- Self-expressive functions
- Cognitive functions
- Conversation management functions

The specific functions you learn to express first in each area will depend on

- your approach to language learning
- your interests, and
- your language learning situation.

At this stage, though, you will not be able to handle functions with complications and will need helpful, cooperative people to talk with.

You will continue to develop ways to express these functions as long as you are learning the language.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to express basic communication functions:

- Be aware of the fact that there are variations in the way you express functions, depending on your relationship to other people and the situation you find yourself in.
- Try to first learn ways to express functions that are the most generally applicable.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to express basic communication functions:

- Read about social functions, self-expressive functions, cognitive functions and conversation management functions to get an idea of the things people do with language.
- Use the production phase of the Survival Phrases technique to memorize expressions you can use to express functions.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Dialogue Strip technique to practice exchanges and to associate what you are saying with a picture.

See: The Dialogue Strip technique

If you are living where the language is spoken

- Use the Eating Out activity to practice using what you have learned.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity to practice using what you have learned.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity to practice using what you have learned.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity to practice your social functions, such as greeting and leave-taking.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to interact appropriately in survival situations

Introduction

Learning to communicate means more than just learning to say words; it means learning how to interact appropriately with people when speaking.

Objectives

Here are some objectives for learning to interact appropriately in survival situations:

- To use the ritualized expressions that frame common conversation situations, such as greetings at the beginning and leave-takings at the end of a conversation
- To use the gestures, facial expressions, and words that accompany polite greetings and leave-taking expressions

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to interact appropriately in survival situations:

- Selective attention  
Be observant of gestures and facial expressions that accompany what people say in performing common communication functions and try to imitate them when you are speaking.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interact appropriately in survival situations:

If you are living where the language is spoken

- Use the Participant Observation technique.  
See: The Participant Observation technique
- Use the Role Play technique to practice interactions.  
See: The Role-Play technique
- Use the Eating Out activity.  
See: The Eating Out activity
- Use the Public Transport activity.  
See: The Public Transport activity
- Use the Shopping Trip activity.  
See: The Shopping Trip activity
- Use the Social Visiting activity.  
See: The Social Visiting activity

Reaching intermediate speaking proficiency

Introduction

At intermediate speaking proficiency you will be able to use language creatively in conversation, although you will make lots of mistakes and your performance will vary a lot in fluency and accuracy. You will need patient and helpful conversation partners at this stage, but it should be very encouraging to be able to use language for authentic communication.

Prerequisites

You need to achieve novice speaking proficiency before you can reach intermediate speaking proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach intermediate speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at intermediate level.

Reason: This will give you an idea of what you are aiming for at this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to pronounce words understandably in connected speech.

See: Learning to pronounce words understandably in connected speech

Grammar objectives

- Learn to use different types of sentences in conversation.

See: Learning to use different types of sentences in conversation

Vocabulary objectives

- Learn to use basic vocabulary in speech.

See: Learning to use basic vocabulary in speech

Discourse objectives

- Learn to refer to people already mentioned.

See: Learning to refer to people already mentioned

- Learn to use sentence and phrase connectors.

See: Learning to use sentence and phrase connectors

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to perform simple communication functions.

See: Learning to perform simple communication functions

- Learn to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address.

See: Learning to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address

Interactional objectives

- Learn to interact appropriately in everyday encounters.

See: Learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to pronounce words understandably in connected speech

Introduction

By now you can understand quite a few words in isolation and some simple sentences. When words come together into phrases and sentences, they sometimes sound different. Your goal at this stage is to recognize words in connected speech at least the length of whole sentences.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce words understandably in connected speech:

- If a tone language, learn to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances.

See: Learning to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances

- Learn to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns

- Learn to use the rhythm patterns of the language.

See: Learning to use the rhythm patterns of the language

- Learn to produce basic sentence intonation patterns.

See: Learning to produce basic sentence intonation patterns

Learning to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances

Introduction

Words with tone sometimes change when following or preceding other words in sentences. Also, speakers of nontonal languages need to learn not to impose their own. You need to learn to pronounce tones understandably not only on words in isolation, but also in connected speech.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances:

- Remember that tones can change when next to other tones. You need to hear a word in lots of different contexts and practice saying it in various contexts to really master it.
- In some languages the interval between high and low tones decreases as the sentence gets longer. In order to sound authentic you will have to learn to do that too.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances:

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

- Use the Memorized Routines techniques.

See: The Memorized Routines techniques

Learning to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns

Introduction

Sentence stress is often used to show which part of the sentence is emphasized or more prominent. Learning to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns is just part of learning to sound like a native speaker.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns:

- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to use the rhythm patterns of the language

Introduction

It is important to learn to use the rhythm patterns of the language to make your speech more intelligible to native speakers. Listen to some nonnative speakers of your language and see how well they do with the rhythm patterns of English to see how important this aspect of pronunciation can be.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use the rhythm patterns of the language:

- Listen to a native speaker speaking the language and track along with the speaker.
- Mimic a recording of a native speaker, sentence by sentence, recording yourself. This is a variation of the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to produce basic sentence intonation patterns

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question or a statement. It can also indicate information about the mood of the speaker: surprise, anger, emphasis, and so forth. To be understandable to your conversation partners, you need to learn to produce appropriate sentence intonation patterns.

Things to do

Here are the things to do to learn when you learn to produce basic sentence intonation patterns:

- Track after a recording of a native speaker, concentrating on intonation patterns.
- Use the Intonation Drill technique.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

Learning to use different types of sentences in conversation

Introduction

You have made a start at understanding some basic types of sentences in your new language. Now you need to expand the kinds of sentences you can understand.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use different types of sentences in conversation:

- Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- While you are actually using the techniques, concentrate primarily on the meaning of the sentences, but also try to notice how the words are arranged.
- You may want to do some techniques where you pay selective attention to the form of the sentences, as well as the meaning.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use different sentence types in conversation.

- Read more about different sentence types in Section 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning*.

### Building on comprehension techniques

- Build on the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Build on the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

### Using structure practice techniques

- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

- Use the Clause Type Practice technique.

See: The Clause Type Practice technique

- Use the Part of Speech Placement technique.

See: The Part of Speech Placement technique

### Using interactive techniques

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

### Learning to use basic vocabulary in speech

#### Introduction

You have learned some common words already, but you will keep learning new vocabulary as long as you are actively using your new language. At this stage you want to keep working on basic vocabulary, especially words for

- people
- things
- places, and
- actions you can see.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use basic vocabulary in speech:

- Work your speaking practice in with your comprehension techniques.
- Remember that there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between words in one language and words in another language.



- Look for feedback from your conversation partners to see if they have understood you.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use basic vocabulary words in speech:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early, in Section 4.1 of Kick-starting your language learning.

Using general comprehension techniques

- Continue to build on the Look and Listen techniques.

Example: You try to describe what you see in the pictures you have heard the language associate (LA) describe.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Continue to build on the Physical Response techniques.

Example: You give commands to the LA and see if they are understood.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Limited Answer techniques.

See: The Limited Answer techniques

Informal practice

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to refer to people already mentioned

Introduction

In question or answer exchanges or when you are telling a story, you often refer back to something already mentioned. It is important to learn how to do this so that people can understand. Here are some kinds of reference to learn:

- Which person a pronoun refers to, when that person has been mentioned in a previous sentence.

Example: "I saw Bob downtown yesterday. He looked really tired."

- What general words may be used to refer to a particular thing or person already mentioned.

Example: "I threw out a bunch of papers and files yesterday. I didn't need that stuff anymore."

- What words can be left out to answer a question if they have been mentioned in the question.

Example: "Where's Bob?" "Outside."

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to refer to people already mentioned:

Using selective attention

- Concentrate on getting the reference right while using the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

Practice

- Use the Pronominal Reference Drill technique.

See: The Pronominal Reference Drill technique

- Use the Record for Correction technique to get your language associate to correct your reference.

See: The Record for Correction technique

- Use the Specialized Cloze technique to work on reference.

See: The Cloze technique

Learning to use sentence and phrase connectors

## Introduction

People do not speak in isolated phrases and one-verb clauses; they link their ideas together into discourses, using conjunctions. Learning to use sentence and phrase connectors appropriately is the first step in learning how to speak in connected discourse.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use sentence and phrase connectors:

- In production practice based on comprehension activities, work up from simple sentences to ones that require you to state the connections between two parts of the sentence.

Example: In taking the other role in the Physical Response techniques, once you can say, "Raise your right hand" and "Sit down," you string commands together: "Raise your right hand and sit down," or "Raise your right hand, but do not sit down."

## Learning to perform simple communication functions

### Introduction

Communication functions (or language functions) is a term used to refer to the purposes for which people use language and the way they get things done, using language. In learning another language, it is important to learn how to use language to get things done.

### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to perform simple communication functions:

- Practice  
Use interactive techniques that require you to perform communicative functions.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to perform simple communication functions:

#### Understanding functions

- Read about basic communication functions in Common purposes or functions of language.

#### Using techniques to learn functions

- Use the production phase of the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Limited Answer techniques.

See: The Limited Answer techniques

#### Getting informal practice

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

## Learning to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address

### Introduction

People in every society use different words and sometimes even different grammatical forms when talking to friends and family than they do in formal settings. To really understand how to address people appropriately, you need to learn about the society and its values, but you can learn basic differences in pronouns or titles from the beginning.

## Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address :

- Practice

Set up practice techniques of conversations or short exchanges between friends as well as more formal ones, so that you get practice using both sets of forms.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address:

- Use the Survival Phrases technique.

Note: Make sure you ask your language associate which forms to use to address which people.

When in doubt, learn the more polite forms first.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Role play technique.

Note: Make sure you know what role the other person is playing, so you can use appropriate forms of address.

See: The Role-Play technique

- Use the Dialogue Variations technique.

Note: Practice the same sort of interactions with people of different ages, gender, status.

See: The Dialogue Variations technique

### Getting informal practice

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters

### Introduction

Learning to communicate means learning how to interact with other people. The language you use in these encounters depends on and is part of the interaction.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives for learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters:

- To know when and how to greet people and take leave of them, using the appropriate gestures, facial expressions, and words
- To interact appropriately with a salesperson when buying something
- To interact appropriately with the driver and fellow passengers on public transportation
- To interact appropriately when you visit others or when you invite other people into your

home

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to interact appropriately in everyday encounters:

- Ask for feedback.  
Ask a culture friend to tell you if you are acting inappropriately.
- Practice appropriate responses.  
Include interactive techniques in your practice activities.
- Observe others interacting appropriately.  
Base your behavior on what you observe.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.
  - See: The Dialogue techniques
  - Use the Eating Out activity.
  - See: The Eating Out activity
  - Use the Public Transport activity.
  - See: The Public Transport activity
  - Use the Shopping Trip activity.
  - See: The Shopping Trip activity
  - Use the Social Visiting activity.
  - See: The Social Visiting activity
- Reaching advanced speaking proficiency

#### Introduction

When you achieve advanced speaking proficiency, you can participate in most everyday activities in the language you are learning. You will be able to make yourself understood fairly easily, although you will still grope for some words. You will begin to handle more complicated communication tasks and situations. It should be more and more fun to speak the language!

#### Prerequisites

You need to have reached intermediate speaking proficiency before you can reach advanced speaking proficiency.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you reach advanced speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Advanced level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what to aim for at this level.

#### Grammar objectives

- Learn to use complex sentences of various types.

See: Learning to use complex sentences of various types

- Learn to narrate events in past and future time.

See: Learning to narrate events in past and future time

#### Vocabulary objectives

- Expand your active vocabulary.

See: Expanding your active vocabulary

#### Discourse objectives

- Learn to link sentences smoothly together to form discourses.

See: Learning to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses

#### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to manage conversations.

See: Learning to manage conversations

- Learn to perform social functions without complications.

See: Learning to perform social functions without complications

#### Interactional objectives

- Learn to take your part in predictable scripts.

See: Learning to take your part in predictable scripts

#### See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to use complex sentences of various types

#### Introduction

The kinds of sentences you encounter depends somewhat on the language. Complex sentences usually have more than one verb, and may be made up of two simple sentences linked by connecting words, called conjunctions. In English, such sentences might have the following conjunctions:

- after
- and
- but
- although
- since
- who
- that
- when
- where

In many European languages, the tense or mood of the verb in the subordinate clause is determined by the conjunction used and by the tense used in the main clause.

Example: In French, the subjunctive mood is used after certain conjunctions, such as *afin que*, *bien que*. The tense of the verb depends on the tense of the verb in the main clause.

In Germanic languages, the word order is different in subordinate clauses than in the main clause: the verb comes at the end of subordinate clauses.

Some languages have sentence structures very different from those in English and other European languages. We cannot describe them all here, so when you get to this stage in learning, you need to pay attention to what happens in complex sentences.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use complex sentences of various types:

- Analysis  
Identify basic clause types and include them in your language learning activities.
- Planning  
Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- Selective attention  
Many of the activities you are using to achieve this objective are the same as for learning to link sentences together into discourses. The emphasis here is on the relationship between the clauses in a sentence.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use complex sentences of various types:

- Use the Linking Drill technique.

See: The Linking Drill technique

- Use the Series technique.

Note: For this and each of the following techniques suggested, you may first want to ask your language associate (LA) to tell the story while you listen, then you try to tell the same story. You may want to record yourself for comparison with the LA.

See: The Series technique

- Use the Picture Descriptions technique.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

#### Focusing on form

- Use the Structure Practice techniques.

See: The Structure Practice techniques  
 Learning to narrate events in past and future time  
 Introduction

Every storyteller needs to indicate to his or her audience the time frame in which the story took place. Most languages do this with tense. Tense is part of the verb system you need to learn to use appropriately at this level.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to narrate events in past and future time:

- Use the Tense Practice technique.

See: The Tense Practice technique

- Use the Record for Correction technique.

See: The Record for Correction technique

Expanding your active vocabulary

Introduction

You will continue to learn vocabulary as long as you actively use the language. If you participate in the culture as much as possible and expose yourself to massive comprehensible input, you should have a pretty large comprehension vocabulary by now. You also need to try out some of these words in your own speech.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you expand your active vocabulary:

- Planning
  - Plan your practice activities to include the following:
    - Practical topics: situations you find yourself in where you need to use your vocabulary in order to get basic goods and services
    - Personal interest topics: concrete topics about which you are particularly interested in being able to discuss
    - Concrete topics of interest to people in the community: topics people want to talk about
- Practicing
  - Use as much vocabulary as possible when doing the practice activities.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you expand your active vocabulary

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

- Build on the Physical Response techniques.

Note: You take the speaking part.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

Note: You take the speaking part.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

Note: You take the speaking part.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

Learning to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses

Introduction

By this time you can probably produce fairly correct sentences most of the time, but you need to practice linking them together smoothly, using correct rhythm and intonation.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses:

- Practice different kinds of paragraphs.
  - Descriptive paragraphs
  - Narrative paragraphs
  - Procedural paragraphs
  - Paragraphs contrasting two items
  - Paragraphs summarizing an argument
  - Lists of items
- Do a lot of listening to particular kinds of paragraphs and discourses to get a good

auditory model.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses:

- To practice procedural texts, use the Series technique.

Note: For this and each of the following techniques suggested, you may first want to ask your language associate (LA) to tell the story, while you listen, then you try to tell the same story, concentrating on the intonation and rhythm. You may want to record yourself for comparison with the LA.

See: The Series technique

- To practice narrative texts, use the Familiar Stories technique, but you tell the story.

See: The Familiar Stories technique

- To practice narrative texts, use the Shared Experience technique, but you tell the story.

See: The Shared Experiences technique

• To practice descriptive texts, use the Picture Descriptions technique, but you describe the picture.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

• Use the Record and Compare technique to compare your intonation and rhythm with that of a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

### Learning to manage conversations

#### Introduction

Every language has ways to manage conversations—ways you know when it is your turn to speak, ways to indicate you want to introduce a new topic or when you need to cut off the conversation, and so forth. It is important to learn to do this so that your conversation partners will know your intentions and the conversation will go smoothly.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to manage conversations:

- Read Functions for managing conversations to get some idea about how people manage conversations.
  - Listen to native speakers managing conversations.
  - Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

### Learning to perform social functions without complications

#### Introduction

At this level, you are working toward handling straightforward social situations. If things are too complicated or sensitive, you may have some difficulties.

#### Prerequisites

You need to first learn to understand social functions without complications before you can perform them.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to perform social functions without complications:

- You need to spend as much time as possible watching and listening to native speakers engaging in communication situations to get a sense of how common social functions are carried on.
- Ask a culture friend to tell you how to do something you are unsure how to handle.

Example: How to get rid of an unwanted admirer

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to perform social functions without complications:

- Read Social functions to get an idea of what kinds of functions to focus on.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

Note: Spend time observing as many social situations as possible.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

#### Learning to take your part in predictable scripts

##### Introduction

As we interact in various communication situations in a society, we develop a sense of what sort of script people typically follow in each kind of situation.

##### Prerequisites

Before you can take your part in a predictable script, you have to learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts.

##### Guidelines

Here is guideline to follow when you learn to take your part in predictable scripts:

- You can only go so far toward achieving this goal if you are not living in a place where the language is spoken. Try to arrange for a stay of at least some months in a place where you can observe and participate in communication situations.

##### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to take your part in predictable scripts:

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

#### Reaching superior speaking proficiency

##### Introduction



When you reach superior speaking proficiency, you will be able to communicate in a wide variety of social and work situations and will be able to meet most of your everyday communication needs.

#### Prerequisites

You need to have reached advanced speaking proficiency before you can reach superior speaking proficiency.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach superior speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Superior level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what to aim for at this level.

#### Phonology objectives

- Learn to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers.

See: Learning to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers

- Learn to convey emotional nuances through intonation.

See: Learning to convey emotional nuances through intonation

#### Grammar objectives

- Learn to converse at normal speed.

See: Learning to converse at normal speed

- Learn to use all structures commonly used in oral speech.

See: Learning to use all structures commonly used in oral speech

#### Vocabulary objectives

- Broaden the range of vocabulary you can use.

See: Broadening the range of vocabulary you can use

#### Discourse objectives

- Learn to produce more complex oral discourses.

See: Learning to produce more complex oral discourses

- Learn to express abstract relationships between ideas.

See: Learning to express abstract relationships between ideas

#### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to express indirect speech acts.

See: Learning to express indirect speech acts

- Learn to use colloquial speech and idioms.

See: Learning to use colloquial speech and idioms

#### See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers

#### Introduction

Very few of us achieve a native-like pronunciation in a second language. But if we can learn to reduce our accent to the point where native speakers do not have to strain to understand us, then communication will obviously be eased, and so will our relationships.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers:

#### Use analysis

• Isolate the sounds you still have trouble with, and the intonation and stress patterns which need improvement.

- Use the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Practice

- Use the Record for Correction technique.

See: The Record for Correction technique

• Identify a local speaker that you would like to sound like, record him or her speaking, and track along with the recording.

Learning to convey emotional nuances through intonation

Introduction

Language is used as much to express how we feel about issues or relationships as it is to transmit information. It is important to learn to express emotions carried by intonation, tone of voice, and other phonetic features.

Prerequisites

Before you can learn to convey the appropriate emotional nuances, you need to learn to understand how speakers of the language express emotional nuances.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to convey emotional nuances through intonation:

- Listen for feedback from native speakers that indicates they misunderstood the emotional nuances of what you said. This may indicate that you need to work on particular areas.
- Work with a language associate or friend and practice expressing certain emotions or attitudes. You may want to use the Record and Compare technique to compare your performance with a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to converse at normal speed

Introduction

While you develop proficiency in a language, you usually need some time to think of the words and structures you want to use. To achieve superior speaking proficiency, you need to have the words and structures automated enough that you can speak at normal conversational speed, without a lot of hesitations and fumbling for words.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to converse at normal speed:

- Do not always concentrate on getting every word right. That will slow you down.

Although it is important to be accurate, do not let your concern for accuracy prevent you from developing fluency.

- Spend lots of time talking informally with friends.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to converse at normal speed:

- Use the language as much as possible in daily life.

Note: Deliberately expose yourself to a wide variety of communication situations in which you need to speak.

- Record the news from radio or television, or record people speaking at normal speed.

Listen to the whole recording several times, and track along with it.

- Prepare oral reports or summaries of things you have heard or read and practice giving them. Do not memorize them; just talk from notes.

Learning to use all structures commonly used in oral speech

Introduction

The grammatical structures found in different genres of oral speech may differ somewhat. It is important to practice various sorts of speech, from informal conversations to prepared speeches, to make sure you can use the grammatical structures that occur in each genre of speech.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use all structures commonly used in oral speech:

- Make sure you are exposed to lots of comprehensible input in a variety of communication situations. This will give you a chance to hear and learn a broad variety of structures.
- Put yourself in situations where you need to use different discourse genres to communicate. That will give you the motivation to use a variety of structures.
- Make a mental note when you notice that you are avoiding a particular construction because you are not sure how to use it. Go back and practice those constructions with a friend.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use all structures commonly used in oral speech:

#### Analysis

- Determine what types of constructions are most difficult for you to speak with clarity and at normal rate of speech.
- Work with a language associate (LA) on dialogues or monologues that contain difficulties. Work until you feel ease—not perfection. Do not hold back—you must talk.
- Use the Text Analysis technique.
- Listen to radio, TV, and films, for fun, if available.
- Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you opportunities to speak the the language.

#### Broadening the range of vocabulary you can use

#### Introduction

By this stage, you have learned to recognize all the sounds of the language and most of the grammatical structures, but you will keep on learning vocabulary forever. The trick is to keep listening for new words and make a conscious effort to incorporate them into your vocabulary.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can use:

- One great way to learn new vocabulary is to set out to learn more about various aspects of the culture. Not only will you understand more about the people you talk to, you will learn lots of vocabulary in the process.
- Remember that words only have meaning in relationship to other words in the language. Check out the meaning of words before you incorporate them into your active vocabulary.
- Make a conscious effort not to "fossilize." Continue to expand the domains in which you learn and use new words. Be sure to learn to use new words in appropriate circumstances.
- Ask a local friend to correct your incorrect vocabulary choices such as swear words, and social blunders. Look for synonyms and do a semantic investigation.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can use:

- Do a Needs Analysis to see what areas of vocabulary you want to concentrate on most.  
See: Section 2.3 of Language learning in the real world for non-beginners to learn how and why to do a Needs Analysis.
- Use the Audio Archive technique.  
See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Interview techniques.

See: The Interview techniques

- Use the Discovering Categories techniques to investigate the topics you chose with a language associate (LA) or other friends.

See: The Discovering Categories technique

- In a language with literature and media resources, discuss books you read on a given subject or television programs you saw.
- Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you exposure to people speaking the language to you and to each other.
- Incorporate new words into your active vocabulary by finding ways to bring them up in conversations.
- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

Learning to produce more complex oral discourses

Introduction

It is one thing to speak a language well enough to get by, and another to

- give a paper at a professional meeting
- preach in a church service, or
- engage in a political debate.

These latter kinds of discourse involve more complex structure in the discourse than are found in simple conversational exchanges.

One important thing you need to do to help people follow your discourse is to use appropriate cues to show which ideas are the most prominent ones and which ideas are supporting details.

You also need to learn to organize your ideas in ways that make sense to speakers of the language.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to produce more complex oral discourses:

- Practice giving various kinds of oral presentation.
- Look for feedback from native speakers to see if they understood the main points of what you said.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to produce more complex oral discourses:

Analysis

- Use the Text Analysis technique to analyze various genres of oral texts.

See: The Text Analysis technique

Practice

- If you have to give a talk, speech, or formal presentation, ask a language associate (LA) for a summary of your main points to see if you got your important points across. If there was confusion on some point, ask the LA to make it clear, then try again.

- Practice describing what might happen in a hypothetical situation.
- Practice explaining why you acted in a certain way.
- Describe a complex object or procedure and ask your LA to try to draw it or do the procedure.

- Practice telling stories or other information in a variety of time frames; then do something almost like intelligibility testing to see what was understood. ("What did I say?")

Learning to express abstract relationships between ideas

Introduction

Within more complex discourses, there is often the need to express abstract relationships between ideas by the use of communication functions such as

- supporting opinions
- hypothesizing
- persuading, and
- interpreting.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to express abstract relationships between ideas:

- Consciously practice expressing abstract ideas.
- Look for feedback from native speakers to see if they understood you.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to express abstract relationships between ideas:

- Practice explaining the reasons you hold a particular point of view.
- Practice explaining conditions under which something will take place.
- Practice explaining the result of a hypothetical action or situation.
- Practice debating one side of a controversial issue.
- Reread What you can say at Superior level and practice doing other tasks on the list.

#### See also

- What is an interpropositional relation?

#### Learning to express indirect speech acts

##### Introduction

Indirect speech acts are those where the purpose of the speaker is not overtly indicated by the words chosen, but where clues are given to the meaning of the speaker.

Example: If I'd like you to open the window I might say, "It's really warm today, isn't it?" People often use indirect speech acts to "save face," when it is thought that expressing a request or idea too directly would be impolite or cause embarrassment. It's important for you to learn how to express some speech acts indirectly in order to be polite, especially in some cultures.

##### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow:

- The particular speech acts you will need to learn to express indirectly depend on the culture, but here are some that are likely to be included:
  - hedging
  - avoiding commitments
  - rejecting advances, and
  - giving criticism or rebuke

##### Things to do

Here are the things to do to learn to express indirect speech acts:

- Use the Role Play technique to specifically practice doing the following, asking your language associate (LA) to give you feedback:
  - request something politely
  - politely decline an invitation
  - hedge when asked to do something he does not want to commit himself to do
  - discourage unwanted advances

##### See: The Role-Play technique

- Ask your LA or culture friends to give you feedback when you sound too abrupt, and then practice expressing those things more indirectly.

## Learning to use colloquial speech and idioms

### Introduction

People use different vocabulary when they socialize with their friends than when they give formal speeches. For one thing, they use idioms and expressions that show they are part of the in-group.

Examples: hanging with friends, what's going down

It is good to learn to use some colloquial expressions, but you need to first identify the group of people who use them, and the circumstances in which they are appropriate.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use colloquial speech and idioms:

- Pay attention to the person using an idiomatic or colloquial expression and the people he or she is speaking to.
- Pay attention to the kind of communication situation in which the expression is used.

### Warning

It is easy to get the connotations wrong when learning colloquial speech. Check to make sure you are not saying something vulgar or rude, or that is inappropriate for you to say. Native speakers may laugh to hear a foreigner use really colloquial speech. Sometimes that is just surprise that you have learned to speak so idiomatically, but it may mean that you should avoid using those forms.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use colloquial speech and idioms:

- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

- Try out idiomatic expressions with your friends, but ask them to be honest in giving you feedback about how it sounds and what the connotations are.

## Reaching distinguished speaking proficiency

### Introduction

Most people never achieve distinguished speaking proficiency in a second language, unless they started to learn the language as a child and have continued to use it all their lives. Some extraordinary people have done so after years of living in another culture and speech community.

### Prerequisites

You need to have reached superior speaking proficiency before you can reach distinguished proficiency.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach distinguished speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Distinguished level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what to aim for at this level.

### Vocabulary objectives

- Expand vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease.

See: Expanding vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease

### Discourse objectives

- Learn to produce complex formal oral discourse.

See: Learning to produce complex formal oral discourse

- Learn to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience.

See: Learning to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience

### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to make references from within the cultural framework.

See: Learning to make references from within the cultural framework  
Interactional objectives

- Learn to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation.

See: Learning to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation

See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Expanding vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease

Introduction

You will not be able to talk about everything, because you do not know everything, but you should be able to converse on any topic an educated native speaker could discuss. Of course, not even native speakers know all the specialist vocabulary restricted to a profession or trade or subject they are totally unfamiliar with.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to expand your vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease:

- Interact as much as possible with people, and talk to them about everything you see in real life and in the media. Watch nature programs, history programs, and educational programs for adults, and discuss them with other people.
- Identify gaps in your knowledge and try to put yourself in an environment where you can learn about them and discuss them, such as in university classes, or interest groups.
- Pick subjects you do not know much vocabulary about, read what you can find about them, then discuss them with people knowledgeable in that area.

Learning to produce complex formal oral discourse

Introduction

Be brave and volunteer to give a speech at some gathering. Agree to give a paper at a conference or symposium. Join Toastmasters, or some other organization where you do public speaking.

Teach a class on something you know. Preach in church or join a debating society.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to produce complex formal oral discourse:

- Practice ahead of time and try out your speech on a native speaker friend. Ask for advice and try again.
- Record yourself giving the speech and go over it later with a native speaker for suggestions on how you might have said things differently to get more impact. This can be a variation of the Record for Correction technique.

See: The Record for Correction technique

Learning to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience

Introduction

Native speakers unconsciously adjust the choice of words and their manner of speaking when addressing different audiences. For instance, a college professor will sound quite different when lecturing to his classes from the way he does when talking with a neighbor about the rose garden. Furthermore, he may sound quite different when teaching an undergraduate class and when he is addressing fellow scholars at professional meetings. You want to learn to do this too, if you aim at distinguished speaking proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience:

- Consciously look for opportunities to give talks aimed at different audiences, and pay attention to the style of presentation as you prepare.

- Look for native speaker reaction to your style of speaking or lectures that seem to be inappropriate to the audience.
- Ask native speakers which speakers have particularly good style or eloquence when speaking and try to emulate them.

Learning to make references from within the cultural framework

Introduction

To really make your points persuasive and sound as though you know what you are talking about when you speak, you need to learn to make references from within the cultural framework of the people to whom you talk.

In order to do this, you have to spend lots of time talking with people, reading, listening and watching media, and becoming familiar with the cultural framework. It cannot come out until you get it in.

Prerequisites

Before you can learn to make references from within the cultural framework, you need to become familiar with that framework and learn to understand references the speakers of the language make to it.

See: Learning to understand references from within the cultural framework

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to make references from within the cultural framework:

- Make a conscious effort to practice alluding to current events, historical events, and current cultural phenomena when speaking. Look for feedback about the success of your attempts.
- Try telling jokes and see if people laugh. If they do not, listen to what their jokes are based on and try again.
- Use the Culture Exploration techniques.

See: The Culture Exploration techniques

Learning to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation

Introduction

To achieve distinguished speaking proficiency, you have to understand how people act in all the social situations you commonly find yourself in. This takes years, and is often just absorbed by watching interactions among native speakers. It is possible, however, to pay systematic attention to different communication situations and to learn some rules which you might not have noticed.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation:

- Follow the method for analyzing communication situations found in Saville-Troike's *The ethnography of communication*.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

Developing Oral Communication Skills

by Carol J. Orwig

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## Summary

This book gives a detailed analysis of the tasks involved in developing listening comprehension and speaking ability in a second language. It breaks down each composite skill into the sub-skills involved for each level of proficiency in speaking and listening comprehension and suggests techniques and activities you can use to develop these skills. This information can be helpful in planning a self-directed language learning program.

## Contents

Developing your oral communication skills

Developing your oral communication skills

## Introduction

This section of the Language Learning bookshelf is intended to help you develop your oral communication skills to your desired level of proficiency. Whether you are in a language school program or studying independently, knowing what knowledge and skills you are aiming for and what strategies, techniques, and activities help to build those skills can help you achieve your goals.

Note: A companion to this book, called Developing written communication skills, is planned for the next release of LinguaLinks. Meanwhile, refer to Guidelines for a language and culture learning program for recommendations about developing reading and writing skills.

## Overview

The suggestions given here are based on the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and on the kind of proficiency-oriented approach to language instruction presented in Omaggio 1986 and Higgs 1984 and other sources. For each major skill, we present the abilities characteristic of each level of proficiency and suggest things to do to develop these abilities. From among these Things to do, you can choose the ones that best fit your learning style, your needs, and your language learning situation.

## Prerequisites

When you set out to develop your language skills, you need to have your ultimate goals clearly in mind. Which of the integrated language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) do you want to develop? All of them or just some? How proficient do you want or need to be?

See: How to set your language learning goals

## Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you develop your oral communication skills:

- It will help you greatly in developing your language skills if you understand the principles of language acquisition.

See: Language Learning principles

- You need to have exposure to the language to develop your skills. It will help you if you make a strategic language learning plan in which you decide on an overall strategy of how and where to get the exposure you need.

- language school
- using purchased language materials
- hiring a tutor, or
- following a program you design for yourself.

Some possibilities are

See: Making a strategic plan for language learning

- The approach to language learning you choose may determine whether or not you choose to concentrate on developing listening skills for a period of time (sometimes called a silent

period) before you try to speak. In general, the receptive skills, listening and reading, tend to develop more quickly and to a higher extent than the productive skills, speaking and writing.

- It can be a big help to you to be aware of the learning process as you progress in developing your skills.

See: Monitoring the language learning process

See: Making a strategic plan for language learning

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you develop your oral communication skills:

- Develop your desired level of listening comprehension.
- See: How to develop your desired level of listening comprehension
- Develop your desired level of speaking proficiency.
- See: How to develop your desired level of speaking proficiency

See also

- Keywords: goals (proficiency), language proficiency, oral communication, skill-building

How to develop your desired level of listening comprehension

Introduction

Here are the stages you go through in reaching your desired level of listening proficiency. For each level, you will find the objectives you will need to achieve in order to reach that level, along with recommendations as to what you can do to reach your objectives.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you develop your desired level of listening comprehension:

- Part of making a strategic plan is choosing an approach to language learning that fits your learning style and situation. The approach you choose will determine which techniques to use from among the recommendations given.

See: Choosing a language learning approach

- Each step will take longer to achieve than the previous one, so you have to have patience!

Steps

Follow these steps to develop your desired level of listening comprehension:

Stage One

1. Reach high novice listening proficiency.

See: Reaching high novice listening proficiency

Stage Two

2. Reach intermediate listening proficiency.

See: Reaching intermediate listening proficiency

Stage Three

3. Reach advanced listening proficiency.

See: Reaching advanced listening proficiency

Stage Four

4. Reach superior listening proficiency.

See: Reaching superior listening proficiency

Stage Five

5. Reach distinguished listening proficiency.

See: Reaching distinguished listening proficiency

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency

Reaching high novice listening proficiency

## Introduction

The objectives listed below are abilities characteristic of high novice listening proficiency, according to the ACTFL guidelines. For each objective, you will find recommendations about techniques or activities that can help you reach the objective.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach high novice listening proficiency:

- Some language learning activities can help you to achieve many of these objectives simultaneously. For example, you learn to recognize vocabulary and sentence structure and the sounds of the language simultaneously when using the Physical Response techniques or the Look and Listen techniques. You will want to have lots of activities where you try to put it all together and get the gist of what is being said.
- At early stages of language acquisition, however, it is sometimes helpful to set apart times to focus on one aspect of listening proficiency and to try to develop that aspect.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached high novice listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach high novice listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Novice level

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

### Phonology objectives

- Learn to differentiate contrasting sounds within words.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds within words

- Learn to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation

### Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand statements, questions, and commands.

See: Learning to understand statements, questions, and commands

### Vocabulary objectives

- Learn to understand common words.

See: Learning to understand common words

### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to interpret basic survival situations.

See: Learning to interpret basic survival functions

### Interactional objectives

- Learn to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations .

See: Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds within words

## Introduction

In order to understand what someone is saying in a language new to you, you need to learn to distinguish the sounds its speakers use to communicate meaning. If the speakers of a language show the difference in meaning in two words by using two different sounds, those sounds are said to be contrasting or in contrast. For example, we make a difference in the words "bid" and "bed" by using different vowel sounds, so in English those are contrasting vowels.

The kinds of sounds that may contrast in a language include consonant and vowel sounds as well as pitch and stress patterns. Here are some recommendations about what to do to learn to distinguish these important sounds.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to learn to distinguish contrasting sounds within words:

- Learn to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels

- If a tone language, learn to differentiate contrasting tones.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting tones

- Learn to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns

See also

- Keywords: stress (linguistic), tonal languages, vowel quality

Learning to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels

#### Introduction

You cannot learn to pronounce a language correctly unless you can hear the differences in the sounds the language uses to differentiate words. For example, in English we have lots of sets of words like "beat" and "bit" and "peel" and "pill" where the only difference in the pronunciation of the words is the difference in the sound of the vowels. Speakers of Spanish and other languages that do not distinguish words with these vowels often have a hard time hearing the difference. Similarly, English-speakers need to learn to distinguish pairs or sets of sounds in languages they are learning. In Korean, for example, the words for "arm" and "foot" sound very similar to English speakers at first.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels:

- The natural tendency of language learners is to fit any new sound into the sound framework of their own language. A course in articulatory phonetics can be a big help in training your ear to hear differences in sounds.
- When you start to learn a language, listen carefully and try to build up in your mind an auditory image of what the language sounds like.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting consonants and vowels:

- Use the IPA tutor to learn to distinguish some of the speech sounds in the world's languages.

See: How to use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds

- When you start learning new vocabulary, pay attention to words that sound the same to you or which native speakers correct you when you try to say. Practice distinguishing these words, using the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Make a Phonetic Work Chart to record the sounds you hear.

Note: This is particularly relevant to learning an unwritten language.

See: The Phonetic Work Chart technique

- Use the Sound Checklist technique.

Note: This technique is particularly relevant to learning an unwritten language.

See: The Sound Checklist technique

- Use the Single Sound Drill technique.

See: The Single Sound Drill technique

- Use the Sound Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Sound Contrast Drill technique

How to use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds

Introduction

The Language Learning bookshelf contains a program that can help you learn to discriminate and produce sounds symbolized by the International Phonetic Alphabet. The language you are learning will not have all the sounds in the IPA, but learning the IPA will help you feel better prepared to learn any language.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds:

Associating symbols with sound

- Click a symbol and hear the corresponding sound.
- Test yourself by choosing hear under the Drill menu. You will then hear sounds in random order and should click the symbol you think represents each sound.

Associating sounds and symbols with their technical names

- Click a symbol to hear the corresponding sound and see the technical name
- Test yourself by choosing read under the Drill menu. You will see a technical name displayed and you should click the corresponding symbol.

Learning to distinguish contrasting tones

Introduction

Although all languages use pitch in a meaningful way, some languages use pitch to differentiate the meaning of words. For example, in Thai, the word for "dog" and the word for "horse" both have the same consonants and vowels: maa. But they have different pitch contours, or tones, and that is how Thai people tell these words apart.

If you are learning a tone language like Thai, you too will need to learn to distinguish the different tone patterns of the language. They are every bit as important as consonants and vowels.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to distinguish contrasting tones:

- When you hear the language being spoken, listen to whether or not the pitch pattern seems to be changing on every word or whether it seems to stretch over the whole sentence. If it seems to change on every word, it might be a tone language.
- When you are trying to distinguish tones, it is important to use a tone frame to hear the relative pitch of the different tones in relation to the same word.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting tones:

- Use the Tone Checklist technique.

See: The Tone Checklist technique

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Learning to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns

Introduction

Stress is the emphasis put on a particular syllable of a word. In English, stressed syllables are also usually longer than unstressed syllables and have a higher pitch. Say the following two words:

- present (as in Christmas present), and
- present (as in "The principal will present diplomas at graduation.")

These two words have contrasting stress patterns. Notice that the first word is a noun and the second is a verb. We have a number of such pairs of related words in English, which are distinguished by stress.

Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting word stress patterns:

- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

Learning to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question, a statement, or a command.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish question, answer, and command intonation:

- Listen to a recording of someone giving a series of commands, as in Physical Response techniques, and hum the "tune" after each command.
- When listening to question-answer sets, hum the "tune" after each utterance.
- Use the Intonation Drill technique.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

See also

- Keywords: intonation

Learning to understand statements, questions, and commands

Introduction

Every language arranges words in meaningful ways in sentences. The first kind of structures you might be able to understand are statements that

- identify people and objects
- describe people and objects
- tell the location of people and objects, and
- tell about people doing something.

You can also usually understand simple commands and questions that might be answered by the statements listed above.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand statements, questions, and commands:

- Set up your comprehension techniques to include the kinds of sentences mentioned above.
- While you are actually using the techniques, concentrate primarily on the meaning of the sentences, but also try to notice how the words are arranged.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand statements, questions, and commands:

- Read about different sentence types in the introduction to Section 4.2 and Section 4.2.2 of

Kick-starting your language learning.

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

Learning to understand common words

Introduction

Nobody can learn to understand a second language without learning lots of vocabulary. A good place to start is learning the names of objects and people you can see. Here are some of the kinds of vocabulary to learn first:

- Names of common objects
- Names of common food and drink items
- Words for common actions
- Basic warnings and commands, such as Stop!, Watch out!, and Be careful!
- The most basic words describing size, color, or age
- Simple questions and statements that use words from the categories above

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand common words:

- Plan your comprehension techniques to include various categories of words.
- Remember that there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between words in one language and words in another language.
- Remember that you only really understand a word in relationship to other words in that language.
- Use physical context to help you understand the meanings of words.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand common words:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early in Section 4.1 of Kick-starting your language learning.
- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Keep lists of different categories of vocabulary and look for relationships among them.

Learning to interpret basic survival functions

Introduction

Language functions is a term used to refer to the purposes for which people use language and the way they get things done, using language. Here are some of the most important functions to be able to understand in the beginning:

- Common greetings and farewell expressions
- Basic warnings and commands, such as Stop!, Watch out!, and Be careful!
- Expressions of thanks

Guidelines

- Analysis  
Identify the most common and widely-accepted ways to perform basic survival functions.

Keep a list of functions and the ways to express them in the language.

- Practice

Use interactive techniques that require you to understand the communicative intent of the speaker and respond in some way that shows you understand.

- Observation

Pay attention when you are in the community to the ways people perform basic communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interpret basic survival functions:

- Read about basic language functions in Section 4.3 of Kick-starting your language learning.

- Use the listening phase of the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Dialogue Strip technique.

See: The Dialogue Strip technique

If you are living where the language is spoken

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

See also

- Keywords: communicative functions, survival phrases

Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations

Introduction

Learning to communicate means learning how to interact appropriately with other people in everyday situations.

Objectives

Here are some objectives for learning to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations:

- To recognize the ritualized expressions that frame common conversation situations, such as greetings at the beginning and leave-takings at the end of a conversation
- To recognize the gestures, facial expressions, and words that accompany polite greetings and leave-taking expressions

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations:

- Selective attention

Be observant of gestures and facial expressions that accompany what people say in performing common communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns in survival situations:

If you live where the language is spoken

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique



- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Reaching intermediate listening proficiency

Introduction

Now that you have made a start, you can continue toward your goal of being able to understand what people say in most straightforward social situations. Each level of proficiency takes longer to achieve than the one before, but is rewarding, because you can understand so much more!

Prerequisites

You need to make a start by reaching high novice listening proficiency, before you can reach intermediate proficiency.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach intermediate listening proficiency:

- Remember that as you do any language learning activity which helps you process messages in the language, you will develop many skills simultaneously. It sometimes helps to focus your attention on particular objectives and to choose activities specifically focused on helping you achieve that objective.
- Remember that you can achieve the same objectives by using a variety of approaches to language acquisition.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached intermediate listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach intermediate listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Intermediate level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to differentiate contrasting sounds in connected speech.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds in connected speech

Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand different sentence types.

See: Learning to understand different sentence types

Vocabulary objectives

- Develop understanding of basic vocabulary words.

See: Learning to understand basic vocabulary

Discourse objectives

- Learn to recognize simple references to something or someone already mentioned.

See: Learning to understand simple reference

- Learn to understand sentence and phrase connectors.

See: Learning to understand connectors

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to interpret basic language functions.

See: Learning to interpret simple communication functions

- Distinguish formal versus informal pronouns.

See: Learning to distinguish formal versus informal speech

Interactional objectives

- Recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday survival-type encounters.

See: Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to distinguish contrasting sounds in connected speech

Introduction

By now you can understand quite a few words in isolation and some simple sentences. When words come together into phrases and sentences, they sometimes sound different. Your goal at this stage is to recognize words in connected speech at least the length of whole sentences.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting sounds in connected speech:

- If a tone language, learn to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences.

See: Learning to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences

- Learn to distinguish contrasting sentence stress patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting stress patterns

- Get used to the rhythm of sentences in the language.

See: Getting used to the rhythm patterns of the language

- Learn to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns.

See: Learning to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns

Learning to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences

Introduction

Words with tone sometimes change when following or preceding other words in sentences. You need to learn to recognize tones not only on words in isolation, but also in connected speech.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences:

- Remember that tones are relative and that you need a frame (an adjoining word or phrase) to compare with the tone on the word you are concentrating on.

- Remember that in some languages the intervals between high and low tones decrease towards the end of a sentence, so that it is easier to hear distinctions toward the beginning of sentences.

Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to recognize tones on words used in complete sentences:

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Learning to distinguish contrasting stress patterns

Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to distinguish contrasting stress patterns:

- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

Getting used to the rhythm patterns of the language

Introduction

In English, stress and high pitch usually coincide. We also usually lengthen the stressed syllable of a word and rush through the unstressed syllables. Languages like English have been called stress-timed languages.

Some other languages, such as Spanish, are called syllable-timed languages, because every syllable is more or less the same length.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to get used to the rhythm patterns of the language:

- Listen to someone speaking the language and tap out the rhythm with your finger or a pencil. Note whether it is a regularly spaced rhythm or a more syncopated one.
- If the rhythm is syncopated, notice where the longer syllables fall; for example, whether they are on emphasized words in the sentence.

Learning to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question or a statement. It can also indicate information about the mood of the speaker: surprise, anger, emphasis, and so forth. To really understand the person you are talking to, you need to be able to understand the clues about how he or she feels about what is being said.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish basic sentence intonation patterns:

- Listen to a recording of someone speaking the language and hum the "tune" after each sentence.
- Use the Intonation Drill technique.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

Learning to understand different sentence types

Introduction

You have made a start at understanding some basic types of sentences in your new language. Now you need to expand the kinds of sentences you can understand.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand different sentence types:

- Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- While you actually use the techniques, concentrate primarily on the meaning of the sentences, but also try to notice how the words are arranged.
- You may want to do some techniques where you pay selective attention to the form of the sentences, as well as the meaning.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand different sentence types.

- Read more about different sentence types in Section 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning*.

Using general comprehension techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

Using structure practice techniques

- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

Getting informal practice

- Listen to people talking to their small children.

Reason: They will usually use commands or simple sentence structures.

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to understand basic vocabulary

Introduction

You have learned some common words already, but you will keep learning new vocabulary as long as you actively use your new language. At this stage you want to keep working on basic vocabulary, especially words for people, things, places, and actions you can see.

Guidelines

- Plan your comprehension techniques to include various categories of words.
- Remember that there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between words in one language and words in another language.
- Remember that you only really understand a word in relationship to other words in that language.
- Use physical context to help you understand the meanings of words.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand basic vocabulary:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early, in Section 4.1 of *Kick-starting Your Language Learning*.

Using general comprehension techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

Reinforcing what you are learning

- Use the Memory Reinforcement techniques.

See: The Memory Reinforcement techniques

Getting informal practice

- Watch TV and try to pick up new vocabulary, even if you do not understand the gist of what is doing on.

Note: If you watch or listen to the news first in your own language, so that you know what is going on, you can pick up new words by listening to announcers talk about the same things in your new language.

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to understand simple reference

Introduction

In question or answer exchanges or when you are telling a story, you often refer back to something already mentioned. It is important to understand what or who is being referred to in a story or dialogue to make sense of it all. Here are some kinds of reference to learn to understand:

- Which person a pronoun refers to, when that person has been mentioned in a previous sentence.

Example: "I saw Bob downtown yesterday. He looked really tired."

- What general words may be used to refer to a particular thing or person already mentioned.

Example: "I threw out a bunch of papers and files yesterday. I did not need that stuff anymore."

- What words can be left out to answer a question if they have been mentioned in the question.

Example: "Where's Bob?" "Outside."

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand simple reference:

- Use selective listening to pay attention to different kinds of reference when doing comprehension activities.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand simple reference:

##### Using selective attention

- Use the Power Tools technique to ask simple questions about objects or people or pictures and listen to how a native speaker answers the question.

See: The Power Tools technique

- When doing language learning activities that involve question-answer sets, listen for words in the answer that refer back to something in the question.

#### Learning to understand connectors

##### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to understand connectors:

- Use Selective Attention to pay attention to connectors.

#### Things to do

Here is a thing to do when you learn to understand connectors:

- In comprehension activities, work up from simple sentences to ones that require you to understand the connections between two parts of the sentence.

Example: In the Physical Response techniques, once you can understand, "Raise your right hand" and "Sit down," you can ask the language associate (LA) to string commands together. For example, "Raise your right hand and sit down" or "Raise your right hand, but do not sit down." The LA can also work toward using pronouns more naturally in these exercises: "Take a banana, but do not eat it."

#### Learning to interpret simple communication functions

##### Introduction

Communication functions (or language functions) is a term used to refer to the purposes for which people use language and the way they get things done, using language. In learning another language, it is important to recognize how people use language to get things done.

See: Common purposes or functions of language

##### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to interpret simple communication functions:

- Analysis  
Identify the most common and widely-accepted ways to perform basic survival functions. Keep a list of functions and the ways to express them in the language.
- Practice  
Use interactive techniques that require you to understand the communicative intent of the speaker and respond in some way that shows you understand.
- Observation

Pay attention when you are in the community to the ways people perform basic communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interpret simple communication functions:

Understanding functions

- Read about basic language functions in Section 4.3 of Kick-starting your language learning.

Using techniques to learn functions

- Use the listening phase of the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Reverse Role Play technique.

See: The Reverse Role-Play technique

- Use the Limited Answer techniques.

See: The Limited Answer techniques

Getting informal practice

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to distinguish formal versus informal speech

Introduction

People in every society use different words and sometimes even different grammatical forms when talking to friends and family than they do in formal settings. To really understand formal versus informal speech, you need to learn about the society and its values, but you can begin to pick up on basic differences in pronouns or verb forms from the beginning.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to distinguish formal versus informal speech :

- Practice

Set up practice techniques of conversations or short exchanges between friends as well as more formal ones, so that you get practice hearing both sets of forms.

- Selective attention

Listen for the different forms in conversations between native speakers and in conversations people have with you.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to distinguish formal versus informal speech:

- Use the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

Note: Pay attention to the words people use when they ask you to do things. Ask them how they would direct their children or a stranger to do the same thing.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Simulations technique.

Note: Note the words native speakers use when taking a part in the role play.

See: The Simulations technique

Getting informal practice

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters

Introduction

Learning to communicate means learning how what people say fits into the context of what they typically do. Every culture has a way to greet other people, every culture has a way to conduct a business transaction, such as buying food. You don't really understand what "Hi, how are you doing?" means in American English until you understand that it is a greeting, not really an inquiry about health. You learn that by observing lots of encounters in which Americans greet each other with "Hi, how are you doing?" and hear the reply "Fine thanks" or "Not too bad" or some other short reply.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of learning to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- To recognize the ritualized expressions that frame common conversation situations, such as greetings at the beginning and leave-takings at the end of a conversation
- To recognize the gestures, facial expressions, and words that accompany polite greetings and leave-taking expressions
- To recognize how people typically act when they sell you something or when they buy something
- To identify how a driver and passengers typically interact on public transportation
- To recognize what people do when they visit others or when they invite other people into their home

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- Analysis  
Analyze the scripts for the most common communication situations you encounter.
- Practice  
Include interactive techniques in your practice activities.
- Selective attention  
Be observant of gestures and facial expressions that accompany what people say in performing common communication functions.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Reaching advanced listening proficiency

Introduction

Reaching advanced listening proficiency will allow you to understand quite a lot of what you hear in everyday life. You will be able to participate in most social situations and get the gist of much of what you hear.

Prerequisites

You need to have reached intermediate listening proficiency before you can reach advanced listening proficiency.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach advanced listening proficiency:

- Remember that it takes longer to achieve each level of proficiency than the previous one.

Keep going and you will get there.

- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached advanced listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach advanced listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Advanced level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs.

See: How to learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs

Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand complex sentences of various types, including those found in descriptive paragraphs, simple procedures, and narration of past events.

See: Learning to understand complex sentences of various types

Vocabulary objectives

- Expand your comprehension vocabulary to the point where you can get the general meaning of most of what you hear in routine social situations.

See: Expanding your comprehension vocabulary

Discourse objectives

- Learn to understand short connected discourses.

See: Learning to understand short connected discourses

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to recognize functions for managing conversations.

See: Learning to recognize functions for managing conversations

- Learn to understand social functions without complications.

See: Learning to understand social functions without complications

Interactional objectives



- Learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts.

See: Learning to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts

See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

How to learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs

Introduction

Although you have learned to recognize intonation patterns of individual sentences, you will find that there are over-riding intonation patterns when these sentences are put together to form paragraphs. Learning to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs will help you understand the important points of what is being said, and when the paragraph is coming to an end.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs:

- Different kinds of paragraphs may have different intonation:
  - Descriptive paragraphs
  - Narrative paragraphs
  - Procedural paragraphs
  - Paragraphs contrasting two items
  - Paragraphs summarizing an argument
- Lists of items often have a distinctive intonation pattern.
- Listen to examples from different speakers, including both men and women.

Steps

Follow these steps to learn to recognize intonation patterns typical of paragraphs:

1. Identify different types of paragraphs from your Audio Archive.
2. If possible, make a transcription of the recording.
3. Listen to the recording and mark on the transcription the pitch contours, places where the voice speeds up or slows down, or where the rhythm changes.
4. Look at the meaning of those parts of the paragraph where the intonation changed and see if you can make any correlations.
5. Listen to several examples of each kind of paragraph to see if the intonation patterns are the same. If they are, you have probably identified a pattern typical of that kind of paragraph.

Learning to understand complex sentences of various types

Introduction

The kinds of sentences you encounter depends somewhat on the language. Complex sentences usually have more than one verb, and may be made up of two simple sentences linked by connecting words, called conjunctions. In English, such sentences might have the following conjunctions: after, and, but, although, since, who, that, when, or where.

Guidelines

- Analysis  
Identify basic clause types and include them in your language learning activities.
- Planning  
Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- Inferencing  
Once you have set up activities to include a variety of sentence types, concentrate on the meaning of the sentences more than on the forms.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand complex sentences of various types:

Using Comprehension techniques

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

- Use the Picture Descriptions technique.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

Focusing on form

- Use the Structure Practice techniques.

See: The Structure Practice techniques

Expanding your comprehension vocabulary

Introduction

Learning vocabulary

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to expand your comprehension vocabulary:

- Analysis  
Keep lists of different categories of vocabulary and look for relationships among them.
- Planning  
Plan your comprehension techniques to include the following:
  - Practical topics: situations you find yourself in where you need to understand what is going on in order to get basic goods and services
  - Personal interest topics: concrete topics about which you are particularly interested in being able to understand what people have to say
  - Concrete topics of interest to people in the community: topics people want to talk about
- Practice  
Concentrate on the meanings of words when doing the activities.
- Inferencing  
Use familiarity with the topic or demonstrations to help you understand the meanings of words.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to expand your comprehension vocabulary:

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

- Use the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

Learning to understand short connected discourses

Introduction

In the previous stage you learned to understand a variety of sentences, but people do not usually speak in isolated sentences; they connect their thoughts into discourses. At this stage of language learning, you should be aiming to understand the following kinds of discourse:

- Dialogues
- Descriptive paragraphs about something you are familiar with
- Procedures, such as how to do something
- Short narrations about predictable content

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand short connected discourses:

- Analysis  
Work to discover the scripts for predictable communication situations.
- Top-down processing  
Use your familiarity with the subject matter or your knowledge of a situation to help you understand stories and descriptions.
- Repeated Attention  
Listen to taped stories over and over until you can understand them.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand short connected discourses:

- Use the Predictable Text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Picture Description technique.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

Learning to recognize functions for managing conversations

#### Introduction

Every language has ways to manage conversations—ways

- to know when it is your turn to speak
- to indicate that you want to introduce a new topic, and
- to indicate that you need to cut off the conversation.

It is important to recognize cues that speakers of the language give you about their desires or intentions as to how the conversation should develop, so you will know how to respond.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize functions for managing conversations:

- Read Functions for managing conversations to get some idea about how people manage conversations.
- Use the Dialogue techniques.

Note: Pay special attention to the way people perform the various conversation management functions.

See: The Dialogue techniques

Learning to understand social functions without complications

#### Introduction

At this level, you work toward understanding the language well enough to figure out what people mean in straightforward social situations. If people are too indirect (perhaps because it

would be socially embarrassing to come right out and say things flat out), you will probably have some problems understanding what is going on.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand social functions without complications:

- You need to spend as much time as possible watching and listening to native speakers engaging in communication situations to get a sense of how common social functions are carried on.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand social functions without complications:

- Read Social functions to get an idea of what kinds of functions to focus on.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

Note: Spend time observing as many social situations as possible, especially those where you can listen and observe without having to speak a lot.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts

#### Introduction

As we interact in various communication situations in a society, we develop a sense of what sort of script people typically follow in each kind of situation.

#### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts:

- You can only go so far toward achieving this goal if you are not living in a place where the language is spoken. Try to arrange for a stay of at least some months in a place where you can observe and participate in communication situations.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts:

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Script Analysis technique.

See: The Script Analysis technique

Reaching superior listening proficiency

#### Introduction

Achieving superior listening proficiency will enable you to understand what is going on in most social and work situations and to pick up on emotional nuances of what you hear.

#### Prerequisites

You need to have reached advanced listening proficiency before you can develop superior proficiency.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach superior listening proficiency:

- At this stage, you will benefit from getting lots of comprehensible input. Almost anything you do that gives you an opportunity to hear the language being spoken will be beneficial to you.
- Spend lots of time interacting with people and listening to radio, TV, and films, if these are available.
- Enroll in an adult education course in an area you are interested in (if available) to give you lots of comprehensible input and a chance to interact with people. The good thing about a course is that you usually listen a lot. Courses on crafts and handwork usually involve demonstrations, which aid understanding.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached superior listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach superior listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Superior level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you aim to achieve to reach this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to understand speech sounds at normal speed.

See: Learning to understand speech sounds at normal speed

- Learn to understand emotional nuances of speech.

See: Learning to understand emotional nuances of speech

Grammar objectives

- Learn to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech.

See: Learning to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech

Vocabulary objectives

- Broaden the range of vocabulary you can understand on social and work topics.

See: Broadening the range of vocabulary you can understand

Discourse objectives

- Expand understanding of complex discourses.

See: Expanding understanding of complex oral discourses

- Learn to understand abstract relationships between ideas.

See: Learning to understand abstract relationships between ideas

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to understand indirect speech acts.

See: Learning to understand indirect speech acts

- Learn to understand colloquial speech and idioms.

See: Learning to understand colloquial speech and idioms

Interactional objectives

- Learn to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude.

See: Learning to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude

See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to understand speech sounds at normal speed

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand speech sounds at normal speed:

- Do not concentrate on trying to understand every word. That slows people down to the point that they lose the thread of the conversation. Just let the language flow over you and try to get the gist of what is being said.
- Be sure to get lots of exposure to comprehensible input. Listening to mother-tongue speakers talking to each other live or via media will help you learn to process language at normal speed.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand speech at normal speed:

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

Note: When listening to your Audio Archive, radio, or TV, or when you overhear two native speakers talking to each other, pay attention to the intonation, rhythm, and other features of the texts.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Record the news from radio or television, or record people speaking at normal speed. Listen to the whole recording several times, or to short clips (of normal speed) until you are able to handle long segments at normal speed.
- Listen to a radio news station that repeats the same news at regular intervals. If you do not catch the story the first time, you may get it the second or third time.
- Talk to a local friend about meanings of speech and nonverbal communication which are unclear to you.

Learning to understand emotional nuances of speech

#### Introduction

Language is used as much to express how we feel about issues or relationships as it is to transmit information. It is important to learn to recognize the cues about emotions carried by intonation, tone of voice, and other phonetic features.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand emotional nuances of speech:

- Use cues from the story line of a film or TV program to help you understand the nuances of feelings shown by suprasegmental features.
- If you are not sure of the emotional tone of what you hear, ask a friend who speaks the language to help you identify the emotions.

Learning to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech

#### Introduction

The grammatical structures found in oral speech are often simpler than some of those found in written texts. In French, for example, the simple past tense is only found in written form, never in conversation. Sentence structures tend to be less strictly controlled and often have false starts. It is important to listen to various sorts of speech, from informal conversations to prepared speeches, to get a sense of the kinds of grammatical structures that occur in each genre of speech.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech:

- Exposure to massive amounts of comprehensible input will help you infer the meaning of grammatical structures occurring in natural speech.
- Analysis of written texts may help you understand grammatical structures also used in oral speech, but sometimes there are forms which are only found in written texts, never in oral speech, and vice versa.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand all structures commonly used in oral speech:

Getting comprehensible input

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Interview techniques.

See: The Interview techniques

- Use the Text Analysis technique.

See: The Text Analysis technique

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

- Listen to radio, TV, and films, for fun, if available.

- Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you exposure to people speaking the language to you and to each other.

Broadening the range of vocabulary you can understand

Introduction

By this stage you have learned to recognize all the sounds of the language and most of the grammatical structures, but you will keep on learning vocabulary forever. The encouraging news is that you can now understand much of what you hear and can acquire new vocabulary quickly from the linguistic context.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can understand:

- One great way to learn new vocabulary is to set out to learn more about various aspects of the culture. Not only will you understand more about the people you talk to, you will learn lots of vocabulary in the process.

- Remember that words only have meaning in relationship to other words in the language.

You cannot understand the word "goal" unless you know whether the conversation is about soccer or about managing a project.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can understand:

- Do a Needs Analysis to see what areas of vocabulary you want to concentrate on most.

See: Section 2.3 of Language learning in the real world for nonbeginners to learn how and why to do a Needs Analysis

Getting comprehensible input

- Use the Audio Archive technique.

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Interview techniques.

See: The Interview techniques

- Use the Discovering Categories techniques.

See: The Discovering Categories technique

- Listen to radio, TV, and films, for fun, if available.

• Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you exposure to people speaking the language to you and to each other.

- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

Expanding understanding of complex oral discourses

## Introduction

By now you can understand fairly straightforward, predictable discourses, but more complex discourses in which you have to keep track of the structure of the ideas, will take further work.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to expand your understanding of complex oral discourses:

- Use the Text Analysis technique.

See: The Text Analysis technique

### Selective listening

- Listen to people debating the pros and cons of an issue.
- Listen to someone describing what might happen in a hypothetical situation.
- Ask people why they acted in a certain way and listen to the answers.
- Ask your language associate (LA) to describe a complex object or procedure and you try to draw it or do the procedure.

Learning to understand abstract relationships between ideas

## Introduction

When you were a novice language learner, your understanding was restricted mostly to concrete objects and actions, but now at this stage you can work toward understanding more abstract relationships between ideas.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand abstract relationships between ideas:

#### Selective attention

• When using comprehension techniques, such as the Series technique, listen for sentences expressing the purpose of various actions.

Example: I cover the pot at night so that the clay does not dry out.

- Listen for sentences explaining the reason for various actions.

Example: I stayed home last night because I was really tired.

- Listen for sentences explaining conditions under which something will take place.

Example: If Bill gets home from work in time, we will go to a movie.

- Listen for sentences explaining the result of an action or state.

Example: The temperature went down to 20 degrees Fahrenheit last night, so my plants froze.

See also

- What is an interpropositional relation?

Learning to understand indirect speech acts

## Introduction

Indirect speech acts are those where the purpose of the speaker is not overtly indicated by the words chosen, but where clues are given to the meaning of the speaker.

Example: If I would like you to open the window I might say, "It's really warm today, isn't it?"

People often use indirect speech acts to "save face," when it is thought that expressing a request or idea too directly would be impolite or cause embarrassment.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand indirect speech acts:

- When you hear something being said that you do not understand, ask your language associate (LA) or a culture friend what was meant.
- Ask your LA specifically how he or she might express some of the following:



- Request something politely
- Politely decline an invitation
- Hedge when asked to do something he or she does not want to commit to do
- Discourage unwanted advances

### Learning to understand colloquial speech and idioms

#### Introduction

People use different vocabulary when they are socializing with their friends than when giving formal speeches. For one thing, they use idioms and expressions that show they are part of the in-group.

Examples: hanging with friends, what's going down

It is important to learn to understand colloquial expressions and to identify the group of people who use them, and the circumstances in which they are appropriate.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand colloquial speech and idioms:

- Pay attention to the person using an idiomatic or colloquial expression and the people he or she is speaking to.
- Pay attention to the kind of communication situation in which the expression is used.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand colloquial speech and idioms:

- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

- Use the Shortened Forms technique.

See: The Shortened Forms technique

- Watch films and television programs in which people are speaking to each other informally.

### Learning to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude

#### Introduction

It is important to understand what is considered polite speech and when people are being deliberately rude or insulting. For one thing, it will help you to avoid being rude or insulting in your own speech—unless you want to be, of course.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude:

- Observation is one of the best tools to help you learn about polite and impolite varieties of speech.
- Native speakers of a language will often forgive grammatical errors more easily than speech that they see as rude.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand whether speech is polite, insulting, or rude:

- Watch for behavioral cues and facial expressions accompanying speech to help you judge the intent of the speaker.
- Watch the reactions of native speakers to see when they perceive speech as being rude or impolite.
- Ask your language associate to point out to you when somebody is being rude.

### Reaching distinguished listening proficiency

#### Introduction

Not many people ever reach this level of proficiency in a second language. If you get there, you will basically be able to understand the language as well as most of the educated native speakers.

#### Prerequisites

You need to have achieved superior listening proficiency before you can reach distinguished proficiency.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to reach distinguished listening proficiency:

- You will need to spend years in a language community before you reach this level as it requires a high degree of cultural knowledge as well as linguistic skills.
- Evaluate your proficiency when you think you have reached distinguished listening proficiency.

See: Checking your progress

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach distinguished listening proficiency:

- Read What you can understand people say at Distinguished level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you are aiming to achieve to reach this level.

#### Phonology objectives

- Learn to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation.

See: Learning to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation

#### Grammar objectives

- By this stage you should already understand the grammatical structures of the language.

#### Vocabulary objectives

- Build an encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary so that you can understand people talking about any subject you have knowledge of.

See: Building encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary

#### Discourse objectives

- Learn to follow the structure of all kinds of oral discourse, including
  - professional presentations
  - political speeches
  - academic debates, and
  - artistic productions, such as plays.

See: Learning to follow formal oral discourse

#### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to interpret variations in the style of discourses directed at different audiences.

See: Learning to interpret variations in the style of discourses

#### Interactional objectives

- Learn to recognize the rules of interaction that hold in any social situation.

See: Learning to recognize the rules of interaction in a social situation

#### Cultural objectives

- Learn to understand social and cultural references from within the cultural framework.

See: Learning to understand references from within the cultural framework

#### See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation

#### Introduction

As you learn to recognize variations in pronunciation, you can also learn a lot about the society and its attitudes toward different regions and people of different social status. Every society has some varieties that are considered standard or prestigious and others that are less prestigious. For example, in England they sometimes refer to the received pronunciation, or BBC English, or The Queen's English. But there are many other regional dialects spoken, and often people of a region cling to their pronunciation to identify with their roots.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize regional and social variations in pronunciation:

- Spend as much time as possible interacting with people from various areas of the country and of different status in society.
- Watch TV and films, noticing different accents and where people are from.
- Watch native speaker reactions as to which dialects are considered prestigious and which are looked down on.

Building encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary

Introduction

You will not really know every word in the encyclopedia, but you want to be able to understand people talking about anything except specialist vocabulary restricted to a profession or trade or subject you are totally unfamiliar with.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you build encyclopedic comprehension vocabulary:

- Get as much comprehensible input as possible from daily interaction with people and from the media. Watch nature programs, history programs, and educational programs for adults.
- Identify gaps in your knowledge and try to put yourself in an environment where you can learn about them, such as in adult education classes, or interest groups.
- Pick subjects that have unfamiliar vocabulary, read what you can find about them, then discuss them with people knowledgeable in that area.

Learning to follow formal oral discourse

Introduction

Some kinds of oral discourse are harder to follow than others, since they are like written discourse, and in fact, are often written first and then read aloud. Examples of this kind of discourse include

- papers read at professional conferences
- editorials on radio or TV
- political debates, and
- the scripts of plays, specially those with archaic speech.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to follow formal oral discourse:

- Read as much as you can about the areas you want to learn to understand orally.

Reason: Formal oral discourse is often harder to understand than written discourse, since you only have one chance to process it, and cannot go back. Learning the vocabulary of the field and getting used to written discourse should help you to process information orally.

- Use the Text Analysis technique to familiarize yourself with the structure of written discourses. This should make it easier to follow formal oral discourse.

See: The Text Analysis technique

- Listen for certain lexical phrases used to indicate the structure of the discourse.

Learning to interpret variations in the style of discourses

### Introduction

Native speakers unconsciously adjust the choice of words and their manner of speaking when addressing different audiences. For instance, a college professor will sound quite different when lecturing to his classes from the way he does when talking with a neighbor about the rose garden. Furthermore, he may sound quite different when teaching an undergraduate class and when he is addressing fellow scholars at professional meetings. Exposure to discourses aimed at a wide variety of audiences will help you learn to pick up on these differences.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interpret variations in the style of discourses:

- Consciously look for opportunities to listen to lectures aimed at different audiences, and pay attention to the style of presentation.
- Look for native speaker reaction to style of speaking or lectures that seem to be inappropriate to the audience.
- Ask native speakers which speakers have particularly good style or eloquence when speaking.

Learning to recognize the rules of interaction in a social situation

### Introduction

To achieve distinguished listening proficiency, you have to understand how people are acting in all the social situations you commonly find yourself in. This takes years, and is often just absorbed by watching interactions among native speakers. It is possible, however, to pay systematic attention to different communication situations and to learn some rules which you might not have noticed.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize the rules of interaction in a social situation:

- Follow the method for analyzing communication situations found in Saville-Troike's *The ethnography of communication*.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

Learning to understand references from within the cultural framework

### Introduction

You can understand all the words and structures of a language and still not know what people are talking about unless you tap into the shared knowledge bank of the culture. This is what everyone assumes you already know about and will understand if they allude to it. It takes years of living in a country to learn what everyone there already knows.

In most countries nowadays, popular culture is determined by, or at least transmitted by mass media. Watching TV is not a waste of time, in terms of culture learning.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to understand references from within the cultural framework:

- Read historical accounts of the country you are in.
- Ask older people to talk to you about what they remember happening during their lifetime.
- Watch television programs about anything and everything, noting especially jokes you do not understand. Ask native speakers about them, as they are often based on implicit cultural information.
- Listen to radio news programs and discussions in depth while you drive or ride the train.
- Find out what is in with the young people in the country—what they are talking about.

## How to develop your desired level of speaking proficiency

### Introduction

Here are suggestions for reaching your desired level of speaking proficiency. Note that if your ultimate goal is to reach superior proficiency, you must first achieve intermediate and advanced proficiency. If you are already at advanced proficiency, you should go directly to that step.

### Prerequisites

Normally you cannot develop a high level of speaking proficiency in a language without first (or simultaneously) developing listening proficiency.

Note: Listening proficiency usually develops more quickly and to a higher degree than speaking proficiency.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you develop your desired level of speaking proficiency:

- Part of making a strategic plan is choosing an approach to language learning that fits your learning style and situation. The approach you choose will determine which techniques you choose to use from among the recommendations given.

See: Choosing a language learning approach

- Each step will take longer to achieve than the previous one, so you have to have patience!

### Steps

Follow these steps when you develop your desired level of speaking proficiency:

1. Reach high novice speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching high novice speaking proficiency

2. Reach intermediate speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching intermediate speaking proficiency

3. Reach advanced speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching advanced speaking proficiency

4. Reach superior speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching superior speaking proficiency

5. Reach distinguished speaking proficiency.

See: Reaching distinguished speaking proficiency

See also

- Keywords: speaking proficiency

### Reaching high novice speaking proficiency

#### Introduction

At novice level you have to rely on memorized phrases for the most part to communicate whole ideas. You are acquiring important building blocks, however, that can help you begin to use language creatively at the next level.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach high novice speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Novice level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what you are aiming for at this level.

#### Phonology objectives

- Learn to pronounce contrasting sounds within words.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting sounds within words

- Learn to produce question, answer, and command intonation patterns correctly in memorized phrases.

See: Learning to produce question, answer, and command intonation

#### Grammar objectives

- Learn to make short statements, questions, and commands.

See: Learning to make short statements, questions, and commands

Vocabulary objectives

- Learn to say common words.

See: Learning to say common words

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to perform basic survival functions.

See: Learning to express basic communication functions

Interactional objectives

- Learn to interact appropriately in survival situations.

See: Learning to interact appropriately in survival situations

See also

- Keywords: Novice proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to pronounce contrasting sounds within words

Introduction

In order to speak a language so that people can understand you, you need to learn to make the sounds its speakers use to communicate meaning. If the speakers of a language show the difference in meaning in two words by using two different sounds, those sounds are said to be contrasting or in contrast. For example, we make a difference in the words "bid" and "bed" by using different vowel sounds, so in English those are contrasting vowels.

The kinds of sounds that may contrast in a language include consonant and vowel sounds as well as pitch and stress patterns. Here are some recommendations about what to do to learn to make these important sounds.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting sounds within words:

- Learn to contrast consonants and vowels.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels

- If a tone language, learn to pronounce contrasting tones so speakers can hear the difference.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting tones

- Learn to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns

Learning to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels

Introduction

You cannot learn to pronounce a language correctly unless you can make the differences in the sounds the language uses to differentiate words. For example, in English we have lots of sets of words like "beat" and "bit" and "peel" and "pill" where the only difference in the pronunciation of the words is the difference in the sound of the vowels. Speakers of Spanish and other languages that do not distinguish words with these vowels often have a hard time making the difference.

Similarly, English-speakers need to learn to pronounce pairs or sets of sounds in languages they are learning so that they can be understood. English speakers learning Korean, for example, find it hard to pronounce the words for "arm" and "foot" so that Koreans know what they are talking about.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels:

- The natural tendency of language learners is to fit any new sound into the sound framework of their own language. A course in articulatory phonetics can be a big help in learning to make sounds foreign to you.
- It is important, when you start to speak a new language, that you continue to listen carefully and try to build up in your mind an auditory image of what the language sounds like. Otherwise, the way you pronounce the language will start to sound right to you, instead of the way the native speaker sounds.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting consonants and vowels:

- Use the IPA tutor to learn to pronounce some of the speech sounds in the world's languages.

See: How to use the IPA tutor to learn to discriminate and produce phonetic sounds

- When you start learning new vocabulary, pay attention to words that sound the same to you or which native speakers correct you when you try to say. Work on mimicking these words after your language associate.

- Use the Sound Checklist technique.

Note: This technique is particularly relevant to learning an unwritten language.

See: The Sound Checklist technique

- Use the Single Sound Drill technique to practice saying sounds you have trouble pronouncing.

See: The Single Sound Drill technique

- Use the Sound Contrast Drill technique to practice making the difference between two similar sounds.

See: The Sound Contrast Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique to check your pronunciation against that of a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to pronounce contrasting tones

Introduction

In tone languages, the tone of words is as important to the meaning as consonants and vowels. Often speakers of tone languages have trouble understanding why those of us who do not speak tone languages have such a hard time making the difference between two words with different tones, since those words sound completely different to them.

If you are learning a tone language like Thai or Chinese, you too will need to learn to make the contrasting tone patterns of the language.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to pronounce contrasting tones:

- As with all sounds, you have to be able to hear the tones of a language before you can make them.

See: Learning to distinguish contrasting tones

- It is helpful, when you are learning to speak a tone language, to know how many contrasting tones a language has. If you can find out this information in a text book or grammar of the language, great! If not, you can figure it out for yourself.

See: The Tone Checklist technique

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting tones:

- Listen carefully to the pronunciation of each word and mimic it; then use the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Learning to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns

Introduction

Stress is the emphasis put on a particular syllable of a word. In English, stressed syllables are also usually longer than unstressed syllables and have a higher pitch. Say the following two words:

- present (as in Christmas present), and
- present (as in "The principal will present diplomas at graduation.")

These two words have contrasting stress patterns. Notice that the first word is a noun and the second is a verb. We have a number of such pairs of related words in English, which are distinguished by stress.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting word stress patterns:

- Use the production phase of the Stress Pattern Drill technique to practice making contrastive word stress.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique to check your pronunciation against that of a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to produce question, answer, and command intonation

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question, a statement, or a command. It is important to be able to pronounce sentences so that people can understand you, and so that you fit in.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to produce question, answer, and command intonation:

- Use the production phase of the Intonation Drill technique to practice making each intonation pattern.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique to check your intonation against that of native speakers.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to make short statements, questions, and commands

Introduction

When you first start speaking a language, you usually make new sentences by fitting words you have learned into the patterns of sentences you have memorized. Some of the most useful sentence patterns to learn first are statements that do the following:

- Identify people and objects
- Describe people and objects
- Tell the location of people and objects
- Tell about people doing something

You also need to learn to ask simple questions and to make polite requests, which might come out as questions or commands.



## Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to make short statements, questions, and commands:

- The kinds of sentences you learn to make should be determined by two things:
  - Sentences you need to use to meet your survival needs. (These may sometimes be more complex than sentences you could construct for yourself.)
  - Sentences you learn to say to build up your overall ability to speak the language.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to make short statements, questions, and commands:

- Read about different sentence types in the introduction to Section 4.2 and Section 4.2.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning*.

- Use the Survival Phrases technique to learn sentences you can use to meet your needs, and use these sentences as patterns into which to substitute other words you are learning.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Clause Type Practice technique to practice basic sentence types.

See: The Clause Type Practice technique

- Use the production phases of the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique to concentrate on the form, as well as the meaning of sentences.

Note: It does not help a lot to recite the form of a sentence without being conscious of the meaning. Be creative in thinking of contexts in which you could say each sentence.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the production phase of the Structure Contrast Drill technique to practice the difference between two sentence types such as question and statement.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

## Learning to say common words

### Introduction

Nobody can learn to understand a second language without learning lots of vocabulary. A good place to start is learning to say the names of objects and people you can see. Here are some of the kinds of vocabulary to learn to say first:

- Names of common objects
- Names of common food and drink items
- Words for common actions
- The most basic words describing size, color, or age

## Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to say common words:

- Build your speaking on your comprehension techniques. You need to learn to recognize words and what they sound like before you can say them.
- When you say a word, ask your language associate (LA) to repeat it after you, so that you can hear the correct pronunciation in relation to your own attempt.

## Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to say common words:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early, in Section 4.1 of *Kick-starting Your Language Learning*.

- Build on the Look and Listen techniques.

Example: If you have learned to point out apple and orange in a picture book, your LA could ask you, "What is this?" You answer, "An apple."

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Build on the Physical Response techniques.

Example: If you have learned to give your LA one-to-five pencils in response to a command, he could ask you, "How many pencils would you like?" You answer, "Two."

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Memory Reinforcement techniques to help you remember the words for future use.

See: The Memory Reinforcement techniques

Learning to express basic communication functions

Introduction

You have already learned how to express some basic communication functions, such as greetings and leave-taking expressions. Now you need to expand the kinds of functions you can express.

There are four areas of functions to work on:

- Social functions
- Self-expressive functions
- Cognitive functions
- Conversation management functions

The specific functions you learn to express first in each area will depend on

- your approach to language learning
- your interests, and
- your language learning situation.

At this stage, though, you will not be able to handle functions with complications and will need helpful, cooperative people to talk with.

You will continue to develop ways to express these functions as long as you are learning the language.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to express basic communication functions:

- Be aware of the fact that there are variations in the way you express functions, depending on your relationship to other people and the situation you find yourself in.
- Try to first learn ways to express functions that are the most generally applicable.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to express basic communication functions:

- Read about social functions, self-expressive functions, cognitive functions and conversation management functions to get an idea of the things people do with language.
- Use the production phase of the Survival Phrases technique to memorize expressions you can use to express functions.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Dialogue Strip technique to practice exchanges and to associate what you are saying with a picture.

See: The Dialogue Strip technique

If you are living where the language is spoken

- Use the Eating Out activity to practice using what you have learned.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity to practice using what you have learned.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity to practice using what you have learned.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity to practice your social functions, such as greeting and leave-taking.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to interact appropriately in survival situations

Introduction

Learning to communicate means more than just learning to say words; it means learning how to interact appropriately with people when speaking.

Objectives

Here are some objectives for learning to interact appropriately in survival situations:

- To use the ritualized expressions that frame common conversation situations, such as greetings at the beginning and leave-takings at the end of a conversation
- To use the gestures, facial expressions, and words that accompany polite greetings and leave-taking expressions

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to interact appropriately in survival situations:

- Selective attention  
Be observant of gestures and facial expressions that accompany what people say in performing common communication functions and try to imitate them when you are speaking.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to interact appropriately in survival situations:

If you are living where the language is spoken

- Use the Participant Observation technique.  
See: The Participant Observation technique
- Use the Role Play technique to practice interactions.  
See: The Role-Play technique
- Use the Eating Out activity.  
See: The Eating Out activity
- Use the Public Transport activity.  
See: The Public Transport activity
- Use the Shopping Trip activity.  
See: The Shopping Trip activity
- Use the Social Visiting activity.  
See: The Social Visiting activity

Reaching intermediate speaking proficiency

Introduction

At intermediate speaking proficiency you will be able to use language creatively in conversation, although you will make lots of mistakes and your performance will vary a lot in fluency and accuracy. You will need patient and helpful conversation partners at this stage, but it should be very encouraging to be able to use language for authentic communication.

Prerequisites

You need to achieve novice speaking proficiency before you can reach intermediate speaking proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach intermediate speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at intermediate level.

Reason: This will give you an idea of what you are aiming for at this level.

Phonology objectives

- Learn to pronounce words understandably in connected speech.

See: Learning to pronounce words understandably in connected speech

Grammar objectives

- Learn to use different types of sentences in conversation.

See: Learning to use different types of sentences in conversation

Vocabulary objectives

- Learn to use basic vocabulary in speech.

See: Learning to use basic vocabulary in speech

Discourse objectives

- Learn to refer to people already mentioned.

See: Learning to refer to people already mentioned

- Learn to use sentence and phrase connectors.

See: Learning to use sentence and phrase connectors

Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to perform simple communication functions.

See: Learning to perform simple communication functions

- Learn to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address.

See: Learning to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address

Interactional objectives

- Learn to interact appropriately in everyday encounters.

See: Learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters

See also

- Keywords: Intermediate proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to pronounce words understandably in connected speech

Introduction

By now you can understand quite a few words in isolation and some simple sentences. When words come together into phrases and sentences, they sometimes sound different. Your goal at this stage is to recognize words in connected speech at least the length of whole sentences.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce words understandably in connected speech:

- If a tone language, learn to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances.

See: Learning to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances

- Learn to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns.

See: Learning to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns

- Learn to use the rhythm patterns of the language.

See: Learning to use the rhythm patterns of the language

- Learn to produce basic sentence intonation patterns.

See: Learning to produce basic sentence intonation patterns

Learning to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances

Introduction

Words with tone sometimes change when following or preceding other words in sentences. Also, speakers of nontonal languages need to learn not to impose their own. You need to learn to pronounce tones understandably not only on words in isolation, but also in connected speech.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances:

- Remember that tones can change when next to other tones. You need to hear a word in lots of different contexts and practice saying it in various contexts to really master it.
- In some languages the interval between high and low tones decreases as the sentence gets longer. In order to sound authentic you will have to learn to do that too.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce tone words in sentence-length utterances:

- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

- Use the Memorized Routines techniques.

See: The Memorized Routines techniques

Learning to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns

Introduction

Sentence stress is often used to show which part of the sentence is emphasized or more prominent. Learning to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns is just part of learning to sound like a native speaker.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to pronounce contrasting sentence stress patterns:

- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique.

See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

- Use the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to use the rhythm patterns of the language

Introduction

It is important to learn to use the rhythm patterns of the language to make your speech more intelligible to native speakers. Listen to some nonnative speakers of your language and see how well they do with the rhythm patterns of English to see how important this aspect of pronunciation can be.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use the rhythm patterns of the language:

- Listen to a native speaker speaking the language and track along with the speaker.
- Mimic a recording of a native speaker, sentence by sentence, recording yourself. This is a variation of the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to produce basic sentence intonation patterns

Introduction

The intonation patterns of a language can indicate grammatical information, such as whether a sentence is a question or a statement. It can also indicate information about the mood of the speaker: surprise, anger, emphasis, and so forth. To be understandable to your conversation partners, you need to learn to produce appropriate sentence intonation patterns.

Things to do

Here are the things to do to learn when you learn to produce basic sentence intonation patterns:

- Track after a recording of a native speaker, concentrating on intonation patterns.
- Use the Intonation Drill technique.

See: The Intonation Drill technique

Learning to use different types of sentences in conversation

Introduction

You have made a start at understanding some basic types of sentences in your new language. Now you need to expand the kinds of sentences you can understand.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use different types of sentences in conversation:

- Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- While you are actually using the techniques, concentrate primarily on the meaning of the sentences, but also try to notice how the words are arranged.
- You may want to do some techniques where you pay selective attention to the form of the sentences, as well as the meaning.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use different sentence types in conversation.

- Read more about different sentence types in Section 4.2 of *Kick-starting your language learning*.

### Building on comprehension techniques

- Build on the Look and Listen techniques.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Build on the Physical Response techniques.

See: The Physical Response techniques

### Using structure practice techniques

- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique.

See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique.

See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique

- Use the Clause Type Practice technique.

See: The Clause Type Practice technique

- Use the Part of Speech Placement technique.

See: The Part of Speech Placement technique

### Using interactive techniques

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

### Learning to use basic vocabulary in speech

#### Introduction

You have learned some common words already, but you will keep learning new vocabulary as long as you are actively using your new language. At this stage you want to keep working on basic vocabulary, especially words for

- people
- things
- places, and
- actions you can see.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use basic vocabulary in speech:

- Work your speaking practice in with your comprehension techniques.
- Remember that there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between words in one language and words in another language.

- Look for feedback from your conversation partners to see if they have understood you.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use basic vocabulary words in speech:

- Read about categories of vocabulary to learn early, in Section 4.1 of Kick-starting your language learning.

Using general comprehension techniques

- Continue to build on the Look and Listen techniques.

Example: You try to describe what you see in the pictures you have heard the language associate (LA) describe.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Continue to build on the Physical Response techniques.

Example: You give commands to the LA and see if they are understood.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Limited Answer techniques.

See: The Limited Answer techniques

Informal practice

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

Learning to refer to people already mentioned

Introduction

In question or answer exchanges or when you are telling a story, you often refer back to something already mentioned. It is important to learn how to do this so that people can understand. Here are some kinds of reference to learn:

- Which person a pronoun refers to, when that person has been mentioned in a previous sentence.

Example: "I saw Bob downtown yesterday. He looked really tired."

- What general words may be used to refer to a particular thing or person already mentioned.

Example: "I threw out a bunch of papers and files yesterday. I didn't need that stuff anymore."

- What words can be left out to answer a question if they have been mentioned in the question.

Example: "Where's Bob?" "Outside."

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to refer to people already mentioned:

Using selective attention

- Concentrate on getting the reference right while using the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

Practice

- Use the Pronominal Reference Drill technique.

See: The Pronominal Reference Drill technique

- Use the Record for Correction technique to get your language associate to correct your reference.

See: The Record for Correction technique

- Use the Specialized Cloze technique to work on reference.

See: The Cloze technique

Learning to use sentence and phrase connectors

## Introduction

People do not speak in isolated phrases and one-verb clauses; they link their ideas together into discourses, using conjunctions. Learning to use sentence and phrase connectors appropriately is the first step in learning how to speak in connected discourse.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use sentence and phrase connectors:

- In production practice based on comprehension activities, work up from simple sentences to ones that require you to state the connections between two parts of the sentence.

Example: In taking the other role in the Physical Response techniques, once you can say, "Raise your right hand" and "Sit down," you string commands together: "Raise your right hand and sit down," or "Raise your right hand, but do not sit down."

## Learning to perform simple communication functions

### Introduction

Communication functions (or language functions) is a term used to refer to the purposes for which people use language and the way they get things done, using language. In learning another language, it is important to learn how to use language to get things done.

### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to perform simple communication functions:

- Practice  
Use interactive techniques that require you to perform communicative functions.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to perform simple communication functions:

#### Understanding functions

- Read about basic communication functions in Common purposes or functions of language.

#### Using techniques to learn functions

- Use the production phase of the Survival Phrases technique.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Limited Answer techniques.

See: The Limited Answer techniques

#### Getting informal practice

- Use the Eating Out activity.

See: The Eating Out activity

- Use the Public Transport activity.

See: The Public Transport activity

- Use the Shopping Trip activity.

See: The Shopping Trip activity

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

## Learning to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address

### Introduction

People in every society use different words and sometimes even different grammatical forms when talking to friends and family than they do in formal settings. To really understand how to address people appropriately, you need to learn about the society and its values, but you can learn basic differences in pronouns or titles from the beginning.



## Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you learn to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address :

- Practice  
Set up practice techniques of conversations or short exchanges between friends as well as more formal ones, so that you get practice using both sets of forms.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use appropriate pronouns and forms of address:

- Use the Survival Phrases technique.

Note: Make sure you ask your language associate which forms to use to address which people.

When in doubt, learn the more polite forms first.

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Role play technique.

Note: Make sure you know what role the other person is playing, so you can use appropriate forms of address.

See: The Role-Play technique

- Use the Dialogue Variations technique.

Note: Practice the same sort of interactions with people of different ages, gender, status.

See: The Dialogue Variations technique

### Getting informal practice

- Use the Social Visiting activity.

See: The Social Visiting activity

Learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters

### Introduction

Learning to communicate means learning how to interact with other people. The language you use in these encounters depends on and is part of the interaction.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives for learning to interact appropriately in everyday encounters:

- To know when and how to greet people and take leave of them, using the appropriate gestures, facial expressions, and words
- To interact appropriately with a salesperson when buying something
- To interact appropriately with the driver and fellow passengers on public transportation
- To interact appropriately when you visit others or when you invite other people into your home

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to interact appropriately in everyday encounters:

- Ask for feedback.  
Ask a culture friend to tell you if you are acting inappropriately.
- Practice appropriate responses.  
Include interactive techniques in your practice activities.
- Observe others interacting appropriately.  
Base your behavior on what you observe.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to recognize typical interaction patterns of everyday encounters:

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.
  - See: The Dialogue techniques
  - Use the Eating Out activity.
  - See: The Eating Out activity
  - Use the Public Transport activity.
  - See: The Public Transport activity
  - Use the Shopping Trip activity.
  - See: The Shopping Trip activity
  - Use the Social Visiting activity.
  - See: The Social Visiting activity
- Reaching advanced speaking proficiency

### Introduction

When you achieve advanced speaking proficiency, you can participate in most everyday activities in the language you are learning. You will be able to make yourself understood fairly easily, although you will still grope for some words. You will begin to handle more complicated communication tasks and situations. It should be more and more fun to speak the language!

### Prerequisites

You need to have reached intermediate speaking proficiency before you can reach advanced speaking proficiency.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you reach advanced speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Advanced level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what to aim for at this level.

### Grammar objectives

- Learn to use complex sentences of various types.

See: Learning to use complex sentences of various types

- Learn to narrate events in past and future time.

See: Learning to narrate events in past and future time

### Vocabulary objectives

- Expand your active vocabulary.

See: Expanding your active vocabulary

### Discourse objectives

- Learn to link sentences smoothly together to form discourses.

See: Learning to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses

### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to manage conversations.

See: Learning to manage conversations

- Learn to perform social functions without complications.

See: Learning to perform social functions without complications

### Interactional objectives

- Learn to take your part in predictable scripts.

See: Learning to take your part in predictable scripts

### See also

- Keywords: Advanced proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to use complex sentences of various types

### Introduction

The kinds of sentences you encounter depends somewhat on the language. Complex sentences usually have more than one verb, and may be made up of two simple sentences linked by connecting words, called conjunctions. In English, such sentences might have the following conjunctions:

- after
- and
- but
- although
- since
- who
- that
- when
- where

In many European languages, the tense or mood of the verb in the subordinate clause is determined by the conjunction used and by the tense used in the main clause.

Example: In French, the subjunctive mood is used after certain conjunctions, such as *afin que*, *bien que*. The tense of the verb depends on the tense of the verb in the main clause.

In Germanic languages, the word order is different in subordinate clauses than in the main clause: the verb comes at the end of subordinate clauses.

Some languages have sentence structures very different from those in English and other European languages. We cannot describe them all here, so when you get to this stage in learning, you need to pay attention to what happens in complex sentences.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use complex sentences of various types:

- Analysis  
Identify basic clause types and include them in your language learning activities.
- Planning  
Set up your comprehension techniques to include various kinds of sentence types.
- Selective attention

Many of the activities you are using to achieve this objective are the same as for learning to link sentences together into discourses. The emphasis here is on the relationship between the clauses in a sentence.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use complex sentences of various types:

- Use the Linking Drill technique.

See: The Linking Drill technique

- Use the Series technique.

Note: For this and each of the following techniques suggested, you may first want to ask your language associate (LA) to tell the story while you listen, then you try to tell the same story. You may want to record yourself for comparison with the LA.

See: The Series technique

- Use the Picture Descriptions technique.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

#### Focusing on form

- Use the Structure Practice techniques.

See: The Structure Practice techniques  
 Learning to narrate events in past and future time  
 Introduction

Every storyteller needs to indicate to his or her audience the time frame in which the story took place. Most languages do this with tense. Tense is part of the verb system you need to learn to use appropriately at this level.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to narrate events in past and future time:

- Use the Tense Practice technique.

See: The Tense Practice technique

- Use the Record for Correction technique.

See: The Record for Correction technique

Expanding your active vocabulary

Introduction

You will continue to learn vocabulary as long as you actively use the language. If you participate in the culture as much as possible and expose yourself to massive comprehensible input, you should have a pretty large comprehension vocabulary by now. You also need to try out some of these words in your own speech.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you expand your active vocabulary:

- Planning
  - Plan your practice activities to include the following:
    - Practical topics: situations you find yourself in where you need to use your vocabulary in order to get basic goods and services
    - Personal interest topics: concrete topics about which you are particularly interested in being able to discuss
    - Concrete topics of interest to people in the community: topics people want to talk about
- Practicing
  - Use as much vocabulary as possible when doing the practice activities.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you expand your active vocabulary

- Use the Series technique.

See: The Series technique

- Build on the Physical Response techniques.

Note: You take the speaking part.

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Look and Listen techniques.

Note: You take the speaking part.

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Predictable text techniques.

Note: You take the speaking part.

See: The Predictable Text techniques

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

Learning to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses

Introduction

By this time you can probably produce fairly correct sentences most of the time, but you need to practice linking them together smoothly, using correct rhythm and intonation.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses:

- Practice different kinds of paragraphs.
  - Descriptive paragraphs
  - Narrative paragraphs
  - Procedural paragraphs
  - Paragraphs contrasting two items
  - Paragraphs summarizing an argument
  - Lists of items
- Do a lot of listening to particular kinds of paragraphs and discourses to get a good

auditory model.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to link sentences together smoothly to form discourses:

- To practice procedural texts, use the Series technique.

Note: For this and each of the following techniques suggested, you may first want to ask your language associate (LA) to tell the story, while you listen, then you try to tell the same story, concentrating on the intonation and rhythm. You may want to record yourself for comparison with the LA.

See: The Series technique

- To practice narrative texts, use the Familiar Stories technique, but you tell the story.

See: The Familiar Stories technique

- To practice narrative texts, use the Shared Experience technique, but you tell the story.

See: The Shared Experiences technique

• To practice descriptive texts, use the Picture Descriptions technique, but you describe the picture.

See: The Picture Descriptions technique

• Use the Record and Compare technique to compare your intonation and rhythm with that of a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

### Learning to manage conversations

#### Introduction

Every language has ways to manage conversations—ways you know when it is your turn to speak, ways to indicate you want to introduce a new topic or when you need to cut off the conversation, and so forth. It is important to learn to do this so that your conversation partners will know your intentions and the conversation will go smoothly.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to manage conversations:

- Read Functions for managing conversations to get some idea about how people manage conversations.
  - Listen to native speakers managing conversations.
  - Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

### Learning to perform social functions without complications

#### Introduction

At this level, you are working toward handling straightforward social situations. If things are too complicated or sensitive, you may have some difficulties.

#### Prerequisites

You need to first learn to understand social functions without complications before you can perform them.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to perform social functions without complications:

- You need to spend as much time as possible watching and listening to native speakers engaging in communication situations to get a sense of how common social functions are carried on.
- Ask a culture friend to tell you how to do something you are unsure how to handle.

Example: How to get rid of an unwanted admirer

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to perform social functions without complications:

- Read Social functions to get an idea of what kinds of functions to focus on.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

Note: Spend time observing as many social situations as possible.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

#### Learning to take your part in predictable scripts

##### Introduction

As we interact in various communication situations in a society, we develop a sense of what sort of script people typically follow in each kind of situation.

##### Prerequisites

Before you can take your part in a predictable script, you have to learn to recognize the way people interact in predictable scripts.

##### Guidelines

Here is guideline to follow when you learn to take your part in predictable scripts:

- You can only go so far toward achieving this goal if you are not living in a place where the language is spoken. Try to arrange for a stay of at least some months in a place where you can observe and participate in communication situations.

##### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to take your part in predictable scripts:

- Use the Dialogue techniques.

See: The Dialogue techniques

- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

- Use the Activities for self-directed language learners.

See: Activities for self-directed language learners

#### Reaching superior speaking proficiency

##### Introduction

When you reach superior speaking proficiency, you will be able to communicate in a wide variety of social and work situations and will be able to meet most of your everyday communication needs.

#### Prerequisites

You need to have reached advanced speaking proficiency before you can reach superior speaking proficiency.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach superior speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Superior level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what to aim for at this level.

#### Phonology objectives

- Learn to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers.

See: Learning to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers

- Learn to convey emotional nuances through intonation.

See: Learning to convey emotional nuances through intonation

#### Grammar objectives

- Learn to converse at normal speed.

See: Learning to converse at normal speed

- Learn to use all structures commonly used in oral speech.

See: Learning to use all structures commonly used in oral speech

#### Vocabulary objectives

- Broaden the range of vocabulary you can use.

See: Broadening the range of vocabulary you can use

#### Discourse objectives

- Learn to produce more complex oral discourses.

See: Learning to produce more complex oral discourses

- Learn to express abstract relationships between ideas.

See: Learning to express abstract relationships between ideas

#### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to express indirect speech acts.

See: Learning to express indirect speech acts

- Learn to use colloquial speech and idioms.

See: Learning to use colloquial speech and idioms

#### See also

- Keywords: Superior proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Learning to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers

#### Introduction

Very few of us achieve a native-like pronunciation in a second language. But if we can learn to reduce our accent to the point where native speakers do not have to strain to understand us, then communication will obviously be eased, and so will our relationships.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to speak with an accent that does not disturb native speakers:

#### Use analysis

- Isolate the sounds you still have trouble with, and the intonation and stress patterns which need improvement.

- Use the Record and Compare technique.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Practice

- Use the Record for Correction technique.

See: The Record for Correction technique

• Identify a local speaker that you would like to sound like, record him or her speaking, and track along with the recording.

Learning to convey emotional nuances through intonation

Introduction

Language is used as much to express how we feel about issues or relationships as it is to transmit information. It is important to learn to express emotions carried by intonation, tone of voice, and other phonetic features.

Prerequisites

Before you can learn to convey the appropriate emotional nuances, you need to learn to understand how speakers of the language express emotional nuances.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to convey emotional nuances through intonation:

- Listen for feedback from native speakers that indicates they misunderstood the emotional nuances of what you said. This may indicate that you need to work on particular areas.
- Work with a language associate or friend and practice expressing certain emotions or attitudes. You may want to use the Record and Compare technique to compare your performance with a native speaker.

See: The Record and Compare technique

Learning to converse at normal speed

Introduction

While you develop proficiency in a language, you usually need some time to think of the words and structures you want to use. To achieve superior speaking proficiency, you need to have the words and structures automated enough that you can speak at normal conversational speed, without a lot of hesitations and fumbling for words.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to converse at normal speed:

- Do not always concentrate on getting every word right. That will slow you down.

Although it is important to be accurate, do not let your concern for accuracy prevent you from developing fluency.

- Spend lots of time talking informally with friends.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to converse at normal speed:

- Use the language as much as possible in daily life.

Note: Deliberately expose yourself to a wide variety of communication situations in which you need to speak.

- Record the news from radio or television, or record people speaking at normal speed.

Listen to the whole recording several times, and track along with it.

- Prepare oral reports or summaries of things you have heard or read and practice giving them. Do not memorize them; just talk from notes.

Learning to use all structures commonly used in oral speech

Introduction



The grammatical structures found in different genres of oral speech may differ somewhat. It is important to practice various sorts of speech, from informal conversations to prepared speeches, to make sure you can use the grammatical structures that occur in each genre of speech.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use all structures commonly used in oral speech:

- Make sure you are exposed to lots of comprehensible input in a variety of communication situations. This will give you a chance to hear and learn a broad variety of structures.
- Put yourself in situations where you need to use different discourse genres to communicate. That will give you the motivation to use a variety of structures.
- Make a mental note when you notice that you are avoiding a particular construction because you are not sure how to use it. Go back and practice those constructions with a friend.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use all structures commonly used in oral speech:

#### Analysis

- Determine what types of constructions are most difficult for you to speak with clarity and at normal rate of speech.
- Work with a language associate (LA) on dialogues or monologues that contain difficulties. Work until you feel ease—not perfection. Do not hold back—you must talk.
- Use the Text Analysis technique.
- Listen to radio, TV, and films, for fun, if available.
- Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you opportunities to speak the the language.

#### Broadening the range of vocabulary you can use

#### Introduction

By this stage, you have learned to recognize all the sounds of the language and most of the grammatical structures, but you will keep on learning vocabulary forever. The trick is to keep listening for new words and make a conscious effort to incorporate them into your vocabulary.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can use:

- One great way to learn new vocabulary is to set out to learn more about various aspects of the culture. Not only will you understand more about the people you talk to, you will learn lots of vocabulary in the process.
- Remember that words only have meaning in relationship to other words in the language. Check out the meaning of words before you incorporate them into your active vocabulary.
- Make a conscious effort not to "fossilize." Continue to expand the domains in which you learn and use new words. Be sure to learn to use new words in appropriate circumstances.
- Ask a local friend to correct your incorrect vocabulary choices such as swear words, and social blunders. Look for synonyms and do a semantic investigation.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to broaden the range of vocabulary you can use:

- Do a Needs Analysis to see what areas of vocabulary you want to concentrate on most.  
See: Section 2.3 of Language learning in the real world for non-beginners to learn how and why to do a Needs Analysis.
- Use the Audio Archive technique.  
See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Interview techniques.

See: The Interview techniques

- Use the Discovering Categories techniques to investigate the topics you chose with a language associate (LA) or other friends.

See: The Discovering Categories technique

- In a language with literature and media resources, discuss books you read on a given subject or television programs you saw.
- Join clubs or interest groups, choirs, sports teams—anything that gives you exposure to people speaking the language to you and to each other.
- Incorporate new words into your active vocabulary by finding ways to bring them up in conversations.
- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

Learning to produce more complex oral discourses

Introduction

It is one thing to speak a language well enough to get by, and another to

- give a paper at a professional meeting
- preach in a church service, or
- engage in a political debate.

These latter kinds of discourse involve more complex structure in the discourse than are found in simple conversational exchanges.

One important thing you need to do to help people follow your discourse is to use appropriate cues to show which ideas are the most prominent ones and which ideas are supporting details.

You also need to learn to organize your ideas in ways that make sense to speakers of the language.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to produce more complex oral discourses:

- Practice giving various kinds of oral presentation.
- Look for feedback from native speakers to see if they understood the main points of what you said.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to produce more complex oral discourses:

Analysis

- Use the Text Analysis technique to analyze various genres of oral texts.

See: The Text Analysis technique

Practice

- If you have to give a talk, speech, or formal presentation, ask a language associate (LA) for a summary of your main points to see if you got your important points across. If there was confusion on some point, ask the LA to make it clear, then try again.

- Practice describing what might happen in a hypothetical situation.
- Practice explaining why you acted in a certain way.
- Describe a complex object or procedure and ask your LA to try to draw it or do the procedure.

- Practice telling stories or other information in a variety of time frames; then do something almost like intelligibility testing to see what was understood. ("What did I say?")

Learning to express abstract relationships between ideas

Introduction

Within more complex discourses, there is often the need to express abstract relationships between ideas by the use of communication functions such as

- supporting opinions
- hypothesizing
- persuading, and
- interpreting.

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to express abstract relationships between ideas:

- Consciously practice expressing abstract ideas.
- Look for feedback from native speakers to see if they understood you.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to express abstract relationships between ideas:

- Practice explaining the reasons you hold a particular point of view.
- Practice explaining conditions under which something will take place.
- Practice explaining the result of a hypothetical action or situation.
- Practice debating one side of a controversial issue.
- Reread What you can say at Superior level and practice doing other tasks on the list.

See also

- What is an interpropositional relation?

#### Learning to express indirect speech acts

##### Introduction

Indirect speech acts are those where the purpose of the speaker is not overtly indicated by the words chosen, but where clues are given to the meaning of the speaker.

Example: If I'd like you to open the window I might say, "It's really warm today, isn't it?" People often use indirect speech acts to "save face," when it is thought that expressing a request or idea too directly would be impolite or cause embarrassment. It's important for you to learn how to express some speech acts indirectly in order to be polite, especially in some cultures.

##### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow:

- The particular speech acts you will need to learn to express indirectly depend on the culture, but here are some that are likely to be included:
  - hedging
  - avoiding commitments
  - rejecting advances, and
  - giving criticism or rebuke

##### Things to do

Here are the things to do to learn to express indirect speech acts:

- Use the Role Play technique to specifically practice doing the following, asking your language associate (LA) to give you feedback:
  - request something politely
  - politely decline an invitation
  - hedge when asked to do something he does not want to commit himself to do
  - discourage unwanted advances

See: The Role-Play technique

- Ask your LA or culture friends to give you feedback when you sound too abrupt, and then practice expressing those things more indirectly.

## Learning to use colloquial speech and idioms

### Introduction

People use different vocabulary when they socialize with their friends than when they give formal speeches. For one thing, they use idioms and expressions that show they are part of the in-group.

Examples: hanging with friends, what's going down

It is good to learn to use some colloquial expressions, but you need to first identify the group of people who use them, and the circumstances in which they are appropriate.

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you learn to use colloquial speech and idioms:

- Pay attention to the person using an idiomatic or colloquial expression and the people he or she is speaking to.
- Pay attention to the kind of communication situation in which the expression is used.

### Warning

It is easy to get the connotations wrong when learning colloquial speech. Check to make sure you are not saying something vulgar or rude, or that is inappropriate for you to say. Native speakers may laugh to hear a foreigner use really colloquial speech. Sometimes that is just surprise that you have learned to speak so idiomatically, but it may mean that you should avoid using those forms.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use colloquial speech and idioms:

- Use the Handling Idioms technique.

See: The Handling Idioms technique

- Try out idiomatic expressions with your friends, but ask them to be honest in giving you feedback about how it sounds and what the connotations are.

## Reaching distinguished speaking proficiency

### Introduction

Most people never achieve distinguished speaking proficiency in a second language, unless they started to learn the language as a child and have continued to use it all their lives. Some extraordinary people have done so after years of living in another culture and speech community.

### Prerequisites

You need to have reached superior speaking proficiency before you can reach distinguished proficiency.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to reach distinguished speaking proficiency:

- Read What you can say at Distinguished level.

Reason: This will give you a general idea of what to aim for at this level.

### Vocabulary objectives

- Expand vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease.

See: Expanding vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease

### Discourse objectives

- Learn to produce complex formal oral discourse.

See: Learning to produce complex formal oral discourse

- Learn to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience.

See: Learning to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience

### Sociolinguistic objectives

- Learn to make references from within the cultural framework.

See: Learning to make references from within the cultural framework  
Interactional objectives

- Learn to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation.

See: Learning to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation

See also

- Keywords: Distinguished proficiency level (ACTFL guidelines)

Expanding vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease

Introduction

You will not be able to talk about everything, because you do not know everything, but you should be able to converse on any topic an educated native speaker could discuss. Of course, not even native speakers know all the specialist vocabulary restricted to a profession or trade or subject they are totally unfamiliar with.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you want to expand your vocabulary to enable you to talk about any subject with ease:

- Interact as much as possible with people, and talk to them about everything you see in real life and in the media. Watch nature programs, history programs, and educational programs for adults, and discuss them with other people.
- Identify gaps in your knowledge and try to put yourself in an environment where you can learn about them and discuss them, such as in university classes, or interest groups.
- Pick subjects you do not know much vocabulary about, read what you can find about them, then discuss them with people knowledgeable in that area.

Learning to produce complex formal oral discourse

Introduction

Be brave and volunteer to give a speech at some gathering. Agree to give a paper at a conference or symposium. Join Toastmasters, or some other organization where you do public speaking.

Teach a class on something you know. Preach in church or join a debating society.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to produce complex formal oral discourse:

- Practice ahead of time and try out your speech on a native speaker friend. Ask for advice and try again.
- Record yourself giving the speech and go over it later with a native speaker for suggestions on how you might have said things differently to get more impact. This can be a variation of the Record for Correction technique.

See: The Record for Correction technique

Learning to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience

Introduction

Native speakers unconsciously adjust the choice of words and their manner of speaking when addressing different audiences. For instance, a college professor will sound quite different when lecturing to his classes from the way he does when talking with a neighbor about the rose garden. Furthermore, he may sound quite different when teaching an undergraduate class and when he is addressing fellow scholars at professional meetings. You want to learn to do this too, if you aim at distinguished speaking proficiency.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to vary the style of discourse to fit the audience:

- Consciously look for opportunities to give talks aimed at different audiences, and pay attention to the style of presentation as you prepare.

- Look for native speaker reaction to your style of speaking or lectures that seem to be inappropriate to the audience.
- Ask native speakers which speakers have particularly good style or eloquence when speaking and try to emulate them.

Learning to make references from within the cultural framework

Introduction

To really make your points persuasive and sound as though you know what you are talking about when you speak, you need to learn to make references from within the cultural framework of the people to whom you talk.

In order to do this, you have to spend lots of time talking with people, reading, listening and watching media, and becoming familiar with the cultural framework. It cannot come out until you get it in.

Prerequisites

Before you can learn to make references from within the cultural framework, you need to become familiar with that framework and learn to understand references the speakers of the language make to it.

See: Learning to understand references from within the cultural framework

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to make references from within the cultural framework:

- Make a conscious effort to practice alluding to current events, historical events, and current cultural phenomena when speaking. Look for feedback about the success of your attempts.
- Try telling jokes and see if people laugh. If they do not, listen to what their jokes are based on and try again.
- Use the Culture Exploration techniques.

See: The Culture Exploration techniques

Learning to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation

Introduction

To achieve distinguished speaking proficiency, you have to understand how people act in all the social situations you commonly find yourself in. This takes years, and is often just absorbed by watching interactions among native speakers. It is possible, however, to pay systematic attention to different communication situations and to learn some rules which you might not have noticed.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you learn to use appropriate rules of interaction in any social situation:

- Follow the method for analyzing communication situations found in Saville-Troike's *The ethnography of communication*.
- Use the Participant Observation technique.

See: The Participant Observation technique

Techniques and Activities for Self-directed Language Learners

by Carol J. Orwig

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## Summary

This book contains detailed descriptions of techniques and activities you can use to learn a second language in by working with speakers of the language. Each technique has a detailed description of the objectives of the technique, the guidelines to follow and the procedure to use. These techniques can be helpful to you in developing your own language learning program or supplementing a language school.

## Contents

Introduction to Techniques and activities

OVERVIEW: Index of techniques

Techniques for self-directed language learners

Activities for self-directed language learners

Introduction to Techniques and activities

Introduction to techniques and activities

We have put together a collection of language-learning techniques and activities you can use to build your language skills with the help of one or more native speakers of the language you want to learn. We have used the term technique to refer to procedures with sequenced steps as distinct from less structured activities. Most of the activities (and a few of the techniques) assume that the learner is living in a community where the target language is spoken.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, techniques for language learning

Index of techniques

OVERVIEW

Index of techniques

Introduction

This module group contains listings of techniques, according to the type of skills they help to develop.

In this module group

Here are the modules on index of techniques:

- Techniques for improving pronunciation
- Techniques for developing grammatical accuracy
- Index to grammatical structures you can learn through comprehension techniques
- Techniques for building vocabulary
- Techniques for learning discourse structures
- Techniques for practicing communicative functions
- Techniques for learning appropriate varieties
- Techniques for learning interactional skills
- Techniques for building cultural understanding

See also

- Keywords: techniques for language learning

Techniques for improving pronunciation

Description

Here are some techniques to use to improve your pronunciation. Some techniques are for single sounds that are problem areas. Others focus on comparing several sounds you have trouble distinguishing. Still others help you work on features such as tone, stress, and intonation.

Objectives

Here are some pronunciation objectives you can work on with these techniques:

- To be able to distinguish when your pronunciation differs from that of a mother-tongue speaker
- To improve the production of sounds that are difficult for you

#### Techniques

Here are the techniques to use to improve pronunciation:

- The Intonation Drill technique
- The Record and Compare technique
- The Record for Correction technique
- The Single Sound Drill technique
- The Sound Contrast Drill technique
- The Stress Pattern Drill technique
- The Tone Pattern Drill technique

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

Techniques for developing grammatical accuracy

#### Description

Any technique or method that gives you exposure to a broad variety of grammatical structures, such as the Total Physical Response techniques or the Text-based techniques, will help you acquire structures and, with enough exposure, should improve your accuracy. The following techniques, however, will help you isolate and work on developing grammatical accuracy with specific structures.

See: [Index to grammatical structures you can learn through comprehension techniques for ideas on how to practice specific structures.](#)

#### Techniques

Here are some techniques to use to develop grammatical accuracy:

- The Clause Type Practice technique
- The Part of Speech Placement technique
- The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique
- The Structure Contrast Drill technique
- The System Drill technique
- The Tense Practice technique

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, grammar, techniques for language learning

[Index to grammatical structures you can learn through comprehension techniques](#)

#### Introduction

In *Kickstarting your Language Learning* Greg Thomson gives suggestions for how to use comprehension-based language learning techniques, such as Total Physical Response and Photo Book techniques to learn to comprehend a variety of grammatical structures. Thomson has deliberately used a non-technical vocabulary in referring to grammatical structures, so as not to intimidate language learners who are not familiar with that technical vocabulary.

It may sometimes be helpful, however, to be able to associate a technical term with what Thomson is talking about. For example, if a learner is in language school and is studying the imperfect aspect (in some languages called the imperfect tense), it might be helpful to be able to refer to *Kickstarting* for ideas on how to do extra practice outside of class by working with a language helper.

#### Description



This index lists the technical names of grammatical terms with links to the section in which they are discussed by Thomson in *Kickstarting Your Language Learning*.

#### Grammatical structures

- Identificational clauses
- Descriptive clauses
- Noun phrases
- Imperatives
- Active clauses
- Intransitive clauses
- Transitive clauses
- Direct objects
- Subject pronouns
- Indirect objects
- Benefactives
- Location phrases
- Possessors and possession
- Instruments
- Source
- Manner
- Past tenses
- Future tenses
- Imperfective aspect
- Time words
- Passive voice
- Interrogatives
- Subjunctive mood
- Optative mood
- Negation
- Inchoative
- Complex sentences
- Compound sentences
- Relative clauses
- Temporal clauses
- Reason clauses
- Conditional clauses
- Concessive clauses
- Purpose clauses
- Causative constructions
- Comparatives
- Superlatives
- Indirect speech

#### Techniques for building vocabulary

##### Description

Any technique that gives you exposure to language you can understand will help you build vocabulary. The techniques listed here are particularly good for building up your comprehension vocabulary.

##### Techniques

These are the techniques to use to build vocabulary:

- The Dialogue techniques
- The Discovering Categories technique
- The Interview techniques
- The Look and Listen techniques
- The Text Portfolio technique
- The Total Physical Response techniques

See also

- Keywords: techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Techniques for learning discourse structures

Techniques

Here are the techniques to use to learn discourse structures:

- The Text Analysis technique
- The Text Portfolio technique
- The Write and Rewrite technique

See also

- Keywords: discourse, techniques for language learning

Techniques for practicing communicative functions

Techniques

Here are the techniques to practice communicative functions:

- The Dialogue techniques
- The Survival Phrases technique

See also

- Keywords: communicative functions, techniques for language learning

Techniques for learning appropriate varieties

Description

These techniques will help you learn what varieties of language are appropriate to different communication situations and purposes.

Techniques

Here are the techniques to learn appropriate varieties of language:

- The Dialogue techniques
- The Handling Idioms technique
- The Text Portfolio technique
- The Write and Rewrite technique

See also

- Keywords: techniques for language learning, varieties of speech

Techniques for learning interactional skills

Techniques

Here are techniques to learn interactional skills:

- The Dialogue techniques
- The Interview techniques

See also

- Keywords: interactional skills, techniques for language learning

Activities for self-directed language learners

Techniques for building cultural understanding

Techniques

Here are techniques to build understanding of the cultural framework:

- The Dialogue techniques
- The Discovering Categories technique
- The Interview techniques
- The Picture Descriptions technique
- The Text Analysis technique
- The Text Portfolio technique

See also

- Keywords: culture learning, techniques for language learning

Techniques for self-directed language learners

Introduction

These are called techniques for self-directed language learners because you can use them to achieve your own language learning objectives, working with any native speaker of the language that you want to learn. They can be used to supplement a language school or independent study course, or as part of your own language learning program.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use techniques for self-directed language learners:

- Use the Comprehension Building techniques

See: The Comprehension Building techniques

- Use the Culture Exploration techniques

See: The Culture Exploration techniques

- Use the Discourse Practice techniques

See: The Discourse Practice techniques

- Use the Memory Reinforcement techniques

See: The Memory Reinforcement techniques

- Use the Production practice techniques

See: The Production Practice techniques

See also

- Keywords: techniques for language learning

The Comprehension Building techniques

Introduction

With the Comprehension Building techniques you are concentrating on learning to understand more and more of the language you are learning, rather than focusing on speaking it.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Comprehension Building techniques:

- Use the Audio Archive technique

See: The Audio Archive technique

- Use the Look and Listen techniques

See: The Look and Listen techniques

- Use the Physical Response techniques

See: The Physical Response techniques

- Use the Predictable Text techniques

See: The Predictable Text techniques

The Audio Archive technique

Introduction

With the Audio Archive technique, you use examples of various types of spoken texts as models for style, intonation, and other conventions that go with each genre. You can also use this technique for vocabulary learning and review.

## Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Audio Archive technique:

- To make full use of the large body of recorded materials you get throughout your language learning
- To acquire a feel for the style and look of different genre of spoken text
- To gain an understanding of the way each type is organized
- To learn new vocabulary
- To use this as a method of reviewing known vocabulary, intonation, and overall production of each specific type of text

## Guidelines

- Begin this collection with your first recordings in language learning. Include recordings of the language associate (LA) saying vocabulary items, giving example sentences, and other such speech. One of the advantages of this technique is that you can learn from materials you have already collected rather than having to collect all new data.
- Keep bibliographical information on each tape (speaker, topic, and date of recording) for future reference.
- Catalog tapes according to content for easy access and review.
- Take advantage of opportunities to record different types of speech.
  - Attend village meetings
  - Attend church or school functions
  - Find a good story teller or a willing historian
- Listen to the tapes and make note of unfamiliar vocabulary, intonation patterns, and specific stylistic techniques. Go over any questions you have with the LA, playing the tape for clarification (this may not be necessary if you are only trying to define vocabulary items). Also, when talking about intonation and style, it may be difficult for a native speaker to distinguish the specifics used for one genre versus another. Your best teacher for such things may be to record several different speakers giving similar information, and then to compare them to learn overall principles.
- Keep all recorded texts for your current level of language learning as well as previous levels.
- Review the texts on a regular basis for best retention.

## The Look and Listen techniques

### Introduction

With the Look and Listen techniques, you use collections of photos or drawings to acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Look and Listen techniques:

- To build comprehension vocabulary
- To recognize new grammatical structures
- To associate new vocabulary directly with the pictures, without translation

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Look and Listen techniques:

- Find out if it is culturally appropriate for you to take photos.

Reason: In some parts of the world, you can get mobbed or arrested for taking photos in public places. In other places, you must always ask permission before taking photos (a polite thing to do in any case). You may be obligated to get prints for the people you photograph. Be sure to find out about this before you take your photos.

- Arrange the photos or drawings in the order of simple to more complex in their content.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Look and Listen techniques:

- Use the Illustrated Dictionary or Picture book technique
- See: The Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique
- Use the Photo Book technique
- See: The Photo Book technique
- Use the Picture Book Plus Recordings technique
- See: The Picture Book Plus Recordings technique
- Use the Picture Cues technique
- See: The Picture Cues technique
- Use the Picture Descriptions technique
- See: The Picture Descriptions technique
- Use the Dialogue Strip technique
- See: The Dialogue Strip technique

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, comprehension vocabulary, photographs and photo books, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning

The Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique

Introduction

With the Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique, you learn vocabulary by looking at pictures in a book while reading or hearing the corresponding words in the target language.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique:

- To gain a large amount of comprehension vocabulary quickly
- To associate the new vocabulary directly with the pictures, without translation

Guidelines

- Work in one semantic domain at a time.
- Go slowly enough to learn all of the items before moving on to another domain.
- Be aware of morphophonemic changes that may occur, depending on the location of the word within the sentence. To see if such changes occur, try getting the word in a different context.

- Record your session for repeated review.
- Suggested materials:
  - An illustrated picture dictionary such as Larousse Illustre or Duden's (publishers)
  - A children's book with culturally suitable pictures of certain semantic domains such as farm animals, tools, or transportation
  - A scrapbook made by cutting pictures from magazines

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique:

Before your session

1. Find an illustrated picture dictionary or other suitable book.
2. Select a page or section. If it is not written in the language you want to learn cover up the gloss.
3. Decide whether you will record the session, and if so get the tape recorder ready.

During your session

4. Let the language associate (LA) look at the pictures.

During your session

5. Ask the LA to name the words for you or to put them in a simple sentence, such as, "This is a \_\_\_\_\_."

After your session

6. If you have recorded your session, listen to the recording and associate what you hear with the pictures in the book.

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, comprehension vocabulary, dictionaries, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning

Example: The Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Illustrated Dictionary or Picture Book technique:

1. You select a page from a book that has pictures of various kinds of farm animals.
2. You cover up the other language gloss (if there is one).
3. You decide you want to record the session so you get your tape recorder and tape ready.
4. You let the LA view the pictures.
5. You record the LA giving the names of each item or putting them in a simple sentence, such as, "This is a pig."
6. You listen to the tape while looking at the pictures.

The Photo Book technique

Introduction

With the Photo Book technique, you take photos yourself or collect photos from other sources, to use to acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures.

See: The use of a book of photos in initial comprehension learning

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Photo Book technique:

- To provide a recognition vocabulary from the first day of language learning
- To provide language learning that involves real communication: receiving messages, processing messages, and responding to messages (even if nonverbally)
- To provide visual teaching or learning aids to use at various stages of language learning that builds on what has been already learned

Guidelines

- Take at least 50-100 photos, if it is culturally appropriate to do so (see Guidelines, The Look and Listen techniques).
- Take photos that contain one or more people as main characters, who are, in most cases, involved with either another person, or with a non-human object (which sets the stage for simple transitive sentences).
- Arrange the photos in a book.
- Collect one type of information about the photos with each pass through the book, for instance, identifying humans (man, men, woman, women, boy, girl, etc.), identifying objects, simple transitive sentences, more verbs, existential sentences, more nouns, locations, instruments, agreement categories, tense/aspect; constituents of noun phrases, negation, questions, commands, modality, voice, coordination and related phenomena, other NP characteristics, and noun roles. See Brewster and Brewster 1976.
- Check to see if the LA has difficulty in interpreting photos, which is true in some monolingual situations. Line drawings might work better as an alternative.

- Use the photo book as a conversation starter after your initial run throughs, talking about the people in the photos, facts about the people and the situations involved in taking the photos.
- Create a photo book for later stages of language learning by illustrating all steps in a procedure, the major events in the daily cycle, yearly cycle, or life cycle, or showing the major differences in each stage. Or photograph major cultural happenings in great detail, and arrange in logical, spatial, or chronological manner.

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, comprehension vocabulary, grammar, photographs and photo books, techniques for language learning

The Picture Book Plus Recordings technique

Introduction

With the Picture Book Plus Recordings technique, you look at pictures and hear a description of them in the target language. The pictures are designed so you can understand the meaning of what is spoken from the context of the picture.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Picture Book Plus Recordings technique:

- To learn a large amount of comprehension vocabulary
- To associate the new vocabulary directly with the pictures, instead of associating the words with translations in your own language
- To enhance listening comprehension skills
- To hear new vocabulary many times before speaking it, which should help your pronunciation when you eventually pronounce the word

Guidelines

- Purchase a program, such as The Learnables by Harris Winitz, which consists of a book of drawings with accompanying record (or tape). Such materials already have the material divided into learnable chunks (called sections). If these are not available or not suitable for the target culture or language, you can create your own. See: How to Make your own Picture Book Plus Recordings technique.
- Work on a section at a time and repeat each one two or three times.
- Take a break before working on a new section, at least 15 minutes.
- Aim to understand the words. Do not repeat the words out loud, as this will not aid in understanding and may cause mispronunciation. Do not spell the words, or you may tend to hear them as they are spelled rather than the way they are pronounced. Do not be concerned with reading; understanding the language must come first. Do not replay an item that you do not understand, listen to the entire program without rewinding the tape recorder. Some words are understood only after being heard a number of times. Each word should be programmed into the section many times, so that by continued study, you can gain understanding.
- Play the program without looking at the pictures for review. Use the tape as background while doing other activities, such as washing dishes or riding in the car.

See also

- Keywords: Picture Book Plus Recordings technique, audio recordings, comprehension, comprehension vocabulary, context, pictures and picture books, predictability, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

The Picture Cues technique

Introduction

With the Picture Cues technique, you have someone ask you questions about a picture. You answer according to what you see in the picture.

## Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Picture Cues technique:

- To help expand the subject matter of your language learning beyond your immediate physical context
- To practice responding simply and naturally to questions

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Picture Cues technique:

Before your session

1. Select pictures, drawings, or photos you want to use.
2. Decide whether you want to record the session, and if so, get the tape recorder ready.

During your session

3. Give the pictures to the language associate (LA), and have him or her make statements or ask questions about them.

Have the LA scramble the pictures so you cannot predict the order.

4. Respond briefly, when appropriate, with true-false answers, short words, or phrases.
5. If you choose to record, have the LA ask questions about the pictures (without your response) while you record.

After recording is complete, ask questions about any vocabulary you are unsure of.

Replay the tape to find the words in question, if necessary.

After your session

6. Practice with the tape and keep the pictures in the same order that the LA used when asking the questions.

You may answer orally or write the answers to the questions.

See also

- Keywords: audio recordings, comprehension, photographs and photo books, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Picture Cues technique

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Picture Cues technique:

1. You select pictures of a market scene.
2. You decide to get your tape recorder and tape ready.
3. You give the pictures of the market scene to the LA and ask him or her to make statements or ask questions about them.

Have the LA scramble the pictures so you cannot predict the order.

4. You respond briefly, when appropriate, using true-false answers, short words, or phrases.
5. You record the LA asking questions about each picture without your response.

After recording is complete, you ask questions about vocabulary items you do not understand.

You replay the tape to find the words in question, when the LA does not remember exactly what he said.

6. You practice with the tape and keep the pictures in the same order that the LA used when asking the questions.

You may answer orally or write the answers to the questions.

The Picture Descriptions technique

## Introduction

With the Picture Descriptions technique, you ask the language associate (LA) to describe pictures you have chosen and you record the descriptions for later practice.



## Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Picture Descriptions technique:

- To acquire
  - descriptive words
  - identification and descriptive sentences
  - present tense verbs (if the pictures contain people doing things)
  - paragraph structures
- To increase comprehension skills of large amounts of language within controllable limits and with visual clues of the meaning

## Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Picture Descriptions technique:

- Choose pictures that have vocabulary you want to learn.

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Picture Descriptions technique:

Before your session

1. Decide what type of pictures you want to look for.
2. Look for appropriate pictures in magazines or books, or take photos.
3. Get your tape recorder and tape ready.

During your session

4. Ask the LA to describe the pictures.  
Record the descriptions to listen to later, but also pay attention to the LA while recording.
5. Ask questions to clarify things you do not understand.

After your session

6. Listen to the tapes while looking at the pictures to reinforce what you have learned.

See also

- Keywords: audio recordings, comprehensible input, comprehension, descriptions, identification, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning, tenses, verbs, vocabulary

Example: The Picture Descriptions technique

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Picture Descriptions technique:

1. You decide to look for pictures that have to do with farming.
2. You find magazine or book pictures, or photos you have taken of locals doing farming.
3. You get your tape recorder and tape ready for the session.
4. You ask the LA to describe the pictures. Record the descriptions for later, but also pay attention to the LA while recording.
5. You ask questions when you do not understand what the LA means.
6. You listen to the tapes while looking at the farming pictures to reinforce what you have learned.

The Dialogue Strip technique

## Introduction

With the Dialogue Strip technique, you learn basic language functions by looking at cartoon strips illustrating a short dialogue exchange, while hearing the corresponding dialogue in the target language.

## Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Dialogue Strip technique:

- To understand what people typically say in everyday encounters

- To associate the dialogue directly with the pictures, without translation

#### Guidelines

- If you start with cartoon strips you have already drawn or with a book such as *The Lexicarry* containing such strips, your Language Associate (LA) may have trouble understanding the situation illustrated by the cartoon. Make sure you both agree on the situation the cartoon strip is illustrating.
  - Be aware that there may be several dialogue variations that could be illustrated by the same picture.
    - Record your session for repeated review.
    - Suggested materials:
      - *The Lexicarry*
      - Cartoon strips you make yourself by drawing pictures
      - Sequences of photographs that illustrate a dialogue exchange
      - Strips made by cutting pictures from magazines

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Dialogue Strip technique:

Before your session

1. Purchase or make a cartoon strip illustrating a short dialogue exchange.
2. Decide whether you will record the session, and if so get the tape recorder ready.

During your session

3. Explain to the language associate (LA) the situation the cartoon strip is intended to illustrate.
4. Ask the LA to take the part of each of the men in the encounter and record the dialogue exchange.

After your session

5. If you have recorded your session, listen to the recording and associate what you hear with the dialogue strip.

See also

- Keywords: audio recordings, communicative functions, comprehension, Dialogue techniques, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning, vocabulary
- Example: Illustrating a greeting exchange

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Dialogue Strip technique:

Before your session

1. You draw a cartoon strip illustrating a greeting exchange between two men who know each other, passing on the street.
2. You decide you want to record the session so you get your tape recorder and tape ready.

During your session

3. You show the strip to your LA and explain that it is meant to illustrate a greeting exchange between two men who know each other, passing on the street.

Note: Your LA may ask you questions about the age of the men, the time of day or other factors about their relationship that might affect what is said.

4. You record the LA greeting an acquaintance on the street and responding to the greeting.

After your session

5. You listen to the tape while looking at the cartoon strip.

The Physical Response techniques

Introduction

With the Physical Response techniques, you practice responding to commands spoken in the target language.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Physical Response techniques:

- To make mental associations between forms and meanings
- To build comprehension vocabulary quickly
- To build listening comprehension skills without interference from trying to speak
- To avoid translating from your own language to the target language
- To begin to assimilate basic sentence and sound patterns

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Physical Response techniques:

- Plan your session thoroughly in advance. This method will not be successful if you just try to make it up as you go along.
- Demonstrate this technique to the language associates (LAs) so they understand you are trying to listen and respond appropriately to each command.
- Try to associate each command with the appropriate action without translating into your own language.
- Have the LA repeat the commands many times in random order so you get lots of practice. It is important to repeat things often enough to learn them well.
- Respond as quickly as possible, so the response becomes naturally connected to the command.
- Record your session with the LA so you can listen to the tape later and practice your responses. Keep reviewing previous lessons.

### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Physical Response techniques:

- Use the Listen and Do technique

See: The Listen and Do technique

- Use the Following Spoken Directions technique

See: The Following Spoken Directions technique

- Use Techniques for Introducing and Expanding Material

See: Introducing and Expanding Material

See also

- Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response), action association, commands, comprehension, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

The Listen and Do technique

### Introduction

The Listen and Do technique is the principal technique in the Physical Response group. All the other techniques are based on it. The objective of the technique is to help you associate sound and meaning directly, without translation into another language, and to reinforce the meaning by physical action or response.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Listen and Do technique:

Before your session

1. Choose a situation where commands would be given that you are likely to use.
2. List in your own language five or more different commands that might be useful in the situation.
3. Gather any props or materials you need for the session.

During your session

4. Communicate to the LA how to do the exercise and what commands in the target language you want to learn.

Tip: Demonstrate the technique by giving commands in English or another language to a learning partner, so the LA can see what you mean.

5. Record the LA giving the commands while you carry out the appropriate action.

6. Have the LA give the commands repeatedly and randomly until you can respond quickly without thinking in your first language. Encourage the LA to correct any wrong responses.

7. Write down the commands at the end of the session if you want to.

After your session

8. Listen to the recording of the commands.

- Perform the actions as you listen, or make simple drawings that illustrate the actions.
- Listen to the recording again and focus on the pronunciation.
- Practice mimicking the commands on the recording when you feel ready (this may not be for several weeks). Look at the picture or perform the action to associate the meaning with the sound.

Variation

G. Thomson (Kick-Starting Your Language Learning) suggests a way to do TPR using two language learners, which works even with LAs who have little or no educational background. The first language learner faces the LA, and the second gets behind the first, in view of the LA, but not of the first learner. The second learner then does things, and the LA instructs the first learner to do whatever he sees the second learner doing.

See also

- Keywords: commands, comprehension, techniques for language learning

Example: How to use the Listen and Do technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Listen and Do technique:

1. You choose to learn commands for how to use a book.

2. You list the following commands in English:

- Pick up the book.
- Put down the book.
- Open the book.
- Close the book.
- Read the book.

3. You prepare for your session by gathering

- a book for the demonstration
- cards or slips of paper, and
- your tape recorder.

4. You communicate to the LA how to do the exercise and the commands you want to learn.

With a learning partner you demonstrate several commands in English for the LA, as follows:

- One of you gives a command.
- The other person carries out the command.

Example:

- One of you says, "Pick up the book."
- The other person picks up the book. You repeat the demonstration until the LA understands.

5. You record the LA giving each of the commands while you do the appropriate action.
6. The LA gives the commands repeatedly and randomly as you respond by performing the appropriate actions with the book.  
You encourage the LA to correct you when your response is incorrect.
7. You write down the commands at the end of the session.
8. You listen to the tape.
  - You perform the commands as you hear the LA give them:
    - open the book
    - close the book
    - read the book
    - pick up the book
    - put down the book
  - You listen to the recording, paying attention to the pronunciation of each command
  - You practice mimicking the tape when you feel ready (this may not be for several weeks).

The Following Spoken Directions technique

Introduction

With the Following Spoken Directions technique, you follow a series of spoken (or recorded) directions. Evaluation is based on how closely the directions are followed or how many points out of a series are accomplished.

Objectives

Here is an objective of the Following Spoken Directions technique:

- To take advantage of a limited amount of natural speech
- to help you improve your listening comprehension ability
- to actually perform the task being described

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Following Spoken Directions technique.

Learner:

- Use this technique in a simplified form as a beginner.
- Alter this technique for intermediate or advanced stages by increasing the difficulty of the directions to be followed, or by increasing the number of steps to be performed.

Teacher:

- Pace the flow of speech of the directions to fit the stage of language learning achieved.
- Use a recorded set of directions for the same learner at different stages of language

learning as an evaluation of progress.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Following Spoken Directions technique:

During your session

1. Complete a set of oral directions given to you by the language associate (LA).
2. Have the LA check your work to see how well you followed directions.
3. Have the LA record another set of directions for at-home practice.

After your session

4. Follow the set of recorded directions for at-home practice.  
Check the results during your next session.

Variations

One variation of this technique is to do it with another language learner. For example, sit back-to-back while listening to instructions given by the LA. An appropriate activity might be to use blocks or rods to build a house. After you are done, you then compare results with each other. See also

- Keywords: comprehension, directions, techniques for language learning

Example: Following Spoken Directions

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Following Spoken Directions technique:

1. You complete the following set of directions as given to you by the LA:
  - a. Take a piece of notebook paper and place it in front of you, with the long side positioned horizontally.
  - b. In the middle of the page, draw a circle about one inch in diameter.
  - c. On top of this circle and touching it, draw another circle, just a little smaller in size.
  - d. On top of these circles, draw another circle a bit smaller than the second one. This is the beginning of a snowman.
  - e. Make a face on the top circle by drawing eyes, a nose, and a mouth.
  - f. Draw a tall hat on the head but do not cover the face.
  - g. Draw two arms that look as if they were made out of two sticks.
  - h. Write your name on the back of the paper.
  - i. Give your paper to the LA.
2. You have the LA check your work to see how well you followed directions in drawing a snowman.
3. You have the LA record a set of directions on how to draw and color various shapes (triangle, square, circle, or rectangle).
4. You follow the recorded directions dealing with shapes.  
You check your work during the next session to see how closely you followed directions.

Introducing and Expanding Material

Introduction

Many beginning techniques can be adapted in a variety of ways to expand the learning experience. Ramiro Garcia has developed and tested many of these variations using Total Physical Response (TPR) in the classroom over many years (Garcia 1988). Some variations have to do with the way new items are introduced to the language learner (called introductory techniques by Garcia). Others refer to the way previously introduced material is combined and expanded for the language learner, to promote greater comprehension (called working techniques by Garcia). Along with TPR, the variations given here can be implemented for many of the Look and Listen techniques.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Introducing and Expanding Material technique:

- To aid in vocabulary acquisition
- To distinguish between several items or actions
- To transfer previously-learned concepts to new situations
- To recognize and respond to previously learned material when it is combined with newly introduced material

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Introducing and Expanding Material technique:

- Follow the natural progression of these techniques, from simpler to more difficult, and move at a manageable pace.
- Be sure the language associate (LA) understands what you are trying to do, what new parameter you are introducing to previously learned material, so he or she can truly carry through with the technique throughout the session.
- Make sure the LA does not fall into a pattern of predictability by making the "next step" obvious. Variety is the key to successfully expanding on learned material.

See: Variation of the Listen and Do technique for a suggestion of how two language learners can work together productively. It is applicable to the techniques listed here also.

Steps: Introducing New Material techniques

Follow these steps to use the Introducing and Expanding Material technique for new material:

1. Have the LA speak a command and perform the action. You then listen and mimic the LA's action.

Example: The LA says, "Ted, get up" and stands up, motioning for you to do the same. The LA then says, "Ted, sit down" and he sits down. Ted responds by doing the same as he observed the LA doing.

2. Ask the LA to create a situation so you must choose between two items, one you already learned, and the other which, by the process of elimination, is easily recognized. Example: The LA shows you two photos from the photo book. You already know the word for "house" but have not learned the word for "barn" yet. He points to the photo with the house and says, "This is a house," then to the photo with the barn and says, "This is a barn." You can understand this even though you have never heard the word before.

3. Have the LA get three items for you to choose from, only one of which is known to you. If you guess wrong, then you try again. If you guess correctly, a word of praise is given.

Example: The LA has a basket with three items; a banana, a mango, and a guava. You only know the word for banana. The LA says, "Ted, take out the mango." If you pick up the guava, he tells you to try again. If you pick up the mango, he says, "Good work, Ted."

4. Ask the LA to introduce a new item following an already learned item. He or she makes it very obvious what to perform by either gestures or other cues.

Example: The LA says, "Ted, open the door." Then he says, "Ted, close the door," using a small hand gesture to hint at the meaning of the action needed.

Steps: Expanding Material techniques

Follow these steps to use the Introducing and Expanding Material technique for expanding and combining previously learned material with new material:

1. Ask the LA to recombine already learned vocabulary items and create different (new) situations, so you can transfer the concepts to new situations.

Example: You already know the commands, "Open the door" and "Touch the book." The LA recombines them as, "Touch the door" and "Open the book."

2. Have the LA follow a slow pace in introducing new material. Too much vocabulary too quickly may prove to be counterproductive for retaining material. Example: see number 8.

3. Ask the LA to recombine vocabulary and also expand material by placing items in more complicated utterances (or performances).

Example: Looking at the Illustrated Picture Book, the LA shows you a page with farm animals on it. You already know the names of the farm animals. The LA says, "This is a pig. The pig is big. The pig is big because he eats a lot of corn husks."

4. As your comprehension vocabulary increases, have the LA add function words to the commands, making them flow more smoothly.

Example: The LA says, "Ted, point to the door with the banana that is in the basket."

5. Ask the LA to continue using the previously learned material, making it the foundation for more complex constructions.

Example: You have already looked at the Illustrated Picture Book farm page and know the basic material (names of animals and their usual activities). Look at the book again. The LA says, "This pig is eating the corn husks so that one day he will be big enough to slaughter. Then the pig will be cooked and eaten."

6. Have the LA use synonyms and equivalents from the beginning. This may sound confusing, but is not when properly carried out.

Example: The LA points to the photos and says, "Ted, this is a little house." "This is a small chair." "This is a huge barn." "This is a large bed."

7. Once you have learned several individual commands, then have the LA give several commands in sequence to be performed as a continuous action. This should not be taken to an extreme or you will not be able to follow through all the way, as it could become an exercise in memorization rather than in comprehension.

Example: The LA says, "Ted, get up, walk to the door, open it, turn around, hop over to the window on one foot, and sit down in the chair there."

8. The LA should not introduce too many similar items at one time, or it may be overwhelming to you. Three or four items at a time is much more manageable. Giving eight or ten related new items might prove very stressful.

Example: While looking at the photo book, the LA shows you several different types of boats. You already know the generic word for boat, but he gives you specific names for "platform fishing boat," "dugout canoe," and "passenger boat."

See also

- Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response), commands, comprehension, photographs and photo books, techniques for language learning, variations

The Predictable Text techniques

Introduction

The Predictable Text techniques are all based on the premise that intermediate learners of a language can understand simple connected discourses if the content of the discourses is already known to them, or is predictable, because of related knowledge.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Predictable Text techniques:

- Use the Bilingual Reading technique
- See: The Bilingual Reading technique
- Use the Familiar Stories technique
- See: The Familiar Stories technique
- Use the Shared Experiences technique
- See: The Shared Experiences technique
- Use the Dumb-Smart Question technique
- See: The Dumb-Smart Question technique

See also

- Keywords: discourse, techniques for language learning, text

The Bilingual Reading technique

Introduction

With the Bilingual Reading technique, you practice reading a translated text in the target language for which you have an equivalent text in your mother tongue. You take advantage of



familiarity with the content to assist your reading practice and comprehension in the target language. This technique can be used with translated material, such as the Bible, magazines, or familiar stories. This is an independent technique and does not require a language associate.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Bilingual Reading technique:

- To improve your recognition of grammar patterns and vocabulary items
- To improve your ability to control verb tense and aspect
- To improve your reading comprehension
- To control spelling and suprasegmentals (accent and tone markings)

### Guidelines

- Use a modern translation of the text, not one with archaic words.
- If you choose the Bible, start with narrative passages such as the Gospels or historical books.
- Unless you are very familiar with the passage, read it in your mother tongue first to get the meaning and then in the target language.
- Start with short passages and reread each one until you have full understanding.
- Read each passage out loud in the target language at least once.
- Commit yourself to reading daily at a set time for disciplined practice.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Bilingual Reading technique:

#### Before your session

1. Choose a short passage in the target language.
2. Have the following items handy:
  - The text in your mother tongue
  - A target language dictionary (if available)
  - A target language grammar book (if available)
  - A fine-point pen or a highlighter and a notepad

#### During your session

3. Read the passage silently in the target language.
4. If you found the passage hard to understand or saw many new things, read the passage again.
5. Check the meaning by
  - reading the passage in your mother tongue, and
  - using the dictionary for the meaning of words in the target language.
6. Look at these structures in the passage:
  - Verb forms
  - Tense uses
  - Relation between tenses in the passage
  - Grammatical constructions
 Identify the tense and aspect of every verb and make notes about these structures if you wish.
7. Read the passage aloud once or twice and pay special attention to the flow of words and sounds.

### Variations

The Bilingual Reading technique may also be implemented by using recorded texts in the target language. With this variation, you should listen to the recording of the passage until you comprehend it easily and it does not sound strange to you.

### Dictation Exercise

If your printed version of the passage matches the recorded version, play the passage and write it from dictation. Use the pause control or stop key to give yourself time to write. Compare your version with the printed passage and correct the errors. Practice writing any misspelled words several times, or record someone reading the passage as a means of practicing with the dictation exercise.

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, discourse, narrative discourse, techniques for language learning, text

Example: The Bilingual Reading technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Bilingual Reading technique:

1. You choose to read John 1:29-34 at your scheduled time of 4:00 p.m.
2. You have the following items handy:
  - The text, John 1:29-34, in your mother tongue
  - A target language dictionary
  - A target language grammar book (if available)
  - A fine-point pen or a highlighter and a notepad
3. You read John 1:29-34 in the target language.
4. You do not understand one part of the passage so you read John 1:29-34 again.
5. You read the passage in your mother tongue and use the target-language dictionary to check for meaning.
6. You look at these structures in John 1:29-34:
  - Verb forms
  - Tense uses
  - Relation between tenses in the passage
  - Grammatical constructions

You identify the tense and aspect of every verb. You decide to make notes about these structures.
7. You read John 1:29-34 aloud once or twice and pay special attention to the flow of words and sounds.

The Familiar Stories technique

#### Introduction

With the Familiar Stories technique, you get the language associate (LA) to tell you a story in the target language that you are familiar with in another language. You listen and record it for further understanding and evaluation.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Familiar Stories technique:

- To take advantage of your knowledge of the story content to:
  - acquire vocabulary
  - learn grammatical constructions
  - acquire a sense of the discourse organization

#### Guidelines

- Try to find out if the target language has familiar stories. Many Western languages have versions of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Cinderella, or Little Red Riding Hood. Even non-Western languages have some familiar stories (acquired in this age of international communication).

- Do not try to translate word-for-word when listening to a familiar story; try to follow the gist of the story.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Familiar Stories technique:

Before your session

1. Get your tape recorder and tape ready.

During your session

2. Have the LA tell a story in the target language that is familiar to you.
3. Record the story.

After your session

4. Listen to the tape and try to follow the gist of the story.
5. Listen to the tape repeatedly to become familiar with
  - vocabulary,
  - grammatical constructions, and
  - some of the discourse organization.

#### Variation

The Familiar Stories technique may be used with the following variations:

1. You may listen to the news on the radio or TV in your mother tongue, then listen to it in the target language. If possible, record the target language version and practice with it.
2. If you find a book with a familiar story in it, you can record the LA reading it. Once you have read the print version, try reading along while you listen to the recording. Do not worry if you cannot follow every word. If there is a translation of the Bible in the target language, you can use it for some familiar stories. See: The Bilingual Reading technique.
3. You can use this technique with two or more language learners. You might tell a story to the LA with a second language learner present not knowing what story is being told. You could use a fairy tale from your culture or a story familiar to the other language learner (from the Bible, an event from history, or from personal experience). The LA then tells the story to the second language learner in the next session.

See also

- Keywords: discourse, story-telling, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Familiar Stories technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Familiar Stories technique:

1. You get your tape recorder and tape ready.
2. You get the LA to tell the story of Cinderella in the target language.
3. You record Cinderella.
4. You listen to the tape and try to follow the gist of Cinderella.
5. You listen to the tape repeatedly, making note of new vocabulary items, grammatical constructions, and a sense of the discourse organization.

The Shared Experiences technique

#### Introduction

With the Shared Experiences technique, you listen to the language associate (LA) recounting something that happened when you were together. Adapted from: Greg Thomson Language learning in the real world for non-beginners.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Shared Experiences technique:

- To take advantage of your knowledge of an event to help you

- understand the reporting of an event more easily
- acquire new vocabulary
- acquire new grammatical structures

#### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Shared Experiences technique:

- Pay attention to things happening during the activity to ask the LA about later (possibly take notes).

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Shared Experiences technique:

Before your session

1. Think of an event or activity you can do with the LA.

During your session

2. Go with the LA and do whatever you have decided on.
3. Take notes to give yourself a script for what happened.
4. Ask the LA to describe what you did together, as if speaking to a third person. Record what is said and add it to your Audio Archive.

After your session

5. Listen to the tape and see if you can follow what the LA said.
6. Make a note of things you do not understand to ask the LA about later.

#### Variation

The Shared Experiences technique can be used to practice your own storytelling. You can turn it into a more sophisticated version of the Record and Compare technique. After your shared experience, try telling the story first. Then ask the LA to tell his or her version of it. Listen to both versions and note the differences.

See also

- Keywords: discourse, reporting, techniques for language learning, text, vocabulary

Example: The Shared Experiences technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Shared Experiences technique:

1. You decide to go to the market with the LA.
2. You go with the LA to the market.
3. You make notes of the 'events' during your visit to the market.
4. You ask the LA to describe what you did together, as if speaking to a third person. You record the description and add it to your Audio Archive.
5. You listen to the tape and try to follow what the LA said.
6. You make note of things you do not understand in the recording to ask the LA about later.

The Dumb-Smart Question technique

#### Introduction

With the Dumb-Smart Question technique, you ask a lot of people the same question in the target language. This needs to be a question you already know the answer to. This permits you to focus on listening to their somewhat predictable responses.

Adapted from: Gradin 1993.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Dumb-Smart Question technique:

- To improve listening comprehension skills
- To build confidence as you discover you can understand what people say

- To learn new vocabulary and new information
- To increase your contact time with people
- To show yourself to be a friendly, interested person

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Dumb-Smart Question technique:

- Use this technique after you have acquired some basic vocabulary and feel confident about asking questions.
- Take advantage of the structured nature of this technique to enjoy interacting with people in a nonthreatening way.
- Select carefully the questions you ask. If people seem reluctant to answer you might be asking a culturally inappropriate question or people might be confused about why you are asking a question with such an obvious answer.
- Focus on listening. Try to notice how people state their answers, because you usually already know what they are going to say. Look for stylistic factors of speech.
- When possible, record the answers. Prepare your recorder ahead of time.
- File your written versions of the answers and collect the recorded answers on tape to become part of your Audio Archive .

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Dumb-Smart Question technique:

Before your session

1. Select a topic you already know something about.
2. Think of a question on this topic that everyone might answer the same way.

During your session

3. Find out from the language associate (LA) how to ask the question in the target language.
4. Record the question for practice later.
5. Ask the LA the question in the target language.
6. Record the LA's answer.
7. Write the answer if that helps you.
8. Try to understand the answer, working from your knowledge of the topic.  
Ask the LA to restate or paraphrase parts you do not understand.
9. If necessary, get help to clarify or translate words you do not understand.  
Tip: It is best to try to understand directly from the target language.

After your session

10. Listen repeatedly to the recording of the LA's answer until you can understand it at normal speed.
11. Repeat the question until you can say it easily and accurately.
12. Go out and ask several people the same question. Listen for familiar vocabulary and try to get the main idea of their answers.

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, interviewing, paraphrase, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Dumb-Smart Question technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Dumb-Smart Question technique:

1. You decide you want to learn how to ask for directions to the bus station since you have been there several times and know the way.
2. You decide on the question, "How do I get to the bus station?"

3. You ask your LA how to ask in the target language, "How do I get to the bus station?"
4. You record the LA's question for practice later.
5. You ask the LA, "How do I get to the bus station?"
6. You record the LA's answer.
7. You write the answer if that helps you.
8. You try to understand the answer, working from your knowledge of the topic. You ask the LA to restate or paraphrase parts you do not understand.
9. You clarify words that you do not understand.
10. You listen repeatedly to the recording of the LA's answer until you can understand it at normal speed.
11. You repeat the question until you can say it easily and accurately.
12. You go out and ask several people how to get to the bus station. Listen for familiar vocabulary and try to get the main idea of their answers.

### The Culture Exploration techniques

#### Introduction

The Culture Exploration techniques help you investigate areas of culture you need to understand in order to communicate effectively in your new language. Remember that communication takes place within a cultural framework, and that the more you know about the culture of the speech community, the better you will know what is going on.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Culture Exploration techniques:

- Use the Interview techniques
- See: The Interview techniques
- Use the Discovering Categories technique
- See: The Discovering Categories technique
- Use the Kinship Analysis technique
- See: The Kinship Analysis technique
- Use the Participant Observation technique
- See: The Participant Observation technique
- Use the Script Analysis technique
- See: The Script Analysis technique

#### See also

- Keywords: techniques for language learning

### The Interview techniques

#### Introduction

With the Interview techniques, you go out into the community and interview people to find out more about different groups community and the life of individuals in it.

#### Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Interview techniques:

- Use the Ethnographic Interview technique
- See: The Ethnographic Interview technique
- Use the Life History Interview technique
- See: The Life History Interview technique

#### See also

- Keywords: interviewing, techniques for language learning

### The Ethnographic Interview technique

#### Introduction

With the Ethnographic Interview technique, you ask questions of members of a culture (or subculture) in their own language in order to learn about the culture. This technique is used for anthropology studies, but may also be used for language learning purposes. For a full description, see Spradley 1979.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Ethnographic Interview technique:

- To understand certain aspects of another culture from the insider's point of view
- To build vocabulary
- To discover how insiders categorize objects, people, and actions

#### Guidelines

- Develop rapport with the language associate (LA) you wish to interview by making repeated explanations when something is unclear, by restating what the LA says to clarify meaning, and by asking for usage of terms and objects rather than "definition."
- Elicit information by asking descriptive questions. Analyze the information given during the ethnographic interview and categorize terms used by the language associate.

See: The Discovering Categories technique

See also

- Keywords: elicitation, ethnographic interviewing, interviewing, techniques for language learning

#### The Life History Interview technique

##### Introduction

With the Life History Interview technique, you meet with an older person on a regular basis to learn about local history and the recent past. This is a technique related to the Ethnographic Interview technique.

##### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Life History Interview technique:

- To have contact with elderly people
- To have the opportunity to learn a little of the local history which might give insight into why things are the way they are now
- To learn
  - what is important history for these people
  - how they measure time
  - storytelling features
  - discourse features

##### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Life History Interview technique.

1. Find an elderly person who is willing to spend several hours with you over a period of several weeks. Explain that you would like to learn about their life and some of the things that happened locally.
2. Spend your first meeting on socializing, not on beginning the work. You might also try to find out if the person has some things he or she would like to talk about.
3. Set up a time to go back and begin your history work.
4. Meet at a suitable location, in the elderly person's home, a park, or wherever you can have time together (without a lot of interruptions or insertions by others).

Use your judgment about whether or not to record or take written notes during the session. If not, write up your findings immediately afterward.

Spend one to two hours with the elderly person, long enough to get work done, but not so long that it gets tiring.

5. Note various storytelling features which were present, and also note discourse features.

6. Try to make a life history timeline, marking dates and events of import, both historical and personal to the elderly person. Notice how the person's life interweaves with historical events, what the person perceives to be important events, and how time is measured.

7. Share what you did with the elderly persons. They might enjoy having a copy and it may also stir up some other interesting memories.

See also

- Keywords: discourse, interviewing, social visiting, techniques for language learning

Example: The Life History Interview technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Life History Interview technique.

1. You decide to ask the 83 year old grandfather of your friend if he would be willing to visit with you and share some of his life and history. He says yes and you tell him you would like to meet with him several times at his convenience.

2. You ask the man if there are certain stories he would like to tell you. He says that he will think about it.

3. You agree to come back tomorrow at 10 a.m.

4. You decide together to sit on his porch during your visit. You ask if it is okay for you to record his stories and he is agreeable. You get out your tape recorder and set it up. You test it to make sure that it will pick up his voice outside.

You ask him if there are any stories or events that he particularly remembers as important to himself or his family, giving him freedom to talk as he wants to. You prompt or insert questions only when needed. He begins to drag a little after 1 1/2 hours, so you suggest that you will continue next week. He agrees.

5. You spend time listening to the tape and writing the stories in your ethnographic notebook. You notice the storytelling style and discourse features.

6. After several sessions, you construct a timeline, marking historical events of note and personal events in the life of the grandfather. You note his concept of important events and how he measures time.

7. After you have completed your paper or historical timeline, you share a copy of what you have done with him.

The Discovering Categories technique

Introduction

With the Discovering Categories technique, you elicit words in various domains of cultural information and try to analyze the semantic categories mother-tongue speakers use to organize relationships between words. Consciously or unconsciously, every language learner must continue to discover and use the categories unique to the target language. This technique is an anthropological research tool, but may also be used as a language learning tool.

Also known as: Domain analysis, taxonomic analysis. Adapted from: Spradley 1979

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Discovering Categories technique:

- To understand the sociolinguistic framework of the target culture
- To know how the vocabulary items relate to each other
- To begin to think in the categories recognized by native speakers

Guidelines



- Use the material you gather in an ethnographic interview as a starting place for discovering categories.
- Look for the names of things.
- See if any items seem to be grouped together, if they belong to the same overall grouping.
- Use these items as jumping-off places to explore and discover categories.

See also

- Keywords: analysis, semantic category, sociolinguistic framework, techniques for language learning

The Kinship Analysis technique

Introduction

With the Kinship Analysis technique, you study the structure of the kinship system and discover how it is organized. Comprehending the kinship of a culture and understanding how it affects life is an ongoing project. Some of the aspects of kinship you need to study are:

- kinship terms referring to specific relationships,
- the types of relationships that are allowed between these various kin, and
- acceptable and taboo relationships of intimacy.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Kinship Analysis technique:

- To discover how members of the culture refer to one another
- To discover what these references infer and assume within the parameters of relationship

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Kinship Analysis technique:

- Pay attention to the terms that people use in conversation and in reference to others.
- Begin with one person when you do an in-depth study, such as a kinship chart. Work with that person extensively, learning as much as possible, before you go on to another person.
- Look for similarities in the relationships of similarly related persons to see what are the acceptable and unacceptable ways of relating. Example: Do they have a joking relationship, a superiority relationship, or a same level relationship?
- Write down all of your observations and insights so that you have a point of reference as you do further study. Take these insights as hypotheses, not as definite understandings, so you can make changes as you gain new and more specific information.

See also

- Keywords: analysis, kinship systems, techniques for language learning

The Participant Observation technique

Introduction

With the Participant Observation technique, you learn about a culture by participating in activities and observing them. It is important to develop your observation skills so that you make a habit of active observation.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Participant Observation technique:

- To identify important social situations in the culture
- To find out the rules for interaction in these social situations, including the scripts people are likely to follow
- To learn new vocabulary
- To discover the way people in the culture categorize concepts and experiences

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Participant Observation technique:

- Pay explicit attention to what is going on and make note of as many details as possible to record later.
- Maintain an insider/outsider perspective. This means that, in part, you are experiencing whatever is going on subjectively as a participant. However, another part of you is looking at it objectively, as an observer.
- Keep records of both your objective observations and subjective feelings.

#### Sources

See Spradley, James (1980) for detailed information on how to do participant observation.

See also

- Keywords: culture learning, participant observation, social situation, techniques for language learning

#### The Script Analysis technique

##### Introduction

With the Script Analysis technique you observe the way people interact in predictable social situations and note the important features of each script.

##### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Script Analysis technique:

- to identify social situations for which there are predictable scripts.
- to learn how people typically act in these situations and what they say, so that you can learn to do things the "right way".

##### Guidelines

- You need to observe people interacting quite a few times to identify situations for which there are predictable scripts.
- The easiest kind of script to identify is one occurring in a particular place, such as in a restaurant, church, or shop.

##### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Script Analysis technique:

1. Identify a common communication situation
2. Describe the setting of the communication situation.
3. Describe the participants in the communication situation and the role each is taking.
4. Describe the main purpose of the communication situation.
5. Describe the act sequence that makes up the script, including the kinds of things people typically say.
6. Describe the rules of interaction you notice the participants observing.
7. Describe what you have to know in order to understand what is going on.

See also

- Keywords: communication situations, scripts, techniques for language learning

Example: How to use the Script Analysis technique

##### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Script Analysis technique:

1. You identify Going to a restaurant as a common communication situation
2. You describe the restaurant as a moderate-priced sit-down restaurant in Dallas.
3. You identify yourself and your friend as customers, and also identify a hostess and a waiter as the roles of two other participants.
4. You describe the main purpose of the communication situation as ordering a meal.

5. You note that the hostess usually asks "How many in your party?" , and then "Smoking or non-smoking?" and then picks up the appropriate number of menus and says "Please follow me." (and so on)
6. You describe the fact that parties will be seated in the order they arrive at the restaurant, unless they have phoned ahead for reservations, in which case they may be seated ahead of a party with no reservations (and so on).
7. You describe the fact that meals on lunch menus usually are smaller than meals on the dinner menu and will also usually cost less (on so on).

The Discourse Practice techniques

Introduction

You can use the Discourse Practice techniques to learn to understand and form appropriate discourses of different kinds. As you use these techniques, pay attention to the structure of the different kinds of discourses you hear.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Discourse Practice techniques:

- use the Cloze technique
- See: The Cloze technique
- Use the Dialogue techniques
- See: The Dialogue techniques
- Use the Series technique
- See: The Series technique
- Use the Text Portfolio technique
- See: The Text Portfolio technique
- Use the Text Analysis technique
- See: The Text Analysis technique
- Use the Write and Rewrite technique
- See: The Write and Rewrite technique

See also

- Keywords: techniques for language learning

The Cloze technique

Introduction

With the Cloze technique, you take a text with every seventh word blanked out, write appropriate words in the blanks, then ask a language associate (LA) to check your answers. This is a technique used widely for literacy purposes, but it is also helpful in language learning efforts (see Literacy Module: Cloze Procedure, for a complete description).

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Cloze technique:

- To develop your ability to use context to infer the meaning of words you do not know within a text
- To understand why some words are incorrect and inappropriate as you discuss your answers with an LA
- To see the natural flow of text in the target language
- To improve your reading fluency

Variation

A variation of the Cloze technique is the Specialized Cloze technique. For this activity, you ask someone to blank out all the words of a particular grammatical form in a text (for example, all

articles or prepositions), then you fill in the blanks. You ask a good writer of the language (or an LA) to check your answers to see if they are correct.

The Specialized Cloze technique will help you gain accuracy in the use of a particular grammatical form, and see how the form is used in natural text.

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, inference, techniques for language learning

The Dialogue techniques

Introduction

The Dialogue techniques involve acting out communication situations. In some techniques, two language associates (LA) act out the dialogue situation while you observe. Other techniques involve one LA, who is familiar with the communication situation, and you, the language learner, involved in two roles of a dialogue.

There is a natural progression with these Dialogue techniques. The ones used initially involve the language learner as an observer only (the Simulations and Dialogue Variations techniques).

Techniques which involve the language learner as a role participant are reserved for later, after some progress in speaking ability is made (Reverse Role-Play and Role-Play).

Objectives

Here are some objectives of Dialogue techniques:

- To familiarize yourself with both roles involved in a dialogue situation
- To gain confidence in the role you will most likely play in a real-life communication situation
- To understand what a mother-tongue speaker might say when playing a given role in a communication situation

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Dialogue techniques:

- Choose only situations in which you have already observed the involvement of locals.
- Choose only situations that you are likely to use in real-life communication.
- Use these techniques only after you are past Stage 1 in the Guidelines for a language and culture learning program, so you can perform your role without a written script.
- Use these techniques to learn acceptable skills in the area of social interaction. Examples:
  - How to make excuses (to graciously decline an invitation for a day at the beach and supply a valid reason for not accepting)
  - How to recognize intent (to understand the real attitude behind the statement of a woman in the doctor's office saying, "Pneumonia, that's all I need.")
  - How to express politeness or annoyance (to apologize to the hostess for spilling a glass of drink, then breaking the glass while trying to set it aright)

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Dialogue techniques:

- Use the Simulations technique

See: The Simulations technique

- Use the Dialogue Variations technique

See: The Dialogue Variations technique

- Use the Reverse Role-Play technique

See: The Reverse Role-Play technique

- Use the Role-Play technique

See: The Role-Play technique

See also

- Keywords: communication situations, culture learning, Dialogue techniques, language associates, role-playing, techniques for language learning

### The Simulations technique

#### Introduction

With the Simulations technique, you get two or more language associates (LAs) to act out a common communication situation. Example: Buying something at the market or greeting and chatting with a friend you meet when you are out for a walk.

#### Objectives

Here is an objective of the Simulations technique:

- To get more authentic real-life interaction than if you just ask one LA to write or record a dialogue for you

#### Guidelines

- Let the LAs practice before you start recording. Everybody needs a rehearsal. Some LAs find it easier than others to play a role, just like some of you!
- Record real life encounters as a "natural" alternative to Simulations.

See: The Audio Archive technique for guidelines and warnings

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Simulations technique:

##### Before your session

1. Decide what communication situation you want to learn about.

##### During your session

2. Explain the communication situation to the LAs and ask each of them to take a role.
3. After they are happy with the simulation, record it.
4. Play the recording for them and ask if they are satisfied with it.
5. Ask about anything you did not understand. You might ask one LA to listen to the tape and write down the dialogue for you, or transcribe it yourself. (This is a lot easier if you are already familiar with much of the vocabulary.)

##### After your session

6. Listen to the tapes again. Note the events that make up the script.
7. After you are comfortable with this information, you are ready for Reverse Role-Play.

#### Variation

The Simulations technique may also be done with a video recorder. You should record the simulation and then note nonverbal interaction styles.

#### See also

- Keywords: communication situations, interactional skills, role-playing, techniques for language learning, video

Example: The Simulations technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Simulations technique:

1. You decide you want to have the LAs act out a dialogue of buying oranges at the market.
2. You explain to the LAs that you want them to act out a buying scene at the market. Ask one to be the buyer and the other to be the seller.
3. You let them practice until they are happy with the simulation, then record it.
4. You play the recording for them and ask if they are satisfied with it.
5. You ask about some words you did not understand. You ask one LA to listen to the tape and help you transcribe it.
6. You listen to the tapes again and you note the events that make up the script, such as

- a. Greeting
  - b. Buyer indicates interest in oranges
  - c. Buyer asks about the price, color, and size of oranges
  - d. Bartering occurs
  - e. Seller answers and points out good qualities of the oranges
  - f. Buyer asks for 8 oranges
  - g. Seller tells buyer the total price is \$.75
  - h. Buyer pays
  - i. Buyer and seller take leave
7. You are ready to use Reverse Role-Play with your information from the tape.

### The Dialogue Variations technique

#### Introduction

With the Dialogue Variations technique, you record a number of versions of dialogues in similar situations, but with varying the age, social status, or gender of the speakers. You notice the things that change with different speakers, and the kinds of things that do not change.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Dialogue Variations technique:

- To form a good idea of the sequence of events that make up scripts associated with different communication situations
- To learn some of the variations that can occur in these events

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Dialogue Variations technique:

##### Before your session

1. Decide what communication situation you want to explore with possible variations.

##### During your session

2. Have two language associates (LAs) act out a simulation of what they would say or do in a certain communication situation. Record this version.
3. Now ask the LAs to change something about the situation. Give them time to practice if they want. When the LAs are ready, record that version of the dialogue.
4. Change something else in the dialogue and record their communication situation.

##### After your session

5. Listen to the tapes for the following variations:
  - Notice if there are standard phrases or routines in a number of versions in connection with a given step in the script.
  - Notice the difference in register or other factors with changes in relationship of the participants or the setting.

##### See also

- Keywords: communication situations, register, scripts, techniques for language learning, varieties of speech

##### Example: The Dialogue Variations technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Dialogue Variations technique:

1. You decide to explore versions of buying something in a shop.
2. You have two LAs act out the shop scene; one as the seller and the other as the buyer. You record it.
3. You ask them to change the situation to an exclusive shop and observe whether the buyer and seller act differently.

When they are ready, you record this version of the dialogue.

4. You change the situation again, so that the LAs pretend that the buyer used to be a regular customer, but has moved away, and is now back in town for a visit. You observe what the buyer and seller say and record their dialogue.
5. You listen to the tapes for the following variations:
  - You note the standard phrases and routines in several versions in connection with each step in a script.
  - You note the difference in register when they pretend it is a very exclusive shop (the customer is more aloof and the shopkeeper is more reserved, yet helpful).
  - You note that the seller is extremely friendly and almost ingratiating when the valued customer returns from an extended absence.

The Reverse Role-Play technique

#### Introduction

With the Reverse Role-Play technique, you act out a communication situation with a language associate (LA). The LA plays the part you are most likely to play in real life, and you play the other part. You will probably want to record this so you can listen to it later.

Adapted from: Thomson, Kick-starting your language learning

#### Objectives

Here is an objective of the Reverse Role-Play technique:

- To get a model of what to say and how to act in a communication situation by observing an LA.

Reason: The LA takes the part you want to play in real life so you are able to learn the way a native speaker approaches the communication task at hand.

At the beginning, your fluency and accuracy in the secondary role is not important, because what you are interested in is learning what the LA's role says.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Reverse Role-Play technique:

##### Before your session

1. Decide on the communication situation you want to practice, including the topic, if relevant, and the setting.

##### During your session

2. Describe the specific role you want the LA to play.
3. Describe the specific language activity you will be engaged in. You might specify any factors to include in the communication situation, such as objects, roles, relationship between actors.
4. Take the other role in the interaction.
5. Tape the interaction.

##### After your session

6. Listen to the tape afterwards and note the vocabulary, structures, and communication strategies used by the LA.

#### See also

- Keywords: communication situations, communication strategies, fluency, role-playing, techniques for language learning

Example: The Reverse Role-Play technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Reverse Role Play technique:

1. You decide to practice the communication situation of buying fruit at the market.

2. You describe to the LA that you want him or her to play the role of a buyer.
3. You describe that the interaction will involve buying fruit at the market. You specify that oranges are to be purchased.
4. You take the part of the fruit vendor in the interaction.
5. You tape the interaction.
6. You listen to the tape and note the vocabulary, structures, and communication strategies used by the LA.

### The Role-Play technique

#### Introduction

With the Role-Play technique, you act out a communication situation with a language associate (LA). You take the role that you would most likely take in real life, and the LA takes the other role.

Adapted from: Thomson Kick-starting your language learning

#### Objective

Here are some objectives of the Role-Play technique:

- To improve communication skills
- To gain confidence in the role you will most likely fill in a given real life communication situation
- To discover what a native speaker might say when playing the other role in a communication situation

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Role-Play technique:

##### Before your session

1. Choose the communication situation you want to practice, including the topic, if relevant, and the setting.

##### During your session

2. Describe to the LA the specific role you want him or her to play.
3. Describe the specific language activities which you will be engaged in. You might specify certain factors to include in the language activity, such as the objects involved, roles, or relationship between actors.
4. You take the other role in the interaction.
5. Tape the interaction.

##### After your session

6. Listen to the tape and note the vocabulary, structures, and communication strategies you used.
7. Listen to the Reverse Role-Play technique tape again and compare what you say in each role with what the LA says.

#### Variation

Another variation you can try after both Reverse Role-Play (RRP) and standard Role-Play (RP) with a particular communication situation, is to do a Dialogue Variation on it. This time you take your role from the RRP session (as vendor), and make a minor change to the communication situation (for example, buy a small bunch of bananas instead of oranges).

#### See also

- Keywords: communication situations, role-playing, techniques for language learning

Example: The Role-Play technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Role-Play technique:



1. You decide you want to practice buying fruit at the market.
2. You describe to the LA that you want him or her to play the role of the vendor.
3. You describe that the language activity will be negotiating the price of a kilo of oranges.
4. You take the part of the buyer in the interaction.
5. You tape the interaction.
6. You listen to the tape and note the vocabulary, structures, and communication strategies you used.
7. You listen to the Reverse Role-Play technique tape again and compare what you say in the role of buyer with what the LA says. Then compare what you say in the role of vendor with what the LA says.

The Series technique

Introduction

With the Series technique, you observe and listen to a language associate (LA) perform and describe the sequence of steps involved in a common everyday activity, such as making a cup of coffee. This technique is particularly useful in understanding how speakers of the language structure procedural texts.

Adapted from: Francis Gouin, nineteenth century

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Series technique:

- To develop the language learning skill of noticing actions and then finding out how to say them
- To understand some of the forms (words and affixes) used in the language to indicate actor and time reference
- To learn vocabulary in context by practicing the series and performing each action
- To learn how everyday activities are carried on in the new culture

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Series technique:

- Categorize some standard procedures to draw upon for this technique.
  - household activities
  - family activities
  - hobbies
  - meal-related activities
  - car activities

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Series technique:

Before your session

1. Decide what activity you want the LA to perform for you.
2. Gather up all the needed props if your language session is somewhere other than at your home (if props will not be readily available).

During your session

3. Have the LA perform a step-by-step demonstration of the activity.
  - Have the LA stop after each activity phase and describe the action. Record the LA describing the action.
  - Ask the LA about any unclear vocabulary.

After your session

4. Listen to the tape and go through the motions while the activity is described. Combining physical activity while listening will help you learn while you are doing the motions.

5. Tell the series to someone else when you feel ready. You might start by saying something like, “I have been learning about how to \_\_\_\_\_. May I tell you what I have learned? You can tell me if I have it right.”

#### Variations

- You can work with two LAs. One LA performs the technique step-by-step in view of the other LA, but you do not watch the action. For instance, you could face the describing LA, and the performing LA would be behind you. The describing LA can tell what the performing LA is doing. In this way you can test your listening comprehension, because you know what the activity is but do not see the action. To check your comprehension, you could then perform the task and describe your actions for the LAs.
- You can videotape the LA or another member of the culture doing some everyday action, or use pictures. For example, the LA can cook something or wash some clothes. Then show the tape to the LA and get him or her to describe each step in the process.

#### See also

- Keywords: comprehension, context, predictability, procedural discourse, techniques for language learning

Greg Thomson's discussion of the series technique in *Kickstarting your language learning*, Chap 2.3

#### The Text Portfolio technique

##### Introduction

With the Text Portfolio technique, you collect several examples each of various genres of written texts to use as models for the style, vocabulary, and conventions that go with each genre.

##### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Text Portfolio technique:

- To acquire a feel for the style and look of each genre of writing
- To gain an understanding of the way each text type is organized
- To prepare yourself to start writing

##### Guidelines

- Collect examples of many different genres of written texts from a variety of sources—anything you can read in the target language:

- business letters
- personal letters
- news stories
- editorials
- short stories
- poems
- novels
- advertisements

- Cut out or photocopy short texts from newspapers, magazines, or books.
- Make a summary or book report for long texts. Keep the bibliographical information (author, title, publisher) so you can find the long texts again.

- Consider this portfolio of texts the written equivalent of your tape audio archive. See:

#### The Audio Archive technique

##### See also

- Keywords: discourse, genre, media, newspaper, techniques for language learning, text

#### The Text Analysis technique

##### Introduction

With the Text Analysis technique, you study the structure of written or oral texts and discover how these texts are organized. Comprehending and producing a language means understanding how the parts of the language fit together as parts of a discourse.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Text Analysis technique:

- To discover what makes a text hold together cohesively
- To discover how to make important information prominent and less important information subordinate
- To see patterns which might not be noticeable without text analysis
- To understand the patterns and be able to use them in conversation, storytelling, and other discourse opportunities

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Text Analysis technique:

- Begin with a short text that you have recorded or heard and written down.
- Work with a language associate (LA) to clarify any questionable items of content.
- Analyze several different genre, one at a time, recognizing that different genre may have different rules for what is acceptable.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Text Analysis technique:

1. Record a simple story or short speech.
  2. Listen to the recording and try to write it exactly as spoken.
- Tip: If you have trouble, listen with an LA, and have him or her clarify any speech that is unintelligible to you or words you do not recognize. **DO NOT** analyze at this point.
3. After you transcribe the entire text, listen again and follow along with the written text to look for errors or holes.
    - Check for sentence breaks. You will need them if you plan to chart the text.
  4. Ask the LA about any vocabulary you are unfamiliar with or any morphological patterns you have not seen before.
    - Realize the LA may not know why certain things happen in text, but simply that they need to happen to have good text.
  5. Once you identify as many words as possible, you need to analyze on your own how the text works. You can do this by charting the text. There are several types of text charting to choose from (Longacre and Levinsohn is one example). The point of charting is to visualize what happens in the text, and to see relationships that are less clear when in simple paragraph form.
  6. Write down some of the patterns you see and observations you have made from working with the chart.
  7. Investigate the patterns further by looking at other texts of the same genre, and by paying attention when other stories are told.

#### See also

- Keywords: analysis, discourse, genre, techniques for language learning

#### The Write and Rewrite technique

##### Introduction

With the Write and Rewrite technique, you write drafts of various kinds of texts and ask a good writer of the target language to correct the drafts or make suggestions for improvements. You continue to rewrite a particular text until it is acceptable.

Note: In general, more accuracy is expected in written material than in the spoken language.

##### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Write and Rewrite technique:

- To develop accuracy in your writing
- To develop a better style in your writing
- To gain confidence that you can write in the target language, using correct discourse

structures

- To develop a personal portfolio with samples of different kinds of texts you write:
  - narratives
  - business letters
  - reports
  - technical papers
  - personal letters
  - magazine articles

Note: This is separate from the Text Portfolio which is samples of authentic mother-tongue speaker texts used as models for your own work.

Guidelines

- Set realistic goals. Do not try to write complex material until you are ready for the challenge.
- Try not to get discouraged when others point out your mistakes.
- Remind yourself that your ultimate goal is accuracy.
- Stick with it even though it is difficult because this is the only way to truly hone your skills as a writer in the language.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Write and Rewrite technique:

Before your session

1. Choose a type of text you want to learn to write well.
2. Look in your Text Portfolio for examples of this kind of text.
3. Plan out your text.
  - What parts should it have?
  - Look at the structure of examples in your Text Portfolio.
4. Make an outline and fill in the general content.
5. Write the content without worrying too much about accuracy. Use a thesaurus or dictionary if necessary and available.
6. Edit the text looking for one of the following on each read through.
  - vocabulary choices
  - connection and overall sense, and
  - spelling and punctuation.

During your session

7. Ask a good writer of the language to make corrections and suggestions.

After your session

8. Rewrite the text and repeat Step 7 until the good writer is satisfied.
9. Add the final version of the text to your personal portfolio.

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, discourse, genre, techniques for language learning

Example: The Write and Rewrite technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Write and Rewrite technique:

1. You decide you want to learn to write a business letter.

2. You look in your Text Portfolio for examples of business letters.
3. You plan your text and by looking at examples, determine that you need to include:
  - date
  - addressee
  - greeting
  - body of letter
  - closing, and
  - your signature and address.
4. You make an outline and fill in the general content:
  - Date: 8Sept94

Mr. John Jones

Jones' Grocery

456 Jones Ave.

Grocerytown, TX

- Greeting: Mr. Jones
  - Body: Request bimonthly delivery of groceries to my home, order to be dropped off by hand, bill to be paid upon delivery
  - Closing: Express appreciation, sign name and include address.
5. You write the content of the business letter, working from your outline, without worrying too much about accuracy. You use a dictionary when needed.
  6. You edit the business letter looking for one of the following on each read through.
    - vocabulary choices
    - connection and overall sense, and
    - spelling or punctuation errors.
  7. You ask a good writer of the language to look at the business letter and to make corrections and suggestions.
  8. You rewrite the business letter and repeat Step 7 until the good writer is satisfied.
  9. You add the final version of the business letter to your personal portfolio.

The Memory Reinforcement techniques

Introduction

With the Memory Reinforcement techniques you use various strategies to strengthen your memory of words you are learning, so that you can recognize or produce them later.

Guidelines

- Create mental associations between words
- Review items frequently at first, less frequently later
- Use your senses, (sight, hearing, touch) to remember words.
- Group words in meaningful ways

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Memory Reinforcement techniques:

- Use the Semantic Map technique
- See: The Semantic Map technique
- Use the Flashcards technique
- See: The Flashcards technique
- Use the Color-coding technique
- See: The Color-coding technique
- Use the Symbol Association technique
- See: The Symbol Association technique

- Use the Mental Image technique

See: The Mental Image technique

See also

- Keywords: memorization, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

The Semantic Map technique

Introduction

With the Semantic Map technique, you draw a graphic representation of words that fit together in the same area of meaning.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Semantic Map technique:

- To use your visual and tactile senses to help you remember the relationship among words.
- To help you figure out just what the relationship among words is.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Semantic Map technique:

- You may want to draw pictures or cut some out of magazines to represent the different words.
- Avoid putting English (or your mother tongue) on the map. Use only the target language.
- You can make semantic maps to represent various sorts of relationships among words, such as

- Kinds of (furniture, fruit, etc.)
- Words associated with a key concept (such as words that have to do with hair)
- Words associated with a certain place (such as the kitchen) or with an activity

(gardening)

- You can also use a semantic map to take notes on a lecture or a book.
- Review your map periodically, when you've made it.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Semantic Map technique:

1. You decide on a key concept around which to build your map.
2. You write the word for the key concept in the middle of the piece of paper (or at the top, whichever makes better sense to you).
3. You think of the words you know, related to the key concept, and write them on the paper around the key concept in ways that show the relationships.
4. Draw lines between the words to represent the relationships among them. Add words, if necessary, to show subgroupings.

See also

- Keywords: inference, semantic category, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Semantic Map technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Semantic Map technique:

1. You decide to make a semantic map to represent kinds of fruit in English.
2. You write the word fruit in the middle of the page.
3. You write the words apple, pear, mango, grapefruit, orange, lemon, lime, pineapple, grape, watermelon, canteloupe, around the word fruit.
4. You add the words citrus fruit and melons and draw lines between the words to show the relationships.

The Flashcards technique

## Introduction

With the Flashcards technique, you combine visual clues with words on flash cards to aid in learning new vocabulary.

## Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Flashcards technique:

- To learn new vocabulary
- To internalize the language without translation from your mother tongue (MT) or other previously learned language

## Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Flashcards technique:

- Make flashcards for all new vocabulary items.
- Avoid translation. Use the visual clue to learn the word in the language, do not just connect it to a word in your MT. Note: Some flashcard techniques suggest using the word in your MT on one side, and the word in the new language on the other side. It is preferred to go from concept (via illustration) to word in the new language, so you learn the true meaning (to the degree that you comprehend it), not just translate a similar word from your MT (with all of its connotations) into the target language (which may have completely different connotations and inferences).
- Use cartoons for action words.
- For advanced learning, give a simple explanation in the language or add an illustrative sentence (in the language).
- Review, review, review. Use all flashcards until you have internalized the words and can use them with ease.

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Flashcards technique:

1. Go through your data and make a flashcard for each word that you are currently learning to use. Write the word (in the language) on one side and draw a simple picture or a cartoon to illustrate the word on the other side.
2. Scramble the flashcards so you cannot predict their order.
3. Look at each illustration and say the related word. Check your accuracy by looking at the other side of the card.
4. Flip through the set of cards several times a day. Add new cards for new vocabulary items and remove cards after sufficient practice.

## Variation

One variation or extension of the Flashcards technique is to make two copies of each card (photocopy if possible) and play a matching game with them. Turn one set of the cards so that the illustration is facing up and the other set so that the word or sentence is facing up. Then work until you can match each set of cards, practicing your pronunciation as you work.

See also

- Keywords: flashcards, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

## The Color-coding technique

### Introduction

With the Color-coding technique, you combine visual clues with words on flashcards or lists of paper to aid in learning new vocabulary.

### Objectives

Here is an objective of the Color-coding technique:

- To use colors to group words meaningfully

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Color-coding technique:

- Choose colors that have associations for you. They don't really need to make sense to anyone else.
- Review words at regular intervals, until you've got them.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Color-coding technique:

1. You decide on groups of words you think it would be helpful to associate with different colors.
2. You get different colored paper or highlighters and mark the words in ways that make sense to you.
3. When you review your vocabulary words, you make note of the color.
4. When you are trying to remember the group the words are in, remember the color you marked them with.

#### See also

- Keywords: flashcards, pictures and picture books, semantic category, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Color-coding technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Color-coding technique:

1. You decide to use colors to help you remember the gender of German nouns.
2. You use highlighters to mark masculine words blue, feminine words pink, and neuter words yellow.
3. You review your vocabulary words, noting which words are blue, pink, and yellow.
4. When you are trying to remember which article to use for a noun, remember whether it was blue, pink, or yellow.

#### The Symbol Association technique

##### Introduction

With the Symbol Association technique, you use a symbol to represent the group a word belongs to.

##### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Symbol Association technique:

- To use visual cues to help you remember groups of vocabulary
- To use your own creativity in practicing words

##### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Symbol Association technique:

- Use a symbol or icon easy for you to draw.
- Use a symbol that makes sense to you.
- Use this technique to represent a grammatical grouping, a semantic grouping, or any other way you find it helpful to group words.

##### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Symbol Association technique:

1. Decide on a group of words you can illustrate with a symbol.
2. Choose a symbol that illustrates a word with which you are already familiar and which is representative of the group.
3. You draw the symbol next to all words in that group in your vocabulary list or cards.



4. When you review your vocabulary words, take note of the symbol on the paper or card.
5. When you want to use a word, try to remember the symbol you drew next to it on the page.

See also

- Keywords: inference, pictures and picture books, semantic category, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Symbol Association technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Symbol Association technique:

1. You decide to use symbols to illustrate noun classes in a Bantu language.
2. You choose a stick figure to represent the class for human beings, a mountain to represent the class the word for mountain is in, a dog to represent the class for animals, and so on.
3. You draw stick figures next to all words in the class for human beings, a mountain next to the class mountains are in, and so forth.
4. When you review your vocabulary words, you take note of the symbol on the paper or card.
5. When you want to use a word, you remember the symbol you drew next to it on the page and know what noun class agreements to use.

The Mental Image technique

Introduction

With the Mental Image technique, you make a mental image of a word or group of words to help you remember them.

Objective

Here is an objective of the Mental Image technique:

- To use mental images to help you remember new words.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Mental Image technique:

- Use images that make sense to you.
- Make a mental image of the place you first heard a new word.

Example: You went to the market and saw a butcher, cutting up meat. You create a mental image of that butcher and that market when you practice the word butcher.

- Make a mental image of objects representing words in an idiom.

Example: You think of a corpse next to a dented bucket to remember he kicked the bucket.

- Make a mental image of words with an extended sense.

Example: You think of a potato with a (human) eye in it to remember the eye of a potato.

- Visualize yourself or someone else doing an action for action verbs.

Example: You have just seen a cooking program where the chef tells you to braise the meat. You store the image of him doing that action, when you think of the word braise.

See also

- Keywords: inference, mental images, pictures and picture books, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

The Production Practice techniques

Introduction

With the Production Practice techniques you work on skills that will help you speak or write your new language comprehensibly and fluently.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Production Practice techniques:

- Use the Handling Idioms technique
- See: The Handling Idioms technique
- Use the Limited Answer techniques
- See: The Limited Answer techniques
- Use the Memorized Routines techniques
- See: The Memorized Routines techniques
- Use the Pronunciation practice techniques
- See: The Pronunciation Practice techniques
- Use the Shortened Forms technique
- See: The Shortened Forms technique
- Use the Structure Practice techniques
- See: The Structure Practice techniques

See also

- Keywords: production, techniques for language learning

The Handling Idioms technique

Introduction

With the Handling Idioms technique, you collect and analyze current idioms and then try to incorporate them into your speech.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Handling Idioms technique:

- To understand idioms when used by other speakers
- To use idioms appropriately and easily

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Handling Idioms technique

Before your session

1. Note idioms in your journal (or notebook) that you hear being used in conversations.

After your session

2. Incorporate as many of these idioms as possible (and still sound natural) in your conversations.

Watch people's reactions as you speak. If they correct you, find out how their understanding differs from what you thought it meant.

3. Add this new information to your journal.

See also

- Keywords: idioms, techniques for language learning

Example: The Handling Idioms technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Handling Idioms technique

1. You pull from your data notebook all the idioms you have heard: You bet!, Right on!, It's happenin', Out to lunch.
2. You ask the LA the meaning of each idiom and its appropriate usage:

Idiom	Meaning	When to use and with whom	Caution
You bet!	I agree, I will	informally with almost anyone	Do not use in formal writing
Right on!	I agree, Let's do it	very informal, with young people	Use with friends
It's happenin'	I like it	very informal, with young people	Use with friends

Out to lunch    Bad idea    informally with almost anyone    Do not use in formal writing

3.    You try to use these idioms in your conversations and watch to see people's reactions. One friend said he was impressed that you knew how to use idioms correctly. He warned against using them too often in a given conversation, or people will get tired of listening to clichés. You write this in your journal.

4.    You make a note of his suggestions in your data notebook.

The Limited Answer techniques

Introduction

With the limited answer techniques you build on comprehension techniques, such as Look and Listen or Physical Response, and start to respond with short answers. This is a natural way to learn to converse, as we often give short answers to questions even in our first language.

Example:    "Where are you going this weekend?"    "Camping."

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Limited Answer techniques:

- Use the Simple Question and Answer technique

See:    The Simple Question and Answer technique

- Use the True-False Comprehension technique

See:    The True-False Comprehension technique

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, techniques for language learning

The Simple Question and Answer technique

Introduction

With the Simple Question and Answer technique, the language associate (LA) questions you about an area of knowledge in which you already understand some vocabulary. You listen and give a short answer, usually one word or two word. This can be built on vocabulary you have learned with the Photo Book technique or the Physical Response techniques, as well as through the Survival Phrases and Power Tools techniques.

Adapted from: Madsen, Bowen, and Hilferty 1985:79-80

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Simple Question and Answer technique:

- To focus attention on the details of an utterance and its meaning
- To respond simply and to show your real speaking ability in the language
- To practice answering the kinds of questions people in the community may ask you
- To give your conversation partners a better idea about how to phrase their questions in a way you will really understand (especially helpful for beginners)

Guidelines

- Work in a subject area in which you already understand some of the vocabulary.
- Give only short one-word or two-word answers.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Simple Question and Answer technique:

Before your session

1.    Decide what subject you wish to answer questions about.

During your session

2.    Have the LA ask questions about the subject you chose, and respond with short answers.

You can repeat the entire series of questions and answers for practice.

After your session

3. Practice this technique in your social interaction with native speakers, if the opportunity arises.

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, techniques for language learning

Example: The Simple Question and Answer technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Simple Question and Answer technique:

1. You decide you want to answer questions about your family.
2. The LA asks you these questions and you give appropriate responses:
  - Do you have brothers and sisters? Yes
  - How many brothers do you have? Two
  - Do you have sisters as well? Yes, I do.
  - How many? One
  - So, there are four of you altogether? Yes, that is right.
  - Really? Are your mother and father still living? Yes, they are.
3. You practice this technique when you are out in social settings, answering questions that people ask about your family.

The True-False Comprehension technique

Introduction

With the True-False Comprehension technique, the language associate (LA) makes statements about a domain in which you already understand some of the vocabulary. You listen and give a short answer to verify the statement as true, or declare it false. This can be built on vocabulary learned through the Look and Listen techniques or the Physical Response techniques.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the True-False Comprehension technique:

- To improve listening comprehension skills by focusing on the details and meaning of a statement
- To respond simply with one word or two word replies

Prerequisites

Here is a prerequisite for using the True-False Comprehension technique:

- You need to know the common vernacular forms of
  - "True" or "Yes," and
  - "False" or "No."

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the True-False Comprehension technique:

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the True-False Comprehension technique:

- Have the LA repeat the statements in random order several times to thoroughly test your comprehension.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the True-False Comprehension technique:

Before your session

1. Select a subject area where you have already learned some vocabulary.
2. Practice saying "true" and "false" in the vernacular. If necessary, you can mimic a recording.

See: The Look and Listen techniques.

3. Gather any pictures or props you want to use to show the LA the subject area you want to practice.

During your session

4. Ask the LA to make some statements about the props or pictures you brought.

Explain that you want the LA to say some things that are true and some things that are not true. You then decide whether what was said is true or is not true.

5. Practice responding appropriately to whatever the LA says. Ask the LA to correct you if you answer incorrectly.

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, statement, techniques for language learning

Example: The True-False Comprehension technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the True-False Comprehension technique:

1. You decide to respond to true and false statements about what you see out the window.

2. You practice saying "true" and "false" in the target language.

3. You do not have to gather any props, because you are using whatever you see out the window

4. You ask the LA to make some statements about what is out the window. You reply appropriately as to whether what was said is true or is not true.

5. You listen and try to respond appropriately to statements the LA makes. You ask the LA to correct you if you do not answer correctly.

The Memorized Routines techniques

Introduction

With the Memorized Routines techniques you memorize phrases to help you meet immediate communication needs and to elicit comprehensible input. These memorized sentences do not represent your general proficiency in the language ; in other words, you do not know the language well enough to have put these sentences together for yourself. For this reason there can be a danger in using these techniques that people will think you speak the language better than you actually do. On the other hand, memorized routines can be a very useful emergency measure to help you have something to say, while you are developing real creative ability in the language.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Memorized Routines techniques:

- Use the Survival Phrases technique

See: The Survival Phrases technique

- Use the Power Tools technique

See: The Power Tools technique

See also

- Keywords: memorized routines, mimicry, techniques for language learning

The Survival Phrases technique

Introduction

With the Survival Phrases technique, you record the language associate (LA) saying survival phrases (sentences and questions) you need to use. You then practice them until you can say them fluently.

Objectives

Here is an objective of the Survival Phrases technique:

- To learn to say phrases that will help you with early communication

## Guidelines

- Find out the meaning of each phrase, but avoid direct translations.
- Use this technique as a way to build up your comprehension vocabulary first. This will prevent you from simply "parroting" memorized phrases without true comprehension.
- Avoid eliciting and using direct translations and try to learn natural speech. Explain the situations in which you need appropriate phrases as best as you can, so the LA will suggest more natural phrases.

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Survival Phrases technique:

### Before your session

1. Identify a specific social situation where you need good control of the language. Be as specific as possible.
2. Decide what phrases you need to learn to communicate well in the situation you have identified.

### During your session

3. Describe to the LA
  - the situation you have in mind, and
  - the kinds of things you want to say.
4. When the LA gives you a phrase to say, check the meaning by asking questions in your shared language, such as:
  - "What does that mean?"
  - "Who would say that?"
  - "When would I say that?"
  - "To whom would I say that?"

If you have no shared language, do your best to check the general meaning of the phrase.
5. Record the phrases when you are satisfied that you know their general meaning, and that they are appropriate in the situation you had in mind.
6. Transcribe the phrases.
7. Try to get the meaning of the parts of the phrases.

### After your session

8. Listen to the recording of the phrases and try to understand what they mean.
9. Try to memorize the phrases.

## Variations

The Survival Phrases technique may also be done with the following variations (as suggested in G. Thomson, *Kick-Starting your language learning*, Section 3.3):

1. Record 50-100 phrases with the gloss preceding or following each phrase. Listen frequently and your comprehension will increase. You can possibly make a drawing to go along with the phrases to spur on remembrance.
2. Use role-play or reverse role-play. Choose a communication situation—for example, a taxi cab going around town. You play the driver and listen to the rider's instructions.

### See also

- Keywords: communication situations, memorized routines, production, role-playing, social situation, survival phrases, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Survival Phrases technique

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Survival Phrases technique:

1. You decide you want to learn appropriate things to say in a market situation when you go to buy something.
2. You decide you need to know how to
  - ask if the vendor has yams, and
  - ask the price.
3. You describe to the LA that you want to learn how to buy yams in the market.
4. When the LA tells you how to ask the price of yams, check its meaning by asking (in English):
  - "Would I say this to every vendor?"
  - "How do I say that the price is too high?"
  - "How do I suggest a lower price?"
5. You record the phrases when you are satisfied that you know the general meaning of the phrases and that they are useful in the market.
6. You transcribe the phrases.
7. You try to learn the meaning of the parts of the phrases.
8. You listen to the recording and try to understand the phrases.
9. You try to memorize the phrases, imagining yourself at the market.

## The Power Tools technique

### Introduction

With the Power Tools technique, you record the language associate (LA) saying sentences (questions and requests) you can use to learn more about the language. You then practice them until you can say them fluently.

### Objectives

Here is an objective of the Power Tools technique:

- To learn phrases that will be helpful in eliciting new vocabulary

### Guidelines

- Find out the meaning of each phrase, but avoid direct translations.
- Use this technique as a way to build up your comprehension vocabulary first. This will prevent you from simply "parroting" memorized phrases without true comprehension.
- Avoid eliciting and using direct translations and try to learn natural speech. Explain the situations in which you need appropriate phrases as best as you can, so the LA will suggest more natural phrases.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Power Tools technique:

#### Before your session

1. Identify specific things you would like to be able to ask about the language or request people to do in your language sessions or out in the community.
2. Decide what phrases you need to learn to say to elicit the information you want.

#### During your session

3. Describe to the LA
  - that you want to learn to ask some questions in the target language
  - the kinds of things you want to say.
4. When the LA gives you a phrase to say, check the meaning by asking questions in your shared language, such as:
  - "What does that mean?"
  - "What would you answer if I said that?"

- If you have no shared language, do your best to check the general meaning of the phrase.
5. Record the phrases when you are satisfied that you know their general meaning, and that they are appropriate in the situation you had in mind.
  6. Transcribe the phrases.
  7. Try to get the meaning of the parts of the phrases.

After your session

8. Listen to the recording of the phrases and try to understand what they mean.
9. Try to memorize the phrases.

Variations

The Power Tools techniques may also be done with the following variation (as suggested in G. Thomson, Kick-starting your language learning, Section 3.3):

Use role play or reverse role play. You could get power tools by speaking English (or some other common language between you) while the LA pretends not to understand. He or she says (in the target language), "What is this?" You say, "It is a hammer." The LA says, "Could you please say it more slowly?"

See also

- Keywords: communication situations, power tools, production, role-playing, social situation, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

The Pronunciation Practice techniques

Introduction

With the Pronunciation Practice techniques you concentrate on skills that will help you to pronounce the language more accurately make it easier for speakers of the language to understand.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Pronunciation Practice techniques:

- Use the Phonetic Work Chart technique
- See: The Phonetic Work Chart technique
- Use the Sound Checklist technique
- See: The Sound Checklist technique
- Use the Single Sound Drill technique
- See: The Single Sound Drill technique
- Use the Sound Contrast Drill technique
- See: The Sound Contrast Drill technique
- Use The Intonation Drill technique
- See: The Intonation Drill technique
- Use the Stress Pattern Drill technique
- See: The Stress Pattern Drill technique
- Use the Tone Pattern Drill technique
- See: The Tone Pattern Drill technique
- Use the Tone Checklist technique
- See: The Tone Checklist technique
- Use the Record and Compare technique
- See: The Record and Compare technique
- Use the Record for Correction technique
- See: The Record for Correction technique

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, mimicry, pronunciation, techniques for language learning



## The Phonetic Work Chart technique

### Introduction

A phonetic work chart is a blank phonetics chart you fill in with the phones you are discovering in the language you are learning.

### Benefits

Making a phonetic work chart can show you groups of sounds you need to check to see if they are in contrast, in variation, or if you have transcribed them inconsistently.

### Prerequisites

- A course in articulatory phonetics

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Phonetic Work Chart technique:

1. Look through your data notebook and write on the phonetics chart every phone you have recorded.
2. Look for clusters of suspect sounds you need to check for contrast.
3. Look for gaps in the pattern of phones to give you ideas of what other phones to look for in your data.

### See also

- Keywords: phonetics

## The Sound Checklist technique

### Introduction

With the Sound Checklist technique, you systematically compare words which you are unsure of, to see whether they have similar or identical sounds and group the sounds accordingly.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Sound Checklist technique:

- To group words according to their like sounds:
  - difficult to distinguish vowel digraphs
  - consonant clusters
  - other sounds difficult to recognize
- To begin to distinguish between distinctive, yet similar, sounds
- To study the environments of sounds for any phonological explanations or to see if they are all distinct sounds

### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Sound Checklist technique:

- Use this technique to clarify and confirm your hypotheses whenever you find yourself struggling with similar sounds.

Tip: Do it early, so you do not “learn” the wrong way.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Sound Checklist technique:

#### Before your session

1. Check your data for words that you think have similar or the same sounds and make a list.

#### During your session

2. Show the list to a language associate (LA) and have him or her say the words. Use the first word as the reference point once through the list. Mark whether each following word is same or different. Have the LA continue through the list and group all words into same groupings. Record the LA saying the list each time.
3. Have the LA read through each grouping while you record it.

4. Have the LA read each grouping, and you repeat each word after the LA. Have him or her check your pronunciation. Repeat the process as necessary.

After your session

5. Use the recording to: continue practicing your pronunciation and to tune your ear to hear the difference between similar sounds.

6. Compare the environments that the similar sounds are found in. Look for complementary distribution or other conditioned explanations. If you find none, assume that the sounds are separate phonemes.

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, checklists (language learning), phonology, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

The Single Sound Drill technique

Introduction

With the Single Sound Drill technique, you focus on practicing a sound of the language you are having difficulty pronouncing. Sounds that cause difficulty are usually those that do not occur in your mother tongue.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Single Sound Drill technique:

- To improve your ability to pronounce a particular sound
- To use that sound without hesitation in the normal course of your speech

Guidelines

- Make drills of the sound in various environments (word initial, medial and final) to get the full range of practice on that sound.

- Drill any sound you:

- know you do not pronounce accurately
- stumble over when speaking
- notice often seems to cause confusion among native speakers if not correctly pronounced
- have a hard time distinguishing from another similar sound when used by a native

speaker

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Single Sound Drill technique:

Before your session

1. Identify a consonant or vowel sound you are having difficulty pronouncing.
2. Look through your list of words and find from five to seven words that have this sound in them in the same position, either:
  - word-initial
  - word-medial, or
  - word-final.

3. If you do not have enough words, ask a language associate (LA) to think of some more words with that sound in them.

During your session

4. Record the LA saying the words, reading down the column.
5. Have the LA repeat each word and you mimic the pronunciation. Have the LA correct any of your incorrect pronunciation.
6. Pronounce each word on your own.

After your session

7. Listen to the recording and practice mimicking the pronunciation of the words.

See also

- Keywords: drills, mimicry, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

Example: The Single Sound Drill technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Single Sound Drill technique:

1. You identify the [T] sound in English as one you are having trouble pronouncing.
2. You look through your word list and find the following words containing the [T] sound:  
thin, thank, three, thorn, and thread.
3. You arrange the words in a column:  
Word-initial

thin

thank

three

thorn

thread

4. You record the LA saying the words in the column; thin, thank, three, thorn, thread.
5. You have the LA repeat each of the words and you mimic. You have the LA correct any of your incorrect pronunciation.
6. You practice producing each of the words thin, thank, three, thorn, and thread, on your own.
7. You listen to the recording and practice mimicking the pronunciation of each word.

The Sound Contrast Drill technique

Introduction

With the Sound Contrast Drill technique, you practice hearing and speaking distinctions between two or more contrastive but similar sounds that may be confusing to beginning language learners.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Sound Contrast Drill technique:

- To hear the difference between similar but contrastive sounds
- To practice pronouncing each sound correctly

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Sound Contrast Drill technique:

- Use this technique to practice hearing and speaking similar but contrastive sounds that you tend to confuse, not just any two contrastive sounds.
- Use minimal pairs (words that differ only by the contrast of the two similar sounds) to practice hearing and speaking these similar sounds.
- Keep a list of sound contrasts you find difficult to hear or produce.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Sound Contrast Drill technique:

Before your session

1. Select two similar but contrastive sounds you need to drill. Check your data for examples.
2. Get additional words from the language associate (LA) that differ only by the contrast of the two similar sounds.
3. Make two columns of words, one for each of the sounds.

During your session

4. Record the LA reading one column at a time.

Tip: Use pictures or objects if the LA can not read.

5. Ask the LA to say a word at random, and you point to the column where the word is located.

Implication: You can discriminate between the two sounds.

6. Practice the words in each column by

- having the LA read them, and
- mimicking as the LA reads.

7. Practice words randomly by

- saying a word from the list at random, and
- having the LA point to the correct column and repeating the word.

Implication: The last pronunciation you hear is that of the native speaker, not your own.

After your session

8. Listen to the recording and mimic the LA's pronunciation of each column of words.

9. Practice pronouncing the contrastive minimal pairs in your list.

Variation

You can use the Sound Contrast Drill technique to practice the sound in a variety of positions in a word or sentence to get the full range of practice. See Brewster and Brewster 1976:303-312 for more discussion of this drill.

See also

- Keywords: drills, mimicry, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

Example: The Sound Contrast technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Sound Contrast technique:

1. You decide to drill the contrast between the /T/ and /t/ sounds in initial position in English. You check your data for words with this contrast: three and tree, thank and tank, and thin and tin.
2. You have the LA give you additional minimal pairs with /T/ and /t/ sounds (thick and tick, thorn and torn, and thread and tread).
3. You make two columns for the following minimal pairs:

/T/	/t/
thin	tin
thank	tank
three	tree
thick	tick
thorn	torn
thread	tread

4. You record the LA reading one column at a time.
5. You have the LA say a word and you point to the column where the word is located.
6. You mimic the /T/ column after the LA, and then do the same with the /t/ column. Then you mimic across each row.
7. You say a word, the LA points to the correct column, then repeats it after you.
8. You listen to the recording and practice the sounds several times.
9. You practice pronouncing the contrastive minimal pairs listed in 3. above.

The Intonation Drill technique

Introduction

With the Intonation Drill technique, you distinguish the various intonation patterns used in speech and practice clauses together which have the same pattern.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Intonation Drill technique:

- To be able to distinguish between different intonation patterns used in speech
- To be able to produce the intonation patterns appropriately
- To have more natural sounding speech

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Intonation Drill technique:

- Begin by listening to native speakers for the way their language flows and for the lilt of their speech.
- Use your recorded materials for further help and frequent reminders as you tackle new patterns.
- If the language associate (LA) has trouble verbalizing how certain clause types are intonated, try listening to recorded examples together.

Reason: It is sometimes hard to analyze your own speech patterns when they are very natural to you. When you try to produce them, you overemphasize the stresses because you are focusing on them. By listening to a recording (of yourself or someone else in natural speech) you can tend less toward extremes, and hear the true pattern.

- Work on one intonation pattern at a time.

Reason: More than one pattern may cause you to intermix them in your mind and add to the confusion. After you have sufficiently drilled one pattern, move on to another pattern.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Intonation Drill technique:

#### Before your session

1. Decide what intonation patterns you want to work on and listen to examples you recorded from other sessions.
2. Write down example sentences from your data.

#### During your session

3. Ask an LA to read your example sentences and record them.
4. Have the LA say each sentence and repeat after him, or her trying to match the intonation.
5. Ask the LA to give you any helpful pointers or comments.

#### After your session

6. Listen to the recording and practice one pattern at a time until you feel comfortable. Practice using the correct intonation pattern in everyday speech.

#### See also

- Keywords: drills, intonation, pronunciation, stress (linguistic), techniques for language learning

### The Stress Pattern Drill technique

#### Introduction

With the Stress Pattern Drill technique, you make lists of words that have the same stress pattern and practice them until you are comfortable with their pronunciation.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Stress Pattern Drill technique:

- To be able to pronounce words with the correct stress
- To see patterns of stress in the language

## Guidelines

- Make lists of words in a consistent manner with regard to their syllable pattern and segmental length.
- Create special drills for words that are special problems which you do not seem to be able to pronounce right, even after the initial drill practice. For example, words which are borrowed in one or both of the languages and which are similar, if not identical, except for stress (photograph in English and fotogra'fi in Swedish).
- Practice long words consisting of many syllables which you find difficult to pronounce by doing the following:
  - tap the rhythm,
  - mimic the last few syllables, and gradually add the beginning of the word, and
  - put the long word into sentences, placing it in different positions for practice.

Note: In some languages, you will find that word stress is modified when a word is placed in a sentence. Word stress might disappear altogether, or stress might shift to a different syllable. Therefore, it is good to practice stress patterns, not only on words in isolation but also to see what happens to the same words when they are placed in various positions within sentences.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Stress Pattern Drill technique:

Before your session

1. List the words in which you have trouble placing stress on the correct syllable.  
Place the words into columns according to where stress falls. Make a separate chart for each separate syllable pattern.

During your session

2. Have the language associate (LA) read down each column. Mimic each word he or she says.
3. Have the LA read across each row. Mimic each word.
4. Record the LA reading down the lists and put the tape aside for practice after your session.
5. Read down and across each list and have the LA correct you if you do not pronounce correctly.

After your session

6. Listen to the tape and continue drilling until you feel confident with the stress patterns.

See also

- Keywords: drills, mimicry, pronunciation, rhythm, stress (linguistic), syllables, techniques for language learning

Example: The Stress Pattern Drill technique

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Stress Pattern Drill technique:

1. You make a list of words for which you are having trouble pronouncing the stress correctly.

Portuguese

Initial stress Portuguese

Medial stress Portuguese

Final stress

's s s s 's s s s 's

'palido pa'lito pale'to

'sabria sa'bia sabi'a  
 'peseego mor'cego empre'gou

2. You have the LA read down each column. You mimic each word after him or her.
3. You have the LA read across each row and you mimic each word.
4. You record the LA reading down the list and set it aside until after your session.
5. You read down and across the lists and have the LA correct you when you do not pronounce a word correctly.
6. You listen to the tape and continue drilling until you feel comfortable with the stress patterns.

The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Introduction

With the Tone Pattern Drill technique, you compare utterances to decide their pitch by substituting them into a constant environment (a "frame"). By keeping the same frame, you will be better able to tell when the substitutions items change pitch. After the patterns are distinguishable, you produce them.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Tone Pattern Drill technique:

- To distinguish one tone pattern from another
- To recognize, initially within a controlled environment, the tone patterns
- To be able to produce words using the correct tone patterns

Guidelines

- Select a frame which will stay the same as you change the substitution items.

Tip: It is best to select a frame in which the substitution items occur utterance medially. If that is not possible, then it will be necessary to check all items with a following frame as well as a preceding one.

- Make sure substitution items are of the same class (all nouns), so they will fit into the same frame. Substitution items can be whole words or unaffixed forms, depending on the language constraints.
- Arrange the substitution items into groups with the same number of syllables, and as much as possible with the same syllable pattern.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Tone Pattern Drill technique:

Before your session

1. Make a list of words you want to practice to determine their tone pattern. Try to come up with a possible frame for the drill.

During your session

2. Explain to the language associate (LA) what you want to do. Have the LA say each item with the frame two times.

Tip: You may have to go through the list several times before you can clearly hear the pitch, and determine its level. You can use other substitution items to compare the pitches (higher, lower, level, or gliding.)

3. Regroup the substitution items into groups with the same tone patterns and go through each group again in the frame for another check on consistency. Regroup again if necessary.
4. Check the groups by substituting them into a different frame: one with a different pitch pattern from the first frame.

5. Record the LA saying the substitution items and frames, one stress pattern group at a time.

After your session

6. Use the recording to practice the items until you feel comfortable with them.

See also

- The Tone Checklist technique
- Keywords: drills, phonology, pronunciation, stress (linguistic), syllables, techniques for language learning, tonal languages

Example: The Tone Pattern Drill technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Tone Pattern Drill technique:

1. You make a list of words you need to practice to determine their tone pattern: spider, snake, squirrel, buffalo, lion, antelope, crocodile, lizard, and hippopotamus. (This example is given in English, even though it is not a tone language, for ease of understanding.)

You decide on the frame: "The man killed a ... yesterday."

2. You explain to the LA what you want to do.

You have the LA say each item within the frame two times.

You have him or her repeat the following another time, since you had a hard time determining their tone the first two times: snake, crocodile, lizard.

3. You regroup the items according to their tone pattern.

Group 1 (lower than the frame): buffalo, lion, crocodile, hippopotamus

Group 2 (higher than the frame): squirrel, snake, antelope

Group 3 (same as the frame): spider, lizard

You go through each group again, checking for consistency. You do not need to regroup anything.

4. You recheck the tone groups by substituting them into a different frame: "A ... played on the rocks."

5. You record the LA saying the groups within the frames, one at a time.

6. You use the recording to practice several times until you feel comfortable with the tone patterns.

The Tone Checklist technique

Introduction

With the Tone Checklist technique, you systematically compare the tone patterns of words to see whether they are the same or different.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Tone Checklist technique:

- To identify the contrasting tones in a language
- To study the phonological environments of tones for any factors that may be causing a change in pitch

Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Sound Checklist technique:

- In considering tone, it is essential to make comparisons in a controlled environment; that is, in a frame with pitches that stay the same relative to each other. You can then compare words with that frame, noting whether the pitch is the same as, or different from, the pitch of the frame.
- If possible, look for a frame where the words you want to check the pitch of are in the middle and where there is a high tone immediately preceding or following the word you are checking.



- You will need to make different checklists for different parts of speech: for example, for nouns and verbs.
- Arrange the words you are checking into groups with the same number of syllables, and as far as possible the same consonant-vowel pattern, length and stress pattern.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Tone Checklist technique:

Before your session

1. Check your data for words that you think have similar or the same tone patterns and make a list.

During your session

2. Show the list to a language associate (LA) and have him or her say the words in a frame. Mark whether each word has the same or different pitch from the preceding word in the frame.
3. Group together all the words you think have the same pitch as the frame.
4. Go back through the words you marked as having a pitch lower than the high pitch frame, but this time try to find a low-pitch frame, and mark whether the words are the same as, or higher than the frame.
5. When you think you have identified groups of words which all have the same pitch, ask the LA to read through each grouping while you record it.
6. Ask the LA to read each grouping again, and you repeat each phrase after the LA. Have him or her check your pronunciation. Repeat the process as necessary.

After your session

7. Use the recording to:
  - continue practicing your pronunciation, and to
  - tune your ear to hear the difference between similar tone patterns.
8. Compare the environments that the similar sounds are found in. Look for complementary distribution or other conditioned explanations. If you find none, assume that the sounds are separate phonemes.

See also

- The Tone Pattern Drill technique
- Keywords: checklists (language learning), phonology, pronunciation, techniques for language learning, tonal languages

The Record and Compare technique

#### Introduction

With the Record and Compare technique, you record your language associate (LA) saying short segments in the language, followed by yourself saying the same words or sentences. You listen in order to compare your speech with the LA 's, while focusing on and identifying the differences in pronunciation and intonation, so that you can correct those differences.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Record and Compare technique:

- To pinpoint where your pronunciation and intonation differs from that of the native speaker
- To learn to hear the kinds of details of pronunciation that allow you to correct yourself.

The payoff comes when you are always understood and have a barely detectable foreign accent so your pronunciation does not detract from what you say

#### Guidelines

- Let your ear become accustomed to hearing native speakers of the target language before you try to use this method. If you get used to hearing your own mistakes too early, you will begin to think they sound okay.
- Do not try to listen for pronunciation and speak at the same time. If you only listen, you can hear yourself in comparison to the model. By recording both yourself and your model, then listening repeatedly, you can hear far more accurately and discern where and how you need to improve.
- Concentrate on these issues:
  - Can you pinpoint where your pronunciation differs?
  - Can you state what is wrong with each difference?
  - Can you make the required changes to match the model?
- Listen to the recording with one hypothesis in mind when you are unsure just how you differ. Example: "I am making the vowel longer than the LA is." If something else seems wrong, try another hypothesis, for example, "I am changing the vowel quality; the LA is not."
- Investigate sentence intonation with this technique also. However, be sure to get a recording of sentences with natural intonation, that fits the context, and does not sound like it was read out of a book.
- Do not work so long on a given word that you "go deaf" on it (unable to hear distinctions anymore; not being able to tell if you are improving or not). If you do, then leave it for a while, and return to it later.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Record and Compare technique:

Before your session

1. Choose words or phrases from a previous session.

During your session

2. Record the LA and you both saying the words, the LA always saying each word first. Record each item two or three times.

After your session

3. Listen repeatedly to the tape and compare your pronunciation with the LA's. Check one thing at a time: vowel length, vowel quality, stress, consonants, intonation, and so forth.  
Your goal: to pinpoint where you differ from the model and to hypothesize exactly what you need to change to match the model.
4. Try to improve accuracy by using a previous recording of only the LA speaking these words. Listen and mimic.
5. Ask the LA to help you focus on specific spots that you have identified as needing improvement. After you work on them, re-record both of you saying those words.
6. Listen to the new recording to see how much progress you have made and decide what remains to be done.

You can repeat steps 3 through 6 as often as needed.

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, audio recordings, intonation, mimicry, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

Example: The Record and Compare technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Record and Compare technique:

1. You choose customary greetings from a previous session: Good morning, good afternoon, and good night.

2. You record the LA and you each saying the greetings, the LA always first. Record each greeting three times.
  3. You listen repeatedly to the tape of greetings, and compare your pronunciation with the LA s. You check one thing at a time: vowel length, vowel quality, stress, consonants, and intonation.
  4. You try to improve your accuracy by using a recording from a previous session of only the LA speaking the greetings. You listen to the greetings and mimic.
  5. You ask the LA to help you focus on specific parts of the greetings that you have identified as needing improvement. After you work on them, record again both of you saying the greetings.
  6. You listen to the new recording of the greetings to see how much progress you have made and decide that you still need to work on phrasal stress.
- You repeat steps 3 through 6 until you are satisfied.

### The Record for Correction technique

#### Introduction

With the Record for Correction technique, you record yourself discussing or describing something and ask native speakers to listen and correct errors in your usage or grammar.

#### Objectives

Here is an objective of the Record for Correction technique:

- To achieve the accuracy needed for superior proficiency

#### Guidelines

- Do not try this technique too soon, or you may be discouraged. At the beginning of Stage 2, for example, when you are just starting to try to talk spontaneously, you will probably make lots of errors or be tongue-tied if you try to get everything exactly right.
- During initial attempts at this technique, seek correction of only those errors that most bother your language associate (LA).
- Use this technique when you prepare a speech for some occasion, to assure as natural sounding speech as possible.

Note: It may take several recordings and sessions with the LA.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Record for Correction technique:

##### Before your session

1. Decide what kind of spoken material you want to record for evaluation.
2. Record yourself.
3. Listen to the tape and note any mistakes.
4. Record again if necessary.

##### During your session

5. Play the recording for the LAs. Ask them to listen to it several times and note phrases that sound awkward or incorrect.
6. Ask the LAs how to say things correctly.

##### After your session

7. Incorporate the suggestions and make another recording for evaluation. Repeat the process until the material is ready to use.

#### See also

- Keywords: accuracy, audio recordings, pronunciation, techniques for language learning

Example: The Record for Correction technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Record for Correction technique:

1. You decide you want to work on giving a speech about yourself and your family for your local ladies' club.
2. You record yourself giving the speech.
3. You listen to the tape of your speech and note any obvious mistakes.
4. You record the speech again.
5. You play the recording of your speech for the LAs. You ask them to listen to it several times and note phrases that sound awkward or incorrect to them.
6. You ask the LAs for suggestions and incorporate them into your speech.
7. You incorporate the suggestions and make another recording of your speech for evaluation. Repeat steps 5 through 7 until you are satisfied that it is ready for the ladies' club.

The Shortened Forms technique

#### Introduction

With the Shortened Forms technique, you practice names, phrases, or titles which are most generally used in a shortened form or as an acronym in the target language.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Shortened Forms technique:

- To build vocabulary
- To recognize shortened forms such as contractions and acronyms when used in verbal and written communication
- To understand the process of derivation of shortened forms

#### Guidelines

- Use the Shortened Forms technique to gain both verbal and written familiarity with shortened forms.
- Make note of shortened forms used in everyday speech so you can explore them with the language associate (LA). Note: Some cultures make great use of these forms for:
  - names (nicknames)
  - contractions
  - commonly used noun phrases (phrases that have been shortened to compounds: a store that sells sporting goods—a sports shop)
  - official titles
- Concentrate on correct pronunciation, including correct stress assignment.
- Try to recognize patterns of derivation, which will help as you begin to experiment with making shortened forms on your own.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Shortened Forms technique:

##### Before your session

1. Decide on a specific type of shortened form you are having trouble understanding.

##### During your session

2. Work with the LA to make a list of several shortened forms.
3. Make a chart containing the long version and the shortened form.

Work with the LA to find the pattern of derivation.

Try to come up with new shortened forms, according to the pattern of derivation to see how widely used it is.

##### See also

- Keywords: acronyms, stress (linguistic), techniques for language learning, verbs, vocabulary

Example: The Shortened Forms technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Shortened Forms technique:

1. You decide you want to explore nicknames.
2. You work with the LA to come up with this list of nicknames: Sue, Tom, Bob, Dick, Beth, and Joe.
3. You make a chart.

Full name	Shortened form
Susan	Sue
Thomas	Tom
Robert	Bob, Rob
Richard	Dick, Rick, Rich
Elizabeth	Beth
Joseph	Joe

You come up with these observations about derivation:

- Usually a nickname incorporates the first syllable of the long form.
- Sometimes a final vowel is added (Sue or Joe).
- Other times the initial consonant is replaced.
- Exceptionally, the final syllable of the long form is taken as the nickname in Beth.

You apply the most common pattern of derivation (the first syllable) to other names:

Result:

Full name	Shortened form
William	Will
Zachary	Zach
Raymond	Ray
Christene	Chris
Louise	Lou

The Structure Practice techniques

Introduction

With the Structure Practice techniques you learn to recognize and produce the grammatical structures of the language you are learning.

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use the Structure Practice techniques:

- Use the Linking Drill technique
- See: The Linking Drill technique
- Use the Pronominal Reference Drill technique
- See: The Pronominal Reference Drill technique
- Use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique
- See: The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique
- Use the Structure Contrast Drill technique
- See: The Structure Contrast Drill technique
- Use the System Drill technique
- See: The System Drill technique

- Use the Clause Type Practice technique
- See: The Clause Type Practice technique
- The Part of Speech Placement technique
- See: The Part of Speech Placement technique
- Use the Tense Practice technique
- See: The Tense Practice technique

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, drills, grammar, mimicry, syntax, techniques for language learning
- The Linking Drill technique

Introduction

With the Linking Drill technique, you practice linking clauses together within complex sentences.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Linking Drill technique:

- To differentiate between the various ways of linking clauses together
- To learn how to use each appropriately in order to use more complex sentence structures

Guidelines

- Begin by using simple independent clauses that you have previously used, and which can be linked together in some type of relationship.
- Work on one type of clause link at a time (cause/effect, temporal relationships: before/after, succession, overlap, simultaneous occurrence).

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Linking Drill technique:

Before your session

1. Decide what kind of link you want to practice and look through your data for clauses to use for practice.

During your session

2. Explain to the language associate (LA) what you want to do. Begin by using two sentences, then try to link them together. Let the LA correct you.
3. Listen to the LA link the clauses, then repeat the sentence.
4. Substitute other clauses, using the LA's linking pattern. Adjust your pattern according to the LA's suggestions or changes. If the LA gives you more than one pattern for the same type of linking, work until you understand the variation and when to use it.
5. Record the LA saying all the linking sentences you worked on.

After your session

6. Listen to the tape and practice saying the sentences.

After your session

7. Try to use the construction in conversation, and pay attention to whether or not it is easily understood. Adjust accordingly.

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, conjunctions, drills, techniques for language learning

Example: The Linking Drill technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Linking Drill technique:

1. You decide that you want to work on cause/effect links. You look through your data and find the following clauses that might be useful:

She fell down the stairs.

She dropped the pot.

The thunder crashed.

The dog is running.

There has been no rain for six months.

We have no vegetables.

2. You explain to the LA that you want to learn how to link two clauses together by their relationship to each other.

You begin by saying: "Because she fell down the stairs, then she dropped the pot."

The LA corrects you by saying: "Because she fell down the stairs she dropped the pot."

3. You listen to the LA link the clauses and then you repeat the sentence.

4. You try linking two more clauses: "Because the thunder crashed, the dog is running." He also gives you the alternative: "The dog is running because the thunder crashed."

You repeat it, and ask if there is a difference in meaning. The LA says there is no difference, either way is fine. You also ask which way he or she would say it. He says that he would normally say it the second way. So you assume that this is the preferred usage.

You then try: We have no vegetables because there has been no rain for six months.

5. You record the LA saying all the sentences.

6. You listen to the recording and practice all of the sentences until you can easily produce the new constructions.

7. You try to use the construction in conversation, and note when you are corrected or not easily understood. You make adjustments as needed.

The Pronominal Reference Drill technique

Introduction

With the Pronominal Reference Drill technique, you practice the correct selection and placement of pronouns in sentences.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Pronominal Reference Drill technique:

- To learn when to use pronouns instead of nouns
- To learn which pronouns are subjects and which are objects (if there are different sets)

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Pronominal Reference Drill technique:

Before your session

1. Look through your data and write down all the pronouns you have learned.
2. Build a set of sentences where you think a pronoun is appropriate.

During your session

3. Use the set of sentences for your language associate (LA). Note the LA's corrections or additions to your constructions, and when it is appropriate to use them.
4. Substitute other constructions until you use all the pronouns you know.
5. Ask the LA to add other pronouns. If a different set of pronouns is used in the object position, repeat steps 1 through 4.

After your session

6. Drill the correct usage of pronouns until you feel comfortable using them.

See also

- Keywords: drills, pronouns, techniques for language learning

The Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

Introduction

With the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique, you concentrate on the structural pattern of one type of sentence at a time.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique:

- To improve your ability to produce a given sentence pattern without hesitation or without getting the words in the wrong order
- To gain new vocabulary
- To formulate some "rules" about the structure of the language, whether consciously or unconsciously, while learning how the language works

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique:

Before your session

1. Select a particular sentence pattern you want to practice.

During your session

2. Have the language associate (LA) give you several sentences of the same type.

After your session

3. Line up the sentences, so that the words in the same slots are aligned.
4. Write a rule which describes the structure.
5. Make different sentences by changing the words in the slots.
6. Choose an activity where you have to use the forms meaningfully.

### Variations

You can use one variation of this technique with a tutor or a very sophisticated LA. (See: Madsen, Bowen, and Hilferty 1985). The tutor or LA prepares a sheet of written sentences, some grammatically correct and some with errors. The LA then reads the sentences, allowing the student to decide whether each one is correct or not.

Discussion: Some will disapprove of this variation because it introduces errors. This disapproval stems from thinking that the students might remember the errors rather than the correct forms.

One aid to overcoming this possibility is to follow the drill with a discussion of why certain items are wrong, and how to correct them. Another possible option is for the student to read the exercises, rather than the LA. Then the student will not hear the LA say it incorrectly. They can then note the correction and have the LA read the corrected version. A further variation of this exercise is for the student to hear the sentences and then to correct them. For example, the student focusing on prepositions needs to recognize when the wrong preposition is used and to be able to make the correction.

See also

- Keywords: drills, techniques for language learning

Example: Stage 2 Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique; appropriate for Stage Two:

1. You decide you want to drill conditional sentences in English.
2. You ask the LA to give you sentences beginning with an "if clause."
3. You line up the sentences, noticing that each one has the following two parts:

Part One	Part Two
----------	----------

If I go to France this year	I will visit the Louvre.
-----------------------------	--------------------------

If it gets warm enough this afternoon	I will go swimming.
---------------------------------------	---------------------



If my friend does not call      I will be sad.  
 If we finish early today        I will go for a walk.

4. You come up with this rule: "The verb in Part One (the if clause) is present tense, and the verb in Part Two is future tense." So far, this rule is a hypothesis. You will have to look for other sentences with if to see whether it always holds true.

5. You practice this sentence structure in various ways:

- You take the chart shown above and cut off the sentences in Part Two. You cut all the sentences apart, scramble them, then try to match them with Part One in all the ways that make sense. You might say, "If we finish early today, I will go swimming" but probably not, "If I go to France this year, I will be sad."

- You change the second half of the sentences to represent something you would actually do in that circumstance. For example, you might say: "If we finish early today, I will go shopping in Oxford" or "If I go to France this year, I will be able to speak French." The point is to say something you really would do.

- You think up different ways you could begin each sentence:

- If ... I will go for a walk.

- If ... I will go swimming.

The Structure Contrast Drill technique

Introduction

With the Structure Contrast Drill technique, you practice the difference between two similar but contrasting sentence structures.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Structure Contrast Drill technique:

- To improve your ability to distinguish between two closely related patterns
- To produce either pattern or its contrast without hesitation

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Structure Contrast Drill technique:

Before your session

1. Select two related semantic patterns: ones that are different by only one grammatical feature.

During your session

2. Ask the language associate (LA) to list other examples under each of these two related sentences.

After your session

3. Look at the forms and try to determine the change in meaning and the change in form.

4. Think of a way to structure an activity so you can practice the difference between the two structures in a meaningful way.

See also

- Keywords: drills, techniques for language learning

Example: The Structure Contrast (Stage One) technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Structure Contrast technique; appropriate for Stage One:

You select positive/negative forms to practice, such as:

- He's drinking water.
- He isn't drinking water.

2. You ask your language associate (LA) to give you other examples:

Positive	Negative
He's drinking water.	He isn't drinking water.
She's mopping the floor.	She isn't mopping the floor.
He's cutting the grass.	He isn't cutting the grass.
John's studying French.	John isn't studying French.

3. You try to decide: What is the change in the form of these pairs of sentences? What is the change in the meaning?

You describe the change: "The change in form is that the negative contains the word 'isn't.' The change in the meaning is that the positive form indicates an action that is taking place, and the negative form indicates an action that is not taking place."

4. You practice the two types of sentences in this way: You use pictures and drawings that depict the actions you wish to practice talking about. You place them in random order and then try to describe the action as each picture comes up.

Example: The Structure Contrast (Stage Two) technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Structure Contrast technique:

1. You discovered a second type of if sentences such as, "If I were a millionaire, I would buy a Porsche."

Compare: Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique

2. You chart the following sentences:

Part One	Part Two
If I were a millionaire,	I would buy a Porsche.
If you loved me,	we would not fight all the time.
If we were all geniuses,	we would not have to study so hard.
If it were summer,	we could go swimming.

3. You analyze the difference from the first set of if sentences. "The form of the verbs in these second sentences differs from those in the first group."

"The if clause in these sentences describes something that is not true, so the second set of sentences are not really possible occurrences."

4. You practice these sentences in the same way as those in the Single Sentence Pattern Practice technique, (see steps # 3-5) then contrast the two types of sentences.

The System Drill technique

Introduction

The System Drill technique may be used for languages which have concord and government systems, in which, if you change one item in an utterance, a change is required in another part of the utterance. For example, in many European languages, when you change the pronoun, you must also change the verb endings.

These types of changes have been traditionally practiced through paradigm drills. However, a system drill will enable you to have automatic control of the trouble spot, by incorporating several substitution drills.

Objectives

Here is an objective of the System Drill technique:

- To gain control of the related changing elements of utterances

## Guidelines

- Concentrate on meaning, not just mimicking when doing these drills. Use pictures, drawings, objects, or actions to accentuate your learning. Do not simply read the drill.
- If the system is too complex to practice all at once, try practicing two or three components at a time, then go on to a few others.
- Use flashcards as an aid when practicing the system. Example, one flashcard for each person; each verb form, with appropriate person and tense. You can then place these cards side by side in the order in which you wish to practice them.

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the System Drill technique:

1. Set up several Single Sentence Practice drills, one for each structure.
2. Practice each drill thoroughly in order to gain control of the association of the parts.
3. When you feel confident that you can control each separate drill, combine them into a chart, showing the relation of the parts of the system to each other, and practice the entire system.
4. When you are ready, make a stimulus-response drill in which you get a cue that tells you which part of the system to use.

## See also

- Keywords: drills, flashcards, paradigms (grammatical), techniques for language learning, tenses, verbs

Example: The System Drill technique: French tenses

## Introduction

Here is an example of the System Drill technique. This is a system drill to learn the French Tense System, specifically the first person plural of the Present, Imperfect and Future tenses in regular verbs:

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the System Drill technique:

1. You set up three Single Sentence Practice drills, one for each tense.

Person	Imperfect	Object
nous	achetions	les oeufs
we	were buying	the eggs
	mangions	
	were eating	
	portions	
	were carrying	
	cassions	
	were breaking	
	comptions	
	were counting	

2. You practice each tense, using pictures, or acting out the present tense, using eggs as props.
3. You combine the three drills into one, and practice it, using props and some context.

Person	Past	PresentFuture	Object
nous	achetions	achetons	les oeufs
		acheterons	

we	were buying	are buying	will buy	the eggs
	mangions	mangeons	mangerons	
	were eating	are eating	will eat	
	portions	portons	porterons	
	were carrying	are carrying	will carry	
	cassions	cassons	casserons	
	were breaking	are breaking	will break	
	comptions	comptons	compterons	
	were counting	are counting	will count	

4. You make a stimulus response drill using the time word: hier (yesterday), chaque jour (every day), demain (tomorrow) to cue which tense to use.

Stimulus time word	Response verb	Object
yesterday-hier	nous achetions	les oeufs
today-aujourd'hui	nous achetons	les oeufs
tomorrow-demain	nous acheterons	les oeufs
hier	nous mangions	les oeufs
aujourd'hui	nous mangeons	les oeufs
demain	nous mangerons	les oeufs

## The Clause Type Practice technique

### Introduction

With the Clause Type Practice technique, you describe objects or events, using well-formed clauses of a type you wish to practice.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Clause Type Practice technique:

- To describe an object or event so the language associate (LA) is able to guess what it is
- To gain confidence in using various clause types. Many clause types are suggested in

Thomson, Kick-Starting your language learning (temporal, questions, possessives, locationals, clauses with indirect objects, instrumentals, or goals).

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Clause Type Practice technique:

#### Before your session

1. Decide what clause type you want to practice. Select several objects or events to describe to the LA.

#### During your session

2. Place the objects where the LA cannot see them. Explain to the LA what you are going to do.
3. Describe the first item or event by using as many clauses as possible. Allow the LA to guess what the object or event is.  
If the LA is incorrect, describe it with a few more clauses.
4. After the object is known, allow the LA to look at it, to correct your clauses, or to suggest others that might be useful. Pay attention to the grammatical structure and note if you did not use the right form.
5. Continue with the next object, repeating steps 2-4, until you have described all objects.

6. Ask the LA to describe some objects or events to you (ones you did not choose). He can describe as you listen.

Pay special attention to the LA's clause types, as you may discover some new ways to express things. You may want to record this part of the session for later reference.

See also

- Keywords: clauses, production, techniques for language learning

Example: The Clause Type Practice technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Clause Type Practice technique:

1. You decide to work on descriptive clauses. You select an apple, a flower, and a stick of firewood to study and describe for your LA.
2. You place the objects where the LA cannot see them, and then you explain that you are going to describe certain objects to him, and you want him to guess what they are.
3. You describe the apple as such:
  - It feels smooth and hard.
  - It tastes sweet, with a little bit of tang.
  - It looks attractive and shiny.
  - It smells slightly sweet.

You let the LA guess what it is, but he cannot, so you add these descriptives:

  - It is red.
  - It sounds crunchy when eaten.
4. You let the LA see the apple after he has guessed it as the object. You ask him to correct your descriptive clauses, and/or make his own to describe it.

You note that your descriptive clauses had the same grammatical structure as the ones he is using.

5. You continue practicing your descriptive clauses with the flower, and the stick of wood.

6. You let the LA select an object without your knowledge of it, after you have described the objects you brought.

He does the describing while you do the guessing. Pay attention to the descriptive clauses he uses. You may discover some new ways to describe objects. It might be helpful to record this session, for later review, especially if you find new descriptive patterns.

The Part of Speech Placement technique

Introduction

With the Part of Speech Placement technique, you use various activities to help you learn parts of speech and their correct placement in the clause.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Part of Speech Placement technique:

- To use the correct vocabulary item (from the appropriate part of speech) in a given sentence
- To place all the components of a clause or phrase in the correct order
- To follow spoken directions involving the part of speech being practiced

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Part of Speech Placement technique:

Before your session

1. Decide on the part of speech you want to practice. Develop a practice activity that will help you gain accuracy in using it.

Before your session

2. Gather the props you will need for your session.

During your session

3. Give the language associate (LA) an object and explain or demonstrate what you want him or her to do with the object.

4. Use the part of speech you are practicing as you carry out the activity you described to the LA. Have the LA correct you when you use the part of speech incorrectly.

5. After you finish with that object, you may try another object or go on to the next activity.

See also

- Keywords: object, production, techniques for language learning, vocabulary

Example: The Part of Speech Placement technique

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Part of Speech Placement technique:

1. You decide that you want to work on prepositional phrases.

You decide that you will describe objects which the LA has hidden, using prepositional phrases to discover their location.

2. You gather a toy car and some colored building blocks for props.

3. You give the car to the LA and ask him to hide it somewhere in the room while you step outside.

4. You tell the LA that you are going to guess the location of the car. Tell the LA to correct any incorrect phrases you might use.

"Is it under the table?" "No."

"Is it near the window?" "No."

"Is it in the bookshelf?" "Yes."

"Is it behind a book?" "Yes."

"Is it behind the blue book?" "No."

"Is it behind the brown book?" "Yes."

5. You decide to move on to the building block activity. You tell the LA that you want him to construct a "building." You then describe the construction:

- The orange block is on the top
- The yellow block is next to the orange block
- The green block is under the yellow and orange blocks
- The little blue block is next to the green block
- The long red block is under the blue and green blocks

You build another configuration and try to describe what you have done to the LA:

- I placed the long red block on the bottom
- I turned the green and yellow blocks the opposite direction on top of the red block
- I put the little blue block on top of the red one, in between the yellow and green blocks
- I put the purple block on top of the blue block
- I put the orange block on top of the purple one
- Then I put the black block on the very top

You feel comfortable with your usage of prepositions and the LA did not correct you many times, so you feel that you have practiced enough for now.

The Tense Practice technique

Introduction

With the Tense Practice technique, you use a group of objects to help elicit sentences in a chosen tense (Ur 1988:94-95,197-201).

## Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Tense Practice technique:

- To become familiar with expressing yourself in the various tenses
- To see general patterns and exceptions to the norm of how a tense works
- To see the overall tense picture, and to work on specifics you have trouble with

## Guidelines

- Complete the entire set of objects for each tense you wish to elicit before you switch to another tense. Do not try to get every tense in succession for one object. This could be confusing to the language associate (LA).
- Use pictures of certain objects if you do not have the object itself. Some tenses may be more easily elicited if you have pictures. Example: For the passive tense you might have a set of pictures of a table with certain food and drink items. The first picture has all the items in their whole state. The second picture shows the items opened or consumed. Ask the LA to assume the second picture is the present and to describe what has been done.

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Tense Practice technique:

### Before your session

1. Gather the group of objects you need to help you learn about tenses.
2. Decide which tenses you want to elicit and practice the questions needed to elicit the tense clauses.

### During your session

3. Tell the LA that you want answers to questions about some objects you will show him. Ask him the same question for each item.
4. Go through the objects again and ask another question to elicit a different tense. Do this until you have all of the tenses you wish to elicit.

### After your session

5. Go through your elicitations again and try to come up with generalizations about each tense. Note any area you need to spend more time inquiring about.

Look for exceptions from the basic order of things and compare with all of your collected data. Note any area you want to investigate in a later language session.

### See also

- Keywords: passive voice, production, techniques for language learning, tenses

### Example: The Tense technique

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Tense technique:

1. You gather the following objects to use in your session: a cup, a stone, a knife, a nail, a sheet of paper, a bottle of water, and a piece of wood.
2. You decide to elicit the following tenses and practice the corresponding questions:
  - Progressive: What are you doing with it?
  - Future: What will you do with it?
  - Past: What did you do with it?
  - Passive: What was done with it?
3. You tell the LA that you want to ask some questions about the objects you have. You place the cup on the table and ask, "What are you doing with it?"  
You continue with each item, asking the same question for each one.
4. You begin with the cup again and ask, "What will you do with it?"  
Then you go through each object, asking, "What did you do with it?"

Last, you go through asking, "What was done with it?"

5. You go back through your material and make the following generalizations about the tenses:

- The progressive tense is usually expressed by the verbal form -ing on the verb and am (first person singular) before the verb ("I am throwing this stone").
- The future tense is usually expressed by the insertion of will before the verb ("I will throw this stone").
- The past tense is sometimes expressed by the -ed form on the verb; however, a number of verbs do not use the -ed form but a variant form of the verb ("I threw this stone").
- The passive is usually expressed by the insertion of was before the past perfect tense of the verb ("The stone was thrown").

You look back through all your data and find examples of the past tense, with -ed and variant verb form. You decide you need to learn when to use which form so you list verbs you have and make a note to investigate the past tense of each for your next language session.

Activities for self-directed language learners

Introduction

Language learning activities are things to do in real communication situations in the community to try out what you have been practicing in structured sessions. These activities help you focus on one communication situation or area of vocabulary and culture at a time. These are just suggestions. Make up more activities of your own, once you get the idea!

Things to do

Here are the things to do when you use activities for self-directed language learners:

- The Eating Out activity
- See: The Eating Out activity
- The Join in the Work activity
- See: The Join in the Work activity
- The Public Transport activity
- See: The Public Transport activity
- The Reading the Signs activity
- See: The Reading the Signs activity
- The Shopping Trip activity
- See: The Shopping Trip activity
- The Social Visiting activity
- See: The Social Visiting activity
- The Telephone Procedures activity
- See: The Telephone Procedures activity
- The Telling Jokes activity
- See: The Telling Jokes activity
- The Town Map activity
- See: The Town Map activity
- The Town Survey activity
- See: The Town Survey activity

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, extemporaneous communication

The Eating Out activity

Introduction



With the Eating Out activity, you go to a local restaurant with a group and share a meal together. This technique works well for a class and teacher to do together, or for a group of language learners and their tutor or language associate (LA).

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Eating Out activity:

- To learn new vocabulary
- To learn the appropriate cultural behavior for eating out
- To have an informal time together with the teacher (or LA) and other students, getting better acquainted on a personal level. These kinds of relationships are often very important to non-westerners.

#### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Eating Out activity:

- Take a native speaker with you who is comfortable in the cultural setting. You need someone to learn from by observation and instruction.

#### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Eating Out activity:

##### Before your outing

1. Discuss vocabulary and phrases which will likely be used at the restaurant.

##### Before your outing

2. Talk about cultural necessities such as tipping, getting the attention of the waitress, and paying.
3. Set up the time and date of the outing.

##### During your outing

4. Go to the restaurant and enjoy yourself. Use the vocabulary phrases necessary to order your meal.

Also spend time in informal conversation with other members of the group.

##### After your outing

5. Discuss any difficulties you had at the restaurant or observations you made about the outing.

Enhance your learning by choosing further activities:

- Write a description of the experience and give your impressions
- Compare appropriate restaurant behavior in your home country with what you have learned is appropriate in this situation.
- Make a do's and don'ts list for eating out in this situation.

#### See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, restaurants, vocabulary

#### The Join in the Work activity

##### Introduction

With the Join in the Work activity, you find out what types of things are going on in the village (town) on a particular day and choose one activity where you can become involved.

#### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Join in the Work activity:

- To observe work patterns and other cultural information
- To get to know individuals better
- To learn new vocabulary
- To increase your ease of speaking conversationally

#### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Join in the Work activity:

- Use this activity as a learning tool, even in the early stages of language learning (predominately to observe and to be involved with individuals). Use it later to continue improving your speaking abilities in a relaxed setting.
- Choose a variety of activities to join in—not merely ones you find exhilarating, but ones which allow you to become involved with people in their setting. You may find that the language and culture learning you get during this activity is vastly different from what you get in the formal "language session" time. This may be the time they let you get an insider's view because you are willing to be involved with their daily schedule, rather than just following your own agenda prearranged during formal language time.
- Carry a small notebook, if possible, to jot down notes while you attend an activity. Otherwise, do your best to make mental notes and then write them down as soon as possible.
- Observe working relationships between participants, including their verbal and nonverbal interaction. You may be able to learn about social hierarchies within these parameters.
- Ask questions about what is going on if you do not understand. However, do not turn this into a language session. If the participants seem unwilling to answer your questions, save them for a language session and simply observe during this activity. Do not press them for answers or you may alienate yourself, or at least make yourself less welcome in the future. Observe the way knowledge is passed from one individual to another (such as from older man to younger). Watch how they train those who do not yet know how to do the work and try to place yourself in that learner's position.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, culture learning

The Public Transport activity

Introduction

With the Public Transport activity, you explore the local public transportation system, learning about routes, stops, stations, fares, and other pertinent information.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Public Transport activity:

- To learn which vehicles you need to locate for your transportation needs
- To know what the fares are and how the routes run (nonstop or otherwise)
- To confidently use the public transportation system

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Public Transport activity:

- Obtain a map of the bus routes, if available, or obtain a map of the town and surrounding areas.
- Learn key terms before you begin this activity such as token , transfer, express, route, and destination.
- Undertake only part of the transportation system at a time. Eventually cover all of it, or all of the parts you will most likely need.
- Take a notebook and pen to write down comments on the information you learn, your reactions to the mode of transportation, and other interesting things.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Public Transport activity:

1. Go to the central transportation station and locate the bus (or other form of transportation you are investigating) that will take you to your destination.

2. Find out the cost of the trip, and the approximate duration. You may choose to explore alternative routes to the same destination, or to explore alternative modes of transportation (taxi cab, motorcycle, etc.).
3. Choose one mode of transportation and go on the trip.
4. Take notes about your trip, how many stops you made, how crowded it was, the duration of the trip, etc.
5. When you reach your destination, find out how and when you can get back to the central station.
6. When you arrive back at the central station, you may choose to try another destination and route or wait until another outing.
7. At some point, you may want to talk about your discoveries with the language associate (LA) or another native speaker. Ask about anything you do not understand concerning the transport system.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, public transportation

The Reading the Signs activity

Introduction

With the Reading the Signs activity, you walk down a street (such as the main street in the business district) and write down the messages that appear on signs. Then you discuss them with the language associate (LA) to understand their content and intent.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Reading the Signs activity:

- To use written messages which are available as an aid in getting around
- To become familiar with abbreviations and shortened speech

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Reading the Signs activity:

Before your session

1. Go to a street that has many signs and write down their content.

During your session

2. Go over the list of signs with the LA and get clarification for any messages you do not understand.
3. Categorize the signs according to common categories:
  - Advertisements
  - Traffic and safety notices
  - Regulations
  - Announcements
  - Information
  - Slogans
  - Place names
  - Miscellaneous

Variations

A further exercise you can do with the Reading the Signs activity is to analyze the grammar of the signs. You might ask such questions as, "What kinds of words are left out?" "What verb forms are used?" Try rewriting the signs into complete sentences. For example, change "No crossing zone" to "You must not cross the street in this place." You might also try to create some signs of your own, incorporating the common principles used in local advertising. If the country

has a highway system, you might spend one session studying highway signs, which vary greatly from those found on a city street. Other possibilities for specialized signs include graffiti, bumper stickers, gravestones, and T-shirt slogans.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, reading proficiency

The Shopping Trip activity

Introduction

With the Shopping Trip activity, you go shopping for the week's groceries without actually purchasing them, but by listing them in a notebook.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Shopping Trip activity:

- To become familiar with the local supermarket (or open air market)
- To learn new vocabulary items of food names
- To gain confidence in being able to make a trip to purchase items by yourself

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Shopping Trip activity:

- Take a language associate (LA) or someone who knows their way around better than you do, on your first trip. You can go by yourself if you are a brave soul, but you should know enough of the language to take care of yourself.

- Make up a list of the items to be "purchased."
- Learn vocabulary items that will be helpful, such as, "a bottle of", "a kilo of", "a can of."
- Make it a comparative trip if there are several supermarkets in town.
- Buy some items, if necessary, on the trip. You may find that you cannot gather (accurate)

information without buying something if you go to an open air market. If bargaining is a part of the purchase scenario and you are not actually going to purchase anything, the price you are told initially would not be the actual purchase price. See the Role-Play technique for suggestions on how to prepare for a trip to the market.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Shopping Trip activity:

Before your trip

1. Prepare your list and set a time for your trip.

During your trip

2. Go to the store and begin walking the aisles, looking for the items you want to "purchase." Notice the overall organization of the store.
3. As you write down prices, you may want to compare brand names, size versus price amounts (is it more economical to buy the large one or not), and other considerations.
4. Ask your companion about things you do not understand.  
Write down new vocabulary items and other things of interest.
5. Go to another store (if available) and do more comparison shopping.

After your trip

6. Tally your "purchases" to find your total cost.  
Write down your overall impression of each store and decide where you want to shop.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, buying and selling, culture learning

The Social Visiting activity

Introduction

With the Social Visiting activity, you take advantage of opportunities to engage in conversations while at social activities, such as visiting in a home, attending a club meeting or a sporting event.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Social Visiting activity:

- To expand your vocabulary
- To increase your listening comprehension
- To increase your ease of speaking conversationally

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Social Visiting activity:

- Use this activity as a learning tool to gain greater conversational skills. It can be used even in the early stages of language learning (predominately for listening skills), but is especially useful as your speaking ability increases.
- Find a person or a setting that is comfortable for you. This may not be a problem for extroverts, but many introverts need a relatively nonthreatening environment before they are willing to utter a syllable.
- Do not turn a visit into a formal setting by making an appointment. Rather, "drop by" and see what is happening. Sit around the kitchen table, the fire, the front room, under a tree, or wherever a group is gathering.
- Try to stretch your limits by speaking more than you really feel comfortable doing, and little by little you will gain confidence.
- Listen for clues which differentiate social visiting from more formal settings of speech usage, such as church, official speeches, or teaching situations--whether public school, language school, or formal language sessions with a language associate (LA).
- Pick up verbal and nonverbal cues and incorporate them into your own social visits. Once you have tested them to make certain they are valid and nonoffensive, make them a part of your social visiting skills.
- Take any questions concerning what happens during these social visits to a LA. Do not pull out your data notebook and turn the social setting into a language session or the parameters will be changed. If you are afraid you will forget something you want to ask about later, try to make a mental note. Even if you forget initially, if the question comes up enough times, you will eventually understand it or remember to ask the LA later.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, culture learning, interactional skills, social visiting, vocabulary

### The Telephone Procedures activity

#### Introduction

With the Telephone Procedures activity, you practice using the telephone to learn the appropriate etiquette and skills required for local use.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Telephone Procedures activity:

- To learn appropriate vocabulary for using a telephone
- To practice using the phone book, dealing with operators, dialing local and long distance numbers
- To learn how to communicate without using facial expressions and gestures

### Guidelines

Here is a guideline to follow when you use the Telephone Procedures activity:

- Practice the same task several times with different people to build confidence.

## Steps

Follow these steps to use the Telephone Procedures activity:

### Before your practice

1. Make a list of questions you want to ask each of the parties you call.
2. Use the telephone book to make a list of the businesses and persons you want to call and their phone numbers.

### During your session

3. Call the first number on your list and explain that you are seeking information. Proceed with all your questions, then end the call.
4. Write down the information you received and how you felt about the phone call.
5. Continue making phone calls until you have exhausted your list or until you feel confident in your ability to use the phone.

### Prerequisites

Here are some prerequisites for doing the Telephone Procedures activity:

You need to learn vocabulary items associated with the telephone before you actually try to carry on conversations. Some of these vocabulary items are dial, receiver, call, dial tone, busy signal, operator, information, collect, direct dialing, and extension.

You also need to learn phone etiquette, such as proper greetings and introductions.

### Variations

Here are some variations of the Telephone Procedures activity:

You can call the operator to find out how to make a collect call or how to charge a call to a third party.

You can practice hearing how people respond when answering a wrong number call. Try calling a business and asking for information they cannot possibly know, or call a private number and ask for a person you know will not be there.

You can call information hot line type numbers or other information numbers: time and temperature, movie theaters, dial-a-joke, 800 numbers, or want ads.

You may also need to learn how to use a radio telephone. You should learn the location of the operation station and how to book a call on the radio telephone.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, numbers, telephones, vocabulary

## The Telling Jokes activity

### Introduction

With the Telling Jokes activity, you practice telling jokes to native speakers after you have practiced them with a language associate (LA).

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Telling Jokes activity:

- To learn the proper intonation and stress needed to carry a joke
- To provide cultural insight into what is considered funny

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Telling Jokes activity:

- Listen to jokes told by native speakers and analyze them for
  - common themes,
  - frequently used words and phrases, and
  - types of jokes: puns, tall tales, or riddles.

There may even be books of jokes available in the language. These may be helpful, even if you do not actually tell the jokes because the language may be closer to actual spoken language.

- Notice the circles in which jokes are told, also where they are not told, and who tells jokes.
- Do not try to translate jokes from your native language as the humor may be completely different. Something that is acceptable joke material in your culture may be taboo in the local culture. Or something hilariously funny in your culture may be of no humorous value locally.
- If you find it difficult to tell a joke, you could focus instead on learning how to listen to jokes and how to respond appropriately to jokes.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Telling Jokes activity:

During your session

1. Tell the LA you want to learn how to successfully tell a joke.  
Ask if there are certain guidelines you should know when telling a joke.
2. Ask the LA to tell you a joke. Notice the verbal and nonverbal cues.
3. Tell your joke to the LA.  
Have the LA tell you how to improve your joke telling.
4. Practice until you are comfortable telling your joke.

After your session

5. Practice telling your joke to several native speakers or groups of native speakers. Keep telling your joke until you get a good laugh.

If you bomb, ask the listeners how you can make the joke funnier.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, culture learning, intonation

The Town Map activity

Introduction

With the Town Map activity, you make a map of a nearby area of town and then you go out and fill in the map with general information, such as street names, store names, landmarks, buildings, parks, and other notable sites.

Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Town Map activity:

- To become familiar with at least one section of town
- To get out into the local environment and to interact with people even if only briefly (possibly set up a network of friends for conversation practice)

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Town Map activity:

- Select a manageable section of town or divide the area you want to map out into more than one outing.
- Make it an enjoyable outing. Take time to explore interesting sites, have a croissant and cappuccino (or whatever the local tasty treat is). Take time to have fun doing this activity.

Steps

Follow these steps to use the Town Map activity:

1. Prepare a map of a nearby area of town.
2. Go out to the area and label all the sites found there. Note places you might want to explore in detail at a later time. Include landmarks that people use in giving directions (mango trees, statues, hills, etc.).

## Variation

Another activity you might do in conjunction with the Town Map is to find out information about the sites on the map which require you to speak with native speakers. For instance, find out the business hours of the stores or the planned social activities at the park (sporting events, etc.).

See also

- The Town Survey activity
- Keywords: activities for language learning

## The Town Survey activity

### Introduction

With the Town Survey activity, you work alone or with another person (as part of a larger overall group) to learn details about one part of town. Once you have collected the information, compile all the findings into a mini-guidebook.

### Objectives

Here are some objectives of the Town Survey activity:

- To learn about a large segment of the community quickly by sharing your findings with other students and learning from their investigations
- To provide an opportunity to speak the local language in a real situation

### Guidelines

Here are some guidelines to follow when you use the Town Survey activity:

- Use this activity after you feel comfortable asking questions (and can understand some of the answers).
- Prepare a list of questions beforehand about the specific place you will go to and learn about.

### Steps

Follow these steps to use the Town Survey activity:

#### Before your outing

1. Decide where you will do your survey and prepare a list of questions. Refresh your mind on appropriate ways to start and end a conversation.

#### During your outing

2. Go to the designated place and find an official person or worker there who is willing to give you information.

#### During your outing

3. Ask your questions and write down answers if appropriate. Otherwise do it after you have left the survey site.

#### After your outing

4. Meet with other survey members and share what you learned. Include in the discussion any difficulties or interesting insights from the experience.

5. Write up your findings and compile all the information for a mini-guidebook.

See also

- Keywords: activities for language learning, interactional skills

## Language Learning Principles

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[Keywords: principles of language learning]

Summary



This book is a collection of language learning principles and guidelines for language learners. The general principles describe what the editors of the bookshelf hold to be important truths about second language acquisition. The guidelines give advice on what to do, based on the general principles. Many of the principles are linked to illustrative stories from the Language Learning Story database. These principles and guidelines can help language learners understand what to do to learn a language more effectively, and why they are doing what they are doing.

Contents

OVERVIEW: General language learning principles

OVERVIEW: Guidelines for language learners

General language learning principles

OVERVIEW

General language learning principles

Introduction

There are two kinds of language learning principles:

- generally held truths about language and language learning, and
- guidelines for how to go about language learning, based on the general principles.

The information in this section are the more general principles. Many of them have further principles, or corollaries to which they are linked. There are also links to the guidelines implied by the general principles.

Many of the general principles and the guidelines are linked to anecdotes told by language learners recounting their own experiences.

See also: [Guidelines for language learners and Language Learning Stories.](#)

In this module group

Here are the modules on general language learning principles:

- OVERVIEW: Principles about language in general
- OVERVIEW: Principles about learner characteristics
- OVERVIEW: Principles about learner attitudes and motivation
- OVERVIEW: Principles about language learning situations
- OVERVIEW: Principles about the language you are learning
- OVERVIEW: Principles about language acquisition

See also

- Keywords: principles of language learning

Principles about language in general

OVERVIEW

Principles about language in general

Introduction

Some language learning principles have to do with understanding the nature of language in general, as described in detail in the discipline of linguistics.

See: [The Linguistics Bookshelf](#) for more information about the nature and structure of language.

In this module group

Here are the modules on principles about language in general:

- Language is systematic
- Languages have a sound system
- In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels
- Languages have a grammatical system
- Languages have a lexical system

- There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages
- Language is used in discourses
- People sometimes speak or write in monologues
- Language is used interactively in conversation
- Language is meaningful
- Language has referential meaning
- Language has functional meaning
- Language has social meaning
- Language has cultural meaning
- There are variations in language due to regional, status, and stylistic differences
- Knowing a language involves control of integrated skills
- Language skills may be productive or receptive
- Some chunks of language are stored and used as wholes
- People use language creatively by recombining elements
- Language knowledge may be intuitive

See also

- Keywords: characteristics of language, principles of language learning

Language is systematic

Principle

Language is systematic.

Discussion

Study of languages all over the world shows that they are complex networks of systems, all linked together in the minds of the speakers. There are various subsystems of language, including sounds, grammar, and vocabulary, each of which have units or elements related to each other.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- Languages have a sound system
- Languages have a grammatical system
- Languages have a lexical system
- People learning a language build up their own systems

Languages have a sound system

Principle

Languages have a sound system.

Discussion

We do not always think about languages having a sound system, apart from the alphabet, but they do. Just as the grammar of a language forms a system, so do the sounds. Here are some of the challenges in learning the sound system of a new language:

- Learning to understand and make unfamiliar sounds
- Learning to understand and make sounds in different combinations
- Learning to recognize contrasting sounds

Further principles

Here is a further principle based on this principle:

- In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is systematic

See also

- Keywords: sounds of a language

In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels

Principle

In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Languages have a sound system

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Watch out for that tone
- That's not quite how we say it

Negative examples

Here is a story that illustrates what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- Your tortilla stinks

See also

- Keywords: sounds of a language, tonal languages

Languages have a grammatical system

Principle

Languages have a grammatical system.

Discussion

Every language has a grammatical system, which means that its speakers order words and parts of words in a systematic, organized, meaningful way. Some languages, especially related languages, may have similar grammatical systems. Other languages may be totally different.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is systematic

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Verb charts

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- The more the language you are learning is like one you already know, the more quickly you will learn it
- Differences between two languages interfere when you try to learn them
- The sooner you can acquire the grammatical system of a language, the sooner you can use the language creatively

See also

- Keywords: grammar

Languages have a lexical system

Principle

Languages have a lexical system.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is systematic

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- A banana by any other name
- Using Dutch to learn Dutch

Further principle

Here is a further principle based on this principle:

- There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages

See also

- Keywords: vocabulary

There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages

Principle

There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages.

Discussion

Even when languages are related and have cognates, there are usually differences in the range of meaning between the words in the two languages. There may be secondary senses, or the words may even be quite different in meaning.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Languages have a lexical system

Negative examples

Here is a story that illustrates what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- When is paper not paper?

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Use cognates, but use them carefully

See also

- Keywords: cognates

Language is used in discourses

Principle

Language is used in discourses.

Discussion

The term discourse is used by linguists to refer to stretches of language (especially speech) longer than a single sentence. Some linguists have concentrated on describing the structure and relationship of words and structures in monologues or written texts. Others have analyzed conversational dialogue. In both cases, there are ways speakers make reference to things said before and let the listener know what points are most important.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- One strike, you're out!

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- People sometimes speak or write in monologues
- Language is used interactively in conversation
- Language learners need to learn to understand and produce well-formed discourses

See also

- Keywords: discourse

People sometimes speak or write in monologues

Principle

People sometimes speak or write in monologues.

Discussion

We all sometimes

- tell stories
- tell people how to do things
- give a pep talk or campaign speech, or
- present a school report.

In other words, sometimes people get up and speak at length to other people without interruption.

These speeches are kinds of monologues and have different structures. Some of the most common kinds of monologues are:

- Narratives
- Procedural discourses
- Descriptive discourses
- Hortatory discourses
- Expository discourses

These same kinds of discourse also occur in writing, along with specialized written genres, such as letters, reviews, novels, newspaper articles, and others.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is used in discourses

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Get exposure to different kinds of discourses
- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works

See also

- Keywords: discourse

Language is used interactively in conversation

Principle

Language is used interactively in conversation.

Discussion

Every day we use language to talk with other people. There is a structure in our interaction.

Usually we greet people, if we have not seen them before that day. We may ask a question, get an answer, ask for clarification, and so on. Usually we indicate when we want to break off the conversation.

The conversation may take many turns, before we are done. Maybe one of the participants thinks of something she wants to say, and changes the subject. Maybe the other person wants to return to the original subject. The conversation evolves as a creation of the people involved.

We are not always aware of the rules and strategies we use in conversation, but we acquire them as part of our general proficiency in a language, and people who do not learn them cannot communicate effectively.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is used in discourses

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Listen to people talking to each other in their language
- Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately
- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Get exposure to different kinds of discourses

See also

- Keywords: communicative functions, conversation, culture learning, interacting with people

Language is meaningful

Principle

Language is meaningful.

Discussion

One of the principle features of language is that it is the representation of meaning by sound, symbol, or gesture. The challenge in learning a new language is to learn how to decipher and represent meaning.

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- Language has referential meaning
- Language has functional meaning
- Language has social meaning
- Language has cultural meaning

See also

- Keywords: meaning

Language has referential meaning

Principle

Language has referential meaning.

Discussion

Referential meaning is the kind of meaning we think of first: the dictionary meaning. Words represent something in the real world or in the world of ideas. Our first question is, what does this word represent?

That question is not always an easy one to answer, because different languages have different concepts. Some languages make more distinctions than others in a particular area, as in all the Mayan words for corn at different stages, or the Eskimo words for different kinds of snow. Moreover, there is specialized vocabulary relating to particular jobs of interests. If we are not cricket fans, we will not understand what a gully is, or a slip or the bails. Part of learning a language is learning new concepts.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is meaningful

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Department of Redundancy department

See also

- Keywords: meaning

Language has functional meaning

Principle

Language has functional meaning.

Discussion

We use language for different purposes or communication functions. Sometimes the purpose of what we say is clear, as when we say, "Please open the window." But at other times our purpose may be less clear, as when we hint at something.

See: Common purposes or functions of language

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is meaningful

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Where are you going?

See also

- Keywords: communicative functions, meaning

Language has social meaning

Principle

Language has social meaning as well as referential meaning.

Discussion

Language is a social activity, developed within the context of a society. So the way we use it reflects the relationships among members of that society. Some societies have a very stratified social structure, and reflect that in the language. In Thai, for example, there are a large number of different pronouns used to reflect the relative status of speakers.

Many European languages have pronouns used to reflect the social relationship between the speakers. They are often called "formal" and "informal" pronouns, but have more to do with relationship than setting. Part of learning a language is learning the social meaning of your choice of words.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- You that man!

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Listen to people of different regions and social status
- Listen to other learners talk with native speakers

See also

- Keywords: meaning, varieties of speech

Language has cultural meaning

Principle

Language has cultural meaning.

Discussion

Language is a cultural artifact, just as much as a painting or a statue is. We cannot really understand what is said if we do not understand the cultural framework, or shared knowledge behind it.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language is meaningful

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Hot and cold food

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

See also

- Keywords: meaning

There are variations in language due to regional, status, and stylistic differences

Principle

There are variations in language due to regional, status, and stylistic differences.

Discussion

There are people whose hometown we know as soon as they open their mouths, because they speak with a distinctive regional accent. Some of these accents are more widely acceptable in a country than others. However egalitarian and democratic we think ourselves, there are probably some people whose accents we laugh at. At any rate, we would not want language learners to learn to talk like that.

There are also differences between spoken and written forms of language, and between the way we speak with our in-group friends and the way we speak with strangers in a more formal setting. It is important to be able to distinguish among the different varieties of language.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- By hook or by crook—getting language however you can
- A conversation on a bus

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Learn appropriate varieties of the language

See also

- Keywords: dialects, social stratification, varieties of speech

Knowing a language involves control of integrated skills

Principle

Knowing a language involves control of integrated skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Discussion

Although language is made up of different elements—words, grammatical structures, and sounds, we put them together to transmit messages using integrated skills.

Further principle

Here is a further principle based on this principle:

- Language skills may be productive or receptive

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency, reading proficiency, speaking proficiency, writing proficiency

Language skills may be productive or receptive

Principle

Language skills may be productive or receptive.

Discussion

The receptive skills are those in which you receive the message: listening and reading.

Productive language skills are those in which you produce a message: speaking and writing.

Some people only use the oral skills, others can read a language, but not understand it.

Basis



Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Knowing a language involves control of integrated skills

Further principles

Here is a further principle based on this principle:

- Productive skills are harder than receptive skills

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency, reading proficiency, speaking proficiency, writing proficiency

Some chunks of language are stored and used as wholes

Principle

Some chunks of language are stored and used as wholes.

Discussion

When we learn a language we do not store every word separately in our memories. Some chunks of language are stored and used as whole units. We use some of these phrases to help our fluency, when we cannot think of the next thing to say. For example, in English, we might use "The thing is" or "as it were." We also use such phrases to structure discourses.

See: Nattinger and DiCarrico 1992

Evidence

We have evidence that people store some phrases as wholes from the way they use them. You will hear people saying "The thing is, is that I have other plans tonight." This shows that the thing is is seen as a whole and no longer analyzed by the speaker, otherwise she would not repeat the word is. Likewise you will hear people saying, "The reason being is that there is no money in the budget." Again the insertion of the word is shows that the speaker does not recognize being as a verb form, but as part of the fixed phrase.

See also

- Keywords: phrases

People use language creatively by recombining elements

Principle

People use language creatively by recombining elements.

Discussion

To use language creatively, you retrieve the components of language from your brain and recombine them.

Speakers of a language not only learn words, but learn how they may be combined and recombined to say different things. In this way language becomes endlessly creative, because you can put the thousands of words together in an unlimited number of combinations. Part of learning a language is learning how words can be recombined into allowable patterns.

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- You cannot rely on memorization alone

Language knowledge may be intuitive

Principle

Language knowledge may be intuitive.

Discussion

People may be able to speak a language fluently and grammatically, but yet not be able to tell you how or why they say things the way they do. Some speakers of a language may be more aware of the structure of the language than others, and be able to describe it, but such explanations may or may not fit with what you hear them say.

## Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- There's got to be a word

See also

- Keywords: language associates

Principles about learner characteristics

## OVERVIEW

Principles about learner characteristics

## Introduction

Some language learning principles have to do with understanding what makes a good language learner. Although some people seem to have intrinsic qualities that help them learn languages more easily than others, there are some things that learners can do to help themselves be better learners.

In this module group

Here are the modules on principles about learner characteristics:

- People are wired to learn languages
- Aptitude can speed up learning
- Some learners take on a different persona when speaking another language
- Some learners resist sounding and acting differently
- Some learners have a higher tolerance for ambiguity than others
- Learners who use learning strategies effectively are more successful
- Learning in your preferred learning style increases motivation and effectiveness

See also

- Keywords: learners (language), personality types, principles of language learning

People are wired to learn languages

## Principle

People are wired to learn languages.

## Discussion

Every normal baby that is born has the innate capacity to learn language. The baby just needs to be in an environment where the language is spoken, and eventually it will learn to talk and understand.

## Implication

Here is another principle based on this principle:

- Believe that you can learn a second language

Aptitude can speed up learning

## Principle

Aptitude can speed up learning.

## Discussion

There are three factors that are usually included when people talk about language learning aptitude:

- The ability to discriminate sounds
- Memory
- Grammatical sensitivity

Sound discrimination helps you distinguish one word from another, which you need to be able to do. Memory obviously helps you store words and structures and retrieve them when you need to speak or write. Grammatical sensitivity refers to your ability to recognize how words are used in grammatical structures.

## Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Verb charts

See also

- Keywords: aptitude

Some learners take on a different persona when speaking another language

## Principle

You may take on a different persona when speaking another language.

## Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- A convert to the culture
- One person, two personas?

See also

- Some learners resist sounding and acting differently
- Keywords: persona

Some learners resist sounding and acting differently

## Principle

Some learners resist sounding and acting differently.

## Discussion

Some people find a resistance in themselves to sounding and acting like the people whose language they are learning, while others positively relish taking on another persona. The resistance may come from culture shock or an aversion to some characteristic of the people whose language they are learning, or it may be a more general personality characteristic sometimes called ego impermeability. Some people have a very firmly entrenched image of themselves, which they resist changing.

See also

- Keywords: childlikeness, ego permeability, persona

Some learners have a higher tolerance for ambiguity than others

## Principle

Some learners have a higher tolerance for ambiguity than others.

## Discussion

People who tend to see the world in black and white, instead of in shades of gray, who like clear “yeses” and “noes,” and do not like things left up in the air, may have some frustration in a new language and culture. This is partly because the learning process itself inevitably involves ambiguity. Categories are fuzzy for a long time; you are not sure what you heard or what it means. You are unsure of how people view the world. The familiar context in which you are used to dealing with people is no longer there, and it is hard to judge people’s intentions, values, and actions. You may even become unsure of what constitutes right and wrong behavior in this culture, and this may be very upsetting to you.

## Implications

Here are some implications of this principle:

The danger is that your frustration may either cause you to give up or to have negative feelings about the speakers of the language. It is important to guard against both of these possibilities by reminding yourself that the ambiguity decreases as you continue to learn and that you will understand and probably like people better when you understand what they are thinking and how they tick.

Wanting a resolution to ambiguities can work in your favor in some ways. You are likely to want to get things right and to continue to search for answers when other people stop caring about the details. The trick with this personality trait, as with others, is to make it work for you and not against you.

See also

- Keywords: culture learning

Learners who use learning strategies effectively are more successful

Principle

Learners who use learning strategies effectively are more successful.

Discussion

Many researchers have recently studied good language learners to see what kinds of learning strategies they use. In general, the results indicate that good language learners use a variety of strategies, and that they use strategies effectively, whereas poorer language learners do not.

See: Language learning strategies

See also: O'Malley and Uhl Chamot 1990 and Ehrman 1989

See also

- Keywords: learning strategies

Learning in your preferred learning style increases motivation and effectiveness

Principle

Learning in your preferred learning style increases motivation and effectiveness.

Discussion

Learning style is the way you prefer to take in and process information. Understanding your learning style and doing what you can to use your preferences will help your language learning.

See: How to discover your learning style and make a learning style profile

See also: Your learning style and language learning

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Learning by hearing and seeing

See also

- Keywords: learning style

Principles about learner attitudes and motivation

OVERVIEW

Principles about learner attitudes and motivation

Introduction

Motivation and attitudes can have as much effect on success in language learning as aptitude or techniques. Understanding your motivation and how you feel about the language, the learning situation, and the people who speak the language can help you be a more successful language learner.

In this module group

Here are the modules on principles about learner attitudes and motivation:

- Motivation affects the time spent learning a language
- Learner attitudes affect motivation
- If you expect to succeed, you will be more likely to succeed
- If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged
- Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning
- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning
- Too much correction or criticism can inhibit your learning

- The more positive you feel about the speakers of a language, the more motivation you will have to learn it
- If you want to communicate with speakers of a language, you will be more motivated to learn it
- If you need to use a language, you will be more motivated to learn it

See also

- Keywords: attitudes, motivation, principles of language learning

Motivation affects the time spent learning a language

Principle

Motivation affects the time spent learning a language.

Discussion

This would seem a fairly obvious principles, but it has implications for success in language learning, because you more time you spend in learning, the more likely you are to progress.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Remind yourself of your motivation

See also

- Keywords: motivation

Learner attitudes affect motivation

Principle

Learner attitudes affect motivation.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Find ways to express your personality

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- The more positive you feel about the speakers of a language, the more motivation you will have to learn it
- If you want to communicate with speakers of a language, you will be more motivated to learn it
- If you need to use a language, you will be more motivated to learn it

See also

- Keywords: attitudes, motivation

If you expect to succeed, you will be more likely to succeed

Principle

If you expect to succeed, you will be more likely to succeed.

Discussion

It is true in any aspect of life that one's self-image often determines either success for failure. It is also true in language learning that if you have a positive self-image of yourself as a language learner you will less likely to get discouraged by setbacks and more likely to persevere.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Set yourself up for small successes

See also

- Keywords: mind-set

If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged

Principle

If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged.

Discussion

This principle, like others, is true in almost any aspect of life, but it also holds true when learning a language.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Be patient with yourself and persevere
- Remind yourself of what you are good at

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Critical mass
- I hate mistakes!

See also

- Keywords: expectations, mind-set

Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning

Principle

Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning.

Discussion

Anxiety is not always bad. Mild anxiety can make you more alert and may, in fact, help your performance, as on a test, or when mild stage fright actually helps an actor's performance. But too much anxiety can make you freeze up and not be able to take in information or remember what you know.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks
- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot

See also

- Keywords: anxiety

Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

Principle

Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking
- Set yourself up for small successes
- Learn to take risks wisely
- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them
- Learn to laugh at your mistakes

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- I feel stupid
- I hate mistakes!

See also

- Keywords: mistakes

Too much correction or criticism can inhibit your learning

Principle

Too much correction or criticism can inhibit your learning.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Try to say that with a swollen tongue!
- She doesn't understand
- There's always somebody better than you

See also

- Keywords: corrections, criticism

The more positive you feel about the speakers of a language, the more motivation you will have to learn it

Principle

The more positive you feel about the speakers of a language, the more motivation you will have to learn it.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Find nonthreatening people to talk with
- Consciously remind yourself of what you like about the culture, the people, the language

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Learner attitudes affect motivation

See also

- Keywords: attitudes, social distance

If you want to communicate with speakers of a language, you will be more motivated to learn it

Principle

If you want to communicate with speakers of a language, you will be more motivated to learn it.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Find ways to explore your interests using the language

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Learner attitudes affect motivation

See also

- Keywords: social distance, speech community

If you need to use a language, you will be more motivated to learn it

Principle

If you need to use a language, you will be more motivated to learn it.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Learner attitudes affect motivation

See also

- Keywords: Needs analysis

Principles about language learning situations

OVERVIEW

Principles about language learning situations

Introduction

The situation in which you learn a language can have a great effect on your success. Some situations are really helpful, and others more challenging. Understanding what makes one

language learning situation ideal and another more difficult can help you better understand the challenge you face.

In this module group

Here are the modules on principles about language learning situations:

- People learn better if their learning is encouraged by speakers of the language
- People need to experience language used in context
- If speakers of two languages really want to communicate, they can do a lot with a little
- People have expectations about who speaks which language
- Communication tends to take the easiest path
- People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language
- People often modify their speech when speaking to foreigners
- In traditional cultures there may be only one right way to do something
- It may be culturally inappropriate to be too direct in what you say
- Every culture has taboo topics

See also

- Keywords: principles of language learning

People learn better if their learning is encouraged by speakers of the language

Principle

People learn better if their learning is encouraged by speakers of the language.

Discussion

Most people are pleased that you want to learn their language, but this is not always the case. For some ethnic groups their language is what identifies them as a people, and they may resent foreigners trying to learn the language that defines them. Other people may be so interested in learning your language that they will resist speaking their language to you. Or they may be proud that they speak your language and want to show off. Nevertheless, you will most often find that people are pleased that you want to learn their language, because it is a validation of them and your interest in them.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Where there's a will, there's a way
- Dinner talk

See also

- Keywords: encouragement, motivation, native speakers

People need to experience language used in context

Principle

People need to experience language used in context.

Discussion

Language is a social activity, and in order to understand how linguistic forms are actually used in communication, we need to experience them in social contexts.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Learning by hearing and seeing
- Dinner talk
- Completely surrounded



See also

- Keywords: context

If speakers of two languages really want to communicate, they can do a lot with a little

Principle

If speakers of two languages really want to communicate, they can do a lot with a little.

Discussion

Communication between two people involves the negotiation of meaning. That is, one person has a communication purpose and says something, and the other needs to infer what the speakers' purpose was. If the hearer does not understand, she needs to indicate that, and the speaker needs to try to find another way to make the meaning clear. When speakers share relatively little ability in a common language, they need to really want to communicate, in order to persevere.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The ferry to Finland
- Where there's a will, there's a way
- Brussels lace

See also

- Keywords: communication strategies, perseverance, resourcefulness

People have expectations about who speaks which language

Principle

People have expectations about who speaks which language.

Discussion

Language is very much associated with a person's identity, and people will expect you to speak a certain language and not another, because of who you are. English speakers tend not to be surprised if people from other countries speak English, because so many people learn English as a second language. In fact, we tend to assume that people will speak English. But speakers of a minority language may be astonished, or even threatened at the idea that outsiders want to learn their language.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Which language should I learn first?
- Language of choice (the only choice): Tzeltal
- Your tongue doesn't match your face!
- Monolingual—like it or not!
- Graduation day
- Ndjuka only, please!
- He can't understand, anyway!
- Expectations

See also

- Keywords: expectations

Communication tends to take the easiest path

Principle

Communication tends to take the easiest path.

Discussion

If people share two languages, they will tend to speak the language that makes communication the easiest for both of them. This means that if you are learning a language and try to speak it to a person who speaks your language well, he or she may try to switch to your language to make communication easier. You sometimes have to persevere to get people to speak their language with you.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Maria la magnifica
- She doesn't understand
- Graduation day

See also

- Keywords: perseverance

People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language

Principle

People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language.

Discussion

This principle is particularly true if you speak a language of wider communication, like English or French. The people you want to practice your language ability with want to practice theirs.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Establish reciprocal relationships
- Make friends with some monolingual speakers

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Expectations
- Trading languages

See also

- Keywords: interacting with people, settings for language learning

People often modify their speech when speaking to foreigners

Principle

People often modify their speech when speaking to foreigners.

Discussion

People automatically make accommodations to foreigners and children. They tend to

- use easier words
- speak more slowly and distinctly, and
- restate what they are saying if they sense you do not understand them.

This can be a big help to language learners, but there can also be potential pitfalls, if the people distort the language in their attempts to communicate with you. This is the way pidginized forms of a language develop.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- No baby talk, please!

In traditional cultures there may be only one right way to do something

Principle

In traditional cultures there may be only one right way to do something.

Discussion

In Western cultures, creativity and innovation are highly valued, but this is not the case in all cultures. You may really shock people if you do not learn the right way to do things.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- What's wrong with our baskets?

See also

- Keywords: culture learning

It may be culturally inappropriate to be too direct in what you say

Principle

It may be culturally inappropriate to be too direct in what you say.

Discussion

Every culture has some subjects that are somewhat delicate to broach because they

- ask a favor
- incur obligation
- risk a relationship, or
- impose on someone else.

Some examples in American culture might be

- asking for a loan
- firing someone, or
- breaking off a romantic relationship.

Some other cultures are much less direct than American culture and a few are even more direct.

One of the challenges in learning another culture is learning how to understand an indirect speech act. You have to have a lot of cultural knowledge before you can interpret it correctly.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately
- Listen to people talking to each other in their language

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- What are you really trying to say?

See also

- Keywords: culture learning, speech acts

Every culture has taboo topics

Principle

Every culture has taboo topics.

Discussion

What is appropriate to talk about with whom? That is one of the things you have to learn as a language learner. Some cultures have very strict taboos about who can even speak to certain people. For instance, in some villages in Papua New Guinea, men are forbidden to speak to their mothers-in-law. Or at least, there may be taboos against using their names.

Even in Western societies we consider some subjects appropriate for polite company and others not. Most Western women would be offended if asked, by a man they did not know, how much they weighed or how old they were. Men might be offended by being asked how much money they make. Of course in some contexts, such as a doctor's office, or a mortgage loan application,

these questions would be asked. The thing to find out is where and under what circumstances such topics are discussed.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- The words are right but everything's all wrong

See also

- Keywords: culture learning, taboo

Principles about the language you are learning

OVERVIEW

Principles about the language you are learning

Introduction

Some languages will probably take longer for you to learn well than others would. This partly depends on what other languages you know and partly on the nature of the language itself.

Understanding what makes some languages more challenging to learn for certain people will help you have more realistic expectations about how long it will take you to learn a given language.

In this module group

Here are the modules on principles about the language you are learning:

- The more the language you are learning is like one you already know, the more quickly you will learn it
- Differences between two languages interfere when you try to learn them
- Some features of language are harder to learn than others

See also

- Keywords: principles of language learning

The more the language you are learning is like one you already know, the more quickly you will learn it

Principle

The more the language you are learning is like one you already know, the more quickly you will learn it.

Discussion

There are various ways in which two languages may be similar. They may have vocabulary derived from the same source, as with French and English. Even though French is a Romance language and English is a Germanic language, they both have a lot of vocabulary derived from Latin. In fact, much of the English Latin-based vocabulary was borrowed from French.

Another way languages can be similar is in having similar grammatical features. This most often happens in related languages, such as French and Spanish, but it can also happen in a smaller way in unrelated languages. For example, English basic word order is Subject Verb Object (SVO). Therefore, it should be easier for English speakers to learn another SVO language than it would be to learn an OSV language.

A third way languages can be similar is in having similar sounds.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Languages have a grammatical system

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Critical mass
- Vocabulary building

See also

- Keywords: progress (language learning)

Differences between two languages interfere when you try to learn them

Principle

Differences between two languages interfere when you try to learn them.

Discussion

If you are learning a language with a lot of differences from any other language you know, you may tend to substitute a familiar pattern for the unfamiliar pattern you have not yet mastered. Even in languages that are closely related, this can be a problem. You may be able to quickly learn to understand a language closely related to one you know, but have trouble producing it correctly, because the more familiar language may interfere.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Languages have a grammatical system

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- You'll never say these words wrong again!
- What's interfering?

See also

- Keywords: interference (language)

Some features of language are harder to learn than others

Principle

Some features of language are harder to learn than others.

Discussion

Are some languages intrinsically harder than others? The answer may be yes. Languages with a lot of irregular forms or merged forms seem to take longer even for native speakers to learn than other languages.

One thing we can say with greater certainty is that some features of a language will have more complexity than others and take longer to master. The features depend on the language.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- You'll never say these words wrong again!

See also

- Keywords: difficulty

Principles about language acquisition

OVERVIEW

Principles about language acquisition

Introduction

This section contains some basic principles about the language acquisition process itself, based on recent research and literature. Understanding the language acquisition process will help you choose environments, conditions, techniques, and activities that will aid the process, and to avoid some activities that might be less helpful.

In this module group

Here are the modules on principles about language acquisition:

- Language acquisition is a developmental process
- People learning a language build up their own systems
- You need lots of comprehensible input

- You can improve your sound discrimination, memory, and grammatical sensitivity skills
- You can compensate for deficiencies in some skills
- The sooner you can acquire the grammatical system of a language, the sooner you can use the language creatively
- You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers
- Native speakers often highly value good pronunciation
- Repetition helps things stick
- Producing language that sounds too good can be misleading
- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn
- You cannot rely on memorization alone
- Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency
- Your brain analyzes language whether you know it or not
- Knowing a language is different from knowing about a language
- Knowing about a language may help you learn it
- Body language, gestures, and your face communicate as much as words
- Learners build up an auditory image of what the language sounds like
- Language learners need to learn to understand and produce well-formed discourses
- Predictable scripts aid comprehension
- Language learners seem to hit plateaus
- You need exposure to language in a variety of social settings
- One language may interfere with another
- The mind tends to filter out redundant material
- Productive skills are harder than receptive skills
- Comprehensible output can become comprehensible input
- Knowing the topic helps you interpret what you hear or read
- Linguistic context helps you understand the meaning of words
- Knowledge of a language may lie dormant, but be reactivated
- Multilingual people may associate languages with a particular setting or audience

See also

- Keywords: principles of language learning, second language acquisition theory

Language acquisition is a developmental process

Principle

Acquiring a language is a developmental process.

Discussion

You cannot expect to run before you can walk. Likewise with language acquisition, you cannot expect to be perfectly fluent and accurate and to talk about anything you want right at the beginning. Language acquisition goes through predictable stages on the way to real fluency.

See: The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Accept the fact that you sound like a child, even though you are an adult

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- The ice cream shop

Further principles

Here are some further principles based on this principle:

- Language learners seem to hit plateaus

- People learning a language build up their own systems

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, fluency, stages of language acquisition

People learning a language build up their own systems

Principle

People learning a language build up their own systems.

Discussion

When you are learning a language, you build up your own version of the language in your head. If you are a beginner, your version of the language will not be very much like an educated native speaker. You will not have nearly as many words in your mental lexicon and your grammatical rules will probably not be quite right, because you will probably have substituted some rules from your first language.

Still, as you keep learning the language, you will refine your understanding of it and it should increasingly approach the system of a native speaker of the language. You might not get all the way there, but you can get close.

Basis

Here are the more general principles:

- Language is systematic
- Language acquisition is a developmental process

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- The ice cream shop

See also

- Keywords: interlanguage, transfer

You need lots of comprehensible input

Principle

You need lots of comprehensible input.

Discussion

When you are learning a language you need lots and lots of exposure to messages you can understand. If you cannot understand anything in a message, it is not comprehensible input. For example, you could listen to a short wave radio program in Chinese and unless you knew some Chinese already, it would not be comprehensible input, because you would have no way of understanding the message. If you already studied Chinese for two years, however, you might get lots of comprehensible input from the radio.

Stephen Krashen is the author who emphasized the importance of comprehensible input to language acquisition. He says that your mind will acquire vocabulary and grammatical structures without your consciously trying to learn them, if you have enough comprehensible input.

See: Krashen 1985

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Dinner talk

See also

- Keywords: comprehensible input

Thomson's example of comprehensible input: Chapter 1.3. You can learn the language in the language before you know the language

You can improve your sound discrimination, memory, and grammatical sensitivity skills

### Principle

You can improve your sound discrimination, memory, and grammatical sensitivity skills.

### Discussion

The skills mentioned here are usually thought of as making up language learning aptitude, but they are skills that can be improved by practice. A course in articulatory phonetics will help you learn to discriminate sounds better. Learning about grammar may help your grammatical sensitivity, and there are memory strategies you can learn.

Just as some people have no particular mechanical aptitude, but yet can learn to drive a car, and people without a special musical aptitude can learn to play the piano or sing, you can improve skills that will help you learn a language, if you really want to learn.

See: IPA tutor for practice in discriminating sounds

### See also

- Keywords: aptitude, grammar, memorization, phonology, skill-building, sounds of a language

You can compensate for deficiencies in some skills

### Principle

You can compensate for deficiencies in some skills.

### Discussion

Even if you have trouble with some aspect of a language, you can compensate by using other strategies and skills. Fortunately, there is a lot of redundancy in language, so that often meaning is carried by more than one feature.

### Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Watch out for that tone

### See also

- Keywords: communication strategies

The sooner you can acquire the grammatical system of a language, the sooner you can use the language creatively

### Principle

The sooner you can acquire the grammatical system of a language, the sooner you can use the language creatively.

### Discussion

Acquiring the grammatical system of the language frees you from memorization and allows you to say what you want in the language. Sometimes grammatical systems are complicated, and you acquire one piece at a time, but when you have that piece, you are ahead. People who do not see the patterns have to memorize all the forms, which takes longer and is tedious.

### Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Languages have a grammatical system

### Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Verb charts

### See also

- Keywords: extemporaneous communication

You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers

### Principle

You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers.



### Discussion

In learning a language, you need to have opportunities to try to communicate with native speakers. At the beginning, it will be hard work for both of you. You will struggle to understand what the other person is saying and to find words and structures to express yourself. The native speaker will try to figure out what you mean from what you say. There will be lots of questions and restatements and checking to see if what was communicated was what was intended. But this kind of use of the language is indispensable to learning to express yourself.

### Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Watch people's reactions to what you say

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The more you speak it, the faster you learn it
- Break time
- Completely surrounded

### See also

- Keywords: native speakers, negotiating meaning

Native speakers often highly value good pronunciation

### Principle

Native speakers often highly value good pronunciation.

### Discussion

Although there are many skills that make up language proficiency, it seems that native speakers often highly value good pronunciation. Some populations value it more than others. Although it is difficult for most adults to achieve native-like pronunciation in another language, it is worth making an effort to try.

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- That's not quite how we say it
- I really don't speak Portuguese well!

### See also

- Keywords: native speakers, pronunciation

Repetition helps things stick

### Principle

Repetition helps things stick.

### Discussion

Sometimes we are surprised or disappointed by how many times it may take us to learn something. But if you consider how many times we hear the same words when we are children learning our first language, it should not surprise us that meaningful repetition will help us learn a second language.

### Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Make up games that work like drills

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Department of Redundancy department
- The good of going to church
- Tenth time's a charm

- Etched into our neural circuits

See also

- Keywords: repetition

Producing language that sounds too good can be misleading

Principle

Producing language that sounds too good can be misleading.

Discussion

Although native speakers are often favorably impressed if we speak their language with an authentic-sounding accent, this ability can also have a down side. Native speakers tend to react to people with good pronunciation as though they were native speakers, assuming that they also have sociolinguistic competence and cultural knowledge equivalent to that of a native speaker. This, of course, is rarely the case. Native speakers who are reminded in every sentence that you are a foreigner learning their language may tend to be more forgiving and tolerant of your cultural mistakes.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- While riding on a bus one day
- Getting in trouble with a good accent
- I really don't speak Portuguese well!

See also

- Keywords: pronunciation

The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

Principle

The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn.

Discussion

The key word here is meaningful. It does little good to listen to language you have no hope of understanding. For example, an English-speaker who is a total beginner in learning Chinese, listening to a Chinese broadcast on the radio. There simply is not anything to make that exposure meaningful to the learner at that stage. At a later stage, however, this would be an excellent way to get meaningful exposure.

Implications

Here are some recommendations based on this principle:

- Use media resources
- Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty
- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them
- Reinforce learning with actions
- Listen to other learners talk with native speakers
- Listen to people talking to each other in their language

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The more you speak it, the faster you learn it
- Completely surrounded

See also

- Keywords: meaningful exposure to language

You cannot rely on memorization alone

Principle

You cannot rely on memorization alone

## Discussion

Memorizing sentences or phrases without understanding the meaning of the parts may help you meet immediate communication needs, but constitutes a heavy memory load and makes for limited communication.

## Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Memorize things when you have to

## Further principles

Here is a further principle based on this principle:

- Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency

## See also

- Keywords: memorized routines

Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency

## Principle

Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency.

## Discussion

Many of us use memorized phrases or sentences to meet some of our communication needs at the beginning stage of language acquisition. But memorizing a question, so that it comes out fluently and with a good pronunciation, can lead speakers of the language to believe that you are fluent in the language, when you are not. They then speak to you as though you were a fluent speaker and you may get totally lost.

## Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- You cannot rely on memorization alone

## Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- When you run out of vocabulary
- Which way to the train station?
- Getting in trouble with a good accent

## See also

- Keywords: beginning learners, memorized routines

Your brain analyzes language whether you know it or not

## Principle

Your brain analyzes language whether you know it or not.

## Discussion

When you learn a language, your brain analyzes the language into its component parts and stores them so that they become available for recombination.

## See also

- Keywords: analysis

Knowing a language is different from knowing about a language

## Principle

Knowing a language is different from knowing about a language.

## Discussion

Children who learn to speak their first language know that language. They can, for example, put verbs into the past tense correctly, but they are unable to describe to you the rule for making the past tense in English, until they go to school and learn it. On the other hand, it is possible to learn about a language, as many linguists do, and not know how to speak it.

Knowing about a language may help you learn it

Principle

Knowing about a language may help you learn it.

Discussion

Although knowing about a language is not the same thing as learning it, that knowledge may help to make language you hear or read more comprehensible to you. For example, if you know that in English the suffix -er is often used to indicate the person doing an action, and you know the word suffer, you will be able to make a guess at the meaning of a word like sufferer, even if you have never seen it before.

Implications

Here is a recommendation based on this principle:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Figure it out!
- Learning it, then saying it

See also

- Keywords: analysis

Body language, gestures, and your face communicate as much as words

Principle

Body language, gestures, and your face communicate as much as words.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- When words don't matter

See also

- Keywords: non-verbal communication

Learners build up an auditory image of what the language sounds like

Principle

Learners build up an auditory image of what the language sounds like.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Don't they sound funny?

See also

- Keywords: sounds of a language

Language learners need to learn to understand and produce well-formed discourses

Principle

Language learners need to learn to understand and produce well-formed discourses.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Language is used in discourses

See also

- Keywords: discourse

Predictable scripts aid comprehension

Principle

Predictable scripts aid comprehension.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Family devotions
- Church in Ombessa
- The good of going to church
- Watching the soaps
- Radio surfing
- You still don't know how to get there?
- Turning up the volume

See also

- The Predictable Text techniques
- Keywords: comprehension, predictability, scripts

Language learners seem to hit plateaus

Principle

Language learners seem to hit plateaus.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Language acquisition is a developmental process

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Getting a head start
- The honeymoon's over
- I'm stuck!

You need exposure to language in a variety of social settings

Principle

You need exposure to language in a variety of social settings.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Some things you'll never learn in in school

See also

- Keywords: varieties of speech

One language may interfere with another

Principle

One language may interfere with another.

Discussion

If you already know a second language and are trying to learn your third or fourth or tenth, you may find that you end up substituting words from the more familiar language when you are struggling to speak the new one. Many people report doing this. As Greg Thomson pointed out to me in private communication, in order to speak a new language a person has to suppress all other languages he or she knows. For some of us, it feels as though we have our mother tongue filed in one folder and all the other languages we know in another folder, and the items sometimes get mixed up.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- When you run out of vocabulary
- Speaking in all the wrong languages
- Why does it keep coming out French?
- Now, which language did I just use?
- Where did all my Spanish go?

- What happened to your Spanish?
- I'm so glad you speak Italian
- Yes, English is my mother tongue (tied)

See also

- Keywords: interference (language)

The mind tends to filter out redundant material

Principle

The mind tends to filter out redundant material.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Pablum or the pope?
- Why didn't I ever hear that word before?

Productive skills are harder than receptive skills

Principle

Productive skills are harder than receptive skills, because you have to put in all the little words and morphemes.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Language skills may be productive or receptive

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Pablum or the pope?

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, speaking proficiency, writing proficiency

Comprehensible output can become comprehensible input

Principle

Comprehensible output can become comprehensible input.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Snakes and skinned knees
- Language learning is child's play
- Telling tales

See also

- Keywords: comprehensible input

Knowing the topic helps you interpret what you hear or read

Principle

Knowing the topic helps you interpret what you hear or read.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- One strike, you're out!

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, predictability

Linguistic context helps you understand the meaning of words

Principle

Linguistic context helps you understand the meaning of words.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Using Dutch to learn Dutch

See also

- Keywords: context

Knowledge of a language may lie dormant, but be reactivated

Principle

Knowledge of a language may lie dormant, but be reactivated.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- I'm so glad you speak Italian

Multilingual people may associate languages with a particular setting or audience

Principle

Multilingual people may associate languages with a particular setting or audience.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- On-site memory
- Now, which language did I just use?

See also

- Keywords: code-switching

Guidelines for language learners

OVERVIEW

Guidelines for language learners

Introduction

This section of principles consists of suggestions to language learners as to things they can do. Many of these suggestions are based on general language learning principles and, in that case, the links to those general principles are indicated.

In this module group

Here are the modules on guidelines for language learners:

- OVERVIEW: Be proactive
- OVERVIEW: Help yourself understand
- OVERVIEW: Help yourself remember
- OVERVIEW: Encourage yourself
- OVERVIEW: Interact with people
- OVERVIEW: Find ways to communicate

See also

- Keywords: guidelines, principles of language learning

Be proactive

OVERVIEW

Be proactive

Introduction

Being proactive means taking the initiative and the responsibility for your own learning.

Nobody can learn a language for you, and it's up to you to see that you do what you can to set yourself up for language learning success. The modules in this section give you guidelines for how to be proactive.

In this module group

Here are the modules on being proactive:

- Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition
- Use selective attention to help your accuracy

- Combine formal and informal learning
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning
- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language
- Expand the areas of language you can operate in
- Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn
- Take opportunities to use the language
- Set yourself achievable goals
- Find ways to generate comprehensible input

See also

- Keywords: opportunities to use language

Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition

Principle

Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition.

Discussion

When you are learning a language in the context where it is spoken, you need to pay attention to what is happening around you. Look for events and situations that you can take advantage of to learn more about the language.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- People need to experience language used in context

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The peanut lady
- Snakes and skinned knees
- Tenth time's a charm
- The silver lining

See also

- Keywords: opportunities to use language, resourcefulness, second language acquisition theory

Use selective attention to help your accuracy

Principle

Use selective attention to help your accuracy.

Discussion

When listening to native speakers in a situation where you do not have to reply, you can focus your attention on a particular feature of the language you want to practice or notice. Listening does not have to be passive! You can notice how a particular word or grammatical point is used, and clarify your understanding of that aspect of the language.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Why didn't I ever hear that word before?

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, selective attention

Combine formal and informal learning

Principle

Combine formal and informal learning.



## Discussion

Most adults seem to learn a second language best from a combination of a structured or systematic component to language learning. This can be provided by a language school or structured work with a language resource person, and an informal component, in which there is an opportunity to experience language in unrehearsed, natural settings.

## Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Some things you've just got to memorize
- Have your cake and say it too
- Christmas Eve
- Bits and pieces from Brazil

## See also

- Keywords: formal language learning, informal language learning

Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

## Principle

Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning.

## Discussion

Even if you live in a community where the language you are learning is spoken, you may have to take the initiative in putting yourself into situations where you have to use it. It is possible, in some countries, to hide out and either stick to people who speak your own language, or just isolate yourself. Most people do this at times, when feeling particularly stressed, but if you really want to learn a language you have to try to speak it. Seek out people who are friendly and set yourself up for small successes.

## Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Learning by hearing and seeing
- Take a trip
- Going solo
- Night fishing on Kao Bay
- Nothing better than interaction
- Am I fluent, or are you accommodating me?
- Monolingual—like it or not!
- Buying bread and meat
- How to excel
- Tenth time's a charm
- Involvement is a must
- Trading languages

## Negative examples

Here are some stories that illustrate what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- Take time for soccer
- Moms, maids, and children

## See also

- Keywords: immersion, motivation

Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

## Principle

Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning.

## Discussion

Often as language learners we find ourselves in a situation where there is more than one language we could use to communicate with other people. There may be people who speak our first language or another language we speak better than the one we are learning now. There may well be pressure on us to use the language that makes for easiest communication, but if we really want to learn our new language, we will have to establish the fact that we want to speak it.

Basis  
Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- Communication tends to take the easiest path
- People have expectations about who speaks which language

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Is grunting better than Spanish?
- My Moore grandmother
- Your tongue doesn't match your face!
- Graduation day
- Ndjuka only, please!
- Slowly, and not too surely

See also

- Keywords: motivation

Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

Principle

Be creative in finding ways to practice the language.

Discussion

It can be a lot of fun to think of creative ways to practice the language you are learning. Try having a brainstorming session with a fellow-learner or just by yourself to think of ways to get more practice. Or read some of the stories below to see what other people have done.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The games people play
- What did you say?
- Have your cake and say it too
- Let's go to the zoo!
- Shopping around
- Filling in the bosses' list
- Village piano music
- Trading languages
- A cookie for a word

See also

- Keywords: opportunities to use language

Expand the areas of language you can operate in

Principle

Expand the areas of language you can operate in.

Discussion

After awhile, many language learners tend to get into a rut and to stop learning new vocabulary, because they stick to the most basic and familiar topics and communication situations. If you want to get beyond the basics, be active in seeking out new situations and topics to learn about.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Explaining what they've never seen
- Solving the world's problems
- Let's go to the zoo!
- Project bachhaus
- Treasure hunts
- Break time
- Am I fluent, or are you accommodating me?
- Filling in the bosses' list
- Classifying books
- Throw fire in the bucket

See also

- Keywords: vocabulary

Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn

Principle

Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn.

Discussion

Research about good language learners has shown that they use more language learning strategies than poor language learners and use those strategies more effectively.

See: Language Learning Strategies for more information about types of strategies and how to use them effectively.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- By hook or by crook—getting language however you can
- A thing or two I've learned ...
- Ship ahoy!
- A little of this, a little of that

See also

- Keywords: learning strategies

Take opportunities to use the language

Principle

Take opportunities to use the language.

Discussion

This principle is similar to the one about putting yourself in situations where you need to use the language, but it has a slightly different focus. The idea here is that you actively take the opportunities that present themselves for using the language, instead of letting them pass you by.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Learning by hearing and seeing
- The peanut lady
- Going solo
- Shopping around
- How to excel
- Required visitation
- To talk, or not to talk?
- A cookie for a word

See also

- Keywords: opportunities to use language

Set yourself achievable goals

Principle

Set yourself achievable goals.

Discussion

If you do not set yourself goals, you may not have much direction in your language learning.

If you set yourself small, achievable goals and do succeed in them, then you will be encouraged to continue language learning. On the other hand, if you set overly ambitious goals and do not succeed you may be discouraged, even if your ability in the target language is the same as in the first situation. It is all about perception.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Time flies

See also

- How to set your language learning goals
- Keywords: expectations, goals (proficiency)

Find ways to generate comprehensible input

Principle

Find ways to generate comprehensible input.

Discussion

If you need lots of comprehensible input to learn a new language, how are you going to get it?

One way is to go out and find ways to get people to talk to you or write to you. Sometimes you can do this by using memorized phrases to ask questions. The point is that you may have to be the catalyst in getting comprehensible input from other people.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Write me a letter

See also

- Keywords: comprehensible input

Help yourself understand

OVERVIEW

Help yourself understand

Introduction

There are strategies you can use to help yourself understand what you hear or read in the language you are learning. The modules in this section will give you guidelines for specific things you can do to help yourself to understand better.

In this module group

Here are the modules on helping yourself understand:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Get exposure to different kinds of discourses
- Use media resources
- Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty
- Use cognates, but use them carefully
- Don't always try to understand every word you hear

See also

- Keywords: comprehension

Use analysis to help you understand how the language works

### Principle

Use analysis to help you understand how the language works.

### Discussion

You can analyze various aspects of language to understand it better, from pronunciation to discourse. Although analyzing a language is not the same as being able to understand and speak it, this knowledge can help.

### Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- Language is used interactively in conversation
- People sometimes speak or write in monologues
- Language is systematic
- Knowing about a language may help you learn it

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Hold this mike, and speak clearly
- Verb charts
- Sorting it out by sight
- A little kin goes a long way
- Figure it out!
- Village piano music
- Learning it, then saying it

### See also

- Keywords: analysis

Get exposure to different kinds of discourses

### Principle

Get exposure to different kinds of discourses.

### Discussion

One thing you can do to help yourself understand your new language is to expose yourself to various kinds of discourse, in situations that will help you understand them. It helps to be aware of the kind of discourse you are listening to, and the general structure of that genre.

### Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- People sometimes speak or write in monologues
- Language is used interactively in conversation

### See also

- Keywords: discourse, genre, meaningful exposure to language

Use media resources

### Principle

Use media resources.

### Discussion

Most languages of the world are broadcast on one or more kinds of media, such as newspapers, radio, television, or films. Of course, there are some minority languages where no public media is used, but if media are available, you should take advantage of them, since they can provide comprehensible input for certain stages of learning.

### Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Soap operas
- My first word
- Break time
- Watching the soaps
- Seeing is learning
- Portuguese newspapers

See also

- Keywords: media

Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty

### Principle

Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty.

### Discussion

Reading material of the right level can be a great source of comprehensible input, but trying to read material that is too difficult can be both frustrating and make for some bad habits. Reading material is ideal if you can read it and get the gist of new vocabulary from context, without having to use a dictionary too much. It can be helpful to jot down any new words you do not understand and look them up later. Often you will have made a pretty good guess as to the meaning of new words by the time you finish the section you are reading.

### Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Break time
- Telling tales
- Portuguese newspapers

See also

- Keywords: reading proficiency

Use cognates, but use them carefully

### Principle

Use cognates, but use them carefully.

### Discussion

Cognates are words that are related to words in a language you already know, and whose meaning you can, therefore, guess at. Beware, however, of assuming that you can be sure you will know the meaning of cognate words, since words often change meaning as they develop historically, and may take different paths in different languages. Make your guess, but check it out with native speakers to find out if you are right.

### Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Ship ahoy!
- Semantic change
- Vocabulary building

Negative examples

Here is a story that illustrates what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- Beware of direct translations

See also

- Keywords: cognates

Don't always try to understand every word you hear

Principle

Don't always try to understand every word you hear.

Discussion

This may seem like strange advice. Why shouldn't you try to understand every word you hear?

For one thing, because it may tempt you to translate everything into your own language, but mostly because it will slow you down so much you that may not catch the gist of the whole conversation. If you can just relax and let the language flow over you, you are more likely to catch the general meaning of what you hear.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Ship ahoy!
- The ferry to Finland

See also

- Keywords: comprehension

Help yourself remember

OVERVIEW

Help yourself remember

Introduction

Once you understand what you hear or read in a new language, you need to remember the words and structures so that you will understand the next time you meet them and so you can use those words and structures when you want to speak or write in the language. In this section you will find some guidelines for how to remember words and structures more effectively.

In this module group

Here are the modules on helping yourself remember:

- Apply what you have learned as soon as possible
- Make up games that work like drills
- Memorize things when you have to
- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them
- Reinforce learning with actions

See also

- Keywords: remembering

Apply what you have learned as soon as possible

Principle

Apply what you have learned as soon as possible.

Discussion

The general principle here is that we remember things we have applied personally much more than things external to ourselves. If we can use words and structures in real communication, we make them ours.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Is grunting better than Spanish?

- Department of Redundancy department
- To talk, or not to talk?
- How do you want that cut?

See also

- Keywords: remembering

Make up games that work like drills

Principle

Make up games that work like drills.

Discussion

How can we make repetition fun? By turning it into a game. The idea behind drills is to control the structures we practice and to concentrate on producing the forms accurately. We can do that in a way that is more fun and more communicative by turning drills into games.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Repetition helps things stick

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The games people play
- Sticks and stones
- Word games

See also

- Keywords: drills, games

Memorize things when you have to

Principle

Memorize things when you have to.

Discussion

Memorization can be a help in getting started in language learning, and may also be necessary or helpful in mastering very irregular or complex forms, but it should be used wisely by those of us who find it difficult. Some people have better memories than others, perhaps because they have developed more skill at making memorable associations. Explore some mnemonic techniques to see if they will work for you.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- You cannot rely on memorization alone

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Some things you've just got to memorize

See also

- Keywords: memorization

Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

Principle

Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them.

Discussion

The more senses you can involve in making associations with what you are learning in your new language, the more likely you are to remember things. Visual images can be a great help, since many of us are conditioned by our education to be visual learners. Visual images also provide a context for understanding what we hear.



### Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Put a picture with that word
- A thing or two I've learned ...
- Sorting it out by sight
- Seeing is learning
- Props can come in handy
- Pink and blue, mountains and goats
- Imprinted with a bump

### See also

- Keywords: mental images

Reinforce learning with actions

### Principle

Reinforce learning with actions.

### Discussion

Associating words with actions forms the basis of one well-known language learning technique, the Physical Response technique. In general, the more associations you can make with new material, the more likely you are to remember it. Actions are particularly helpful for tactile learners.

### Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

### Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Playing the fool

### See also

- Keywords: action association

Encourage yourself

## OVERVIEW

Encourage yourself

### Introduction

Your emotions are very important when learning a new language. Negative emotions can erode your motivation, while positive emotions can keep you going. There is also evidence that you are more open to new input when you are relaxed and happy, so learning to encourage yourself is an important factor when learning a new language. The modules in this section give you some guidelines for how to encourage yourself and thereby enhance your language learning.

In this module group

Here are the modules on encouraging yourself:

- Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks
- Believe that you can learn a second language
- Find ways to express your personality
- Accept the fact that you sound like a child, even though you are an adult
- Remind yourself of your motivation
- Find nonthreatening people to talk with

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking
- Set yourself up for small successes
- Learn to take risks wisely
- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them
- Be patient with yourself and persevere
- Learn to laugh at your mistakes
- Watch people's reactions to what you say
- Find ways to explore your interests using the language
- Consciously remind yourself of what you like about the culture, the people, the language
- Remind yourself of what you are good at

See also

- Keywords: encouragement

Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks

Principle

Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks.

Discussion

It is important to get lots of comprehensible input and be engaged in language learning as much as possible. It is also important to get some breaks from time to time so that you do not become exhausted by the hard work of language learning. If you find yourself avoiding the language for long periods of time, you will be in trouble, but short breaks can make you more productive in the end.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Brain pain
- A private place
- An electrifying experience

Believe that you can learn a second language

Principle

Believe that you can learn a second language.

Discussion

If people are wired to learn languages, and if you learned your first language, you must still have the capacity to learn another language, given the right circumstances. Although children have some advantages over adults, many adults have learned multiple languages successfully. If you are motivated and have the right conditions, you can learn.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- People are wired to learn languages

See also

- Keywords: attitudes, motivation

Find ways to express your personality

Principle

Find ways to express your personality.

Discussion

One of the basic functions of language is self-expression. If you can find ways to use your new language to express your own ideas, emotions, interests, and experiences, you will make the language yours and be more likely to want to continue with it.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Learner attitudes affect motivation

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- I've got to be me

See also

- Keywords: ego permeability, persona

Accept the fact that you sound like a child, even though you are an adult

Principle

Accept the fact that you sound like a child, even though you are an adult.

Discussion

One thing that most adult language learners find frustrating is that they have the communicative repertoire of a child, but the communication needs of an adult. They often want to be able to talk about the kinds of abstract or complex subjects they can discuss in their first language, but they can only handle the most concrete, predictable topics in their new language. If you can come to terms with the fact that you have to go through developmental stages in language acquisition, you will find the process less frustrating.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Language acquisition is a developmental process

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The unwanted fountain of youth
- I've got to be me

See also

- Keywords: childlikeness

Remind yourself of your motivation

Principle

Remind yourself of your motivation.

Discussion

When your enthusiasm for language learning starts to wane, it can be helpful to remind yourself of why you decided to learn this new language in the first place. If your motivation is strong enough and important enough to you, personally, your determination to continue will be strengthened.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Motivation affects the time spent learning a language

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Bits and pieces from Brazil
- A little kin goes a long way
- A tit for tat

See also

- Keywords: motivation

Find nonthreatening people to talk with

Principle

Find nonthreatening people to talk with.

Discussion

Some people are more fun to talk to, in any language, than others. And some people are more welcoming, encouraging, and helpful. Those are the kinds of people who will lower your anxiety and increase your motivation to be able to make relationships and communicate in your new language. Look out for them, and spend as much time as you can with them.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- The more positive you feel about the speakers of a language, the more motivation you will have to learn it

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Solving the world's problems
- Maria la magnifica
- Christmas Eve
- Mama Anastasie
- Ewondo kitchens

See also

- Keywords: criticism, interacting with people, mistakes, native speakers

Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot

Principle

Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot.

Discussion

It can be exhausting and intimidating for a language learner to try to speak a second language all the time, and yet it is important to get lots of comprehensible input. If you can participate in some situations where you do not have to talk a lot, but where you can listen to the language being used in authentic communication, you will probably feel less anxiety, although it is still tiring to try to process what you hear. Of course it is important to spend some time actually negotiating meaning with speakers of the language, too.

Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning
- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Playing the fool
- Making dolls
- Maria la magnifica
- Tell us a story!
- War stories
- A day at the park
- Mama Anastasie
- A time to speak, and a time to be silent
- The old folk's home

- Ewondo kitchens

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency

Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking

Principle

Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking.

Discussion

Some people are so afraid of making mistakes that they do not talk at all. This is like being so afraid you will fall off your bicycle that you never get on it. It is sure that you will not fall off your bike that way, but you also will never learn to ride it.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Becoming like a child
- A time to speak, and a time to be silent
- Throw fire in the bucket

Negative examples

Here is a story that illustrates what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- A hint for the shy language learner

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, mistakes

Set yourself up for small successes

Principle

Set yourself up for small successes.

Discussion

If you set achievable goals for yourself, you will set yourself up for success, and each success will encourage you to go further. The trick is to set yourself a series of small, achievable objectives, and to prepare yourself so that you succeed in them.

Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning
- If you expect to succeed, you will be more likely to succeed

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- A circuit for success
- The Snoepwinkel
- A little kin goes a long way
- To market, to market!

See also

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

Learn to take risks wisely

Principle

Learn to take risks wisely.

Discussion

Taking risks wisely is as important in language learning as in other areas of life. What are the risks in making conversation? That you will make mistakes and be misunderstood or laughed at. Nobody really enjoys such an experience, but it bothers some people so much that they are unwilling to speak at all for fear of making a mistake. The trouble with this is that they miss out on conversational opportunities and a lot of comprehensible input.

If you are not a conversational risk-taker, what can you do to encourage yourself to speak more? First of all, you can accept the fact that you cannot learn to speak a language well without making some mistakes and that mistakes can be valuable learning experiences. Try to think of yourself as testing hypotheses and getting data in return. That may help you to be willing to experiment more with language. To minimize your risks, you should probably spend more time listening to people talk before you try to speak.

If you take conversational risks too readily, you may find yourself making lots of mistakes because you just blurt things out without thinking. If you continue to make mistakes without correction, they may start to sound right to you. Here is something you can try to make yourself think twice before taking a conversational risk: play a game with yourself, where you award yourself a point for every guess that turns out to be right and deduct two points for every guess that is wrong. (If you are not a natural risk-taker, weigh the scoring the other way round!) See whether you win or lose the game with yourself.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

See also

- Keywords: accuracy, fossilization, mistakes

Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

Principle

Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them.

Discussion

Many people fear making mistakes in a second language, but if you look at making mistakes as hypothesis-testing, your attitude toward it may change. A scientist looks at a failed experiment as just one more piece of data that will eventually lead him to a correct conclusion. That is the way language learning is. If you accept the inevitability of making mistakes and decide to learn from them, they become less scary.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Pepper and green pepper
- Buying meat
- Yes, we'll do it, but no windows
- Beware of direct translations
- You can't say it that way!
- Becoming like a child
- A time to speak, and a time to be silent
- Your tortilla stinks
- How to excel
- What time do we go home?

Negative examples

Here is a story that illustrates what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- I hate mistakes!

See also

- Keywords: expectations, mistakes

Be patient with yourself and persevere

Principle

Be patient with yourself and persevere.

Discussion

Often we are more patient and forgiving of either people than of ourselves, but harsh self-criticism does little to help our language learning. A kindly attitude toward ourselves and realistic expectations will be much more productive.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Slow start
- There's always somebody better than you
- You'll never say these words wrong again!

See also

- Keywords: mind-set, perseverance

Learn to laugh at your mistakes

Principle

Learn to laugh at your mistakes.

Discussion

Part of being able to enjoy language learning is being able to laugh at our mistakes. Often we are embarrassed at the time, but think of all the stories you will be able to amuse your friends with for the rest of your life!

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Keeping a stiff upper lip
- Was it something I said?
- How to excel
- Living in cupboards
- A tit for tat

See also

- Keywords: mistakes

Watch people's reactions to what you say

Principle

Watch people's reactions to what you say.

Discussion

When you interact with other people and negotiate meaning with them, it is important to be alert to the feedback they give you from their facial expressions, gestures, and posture. This is how to

pick up on whether or not they have understood you, or more importantly, whether or not you might have offended them.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Was it something I said?

See also

- Keywords: mistakes

Find ways to explore your interests using the language

Principle

Find ways to explore your interests using the language.

Discussion

You will be more motivated to use your new language if you can use it to explore areas of interest to you, including hobbies, sports, professional interests, crafts or arts.

- hobbies
- sports
- professional interests
- crafts, or
- arts.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

• If you want to communicate with speakers of a language, you will be more motivated to learn it

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Making dolls
- Counted cross-stitch

Consciously remind yourself of what you like about the culture, the people, the language

Principle

Consciously remind yourself of what you like about the culture, the people, the language.

Discussion

Sometimes, in the midst of culture stress, we can become negative about the people we are learning to communicate with and the language we are learning. And yet in most cultures there are things we can really admire and enjoy. Dwelling consciously on those things is a good way to bolster our motivation.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

• The more positive you feel about the speakers of a language, the more motivation you will have to learn it

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Ewondo kitchens

See also

- Keywords: mind-set, social distance

Remind yourself of what you are good at



## Principle

Remind yourself of what you are good at.

## Discussion

Sometimes, when learning a new language, we need to remind ourselves of all the things we are good at, even if we are not yet very good at speaking this language. Keeping our overall morale high will encourage us to persevere with language learning.

## Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged

## Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Try to say that with a swollen tongue!
- I feel stupid
- There's always somebody better than you

## See also

- Keywords: mind-set

## Interact with people

### OVERVIEW

## Interact with people

### Introduction

Language is primarily a means of communicating with other people and it is essential to interact with people to learn a language well. Here are some guidelines for how you can profitably interact with people to help you learn a new language.

### In this module group

Here are the modules on interacting with people:

- Establish reciprocal relationships
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Listen to other learners talk with native speakers
- Listen to people talking to each other in their language
- Talk with children and listen to parents talking to their children
- Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately
- Try to find a pen pal
- Look for people who have time to talk with you
- Find good language role models
- Listen to people of different regions and social status
- Make friends with some monolingual speakers
- Find people who speak clearly
- Show your interest in the language and culture
- Learn appropriate varieties of the language
- Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends

## See also

- Keywords: community, interacting with people, speech community

## Establish reciprocal relationships

### Principle

Establish reciprocal relationships.

### Discussion

An important part of a real relationship between two people is that both parties get something out of it. You will need a lot of patience and time from speakers of your new language, so look for ways you can help them benefit from the interaction as well.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Have your cake and say it too
- Mama Anastasie
- Counted cross-stitch
- What can you tell me about ...

See also

- Keywords: community

Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Principle

Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language.

Discussion

If you really want to learn a new language well, you will also learn a new culture, because the two are part of each other. The best way to learn a language is to adapt to the cultural context. Resisting it will not get you very far.

Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- Language has cultural meaning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Basketball fiestas and town duty
- Respect: How do you show it?
- The town drunks
- The basket maker
- Being asked to complain
- Soap operas
- Dressing for the occasion
- A new mother
- Let the shoes shine
- Take a trip
- She's not giving up. We may as well help her.
- Buying bread and meat
- How to excel
- Required visitation
- We'll talk to you, but we won't teach you

Negative examples

Here are some stories that illustrate what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- Take time for soccer
- Moms, maids, and children

See also

- Keywords: culture learning, speech community

Participate as fully as possible in the culture

Principle

Participate as fully as possible in the culture.

Discussion

The more you are able to participate in the culture, the more comprehensible input you will get, and the more you will be able to understand what people are talking about.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Language has cultural meaning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Basketball fiestas and town duty
- Respect: How do you show it?
- The basket maker
- Collecting firewood
- Take a trip
- Playing the fool
- Hold this mike, and speak clearly
- Project bachhaus
- Night fishing on Kao Bay
- Nothing better than interaction
- She's not giving up. We may as well help her.
- Buying bread and meat
- What's most important?
- The old folk's home
- When words don't matter
- May I pick Your hair?
- Portuguese newspapers
- Ewondo kitchens

Negative examples

Here are some stories that illustrate what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- Take time for soccer
- Moms, maids, and children

See also

- Keywords: culture learning, participant observation

Listen to other learners talk with native speakers

Principle

Listen to other learners talk with native speakers.

Discussion

You can actively engage in learning by listening to how other other learners interact with native speakers. What is comprehensible input to them can also be comprehensible input for you, if you pay attention.

Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- Language has social meaning
- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Out the window or from the porch

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency

Listen to people talking to each other in their language

Principle

Listen to people talking to each other in their language.

Discussion

It is more difficult to understand people talking to each other in their language than to understand them talking to you. But at the right stage it is a great way to learn another language, because you hear idioms and can pick up on areas of background knowledge you still need to explore. You can also learn rules of interaction for the culture, and the way native speakers do things.

Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- It may be culturally inappropriate to be too direct in what you say
- Language is used interactively in conversation
- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Collecting firewood
- War stories
- There's got to be a word
- Buying bread and meat
- Out the window or from the porch
- Ewondo kitchens

See also

- Keywords: listening proficiency, native speakers, role-models

Talk with children and listen to parents talking to their children

Principle

Talk with children and listen to parents talking to their children.

Discussion

Listening to parents talking to their children is a great way to learn a language for two reasons:

- The parents will often simplify what they say and repeat things more than they would when speaking to adults.
- The parents will overtly teach their children what is important in the culture.

Both of these are helpful to people learning a second language and culture.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Tell us a story!
- Learning from the kids
- Language learning is child's play

See also

- Keywords: childlikeness, listening proficiency, role-models, speaking proficiency

Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately

Principle

Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately.

Discussion

One sure thing about learning another language is that you will make mistakes, but a culture-friend can help you recognize and learn from your mistakes and make amends for them.

Basis

Here are some more general principles that lie behind this one:

- It may be culturally inappropriate to be too direct in what you say
- Language is used interactively in conversation

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The words are right but everything's all wrong
- Master of ceremonies

Negative examples

Here is a story that illustrates what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- You that man!

See also

- Keywords: culture friends (mediating persons), culture learning, role-models

Try to find a pen pal

Principle

Try to find a pen pal.

Discussion

Finding a pen pal with whom to correspond in another language can be very motivating and fun. In the day of electronic mail, it may be possible to find an e-pen pal.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Mail!
- Write me a letter

See also

- Keywords: writing proficiency

Look for people who have time to talk with you

Principle

Look for people who have time to talk with you.

Discussion

In every society some people are busier than others. If you can find people who have time to talk, and who may be lonely, you will have a great source of comprehensible input.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The basket maker
- My Moore grandmother
- War stories
- Nothing better than interaction
- The old folk's home
- Captive audience

See also

- Keywords: interacting with people, role-models

Find good language role models

Principle

Find good language role models.

Discussion

It is important to learn the right varieties of language. There are some things we may want to recognize, but do not want to say.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Learning the wrong thing
- Choose well your friends and teachers

See also

- Keywords: language associates, role-models

Listen to people of different regions and social status

Principle

Listen to people of different regions and social status.

Discussion

It is important to recognize the regional and societal varieties of speech and how people in the society at large react to them.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- Language has social meaning

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Take a trip
- How to excel

See also

- Keywords: dialects, social stratification, varieties of speech

Make friends with some monolingual speakers

Principle

Make friends with some monolingual speakers.

Discussion

If you make some monolingual friends, you will not be tempted to fall back on another language to make communication easier.

Basis

Here is the more general principle that lies behind this one:

- People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language

See also

- Keywords: language associates, monolingual

Find people who speak clearly

Principle

Find people who speak clearly.

Discussion

Every language has some people who mumble and others who speak clearly. Obviously, the latter are easier for language learners to understand at the beginning, although you want to be able to understand everyone, eventually.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- The mush mouth factor

See also

- Keywords: language associates, role-models

Show your interest in the language and culture

### Introduction

People will probably be more interested in getting to know you if you show interest in them and their culture. That is human nature.

### Principle

Show your interest in the language and culture.

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Respect: How do you show it?
- Of bakeries and bread stores

### See also

- Keywords: culture learning, friendships

Learn appropriate varieties of the language

### Principle

Learn appropriate varieties of the language

### Discussion

Although you want to recognize and understand the different regional and social varieties of speech, you want to learn to speak a dialect that is widely acceptable.

### Basis

Here is the more general principle:

- There are variations in language due to regional, status, and stylistic differences

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Learning the wrong thing
- The mush mouth factor

### See also

- Keywords: varieties of speech

Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends

### Principle

Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends.

### Discussion

People will often respond to a plea for help. If you cast yourself in the role of a learner who needs help, you will be more likely to get it and to make friends than if you try to appear self-sufficient.

### Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Of bakeries and bread stores
- A new mother
- Counted cross-stitch
- Live dictionaries
- A helping hand

### See also

- Keywords: childlikeness, friendships

Find ways to communicate

## OVERVIEW

Find ways to communicate

### Introduction

One of the problems all language learners runs up against is finding ways to communicate when you don't yet know the words and structures you need to say exactly what you want to say. The modules in this section give you guidelines for how to find ways to communicate, using what you do know.

In this module group

Here are the modules on finding ways to communicate:

- Use all your resources to communicate
- Coin words to help you communicate, but be careful
- Rehearse what you want to say ahead of time
- If you do not know a word, circumlocute
- Learn responses to keep the conversation going
- Use memorized phrases at the beginning to get people to talk to you
- Check out the meaning of words, before you add them to your active vocabulary
- Give and get feedback to check comprehension

See also

- Keywords: communication strategies, communicative competence, perseverance

Use all your resources to communicate

Principle

Use all your resources to communicate.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- The ferry to Finland
- Hunting for ribbon
- Where there's a will, there's a way
- Benjamin
- Throw fire in the bucket
- Brussels lace

See also

- Keywords: resourcefulness

Coin words to help you communicate, but be careful

Principle

Coin new words to help you communication, but be careful.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- You can't say it that way!

Rehearse what you want to say ahead of time

Principle

Rehearse what you want to say ahead of time.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- The Snoepwinkel

See also

- Keywords: rehearsal strategy

If you do not know a word, circumlocute

Principle

If you do not know a word, circumlocute.

Examples



Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- Christmas Eve
- Hunting for ribbon
- Towels with complications
- Throw fire in the bucket

See also

- Keywords: circumlocution

Learn responses to keep the conversation going

Principle

Learn responses to keep the conversation going.

Examples

Here are some stories that illustrate this principle:

- While riding on a bus one day
- I'm so glad you speak Italian

See also

- Keywords: communicative functions, conversation

Use memorized phrases at the beginning to get people to talk to you

Principle

Use memorized phrases at the beginning to get people to talk to you.

Discussion

Memorizing phrases when you don't speak the language very well can have both positive and negative effects. It does get people talking to you, but you may not understand what they say!

In general it is good to use two kinds of memorized phrases at the beginning:

- survival phrases

These are phrases you can use to meet your most immediate social and survival needs.

Examples: greetings, asking prices, or asking for help.

- tool phrases

These are phrases you can use to learn more about the language.

Examples: What is that called? What is he doing? What kinds of X are there?

See: The Memorized Routines techniques for more details on how to elicit and learn such phrases

See also

- Keywords: conversation, memorized routines

Check out the meaning of words, before you add them to your active vocabulary

Principle

Check out the meaning of words, before you add them to your active vocabulary.

Negative examples

Here are some stories that illustrate what can happen if this principle is not followed:

- Learning the wrong thing
- Was it something I said?

See also

- Keywords: culture friends (mediating persons), vocabulary

Give and get feedback to check comprehension

Principle

Give and get feedback to check comprehension.

Examples

Here is a story that illustrates this principle:

- Run that by me again?

See also

- Keywords: comprehension, negotiating meaning

## Language Learning Strategies

by Carol J. Orwig

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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

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

Comprehension 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 embarazada 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!

Embarasada means "pregnant". (Aren't you embarrassed?)

See also

- Keywords: transfer

#### Memory strategies

#### 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

### Production strategies

#### 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

Communication strategies

## 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 Stories

by International Language Learning Department (compiler)

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### Summary

This book contains a collection of true-life anecdotes told by a number of language learners. Each story illustrates one or more important language learning principle and is linked to the relevant principle in the Language Learning Principles book. These stories are an interesting way to learn about second language acquisition from other people's experiences.

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Welcome to the Language Learning story database

Introduction

This database is comprised of stories from the language learning experiences of various members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. You will find that some of these stories will have you laughing, and some of them will cause you to (almost) shed an empathetic tear. Hopefully you will find that by reading of the experiences of others, you are encouraged and challenged to take up the task of language learning with zeal, giving it your best effort.

Along with the stories themselves, you will find principles the stories illustrate and some comments by the editors. These are given for your help, so that you can not only enjoy the story, but also see what helpful insights it gives you into the task of learning the language.

As you read the stories, keep in mind that various methods were used to record them: some were audio recorded at "story parties," then later transcribed, and edited. Some were given in an "interview" type format, recorded, transcribed, and edited. Others were keyboarded by the author, and later edited. All stories have been approved by the author after the original editing process.

Other editors included: Karen Chadbourne Daley, June Mathias, Erin Lunsford, Barbara Colborn, and Carol Orwig. I inherited the project, and have enjoyed making it what I hope is a very helpful and enjoyable tool, if even a brief diversion, in the language learning process.

Sandra G. Wimbish

In this module group

Stories by Judi Lynn Anderson

OVERVIEW

Stories by Judi Lynn Anderson

by Judi Lynn Anderson

In this module group

Here are some stories by Judi Lynn Anderson:

- Have your cake and say it too
- Collecting firewood
- The games people play

Have your cake and say it too

by Judi Lynn Anderson

One of the things that helped us the most in our initial language learning was to work with the people, not at a desk, but engaged in some activity together.

The Chinantec women had been given gifts from the government of staples like butter, milk, and cheese, and they wanted to know what to do with them. We often invited them over to our house to make cake or other baked goods. This gave us a hands-on opportunity to be working with them, and having to talk with them. So we made lots of cake.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Establish reciprocal relationships
- Combine formal and informal learning
- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

Collecting firewood

by Judi Lynn Anderson

In the late afternoon we often went with the Chinantec women to get firewood. This introduced another situation in which we learned a lot about wood and the animals and trees that we walked

by. It also provided us with the opportunity to be with the ladies and to hear natural language, and to practice the language we were learning.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Listen to people talking to each other in their language

The games people play

by Judi Lynn Anderson

Sitting at a table all the time with a language helper can be awkward. We found that certain games were very good for language learning—skill games that didn't involve reading. We played Blockhead, Pickup Sticks, and Memory.

Blockhead was really good, because you have shape and color vocabulary, and all kinds of spatial relationships—'on top of', 'beside', 'falling down', 'it's tipping'. But you hear the same words over and over again, so it's a stable thing.

Pickup Sticks is the same. You have colors, spatial relations, and movement.

For Memory, we used cards with pictures of things indigenous to the area. Each player had to name the object as they turned over the card.

These three games are useful for initial language learning because they involve many repetitions of few words. Also, Chinantec Indians are good at eye-hand coordination, which the first two games require.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language
- Make up games that work like drills

Stories by Katharine Barnwell

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Katharine Barnwell

by Katharine Barnwell

In this module group

Here are some stories by Katharine Barnwell:

- Props can come in handy
- Getting in trouble with a good accent
- Word games
- The honeymoon's over
- Semantic change
- Some things you'll never learn in in school
- A helping hand
- Captive audience
- Slow start
- Insisting on the hard way out
- Street talk

Props can come in handy

by Katharine Barnwell

While learning the Mbembe language in Nigeria we found that visual props were very helpful aids in gaining fluency. Here are a few examples:

Having books helped a great deal. We had one book in particular which had many stories with pictures in it. The children would tell us what happened in the pictures, and we could really get the sequences of sentences in this way.

The people also loved photos of our families. By talking with them about our families we were able to collect many kinship terms. And I think it helped them to see us as real people, with families like them.

Flannelgraphs were very helpful for telling stories. Once the people knew the stories they would tell them, using the flannelgraphs, and soon were telling the story much better than we had told it. By listening to them, we learned to tell stories better.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

Getting in trouble with a good accent

by Katharine Barnwell

While learning the Mbembe language in Nigeria, something we found helpful was recording traditional stories and other texts for language analysis. By the time we had written a text down, very slowly and painfully, we had begun to follow it and learn it. We would listen to a story again and again until we knew it almost by heart and then tell it to the people, which they loved. That was a good experience, especially for learning proper intonation. But people sometimes got the wrong impression. They thought we could speak fluently, and were disappointed when they found we couldn't!

Also, in the early stages of learning the language we learned the greetings well. That was fine, but people thought that because we could greet, we would also be able to keep on talking to them! They soon learned our limitations, however. And actually, they were very patient with us and loved to keep teaching us new things.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency
- Producing language that sounds too good can be misleading

Word games

by Katharine Barnwell

The Mbembe language of Nigeria is a noun class language. This means that prefixes on the verb and other parts of speech change depending on the class of the noun in subject position. Mbembe has about 15 different classes (some other languages have many more). So when we were learning Mbembe, we needed to practice figuring out the changes in sentences which occurred every time the subject changed, and making the changes quickly and naturally. We created a game by putting a different noun in front of a constant predicate. Mbembe speakers realized the sentence changed, and were quite impressed and excited by this feature of their language—which they had used automatically all their lives but never thought about before. Once the people caught on to what we were trying to do, they had great fun in helping us, even coming up with words belonging to noun classes we hadn't had before.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Make up games that work like drills

The honeymoon's over

by Katharine Barnwell

I think the worst time for learning a language is after about 2 or 3 months of working with it. In the beginning you are excited, it's interesting, and people are patient with you because it's new. By the end of two or three months, you've learned a little bit, so the people begin to expect more from you than you are able to give. You get frustrated because you can't say more than a limited amount. After a little while, though, you are over the hump and have acquired enough of the language to really understand what is going on. It's the in-between stage that is probably the hardest.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Language learners seem to hit plateaus

#### Semantic change

by Katharine Barnwell

It's dangerous to assume that you know the meanings of words. Often, when a word crosses a language barrier it takes on a whole new meaning. For example, we were somewhat surprised to discover that we were described as "fadders" by the Mbembe people. That was because the only white people to precede us were Catholic priests, who were referred to as "fadders" (fathers). So when we came along, we were "fadders," too.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Use cognates, but use them carefully

#### Some things you'll never learn in in school

by Katharine Barnwell

We found that when the Mbembe people got into a situation where they had strong feelings, a whole new and different genre of speech came out. I remember one instance when there was a cholera epidemic, and a number of people died. One mother had a two-year-old baby who caught cholera. There was a hospital about 10 miles away, so we took the mother and her baby in our car and headed there for help. Sadly, the baby died on the way. The mother spontaneously responded with an outflow of what could only be described as poetry. It was a very emotional moment from which I gained insight into whole new areas of expression, figurative and rhythmic language.

You just have to be alert for different types of situations where you will hear these things—you can never set them up; they just have to happen. You have to be spending time with people and relating to them, sharing with them in joys and in sorrows.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- You need exposure to language in a variety of social settings

#### See also

- Keywords: varieties of speech

#### A helping hand

by Katharine Barnwell

I remember once making a friendship because I needed help. I had to get across a river by walking across a tree trunk lying over a deep ravine. I hate heights! The lady I was with could see I was scared. She took me by the hand and walked me across the tree trunk. After that, she really took me under her wing, having decided, I guess, that I was just a human person like herself after all!

I learned that we have to be ready to be helped, and allow others to help us. That's one important way to connect with people and build relationships.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends

## Captive audience

by Katharine Barnwell

With the Mbembe people in Nigeria, one activity we found productive for learning the language was visiting people in prison. When we got to the point of testing Bible translation, it was one of the best situations we could find. The prisoners had assigned work during the mornings, but in the late afternoons and evenings they usually sat around with nothing to do. They were very pleased to help us, and we were allowed to work with them and have them help us check what we had translated. And it was encouraging to see people becoming really interested in the Scriptures, responding to what they heard and read, even while the translation was still at the testing stage.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Look for people who have time to talk with you

## Slow start

by Katharine Barnwell

I was privileged to visit one of the SIL teams working with the Australian Aborigines. They told me how they had to go very slowly in the early stages of being with the people. For example, they could not go to people's homes at first; that would have been going beyond what was acceptable and would have caused offense. It was four years before they got to the point where they felt they could visit somebody else's house.

You have to be ready to adapt to the culture and environment you enter. It often requires a tremendous amount of patience to wait, and to look for the proper time to take the initiative. It takes a great deal of sensitivity to the culture, the people, and the social interactions that take place. You have to figure out appropriate ways to get to know people and establish relationships for your particular situation.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Be patient with yourself and persevere

## Insisting on the hard way out

by Katharine Barnwell

It is important to get yourself into situations where you have the opportunity to speak the language you are trying to learn, and where you can hear the language being spoken all around you. You have to establish from the beginning that you really want people to speak to you in the language, and that this is the language you are going to speak. That is hard to do, especially if there is another language in which you can communicate; it is tempting to take the path of least resistance. It might help in the early stages not to reveal that you can speak much of that other language.

Once you become more fluent, the effort pays off. Other people feel much more at home speaking their own language and will talk more freely if you are on their home ground, as it were. You want to put yourself in the position where the mother tongue speakers are advantaged and you are disadvantaged, rather than the other way around.

## Street talk

by Katharine Barnwell



I learned much of my French while working in a summer camp with kids who came from poor areas in Paris, and by reading classical French literature in a university course. Later when I was in West Africa, I found myself in situations where I had to try to give translation consultant help in French. At first, I was tongue-tied because I didn't know the words for that new situation and environment. I had to learn a whole different set of French vocabulary for this new context. It's important to make sure you get into lots of different situations when learning a language, because different situations bring up whole new demands on the vocabulary you use and give you the opportunity to expand your inventory.

Stories by Elaine Beekman

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Elaine Beekman

by Elaine Beekman

In this module group

Here are some stories by Elaine Beekman:

- When you run out of vocabulary
- Out the window or from the porch
- Yes, we'll do it, but no windows
- A convert to the culture

When you run out of vocabulary

by Elaine Beekman

When we went to Europe on our way to Africa, each of us took a different phrase book, and was responsible for the country in which that language was spoken. I was responsible for France. I learned all the things we would need to say as we got off the plane, found a place to stay, and figured out what to do with the baggage. I had practiced enough that it came out pretty well. However, soon I ran out of things to say and didn't understand anymore. The man I was speaking to became very angry with me. He said, "You talk perfect French—now don't talk to me in Spanish!" I had converted to speaking Spanish when I ran out of French!

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another
- Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency

Out the window or from the porch

by Elaine Beekman

When we lived in Mexico, my husband John worked more extensively with the Chol people than I, but he worked within earshot of our home, and I always listened to the conversations. If I did not understand something, I wrote it down and asked John about it later that day. Listening was a good way to learn the language, although I did not get to speak it very much.

The people came to our house daily for some kind of medical care. I learned all kinds of words about heads, stomachs, feet, and aching backs. However, it was still hard to carry on a conversation because the words I learned were so rigid.

We really needed to hear how the people talked to each other, which wasn't always easy, when they knew we were there. But at night they frequently slept on our screened-in porch. We heard them talking into the night—it was the best way to really hear all their idiomatic expressions, though we could not understand everything. It always gave us something to ask about, and that was a takeoff point for learning.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Listen to people talking to each other in their language
- Listen to other learners talk with native speakers

Yes, we'll do it, but no windows

by Elaine Beekman

When we went out to Chol country, my husband John talked with some of the local men about building a house. We could not speak any Chol yet, only Spanish, and the men knew only a few words in Spanish. John decided to draw a picture of the house we wanted to have built. He said to them, "This is the puerta," which they understood. Then he pointed to a window using the Spanish word ventana and they responded jinquyi ("yes, it is"). So John requested six jinquyis to be cut into the house. He asked for some ventanas, and they said OK.

Later John went out to see the house—no windows! As he talked with the men about the lack of windows, he found out that they had just been agreeing that what he had pointed to was probably a ventana. They'd made no sense of his request for six jinquyis, and windows were unheard of in their homes. He finally found out that ventana meant to them, "Yes, we'll do it!" So he had about six "yes, we'll do it's" in the new house!

The moral of this story is that you can't assume anything.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

A convert to the culture

by Elaine Beekman

I went down to the coast of Mexico with two North American friends of mine. The people of that area were very outgoing and loud, and would yell down the street to each other. One of my friends was very extroverted, and could really project herself into the culture and be like one of the local people. My other friend was so different. She had to really work at it, as she was more introverted. Eventually she succeeded in projecting herself and being accepted into that culture. Interestingly, when she came back into American culture, I noticed that her personality had changed some from her quiet New England style. She still spoke with her New England accent, but had a much more strident way of talking than before.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Some learners take on a different persona when speaking another language

Stories by Karen Chadbourne

OVERVIEW

Stories by Karen Chadbourne

by Karen Chadbourne

In this module group

Here are some stories by Karen Chadbourne:

- Take a trip
- Playing the fool
- A hint for the shy language learner

Take a trip

by Karen Chadbourne

When I lived in the (former) Soviet Union, I traveled by train overnight several times. Each time I did, it was an opportunity to interact with new people and to practice my Russian.

For example, once I went by train from Moscow to Warsaw. Near Brest the gauge of the tracks changed, which provided a conversation topic, without having to think one up. Of course, the

natural things to talk about when you first meet someone are: "Who are you?" "Where do you come from?" "What do you do in life?" "What circumstances brought us to be in the same place at the same time?"

Aside from repeating these same conversational routines, getting out and traveling takes you to new contexts, where the answers will be different from those on your usual beaten path. It exposes you to people with different accents, dialects, socioeconomic backgrounds, and perspectives.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Listen to people of different regions and social status
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

#### Playing the fool

by Karen Chadbourne

Early in my first long-term exposure to another culture, I found that playing games was an easy, productive way to spend time with my new friends. Games are user friendly—they provide a context in which you can make lots of mistakes at low risk of embarrassment or offense, and they are meant to be fun.

Two of my Russian friends taught me a game called "Durak, which means "fool." Playing the game not only gave me exposure to instructions (they had to explain to me how to play the game), but also to number words, turn-taking phrases, and other game protocol expressions. I also had lots of time to listen to conversations between my friends. Their conversations with each other were at normal speed; when they were talking directly to me, they usually spoke a bit slower.

I found that the hands-on dimension of actually doing a game really helped me to retain the associated language long after I stopped playing "the fool."

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Reinforce learning with actions

#### A hint for the shy language learner

by Karen Chadbourne

If anyone is guilty of being afraid to say the wrong thing, especially in a foreign language and culture, it is me. The danger for a person with this sort of shyness is that he may miss opportunities to communicate by postponing saying anything until he knows the "right" or perfectly grammatical thing to say.

It was a turning point when I discovered that the reason my Russian friends would often snicker at me when I participated in a conversation was that I would take so long thinking over my sentence, to get it to come out perfectly, that it often came out long after they had moved on to other topics.

Looking back, it seems to me that I began to get to know people better only after I was willing to take some conversational risks.

My advice to the slow to speak would be: take the leap! Say it now, lest opportunities for deepening your cross-cultural relationships and learning from your mistakes escape you.

#### Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking

Story by Lon Diehl

#### OVERVIEW

Story by Lon Diehl

by Lon Diehl

In this module group

Here is a story by Lon Diehl:

- He can't understand, anyway!

He can't understand, anyway!

by Lon Diehl

People often assume that you don't understand their language when you are a foreigner. When we lived in an Asian country in 1970–1971, I was in an elevator, along with two local ladies. They looked at each other, not realizing that I spoke the local language fairly well. One said, "Look at that foreigner! He's dressed so politely." The other replied, "Yeah, but he's so ugly!" I didn't let on that I understood.

Another example of people assuming that you don't understand, sometimes in surprising ways, was when I was in a hardware store in the capital city. I asked the clerk in her language how much a particular object cost. She held it high and yelled in the same language to someone in the back of the store, "Hey! How much should we cheat the foreigner for this one right here?" She said this in the very same dialect of the very same language in which I had asked her the price!

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- People have expectations about who speaks which language

Stories by Louise Diehl

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Louise Diehl

by Louise Diehl

In this module group

Here are some stories by Louise Diehl:

- Where are you going?
- Dressing for the occasion
- A circuit for success
- A day at the park

Where are you going?

by Louise Diehl

When we lived in a certain Asian country, I never had any formal training in cross-cultural communication, or in how people exchanged greetings. As I walked down the road, I noticed people would say to me, "Where are you going?" I would try to tell them as best as I could, but I began to feel annoyed with it. I thought, "They sure are nosy! It's none of their business where I'm going." Finally, after a while, I learned that this was a standard greeting, and you could respond to it with anything you wanted. This is not a request for information but a greeting, and a casual response is all that's needed to round out the exchange.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Language has functional meaning

Dressing for the occasion

by Louise Diehl

One thing I found helpful while learning an Asian language was dressing much like the local people. We attended a minority school with many people from the northern part of the country. They can be Caucasian in their looks; many have larger noses, and their eyes are not like those of many Asians. One of my proudest moments was when I was in a little store near our minority school, and someone asked me what language group I came from in the country we were in. She probably thought I was from one of the northern groups.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

A circuit for success

by Louise Diehl

I found that riding buses was a great way to practice language learning, because I was asked fairly standard questions on short rides. I could perfect the answers, so I got a feeling of competence from answering the same questions over and over again.

Another thing I did was go in and out of many different stores. I went from shop to shop or from person to person and asked or was asked the same kinds of questions. I was able to get rather fluent in that. When I wanted to take the initiative, I asked questions that I already knew the answers to, or where the answer didn't matter. I pointed at something and asked what it was. Though it didn't matter what the answer was or if I could understand it, it got me talking to the people. I found they really appreciated that.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Set yourself up for small successes

A day at the park

by Louise Diehl

After I had been studying the local language for a while, I heard of a kindergarten class that was going on a field trip. I volunteered to go along with them. It was a good language learning experience for me because kids don't use that much vocabulary, and they usually speak rather clearly. We went out to a park where they played a singing and action game. I just joined in the activities of the day, which was great fun for me. Because there were a lot of kids running around screaming, I wasn't expected to say a whole lot. I could jump in when I felt like I could say something, and play with the children the rest of the time. I remember that, and also songs that I've learned. Those are things that help to link me with words.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot

Stories by Steve Echerd

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Steve Echerd

by Stephen M. Echerd

In this module group

Here are some stories by Steve Echerd:

- Dinner talk
- How do you want that cut?
- Turning up the volume
- Etched into our neural circuits
- Watching the soaps

- To talk, or not to talk?
- Let the shoes shine
- Treasure hunts
- Required visitation
- Now I can speak to you
- Language of choice (the only choice): Tzeltal
- The more you speak it, the faster you learn it
- What's wrong with our baskets?
- Village piano music
- Completely surrounded

#### Dinner talk

by Steve Echerd

When I was attending language school in Peru, we stayed with a local couple. The wife was an excellent cook who took great delight in trying to fatten me up. Every meal with them was an event. We had at least a two-course meal each time, and sometimes four-course meals on Sunday.

My hosts really liked to sit around the dinner table and talk, even when I was at the "baby talk" stage. The husband was retired and spent his days in downtown Lima, going from place to place, visiting his friends in the coffeehouses, then coming home for meals. He was very inquisitive and would ask us what we thought about certain things, or if we had read this or that in the news that day. He asked about the United States and political situations. I tried to explain these things in simple Spanish, and it forced me to use the language beyond only the basic greetings and usage.

It helped greatly to be in a situation where we were immersed in the language on a consistent basis, and had people who wanted to talk to us.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- People learn better if their learning is encouraged by speakers of the language
- People need to experience language used in context
- You need lots of comprehensible input

How do you want that cut?

by Steve Echerd

During language school in Lima, I really tried to make use of the textbook. There was a set of dialogues in each chapter where the focus was on a different topic—for example, the post office. I would learn the vocabulary about the post office and then go down to the post office and wander around, or go downtown and ask directions to the post office.

There was one unit in the book about a guy who was getting a haircut. So I went to the barbershop and used the same dialogue that was in the book. When the barber asked me how I wanted my hair cut, all I knew how to tell him was what the dialogue had said. So I got that haircut, which wasn't too bad, as Latin American barbers are artists and want to try to make you look good anyway!

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Apply what you have learned as soon as possible

Turning up the volume

by Steve Echerd

When I was learning Spanish, I found that it often helped to have familiar and predictable content and scripts, especially at a certain stage of language learning. I spent a lot of time going to bookstores and found such things as Perry Mason, Agatha Christie, and comic books in Spanish. It was easier to read things that had been translated from English to Spanish, because I knew the meaning already. For example, it was easier to read Agatha Christie than to read the daily newspaper. It was easier to understand dialogue at church than when we were involved in gatherings of the family we stayed with.

Going to church was an important part of my week, because it felt like every week the "volume" got turned up another notch. I understood more and more of what was being said and was able to "enter in" more to what was going on.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Predictable scripts aid comprehension

Etched into our neural circuits

by Steve Echerd

One thing Pam and I did when we got back to the United States to solidify what we knew in Spanish was to memorize Scripture from a modern Spanish translation. For the nine months that we were in the US we worked on the 2nd chapter of Acts. We would say verses back and forth to each other in the car as we were driving back and forth to the university. The repetition helped us to say things fluently and helped to get patterns of vocabulary and grammar structures etched into our memory so we could accurately produce the sounds.

When we were in Guatemala and later Honduras, I was able to use patterns from verses we had memorized in what I was trying to say.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Repetition helps things stick

Watching the soaps

by Steve Echerd

A conscious strategy I have recommended to people when coaching them in Spanish has been to make video tapes of soap operas or other TV shows, especially dramas. The actors speak standard Spanish and enunciate rather clearly. When you look at the tape, later, you can stop and look up a word in the dictionary, or rewind the tape and review.

You can learn a lot of standard cultural information from watching these shows, such as what people do when someone joins them at a table in a restaurant, how they order a meal, answer the telephone, and end a conversation. I think I would do this frequently in a new language learning situation, and maybe even transcribe the dialogue. It depends on how much time you want to invest. This is an example of controlling the situation so that you already know the meaning of what is happening.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use media resources
- Predictable scripts aid comprehension

To talk, or not to talk?

by Steve Echerd

I did not usually have good conversations with people when using public transportation. However, I realized that since I was in this situation several times a day, I had opportunities available to me to speak the language if I would just make use of them.

Other times I would be standing in line, waiting for something. It would occur to me, "Okay, Steve, you have a choice. You can either stand here and be in your own little world, or you can talk to the person in front or in back of you." I didn't always choose to practice, but whenever I did I was always rewarded. People responded in nice, warm conversation.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Apply what you have learned as soon as possible
- Take opportunities to use the language

Let the shoes shine

by Steve Echerd

There was a certain man in downtown Guatemala who gave really good shoe shines. Since I enjoyed having my shoes shined, I always looked for him. We talked a lot and I learned all about his family and other things. We became friends, and I visited him for several years. Once he told me he was having financial problems. I wanted to help him, but didn't want to ruin our friendship by giving or loaning him money. Instead, I bought from him \$25.00 worth of shoe shines. I made up a set of coupons for the shoe shines, and had him sign each one. I put a map on the back of exactly where to find him downtown (he was always in the same place) and gave them to friends for Christmas. Once my friends finished using their free shoe shines with him, they all decided to give him their business. He really expanded his gringo clientele in this way.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Treasure hunts

by Steve Echerd

I went to a Spanish language school in Peru for a four-month course. Pam and I really wanted to get out to our assignment after this, but SIL administration wanted us to stay in Lima and do Spanish assimilation for at least four more months. We continued to live with the Peruvian couple we had been staying with, and SIL gave me a job in the Lima office. They sent me out to run errands to stores or the airport, and later moved me to the Buyer's office. I had a motorbike, so I went out into the city and learned additional vocabulary, as well as more about Lima. Every day was like a treasure hunt, because I had to use the telephone book, ask questions, and guess the general category of the items I was looking for.

It took me days to find rubber cement in Lima. First I had to figure out what to call it. After five days I finally found it at a shoe repair shop. I had to find out what questions I needed to ask in order to get the information I wanted.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in

Required visitation

by Steve Echerd

When we were in the stage of our cross-cultural living training where we went to live in a rural village, I spent a lot of time with the local men. I went with them when they took their pigs to market, and we got to talk to a lot of Tzeltal people.



We'd had very little training in language learning back then in the early 1970s. I think my persistence in language learning came from a desire to overcome my inclination toward being an introvert. I think with my personality there is a little switch inside my head, and I'm much more energized by people in the village type of setting. It was true with the Payas when we later went to Honduras, and it was true with the Tzeltals. I would go out and look for interactions with people.

I had a very strong sense of, "Okay, we're here to learn this language. And as soon as we get done with our breakfast chores, we need to be out there to talk to people." I wanted to be a good steward of my work time, and also I was curious.

Pam and I became famous through the whole valley, and people would come on Sunday afternoons to visit, and to see these crazy gringos that people had been talking about. People would just mob our little house. This little aldea we lived in had 23 people, in one extended family: a widowed mother, and her three grown sons, and their wives and children. But, on Sunday afternoons there would be 50–75 people, mostly just standing around our house, watching us! It was like living in a fishbowl! They would walk for half a day just to see us. It was very uncomfortable, because we weren't at a point where we could really converse at any length.

We finally figured out that it was going to be like that all the time unless we did what was culturally appropriate, which was to go out visiting on Sundays. So, we began going over to the next little settlement, and paying a house call on somebody, sitting around inside their house, asking them questions, and in some cases, making them uncomfortable, instead of us feeling uncomfortable.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Take opportunities to use the language
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Now I can speak to you

by Steve Echerd

Tiburcio was the head foreman at the base camp for our cross-cultural training. I had tried to talk to him a little during our initial stay there, but with little success, since I spoke so little Tzeltal. Then we went to live in a Tzeltal village for seven weeks. Toward the end our village time, there was a visiting American dentist who was going through the area pulling teeth and giving some dental care. Tiburcio was traveling with this dentist as an interpreter and dental assistant. They set up this little day clinic 40 minutes walk from the little aldea where we were. In general, we were not supposed to have any contact with other campers or anybody from staff. But an exception was made for this dental clinic, so I accompanied some of the people from our end of the valley up to where the dentist was. As they were getting some dental attention, I watched the dentist work, and chatted with Tiburcio. I knew no Spanish, and so it was either English (which he didn't know) or Tzeltal. I didn't have a crutch. It felt really good being able to talk with him after being so frustrated earlier at not being able to communicate.

Language of choice (the only choice): Tzeltal

by Steve Echerd

There were a couple of occasions during the time we lived in a Tzeltal village in Mexico when someone who spoke only Spanish came through, perhaps to sell a pig, or to rent our lantern for a big dance. We didn't know Spanish and could only speak Tzeltal. One of the big landowners in the valley threw a big fiesta, and we ended up going to it. When we arrived, they made us the

guests of honor. It was a huge fiesta. The landowner spoke a little bit of English and Spanish, and he understood Tzeltal. He thought it was funny, this gringo who could only speak Tzeltal.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- People have expectations about who speaks which language

The more you speak it, the faster you learn it

by Steve Echerd

I went to Spanish school in Lima, Peru, at a school run by a Catholic order for American, Canadian, Irish, and English priests and nuns who had been assigned to South America. It was a four-month course and a very good school, with a maximum class size of three students to one teacher. There were 40 in our session: 19 priests, 20 nuns, and me! The nuns lived in a convent nearby, and the school provided dormitory housing for the priests. Pam and I were living with a retired Peruvian couple.

Every morning after breakfast, I would ride the bus across Lima to go to the school. Lunch was provided there as part of the program. We had 4 sessions in the morning, then lunch, and 2 sessions in the afternoon. We were done by about 2:30 or 3 o'clock. They used standard audiovisual texts and a language laboratory approach. Every week they would evaluate all of the students and juggle the classes around, so that you were always pretty much in a group that had the same proficiency as you.

I ended up for almost the entire time with two priests who were at about the same aptitude and level as I was. Working through the textbook, we progressed at about the same rate on syntax. But they were only using Spanish for about 4–5 hours a day. The rest of the time they were in the dorm with a bunch of other English speakers. On the other hand, I was immersed in Spanish all of the time, except when Pam and I were up in our room speaking English to each other. After a couple of months, one of the priests who was in our group of three told me, "I think I have about the same aptitude for language learning, and certainly we are at the same level grammatically. But, I really see a difference in your fluency and your range of vocabulary. I make the same mistakes you do, but you make them with much more vocabulary." So, he asked permission to move in with a Peruvian family because he saw the contrast. And, he really wanted to learn Spanish enough to look for a Peruvian family to live with.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn
- You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers

What's wrong with our baskets?

by Steve Echerd

Basket-making was a specialized skill in the Tzeltal area of Mexico. And in the little part of the valley that we were in, there was one person, a man, who knew how to make baskets. I was really interested in learning how to do it, and I convinced him to show me. I learned the principles, and decided that I could design my own baskets. The very first basket I made was one I designed, and it had a lid. They had never thought about having baskets with lids on them before. And there were several women who wanted to buy my basket because it was so unusual. There was this one guy, who never liked me the whole time we lived there. He didn't live in the little aldea we lived in; he was from another settlement. But every time he was around he tried to get the other people to laugh at me. So when I made this basket with a lid, he just laughed and ridiculed and belittled the whole idea.

In retrospect, I probably should have made my first few baskets like Tzeltal baskets.

I think we are too quick to do things our own way, and to not understand that creativity isn't valued in the same way in many cultures. Until you've gained some credibility, things are not valued as "creative" but rather may be seen as "a mistake."

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- In traditional cultures there may be only one right way to do something

#### Village piano music

by Steve Echerd

The Paya language has a very simple tone system, only two contrastive tones. The high tone has allotones of high and mid. Learning to hear them and to transcribe them was a problem.

Teaching my language associate to help us was a problem, because he was already literate in Spanish (which has no tones). They had tried to write Paya before we got there, and were thrilled that we were there to help them figure out how to write it. We bought an old, standard size typewriter with Spanish keys on it, and taught our language associate how to type. He would record stuff on tape for us, and then he would transcribe it by hand. Next we would go back and mark the tones on things, and then he would type it for us. But getting him to be consistent about writing the tone was a challenge.

We finally hit upon a system where we got three glasses and filled them with water. I picked a word that had all three of the "etic" tones in it. We used that as our reference word. Each day at the beginning of the session we poured the water out until we got the glasses to clink at the right tones for this reference word. After "calibrating" our "tone glasses," Tiro would work on adding tone marks to our transcriptions of his tape recordings. He would check himself by clinking the glasses.

The first day we hit on this, he was so excited. We usually worked until 8 o'clock at night at the very latest, because it got dark. He would go home, and we would go to bed. But, that night he was just fascinated! He kept calling the glasses, "my piano." He said, "I've got to play my piano." He stayed up several hours after we went to bed clinking these water glasses and writing by the light of our kerosene lantern. He was as excited about that as we were. It turned out to be a good way to validate a transcription.

We had to tune the water glasses every day before Tiro would start his work, because he would say the reference word lower or higher from one day to the next, or the tone intervals would be different. Using this "piano" helped Pam and me to begin to hear the tone better.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language
- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works

#### Completely surrounded

by Steve Echerd

I feel very strongly about the importance of living with a family, immersed in the language and culture. It's definitely worth the stress, uncertainty, and discomfort to do it. It works best if you have someone to mediate for you, to set it up, and to intervene if things are not working out.

I think it is best if there are children in the household you live in, as well as somebody close to your age who can include you in their social activities, and also some older people. In Latin America, because of the extended family, you get a lot of interaction.

When Pam and I lived with one older couple in Peru, there were not any children in the household, but their grown children included us in some of their activities, and their grandchildren came over occasionally.

Some of the people that I have coached lived in a family with 4 or 5 children, ranging in age from adults down to elementary age, and with the extended family, maybe there would be an aunt or grandmother in the household. In this situation, there is always somebody around to talk to. You have as much opportunity to interact with people as you can stand; sometimes even more!

I insisted that each of the dozens of people I've coached in Spanish live in an intense, family situation. Almost every person initially resisted the idea. But the majority of them, after getting over the initial fear, met their language goals and were very comfortable in the Guatemalan community. They were at ease using public transportation, had numerous Guatemalan friends, and had those they considered as "family members." They adjusted more easily than those who had come to Guatemala under the era of the "Don't learn Spanish" ("Just learn the local languages") philosophy. Some colleagues who had already been in Guatemala for some time wound up asking for help, and even spent a month or so in a Spanish immersion situation themselves, after seeing how well this worked for the newcomers.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- The more meaningful exposure, the more you learn
- You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers
- People need to experience language used in context

Stories by Ilene Foote

### OVERVIEW

Stories by Ilene Foote

by Ilene Foote

In this module group

Here are some stories by Ilene Foote:

- I've got to be me
- Beware of direct translations
- Where did all my Spanish go?
- Yes, English is my mother tongue (tied)
- A cookie for a word

I've got to be me

by Ilene Foote

Learning French was very stressful for me because I couldn't express myself. As an American, what I do, and what I have done is so much a part of who I am, and when I get into a new culture and a new language, I have no way of telling people who I am. The only way they can judge who I am is by what I happen to reveal about myself. If I'm talking like a three year old, they tend to treat me like a three year old. It's stressful to be treated that way when I used to have an adult life. It's frustrating because I couldn't get to know them either. Even if I could have formulated a question, I could never have understood their answer. I'm very people-oriented, and being cut off socially was very frustrating for me.

But, it did make me seek other ways to express myself. I became a photographer and spent lots of time and money taking pictures. I wrote poetry in English, and tried all sorts of ways to express myself.

It was also helpful to express myself by singing in a choir. This helped with my pronunciation, because if I didn't pronounce things exactly the way the choir did, I stuck out, and ruined the sound of the whole choir. So, I was a very good listener during choir practice, and they'd all help me say things correctly if I wasn't saying things right.

## Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find ways to express your personality
- Accept the fact that you sound like a child, even though you are an adult

Beware of direct translations

by Ilene Foote

I'd been in Switzerland only a few months when the church I attended asked all of the foreigners studying French in preparation to work overseas to introduce themselves in the evening service. I agonized over how to express myself well after only six months of French. But I wrote out what I had to say, first in English, and then I translated it as best I could. I wanted to end this talk with a challenge to the audience, because I thought, "I should be recruiting the Francophones to go to Africa, so that people like me don't have to agonize over learning French. It would be so easy for them. They could just hop on a plane and do down there."

One point I wanted to make was that my financial support came from churches and individuals. I wanted to say, "I have many, many supporters at home, making this work possible." Well, I used my little pocket dictionary and found that the verb "to support" was *soutenir*. I knew that one of the suffixes for someone who does something was *-eur*, so I put them together and created *souteneur*. On our way to the church service, when I tried my sentence out on my Swiss landlady, Hermine, she was absolutely horrified. "You can't say that!! You can't say that!!" What I had said was, "I have many, many pimps back home, making my work possible!!"

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- Use cognates, but use them carefully

Where did all my Spanish go?

by Ilene Foote

I studied Spanish in college, and when I went to Switzerland to learn French, the first couple of months, every time I opened my mouth, Spanish would come out, even though it had been years since I had spoken Spanish and certainly hadn't mastered it. After a couple of months, I lost the Spanish completely, and I've never recovered it. When I started learning French, it was as if Spanish went through my brain and out the other ear, and it was gone forever.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another

Yes, English is my mother tongue (tied)

by Ilene Foote

When I came back to the United States on my first furlough, I had been speaking a lot of Munukutuba and French. As soon as I came back, I immediately went on a trip to speak to churches because I had an unlimited mileage plane ticket that I had to use when I first entered the country. For that first month, I could not complete one entire sentence in English without stopping, or pausing, or throwing in a French word. One time, I'm sure I went on for two or three minutes in French before someone stopped me.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another

A cookie for a word

by Ilene Foote

When I lived in an African country, our night guardian in the village, Maurice, had moved from a Lingala speaking area to a Munukutuba speaking area and wanted to learn Munukutuba. He had to in order to survive, fit in, and be understood.

So, he would buy a little package of cookies, and he'd go over to the school and wait. When school would let out, he would be sitting there by the school with his package of cookies. Of course the kids would come flocking over to him. He would say, "I'll give you a cookie if you teach me how to say ..." and he'd indicate an object or an action. They'd practice and rehearse as long as he kept feeding them cookies. He did that every day for six weeks, until he knew that language.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language
- Take opportunities to use the language

Stories by Lisbeth Fritzell

OVERVIEW

Stories by Lisbeth Fritzell

by Lisbeth Fritzell

In this module group

Here are some stories by Lisbeth Fritzell:

- Monolingual—like it or not!
- What time do we go home?
- What are you really trying to say?
- We'll talk to you, but we won't teach you
- Thank you for the story
- Filling in the bosses' list
- Explaining what they've never seen
- Try to say that with a swollen tongue!
- You can't say it that way!
- Why didn't I ever hear that word before?
- Speaking in all the wrong languages
- Brain pain

Monolingual—like it or not!

by Lisbeth Fritzell

When we went to the islands off Papua New Guinea to learn the language we would be working in, we started off living on a plantation, where we could also use Pidgin. But we had some problems: for one thing, the people who were supposed to teach us the language worked very long days on the plantation. Also, there was a mix of people; not all of them spoke the language we were learning. But we had a few language sessions, and we got some basic vocabulary.

Then we moved to the village where we were going to live in the long term. The pastor, who was in charge of finding us a house, had gone ahead of us and told the people in the village very strictly that they were never to use English or Pidgin with us. And they didn't! We weren't really aware in the beginning that they had promised never to speak Pidgin. So, in the beginning when we asked if they could explain what they were saying, they would exclaim, "No, no, we can't

“speak Pidgin! Don't make us speak Pidgin!” So, we went monolingual after about a month on the plantation.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- People have expectations about who speaks which language
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

What time do we go home?

by Lisbeth Fritzell

When we first moved to a village in Papua New Guinea, no one would speak Pidgin with us. We needed to take a boat into town; it would leave the island in the morning and come back in the afternoon. As we were getting off of the boat in town, we asked the captain when he was going back to the island. We thought that we knew the numbers, and would listen for him to say “two o'clock” or “three o'clock”.

He was saying something, but we could not hear any numbers. So, we asked again, and yet again. We couldn't understand a word of the answer, but we really needed the answer. So we tried asking him numbers then, saying “time one” and point to the clock. No reaction, no answer. After a while, using body language, we found out that what he actually said was something like, “I will be going back when the sun is high in the sky” which, of course, was the way the people really think of things. That was one of the times when we thought, “These people are very patient.”

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

What are you really trying to say?

by Lisbeth Fritzell

Once we were on the wharf in the market town in Papua New Guinea, preparing to go back out to the island where we lived, on the boat. The boat was there. The driver was there. And the driver came to us, and asked something very nicely. We understood most of it, something about he was going to go now, but he needed to buy petrol. And we said, “Fine, we'll sit here. Just come back, and we'll wait.”

He started walking around and trying again, and saying the same thing, “Need to buy some petrol. I'm going to buy some petrol.”

And we said, “Oh yes, that's fine, we'll just wait for you here.” He gave up, he couldn't get his message through.

He sent another person over who came and said, “It's about time we leave, we just need to get some petrol.” We understood what they were saying, but something was not quite right until someone dared to be a little bit more straightforward. Of course it was very embarrassing for them to say, “Please would you give us your money now so we can buy petrol for the boat.”

Normally you pay after the trip, but the driver was short of money. In his culture he couldn't say it straight out, so he was just hinting and saying things in a roundabout way, which was really impossible for us to understand.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- It may be culturally inappropriate to be too direct in what you say

We'll talk to you, but we won't teach you

by Lisbeth Fritzell

After we got to the village where we would be living, we found that no one wanted to be our language associate. The people who had been there for a short time previously had asked certain people to come and work with them in their house to teach them the language. But the local people found this very difficult for several reasons. For one thing, it was not good culturally to be in someone else's house. They never visited inside other people's houses. They always visited outside. And to go into the foreigners' house was very embarrassing. Everyone outside would be snickering at this person who dared to be in there, especially if that meant the language associate would be alone with a person of the opposite sex. And also, the rest of the people thought, "Who do you think you are that you know the whole language and can teach them!"

So when we asked the village people to come and help us, they said, "No way!" No one wanted to come. But when we went to their place and just sat around outside, had something to eat, and sat and talked, everyone was willing to help us, even if we brought out paper and pen and started to write down words.

In the language learning process we were helped by everyone and anyone who came by, or who happened to be outside when we walked past. We just used every natural situation. It worked really well. At the same time we were building relationships, and we were becoming known by the whole village. That helped us as well.

There were times we felt like everyone in the village thought we were going a bit slow. They were waiting for us to learn faster and better because they were all teaching us. When we needed encouragement, we just walked over to another village. They'd say, "Ah, listen to these ladies, they already know the whole language!" "Listen to them, they can already say something in our language!"

We actually seemed to be getting quite famous all around. Even in town we met people who'd say, "Ah, you must be the white ladies who are learning our language." So we had good relationships.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Thank you for the story

by Lisbeth Fritzell

Most of the time we were learning, we spoke informally with people, and wrote words in the little notebooks we carried as they came up. One method, however, worked really well to try to get new vocabulary and sentence structures. We asked someone to tell a story and we recorded it. Sometimes the stories were too complicated, and we just left it at that, and said, "Thank you for the story." Sometimes they were very simple, but we still went over them. We'd play a little bit, and ask the person to say it again. Then we would transcribe it word-by-word so we could later interlinearize it, picking out all the small bits. That method continued to be helpful. We used all those stories and transcriptions to do grammar and discourse analysis.

It was very hard work, but the people were patient with us. To first tell a story and then go over it word-by-word so we could write it down could take a couple of hours. But they were very helpful. Even then, we usually got the crowd, in the end, explaining everything. And we got some really nice traditional stories as well, which was good.

Filling in the bosses' list

by Lisbeth Fritzell

When I was working with SIL in Papua New Guinea, we got an anthropology questionnaire because we were supposed to do an anthropology write-up about the people we were living with after a while. This questionnaire had questions about all sorts of things, from statistics to values.



Some of them were things we were not able to answer. So, we took the whole questionnaire and met with people and said, "Our bosses have given us this paper to fill in, and we just don't know the answers. Could you please help us?" We found we could use the questionnaire as an excuse to talk about tricky subjects; for example: what happens to people who do wrong? What kinds of things are wrong in the culture? For instance, we talked about divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, having more than one wife, what women thought of men bashing them up, and arranged marriages and things like that which, in small talk, would have been difficult to bring up. Having them there on the list and having an excuse, we could say, "You know, we'd really like to know these things." People were very happy to help us; they came up afterwards and said, "Do you have any more things on the paper? We have some spare time, and we'd like to help you." So, that was very good; we got lots of interesting words we could talk about.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in
- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

Explaining what they've never seen

by Lisbeth Fritzell

When we were learning a language of Papua New Guinea, we were able to speak quite quickly; it's not a very difficult language. We usually had lots of adults and some children hanging around our house. We would bring out pictures and talk about things.

I had happened to mention Sweden's dark winter days when the sun comes up and goes right down again, and summer's midnight sun, when it's light almost all day and all night. That story became so famous that people would stop and ask, "Is it really true about the sun moving differently in your country?" They would call me over and you could hear the men arguing, "Ah, no it's not true, it's not possible." After a while you'd hear, "Lisbeth, come here to us." And so, it was a story I told many times, and it was a good exercise for me to try to explain what was unknown to them.

We found a couple of other topics that were good as well; one was contact lenses. We talked about politics, education systems, and what we do when we vote. But of course, those were things that had been talked about a lot in the village. So, we knew what they were saying about Papua New Guinea politics, then we could compare. We just had good times when we could talk about some topic we could introduce.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in

Try to say that with a swollen tongue!

by Lisbeth Fritzell

When I did language learning in high school in Sweden, I didn't do very well. There was too much memorization. I did better in subjects where I had to understand something and put it into practice. But in our language classes we were just supposed to memorize 10 or 20 vocabulary items for homework, and then we were supposed to know them. For me that was very difficult, and I couldn't be bothered to try.

But I found in learning a language in Papua New Guinea (PNG) that it was a social activity, and I really enjoy being with people. My experience in PNG has been that people are very friendly, and have a good time. So I didn't find it nearly as difficult.

One thing that I did find difficult in PNG was that some people correct you, and correct you, and correct you! After you've said a word seven times, you feel like your tongue is now swollen, and

by the eighth time it is impossible to say. So I just avoided those people. When I saw them coming, I would go wash my clothes or something. Another thing that was difficult was that the village people were always comparing my partner and me. Sometimes you're on the winning end, but you still feel bad because you know that the other person is not appreciating it. Sometimes you're on the losing end, and you feel really bad. You feel you've tried so hard to learn the language, and they say, "Oh, Robin speaks the language perfectly, but Lisbeth, she can't say anything yet!" Of course it's all exaggeration. It's an evaluation built on one sentence or so. Even knowing that the person saying it can't really evaluate me because they only heard me say one thing, and I know I made a mistake, it still hurts. I don't know what the solution is. One thing that is important is to have a good relationship with the people you work with. And other than that, just keep telling yourself that you're okay.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Too much correction or criticism can inhibit your learning
- Remind yourself of what you are good at

You can't say it that way!

by Lisbeth Fritzell

We had a visit from a pastor friend who was from another village in Papua New Guinea. We invited him over to share some food with us. We had fish. He asked in the language who had caught this fish on a hook. (There are different words for specific types of fishing in the language.) Robin answered, "This fish was not caught on a hook; it was caught in a fish trap." They usually make verbs from a noun, so she took the noun, "fish trap," and turned it into a verb to say, "this fish was fish-trapped." Our friend swallowed his food and said, "I have to go now." He went next door. We could hear that they were really having a good time over there. There was a crowd sitting and talking, as there always were in houses all over the village. They were really having a good time, laughing and laughing. After a while we came outside, and they told us what they were laughing at—this fantastic new word that the "white misses" had made up, "fish-trapping a fish." You can't say that! It wasn't a bad word, which is what we first thought when they were laughing, because it really makes people laugh when we say swear words by mistake. But, they just thought that this was impossible to do. We were following all of the rules, but we couldn't do it with this one word, even if we tried.

I don't think that we will ever forget that one word. We know now for sure how you say that you get fish from a fishtrap, and the word for fishtrap. And the village people will never ever let us forget it, unless the word we used becomes so famous that it actually becomes a common word!

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Coin words to help you communicate, but be careful
- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

Why didn't I ever hear that word before?

by Lisbeth Fritzell

I've found that my ears or my mind filters the language, so that I hear what I know. I hear the bits that I can make sense of. But the little bits and small variations that I don't understand, I don't even hear, unless they're really big.

One time we were taping and transcribing a story when this word *liti* came up. It is usually used for 'small', but it was in a different part of the sentence than usual, and the storyteller told us that this time it meant 'always'. I questioned, "Always? I'm sure that I've heard a word for always before, but I am sure that I've never heard this word in this context. This must be a very unusual

way of using this word." So, we were talking about it, and people said, "Yes, that means something like 'always'." After that, because I had learned it, I kept hearing it all of the time. I must have heard it every day in some sentence!

So, I might have heard a word before, but because it didn't mean anything to me, I didn't even know that I had heard it. But of course I must have, because once I knew it, it came up so often. I can't believe that the whole village would have started to use the word after I learned it! So for me it is important to have times when I can go slowly over a text and find those little bits.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- The mind tends to filter out redundant material
- Use selective attention to help your accuracy

Speaking in all the wrong languages

by Lisbeth Fritzell

Before I went out to work on the Duke of York language of Papua New Guinea, I had been doing literacy and teaching teacher training in Pidgin. I was quite fluent in Pidgin. But when we started to learn the Duke of York language, it seemed as though the efforts took up all of my brain.

Somehow Pidgin got pushed very far back without my knowing it.

When we spoke with a policeman on the island, who didn't understand the local language, I had to use Pidgin. I opened my mouth to ask him about my car, and said the first word in Pidgin, and after that all the words were in Duke of York. I couldn't even make even one sentence in Pidgin.

The policeman and his wife were falling over laughing. I just could not make myself say Pidgin.

Of course, I got into similar trouble when we got into town and tried to ask the bus drivers to

come down to the wharf to take us somewhere. After I was more familiar with the local

language, when I wasn't having to strain myself as hard to speak, I could keep three or four

languages going at the same time. But at the time, it just totally blocked out all other languages.

It even happened when I went back to Sweden. There was a French lady on the bus who was

trying to ask the bus driver about the ticket. The bus driver couldn't speak French or English. So

I tried to explain it to the lady in French, but it was either Pidgin or Duke of York that came out.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another

Brain pain

by Lisbeth Fritzell

When I was working hard learning the Duke of York language of Papua New Guinea, sometimes during the day I felt "brain pain"! I thought, "I just can't handle it anymore; it's like my tongue is turned backwards. And if someone asks me a question, I know I won't get it right. I just can't keep my concentration anymore." I needed to find another activity in order to get away from the language.

Being in the village, that was not so easy. It is very strange to the local people if you go inside your house and shut the door; you have to say you're sleepy. And even if you're sleeping, it's all right for anyone to come and bang on the house and wake you up. Sleeping is not an activity that is respected.

But I knew that I needed a rest, and that if I didn't get away, I would be very grumpy. I found a few activities I could do; one thing was to go down to the sea, and go for a swim. No one keeps up long conversations when you are out swimming. And it's very nice—you can go snorkeling: beautiful coral, colorful fish. Usually the waves and the noise of the sea make it impossible to talk to each other unless you shout. Another thing was to do my laundry: fill up the buckets,

carry water, then go and scrub my clothes. I would have to be very desperate, but I could even go and wash dishes or cook something. People could then see that I was doing something, not just sitting in a room. I found that it was good to find a way where I could be away from people without it looking strange or being antisocial.

At night, when Robin and I are by ourselves, I also try to find other relaxing activities instead of poring over translation or language files. For instance, I read Swedish books that I've collected, or we pull out all of the crossword puzzles from newspapers we get in town. I have found that it is very good to have time to rest.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks

Stories by Laura Gittlen

## OVERVIEW

Stories by Laura Gittlen

by Laura Gittlen

In this module group

Here are some stories by Laura Gittlen:

- Text glossing
- What did you say?
- Family devotions

Text glossing

by Laura Gittlen

If I had things to do over again, I would do more text glossing early on in language learning. By this, I mean writing a translation of each word of a text under it, producing an interlinear translation. It forces you to sharpen your definitions of words.

What did you say?

by Laura Gittlen

Sometimes you have to create opportunities to use the language you are learning, especially if you are away from where the language is spoken. One way is to use the language as a secret language. If your children don't know the language, you can use it to talk about something you don't want them to hear. Or you may just want to communicate some message that you don't want other people to overhear. You end up talking about things in the language that you might not otherwise actually say to anyone else.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

Family devotions

by Laura Gittlen

While living in a Mixtec village, we found that having family devotions was a foundation for some of our language learning. Before breakfast, before we came together, each of us, separately, would read a chapter of the Bible in English. Then when we got together at breakfast we would talk (in English) about our favorite verse from the chapter, or something that we just wanted to make a comment about. The whole family got involved, from the littlest to the oldest. Then, when the children went off to school or to play, we would talk with our language helper about the same chapter in Mixtec. He had also read the chapter beforehand in Spanish, and

usually had questions of his own about it. Besides, he would want to know what we and the kids had been saying about it in English, because he had been eating breakfast with us, and had overheard us.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Predictable scripts aid comprehension

Stories by George Huttar

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by George Huttar

by George L. Huttar

In this module group

Here are some stories by George Huttar:

- Trading languages
- Using Dutch to learn Dutch
- The good of going to church
- Let's go to the zoo!
- Ndjuka only, please!
- Involvement is a must
- What can you tell me about ...
- Going solo
- Put a picture with that word
- Imprinted with a bump
- On-site memory

Trading languages

by George L. Huttar

When I was in Jakarta, I would think of something that I needed to buy that was inexpensive, and would go around to different shops to look for it. By doing this, I could practice asking for things, seeing what they had, and learning the numbers and prices. It gave me an opportunity to go around and learn some of the language.

I found that people in Jakarta like to "trade" languages. If you teach them the English word for something, they will teach you the local word. I went to a local eating place that tourists don't normally go to, where they set up stalls along a canal. There were a bunch of young men there, so I used a couple of greetings on them. I proceeded to point to different parts of my face and the rest of my body. I told them the English word and they gave me their word. I pointed to different kinds of food and we did the same thing. I'm not sure I knew how to say things like "what is this?" or "how do you say ...?" but they caught on pretty soon and enjoyed it—they got a few English words out of it and I got some Indonesian words. It was fun.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

Using Dutch to learn Dutch

by George L. Huttar

When we were learning Dutch in Suriname, I tried to encourage the others to use a monolingual dictionary as much as possible. In reading what the Dutch-Dutch dictionary says about a particular word, you can get some good sample sentences and some other vocabulary words. It

takes longer, but it also keeps you from falling into the trap of thinking "this Dutch word always means this English word."

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Linguistic context helps you understand the meaning of words
- Languages have a lexical system

The good of going to church

by George L. Huttar

A good activity for learning French in Senegal was going to church. We were familiar with the concepts there, and we could pick up some words from the sermon and especially from singing. In singing, the repetition was a big aid for us. If we didn't understand the words the first time, we usually could by about the fourth time.

Reading the Bible in a language that's not familiar is a big help in learning that language, because you kind of know what the content is anyway. Words that you'd otherwise have to look up, you don't need to.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Predictable scripts aid comprehension
- Repetition helps things stick

Let's go to the zoo!

by George L. Huttar

When I was in Suriname and really focusing on vocabulary expansion and in specialized vocabulary, I took local people to three different locations: the zoo; an historical museum which had things from slave days, such as chains, shackles, and tools; and a general museum where they had different insects and birds and other things. The people all had knowledge about these things, even though some of the items, such as those from the slave era, were not part of the present culture. All of these were ways for me to monolingually get new vocabulary.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in
- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

Ndjuka only, please!

by George L. Huttar

When we first started learning the Ndjuka language in Suriname, we stayed in the capital city for a couple of months. We worked through English and Dutch in order to get some of the basic expressions—the greetings, thank you's, and main questions. We learned all of these bilingually before we actually went to the area where the people traditionally lived.

When we arrived, we used only that language—Ndjuka. The people made the assumption that white people knew one of several different languages, and tried to communicate with us in those. We decided to pretend we didn't know any of those languages. Eventually they quit trying to use them with us, and spoke to us in their language. We had essentially monolingual language learning after a bilingual start. We wanted to convey to them the worthiness of their own language. This also helped us to communicate with many people who only knew Ndjuka—people we might not have connected with otherwise.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

- People have expectations about who speaks which language

Involvement is a must

by George L. Huttar

It's important to feel accepted by the people who speak the language you're learning. One thing that was helpful to me was being active in various activities. For example, when I was learning Dutch I was involved in a local choir. That helped improve my Dutch, as well as other languages. At the same time I learned a lot about the local culture and current events, such as politics, the economic situation, or recent disasters. This came about as a result of developing relationships with these people.

There were several people in the choir whose English was better than my Dutch, but they always spoke to me in Dutch. It would have been easier to converse in English, as they typically do with Americans, but the relationship I had with them in the choir overcame this issue. It also helped to have something else to do with them besides converse.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

What can you tell me about ...

by George L. Huttar

The people we worked with in Suriname were very interested in the ways of life of other people around the world. Whether you had a National Geographic magazine in your hand or something in your head, you could discuss with them the ways different people raise crops, and so forth.

One of the first books a native speaker produced in the language was about the Karen people of Burma. It described how the women stretched their necks with golden rings. Another book they produced was about octopus, which they didn't have, but were curious about. We could offer them interesting facts and ideas about things and other places.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Establish reciprocal relationships

Going solo

by George L. Huttar

One summer I spent a couple of weeks in Brazil. Most of the time I traveled the country from city to city, accompanied by an American who spoke very good Portuguese. I didn't really need to learn or understand Portuguese since he was with me. On the last day of my trip, my companion left for Brasilia. I was going on to Sao Paulo to catch a plane home. Since I had a few hours alone in town without my friend, I decided to take the opportunity to see what I had picked up over the previous weeks. My goal was not to sound like a native or speak correctly, but rather to communicate and see if I could make myself understood.

I went into used bookstores and managed to explain to them what I was looking for. I also went to a bank and was able to find out what the exchange rate was and if they would exchange money with me even though they were closed. It was very basic Portuguese, but I could use it to communicate and get some tasks accomplished.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Take opportunities to use the language

Put a picture with that word

by George L. Huttar

I use mental images of objects, people, and whole events to help me remember a lot of vocabulary items and sometimes whole sentences people say on particular occasions. For example, for the word "ken mii " (a device for squeezing the juice out of sugar cane), I had a mental image of the one that was standing near the shore of our river, and certain men standing around it, feeding cane into it. Associating specific images with specific items helps me remember them more easily.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

#### Imprinted with a bump

by George L. Huttar

One of the first language learning experiences I had outside of the classroom was in Ecuador the summer before my senior year of college. I was walking down a steep street in a crowded market area in Quito with a friend. He bumped into somebody and said, Lo siento, "I'm sorry." That was a very clear image in my mind, and I have never forgotten how to excuse myself if I bump into somebody in that language, as it has stuck with me—for 33 years!

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

#### On-site memory

by George L. Huttar

This past summer I knew I would be using Dutch when I went to Suriname. However, it was not until I actually got onto the plane that Dutch expressions started coming into my head. I began having success in thinking through how I would talk about certain things in Dutch. When I got into the actual physical environment where that society used Suriname Dutch, everything began to come up very strongly, whereas it would not before that.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Multilingual people may associate languages with a particular setting or audience

Stories by Mary Huttar

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Mary Huttar

by Mary Huttar

In this module group

Here are some stories by Mary Huttar:

- To market, to market!
- Radio surfing
- One strike, you're out!
- Learning it, then saying it
- I'm stuck!
- The silver lining
- A little of this, a little of that

To market, to market!

by Mary Huttar

In Dakar, I would go to the market every Saturday morning. I didn't have to know a lot of French in order to purchase things. I was able to ask how much something was, and could understand the answer in most cases. I could also say the names of most of the vegetables and fruits. The



first week we were in Senegal, I found I could do the shopping and I felt quite proud of myself, even though it was very elementary. I didn't have to have anybody with me to help me. A controlled situation like the market worked very nicely.

The only crisis was when I got lost in the market and couldn't figure out where the car was! But I found somebody that I knew who was able to help.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Set yourself up for small successes

Radio surfing

by Mary Huttar

During my time in Senegal, my goal was to work on learning French. I would "radio surf" at night, listening to the same news broadcasts in different languages. Sometimes we heard English broadcasts earlier in the evening, and heard the same broadcasts in Dutch or French later that night. Since they had the same content, I was able to learn the meanings of what was being said in French.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Predictable scripts aid comprehension

One strike, you're out!

by Mary Huttar

One activity that worked fairly well for me when we were in Suriname, but was also somewhat frustrating, was doing the wash down at the river every morning with the other women. That was the time when all the news got spread from one person to another. At first I did my wash with everybody else and just listened to what was being said. I could understand separate words, but I usually did not know what the whole message was.

In Ndjuka, there are general words which are substituted for nouns and personal names which are used very frequently. Once the person's name or a particular noun is mentioned, the word for "person" or 'thing' is used after that. You do not have to say who or what it is. So, if you do not initially get in on the topic, you get very lost. That was incredibly frustrating for me.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Language is used in discourses
- Knowing the topic helps you interpret what you hear or read

Learning it, then saying it

by Mary Huttar

When we worked specifically on the grammar of Ndjuka while in Suriname, that was all we focused on during the day. One of the times we realized that I was doing a lot better in the language was when we went to a church where my husband was supposed to speak. I was asked to say something also. When I got up to talk, George was astonished that I could use a lot of constructions of the language that we had recently discovered. I was a lot more fluent because I was able to use a variety of constructions, instead of just sticking to a few that were more common.

Fluency and variety include not only expanding your vocabulary but also using different types of constructions. This is a byproduct of concentrating on analysis and not specifically language learning. We also had lots of examples and were at a stage where we could understand these examples.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Knowing about a language may help you learn it

I'm stuck!

by Mary Huttar

I remember very clearly getting to a "plateau" in learning Ndjuka, where it seemed I could not learn any more or get to the next "level" of proficiency. It was very easy for me to reach the first plateau, but then it was a challenge to determine where I went from there, or how I was to get up the next step of the ladder. I think this often coincides with living in the culture for a period of time. You get to a point where the culture is no longer as new and fascinating as it initially was.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Language learners seem to hit plateaus

The silver lining

by Mary Huttar

One time there was a robbery during a training course in Africa. One thing that was taken was a driver's license. The owner of this license was required to get a new one in Senegal, as he was not able to get a replacement from the United States. Despite all the red tape he had to endure, it was a wonderful opportunity for language and culture learning. He was able to learn a great deal about laws in Senegal, the way driving tests are given there, and so forth. So although it was an extremely stressful situation, he was able to use it as a learning opportunity.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition

A little of this, a little of that

by Mary Huttar

I do not learn by just one method. One principle, for me, is that the more "vehicles" by which I get exposed to the language, such as hearing, speaking, reading, writing, listening, practicing myself, and so forth, the better I learn. Last year when I was taking a review of French, the class was taught by using as many senses as possible. The learning actually took place in the classroom, which was very different from former classes I had taken.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn

Stories by Ted Jones

OVERVIEW

Stories by Ted Jones

by Ted Jones

In this module group

Here are some stories by Ted Jones:

- Department of Redundancy department
- The basket maker
- Some things you've just got to memorize
- Keeping a stiff upper lip
- Learning the wrong thing
- The mush mouth factor
- Learning by hearing and seeing

Department of Redundancy department

by Ted Jones

When I hear someone use a new vocabulary item for the first time, I try to repeat it and ask questions about it until I feel sure I understand what it is, and how and when it's used. When I've used the word enough times in the context of the new situation, then it's mine. I don't have to write it down and go back and think, "How can I use this word?" because I've done it on the spot. In a Zapotec village in Oaxaca, Mexico, I would sometimes sit all day with the basket maker as he made different kinds of baskets. I'd say, "OK, what kind of basket is this?" "This is a 'dxumlluag' " (a basket with a handle on it).

"Oh, so this is a dxumlluag, huh?"

"Yeah."

"Well, who uses this dxumlluag?"

"Well," he says, "mostly the women use it when they go to the market."

"The men don't use the dxumlluag then?"

"No, the men don't use it."

"How much do you make when you sell one of these dxumlluag's?"...

You know, after using this word about a dozen times, I've got it. Bingo, it's mine. Sometimes I wrote the stuff down, sometimes not. From then on I'd call it a dxumlluag. I wouldn't think of it as a basket with a handle on it.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Repetition helps things stick
- Apply what you have learned as soon as possible
- Language has referential meaning

The basket maker

by Ted Jones

Right across the arroyo from where we lived in a Zapotec village was a basket maker, an older man. He sat there all day, making his baskets, and I said to myself, "There's my man."

So I took my little wooden chair and my notebook, and I walked over and sat down and started talking to him. He became one of my best friends. I would sit there all day and he would talk to me, and I would write stuff down and ask what it meant.

I'd say to myself, "OK, now he used this word here, and that word there. Why did he do that?" I began to see it like a big jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes he'd get me to help him make baskets, or take the leaves off the carrizo (wild cane). I got reams of words and phrases from him—pages and pages of data.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Look for people who have time to talk with you

Some things you've just got to memorize

by Ted Jones

Although I mostly learned Zapotec just by spending time with people, doing things with them, listening and paying attention to what they said, I found that there were some things I just had to memorize. Two things I had to be really careful about were tone and stress. Our tone problems were only in one-syllable words. I knew there was no way just to remember them, so those were the things that I had to write down and memorize.

## Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Combine formal and informal learning
- Memorize things when you have to

## Keeping a stiff upper lip

by Ted Jones

Among Zapotecs, if you show that you can't take joking, it is seen as a sign of weakness, and that will call you 'ndaa', which means 'delicate'. So you need to learn to just laugh and joke with people as you make mistakes, and not take their ribbing personally. If you can throw some joke right back at them, you will be respected.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Learn to laugh at your mistakes

## Learning the wrong thing

by Ted Jones

I learned Zapotec pretty much the same way I learned Portuguese: by guessing meanings from hearing how words are used in context. This can get you into difficulties, though. I learned, after I'd been speaking Zapotec for many years, that I'd been using vulgarities which I'd picked up from some language helpers. I was so embarrassed! I had to go back and apologize to people for the things that I'd said to them before.

## Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find good language role models
- Learn appropriate varieties of the language

## Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- Check out the meaning of words, before you add them to your active vocabulary

## The mush mouth factor

by Ted Jones

My landlord in the village strongly advised me to keep my mouth shut when I spoke Zapotec. Literally! He told me I shouldn't open my mouth so wide to speak. It seems that the men speak in a mush mouth way. There are lots of retroflexed sounds, and the men tend to let this push everything back, and they keep their mouths closed when they talk. The women, however, speak with a clear bell tone.

I asked myself, "How am I going to write words down correctly?" Eventually I found a neighbor lady who liked me. I'd go back and forth between the men and this woman, because it was much easier to learn to speak and to understand what sounds were present by listening to the woman.

I'd ask her about specific words.

Over the years I learned to make the distinctions and to be able to switch between the two.

Thankfully I finally ended up with a male language helper who did not speak with a mush mouth.

## Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find people who speak clearly
- Learn appropriate varieties of the language

## Learning by hearing and seeing

by Ted Jones

My first language learning experience was in a very small school in Brazil, where we were taught by rote memorization. It almost drove me nuts! It ran counter to the way I thought languages should be learned, but I picked up enough in three months so that I could be out among people, asking questions and talking to them.

Once I was out with people in real-life situations, I picked things up quickly, just like soaking up water in a dry sponge. I would just use what I had learned in school—nouns and a few simple verbs—and go from there.

From there on it was a case of filling in the holes. I tried to be really observant. I watched, and asked myself, "What did they say when they wanted this?" "Oh, that's what they said!"

My wife has always been more concerned with knowing exactly what each word means, but I just want to know when and where and how to use it.

I didn't really worry about the grammar either, but I knew when to use it. I even picked up the subjunctive kind of by accident.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Learning in your preferred learning style increases motivation and effectiveness
- Take opportunities to use the language
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- People need to experience language used in context

Stories by Mildred Larson

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Mildred Larson

by Mildred L. Larson

In this module group

Here are some stories by Mildred Larson:

- Tell us a story!
- Telling tales
- Am I fluent, or are you accommodating me?
- Sorting it out by sight
- Mail!
- Time flies
- Why does it keep coming out French?

Tell us a story!

by Mildred L. Larson

When we first arrived in the Aguaruna language area of Peru, we lived in a clearing next to another family. We frequently went over to our neighbor's house in the evening. The lady of the house told her children stories—legends and well-known tales. She always welcomed us and would let us participate. If the children did not understand a part of the story, they would interrupt her and ask questions, which she would answer by elaborating. We felt free to do the same.

It was often embarrassing for us to talk in front of the adults, so it helped to practice with the children. We had many picture books with birds and animals which the children enjoyed looking at. We could talk with them, and they would tell us about various animals, what they did and what they ate.

I think we learned more language from the neighbor lady and her children than with anyone else when we were first starting out.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Talk with children and listen to parents talking to their children

Telling tales

by Mildred L. Larson

You learn a lot by reading aloud, but you have to have something to read in the language first. In Peru, I got some Aguaruna children's stories from a man in the village, wrote them up, and read them to the children. It was fun for them to hear these stories over and over, and it was wonderful practice for me to have to say all those words in full sentences. Although they were written at a children's level, it helped immensely to see the fixed phrases and verb endings. I knew and understood what I was saying when I told the stories.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty
- Comprehensible output can become comprehensible input

Am I fluent, or are you accommodating me?

by Mildred L. Larson

It's important to not be exclusive in the language you're learning. We lived initially with an upriver group of Aguarunas in Peru. We thought we were doing really well and knew the language, because we could talk to the people we lived with, and could carry on conversations about most things. After living upriver for a few years, we moved downriver to another place where the same language was spoken. Suddenly we felt like we did not know the language anymore, because the people there were saying things we had never heard before!

The people in the downriver village did not know what we knew, so they did not limit themselves to the little bit of the language we actually knew. We felt very lost for a while, until we eventually learned the new vocabulary—or until they learned our vocabulary!

There is a danger of getting in a rut with the language, and not learning it any further. One of the best things that happened to us was when we were training teachers in a bilingual education program and moved every couple of weeks to train different groups. We constantly changed from one place to another, but it really helped us expand our vocabulary—much more than if we would have stayed with the same group the entire time.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

Sorting it out by sight

by Mildred L. Larson

I can learn a little bit of language by listening, but I am basically a sight person. I have to see language written down, so I had to do a lot to get things on paper. I tried to figure out verb conjugations for analysis, because I knew if I could see how they worked, I could remember them.

One day I was working with the school teacher on verbs. I put down a bunch of forms like, "I work," "I will work," "We will work." The teacher caught on immediately. He took the paper and filled in all the conjugations with all the verb stems, and completely conjugated about thirty verbs for me. He was discovering his language, and I learned it because I could see it, and learned which forms to use. He was really getting into language analysis, and I was learning better.

## Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

Mail!

by Mildred L. Larson

Letter writing was one thing that really got the Peruvian Aguarunas excited about literacy. Before they could read and write, they had to communicate everything by word of mouth. Now, they could write down what they wanted to say to friends and relatives and send the letters downriver.

I found that by composing letters to people downriver and getting a written correspondence going, I learned through writing the body of the letter. I had to check my forms, and if it was something really important, I had someone else check it before I sent it. They pointed out my mistakes and showed me how to correct them. Another helpful thing was getting letters back from the people. I used those letters to help myself write the next letter, and used their openings and closings. I learned a lot of extra language through this "composition class"!

Through receiving letters, I gathered some good stories from people about trips they made. This was an important part of conversation in their culture. Through this, I was able to learn the structure of how one tells a first person narrative in the language. Then, when it was my turn to tell a personal experience, I could say it in a relatively good way.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Try to find a pen pal

See also

The Write and Rewrite technique

Time flies

by Mildred L. Larson

I had to really plan and work at learning the Aguaruna language in Peru. I had little cards with vocabulary words, and set a goal to learn 10 new words every day. Or I would read to a child for at least 30 minutes a day. If I had not done things like that, and set some reachable goals for myself, time would have just flown by and I would not have progressed in my learning or proficiency.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Set yourself achievable goals

Why does it keep coming out French?

by Mildred L. Larson

When I went to Lima, Peru, I had problems trying to learn Spanish. I think I had learned too much French in college, and I had to suppress it in order to learn the Spanish, because whenever someone said anything to me in Spanish, I would answer in French. It was a very difficult thing to do, but it was necessary if I wanted to learn and communicate in Spanish.

## Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another

Stories by Erin Lunsford

OVERVIEW

Stories by Erin Lunsford

by Erin Lunsford

In this module group

Here are some stories by Erin Lunsford:

- The words are right but everything's all wrong
- Live dictionaries
- 'Cuz I said so!
- You still don't know how to get there?
- Living in cupboards
- A traveler's phrase book for Russian
- She's not giving up. We may as well help her.
- Of bakeries and bread stores
- Christmas Eve
- The unwanted fountain of youth
- By hook or by crook—getting language however you can
- Was it something I said?
- Run that by me again?

The words are right but everything's all wrong

by Erin Lunsford

When some colleagues went to meet a new language associate at the local university, the wife was great with child. She made an emergency stop in the little girl's room (as such women are wont to do) while her husband went ahead to the appointed meeting room so as not to be late. Mustering up his best language efforts (they had been learning Chuvash for a short time), he went through the proper greetings and introductions with Pyotr, and then explained that his wife would be coming in a moment—she'd stopped at the bathroom on the way.

As their friendship and rapport developed, my friends and Pyotr became comfortable about teasing and joking with each other. This progressed into Pyotr's becoming a good "culture friend," one who could tell them insights about the Chuvash culture that might have otherwise been lost on them. It was with great mischievous humor in his eyes that Pyotr one day told my colleagues his memories of their first meeting. "You were so proud of yourself that you could say so much in Chuvash. But what you said was something no Chuvash would ever say! We don't mention it even to our family when we are headed for the bathroom. We would just say something like, 'I'm going outside for awhile!'"

"The kisses of an enemy may be profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately
- Every culture has taboo topics

Live dictionaries

by Erin Lunsford

I was living in Cheboksary, a city on the upper Volga river in Russia. Since my primary reason for being there was to learn Russian, I did my best to interact with people wherever I met them. One evening I was riding a surprisingly uncrowded bus, so I had the rare privilege of being seated, and without a seat mate at that! I took the opportunity to read a bit of Russian poetry out of a children's book I had with me. On the page was printed a drawing of a ship on rough waters under a starry sky, so I had a guess as to the poem's theme. Still, I was running into vocabulary with which I was unfamiliar. Rather than pull out my dictionary, I considered asking the lady seated behind me if she could explain a word here or there to me—thus, I would get much more



exposure to Russian than if I merely looked up the word and got the English equivalent. On the other hand, I might not understand the lady, which could be embarrassing to both of us. But I decided to take the risk—I knew that a warm smile and profuse thanks whatever the outcome would make things all right.

I turned around and explained to the lady that I was trying to learn Russian—could she help me understand a few words in this poem? (Russians love their poetry!) She agreed that she could certainly try. So we started out with a word that I suspected meant 'waves'. I still wasn't sure at the end of her enthusiastic explanation what it meant, so I checked my understanding by asking if she was talking about water in the ocean that did like this, and made big, waving motions with my hands. Yes! She was ecstatic, and did the same waving motions, repeating the word for 'wave'. Ha! I'd hit on a gold mine. This woman wasn't inhibited, and charades suited us just fine as a gap-filler. She soon moved up to sit next to me, and had the attention of the entire bus riveted to her dramatic description of this beautiful poem. I was mesmerized by the flow, and, without understanding every word, knew by the end just what the poem was expressing. She, too, must have been immersed in the experience, because she nearly missed her bus stop.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends

'Cuz I said so!

by Erin Lunsford

On a blizzarding night several months into my stay in Russia, I was standing at a remote bus stop, waiting for a Russian friend who never showed up. I finally decided to head back home. But no buses were coming, and, not having been in a Russian blizzard before, I didn't know whether any more would be running that night. The only occasional passers-by were men who had obviously had more than their share of Vodka, and I didn't want to call unwanted attention to myself by asking them where there might be a phone. As time went on, I was getting cold and a bit anxious, so I was relieved to see two young adolescent boys coming toward me in the dimly lit, whirling snow. I approached them and was posing the question before I realized that they were actually young men, also quite extroverted with Vodka. Sure there was a phone nearby—come home with them! I could use theirs! I graciously declined, and turned away. The invitations, however, persisted.

Suddenly a phrase came to mind that I'd heard over and over when I'd listened to one of those Berlitz traveler tapes. It was under the section, "Emergencies and other unpleasant experiences," and the phrase was "Leave me alone, please." I used it, hearing the Berlitz lady's voice in my mind as I did so, and smiling grimly to myself. The guys didn't give up, however, and Berlitz failed me, because next I was supposed to say, "If you don't leave me alone, I'll call the police." Calling, of course, being my difficulty, I astutely calculated that the impact of such a statement would have been hilarity. So I simply repeated, "Leave me alone!" "Oh come on, why?" Then, with all the fire and sharpness I could muster, (and with one hand slipping into my pocket for my personal alarm), I said with great authority, "Because I told to you to!!!" Thankfully, instead of dissolving into tears of laughter at my grammar, they looked somewhat frightened, and immediately turned away. I'm not sure whether they even realized (being a bit "under the weather") that I was a foreigner. They may have figured that anyone who uses Russian as wildly as I just had must be dangerous.

You still don't know how to get there?

by Erin Lunsford

I spent 5 months in Russia in order to learn the language by informal means. I quickly discovered that asking for directions was a good conversation opener, but that understanding the response was a bit overwhelming. I had no way of predicting what they were going to say, and found myself floundering in an ocean of vocabulary and details that were undecipherable to me. I would typically try to at least confirm the general direction by pointing toward where I thought they meant and asking if that were correct, which launched them off into a second round of elaborate explanation. I never did find a stranger in such a situation who was aware of my dire need for simplicity, so I usually ended such encounters with a wan smile with thanks, and a foggy brain. I'd walk as far as my understanding had gone, and ask again at the next corner! I don't know why it never occurred to me to ask for directions when I was setting out for a destination I knew how to get to! Then the information coming at me would have been predictable. I'd know in concept the script they were supposed to be saying, and I could ask questions about the vocabulary without worrying too much about missing the gist of what they were saying. And I could have asked people again and again, all along the way (just like I normally did in unfamiliar territory), in order to get repetitious input. Of course, living in a big city like St. Petersburg makes it much easier to get away with that ruse—word doesn't get around quite as quickly that the American keeps forgetting her way to the bread store!

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Predictable scripts aid comprehension

#### Living in cupboards

by Erin Lunsford

My family moved to Peru when I was 10, exposing me for the first time to the possibility of acquiring another language. Since most of my friends and associates were American, I'm not sure how I picked up the beginnings of my Spanish in the earliest days. What I do remember, however, is an incident that happened in the first few weeks there, with my rudimentary language skills. I was helping a Peruvian woman put away dishes after we had washed them, and I didn't know where to put certain pots. But I didn't have a clue how to say the equivalent of, "Where do these go?" I puzzled for a few moments, and then, knowing it would sound silly but would get the point across, I asked, "Where do these live?" Florinda burst out laughing, showed me where the pots lived, and then gave me the more conventional way of asking for such information. Florinda and I, however, preferred the nonconventional mode ever after.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Learn to laugh at your mistakes

#### A traveler's phrase book for Russian

by Erin Lunsford

I was going to visit my sister and brother-in-law in Russia—my first time there! Knowing that this visit was to be a working one, I decided that I'd better get a jump on learning Russian. But how?

At the library I checked out a Berlitz traveler's phrase book and cassette tape. I decided to just listen to the tape while going about my chores, not to memorize any vocabulary, but simply to get a feel for the intonation and sound of the language. With my housemates away, I felt free to turn the tape over again and again. Even on my lunch breaks at work, I would lose myself in Berlitz. I was amused at certain choice phrases as, "Where's the nearest beauty parlor?" Like I was really going to need that!

I started liking the sound of a few of the phrases that had special lilts. After a week or so, I found myself muttering little sing-songy sounds as I worked. I'd catch myself with a start, wondering, "What did that mean?" and rush back to my tape at lunchtime to discover what little word or phrase I'd produced! Suddenly lots of small phrases started sticking, even without memorization. I got off the plane in St. Petersburg and was disappointed when the customs official didn't say, "Show me your passport, please." (Which I would have understood, thanks to Berlitz.) In fact, he didn't say anything at all, just took the book, stamped it and shoved it back at me. Alas! Was I really going to be able to use Russian on this trip? I'd already lost a valuable opportunity! Minutes later I found myself in a crowded side room with a hundred other people, wondering how I would see—or get to—my luggage if it arrived. Suddenly, through a momentary gap in the crowd I spied my suitcase. Not knowing what else to say, I blurted out a phrase from a Berlitz hotel dialogue about a lost bag being found: "My baggage!" I cried out in Russian with the same overjoyed tone that I'd heard on the tape. People immediately made way for me to squeeze to the front and snatch what was mine.

I discovered in time that my cassette experience had been valuable preparation. Though I never did need to say, "Where's the nearest beauty parlor?" I did need to say, "Where's the nearest metro?"—an easy substitution. The reasonably good accent I picked up from having tracked with the tape for so long got me in trouble with strangers, who thought I must know more Russian than I did. But it was a great help among new Russian friends, who were anxious to help me with my Russian so that my speaking—hilariously inept, though sounding nice to their ears—would take on some meaning.

She's not giving up. We may as well help her.

by Erin Lunsford

The summer after high school graduation I was the guest of my Japanese friend's family at their home in Japan. Eager to acculturate myself as rapidly as possible in the three weeks I had there, I usually declined the fork they offered in place of chopsticks. I couldn't get over the dexterity with which everyone—even children—could manage all kinds of food using chopsticks, and I freely admired their skill. (That must have sounded as funny to them as it did to me when they returned my compliments by commenting on how agile I was with a fork.) Everyone supplied their own theory of how chopsticks worked best, and took pains showing me how to position my fingers. The attempts caught up with me one meal when I finally rubbed the skin on my fourth finger raw. After a day of rest, though, I was at it again (staying away from the squared off sticks as a rule), still hopelessly uncoordinated, but eager. My Japanese friends affectionately showed all their friends and relatives this mark of my determination and my eagerness to eat like they did.

I was just as eager to learn a bit of Japanese while I was there, and everyone generously pitched in to help, though no doubt this was exhausting work for them. Everyone I met was tickled to find an American so desirous of learning their culture and language, and lots of positive feelings were thus generated, even if I was still flinging food from uncooperative chopsticks and slaughtering their language.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

Of bakeries and bread stores

by Erin Lunsford

I had been in Russia for a few short weeks. Although I had not had formal language lessons, I had been diligently picking up what I could from a Russian coworker with whom I'd spent hours each day. One day I and other Americans were being driven around town by Oleg, another monolingual Russian co-worker who rarely cracked a smile or tried to converse familiarly with any of us Americans, being new to the cross-cultural experience himself, and quite uncomfortable with the language barrier.

I was slowly gaining familiarity with the Cyrillic alphabet, and was sitting in the back seat peering out the window at a shop sign—the word was long and convoluted (to my unaccustomed eyes), and it was taking me a long time to sound it out. When finally I did make out the word, (it was the fancy equivalent of "bakery"), I recognized it and interpreted, half under my breath, "Oh! Xlebni magazin !" which is an alternate, very simple way of saying 'a bread store'. All of a sudden I noticed Oleg beaming at me through the rearview mirror as though I was his daughter and had just taken my first step. He had never heard me use more than greetings and standard phrases in Russian until then, and now he knew I'd just generated a phrase. His pleasure made me feel like I'd done a marvelous feat!

After that incident, Oleg was a willing language teacher whenever we were driving somewhere. Though he was not what I'd call a "natural," he'd go to great lengths to try to help me understand what he wanted to say, and would also point out interesting sights along the way, telling me a bit of historical or other information (of which I could usually pick up or learn a little something). The transformation was delightful.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Show your interest in the language and culture
- Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends

#### Christmas Eve

by Erin Lunsford

While in Russia, I hired a tutor from the local university for a couple of hours each week to augment my informal acquisition of Russian, hoping to practice informal conversation in a controlled environment. However, this good lady was accustomed to teaching grammar to mother tongue Russian speakers, and, being of a proper Russian teaching style, she wanted to teach me through formal lectures all the Russian grammatical terms. Since I was unfamiliar with academic language, she thought I didn't know much Russian. She relied heavily on her dictionary, showing me the English even for basic things I knew well in Russian. Our communications were stilted, serious, and full of monitoring of everything I said. I felt inhibited to say anything for fear of mistakes. I think we were both a little frustrated, and couldn't seem to break out of the formalism.

Change in our relationship came quite unexpectedly. Russians celebrate the Orthodox Christmas in January, but my teacher wanted to make me feel at home during this, my first winter in Eastern Europe, so she had me over for a big Christmas Eve dinner by the Western calendar. Sergei, her jovial neighbor who spoke some English, was there, too. He was anxious to meet his first American ever. His curiosity and questions about American culture loosened me up, and he was pleasantly surprised to hear me answer comfortably in Russian, having been told by my teacher that I didn't speak much.

Suddenly, with my teacher and Sergei bantering back and forth between themselves over dinner, the formalism and boredom was shattered, and I was chatting in everyday Russian with them both. Sergei turned out to be a natural and wonderfully insightful language "teacher," tolerant of colloquialisms, and quite intuitive at understanding what it was I was trying to get at in my

questions. And he came boldly to my defense when I'd make mistakes grammatically and my teacher would want to stop everything and correct me before I got my thought out. "Let the person talk!" he would rebuke teasingly. He had the insight to see that I needed to get my tongue loosened up as much as I needed refinement, and as long as he understood what I was saying, that was enough. "After all," he would remind us, "What is communication but getting a message across clearly? She's doing it, isn't she?" He was fascinated by my roundabout ways of putting things when I was unacquainted with the typical expressions.

I learned more by listening closely to the interactions between the two of them and asking questions from time to time about what they were saying than I would have, had they taken the time to stop and correct my own production.

We decided to meet more informally after that, at my teacher's house instead of at the university. My teacher was quite unsure that she could count times we spent baking and laughing together as tutoring times, especially when Sergei would stop by and "bother" us. This was entirely foreign to her mental construct of how "learning" was supposed to happen. She would throw up her hands at Sergei's colloquial explanations of why certain grammatical things were the way they were. Now and then they would argue about the meaning of an expression, which afforded me more exposure to different registers of language, as well as more information about the expression. No one could deny that learning was happening! And in spite of all her protests, I could tell that my dear teacher was enjoying this new "tutoring" style and seemed hugely relieved that the self-imposed pressure was off her to present formal lectures about everything I wanted to know.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Combine formal and informal learning
- If you do not know a word, circumlocute
- Find nonthreatening people to talk with

The unwanted fountain of youth

by Erin Lunsford

Pride has to go when language acquisition is under way. Things happen that make you realize how silly you must sound to people. Take what happened to me in Russia. Since I'm single, people don't have a good idea of how old I am. So it was no great surprise when, upon meeting Russians who asked me my age (thinking I was a brave girl to be so far from home at such a tender age), the revelation of my 28 years would evoke exclamations of disbelief. It did come as something of a blow, however, when someone I considered a reasonably good friend about tripped over his jaw when he found out I was over 20. That means he must have thought I was a teenager when we'd first met a year and a half previous! I wondered, did I come across as incredibly immature?

Then I pieced it together: he had been the first Russian friend I'd met, and had had the unfortunate honor of being my first (unofficial) language tutor, since we'd worked together from my first week in the country, when I knew essentially nothing in the language. We were responsible for fixing up several flats in preparation for a team of Americans coming to live there. At the beginning of each day, we'd receive a basic work assignment—Alexei in Russian, I in English. It was up to us to work out the fine details as we dashed around town evaluating the needs of each flat, prioritizing, bargain shopping for furniture and loading it on top of his little car for delivery. We found all kinds of creative ways to negotiate meaning between ourselves—heavy on the charades and dictionary use at first, and as the weeks went by, relying more and more on simplistic explanations, and long, ingenious detours around vocabulary obstacles. He

was incredibly patient and helpful. We were quite proud of ourselves in those early days that we understood each other so well with so little to go on! What hard work mentally!! (Our throbbing headaches by the end of the day were well deserved.)

We often laughed at ourselves as we thought about how we must sound to other people—so childlike in our simplistic and dramatic conversations! I envied his ability to operate so smoothly in his culture and talk intelligently with the store clerks. It never occurred to me that he didn't really have the opportunity to witness me in my element, talking like an intelligent adult, since all of our negotiations with each other and with shop keepers were in Russian, not English. We couldn't discourse about terribly abstract or deep things, so Alexei probably pictured me as a fairly naive, simplistic person.

It was after over a year's separation—and some progress in language acquisition on my part—that I saw Alexei next, and what fun it was to finally be able to talk about things with at least a small degree of dignity! But the impression of youth must have been pretty deeply set from our first six weeks of friendship, judging by how widely his eyes bugged at the news of my age.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Accept the fact that you sound like a child, even though you are an adult

By hook or by crook—getting language however you can

by Erin Lunsford

I had just gotten back from a 6-week working vacation in St. Petersburg, Russia, where I'd had massive exposure to the language, thanks to having been teamed up with a Russian who spoke no English. My language skills had gone from a zero to a hilariously sloppy but bold conversational ability. The absolute need to communicate with my co-worker had catapulted me into high-gear intake and output. We had used a lot of strategies to get around my limitations in the language, but we found it amazing how foundational to basic communication certain key verbs and other words turned out to be.

On my return to the States, I had several weeks before my university was to start up, so I got acquainted with some Russian immigrants attending an ESL class near my home. My Russian took on a few more dimensions in those weeks, and I was sad to be moving away. I decided that I would beg for permission at the university to sit in on several levels of Russian just to glean what I could from them, and maintain my exposure to natural conversational styles.

When I found the 3rd year university Russian teacher, I began to explain to him my interest.

Highly amused, he asked me to come talk about it in his office. Passing the department secretary's office, he chortled gleefully, "This young lady has been on a 6-week trip to Russia, and now she wants to join 3rd year Russian!!" But after I explained that I just wanted to be exposed to Russian dialogue in class and do whatever I could of the homework, he was converted to the idea, possibly just for the entertainment factor of it all.

A large part of the homework was to read short stories. Class time was spent discussing them—entirely in Russian. After the first day of class, the teacher asked me how much of what had been said I had understood. Apart from the recitations of memorized proverbs and poetry, I thought I had taken in about 70 percent of the discussions, not word for word, but gist for gist. He looked a bit incredulous, but in debriefing, saw I actually had picked up something.

The readings at night were work! I rarely made it through the entire assigned section, because nearly every word had to be looked up! Sometimes I would just look up the key words and guess at the rest. The vocabulary is much more dense and uncommon in good literature than in conversation. But my curiosity and love for a good story kept me going for sometimes hours at a stretch. It was worth the effort, because all the wading through deep waters alone prepared me

for the following day's topic of discussion. Knowing what the conversation would be about, made guessing unknown vocabulary during class much easier! I didn't try to memorize any but the most useful words I came across in the reading. But the next day in class I might hear some of the vocabulary that I had looked up and written out; hearing it in use sometimes helped me acquire it inadvertently.

The teacher asked how long it took me to do the readings ... and then why it took me so long—how many words did I have to look up on average? "Almost all of them." He couldn't figure out how I could comprehend what went on in class if I had so little apparent knowledge of Russian. Most native speakers of any language usually don't realize how widely their language register differs from spoken conversation to written, and how much can be (and is) communicated orally with a quite small pool of vocabulary.

That quarter I also sat in on 2nd year and 5th year Russian, but didn't get as much out of them, though they, too, were taught in Russian. Why? Because they were busy talking about grammar, unfamiliar metalanguage talk, instead of talking about real life, the domain I was most familiar with from having lived for a short time in Russia.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn
- There are variations in language due to regional, status, and stylistic differences

Was it something I said?

by Erin Lunsford

My Russian was just coming to life after several weeks in the country. My Russian co-worker, Alexei, and I had just finished a day of hard work around town, getting several flats in good living condition for some Americans who would arrive soon. Though technically hired to merely drive workers like me around town, Alexei had also proved himself a diligent and talented handyman, strategist, and mover of heavy furniture.

Another American had joined Alexei and me that particular day to lend a hand. He, too, was duly impressed with Alexei, and at the end of the day as we were all driving home, we were praising Alexei for all the wonderful things he'd done. Both of us Americans were fledgling Russian speakers, so we were pooling our resources to express our appreciation to our monolingual friend, no doubt in rather unique turns of expression. I watched Alexei's face in the rear view mirror as he took in all our flattery. He seemed to be enjoying the attention in a shy but amused way. Then we ran out of vocabulary before we ran out of gratitude, so I decided to sum it all up by saying Alexei was just an all-around good kind of guy. Which, being interpreted into 3-week-old Russian, went, "You are a good man." The effect was astonishing! Up went Alexei's eyebrows, and his face first blanched and then turned beet red in an embarrassed expression. I shrunk down in the back seat, wondering what in the world he thought I'd just said, but too embarrassed to ask!! I wish I'd had the composure to apologize and admit I had no idea how I had erred. But Alexei, being the good kind of guy he was, regained composure momentarily, apparently forgiving my blithe ignorance, and continued being the prized worker he was.

But what had I said? Several months later, back in the United States, I ventured to ask someone what could have gone wrong. After some laughter, my mentor told me that I should have said, "You are a good person." Inclusion of the sex of the person implies, well, you know ... prowess perhaps.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Learn to laugh at your mistakes

- Watch people's reactions to what you say

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- Check out the meaning of words, before you add them to your active vocabulary

Run that by me again?

by Erin Lunsford

People in Russia who have a good sense of humor enjoy talking to me, because I am a rather nontraditional speaker of Russian. I'm one of those people who would like to try to stay in the conversation even when it's way over my head. (I do that in English, too, by asking a lot of questions that make the person come back down to my level.)

Some Russians are naturally better conversationalists with foreigners than others, because of their simpler speaking style, and their ability to gauge their speaking level to your comprehension level. Others are not so natural. You ask them to slow down, and they do—for the first two words. You ask them to reword something, and they just say it louder, or in equally complex language. I used to be cowed by such speakers, and wanted to flee from such encounters. Then I found my stubborn streak, and decided that a little bit of uncooperativeness on the speaker's part wasn't going to keep me from having a good language experience. So I started a new technique that often stops people in their tracks.

When I strain to understand someone, I usually start with the typical requests to slow down, enunciate, speak simply, whatever. If they keep plowing persistently on, I interrupt as politely as possible, and ask "Excuse me, but are you saying ...?" and proceed to give my most intelligent guess, even when I'm positive that my best guess is going to dumbfound them with my ignorance. I often get a startled look, a laugh (varying from nervous to hearty), and a sudden change in disposition. They notice me for the first time, in a way. They start talking to me, a foreigner who barely knows their language, all things considered. Sometimes it takes several rounds of these questions to reel them down to my level. They realize, "It wasn't just a fluke; she really doesn't get it when I keep talking the way I would to a normal person." It works!

Even with cooperative conversational partners, from time to time the conversation may hit a snag (where I suddenly lose even the stream of conversation and can't get it back). I've found that it's sometimes much more productive to swallow my pride early on and venture an interpretive guess out loud, than to let things get entirely out of hand. When they re-explain, I repeat back my new understanding of what they mean, and so on, until they are satisfied that I got the message.

The further off my guess is, the more jokes I make about myself or my guess, and that sets the tone for them to find humor and not irritation in my limitations. Amazing reams of information have been passed on by such negotiations of meaning, and my antics have supplied many good laughs when Russians retell their friends about our unusual encounters.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Give and get feedback to check comprehension

See also

- Keywords: negotiating meaning

Story by Greg Lyons

OVERVIEW

Story by Greg Lyons

by Greg Lyons

In this module group

Here is a story by Greg Lyons:



- The Listening approach

The Listening approach

by Greg Lyons

When I applied to the language school where my wife was studying, the classes were full. So I chose a different school which used the Listening approach to language learning. The Listening approach claims that listening and understanding local speakers for 1,700 carefully planned hours is all that is necessary to achieve native speaker proficiency. The student listens to graded stories, exclusively told by talented local speakers. A student listens at a given level until his comprehension reaches 95 percent. When he advances, he must understand at least 75 percent at the next level. No student may speak the new language until completing all 1,700 hours, normally in about six months.

As you can imagine, daily living is difficult without speaking even a few words of the language surrounding you. Just as a child eventually learns the language of his caretakers, eventually the adult is supposed to be able to speak spontaneously. Virtually all of the class time in the listening approach is spent hearing and trying to comprehend. In a more traditional approach, for example a daily route through the market, you may spend only 25 percent of your time comprehending the language. If you converse, then naturally about 50 percent of the time is spent talking.

Therefore, progress should be slower.

Students are encouraged to take up to 8 hours or more a day, due to radical discounts based on a sliding scale. Also semester by semester as you continue, the fees decrease significantly. The program is amazingly effective, but few complete it sticking to all the rules. The student is marvelously prepared to understand lectures, where the goal is to grasp the main point. The language itself is not in focus. One classmate went on to get a master's degree, but this was a special case.

My own personality is rather reticent. I do not feel a great need to speak. I was able to risk trying this method because high proficiency was less necessary in my work. Since I did not have a work assignment, I pursued this approach for two years. The program had variety and provided a great deal of cultural information. Reading was not seriously studied until far into the course.

Sometimes we played games. It was a fun, low-pressure way to start out, but it needs to be supplemented with structured learning later on, according to personality and goals. I don't think it is time or cost effective for someone who feels a sense of urgency to acquire a language and move on.

My comprehension is way out of proportion with my other language skills. For instance, I cannot define words easily. My understanding of the language is like a local speaker. I know very few linguistic things about the language even though I have a linguistics background. I do want to increase my structural knowledge of the language. When listening to language learners who speak better than I do, I frequently notice that they miss the point. Because such people speak easily and a great deal, they can compensate for their comprehension errors by asking for and receiving clarification.

In my work, many of my colleagues knew lots of English and wanted to learn more. I applied one of the principles of the listening approach. If you are going to speak, use your own language, not the one you want to learn. So, I requested that my colleagues ask me questions in the local language, and I responded in English. It was less stressful for me. I spoke my mother tongue and my colleagues spoke back to me in theirs. Sometimes it worked, but sometimes it didn't. Some people simply wanted to practice speaking English. When the subject matter required technical vocabulary that did not exist in their language, it became difficult.

Stories by Melinda Lyons

## OVERVIEW

Stories by Melinda Lyons

by Melinda Lyons

In this module group

Here are some stories by Melinda Lyons:

- What dialect do you speak?
- Getting a head start
- Feeling successful
- Specialized vocabulary
- Long names
- Expectations
- Classifying books
- Take a trip

What dialect do you speak?

by Melinda Lyons

My husband is a man of few words. He is not very talkative. Normally he speaks the most when he is angry. At such moments, he just has to say something. While some people express their anger through intonation, my husband tends to express his anger by speaking in short clipped syllables. However when locals hear him speak that way, instead of realizing that he is angry, they think that he learned his local language in the northeast part of the country. They find this rather puzzling because it is an unlikely place to learn the language.

Getting a head start

by Melinda Lyons

Before departing for language school, I had lots of free time, so I sought a language learning situation in the US. The native speaker who taught me knew very little English and I didn't know any of the target language. She tried to teach me what she thought I needed to know. I learned some stock phrases, how to count from 1 to 20, and some basic vocabulary. I felt that the experience was a fiasco. I didn't learn much. I couldn't communicate my plans or goals for each session, but I did hear a native speaker.

When I arrived in the country, I entered a fast-paced program, as my husband and I had agreed upon. The first month was easy and fun. The first two weeks of phonetics was a breeze. The next two weeks was 200–300 words of basic vocabulary, most of which I already knew. I was the best student in the class, which made me feel very good about myself. The next three months, classes continued 4 hours each morning.

Then I became pregnant. The fifth month of class was difficult. I felt queasy and it was hard to concentrate. I would sip milk from break time through the rest of the morning, which I wasn't sure was permitted. I was trying so hard to not get sick. I wondered what the others thought about this former A student who was now acting dumb. The sixth month of class went easier. Midway, I tested at a high Level 2+ on the LAMP scale. After 7 months of studies, I stopped formal language school for a variety of reasons. At this point I had reached the beginning of Level 3. The head start on language learning had paid off.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Language learners seem to hit plateaus

Feeling successful

by Melinda Lyons

When I went through labor to deliver my second child, I felt that my language learning had been successful. During the contractions, I did my breathing exercises. However, in between the contractions, I spoke to the hospital nurses in the local language. First of all, they felt amazed that a woman in labor would not scream. Apparently, most local women scream during labor, even though otherwise they are very controlled. Second, it was novel for the nurses to hear a foreigner who knew the local language well enough to keep on speaking it even in a very stressful situation.

My physical appearance as a dark, Western European was an advantage as well. Many locals mistook me for a part-local and thought that perhaps I had been in the US and then returned. My accent was fairly good. When I spoke only a few words, instead of commenting on how good my language was, they treated me as if I belonged there.

Specialized vocabulary

by Melinda Lyons

I found it very difficult to continue language learning after the formal classes ended. Advanced listening courses were available in the areas of linguistics, history, reading newspapers, politics, government, housekeeping and religion, but I was unable to locate anything in library science, my specialty. Probably I was one of the first English speaking librarians to learn the local language.

I photocopied an out of print list of library terms prepared to help local students read library science articles in English. In vain, I tried to locate a local speaker to help me learn this vocabulary. My attempts to prepare in advance were futile. Once on the job, I eventually acquired everyday terms such as card catalog, journal, periodical and reading room. My goal was to read library science articles in the local language, but no one seemed willing to sit down and help me with infrequently used terms.

Long names

by Melinda Lyons

During language school, the characters in the stories we read had one-syllable nicknames. However, when I began working in a library, I was introduced to the employees by their long, formal names. These given names were very different from English names or the names of the local friends I knew informally. Months later, I still didn't know the full names of the staff that I regularly taught. To this day, I only know the long formal names of about half a dozen or so locals. It was very difficult for me to retain these long names.

Even though I could read the department names in the library where I worked, I constantly found myself going to the wrong department. The department names were very long. It was not easy for me to tell at a glance what was in each department. The everyday language that I studied in school consisted of short words. The literate language was derived from an Indian language with long words. It was hard to master this part of the language.

Expectations

by Melinda Lyons

I worked as an English language consultant in a local library and I wanted to improve my local language ability and my vocabulary in the domain of library science. I perceived my official role as to help locals catalog their library books in English. However, some people viewed me as an English teacher. They saw me as an opportunity to practice their spoken English and they wanted me to use English as much as possible. Meanwhile, some of the older librarians felt very uncomfortable speaking English. A few would not talk to me at all, because they thought that their boss wanted them to only use English. I made it a point to speak to them in the local

language and let them know I was willing to communicate even if they did not want to use English. They were still reticent to converse with me.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- People have expectations about who speaks which language
- People may resist speaking their language because they want to learn your language

#### Classifying books

by Melinda Lyons

I worked as an English language consultant in a local library, helping them to catalog their books in English. The locals needed to know the semantic domain in order to select the proper subject heading to classify a book. Sometimes I could easily answer their question. Sometimes the problem stemmed from their knowledge of English. Most spoke English at about Level 3 or 4. Once in a while, there was not a simple English equivalent for the local topic or book title. This was a challenge to me, because I only spoke the local language at about Level 3. In some cases, I asked the people to explain the situation in the language to me. We worked back and forth in both English and the local language to reach a satisfactory subject heading, especially for obscure vocabulary items. One time there were detailed questions about plumbing terms. They wanted to know, for example, what headings for different parts of a sink might be found in the Library of Congress. Such specialized topics are not covered in a normal school setting.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in

#### Take a trip

by Melinda Lyons

People in the country where I work frequently take weekend holiday trips. After we had been in the country for about 5 months, my husband, son, and I took such a trip with some people from church. Among the dozen teenagers, young adults, and a few chaperones, only one or two spoke good English. Because we were outnumbered, we had much more opportunity to hear the local language than to speak English. Actually, we didn't learn a lot of the language, but afterward we felt more comfortable in the culture. They had fun and so did we.

One part of the trip was a visit to a village of a certain local language group, usually ignored and considered backward and of low status. Upon our arrival in the village, the teenagers were surprised that they were offered cold water. It was an eye-opener for the young people from the city to learn that the village people had electricity. One of the ladies from the city was a language teacher for another mission, and she challenged the young people from the city to learn five words of the local language, for a small prize. They never would have thought about doing this on their own. It was interesting for us to observe the teenagers trying to interact with the village people, who were rather shy. They did not have an easy task.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Stories by Inga McKendry

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Inga McKendry

by Inga McKendry

In this module group

Here are some stories by Inga McKendry:

- Grammatically correct, but not culturally correct
- Language and culture

Grammatically correct, but not culturally correct

by Inga McKendry

We wanted Mixtecs to feel at home in our house, so we learned how to offer someone more food at a meal. Then we made a drill for our language learning lessons, using different food items as a substitution in the drill. We could say, "Would you like more beans? Would you like more tortillas?" We even practiced using the proper forms of "you" in the question, since that's culturally important. However, three years later we discovered that our language associate had been going hungry at first. Culturally, she could not accept food offered if that was the phrase we used. Thankfully, she had begun warning new people that came to our house that it was OK to accept food when we used that phrase.

Language and culture

by Inga McKendry

Languages can make distinctions you've never dreamed about.

In our very earliest days of learning Mixtec, we travelled out to a village and learned some of the language from an older gentleman. One of the phrases we learned from him was, "I didn't understand. Would you repeat it please?"

On our next trip out, we were excited to try out the things we'd previously learned. We went with a lady friend of ours to another village. An old man came up and said something to us that we didn't understand. I thought, "Great! A chance to use our new phrase!" In my faltering Mixtec, I said, "I didn't understand. Would you repeat it please?" The lady who was with us said, "No, No! You can't say it that way!" She corrected me, but we wondered what I had done wrong. We found out much later that when speaking to a person of higher status or greater age, you must use not only a special form of the second person pronoun ('you'), but also a special form of the first person pronoun ('I'). The pronoun we'd used with the older gentleman displayed a complete lack of respect in a culture where respect for one's elders is very important.

Stories by an unnamed author

## OVERVIEW

Stories by an unnamed author

In this module group

Here are the modules on stories by an unnamed author:

- Buying meat
- Shopping around
- My Moore grandmother
- The peanut lady

Buying meat

Every other Saturday in Burkina Faso, I went to Omar the butcher to buy fresh beef. Because the meat was tough, I wanted the chunk cut into small pieces. Omar would cut off a few pieces and show them to me to see if they were small enough. When I gave my consent, he would cut up the whole portion. While waiting, I would converse in the local language.

One day as I was reviewing a list of verbs with my language associate, an awful thought came into my mind. I groaned, moaned, roared with laughter, and then decided to confess to her. For two years I had been asking Omar to chew the meat into small pieces instead of to cut it into small pieces. The two verbs differed by only one syllable.

The next Saturday when I bought meat, I carefully asked Omar to cut it into small pieces. I was so relieved he didn't make an issue of my mistake. I did wonder, though, if he had told his friends about the white lady who wanted him to chew her meat.

I could have gone to another butcher or not told my language associate, but I had long ago learned that it's impossible to avoid making mistakes while learning a language and I didn't want to give up the friends I had made.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

#### Shopping around

During rainy season, women grill and sell corn on the cob at street corners and under street lights in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. I would often buy an ear or two on my way home from work. There were numerous vendors vying for my loyalty, and if I went to the same vendor all the time, she could become extremely possessive. If, on another occasion, she saw me purchasing corn from someone else who was lined up in the 100 yard stretch of corn vendors, she would come over and ask me to buy from her as well. I began to feel guilty for having been disloyal. I decided it would be better to buy corn from someone different each night. I would greet not one, but several of the ladies, which made them all happy, and then buy corn from just one of them. The next night I would stop at a different place along the road and repeat the procedure. The ladies seemed more content and I had the advantage of practicing vocabulary for corn husk, corn silk, fan, fire, and so forth without boring them. At other times I would stop at a solitary vendor. If, as a complete stranger, she was understanding me, I felt reasonably confident that my vocabulary and pronunciation were clear. Shopping around didn't make any difference in price, but it certainly helped my language learning.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Take opportunities to use the language
- Be creative in finding ways to practice the language

#### My Moore grandmother

Shortly after moving into my apartment in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, I met an elderly woman sitting along the dirt road beside her house. I exchanged greetings with her, using the few phrases I knew in Moore. Then she responded with a phrase I didn't recognize. I paused and then tried repeating the phrase. She answered with the same phrase. It sounded a little bit like the word for money, but I didn't think she was trying to beg. She tried to make herself clear, not accepting the fact that I couldn't understand. Maybe she had never talked to an American before. I knew around 50 words of Moore, so I finally said good-bye. I would be forced to speak Moore if I continued my relationship with this "grandmother," I thought to myself.

As the weeks went by, my vocabulary did increase. I learned that my grandmother's question was "Where are you going?" I stopped to greet her from time to time. Our conversations got longer. She was very patient when I couldn't understand something, but she never spoke French with me. We were just friends, not language partners. One time when she saw that I had purchased some large aluminum pots, she had a young grandson carry them to my apartment on his head. A few weeks before I left for furlough, I stopped by to tell her that I was going to be leaving for a year. I reminded her of the first day I met her and how I didn't even understand the phrase "Where are you going?" She thought for a moment—maybe she had forgotten those early days—and then laughed. Then she led me into her courtyard and brought over every family member so I

could say good-bye to each one. I'm looking forward to seeing my Moore grandmother when I return.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for people who have time to talk with you
- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

#### The peanut lady

Around the corner from my apartment in Burkina Faso, a lady sold peanuts. When I took my daily walk, there she would be, selling peanuts and fried cakes. I greeted her with the phrases I knew and continued on my walk.

As the weeks went by, my vocabulary increased. I only spoke Moore with her and noticed that her other customers also spoke to her in Moore (but maybe she did know French). I would try out new phrases with her and then continue on. There were only a few times that we chatted longer. Sometimes I bought peanuts from her. It was entirely appropriate for me to greet this neighbor, and at the same time I made the most of the situation to practice the language that I was learning.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition
- Take opportunities to use the language

#### Stories by Mary Morgan

##### OVERVIEW

#### Stories by Mary Morgan

by Mary Morgan

In this module group

Here are some stories by Mary Morgan:

- Your tongue doesn't match your face!
- No baby talk, please!
- Which language should I learn first?
- A thing or two I've learned ...
- Now, which language did I just use?
- Oops, I got derailed!
- Do it yourself grammar
- The Good Book

Your tongue doesn't match your face!

by Mary Morgan

When I went to the Solomon Islands and needed to learn Pidgin, I used two strategies. I studied structured material, produced by the Peace Corps, and I went to live with a family of Solomon Islanders for six weeks. At that time, very few expatriates except the Peace Corps people lived with families, and I was sort of looked down on by some of the expatriates because I did. But I found it was fun, just plain fun!

Because of that six weeks I spent in the village, I really got into Pidgin, and during the next 2½ years that I was there I really surprised people. I would speak Pidgin and people would look at me and see this white face and speak English to me. And I would look at a Solomon Island face and speak Pidgin, and it was a scream. Finally, people got so they saw me as someone who could speak Pidgin and would speak Pidgin with me.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- People have expectations about who speaks which language
- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

No baby talk, please!

by Mary Morgan

After I had served on the staff of our Field Training Course for five years, I thought that I had learned to speak Tzeltal pretty well. I could talk to all the people living around the camp and communicate with them. What I didn't realize was that the Tzeltal people living near the camp had learned to speak a sort of Pidgin Tzeltal to communicate with us, because that's what we spoke.

I discovered this mortifying fact, when at a literacy workshop, where a friend of mine said, "Sister Mary, I need to teach you Tzeltal! You talk like a baby. Everyone around the Training Course site does, because it's too hard for the people to teach you how to speak their language with all the complications. It's too hard on them, so they speak baby talk to you!"

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- People often modify their speech when speaking to foreigners

Which language should I learn first?

by Mary Morgan

On the coast of Kenya I met a couple who went to work with a minority language in that country. They decided not to learn Swahili first (the trade language), but just to plunge in and learn Penyella, because they were afraid that if they didn't, they would never really learn the local language. It was really hard, because people in the village automatically tried to speak Swahili with them. But they learned the Penyella language really well.

When I was working in Latin America, we had the same question: should we learn Spanish first, or the local language? Our organization's policy changed over the years on that question. At one time, our workers were told not to learn Spanish until they had learned the local language, and some of them never really learned to speak Spanish well, which caused difficulties in living in the broader context of the country. Later, our members were encouraged to learn Spanish first, but then some of them found that made it harder to get the local people to speak to them in the local language. Maybe if it's a very multilingual situation it's good to say to people, "I really want to learn your mother tongue" and to start with that.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- People have expectations about who speaks which language

A thing or two I've learned ...

by Mary Morgan

I'm going to learn a new language when I go to West Africa. I don't know which one, yet, but I'm going to be a literacy consultant and I think it is important for me to learn a West African language, because it'll help me to understand the problems people are struggling with in literacy. The languages are so different from ones I've learned.

I know it's going to be hard. It'll have tone and other things I'm not used to. But I've been thinking of a couple of strategies. One is to set aside improving my French for the time I am working on the new language and just be wholehearted about learning it. When I learned Mixtec in Mexico, I was doing so many other things—working on my degree and doing survey work. I just couldn't concentrate.



The second thing is to do something I did do in Mixtec: make little picture cards, with phrases on them of everyday things. One I remember was "Let's go pick blackberries." The kids would come along and say it a lot, so I made a card with a picture and the phrase on the back. And I just wrote down the phrase the way I heard it and didn't worry too much about how correctly it was written. One of the problems was that there were so many varieties of Mixtec in that one village that people would say the phrase differently. That may be true in Africa, too.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn
- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

Now, which language did I just use?

by Mary Morgan

It's hard sometimes to keep languages apart in my mind. When I studied French and Portuguese, I would answer the professor in Spanish. I always knew what he was saying, but I would answer in Spanish. But I really have Spanish assimilated, because I've had it for a long time and taught in it. I learned French through Spanish and Portuguese through French.

Part of being able to reference several languages without losing your ability to function in the others, I think, is the degree of assimilation and use. And also, you need to train yourself to switch languages, quickly, as interpreters are trained to do. But then, interpreters have a high suicide rate! Because it is so demanding, your concentration has to be so high, unless you are one of those people who is bilingual as a child.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another
- Multilingual people may associate languages with a particular setting or audience

Oops, I got derailed!

by Mary Morgan

In France I was taking a course, and I was always the first one to volunteer for anything because I really wanted to learn this language. So I had volunteered to give an exposé, and had it all memorized. I'd practiced it with my family and had it all down. I was talking about my work and how I work with unwritten languages. I got up and announced the topic, and someone said, "Can we ask you some questions? We don't know what unwritten languages are." So all these students started asking questions and they couldn't believe we were working in developing countries. By the time the students asked all the questions, I couldn't remember a word of my exposé. Not one word! It was very embarrassing as a professor, as a person who teaches in different languages, just to lose it. I was in a cold sweat, but then I looked at my notes and sort of got started, and I got through it.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning

Do it yourself grammar

by Mary Morgan

I took a course in French literature one summer at Wake Forest University. I memorized more than I had ever memorized in my life and it wasn't easy, because memorization is not easy for me. But I learned a lot.

In the end, I made my own grammar book. I had a month after two intensive courses, and I went through all of my notes and pulled out all the comments I had written down about what the

professor had said and put it into my own little grammar book. That really helped me to make it mine.

The thing I had the hardest part with, in that course, was putting the right words together. I wrote everything in French, and the papers came back with enough red marks to start a red hearts club. The professor said, "Mary, you are trying to say too much!" I got most of the tenses right, but the collocation of words wasn't very good.

The Good Book

by Mary Morgan

One thing that really helped me, while learning French, was that I read the lectionary readings—the Epistle and the Gospel for every day—in French. If there are Scripture passages available in the language I'm learning, I use them, because I am already familiar with the content.

Stories by Jennifer Munger

OVERVIEW

Stories by Jennifer Munger

by Jennifer Munger

In this module group

Here are some stories by Jennifer Munger:

- Being asked to complain
- Fitting In
- Learning from the kids
- War stories

Being asked to complain

by Jennifer Munger

One day when I was sitting with my language tutor, she said, "Today we're going to talk about and practice how to complain in Russian." Her list consisted of 35 phrases of complaints appropriate to say in a grocery store. We went through the items one by one, and she made me go through each about 20 times, because my intonation was just not "complaining" enough.

I got to the point where I was shouting these things. She would just shake her head and say, "You are not going to get anywhere in this country if you don't learn how to complain."

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Fitting In

by Jennifer Munger

My time for language learning was very limited in Russia. One way I practiced the language was by going places with my Russian friends. We went to concerts, museums, public swimming pools, and other places of interest. One thing I liked about concerts was that I didn't have to talk all the time. I could take the time to listen and talk in a relaxed way, on the way there and during intermission. Another helpful thing in St. Petersburg was that if we dressed in Russian dress, we looked like Russians instead of foreigners. Because of this, we didn't have people coming up and flooding us with questions that foreigners frequently get asked. Instead, people would ask us questions such as what time it was, or how to get to places. We could practice the language without them knowing we were foreign—at least until we opened our mouths!

As time went on, we learned a lot of phrases and were able to get to the point where we sounded fairly "Russian." On the buses I would learn what people frequently ask and write that down. I would go home and practice those phrases. Then, when somebody would come up to me and ask what street we were on, or how to get to a certain place, I would have the response memorized. I

practiced it until I sounded pretty fluent. It was a real boost to be able to say something that they understood.

Learning from the kids

by Jennifer Munger

My children were four and six when we went to Russia. By the time we left, four years later, they were fluent in Russian. They became good teachers for me. They were patient, and they saw that I was trying and was not afraid to practice my Russian, even though I made mistakes. I've always known that boldness is more important than perfectionism, but in front of my kids I found it to be invaluable. I believe it helped them to better learn the language, too. They both went to Russian schools, so sometimes I went with them and sat in the class to listen and go through the first grade book with them. That was helpful to me in learning Russian.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Talk with children and listen to parents talking to their children

War stories

by Jennifer Munger

I found that most older Russian people love to talk. They often sit on park benches outside, so I would go to the park and let my kids play, while I sat down on a bench to listen to the older people. I didn't want them to know I was a foreigner so I usually didn't do a lot of talking. I wanted them to feel free to talk and give me their life story, which they often did. This was also true when waiting in food or bread lines. I tried to stand next to an older person. Inevitably, they turned around and started talking to me. They often told about how they lived through the blockade during World War II. Listening to them was really good for learning the language.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Listen to people talking to each other in their language
- Look for people who have time to talk with you

Stories by Dave O'Bar

OVERVIEW

Stories by Dave O'Bar

by Dave O'Bar

In this module group

Here are some stories by Dave O'Bar:

- Solving the world's problems
- Master of ceremonies
- Puzzled
- The old folk's home
- Throw fire in the bucket
- Project bachhaus
- Seeing is learning
- A time to speak, and a time to be silent

Solving the world's problems

by Dave O'Bar

When I was a student in Germany my junior year of college, I was adopted by a German family. One of the things I found most effective was talking to my German "brother," who was about 10 years old. I'm an ISTJ (Meyers-Briggs temperament categorization) and am fairly reserved when

it comes to new social settings, but in that context it was fun and freeing to try out all my crazy ideas on this boy.

I had asserted that German was the most illogical language in the whole world (although it is, in fact, fairly logical and regular), because it had some crazy exceptions. I used the word Uhr, which Germans use the same as the English use 'o'clock', but it also means 'clock'. My "brother" and I spent several hours one evening joking about how illogical any language was that would fail to distinguish between those two things. Even though it was nonsensical, it was a wonderful way to hear him talk about it. From there we went on to anything else in the language that struck me as an irregularity. I felt completely unabashed because it was not threatening for me to hear my "brother" say, "It doesn't work that way," and to hear his perspective on how the language worked, which was often different from what the textbooks said.

It became almost a nightly ritual for both of us to stay up long after we should have been sleeping. We took some problem that was going on in the world and talked for a couple hours about how if we were king or president we would solve the problem. Because it was a nonthreatening environment, it was a great time to try piecing together things that I had learned. It also helped to hear from him correct grammatical patterns. I think I learned a lot of language that I wouldn't have otherwise.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find nonthreatening people to talk with
- Expand the areas of language you can operate in

#### Master of ceremonies

by Dave O'Bar

The college I attended in Germany was located in a small village. Every year it was tradition for the American students to put on a talent show for all the villagers. I was designated one year to be master of ceremonies, which meant I had to introduce each of the acts. I figured it would be a fairly easy job, as I had learned quite a bit of the language by that time.

As I faced the audience that evening I stood very casually, with my left hand holding the program. My right hand was in the right pocket of my pants, as if I were doing a comedian monologue. In the midst of this, my 10-year-old German "brother" came out of the audience, onto the stage, and motioned for me to bend over so he could whisper in my ear in the midst of a few hundred people. He said in German, "Take your hand out of your pocket— it's impolite in front of a group of people!"

I had no idea that it was impolite. To the contrary, I thought I was conveying that I was relaxed with the audience. I immediately took my hand out of my pocket, and the whole audience burst out laughing and started clapping. This American had learned something!

I later found out that in this culture, my initial stance conveyed an affront, saying that I wasn't interested in others, which is not what I meant to convey at all. I'm thankful that my "brother" came up and told me about it, because it warmed up the audience to me considerably. It was good that I had a relationship with him such that he dared to do it!

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately

#### Puzzled

by Dave O'Bar

In the evenings I found it enjoyable to participate with my German family in what they were doing. This involved a variety of things. My "sister" liked doing crossword puzzles. I found it

exceedingly difficult to do a crossword puzzle in a different language, but by having that as the focus of the attention, with a native speaker, it actually turned out to be a lot of fun. Every once in a while I would think of a word that hadn't occurred to her. This made the whole thing worthwhile!

Another alternative was watching the television show "Dallas," dubbed into German, with my German "brother." It was interesting to see how they actually represented what was being said with the dubbing in the other language!

This family actually spoke their native language of Swebish with each other, while I had learned regular German. This was an obstacle for me, but they went out of their way to speak regular German with me. If they wanted to plan a surprise for me, they just switched over to speaking Swebish, and I went from understanding most of what was said to understanding virtually nothing. That was discouraging at first, but it presented a challenge to me to learn some of the local language, and to learn when not to use it.

The old folk's home

by Dave O'Bar

As a student in Germany, part of my coursework involved going to the old folks' home one afternoon a week to talk with some of the people who had no family. I talked to them for about three hours a week. I visited an elderly lady who had no family and really enjoyed getting to know her and hearing her life stories. We formed a good friendship, and she continued to write to me for 10 years after I returned to the United States, until she died. It was a wonderful way to get a different perspective on things. Because she was much older, I heard stories that I wouldn't have heard otherwise.

This involved a lot of listening—we started on a topic and then I faded into the background and listened to her talk. I developed a collection of allowable constructions. I then had to figure out which of those constructions was actually allowable in regular German, as opposed to her version. I checked these things out before incorporating them into my own pattern of speech. This was a nonthreatening way to learn the language, as well as to acquire general discourse through learning stories.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for people who have time to talk with you
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot

Throw fire in the bucket

by Dave O'Bar

While I was a student in Germany, I worked with one of the German airlines. There, I generally spoke in German because I enjoyed the opportunity. One day, one of the pilots asked me to explain how a jet engine works. I turned about three shades of green wondering how I would respond to him, as I didn't have all the technical vocabulary I would have had if I were a native speaker. Then I thought, "Oh, well ... just go for it! Call it 'the thing that spins around', or 'where the air gets squeezed together', or 'where you throw the fire in the bucket!'" It was wonderful, and they still laugh about that lecture on how engines work! I'm not sure exactly what got communicated, but it was one of those times where I just decided to overcome my inhibitions and not care about being grammatically correct in order to communicate.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in

- Use all your resources to communicate
- Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking
- If you do not know a word, circumlocute

#### Project bachhaus

by Dave O'Bar

Something fun that I did to get more exposure to learning German was to go down to the community area where the people baked bread, known as the bachhaus. They continued this tradition because not everybody had an oven in their house. My "project" was to find out about all the different kinds of bread people baked, and the history behind why they made each kind. From there, in talking with people, we branched off onto the topic of food in general, and to what specific kinds of food one makes for certain holidays.

It seemed so natural to ask things like, "Tell me about what kind of bread you are baking," or, "Who taught you how to make that?" It was a tremendous time to widen my vocabulary in an area I wouldn't normally learn very much about. I had the opportunity to get to know lots of different people who were there at the bachhaus, and also learn more about the culture.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Expand the areas of language you can operate in
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

#### Seeing is learning

by Dave O'Bar

I am a very visual person when it comes to learning, so in Germany I picked up a lot of language by watching television. I picked out phrases and words and figured out what they might mean in that particular context. For me, seeing something in writing clamps it into my memory. I tend to be more confident about a structure that I have seen in writing than one that I have only heard, because I am able to "picture" things more clearly on the page and remember them.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them
- Use media resources

#### A time to speak, and a time to be silent

by Dave O'Bar

An area I struggled with in learning German was being pushed out of my comfort zone. When I was ready and felt confident, then I would speak. When I felt I was being pushed too fast, I tended to want to draw back more. As individual learners, one of the reasons people may have had a bad experience is from feeling they were pushed too fast. Since people differ, there is probably a varying need for time to assimilate what is learned before it is actually put to use.

One of my German teachers told my class he felt the best thing for us to do to improve our German was to not be so precise, but to just talk faster! Apparently the things that we as students felt would be glaring mistakes in speaking were quite insignificant when speaking to native Germans, as they could figure out what the endings, and such were supposed to be.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking
- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

Stories by Carol Orwig

## OVERVIEW

Stories by Carol Orwig

by Carol J. Orwig

In this module group

Here are some stories by Carol Orwig:

- Critical mass
- You that man!
- I hate mistakes!
- When words don't matter
- There's always somebody better than you
- She doesn't understand
- Ship ahoy!
- Graduation day
- Lazy Lips
- Benjamin
- Hot and cold food
- What's interfering?
- Don't they sound funny?
- You'll never say these words wrong again!
- Brussels lace
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- Pink and blue, mountains and goats
- Kipo
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- Church in Ombessa
- Sticks and stones
- Maria la magnifica
- Write me a letter
- Ewondo kitchens
- Language learning is child's play
- The ice cream shop
- Making dolls
- Where there's a will, there's a way
- Which way to the train station?
- Your tortilla stinks
- Snakes and skinned knees
- One person, two personas?
- Mama Anastasie
- What happened to your Spanish?
- I'm so glad you speak Italian
- I feel stupid
- An electrifying experience
- The ferry to Finland
- The Snoepwinkel
- Figure it out!

Critical mass

by Carol J. Orwig

When I went to Mexico, I had never had a Spanish lesson in my life, but I had a lot going for me. For one thing, I speak English (the American variety) as my first language, and Spanish and English not only come from the same large language family, but also both have gotten a lot of their vocabulary from Latin. I had studied Latin, as well as French and Italian, at university, so had a lot of background from which I could figure out the meaning of Spanish words.

Once I got used to the way Spanish sounded, I could get the gist of a lot of what people were saying, especially if they slowed down and made an effort to help me understand. I very quickly reached that "critical mass," which is the point where you can understand conversations going on around you. That's the point at which my language learning really took off, and where I benefited a lot from being with Spanish-speaking people.

My experience in learning Nugunu, a Bantu language of Cameroon, was quite a contrast. I knew a little bit of one language related to Nugunu—Ewondo—but the words in the two languages sounded very different, apart from a few loan words, so that was not a lot of help in understanding what people were saying. It seemed to take ages for me to reach that "critical mass" of vocabulary and grammar, and I found myself really discouraged. "I used to think I was a pretty good language learner," I told myself and others, "but now I am not so sure. What is wrong?"

Nothing much was wrong, except my expectations. Oh, I could have benefited from some better techniques, no doubt, but once I thought about why it was taking so much longer to learn Nugunu, I was more patient with myself.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- The more the language you are learning is like one you already know, the more quickly you will learn it
- If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged

You that man!

by Carol J. Orwig

More than once in my language learning career I've gotten into trouble when I thought I understood the social and emotional nuances of an expression, only to find out when I used it that I had not understood at all. The most dangerous instances of this have to do with epithets, names or expressions you use to address someone directly.

Once in Ombessa, in Cameroon, I heard an expression which translated literally meant "You that man." My language helper told me this was an expression you could use when somebody was bothering you and you wanted them to stop or go away. It did not sound so bad to me, but I tried it out once, in a joking way, on a man who was a friend and who acted as our night watchman when we were out of town. He was teasing me, and I said, "You that man." He was really shocked. "What have I done to you that you should call me that?!" he said. I realized that it was a pretty strong expression, and obviously one you did not use in jest.

The only other time I tried to use that expression was also less than a success. A drunk was pestering me on market day, and just would not leave me alone. Finally I said, "You that man!" to him. He immediately got furious, and started yelling "You that woman!" back at me. I decided I had better stop trying to use that expression altogether as I obviously did not understand the emotional connotations connected with it.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Language has social meaning

Neglected principles



This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- Make a culture-friend who will tell you when you act or speak inappropriately

I hate mistakes!

by Carol J. Orwig

I often teach a course in language learning principles for people who are going to work overseas. One of my students was Jan, a medical doctor, who had already worked in Uganda for many years. Jan had a terrible self-image as a language learner. "I am hopeless at learning languages," she said.

Obviously, Jan was both bright and dedicated. Why did she think she was hopeless at languages? For one thing, she was a perfectionist. "I hate mistakes," she said. "Doctors aren't supposed to make mistakes. Mistakes kill people!" The trouble, of course, is that you can't learn a language without making mistakes. Mistakes are inevitable, but fortunately the results are rarely fatal. Although Jan understood that cognitively, she still felt bad inside when she made mistakes. When Jan told us about her language learning situation in Uganda, we could understand why she was struggling. It was an almost impossible situation. Her medical services were so much in demand that she rarely had time to work on language learning. "How can I take time off to study when people are dying?" she asked. The people who came for medical help spoke a number of languages, not just one. So if she heard people talking, she wasn't sure what language they spoke. Jan wanted to be involved in Bible teaching as well as medical work, and really would have liked to learn at least one language well enough to teach in it.

As we talked with her, she came to realize that her own expectations and those of her organization were quite unrealistic, given her situation, and that she would have to lower her language learning goals to something more reachable.

Fortunately, Jan also had the determination and grit that had helped her get to be a doctor, so she stuck with phonetics and the language learning methods, and ended up feeling that it might be possible for her to reach at least some of her language learning goals.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- If you have unreasonable expectations you may get discouraged
- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

When words don't matter

by Carol J. Orwig

When I was on the staff of the Africa Orientation Course in Cameroon, I went out to several Ewondo villages for stays of between four and six weeks. I would share a house with an Ewondo family and make friends in the village. I was amazed at how hospitably and warmly I was received.

In one village, Nkil Zok (which means Elephant Path), I made the acquaintance of a woman called Virginia, who lived nearby. She was a widow who had a number of children to raise. One of her daughters, still a teenager and unmarried, had a two-year-old boy. This was not uncommon in the village.

While we were there, Virginia's grandson fell sick. Although there was a mission clinic just a couple of miles away, they didn't go there for help, but rather relied on the traditional healer. One night we were awakened by wails in the night. After a couple of days of high fever, the child had died.

I felt real sorrow for Virginia and her daughter, along with frustration that they had not gone to the clinic for help. But how could I express condolences? My Ewondo was very weak, consisting mostly of greetings and other memorized phrases. How could I express anything as deep and meaningful as sorrow at the loss of a beloved child?

I went to the wake, and just sat there in the room with family and friends, looking at the small body laid out on the floor in his Sunday best. I watched Virginia talk about the child's life, though I could not understand what she said. Someone later gave me a summary in French. The child's mother cried and wailed, and was held and comforted by some of the other women. I went up to see Virginia before I left, and just took her hand, with tears in my eyes. I had the feeling that even if I had spoken fluent Ewondo, I would not have had words for this occasion. "You see the child is dead," she said. "I see," I replied.

That is all we said. But really the words did not matter.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Body language, gestures, and your face communicate as much as words
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

There's always somebody better than you

by Carol J. Orwig

Although I love learning languages, I am far from the best language learner I know. I can think of many people whose facility for learning languages I envy. Most of them are European friends, although some African friends also amaze me, and there is at least one American marvel among my acquaintances.

One fellow, an Englishman, has a particular gift for phonetics. He has achieved a native-like pronunciation in four or five languages other than English. Envy. Then there is the Belgian friend who not only speaks English with a proper "received pronunciation," but can also accurately mimic several regional dialects of Britain, and whose breadth of vocabulary is amazing. And my Dutch friend who gets asked where in Britain she is from ....

I could sit around feeling blue if I compared myself to them. But I have decided that is sort of silly and besides, it would not help me learn any better. Anyway, there are people who I know feel that way about me. You can always find somebody better than you.

What I found helped me, when I found myself starting to compare myself to others, was to instead use myself as the point of comparison. In other words, to keep track of the progress I was making and how much more I knew at a given moment than I had a month or two before. As long as I knew I was making progress, it didn't matter so much what other people were doing. Most of the time, anyway.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Too much correction or criticism can inhibit your learning
- Be patient with yourself and persevere
- Remind yourself of what you are good at

She doesn't understand

by Carol J. Orwig

When you and another person are learning a language together, people in the community can sometimes make things difficult by commenting out loud on how the two of you are doing. I have been on both sides of this awkward situation.

Once in Mexico, a friend and I were trying to learn a bit of Tzeltal, a Mayan language. We lived in the Tzeltal area for about four months altogether as part of a Field Training Course, but during

the last six weeks, we worked on the language most intensively, as we were then living in a Tzeltal village.

Our neighbor, Elodia, was talking to my partner and me one day and said something my partner did not understand. Elodia turned to me and said, "She doesn't understand." My partner did understand that comment, and was understandably humiliated to be discussed as though she were not there. I was embarrassed, and I knew I could not really speak Tzeltal any better than my friend, although I understood a bit more at times.

On the other hand, when I went to Ombessa, in Cameroon, I was the one who did not understand. My partner had been working on the language for nearly a year, off and on, although she had not lived in the community for much of the time. She spoke both French and Nugunu better than I did. I confess that I found it hard sometimes to find people talking to Phyllis as though I were not there, since I could not follow the conversation as well as she did.

One thing I did was to go out visiting at times by myself, although Phyllis and I still went lots of places together. When I was the only foreigner around, people took more pains to communicate with me, and I had more time to frame what I wanted to say. Eventually I caught up a bit, and at that point it was a help to go around more with Phyllis. But I confess to many a struggle with my less noble feelings while I was catching up.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Too much correction or criticism can inhibit your learning
- Communication tends to take the easiest path

#### Ship ahoy!

by Carol J. Orwig

Once when visiting friends in the Netherlands, I had a real treat. My friends' neighbor was helping to build a sailing ship, just the way they had done it in the seventeenth century, and he offered to take us on a guided tour of the ship!

This was lots of fun, but I soon found my Dutch comprehension to be inadequate. After all, how often do you hear twentieth century Dutch people using nautical vocabulary? I would not have known much English nautical vocabulary, for that matter, if I had not read all the Captain Hornblower books during a phase in my youth.

Several things helped me make some sense of what I was hearing: our guide was pointing at things while he spoke to us, so sometimes I could guess at the meaning from what he pointed at. Sometimes I could catch enough everyday words to help me guess at the more exotic ones. Also, I realized that a lot of English sailing vocabulary must either have come from Dutch or have been borrowed by the Dutch from English. The English term "boom" for example, must come from the Dutch word which just means "tree." There are also words such as keelhaul, which are nearly the same in both languages.

If I got too tense trying to figure out every word, my brain just seemed to seize up; but if I let it all flow over me, and concentrated on getting the gist, I could follow quite a lot. And if I were completely lost, I could appeal to my friends for a translation. But that was cheating.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use a variety of strategies to help yourself learn
- Don't always try to understand every word you hear
- Use cognates, but use them carefully

#### Graduation day

by Carol J. Orwig

When you find that you already have one language in common with other people, it can be hard to motivate yourself to speak to people in another language, even if that is the one you really want and need to learn. In fact, often people will be frustrated if you try to speak to them in their own language, if they speak your language well.

This was the situation I faced when trying to learn Dutch. So many Dutch people speak English well that it was hard to get them to put up with my stumbling Dutch. They would immediately switch to English. My most successful encounters, at the beginning, were with children.

Once I got to the point where I could converse in Dutch, however, my language learning efforts were helped a lot by friends who not only agreed to speak to me in Dutch, but insisted on it. If I got tired and tried to bail out and use English, they would usually urge me to try to say it in Dutch, and went even further at times.

I was invited to the graduation from university of one of these young friends. The entire family of not only the graduate, but also of his wife were there, with me tagging along. The family, of course, was speaking Dutch together, but the graduate's father-in-law started to speak to me in English. "Talk Dutch to her!" his daughter remonstrated. The poor man started to apologize, then said, "I just cannot get used to the idea of speaking Dutch with an American!" He did bring himself to speak Dutch with me for the rest of the day, and although I was very tired at the end of it, I had had lots of exposure to the language, which I very much appreciated. And what's more, I felt like one of the extended family!

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Communication tends to take the easiest path
- People have expectations about who speaks which language
- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

#### Lazy Lips

by Carol J. Orwig

It sounds pretty basic, but I have found that getting my mouth set in the right position helps me to pronounce a new language properly. In Spanish (at least Mexican Spanish) the sounds "s," "n," "t," and "d," for example, are pronounced right behind the teeth, rather than a bit further back, as we do in American English. Somehow, getting my jaw in the right position helps me do this.

Speaking French requires moving your lips much more than I usually do in English. This, of course, is because of the rounded vowels, such as are found in *tu* or *peur*. I remember in college my French teacher berating us for having lazy lips. If I can get myself to concentrate on moving my lips, the sounds come out better.

Dutch "s," on the other hand, is further back in the mouth than my normal English "s." And there are sounds back in the throat. The rest position of my mouth, when speaking Dutch, is different somehow from when speaking each of the other languages mentioned.

Sometimes it's getting the rhythm right that seems to make everything else come out better. That is definitely the case when I try to speak Italian.

#### Benjamin

by Carol J. Orwig

When I first went to Mexico, I had not studied Spanish at all, but I had a lot going for me. I'd already studied Latin, French, and Italian, all closely related to Spanish. So, once I got used to the pronunciation, I understood a lot of what I heard, although I could not really make myself understood very well.

When I had been there only two or three weeks, my friend, Maria, took me and some other friends down to Juchitan, her home town, for a few days. One of the people who went with us was Benjamin, a young man who spoke Amuzgo, an indigenous language of Mexico, as well as Spanish. Benjamin sat across the aisle from me on the bus for a lot of the way, and we wanted to talk to each other. This was one of those situations where you had to be ingenious if you wanted to communicate. I'd only had the present tense in language school, but wanted to tell a story about my past. So I said something like: "This happen years ago" and went on to tell what I could in broken Spanish, using the present tense. Benjamin, being a clever guy, filled in the proper verb forms and got the gist of what I wanted to say. It was terrible Spanish, but I felt very pleased with myself for having gotten the message across.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Use all your resources to communicate

Hot and cold food

by Carol J. Orwig

I thought I knew what hot and cold food was, until I went to Comaltepec, in Mexico. There I learned that the local people thought of food as being intrinsically hot or cold. This had nothing to do with the actual temperature of the food, but was some spiritual attribute. Some fruits were hot, and you gave them to people who had a chill, and some fruits were cold, so you gave them to people with a fever. I wasn't there long enough to find out all the implications of hot and cold food, but it was obviously part of a view of the world different from mine.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Language has cultural meaning

What's interfering?

by Carol J. Orwig

I had spent the summer in England and was on my way to visit friends in the Netherlands before going back to the USA. The flight to Schiphol airport had gone well, I had collected my luggage and passed customs, and now I was standing in the queue waiting to buy a train ticket to Utrecht via Amsterdam. I was rehearsing in my mind what I would say in Dutch to buy the ticket.

Just behind me a couple were speaking Spanish to each other. Being an incurable extrovert, I asked them in Spanish if they were from Spain. They said Si ! and practically fell on my neck with relief. They did not speak Dutch or English or French or German—in fact anything but Spanish, and they wanted to buy a ticket to Amsterdam so they could drink coffee in the Dam, the famous plaza. Could I help them?

Sure! I turned back to the counter and started to order a ticket for myself to Utrecht and two tickets to Amsterdam, and my mind went blank. I couldn't dredge up Dutch for anything! All I could think in was Spanish. There were a lot of people behind me in the line and I did not want them to get too impatient, so I finally bailed out and used English to buy the three tickets. I felt really deflated. I knew that I knew how to do all that in Dutch!

Nevertheless, off I went with my new friends, since I had to go to Amsterdam in order to change trains. On the train, I found myself sitting across from the Spaniards and next to a Dutch woman. I carefully tried to frame a question in Dutch and still felt blank. Finally, I went back in my mind to greetings and other basic sentences I had memorized when I first started learning Dutch and all at once, Whoosh! The log-jam broke and my Dutch gushed out again.

It was all very odd, but as a friend told me later, very common. After all, he said, you have to inhibit one language to allow another to come out. Your mother tongue is not usually affected,

unless you have been using another language almost exclusively for a long time. But other languages can either get mixed up with each other, or if you have the barriers well established, can block each other for a short time. After awhile, and in the right context, they'll come back.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Differences between two languages interfere when you try to learn them

Don't they sound funny?

by Carol J. Orwig

One of my most interesting language experiences was in a village called Comaltepec, in Oaxaca, Mexico. The people in Comaltepec spoke a dialect of Chinantec, a very complex Otomanguean language. As in many of the mountainous regions of Mexico, this area of Oaxaca has an amazing diversity of languages. From Comaltepec, you can actually see across one valley to Quiotepec, where they speak another Chinantec dialect. And in the other direction you can see to a village where they speak a Zapotec language, which is very different from Chinantec, although belonging to the same major language family, Otomanguean.

Chinantec languages have a very complex sound system, which is overwhelming to the beginning language learner. Vowels can be long or short, nasalized or oral, and carry any of eight tone patterns. There are other complications such as glottal stops at the beginning and/or end of words, and a thing called ballistic accent.

One day, toward the end of my first week in Comaltepec, a woman from Quiotepec came around selling pots and other earthenware vessels. Judi Lynn, who had been learning Chinantec for several years said, "Listen! That woman's from Quiotepec. Doesn't she sound funny?" Well, to me they all sounded the same, and they all sounded funny.

But you know what? About a month later the woman with the pots came back and she did sound funny!

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Learners build up an auditory image of what the language sounds like

You'll never say these words wrong again!

by Carol J. Orwig

One of my first and biggest language learning challenges was when I went to the town of Comaltepec, in Oaxaca, Mexico, where the people spoke a language called Chinantec. There are more than 10 Chinantec languages, belonging to the Otomanguean family, and they are all extremely complex. The sound system of this brand of Chinantec had almost every complication I had studied in my phonology classes: there was tone (eight different patterns), long and short vowels, nasalized and oral vowels, glottal stops at the beginning and ends of words, and something called ballistic accent! It was very hard to get anything to come out of my mouth right!

I made all sorts of mistakes trying to begin to learn Chinantec, even with the help of Judi Lynn, who had been working on it for almost eight years. I remember trying to say the name of my language associate, Elodia, and by getting the tone and length wrong, coming out with first rabbit, and then darling. It made me afraid to try to say anything, especially since there were naughty words that differed only slightly from such common words as beans, rain, and rainbow. There were whole sets of words that differed only by tone or length. I remember once getting Elodia to record the nii words for me; there were at least six—maybe eight. One meant 'bell', another 'salt', and another 'sheep'. I can't remember them all now. But after she had made the recording Elodia smiled and said, "Now you'll never say these words wrong again!"

Of course, I did. It can be very helpful in learning to distinguish a set of closely related words to listen once or even many times to a recorded list of them, but when you have to use them in speech, it is easy to make mistakes. It is hard for people like Elodia, who grow up speaking a very complex language, to realize just how long it can take for a foreigner to control it all. She and I both had to be patient.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Be patient with yourself and persevere
- Some features of language are harder to learn than others
- Differences between two languages interfere when you try to learn them

#### Brussels lace

by Carol J. Orwig

Once when in the Netherlands, visiting a Dutch friend, we went on a day-trip to a textile museum in Belgium, near Brussels. They were having a special lace-making exhibition, and I thought I had died and gone to heaven, since lace-making is one of my hobbies, and needlework in general is a passion. We walked around an old chateau, watching Flemish women making all sorts of lace, and when I saw something I was really interested in, I would try to ask a question about how it was done.

Now there were all sorts of obstacles to my really conversing with these ladies. For one thing, my Dutch at that stage wasn't very good. For another, the ladies spoke Flemish, which is more a dialect of Dutch than another language, but one with different vocabulary than I was used to, and a different accent. And thirdly, I did not really know lace-making vocabulary in Dutch.

On the other hand, the ladies were flattered that I was interested, and they were very helpful, demonstrating what they were doing while they talked about it. So I had a couple of things in my favor: they were talking about something concrete I could watch, and we were all interested in lace-making. The desire to know how to do a particular stitch overcame my shyness and embarrassment at speaking imperfect Dutch. Their desire to show someone how they did their beautiful craft made them more patient in helping me to understand.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use all your resources to communicate
- If speakers of two languages really want to communicate, they can do a lot with a little

#### Unholy motivation

by Carol J. Orwig

My first try at learning a non-Indo-European language was when I was doing my field training course down in southern Mexico. We were living among the Tzeltal people, who were descended from the ancient Mayans. I could not wait to try out all I had learned in my SIL courses, and when we had our first session with a Tzeltal resource person, I eagerly copied down sentences and started to try to figure out the word order in the sentences.

As I was working, along came a staff member. "Oh, you're one of those," he said. "One of what?" I asked. "One of those people who thinks you can learn a language by analyzing it!" he said. "You'll never learn to speak a language that way. You have to go out and actually talk to people, and spend time with them!"

I felt really irate. What did this guy know about me anyhow? Who says I wasn't going to go out and talk to people? Nobody can keep me from talking, anyhow. Ask any of my friends. Who says that you can't analyze a language and go out and speak it?!

At any rate, my motivation to learn Tzeltal was suddenly strengthened by a desire to show this guy that I could do it. As it happened, he was the one who had to evaluate my progress at the end of the first six-week phase. They brought in an employee I didn't know, and we had a nice conversation. The staff member was impressed. I felt briefly smug, then went off to repent of my attitude. But the motivation, although unholy, was strong. And it really worked.

Pink and blue, mountains and goats

by Carol J. Orwig

"What can I use to help myself remember the gender of words?" I asked myself when studying French. Sometimes I could tell the gender from the form of the word or from the sense, but not always. Of course, I was told to learn the article with the word: le livre, la lune, and so forth, but I couldn't always remember which article it was. One trick I used was to write the masculine vocabulary items on blue notebook paper and the feminine words on pink paper. If I had been learning German, I'd have bought some yellow or green paper for the neuter words.

A silly trick? Maybe, but it helped me remember. If I wasn't sure, I could sometimes visualize a word on the pink page or the blue page.

I used a similar visual cue when learning Nugunu, where there were eight common genders of words. Too many for colors, I decided, although I could have tried it anyway. What I did was to choose a word from each class—a concrete, picturable item I could make a line drawing of. I chose "mountain" for one class, and "goat" for another, and so on. I would draw my squiggle at the top of the page where I had written the words of each noun class. I also tried making some flashcards for myself, with the words on one side and a sentence using the word on the other side, and my squiggle in the corner to remind me of the noun class. When I was trying to remember the class, I would see the squiggle in my mind's eye and it would help me. As far as I'm concerned, use whatever works.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Associate words with images to help you understand and remember them

Kipo

by Carol J. Orwig

Every afternoon, when I was living in Ombessa, Cameroon, I used to go for a walk around the neighborhood. These walks served several purposes—they gave me some exercise, lifted my spirits, gave me a chance to speak Nugunu and to visit with my neighbors. One household of neighbors consisted of two widows and a number of children, of whom one, Kipo, was both an orphan and crippled. She had either had polio as a baby, or had been given a shot of antimalarial medicine improperly. At any rate, one leg was paralyzed, and she had never learned to walk upright, but crawled everywhere on hands and knees.

Although our main purpose in being in Ombessa was to do linguistic analysis and translate the Bible, I decided I could not live with myself if I didn't try to do something for Kipo. I knew it would not be a good idea to start something the family would not keep on with, but one thing I could do was get Kipo some crutches. So, with the help of Sister Marguerite, a nun who worked with crippled children, I got the crutches.

The next challenge was to teach Kipo how to use crutches. She could hardly stand up straight, her muscles were so contracted from lack of use. I knew that I would have to help her practice—every day.

So, my next language learning session consisted of getting a text I could use to explain to Kipo how to walk with her crutches. It was a procedural text, explaining that she should put the crutches out in front of her, shift her weight to her arms, then take a small step, and so forth.



This text was one of the few I actually memorized, after the initial greetings and power tool expressions. I was motivated to learn it because it was really important to me that Kipo should learn how to walk. I used it several times, reminding her of the steps, as I walked backwards in front of her, ready to catch her, with her aunt behind.

Kipo learned to use her crutches, and soon was going everywhere on them. I learned a lesson about how quickly and how much I could learn to say, when there was a really good reason to communicate.

When is paper not paper?

by Carol J. Orwig

One time I was talking in English with a Mexican friend of mine. She speaks very good English, but that day she said something that puzzled me. She was talking about being nominated for an office on an executive committee and said, "I don't really feel comfortable with that paper."

I was confused for a minute, before I remembered that in Spanish, although the primary sense of the word papel is the same as English 'paper', a secondary sense of papel is in English 'role', as in a play. She was telling me that she felt uncomfortable in that role.

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting these principles:

- There is seldom a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages

Church in Ombessa

by Carol J. Orwig

When I was living and working in the town of Ombessa in Cameroon, church was not only a religious experience, it was also a language learning opportunity. This was because most of the time the sermons were preached in French and translated into Nugunu. Since I understood French better than Nugunu, I would have an idea of what was coming, and that helped me not only to get the gist of what was being said, but also to learn some new words in Nugunu.

Sometimes the Scriptures were translated into Nugunu ahead of time and read aloud in that language only. The references would be given, so I could look it up in my French or English Bible and again have a frame of reference that helped me to follow the story in Nugunu and to learn new words. The same was true for standard parts of the service, such as the Gloria or Lord's Prayer, which were often sung.

Although I went to church to worship and to gather together with other Christian people, I benefited from the language exposure because of the predictability of what I was hearing.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Predictable scripts aid comprehension

Sticks and stones

by Carol J. Orwig

I am not really one for drills, although I probably do not mind them as much as some people do. Still, being a people person, I find it more fun to spend my time interacting with people than sitting in a room by myself, interacting with a drill. On the other hand, there are always parts of a language I need to practice in some systematic way in order to get control of them.

Such was certainly the case when I was learning Nugunu, a Bantu language of Cameroon. Like most Bantu languages, Nugunu has noun classes, which means that the nouns of the language are classified into different groups, and all the words which modify those nouns change depending on which noun they are describing. For example, the word 'one' would be gimmue if you were counting one glass and mmue if you were counting one person. The first part of the word

changes and the last part stays the same. There are at least eight common groups of words that change this way, and the singulars and plural are different, too.

This was just one of the things I needed to practice when learning Ngunu, but I found a way to make it fun. I went for a walk one afternoon till I found some children who wanted to play. I had with me five sticks and five stones. We started to play a game with the sticks in which they asked me for one to five sticks and I gave them the right number. Then they held up one to five sticks and I had to say the right number. This might not have been a riveting game for Western children, but I was a novelty in town and these kids didn't have TV, so they liked to play. Once I got good at sticks, we switched to stones. And all the numbers changed. I got in my noun class practice in a way that I found much more fun than sitting at a desk, and the kids got some attention, which they enjoyed.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Make up games that work like drills

Maria la magnifica

by Carol J. Orwig

My first assignment with SIL was to Mexico, and my first job upon arriving there was to learn Spanish. I attended a good school three hours a day, but probably gained as much from my friendship with Maria Villalobos and the people she introduced me to as I did from formal studies. Maria worked in the post office store at our center in Mexico City and took it upon herself to befriend new gringos arriving in Mexico. She was a Zapotec indian and very proud of her heritage, wearing the traditional dress. I had only been in Mexico a couple of weeks when she invited me to go home with her to the city of Juchitan on the Isthmus. It was a wonderful introduction to that part of Mexico, and to the Zapotec people.

Although Maria could understand English very well, she did not like to speak it, because she did not want to sound funny. She said she would hear other Mexicans speaking English and it hurt her ears. When absolutely necessary for communication, as when the person she wanted to talk to understood no Spanish, she could and would use English.

Because I had a background in Romance languages, I could understand a lot of Spanish almost from the beginning, but it took me a while to be able to speak it. Neither Maria nor I wanted to wait to become friends and share meaningful experiences, so we started having conversations that would start out with us both speaking Spanish, but end up with her speaking Spanish and me speaking English. As communication, it worked very well. As my Spanish got better, more and more of our conversations were completely in that language.

This practice could be dangerous, I suppose, if you came to rely on doing it all the time. It worked for me, I think, because I really wanted to be able to speak Spanish, and kept pushing myself to use it as much as possible. But it pointed out to me the fact that people who really want to communicate with each other will feel the pressure to use the language or combination of languages that will allow for the easiest and most complete communication. It is frustrating to both parties to use a language that one of the conversation partners doesn't control very well, if there is another option.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Communication tends to take the easiest path
- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Find nonthreatening people to talk with

Write me a letter

by Carol J. Orwig

Several of my good friends are Dutch. Some of them always write to me in English, which they speak and write almost like native speakers. Others write to me in Dutch, which I enjoy, but I'm sometimes too lazy to reply in Dutch, in which I feel insecure. It is funny, because I am quite happy to blab away orally in Dutch, at the least excuse, but because I never studied Dutch in a formal setting, I am not sure of the spelling and the differences between oral and written style. Anyway, that's my excuse!

The arrangement I have with my friend, Annemieke, works well. We each write letters in our own language. I love hearing the way she expresses herself in Dutch, which has lots of fun idioms, and I feel more like myself when writing in English. It certainly takes less effort than composing personal letters in a second language. Someday I am going to have to make an effort to work at writing in Dutch, even if it is all for fun, but in the meantime, exchanging letters this way is not only a way to keep in touch with a friend, but a good source of comprehensible input in Dutch.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find ways to generate comprehensible input
- Try to find a pen pal

Ewondo kitchens

by Carol J. Orwig

When I was on the staff of the Africa Orientation Course in the mid-1980s, we used to go for four to six weeks at a time to live in different Ewondo villages. This was the last phase of the training, the time when new arrivals to Africa could put into practice what they had learned in the early stages of the course.

Most often we shared a house with an Ewondo family, who took us in very hospitably. In Ewondo culture, it is not uncommon for a man to have more than one wife. Each wife will have her own kitchen house, although the whole family may sleep in the main house. The kitchens are the social centers of family life. That's where the women and small children spend the day and often where friends come to visit in the evening.

Some of my most relaxed and most profitable language learning was done sitting around Ewondo kitchens, helping with some domestic chore such as shelling peanuts, while listening to people talk. There were lots of objects around if I wanted a vocabulary lesson, and usually people were glad to help me learn. I found that having something to do, such as shelling peanuts, gave me a reason for being there and made everyone more comfortable. I could also observe how some interesting food was prepared, such as the many ways to fix manioc.

Even though I could say very little in Ewondo, there was a feeling of acceptance and contentment and of solidarity as women. I had some very happy times sitting in Ewondo kitchens.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Consciously remind yourself of what you like about the culture, the people, the language
- Find nonthreatening people to talk with
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Listen to people talking to each other in their language

Language learning is child's play

by Carol J. Orwig

Some of my very best friends are Dutch, and I had wanted to learn the language for some years, but did not make very much progress because all of my friends spoke such good English they didn't really want to try to converse with me in Dutch. And I found myself, somewhat uncharacteristically, embarrassed to even try out my Dutch on them. Fortunately for me, one couple had a 3½-year-old daughter, to whom, naturally, they spoke Dutch. I really wanted to make friends with this child, so tried to talk with her. Somehow I wasn't embarrassed to try to talk with her, even in front of her parents. Maybe it was because that really was the only language I could use to communicate with her.

She had some picture books, and like many children, loved to have an adult read them to her. I could pronounce Dutch more or less intelligibly, although some of the sounds were hard for me and I still sound like a foreigner. So, Gabrielle would sit on my lap while I read her stories over and over again. If I pronounced a word wrong, she would correct me, which didn't seem to bother me at all, whereas correction from an adult sometimes does. (Although I try not to let it.) We both had a great time!

As she got older, the stories got longer and harder; but my vocabulary was growing, and for the most part I could follow them. Eventually, Gabrielle learned to read, and started reading the stories to me! We were still having fun, and I was still learning. We also played games of hide and seek, had tea parties, puppet shows, went paddling in the ocean or the pool. All the time I was learning.

Now Gabrielle is reading me stories in English, which she is learning. We still talk together in Dutch, though. She also reads stories in Dutch to Nathalie, her little sister. I listen in, and sometimes read to Nathalie myself. Probably this child's play has done more for my Dutch (and my relationship with the children) than any other activity I have tried. And it was lots of fun.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Talk with children and listen to parents talking to their children
- Comprehensible output can become comprehensible input

#### The ice cream shop

by Carol J. Orwig

It's fun to watch children learn languages. I remember being in an ice cream shop in Toronto with a darling three-year-old girl and her parents. We were all enjoying some delicious ice cream. Some of us had cones, but the little girl had hers in a cup.

Suddenly her plastic spoon snapped and she said, "Look, daddy, I broke my spoon!" I'm sure she never heard the word "broke" from her parents, but she obviously had internalized the rule for making the past tense of regular verbs in English, even though she couldn't have explained it to us. She still had to learn that "broke" was an exception to the rule, but that would come.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- People learning a language build up their own systems
- Language acquisition is a developmental process

#### Making dolls

by Carol J. Orwig

Once when visiting friends in the Netherlands, I had a great birthday present. My friend took me with her to a doll-making class. I like all sorts of crafts, and would have enjoyed learning to make the dolls anyway, but it was a special treat to be able to do it all in Dutch.

I was at the stage where I could understand most standard Dutch on common topics and could socialize in a limited way, but would probably have been nervous if I had been in a situation in which I'd had to do a lot of talking. But in this situation I just had to follow the teacher's directions, and watching what she was doing helped me to understand. My friend was there too, to translate for me in case of emergency. So it was all a very low-stress situation.

This event took place in a village in the south of the Netherlands, where the people speak a dialect somewhat different from the standard Dutch you might hear from radio or TV broadcasters. The teacher's accent didn't seem so very strong to me, but some of the other women in the class were really hard for me to understand. But since I did not have to answer, I could just tune in and tune out, and let it all flow over me.

Later on, I talked about the experience in English with my friend and found out that I had gotten the gist of most of the conversation. This experience was lots of fun and gave me good practice in comprehension fluency. I learned how to make really cute dolls, too!

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Find ways to explore your interests using the language

Where there's a will, there's a way

by Carol J. Orwig

When I was 22, I went to Europe and for the first time got a chance to really try out my language skills. The friend with whom I was traveling spoke only English, but I'd gotten us through France and Italy with my somewhat halting French and very basic Italian. Now we were in a compartment on a train from Venice to Vienna, facing an even bigger adventure, as neither my friend nor I spoke German.

After we'd crossed the Austrian border, the compartment began to fill up, and a teenaged girl sat next to me. She greeted me in German, and I came up with one of my memorized phrases, prepared for such an occasion, "Es tut mir leid, ich spreche wenig Deutsch." 'Sorry, I don't speak much German.' She said "Oh," and we just sat there for awhile, but we both wanted to communicate with each other. I looked out the window after awhile and pointed at a cow, grazing in a field. "Cow," I said. "Kuh," she said. Then we both giggled. "Haus," she said, pointing. "House," I said. And we both giggled again.

By the time we got to Vienna, I knew that she was 16, was visiting her sister in Vienna, was excited because she was going there for the first time, and that she was studying chemistry in school. She knew that this was my first trip to Europe, that my mother had a twin sister, that I was a Latin teacher. I spoke simple English, she spoke simple German, and we resorted to my phrase book and English-German pocket dictionary for help.

What was even more amazing to me was that before we were done, we had everyone in the compartment communicating, through a funny sort of chain. My friend, Barbara, would say something to me. I'd repeat it to my new Austrian friend in simple English. She'd say it in German to some middle-Aged Austrian ladies sitting next to Barbara. Finally, the other person in the compartment, a Czech fellow, got into the chain as well, speaking somewhat halting English, which Barbara and I could understand. My new Austrian friend and I sat there smiling at each other. "Wir verstehen uns," she said. 'We understand each other.' And we did.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use all your resources to communicate
- If speakers of two languages really want to communicate, they can do a lot with a little

- People learn better if their learning is encouraged by speakers of the language

Which way to the train station?

by Carol J. Orwig

I don't really speak German, but that hasn't kept me from going to Germany several times. On my very first visit, when I was about 22, I learned about the problem with phrase books. If you are a reasonably good mimic you can learn how to ask a question, but the phrase book doesn't help you understand the answer.

My friend, Barbara, and I were in Munich and had found a place to stay in a small hotel near the main train station. The next morning we went off sightseeing, but as neither of us had a wonderful sense of direction, we eventually found ourselves lost. Oh dear. What to do? I dragged out my trusty phrase book and asked a friendly-looking passer-by, "Entschuldigung, bitte, wo ist der Bahnhof?" "Excuse me please, where is the train station?"

My helpful new acquaintance then started off in a lengthy explanation, of which I could distinguish only "Links" and "Rechts." Barbara asked me, "What did she say?" I said, "She told us to go left and then right." Barbara asked, "Where do we go left?" "I don't know," I answered. So off we went, in a general leftward direction, until I got up my nerve to ask another friendly-looking stranger the way to the train station. This went on for quite awhile until finally somebody started saying "Rechts" instead of "Links." We eventually recognized the train station, and were able to find our way back to the hotel. Well, I suppose the phrase book did help, but it was not a very efficient method of communication!

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Memorized material can give a false impression of your proficiency

Your tortilla stinks

by Carol J. Orwig

While in Mexico, I spent about six weeks in a Chinantec village called Comaltepec. The Chinantec language was the most challenging I've ever encountered, before or since, at least as far as pronunciation is concerned. I usually think of myself as a pretty good language learner, and a fairly good mimic. But it seemed like forever before I could get a word out that people could really understand. If I made the vowel too long, or too nasal, or got the wrong tone, I said something completely different from what I'd intended. One really embarrassing incident happened when visiting a very kind neighbor, who served my partner and me some of her delicious homemade tortillas. They really were the best tortillas I'd ever eaten and I wanted to compliment her by saying "Your tortillas are delicious!" Instead, I got the tone wrong and said, "Your tortilla stinks." Fortunately for me, she had a sense of humor and was willing to forgive a dumb gringa a lot.

On another continent, in Cameroon in West Africa, I made a similar blunder in another tone language, Ewondo. That time I wanted to say to my hostess, "Your fish is delicious." I got the tone wrong on zam (high tone), meaning 'delicious', and instead said zam (rising tone), meaning, 'Your fish has leprosy.' Once again I provided amusement to the community, but was forgiven. You have to laugh at yourself if you are going to go around saying hilarious things. And you will!

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting this principle:

- In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels

Snakes and skinned knees

by Carol J. Orwig

While in Cameroon, I served four times on the staff of the Africa Orientation Course (AOC), a program aimed at orienting new SIL members to life in Africa. During each session, we spent four to six weeks living with families of Ewondo people in villages outside the capital city, Yaounde. Although Ewondo was not the language which I had been assigned to learn and analyze, I wanted to learn as much as I could, in order to make friends in the village (and not just incidentally, to inspire the AOC participants to do the same). By the third or fourth year, I was beginning to speak some very basic Ewondo.

One day on the way back from the water hole, with full buckets in each hand, I saw a long black snake slithering through the cocoa plantation. It seemed about 8 feet long to me, though I suppose it may have grown in my memory. Still, I don't really care for snakes, and it scared me. Probably I scared it, too! Anyway, it glided off quite quickly, and I made my way back to the house, with considerably less water than I'd started out with!

I started telling my snake story to my neighbor, who was suitably impressed and asked me questions about the snake. She told me it was doubtless very poisonous, and asked why I hadn't killed it. I told her that I told the snake: "I don't kill you if you don't kill me." She thought that was very funny, and told the story to her mother, who was sitting there. I listened to her tell my story, and picked up some useful vocabulary to try out the next time I told my story.

That afternoon, I went all around the village, telling my snake story. Each time, I was asked the same sorts of questions, and gave my answers. Each time I learned some new vocabulary. My snake story turned out to be highly amusing to my neighbors, and to be a good language learning experience for me. After that, I talked about everything that happened to me, skinned knees, whatever. It all served to get people talking to me, and me talking to them.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition
- Comprehensible output can become comprehensible input

One person, two personas?

by Carol J. Orwig

I was on a plane once, flying to Mexico City from Dallas, Texas. On one side of me was an American woman, on the other a Mexican woman. Being a chatty person, I started talking to my American neighbor, using the sort of small-talk appropriate for strangers on planes. We were, of course, speaking English. After awhile our conversation lagged, and I started talking to the Mexican woman, this time, of course in Spanish. When that conversation eventually lapsed, the American woman said to me in surprise, "You know, you were completely different when you were speaking Spanish! Your tone of voice changed, you started waving your hands around, the expression on your faced changed."

I had been unaware that I was doing anything differently. I supposed I just adapted to my audience, and took on a slightly different persona, or role, along with the new language. My personality didn't change in five minutes, but a different expression of it came out when I was using a different language.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Some learners take on a different persona when speaking another language

Mama Anastasie

by Carol J. Orwig

From 1985–1987 I lived and worked in Ombessa, a town in the Central Province of Cameroon. My main job while there was to learn and help analyze Nugunu, a Bantu language thought to be spoken by somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 people. Every afternoon I walked around the village, visiting people and trying to converse, although my Nugunu was limited. One of my favorite people was Mama Anastasie, a woman probably in her 70s, whose kindness and joy in life were obvious from the very beginning. She treated me like a daughter, always welcomed me, and wanted to help me learn Nugunu.

I would go and sit in her kitchen house and she would tell me in Nugunu about whatever she was doing: grilling peanuts, washing dishes, making a sauce for fish, sweeping the floor. She really wanted me to learn, so she would say, "Write that down and learn it!" I noticed that when I was sitting with Anastasie, feeling relaxed and accepted, I seemed to be able to take in much more Nugunu, and even to speak it better, than if I was visiting someone who I was not sure liked me. My first year in Ombessa was not very easy emotionally. I had a lot of cultural adjustments to make and often felt stupid because I could not communicate in Nugunu. But I never felt stupid or even alien when visiting Mama Anastasie.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find nonthreatening people to talk with
- Look for situations you can participate in without pressure to speak a lot
- Establish reciprocal relationships

What happened to your Spanish?

by Carol J. Orwig

Long ago, when I was at university, I took a year of Italian. Unfortunately, I did not have much chance to use it, except for a whirlwind tour of Europe shortly after graduation. About 15 years later, I was asked to go to Italy for three weeks to help out the Italian representative of our organization. So I did. It was quite a trip—I stayed with an Italian family of whom only the father spoke any English, and he was quite happy to speak Italian to me as long as I could follow.

I had learned Spanish reasonably well, having lived in Mexico. Spanish helped me understand quite a lot of the Italian I heard or read, but because the languages are so similar I kept mixing them up, as well as throwing in a little French and Latin, and ended up speaking something resembling Proto-Romance. Fortunately, the Italians are very tolerant people.

I had further adventures, which you may read about elsewhere, but when I got back to England after three weeks in Italy, I ran into a friend from Honduras. He and I usually chatted in Spanish, so he started in speaking that language to me. Help! I could not speak Spanish for the life of me. It kept coming out in Italian or this personal creole I had invented. The funny thing was that I normally spoke Spanish much better than I ever spoke Italian, but I had stomped it down so hard to try to speak Italian that it didn't come back for about three weeks. My Honduran friend couldn't believe it, but the mind will do strange things.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another

I'm so glad you speak Italian

by Carol J. Orwig

Although I had studied Italian for four semesters back in college, I had not used it apart from one three-week visit to Italy. About 15 years later, I was asked to go stay with an Italian family for



three weeks and help the husband get his office organized. Now, organization is not my forte, so I was wondering how it would all work out, but off I went. It took me almost 24 hours to get down to Southern Italy by train from Frankfurt, and I did not sleep very well en route, so by the time I got to my host and hostess's home my brain did not seem to be working very well. In those intervening 15 years I'd learned Spanish, which is of course closely related to Italian. This was both a help and a disadvantage when trying to drag up my Italian from the dark recesses of my memory. It seemed to help my comprehension, but hinder my speaking. I could understand a lot of what people were saying to me, but when I tried to talk, it came out in Spanish, or French, or Proto-Romance!

Anyway, it turned out that my hostess and the five children spoke only Italian, and the husband resorted to English only when communication failed otherwise. That first night I sat in the kitchen, dead tired after the long train ride, listening to my hostess talk to me enthusiastically. I would come out with "Si" or "No" at what I hoped were appropriate places, and otherwise hardly said anything. But not much more was needed, as she enjoyed talking. After about an hour she said "Oh, I'm so glad you speak Italian!"

Actually, it was just what I needed to refresh my memory of what Italian sounded like, and how to say some of those things I'd forgotten. By the end of the three weeks, I was able to say much more than when I'd arrived, although I still got it mixed up with Spanish.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- One language may interfere with another
- Knowledge of a language may lie dormant, but be reactivated
- Learn responses to keep the conversation going

I feel stupid

by Carol J. Orwig

I often teach a course in language acquisition principles and techniques to people who are going to work in countries where they will have to learn another language. Quite a few of my students have been physicians, nurses, or midwives. They were all obviously very bright and capable people, but they did not always feel that way.

One person who comes to mind is Peter, who'd been to all the best schools in England, graduated from Cambridge, and had qualified and practiced as a doctor for over 10 years. He, along with my other students, was doing a practicum at the end of the course in which he applied the techniques and practices covered in the course to a non-Indo-European Language—in his case, Turkish. When I asked the class, "Well, how did you feel about what you did yesterday?" Peter said, "I felt stupid!" "Peter," I answered, "You know you're not stupid." "But I felt stupid!" he replied.

One thing that cheered Peter up a bit was when we did a checklist to sort out the different sounds. "This is scientific!" he said, "This is hypothesis testing!" Suddenly Peter felt back in his element.

Another thing that cheered Peter up was giving me free medical advice about my hay fever. It reminded me that when we are doing something that makes us feel inept or out of our comfort zone, it makes us feel better about ourselves to do something we know we can do well.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Fear of making mistakes can inhibit your learning
- Remind yourself of what you are good at

An electrifying experience

by Carol J. Orwig

I'd been in Ombessa, a small town in Cameroon, for about a month, and was just beginning to learn Nugunu, the local language. My partner, Phyllis, and I lived in a house with electricity and running water. This turned out to have almost as many disadvantages as advantages. One evening Phyllis and I came in from jogging, and I went in to the bathroom to have a shower. I reached for the light switch and found myself paralyzed by electricity running through my body. I'd touched a live wire, or probably two, sticking out from the back of the switchplate. I screamed for Phyllis to turn off the circuit breaker, which she did in a hurry, and I went flying across the room as the electricity let go of me.

After a trip to the capitol, skin grafts on the index finger of my left hand, and Christmas (this occurred on December 21), I found myself back in Ombessa trying to learn Nugunu. But all my defenses were up. I didn't want to learn Nugunu, or even see or talk to the Nugunu people. All I wanted to do was to curl up in a ball and shut out everything. This really is very unlike my usual attitude toward people and languages, so when I had to go back into the city to get my stitches out, I decided to stay for a week and try to recuperate.

I stayed in my room at the SIL Center for most of the week, sleeping more hours than I thought I could, reading mysteries and other escapist literature, eating in the dining hall, going out with some expatriate friends, and just withdrawing from the strains of being in a foreign culture. Although I felt a bit guilty for doing this, the therapy worked: a week later I was able to go back to Ombessa and enjoy being with Nugunu people and continue learning their language. The incident, and my bandaged hand, also gave me a great story to tell the people. Sympathy for me opened doors to a lot of conversations.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks
- Certain kinds of anxiety can interfere with your language learning

The ferry to Finland

by Carol J. Orwig

After traveling around Europe for six weeks, I found myself on a ferry going from Stockholm to Helsinki. The archipelago was breathtakingly beautiful, and I was having a good time, but it had been a pretty stressful day, as I don't speak Swedish, and my Finnish is extremely limited.

The ship left Stockholm at about 6 P.M. and arrived in Helsinki the next morning. I'd reserved a cabin for the night, which I knew I'd be sharing with another woman. She turned out to be a Finnish woman in her 60s who spoke only Finnish. A challenge!

We got along pretty well, even though I was only at about Level 1 in Finnish, and it is not related to any other language I know. I was really surprised, actually, at how much we were able to say to each other.

On the way back to Stockholm, I found myself with another monolingual Finn: a schoolteacher escorting her students on an end-of-term trip. She came into the cabin at one in the morning, waking me up, and began to chat. I guess that being a schoolteacher, she liked to lecture, because she talked about all sorts of things, such as how men from Karelia have a predisposition to heart disease, and the sociolinguistic situation between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking Finns. I was so sleepy that I just let it all roll over me, trying to get the main gist. Again, I was amazed at what I could glean from her, given my very limited proficiency in Finnish.

I think, in both cases, the women were just so surprised that there was a foreigner (especially an American) who wanted to learn Finnish that they persevered in trying to communicate with me. Also, I think I must be a pretty good guesser. I usually come out well in these situations and am

able just to hang onto the conversation, guessing at the overall meaning from the few words I am able to understand.

It helped that these women were European and had a Western mind-set, even though Finnish is a non-Indo-European language. My guesses were much more likely to be right than if I'd been talking to someone with a completely different world view.

I must say, that it was great fun, but exhausting.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- If speakers of two languages really want to communicate, they can do a lot with a little
- Use all your resources to communicate
- Don't always try to understand every word you hear

#### The Snoepwinkel

by Carol J. Orwig

I was in Holland, visiting friends, and wanted to try out my Dutch, which I was just beginning to learn. The trouble was that my friends spoke English too well, and it just didn't seem to work very well for me to try to talk Dutch with them. On the corner there was a Snoepwinkel—a candy shop—run by a little old lady.

The shop was too good to be true. Not only was it small and authentic, but Lena, the proprietress, wore a Dutch national costume, and used an old-fashioned brass balance scale to weigh out the drop (licorice) or other candy.

I decided to go buy some drop and practice my Dutch on Lena. She didn't speak English, so we'd have to speak Dutch. And if I bought something from her, she would be motivated to talk to me, even if my Dutch was very basic.

Before I went to the shop, I rehearsed the transaction: I would greet her, I would ask for some drop. I wanted sweet, not salty. I wanted 100 grams. I thought I could say all those things.

Rob, one of my friends, snickered as I set off for the shop. "Don't forget to say please and thank you," he said. I promised myself to think of some suitable revenge.

It all went fine! I was prepared for the transaction and came home with my drop. Lena even asked me a couple of other questions I could answer, such as where I was from and who I was visiting. I went back feeling very pleased with myself for a successful cross-cultural and language learning encounter. And the drop was tasty, too.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Rehearse what you want to say ahead of time
- Set yourself up for small successes

#### Figure it out!

by Carol J. Orwig

I learned some of two Cameroonian languages, during my stay in that country: Ewondo and Nugunu. My Nugunu was better than my Ewondo, and it was partly because I was working on analyzing Nugunu. I spent time in areas where both languages were spoken, and in fact, even lived with some Ewondo families, but my understanding of how the system worked was much better in Nugunu, even though we had grammar books of Ewondo, and we were trying to figure out Nugunu. When I just tried to read the grammar book, somehow I wasn't as engaged in it in the same way as when I had to figure it out for myself.

I remember that I had been in the Gunu village about three months, when I was asked to write a paper about verb suffixes. I thought, "You've got to be kidding!" The Nugunu words were just long strings of consonants and vowels. But when I got into analyzing them, it was just like an

extended Grammar 1 problem. I realized there was a one-syllable stem and the rest of the verb was all these suffixes, and I could figure out the order of them. If you looked back at the Proto-Bantu, they were just reflexes from Proto-Bantu. It was an interesting analytical paper to write, although I had to write it in French, which traumatized me greatly.

The interesting thing, though, was that when I went back to the village, I began hearing those pieces, whereas before I had heard just long unanalyzed words. So this is where I quibble with people who say that analysis, or learning the rules, doesn't really help you acquire ability in a language. I'm sure that understanding how a language works makes it more comprehensible to me.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Knowing about a language may help you learn it

Stories by Dave Persons

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Dave Persons

by Dave Persons

In this module group

Here are some stories by Dave Persons:

- Basketball fiestas and town duty
- Respect: How do you show it?
- Is grunting better than Spanish?
- The town drunks

Basketball fiestas and town duty

by Dave Persons

The first five years that we worked in a Zapotec village, I played basketball with one of the local teams when they would go to tournaments at fiestas in other towns. That was very helpful in learning the culture as well as the language as I related to the other guys on the team. Some of those same guys later became leaders in the church.

Another thing I did was to be involved in town duty (tequio). Since we built our house in the first year we were there, we were property owners. So, we were required to be involved in town duty. And so when they called for everybody to come together to do a town project, then I would be involved. Sometimes we would go out and clear the borderline between the land belonging to our town and the next town over. So it was a neat chance for me to make friends, to use the language and see the language being applied to our environment.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

Respect: How do you show it?

by Dave Persons

I used to go with the town topilas (town police or messengers that are sent by the town president to bring somebody or deliver a certain message). They got a real bang out of that. They got such a big bang out of it that the town authorities would ask me first for the answer to their message. I had no idea what the answer was, or even what the errand was that we had gone on, so of course I would defer to the ones who were in charge of the topilas. I learned some very specific ways of

conduct when you're in the presence of the town authorities, and the proper terms to use in addressing them.

When you first came back to the town president, and before the message was delivered, you were supposed to take your hat off and hold it behind your back with one hand, and put the other hand behind your head, and kind of bow while saying peshke the ta to each person in authority. And it's supposed to be said with a high tone. The higher the tone, the more respect you're showing toward the person you're talking to. It felt kind of funny at first, and they laughed, but they really enjoyed it, because no outsider, absolutely no outsider, ever does that. Most of the time it's just the opposite; they think that all the local ways of doing things are beneath their dignity.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Show your interest in the language and culture

Is grunting better than Spanish?

by Dave Persons

When I was first trying to learn Zapotec, I used Spanish whenever I really had to communicate. But as I learned Zapotec words, especially nouns, I just replaced the Spanish with the Zapotec words. And little by little, I'd replace more and more of the Spanish. My grammar still needed some adjusting, but we learned the grammar that way too.

You have to find some way to start putting the new language to use. Otherwise it becomes too easy to use the trade language as a crutch, and you never really get into learning the language. And you have to communicate somehow, from the very beginning. You can't just go around and grunt.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Apply what you have learned as soon as possible
- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

The town drunks

by Dave Persons

A lot of times in the process of trying to do business in the Zapotec village where I live, I've been interrupted by drunks, and they can get very belligerent. But I've discovered that you can't just ignore them. Because later on, they'll remember and you've made yourself an enemy if you don't treat them right. So sometimes I just humor them. They'll be trying to say something to me, and I can't understand it, because it's garbled to start with, and they try to throw in a little bit of Spanish or English even though they don't know it. So a lot of times what I'll do is go ahead and answer them in Zapotec. They don't understand a thing I'm saying, but they just come right back as if they do. Everybody around is seeing what's going on, and they're getting entertained, and the drunk isn't being offended.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Stories by Carolyn Rensch

OVERVIEW

Stories by Carolyn Rensch

by Carolyn M. Rensch

In this module group

Here are some stories by Carolyn Rensch:

- No Spanish!
- Speak to me, please
- Watch out for that tone
- Total immersion
- Learning tone from text
- Language on my mind
- I don't want to insult you
- I know those words, but what did you say?

No Spanish!

by Carolyn M. Rensch

Otis and Mary Leal were some of the earliest members in the Mexico Branch of SIL. When they went there Otis knew Spanish. And so, he started out in Spanish and tried to transfer to Zapotec later. The Zapotecs considered Spanish a higher status language, and a lot of them would never speak anything to him but Spanish. He had a very difficult time switching over from Spanish to Zapotec. Even at the time we came, 20 years later, many people would not speak Zapotec with him. So, when we went to there for part of our training, he said, "No Spanish." Cal and I had both majored in Spanish in college. But he oriented us to learn essentially monolingually. If we had problems, we went to the Leals for them to intercede for us.

Then we went to the Chinantecs, who were essentially monolingual, which made it quite easy to use a basically monolingual approach. We started out with a few basic Chinantec expressions that had been elicited through Spanish. And we had to build on that little by little.

Speak to me, please

by Carolyn M. Rensch

Cal asked a certain man to help us learn the Chinantec language of Mexico. Like everyone else, he was a farmer. So, most of the time he could only come for an evening session. On rainy days he sometimes came at other times. We lived in the town hall which was partly open-sided, right in the middle of the town square. So people came by all the time and we could talk with them. We also went out and visited their homes. And at the river, when we went to wash and take a bath, there were people there to talk to. We were always asking them questions, making conversation, getting new information. When they would come and say something we didn't understand, we would try to figure out what it was they were saying, getting it down on paper. We didn't have portable tape recorders in those days, so it was all paper and pencil.

I remember also, a man came and gave us a text about "We poor Chinantecs." And he was kind of a dramatic person, and spoke in very exaggerated pitches, in very expressive ways. Cal got that down, and we learned it. I think we learned some other texts also. But it was all from paper; we had no tape recorders.

Watch out for that tone

by Carolyn M. Rensch

When Cal decided that he wanted us to work with the Chinantecs, he knew from our SIL training that I was not very good at tone. My agreement with him was, "If you want to go to this language, you've got to take the lead working with the language helpers. I can try and do what I can." I improved, but I was probably not as good at tone after 20 years there as he was the first day. I could communicate with people, but my attempts were probably laughable, not only because of the specific tone of words, but also because the verbs are very complicated tonally and morphophonemically. One doesn't easily learn that. Cal hardly found any two that are in exactly the same class all the way through the whole conjugation of the verb. So, I make no

claim to have conquered the whole verb system. But the verb forms that we heard frequently were easier to pick up—you didn't have to think about how to conjugate them; you just had a feel for them. Cal got quite good, being a natural at linguistics.

It didn't bother me too much that I was making mistakes, unless I couldn't communicate. The Chinantecs were kind enough not to laugh. We felt accepted by the people, partly because we spoke the language, partly because after a while we asked them if it was okay for me to wear their dress. They said, "yes." They felt we were identifying with them, both because of clothing and language. They appreciated their language, and they appreciated us wanting to use it.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- You can compensate for deficiencies in some skills
- In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels

#### Total immersion

by Carolyn M. Rensch

When we first moved into the village, the Chinantecs seemed a little shy. But it didn't take them long to be always around us in mobs. We didn't need to make very many opportunities for learning the language, except during the middle of the day when there weren't as many people around. The men were out in the fields. We'd go and visit wherever someone was at home, and try to talk. Cal also went to the fields and helped with communal work.

In the early days, we did some dialogue memorization. Eventually there came to be too many people around to spend our time studying.

But I learned more from listening than I did from other language learning methods anyway. And there were always listening opportunities! People were always around our home wanting medical help, and wanting to pray about this and that. In the mornings, Cal did the medical work while I washed clothes and taught our children. In the afternoons, I took over so Cal could study. But everything that went on in one room you could hear in the other, since the reception room and our kitchen area were only separated by a chest-high cabinet! Besides, people were never inhibited about going to any part of the house—the kitchen or the bedrooms or anywhere—even if we would have liked them to be.

People were always around. It was an immersion situation! There were often 20 or 25 men at the house in the evening, eager to go over Bible text that had been translated that day.

#### Learning tone from text

by Carolyn M. Rensch

I learned a lot of Chinantec by reading the Bible translation we were working on. Cal, who was better at tone than I, would mark tone on the text, and that helped reinforce it for me. I learned more that way than by trying to study verb forms out of their context.

#### Language on my mind

by Carolyn M. Rensch

One of the most important things for me in learning a language was to have language on my mind: to have my ears open and be thinking about what people were saying, paying attention, trying not to just let it flow over me, but focusing on various aspects. I just had to keep my ears open for for different kinds of things that would be new or interesting or important—or just for how people say things.

I do that with English, too. I'm quite attentive to how people express things. It carries over into other languages.

I don't want to insult you

by Carolyn M. Rensch

I've been intimidated about using the Japanese I know, because you can't say anything without making a statement about the status of the person you're talking to. There are status markers everywhere you turn! And the little bit that I know isn't informed enough in that area. So I'm afraid of making a social blunder.

In Mexico that wasn't as much of a problem. If you use "country Spanish" to somebody who is more educated, simply because that was what you had been hearing, and they might think that was amusing. But status differences don't have as much effect on lexical choices as they do in the international languages of Asia.

I know those words, but what did you say ?

by Carolyn M. Rensch

When we lived with the Chinantec, my husband Cal would go to their town meetings where they would be discussing some topic. He could understand the words, but he never found out how they reached a decision. A lot was communicated by inference, and they didn't call people by name. In Chinantec, you normally don't speak of anyone's name; you use oblique references to people, especially if you are talking about who should do such and such a job. Even though Cal might have understood every word that was said, he didn't know what decision had been reached, or how they reached it! Decisions are not made by voting, or anything so direct. It's by consensus.

This business of not using names was so confusing to us! Sometimes they will use a title or relationship term: my cousin, or my child's godfather, so-and-so's father, or the one who lives by the river.

In Japanese, you also have to be clued in, because you rarely use pronouns in conversation.

Keeping track of who you're talking about by inference and context is difficult!

Stories by Gary Simons

OVERVIEW

Stories by Gary Simons

by Gary F. Simons

In this module group

Here is a story by Gary Simons:

- A banana by any other name

A banana by any other name

by Gary F. Simons

Years ago, when I was in Mexico for a Field Training Course, I saw a man at the market selling bananas. There were so many different piles of bananas: some were short and red, some were long and more triangular than round, some were very small and yellow. Some of the bananas looked almost the same to me, but were in different piles. So I asked the man, "How can you tell the bananas apart?"

"That's easy," he said. "They have different names."

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Languages have a lexical system

Stories by Wil Snyder

OVERVIEW

Stories by Wil Snyder

by Wil Snyder

In this module group

Here are some stories by Will Snyder:



- Break time
- It's as simple as watching TV and reading
- That's not quite how we say it

Break time

by Wil Snyder

My wife and I went to China to study Mandarin at the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing. We were able to go there at the invitation of one of the professors, who set up our language learning situation with tutors from the linguistics department. So we really didn't have any other option for language learning.

The Chinese teaching style is very structured, sort of traditional. My wife and I and our tutor would go into a big classroom and we would take two desks near the front. He would stand behind the podium, and we would have class, just like there were 30 other students. And our program was set up for 10 hours of class per week, which is unusual in China. Most programs for foreigners were 20 hours. And we were very happy that it was only 10 hours. The 10 hours that we had were, for the most part, pretty useful, especially at the beginning, for pronunciation, drills, and learning grammar patterns and sentence patterns.

But, as our language progressed a little bit, we needed more flexible kinds of ways to progress with the language. And one of the most helpful time of class was break time with the teachers. In the beginning, of course, we could hardly converse with them, so the break times were very short, and we would get right back to class. But after the semester, we got to know them well, and they were very interested in us, and break times got longer and longer and we just sat down and chatted, sometimes 20 minutes, maybe even half an hour. And that was the best time of class for us, by far the most challenging and the way that we learned the most in class. And our teachers kind of sensed that, even though they needed to get back to the textbook, and finish a certain number of lessons that they had planned. So, we found out that as our language progressed, this time with Chinese teachers or friends, homes or dormitories, was very good for speaking and listening practice.

But, as our language skills increased, we needed more flexible ways to progress; spending break time with the teachers afforded that opportunity. In the beginning, when we could hardly converse in the language, break times were short. With time, we got to know our teachers well and they were very interested in us. Break times got longer and longer as we just sat and chatted, sometimes for 20, even 30 minutes. I think our teachers sensed that this was by far the most challenging and useful time of class for us. But they still felt they needed to get back to the textbook and finish their lesson plans.

As our learning progressed, such informal times with Chinese teachers or friends in homes or dormitories were very good for speaking and listening practice.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use media resources
- Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty
- You need chances to negotiate meaning with native speakers
- Expand the areas of language you can operate in

It's as simple as watching TV and reading

by Wil Snyder

Two of the things that helped my listening and speaking skills the most were reading and watching TV and movies, besides just being around people and listening. Spending a lot of time on passive listening skills helped me know how to speak and write.

In the early days, talking with people did a lot to build my vocabulary, but after eight or nine months of study, I needed something more. At about the same time, my Chinese was getting good enough that I could understand the gist of what was going on if I watched TV. At that point, TV became a useful language learning tool. Watching TV was also good for me if I hadn't spoken Chinese for three or four days; I would be a little bit rusty, but if I just watched TV for a couple of hours, the level of fluency I had achieved would return.

Reading, too, helped me build my vocabulary. I would go through lots of other textbooks outside of class and just read the lessons, focusing on the vocabulary and how it was used in text. Then, when I was listening to friends or TV, I'd hear these same new words popping out! These were words that people had been saying over and over, but that I'd never understood or realized they were saying before. After I had spent time actually looking at them in books, I would retain them and learn how to use them in context.

That's not quite how we say it

by Wil Snyder

We took a nine-week intensive course in Chinese, in Indiana, before we went to Beijing. But when we got to Beijing, our teachers started us at ground zero, assuming absolutely no knowledge. It was a little bit frustrating to me to have to go over all of the things we had already done, and to be using valuable time in China on stuff that I felt I had already done. But, our teachers were drilling us because of our pronunciation. When we would miss a tone, pronounce something a little off, they would correct us every single time, for the whole two years. That was kind of frustrating, but I still have come to realize that and am thankful that our teachers were like that, and that I didn't absolutely rebel against it. I saw lots of other foreigners who had skipped over a lot of the pronunciation. At the end of a year or two, sometimes the Chinese still could not understand them. People always said that our pronunciation was very good. We can thank our tutors for being real sticklers and not just letting us move on to other stuff.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- In some languages the tone system carries as much meaning as consonants and vowels
- Native speakers often highly value good pronunciation

Stories by Nancy Sullivan

OVERVIEW

Stories by Nancy Sullivan

by Nancy Sullivan

In this module group

Here are some stories by Nancy Sullivan:

- My first word
- Soap operas
- Pepper and green pepper
- Buying bread and meat
- Portuguese churches
- A new mother
- Counted cross-stitch
- Hunting for ribbon
- Towels with complications
- Moms, maids, and children
- How to excel
- A conversation on a bus

- Signing on the dotted line
- Vocabulary building
- Verb charts
- Pablum or the pope?
- I really don't speak Portuguese well!
- While riding on a bus one day
- Tenth time's a charm
- There's got to be a word

My first word

by Nancy Sullivan

Before I arrived in Portugal, I had studied a tape with a few phrases like "hello" and "good-bye." My first full day in the country, we were watching TV in the home of another non-Portuguese couple. During a series of commercials, there was a supermarket ad. Because of an upcoming holiday, there was a sale. One word screamed across the screen and out of the man's mouth over and over. I was familiar with the stylistics of a commercial and I watched mechanically. Finally I blurted "Save! Save! That's what that word means!" I was so excited because that was the first word of Portuguese that I learned outside of the tape.

TV was helpful because it provided visual and audio impact as well as the known dynamic of a commercial. I did not use TV again until much later in my language learning, but this ad was a fun way to learn my first Portuguese word.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Use media resources

Soap operas

by Nancy Sullivan

In Portugal, Portuguese and Brazilian soap operas are very popular. At 8 or 9 P.M. in any Portuguese-speaking country, you can hear the soap operas coming from apartment windows. When I went to buy bread or to get my hair done, all the women would be talking about soap operas. In the US, we'd think that such conversations were frivolous or that we were too busy to watch them. However, I recognized that I was in a different culture and involved with language learning. I lacked the vocabulary to introduce my own topics. In order to converse with the women, I began to watch at least one of them regularly. I knew the characters and visually I knew the story line. Sometimes I read the TV guide to help supplement my vocabulary. When I went to get my hair done, the women could help explain what I had seen. Also, their conversations were easier to understand, because we shared the same cultural database. In order to participate in conversation, I had to be in the know, even if it meant learning things that otherwise did not interest me.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use media resources
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

Pepper and green pepper

by Nancy Sullivan

When I was learning Portuguese, I made it a point to shop at the small local shops whenever possible instead of going to the large supermarkets. I was forced to engage in conversation to get my food, because the clerk picks out the fruit and vegetables for you and weighs them. So you have to specify what you want, and how much, or how many kilos.

I'll never forget the day I went to get some peppers. The words for pepper and green pepper sound similar. I asked for two peppers. When the two ladies behind the counter started to giggle, I said, "I chose the wrong word, didn't I?" I figured that once I made a fool of myself in public, I wouldn't repeat this mistake. Well, I still make that mistake to this day.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

#### Buying bread and meat

by Nancy Sullivan

When I was learning Portuguese, I discovered that the bread store is the local gossip place, outside of the beauty salon. The lady who runs it knows everything that is happening in the neighborhood, and everyone goes there to buy bread and chat with her. Once you've been shopping there for two weeks, it's almost impossible not to know her name. You would really be missing out, not just on language learning, but socially, if you didn't go there and chat.

Waiting in line at the butcher shop is similar. People chat. Summertime tourists are nothing new to locals. However, when they learn that you actually live there and that you can speak Portuguese, they will talk with you and ask lots of questions. One time I spent 1½ hours in the butcher shop, trying to buy a kilo of ground meat. I was the only customer. I had to learn all about the owner's relatives in Rhode Island and New York, the kinds of houses they had, and how often they come back to Portugal. They told about their trip to the Azores and back. "And do you know anyone in Providence?" "No, I don't know anyone there at all. I've only been there once." On and on went the conversation. The more you talk and the more you understand, the more pleased they are, and the more they want to speak with you. Few local people where I was spoke English, except for those under 30 who had learned in school. Very few wanted to speak English, but they conversed at length with a foreigner who spoke their language.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Listen to people talking to each other in their language
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language

#### Portuguese churches

by Nancy Sullivan

I expected Sunday morning at church to be a supportive environment where I could speak Portuguese with strangers. To my surprise, it was not a social domain, but a family one. The coffee shop in Portugal is a social domain. In a church, there might be five main families. People normally only spoke to members of their own family at church. You can't assume what the social structure will be like in a new culture. When I was sick in bed, some of the women from the church came over and helped me. That was a different environment and they were willing to speak to me there.

Joining the choir at church was a wonderful opportunity. Few of the Portuguese people at church had studied music. In fact, the choir director was an American and I was the only alto who could read music. The other altos all hovered around me trying to listen. I'm not loud, but I could sing in tune and keep on time. My pronunciation was lousy, but I had something to contribute to them and they appreciated it.

When our family finally got a car, we could get to church regularly in the rain. Soon, I was elected president of the couples Sunday School class. "But I'm an American," I protested. They

replied, "We don't care. We like you." That was a real compliment. My responsibilities included listing the prayer needs on the board. They felt that I was competent enough in the language and they were willing to entrust me with that job. I felt honored.

A new mother

by Nancy Sullivan

The last term of language study, I wanted to work on more complex parts of grammar and oral production. A woman from church had just had a baby. She no longer worked, but stayed at home. I went to her home two days a week just to converse. I hoped to spontaneously produce the constructions that I wanted to practice. At first, thinking I wanted to study grammar formally, she pulled out a grammar book. Later she put the book away. We just chatted and she corrected me. She showed me pronunciation errors and pairs of words that I didn't realize had the same sounds. She was sophisticated in Portuguese. She corrected my subjunctive verb forms. I brought her the questions that I wrote down during the week and she would answer them. For instance, she would know if a variation was a stylistic change or if it meant something different.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends

Counted cross-stitch

by Nancy Sullivan

When I was pregnant with my son, I was sick in bed. Some of the women from church came over to just talk to me. They talked more slowly so that I could understand. One of the ladies taught me about knitting. I hadn't knitted for years. She brought me needles, yarn, and patterns. It was fun. I learned all the vocabulary for knitting. The Portuguese do lots of handwork. However, I didn't learn all the details of cross-stitch. When I got well, I went into a store looking for the special fabric needed to do counted cross-stitch. I used the word for cloth. I tried to explain that it had squares on it, but the shop keeper drew a complete blank. Finally I went home, found a sample and showed it to him. Then the shopkeeper understood me and told me which store sold it.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Ask for help and you will learn as well as make friends
- Establish reciprocal relationships
- Find ways to explore your interests using the language

Hunting for ribbon

by Nancy Sullivan

One time I tried to buy ribbon. The storekeepers of these specialized shops are very impatient. Generally about five customers are bustling around, crammed together in their tiny shop at once. Buttons run up and down the walls, along with all the yarn and thread as well as everything that has to do with cross-stitch or sewing.

I tried to explain myself. "It's like rope, but it's flat." Someone brought out scotch tape in a dispenser. "No, It's something that shines." "No, it's not something that glows!" I didn't get the ribbon there. I tried in another store, using a different phrase and hoping it meant satin ribbon. The clerk brought out a velour finish ribbon. I struck out again. Finally I poked around in the neighborhood until I found a shop with ribbon in the window. I asked, "What you call that?" Success! I had to wait until I saw it.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use all your resources to communicate
- If you do not know a word, circumlocute

Towels with complications

by Nancy Sullivan

One time I needed to buy a wedding gift for someone in our Sunday school class. A girl friend suggested that a luxurious set of towels with appliqués might be a suitable gift. Since she was an American married to a Portuguese man, we discussed the purchase in English.

When I entered the store, I hesitantly explained that I needed a towel, with things on it, things like shapes and ribbon. The shopkeeper looked confused and brought out an embroidered towel. I said, "No, not letters, but shapes, like flowers or rabbits." Then he pulled out another towel, with appliqués. The quality of the towel was not what I expected, so I asked him, "What is this called?" The word he gave me sounded like "complications." I looked at him funny and repeated the word. I giggled and he said the same word again. Finally I concluded by saying that it wasn't quite what I was looking for and I left his shop.

I went into another store and asked for a set of "towels with complications." The clerks quietly giggled but brought out something that I wanted. Later I learned that the proper word sounds more like "applications" than "complications." Maybe the first man didn't know his product line, or maybe I had misunderstood. At any rate, I felt stupid.

Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- If you do not know a word, circumlocute

Moms, maids, and children

by Nancy Sullivan

One expatriate mom I knew was resistant to putting her children in child care, even though it would have given her undistracted time for language study, and would have given her girls the chance to interact with other children who spoke the language. She found a solution in hiring a talkative and patient maid who would chat with the girls hour after hour.

We put our kids in Portuguese school. I think it's important for families who choose to home school to make sure that the kids go out to play with the local children. Some families, probably without intending to, ended up isolating their children from the Portuguese environment, and kept them from being able to really learn the language.

I remember another mom who had five kids, including a newborn. She stayed home from church all the time because there wasn't a Sunday School, without which it would have been impossible to keep five kids still during a two-hour service. Her husband went to church alone. After 18 months, she was not even at Level 1 because she had spent so little time out in the neighborhood. The kids went out to play with local children and had learned more of the language than she knew. This mother was trying to be an all-American mother and housewife. She preferred to do all the housework herself, so she did not want a maid, even though her language learning would have greatly benefited by hiring one.

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting these principles:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

How to excel

by Nancy Sullivan

Part of our assignment was overseeing language learners. Some excelled more than others. We reflected on the qualities of those who learned the language well. They were prepared to be humiliated. They were willing to risk their image to produce the sounds. They laughed at themselves. They made a special effort to put themselves into a conversational environment. They sought out opportunities to talk. They nurtured relationships with individuals in their neighborhood. They were willing to talk. They brought Portuguese speakers to their home frequently. One couple had a Portuguese lawyer tutoring them as well as a Portuguese lady who lived in a room in their house. This increased their exposure to the language, since these people had different social standing, and they learned different aspects of the language through them. Another facet of successful learning was knowing what resources were available such as tutors or schools.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Take opportunities to use the language
- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Learn to laugh at your mistakes
- Listen to people of different regions and social status

A conversation on a bus

by Nancy Sullivan

I remember having studied the Portuguese conditional tense in class. Most people do not use it in everyday speech. It is mainly reserved for formal writing and the imperfect tense is used instead. One day, I was listening to someone who was chatting with me on the bus. I heard the imperfect form over and over again. I felt puzzled, and asked a series of questions to try to make sense of the conversation. It finally dawned on me that my fellow passenger was not talking about something that had taken place in the past. He was using the imperfect form as a conditional. Suddenly the conversation had a completely different meaning. Later on, I heard someone actually use the conditional in a news report.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- There are variations in language due to regional, status, and stylistic differences

Signing on the dotted line

by Nancy Sullivan

I remember going to the doctor when our son needed to have an ear operation. The first specialist we were referred to suggested that we obtain a second opinion. So we went to a second specialist who again ran various tests. The doctor explained the test results, including the facial X-rays. Since it was the second time through, I was more familiar with the medical vocabulary concerning the bone structure, ear, and adenoids, but I didn't understand everything. The doctor was talking very fast. It wasn't until we were out the door and paying the bill that I realized I had unintentionally signed up this doctor to perform our son's surgery.

I felt awkward. We had not intended for this doctor to operate on our son, but we proceeded anyway. Afterward I felt stupid that, after essentially five years of language study, I still got into a mess this bad. I wondered if it is not the custom to get a second opinion in this country, but the first specialist had suggested for me to get a second opinion. Later, my regular doctor told me that the second specialist was well-qualified but sometimes manipulative. Perhaps the predicament was not entirely due to my language skills.

## Vocabulary building

by Nancy Sullivan

When I began to learn Portuguese, I realized that there were many cognates with French, which I had previously studied, as well as infrequently used English words. I didn't have to strain to memorize vocabulary. If a word was unfamiliar, sometimes I would just use it over and over again. Maybe those around me got tired of hearing it, but I could see that I was advancing more rapidly than other Europeans in the class. My language learning skills were effective so I did not change my method.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- The more the language you are learning is like one you already know, the more quickly you will learn it
- Use cognates, but use them carefully

### Verb charts

by Nancy Sullivan

In the first few months of formal Portuguese language study, I sketched a chart with all the verb forms: first, second, third person, singular and plural, present, past, future, imperfect. All by myself, I generalized rules for the constructions, even if I couldn't produce them.

Later, while overseeing language learners, I met an older school teacher from another organization. After months and months of study she still had not perceived that there were patterns in the language. When my husband showed her a verb chart, she exclaimed, "Wow, they start all the same way. The stems are the same. These endings work this way!" She began to see all the regularities. She had been memorizing every verb separately in every tense and person. Apparently in her formal training, verb charts had escaped her notice. She wasn't aware that the forms were predictable. Linguists and nonlinguists look at language differently. It was then that I gained clues on designing language learning tests for nonlinguists and support workers.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Languages have a grammatical system
- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Aptitude can speed up learning
- The sooner you can acquire the grammatical system of a language, the sooner you can use the language creatively

### Pablum or the pope?

by Nancy Sullivan

While overseeing Portuguese language learners, I noted that there were differences in language learning between linguists and nonlinguists. There were three main areas: the speed in acquiring the grammar, the vocabulary, and the prepositions. For nonlinguists in particular, prepositions were difficult, because people weren't paying attention to them. The focus was on the 'important' parts—subject, verb, and object—and not on the little words in between. Of course, for English speakers, articles, too, fell outside of the "important" category, until they realized how quickly articles can get you into trouble in Portuguese.

One student preached a sermon in which he said a papa 'pablum' (baby formula) over and over again. As far as the congregation was concerned, the whole sermon was about pablum, but that made no sense. They wondered, "What in the world is he talking about?!" Eventually the congregation figured out that he meant u papa 'the pope' instead of a papa 'pablum'. When they



snickered, the preacher thought they were beginning to respond to his message. He had no idea that he was using the wrong article.

For language learners of Portuguese, prepositions aren't quite as dangerous, so they're not a natural area of focus, and are usually overlooked in the early stages.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- The mind tends to filter out redundant material
- Productive skills are harder than receptive skills

I really don't speak Portuguese well!

by Nancy Sullivan

When we first went to Portugal, I had a mimicry tape I had worked with. And I could say, "I do not speak Portuguese well." But I'm good at mimicry, and that phrase just flowed out.

People would walk up to me, and ask me questions, even from our first day. This guy walked up to me outside, and said whatever it was he said. And I said, "I don't speak Portuguese well." And he smiled, and said something again. I realized there was a question in all that. And I hadn't the faintest idea what it was. His words were not in the list of mimicries I had done; vegetables and fruits I had done. So I could have shopped for groceries, but I never could have handled this guy's questions. So, I said, "Really, I don't speak Portuguese well." And he smiled again, and asked his question again! Finally I had to say, "I'm an American, and I don't speak Portuguese well." He stopped and pointed to my watch. So, I said, "Okay."

So the next time, which was about 15 minutes later (many people don't have watches, and this was not an uncommon question), somebody came by and said something to me. And I said, "I don't speak Portuguese well." Here we go again! We went through the whole thing again. And it turned out to be the same question. So I got to the point that if someone came up to me on the street and asked me a question, I would just hold up my watch! And I never had a time when that did not appear to be the right answer. No one ever told me if that wasn't the right answer! But I couldn't say anymore, "I don't speak Portuguese well," because if I said it in Portuguese, they thought it was a joke. So I had to say it in English or they wouldn't believe me.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Producing language that sounds too good can be misleading
- Native speakers often highly value good pronunciation

While riding on a bus one day

by Nancy Sullivan

We had an hour bus ride from where we lived to the Portuguese language school we attended. Sometimes people wouldn't talk to you on the bus. But there was a particularly hideous shopping center being built on the route at that time. And I remember one conversation when a man said, "What do you think of that?" And I wasn't sure what the "that" referent was. And so I said, "What?" And he said, "That over there." And I said, "Well, it's uh ... I've never seen anything like it!" And so he started going on about (I think) architecture in Portugal. And I remember he said he thought it was ugly, hideous, the colors were inappropriate, or something about the colors, and something about foreigners, and I don't know what all else. I was going, "Uh, okay, yes." I had learned enough of the conversational markers like, "I'm listening; keep going." I could more or less follow. So he kept going and going.

Then he started asking me questions, but at first I wasn't even aware he had! I hadn't picked up the question intonation. That really made me look stupid. So I had to explain myself.

He said, "You don't speak Portuguese?"

I said, "I've only been here two months. I study Portuguese."

"What are you going to do?" (These topics I can handle.)

"I'm going to Africa, to Angola."

It turns out half of the population, it seems, is from Angola or knows somebody that lives there. So he had a lot to say about Angola.

It was nice, but it was at the point where I could understand only a little bit. But when I spoke it was with a good enough accent that he thought that I was comprehending it all.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Producing language that sounds too good can be misleading
- Learn responses to keep the conversation going

#### Tenth time's a charm

by Nancy Sullivan

We found out that, in Portugal, if you could reproduce a certain kind of interaction 10 times, it seemed to be the right number to become included. So if you went to the bread store 10 times, then instead of just being acknowledged and them taking your order and helping you, you would actually become included in what was going on. So, Terry bought his newspaper 10 times at the same place, day after day. And I went to the big hypermarket once a week. Every Tuesday I would get on the bus. At about the tenth time, after 2½ months, the driver said, "Hello."

A couple of weeks later, I thought the driver knew who I was, but he wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to the passengers on the bus. As we went through the route to the market, which is the last stop, he said something to some of the people getting on. I was far enough back that I couldn't understand what he said. But some of those people got off to catch a different bus.

Others went ahead and got on. I was thinking, "What's going on, some of the people that usually ride aren't getting on." I recognized some of the faces. I thought, "Maybe I'm on the wrong bus today. Maybe these people know something I don't." I looked around for a sign, and I didn't see anything that said anything about it.

Well, it turned out that there was a detour in the middle of the route. But the end point, which was my stop, was still the same. Apparently the bus driver had remembered me and what my stop always was. He knew he didn't have to tell me about the detour, because it didn't affect my stop. Once I realized that I was being remembered, I figured it was okay to initiate conversations. So I would get on the bus and say, "Hello." We would chat, and I eventually found out about the driver's family. The ticket checkers and the ticket sellers also became very familiar, and they would chat, too.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Repetition helps things stick
- Take advantage of everything that happens for language acquisition
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

#### There's got to be a word

by Nancy Sullivan

We lived in the suburbs in Portugal. The bus system in our neighborhood had worked for years and years on the practice of buying the ticket when you got onto the bus. The rest of the city used the system where you bought a batch of tickets at a time (called a booklet). And they would click however many tickets you would need for that particular trip. Our bus system switched over, except instead of buying a batch of tickets, you would buy one ticket that had multiple punches on it. I thought, "There's got to be a special word for this because it's not a booklet, and it's not

just a ticket—it's actually worth 10 trips clear into the city." You could buy them for different distances.

I went up to the kiosk and asked the guy, "What do you call this thing here?" He said, "It's a ticket." I thought, "There's got to be another word."

I was loitering around there, waiting for the bus to come when I overheard the next person say, "Give me a senya of four" which meant one of those strips worth four individual tickets. So I realized that senya was the word. This was completely new—none of the other bus systems in the area used a repeated punch ticket—but they just intuitively knew what to call the ticket when it came up in conversation, even though they couldn't tell me the word for it on command. So it was a matter of eavesdropping, and hearing what the right vocabulary item was.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Listen to people talking to each other in their language
- Language knowledge may be intuitive

Stories by Terry Sullivan

### OVERVIEW

Stories by Terry Sullivan

by Terry Sullivan

In this module group

Here are some stories by Terry Sullivan:

- Take time for soccer
- What's most important?
- Portuguese newspapers

Take time for soccer

by Terry Sullivan

When I was in Portugal, I was always busy with work, not taking the time to buy a soccer magazine or to go to matches. Now I regret having missed these opportunities for social interaction and passive knowledge of the culture. My advice would be go to the coffee shop, "waste time" and get to know people's names. Buy a soccer magazine, go to a soccer game and be part of the 6-hour traffic jam. Learn how to say, "Did Jose make a goal?" In a sports conversation, there is a restriction of the vocabulary. Words from the same semantic fields come up again and again. Even someone who is beginning in language learning can benefit by learning about sports and gain cultural knowledge besides.

Neglected principles

This story illustrates the potential consequences of neglecting these principles:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Adapt to the culture to make relationships and learn the language
- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning

What's most important?

by Terry Sullivan

We knew some reserved students. For them, everything had to be purposeful, and normal conversation was very difficult. It was like an invasion to have contact with strangers. Reading and writing well was possible, but comprehension, pronunciation, and conversational skills were poor because of little time with people.

At the same time, we knew another student with poor language skills. Since he was preparing to do support work, he visited all the local auto shops, parts stores, and TV repair places. He was very personable, expressive with his hands, and confident that he would be able to get his point

across. He was completely unafraid of failure and extremely outgoing. He cultivated relationships, had more friends than anybody, and knew his way around town. If you needed a spare part, he knew exactly where to find it. However, he was restless and couldn't sit still in a classroom, locked into a set pace. He preferred to use a tutor, but he never seemed to unlearn errors in his grammar and pronunciation. He would have been a disaster as a linguist, but we could use more language learners like him. Even though he spoke so poorly, the nationals welcomed him because he identified with and interacted with the people.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

#### Portuguese newspapers

by Terry Sullivan

In the second month of learning Portuguese, my wife asked what she could read. The teacher suggested a newspaper with book reviews. She spent hours wading through a 6-column article which compared Indiana Jones to Tin-Tin. It seemed like a waste of time, but she discovered much vocabulary. Then we found that Portugal had competitive newspapers on a variety of topics including sports, arts, and science. They varied in language difficulty. We began with some that were even simpler than Reader's Digest.

Some newspapers had very little international news. When the Iraq-Kuwait war broke out in January 1991, the two-inch high headlines read "Portugal eats More Meat," "France Wants To Clean Our Statues," or "We Ate More Fish In The Summer Than We Did Last Year." The focus stayed on local news even when there were serious political events such as world wide wars, presidential elections, or the Angolan war. In the first year of language learning, I found these newspapers very helpful. As my reading ability improved, I progressed to more difficult ones, and finally settled on one of the three standard papers.

Along with the newspapers we also read the TV guides. We learned that the TV shows and characters such as Big Bird, Bert, and Ernie had different names than their American counterparts. It was helpful to have interesting and popular things to read instead of starting with serious literature. They also gave us conversation topics with everyday people who follow TV programs.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Look for reading material of the appropriate difficulty
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Use media resources

#### Stories by Jim Wheatley

##### OVERVIEW

Stories by Jim Wheatley

by James Wheatley

In this module group

Here are some stories by Jim Wheatley:

- Becoming like a child
- Bits and pieces from Brazil
- Nothing better than interaction
- A tit for tat
- A little kin goes a long way
- A private place

## Becoming like a child

by Jim Wheatley

I didn't like to use the target language with a native speaker who knew my language well. It was very embarrassing to try to speak Portuguese with somebody who spoke English so well. I felt foolish as an adult trying to speak the language and acting like a child. But I didn't feel hesitant. I knew the only way to learn the language was to make mistakes.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Do not let your desire to be correct keep you from talking
- Expect to make mistakes, and learn from them

## Bits and pieces from Brazil

by Jim Wheatley

One time we were talking to a government official in Portuguese about a situation in Brazil. To ease some tension, I told a joke in Portuguese and it just cleared the air. For me, that was what really helped get me over that next hump in learning and speaking the language.

I don't freeze up in class, but it depends upon the teacher. I had one teacher who was very strict and didn't seem to have the relationship skills which I find are so helpful in classroom learning. There were times when I didn't feel very motivated, but I kept on going because I knew I had to learn the language. The real problem in Brazilian culture was getting to know someone. The best way for us to make friends was to go through churches. One other thing we did was to get our shoes shined every day. We talked to the shoeshine boy to get some language practice.

I never felt our program was restrictive. We had class for two hours every day, and then we were free to look at our notes, go talk with people, go to church services, and talk with friends. One friend of mine was looking for some land to buy, so I would go with him on his trips and other excursions.

I don't remember people being very critical of my mistakes, with the exception of one or two, who were fairly critical. I felt stupid at the time, but I never felt I wasn't making progress fast enough—I didn't know how fast I was "supposed" to learn. I knew I needed to know the language, so I never felt that I wasn't learning in one way or another.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Remind yourself of your motivation
- Combine formal and informal learning

## Nothing better than interaction

by Jim Wheatley

We had six months of Portuguese language learning before we actually went to a "jump off" town for another six months, working in administration and helping around the SIL center in Brazil. This was before we started Bakairi language learning. I didn't feel we had problems with the comprehensible input, except when we got onto really difficult topics. But I had lots of interaction with native speakers, and lots of exposure to the language and culture. I could actually choose my own learning style and preference, even though I didn't have a specific plan. My best style for learning is interaction with people.

### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Look for people who have time to talk with you

### A tit for tat

by Jim Wheatley

The language we learned was Bakairi, one of the Indian languages of Brazil. It was very frustrating because we had to learn by listening and were laughed at by the women. They were quite hard on us because no one outside their group had ever tried to learn their language before. They had been laughed at by others, so they seemed to take it out on us as a way of "getting back" at those who had ridiculed them. This was very hard on my wife and me, but we just kept working away at it.

Eventually, I spent every morning at a desk working on verbs, text, and short phrases. I got some short texts from school children on topics about girls, boys, fishing, hunting, and all sorts of things. Locals came back at night to listen to the tapes we made of them. They laughed and we would joke. The tapes were great because we could hear the same thing over and over again. The Bakairis were very gentle with us after we got over their initial laughing and making fun of us. It became fun because it was a joking relationship we had with them. They were very understanding in terms of mistakes, and they worked with us to correct us. I always felt I had the motivation to learn the language because I knew it was essential to what I was doing there.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Remind yourself of your motivation
- Learn to laugh at your mistakes

### A little kin goes a long way

by Jim Wheatley

I didn't have too much of a problem with going blank. I went around to different houses during the afternoons and said, "Are you walking around?" I said this over and over until I got it down. I did feel stupid at times, though. I remember once being envious of a 12-year-old orphan boy because he could speak the language and I couldn't. Here I was, a grown American man and I couldn't speak the language. It really bugged me.

I took an interest in the kinship system and analyzed that. That really helped, because I could say things like, "This is your brother-in-law," and "This is your cousin." The people liked that a lot, and it motivated me to learn what verbs and other parts of speech went together.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works
- Set yourself up for small successes
- Remind yourself of your motivation

### A private place

by Jim Wheatley

When we worked with the Bakairi of Brazil, they were constantly in our house. This bothered my wife in particular, because she really needed some "alone" time. We designated one private room in the house where she could retreat to be by herself when she needed it.

We found it very important to have some kind of place where we could go away from the home, whether it was another little house separate from the home, or a room in the house. There, we could actually be separated from the community and be by ourselves, with or without each other. I remember once being so frustrated with language learning that I went off by myself and spent a day and a half reading a novel, just to take a break.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Find ways to relax and get away from the language for short breaks

Stories by Sandra Wimbish

#### OVERVIEW

Stories by Sandra Wimbish

by Sandra G. Wimbish

In this module group

Here are some stories by Sandra Wimbish:

- Night fishing on Kao Bay
- Hold this mike, and speak clearly
- Choose well your friends and teachers
- May I pick Your hair?
- Slowly, and not too surely

Night fishing on Kao Bay

by Sandra G. Wimbish

The Pagu people live on an island in Indonesia. Although they do not make their living from the sea, some of the men will occasionally go fishing at night. My husband, John, decided to go along one night, as a way of getting to know his companions better, and to get some language practice. Not being a "night person," it was a challenge to pump himself up for staying up all night.

What began as a nice boat ride developed into the most in-depth study on Pagu beliefs about spirits and related beings that we ever had. Part of the reason for the men's openness was environment: there they were, on an outrigger in the dark of night, waiting for fish to bite, and not a whole lot otherwise to pass the time. Another part of their willingness was opportunity: the Pagu's underlying belief system comes to the surface in certain situations, including those we would consider scary or eerie. And certainly, part of it was the fact that John had been willing to go with them, investing time, energy, and effort while he could have been sleeping.

Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Put yourself in situations where you have to use the language you are learning
- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

Hold this mike, and speak clearly

by Sandra G. Wimbish

One of the very enjoyable activities we did while learning Pagu in Indonesia was to record folk tales. At first it was a matter of figuring out which willing Pagu were good storytellers and which ones were not quite so eloquent. John worked on getting stories from men, while I tried, most unsuccessfully, to get them from women.

Our favorite storyteller, Nik, was very animated in his storytelling and would draw quite a crowd as he let loose with his sometimes little known fairy tales. You could hear the peals of laughter several houses away as our parlor was transformed into a men's club.

After we tape recorded a story, we began the somewhat arduous task of transcribing, listening over and over again to hear what was said. Early on in language learning, we did the transcribing during sessions with a language associate because of our limited knowledge of Pagu. A little later on, however, we found that it worked best to make a preliminary transcription alone and to then listen to the tape with a language associate for two reasons: to check what we had written down, and to dispel any questions we had as to what we had not been able to catch. Actually, a third unplanned reason was also revealed in time: to get an alternate version of the story, if the language associate knew one.

We found the folk tales to be of great help in language learning on several levels: new vocabulary, grammatical structures, colloquial expressions, cultural beliefs, and of course, discourse level structures. We knew that we heard "ma" a lot in speech, but until we saw the multitude of ways it worked in several stories, we could not have guessed how many "ma"s there are in the Pagu language. Discourse charting was very helpful to lay it all out and get a feel for where everything went in good Pagu discourse.

Obviously, it was fun and helpful for us, but it was also a very successful method in a society in which people apparently place quite a bit of value on their oral tradition.

#### Principles

Here are some principles that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture
- Use analysis to help you understand how the language works

Choose well your friends and teachers

by Sandra G. Wimbish

When we moved to the village of Solsol to continue learning the Pagu language, one of the friendliest women was Meri. Naturally, I gravitated toward her in my early days there. However, I soon learned that, although Meri spoke Pagu, her use of the language was not up to snuff. I first noticed that she did not make the distinction between third person singular masculine and feminine (which Pagu does, but the national language does not). Upon deepening our friendship, I learned that, although Meri was Pagu, she was fostered out as a girl, and grew up in the provincial capital, where she spoke the national language. She had moved back as an adult, married a man from a related language, and according to other locals, pretty much butchered the Pagu language.

I was sad, because Meri was definitely the easiest woman for me to relate to in Solsol, probably in part because she had lived outside of the area. I enjoyed sitting around, visiting in her house, going to her mountain garden to see her harvest rice, gather firewood, and cut bananas and vegetables. She welcomed me freely, while the other Pagu women were less comfortable in my presence, though they did allow me to socialize.

But I had to make a conscious effort to not look to her for language help, and to actually ignore the way she spoke. This was easier as I improved in Pagu, and I even tried to get her to differentiate between male and female, though without success! Our friendship moved along nicely, and maybe it was easier for others to accept me because Meri did; I don't know.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Find good language role models

May I pick Your hair?

by Sandra G. Wimbish

You never know what social activities you may find yourself participating in for the sake of language practice and building relationships. One of the favorite Sunday afternoon leisure activities of Pagu women was to delouse one another's hair. They would gather under the shade of a tree, converse, and pick.

Being the disciplined language learner that I am, I decided that although I had no lice which needed to be picked, I would avail myself to the opportunity at hand (no pun intended). So, off I set, and down I sat. Because the Pagu women are basically the hard workers of the society, this was one of few opportunities to catch them totally relaxed, enjoying their break. They knew that I did not have lice, so they did not make any effort to inspect my hair. They were curious, however, how I kept from having the little critters. And they knew how they were transported



from one person to another, because of the time one of the children decided to comb our Emily's hair with their comb ... but that is another story.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Participate as fully as possible in the culture

Slowly, and not too surely

by Sandra G. Wimbish

The Pagu women would meet once a month on Sunday afternoon for their Women's Meeting from church. I remember one time, when I was not very far along in my language learning, we were sitting in the home of one woman, waiting for others to come. Casual conversation was the norm, and though I could not understand everything that was being said, I could catch some of it. I made a decided effort to speak in Pagu, albeit slowly. The women were willing to listen, even gently correct my many mistakes, and so I established the fact that I was going to use Pagu, and not just the national language.

#### Principles

Here is a principle that this story illustrates:

- Establish that you want to speak the language you are learning

Language Learning Troubleshooter

by Carol J. Orwig

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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: Meaningful exposure to the language

OVERVIEW: Emotional blocks to language learning

OVERVIEW: Mismatch between learning style and learning situation

OVERVIEW: Lack of encouragement and accountability

OVERVIEW: Lack of motivation

OVERVIEW: Lack of plan

OVERVIEW: Common feelings in language learning

Start here to troubleshoot

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

Project rate of language learning progress

#### OVERVIEW

Project rate of language learning progress

#### Introduction

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 US Foreign Service Institute) to learn different languages.
- 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)

Progress charts based on FSI data

#### 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

- 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)

Progress chart for group 1 languages

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)

Progress chart for group 2 languages

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 2 languages

Advice

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

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

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

Progress chart for group 3 languages

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 3 languages

Advice

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

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

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

Progress chart for group 4 languages

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for group 4 languages

Advice

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

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

See also

- Keywords: difficulty, progress (language learning)

Progress chart for low aptitude learners

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for low aptitude learners

Advice

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

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)

Progress chart for average aptitude learners

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for average aptitude learners

Advice

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

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)

Progress chart for high aptitude learners

OVERVIEW

Progress chart for high aptitude learners

Advice

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

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)

Compare progress against the FSI data

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

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

[Project time to reach goals](#)

[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

OVERVIEW

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% to the estimates.

Example

Q: It has already taken me 6 months to reach level 1 proficiency. How long will it take me to get to level 3?

A: It takes about 4 times as long to reach level 3, thus you can expect it to take about 2 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

- OVERVIEW: Project rate of language learning progress
- Keywords: goals (proficiency), progress (language learning)

Meaningful exposure to the language

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

Comprehensible input

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

Usually lost in formal study sessions

#### 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.

Generally follow what is going on in formal study sessions

#### 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. Understand almost everything in formal study sessions

#### OVERVIEW

Understand almost everything in formal study sessions

#### Advice

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

Usually bored during formal study sessions

#### 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.

Understand almost nothing when native speakers talk together

#### 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.

Understand some when native speakers talk together

#### 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

Understand most of what native speakers say to each other

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 don't understand, you might jot down questions to ask a culture friend later rather than interrupt the conversation to ask at the time.

Reading material is needed

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

Your reading material is too difficult

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.

Good level of reading material difficulty

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 don't understand so that you can study and review them later, but don't 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.

Reading material may be too simple

### 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 don't understand so that you can study and review them later, but don't 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.

Unable to follow radio and TV dialog

### 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, etc.) 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.

Limited ability to follow radio and TV dialog

### 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.

Able to follow radio and TV dialog

#### 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.

Easily able to follow radio and TV dialog

#### 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.

Infrequently using the language with the resource person

#### 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 & Answer
- Picture descriptions
- Shared Experiences
- Familiar Stories

Frequently using the language with the resource person

#### 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.

Conversations with native speakers

#### 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.

Hard to converse

#### 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 don't 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 don't 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.

Able to converse

#### 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.

Exposure to authentic communication situations

#### 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.

Limited access to language community

#### 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.

Authentic communication is essential

#### 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.

Possible causes for limited exposure

#### 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're 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.

Contact strategies when people don't seem friendly

#### 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.

Places to observe native speakers interacting

#### 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 non-academic 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's 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.

Contact strategies for families

#### 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

Emotional blocks to language learning

#### 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

Mind goes blank

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

Embarrassment

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.

Reluctance to use target language

OVERVIEW

Reluctance to use target language

Introduction



This isn't 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 don't 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.

Hate making mistakes

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'll have good stories to tell for the rest of your life!

See also

- Keywords: mistakes

Feeling foolish

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.

Dealing with derision

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

Fear of being misunderstood

OVERVIEW

Fear of being misunderstood

Introduction

It certainly is frustrating when you can't 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 non-verbal cues that indicate confusion by the listener.

Teacher critical or derisive

OVERVIEW

Teacher critical or derisive

Introduction

It's 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.

Criticism or hostility

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 don't 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.

Mismatch between learning style and learning situation

#### 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

Learning in a classroom setting

#### 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
- 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 vs. 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
- 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

Independent study

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
- 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 vs. 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
- potential loss of prestige in community

See also

- Keywords: independent language study

Your own language learning program

OVERVIEW

Your own language learning program

Advice

How to manage your language learning program can help you organize and manage your language learning program.

Lack of encouragement and accountability

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

Share with fellow learners

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

Use a standard or scale

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.

Be accountable for progress

OVERVIEW

Be accountable for progress

Advice

Arrange to send regular reports to your supervisor or consultant. If you don't 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

Setting and meeting specific goals

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's 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)

Lack of motivation

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

Not convinced of importance

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 won't 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 DON'T 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'll probably struggle with this issue throughout your language learning program.

Get negative reinforcement

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 aren't good at analysis, maybe someone else can help you.

Try to discover:

- Situations in which your motivation is increased
- Situations in which your motivation is 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
- 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

[Lack of plan](#)

[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 language learning plan](#).

[Common feelings in 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

[Developmental process](#)

[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.

[Possible problem areas](#)

[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)

Essays on Field Language Learning

by Greg Thomson

## Contents

Preface by Carol Orwig

A Few Simple Ideas for New Language Learners: ... and old ones needing some new life, by Ambrose Thomson, Angela Thomson, Chad Thomson, and Greg Thomson

Kick-starting Your Language Learning: Becoming a basic speaker through fun and games inside a secure nest, by Greg Thomson

Language Learning in the Real World for Non-beginners, by Greg Thomson

The Use of a Book of Photos in Initial Comprehension Learning, by Greg Thomson

Leave me alone! Can't you see I'm learning your language?, by Greg Thomson

Preface by Carol Orwig

These essays by Greg Thomson provide accessible, innovative and practical guides for self-directed language learners, whether learning a major world language or a previously unwritten minority language. Himself a proficient speaker of languages as diverse as Blackfoot, Urdu and Russian, Thomson worked for many years with the Summer Institute of Linguistics as a language-learning consultant, among other roles. He continues to study language acquisition and to give workshops and guidance, particularly to people learning languages in the settings where they are spoken.

The first essay in this collection, A Few Simple Ideas for Beginning Language Learners is the most recently written and is a collaborative effort by the entire Thomson family, based on their experiences learning Russian.

Kickstarting your Language Learning tells beginning language learners how to get a start in comprehension and how to become a basic speaker of a language.

Language Learning in the Real World for Non-Beginners tell language learners how to move ahead, once they are basic speakers of a language, no matter how they got there.

Use of a Photo Book in Initial Language Learning gives advice on how to set up and arrange a book of photographs and how to take advantage of it in learning a second language.

Leave Me Alone! Can't you see I'm learning your language? is an essay on the importance of language learners developing and expanding social networks.

A Few Simple Ideas for New Language Learners:



... and old ones needing some new life  
 by Ambrose Thomson  
 Angela Thomson  
 Chad Thomson  
 Greg Thomson  
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## Contents

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2. The Simple Activities
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Author note

### Dedication

This article gives an overview of Greg Thomson's approach to self-directed language learning. It describes four key principles underlying Thomson's approach: communing, understanding, talking, and evolving, and then describes five simple activities based on these principles. This information will give you a good overview of Thomson's developmental approach to self-directed language learning.

### 1. Some Background Principles

Who should read this?

Have you ever noticed that learning and using a new language can be emotionally demanding? That's for sure. We can make it better by good mental health practices, but we can't make it emotionally undemanding.

So we've been thinking, since it is going to be emotionally demanding no matter what, why not make it intellectually undemanding? Now you may find that you like it to be intellectually demanding. Maybe that helps your emotions. You are an outstanding student, and your ability to learn stuff better than the rest of us is a real encouragement to you. You love languages courses, and you like them to be as demanding as possible. Or you love reading complicated grammar books and doing all the exercises. Question: Is this working for you? Are you steadily getting better in the language you are learning (as measured by your ability to use it conversationally)? Then accept the heartfelt congratulations of other readers and us, and put this paper down. We've known people who have become famous as language learners through endless hours of intense study combined with intense efforts to use the language in real life. What we have to say is for those of us who are tempted to envy them.

Or perhaps you are just hanging around with people and you are making good progress in the language. We know a guy who learned Urdu really, really well just hanging around with buddies in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (We kid you not.) We know another guy in Canada from Russia who is an excellent public speaker in English, fifteen years after starting. He refused to take ESL courses, because he hates studying languages. He noticed after nine months that he could speak a lot more English than many of his friends who had been full time ESL students for the same nine months. If you're doing great without doing any special "language learning activities" beyond communicating in real life, then accept the heartfelt congratulations of other readers and us, and put this down. What we have to say is for those of us who are tempted to envy people like you. Whew! Are they gone? Now they are kind, well meaning people, and we love them, and are happy for them, but they intimidate us. Now we're left with the 80% or so of us who are unable

to remove the emotional demands from language learning, and so we really might like to limit the intellectual demands.

Now we are a pretty traditional family. Angela bore and we raised six children. Four of them are out of the nest. What we are about to share has grown out of our recent language learning experiences. One of us (Greg) previously wrote a number of papers on field language learning. Those reflected what Angela and Greg, and a number of colleagues in the Language Project of the Church of Pakistan, learned about language learning between 1986 and 1990. For people who have read those essays, this can be taken as a partial update. Those papers contain a lot of detail. That is one reason for the present paper. Getting started in language learning shouldn't be so complicated. What we have to say here is based on our recent experiences in what Greg has elsewhere called a "challenging" language learning situation: the early months of learning Russian in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. At the outset of this project our ages were 13, 47, 10, and 47, respectively. It has been nearly 100% a joint project. Learning Russian is part of our shared family experience.

### 1.1. Four cute language learning principles you won't forget

We often see requests for information which go something like "I want to start learning language X. Can someone please recommend a good textbook?" Or "Does anyone know if there are courses in language X taught in my area?"

#### 1.1.1. Communing

A language is not an academic subject. A language is something that happens between people in flesh and blood. That is where it is. That is what it is. No more. No less. Individuals experience the world individually. That is called perception. Communities experience the world together. That is called language. Thus the first cute principle is Communing. And here is a golden rule to go with it:

Golden Rule C ( for "communing": Join with people around experience using language.

For example. If you are a beginner in Language X, and someone points to various objects in the room, and says what they are called, then you are joining with that person around experience using language. This is sometimes called here and now language. Or suppose you are more advanced in language X, and are showing someone a photo of your father's store. You attempt to describe parts of it to your friend. She has trouble understanding you and tries to help you clarify what you are saying. But you then need her to clarify what she said in her attempt to help you clarify. Back and forth you go, until she has figured out what you are trying to say. Or perhaps she has the photo and you go back and forth figuring out what she is trying to say. Same difference. It is sometimes called negotiating meaning. In negotiating meaning around the photo you are joining with people around experience using language. Or suppose you are more advanced yet, and someone is telling you a lot that you didn't know about events in your new community during the previous ten years. That is the experience of the community. Communities have lots of experience that is only shared largely indirectly by means of language. Person A has the experience. Person B shares in it only because person A told him about it. And person C, who has never even met person A, shares in this experience too, because person B told her about it. Now you are getting people to share the community's experience and knowledge with you. You are still joining with people around experience using language. From beginning to end, progress comes as you join with people around experience using language.

Come back to all those people who say, "I want to learn language X; where can I find a textbook?" What would be a better first question for them to ask? Try "I want to learn language X; where can I find some speakers of language X?" How rarely people ask that. How odd.

#### 1.1.2. Understanding

The second cute principle is the principle of understanding. You need to understand things that people say in language X. And that gives us the second golden rule.

Golden Rule U (for 'understanding:): Pay attention to large doses of things that people say which you can understand.

Now you may be thinking, how can you understand a language that you haven't learned yet? Piece of cake. We'll see later that you can set up activities which will get people to say lots of things to you that you can understand. And we'll just suggest a few simple activities.

Can you see why this golden rule is important? You want to learn to speak Language X in a manner similar to the way that its current speakers speak it. Well then, you have to hear what they are saying. No language could ever be captured in a textbook. If you go on and on in this language, eventually you'll have understood people speaking it for many thousands of hours. You will "pick up" an awareness of the kinds of things people say. Even quite early you'll often be saying to yourself, consciously or unconsciously, "Oh, so that's how they say that." If you haven't started yet you might find that hard to imagine. But let us get you there.

You may notice we haven't said anything about memorizing words and sentences. Memorizing is a great activity for certain purposes. But for most people it is time consuming, and time spent on memorizing is time taken away from communing and understanding. You can progress more quickly if you skip the memorizing and get on with the communing and understanding.

#### 1.1.3. Talking

The third cute principle is the principle of talking. There are various ways the third golden rule can be formulated. How about this?

Golden Rule T (for talking): To become good at speaking you need to speak a lot, putting your own ideas into your own words.

There is an additional step to get from being able to understand something to being able to come up with it when you need to say it. If you do things right, then your language ability will be something like the following diagram, at least for the first few years:

Now language learning doesn't always work this way. If this same learner, instead of communing, understanding, and talking, had chosen to memorize "useful expressions" and vocabulary and "model sentences" and rules, and subsequently to talk, and then commune, and then understand, then her abilities might be better expressed by the following diagram:

Now we can't prove that this is true, but that is what some of our language learners felt like, and we know plenty of others who describe their experience in similar terms. (There are exceptional people who do really well this way, but we told them to stop reading after the first paragraph or two.)

#### 1.1.4. Evolving

The final cute principle is evolving. By this we mean that your ability to use the language changes over time, and along with it, you will want to change your approach to communing, understanding and talking. Thus the final golden rule is as follows:

Golden Rule E (for "evolving"): Adapt your language learning activities to your current level of language ability.

Which brings us to the topic of what are the few simple things to do to learn a language.

### 1.2. Things to do to learn a language

First, what are the key resources you need to locate? A textbook, you say? Bzzzz ! Ah, but you knew better. A human, you say. Chime! One or more fluent speakers to join with around

experience. Next, you need some time to meet with those people. Third, you need some experience to join around.

One of the authors has written quite a bit about how to find people, and the kind of people to find in the paper "Leave Me Alone! Can't You See I'm Learning Your Language?" But we continue to see repeatedly that a key to organizing your early language learning is the way your native speaker friends understand their role as your helper and co-communer. Explain to them that you need a friend, not a teacher. People base new roles on ones they already know. "Teacher" may seem to them to be the obvious one. Don Larson reminds us that "mother, father, uncle, aunt, older sibling" are closer to what you actually need. You need someone who will talk to you in such a way that you can understand her, and who will help you along as you struggle to put your own thoughts into words. That's all you need. If the person can read English, let her read this very paragraph if you'd like. She will be "teaching" you in a sense, but not in the sense that she is likely to have in mind. So it is better to call it something like "language practice". And call your language sessions "visits" rather than "lessons". The youngest of the authors emphasizes that even the word "sessions" gives too serious a tone to what we have in mind by "visits". We find that in meeting with three different friends there is one with whom we are more formal in that we tape recorded the visit. The other visits are just visits.

1.3. Now what do you do with your resources?

So now you have people, or at least one person, and you have agreed to meet for, let's say, one hour three times a week for language practice. Next, what experience should you join around? Well, let's start with the physical objects of everyday life. Of course, these will vary from culture to culture. But every aspect of life is full of objects. Think of rising in the morning in the authors' culture. Objects: bed, pillow, blanket, sheet, pajamas, robe, belt, slippers, door, bathroom, toilet, sink, soap, washcloth, towel, shower, water, razor, toothbrush, toothpaste, hairbrush, curling iron... The point is, life is full of objects.

People can recognize objects. You have some memory of what it is that beds look like, and you use that to recognize beds when you see them. Let's call this memory of what beds look like a "mental image" of beds. You also know the sound of the word "bed", so that you can recognize that word when you hear it spoken. To know the word "bed" is to have a link in your brain between the memory of the sound, and the memory of what a bed is when encountered in the world. So you want your language activities to lead to forming many such links between the sound form of words and the mental image. Perhaps the best and quickest (to say nothing of funnest) way to do that is to have the actual objects present when they are talked about. It also enables you know what is in fact being talked about!

Figure 3: A word in your head

(Don't take the mental image business too literally if you are relating the word "dog" to a dog that you can see, or even a toy dog that you can see, or a stuffed dog, or a picture of a dog, then you are making the right link. Later when you hear the word it will call up the "image" even though you may not experience any vivid mental picture.)

Switching from beds to dogs, the following diagram is an attempt at illustrating the way the word for "dog" will be represented in your head. Learning this word is a matter of getting two things to become very strong: item 1 in the diagram, the memory of how the word sounds; and item 2, the link from that memory to the mental image. We are assuming that the mental image itself is already there, though this may not be the case when there involve new cultural objects or actions. And there is a further matter of using the word in your own speech once it is strong enough that you can retrieve it and speak it as you need it. This is a matter of getting what comes out of your

mouth to match your memory of what the word sounds like (that is to match item 1 in the diagram).

Initially your memory of the sound of the word (1 in the diagram) is likely to be weak, and the link between the memory of the sound and the mental image (2 in the diagram) is likely to be weak. But something will have changed in your head, just the same. With some words, your memory for how they sound may become strong first, while the link to the mental image remains weak. You hear the word, and think, "I recognize that word, but I can't think of what it means". In other cases the link to the mental image may be strong, so that you start to say the word to express that meaning, and suddenly you realize that you are not exactly certain of how it sounds when spoken. Eventually both the memory of how it sounds and the link to the image become strong, and then, once you have used that word a few times in your own speech, it will be a secure part of your language ability.

Names of objects are by far the easiest things to learn first, so "go to town". Gather up a whole bunch of the objects of everyday life, and take them to your native speaker friend for your language learning visit. And collect more at her house. (We actually think it is better at first to have her come to your house, but this is not essential.) Or go outside with her to find objects galore, some of which, of course, cannot be gathered up. This brings us to the simple activities. All language learning activities, whether for beginners, or for advanced learners, have one or both of the following purposes:

- to enable you to hear (with understanding) how native speakers talk
- to encourage you express your own thoughts in your own words as best you can in your new language

## 2. The Simple Activities

What follows contains the main meat of this paper. It is the part that you may want to come back to.

### 2.1. Simple activity 1: learning names of objects:

Take twenty objects and put them on the table in a clump. Remove two from the clump. Your friend tells you, "This is a glass and this is a spoon". You are now understanding the language. She then asks "Where (or which) is the spoon? Where is the glass?" You respond by pointing. Then you take a third object from the heap, add it to the first two, and continue in the same way. Pretty soon she is asking you randomly to point at any of the twenty objects. You now have a (weakly implanted) vocabulary of twenty words.

#### 2.1.1. Interlude -- Some commercial resources for extending simple activity 1:

There are many variations of this activity. And it feeds into others, such as the Lexicarry activity (simple activity 2). They are easy for your friend to learn, and what you are doing quickly comes to make perfect sense to her. It may come across a bit like a "teaching 119 activity, but not a familiar one. You will find more natural ways of building vocabulary later by simply conversing about objects and pictures, and yet you can profitably come back to this activity whenever you feel discouraged about slow vocabulary growth. Are you an intermediate level learner who has grown discouraged feeling you haven't made much progress for a long time. Then grab one of the tools listed just below, and conquer a few hundred new vocabulary items. That ought to give your spirits a lift.

The following books are sure winners. If you visit the ESL (English as a Second Language) center of a major university you may find others.

Lexicarry: An illustrated Vocabulary Builder for second Languages, by Patrick R. Moran (1984, 1990) Pro Lingua Associates, 15 Elm Street, Brattleboro, Vermont 05301. PH.: 802-257-7779

Action English Pictures, by Noriko Takahashi; text by Maxine Fauman-Prickel (1985, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 07632)

The Basic Oxford Picture Dictionary, by Margot F. Gramer. (1994. Oxford University Press. )

Actionlogues, by J. Klopp. (1985, 1988. Sky Oaks Productions, Inc. P.O. Box 1102, Los Gatos, California 95031. Ph.: 403 395 7600)

Longman Photo Dictionary, by Marilyn S. Rosenthal and Daniel B. Freeman. (1990, Longman)

Word by Word, by Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss (with Germadi G. Borbatov for the English-Russian version. 1996, Prentice Hall.)

Picture It! Illustrated by Richard Togli, no author listed. (1978, International communications Incorp., Tokyo; 1981, Prentice Hall)

Most of these are designed for ESL, and so they have editions available in various European (and sometimes Asian) languages. But that is neither here nor there, since we are interested in the words in our friends' heads, and in their communal sharing of experience. For our purposes all that matters is the pictures (and our friends-- who matter infinitely more than the pictures).

### 2.1.2. Extending simple activity 1 -- simple activity 1a

Some of these books also come with instructions as to how to use them. We ignore those instructions and use them in ways that suit us. Now the pictures in these vocabulary books will function as the objects did in simple activity 1. Your native speaker friend can first tell you what is happening in two pictures: "This man is waking up. This man is getting out of bed." Then she can ask you, "In which picture is the man waking up? In which picture is the man getting out of bed?" (Or she might simply say "He is getting up. He is getting out of bed.") You can respond by pointing. Then she adds another picture. Then another. Before you know it she has you responding by pointing to any of twenty pictures which she asks you about randomly.

Now these vocabulary building techniques are supposed to be simple, and they are. Some snooty language learning specialists will say condescendingly, "But those aren't information questions. They are merely display questions." But if you can acquire, without drudgery, many hundreds of vocabulary items in a few weeks, what do you care what they say? Just think what you are accomplishing. First, you are forming a strong memory of the sound form of each word. Second, you are forming strong links from the memory of the sound form to the mental image of the item or action. (Review the diagram above if this is unclear.)

By the way, verbs appear to us to be considerably more difficult to acquire than nouns. This doesn't surprise us. To acquire the word for "dog", "cat", or "man", you need to link the sound form of the word to the mental image of a dog, cat or man. By contrast, you can't have a simple mental image of "running". You must have an image of a dog, cat, or a man (or the like) first, and then you can have it be running. So linking the sound forms of action verbs to their mental images is naturally more difficult than linking the sound forms of concrete nouns to their images. We think it helps to act out the verbs as you hear them some of the time. (The reasons are a bit complicated.)

But be patient. Whenever you are understanding your native speaker friend as she talks about objects and activities, learning is occurring. Learning often does not go through to completion all at once. Each time you understand a word used in reference to an object or situation, your memory for the sound form of that word gets a little stronger. And your link from that sound form memory to the mental image of the object or situation also gets a little stronger. Time spent understanding language is never wasted. Don't get discouraged if you cannot recall a lot of words when you want to use them. That will come. You just have to understand them enough times to make them strong enough. And as we say, by means of simple activity 1 (including 1a),

you can quickly come to understand many hundreds of concrete nouns and verbs used in simple but natural utterances. And we have (only) a few more simple activities.

### 2.1.3. How do you get enough repetition with these simple activities?

It may take many times hearing a word and associating it with the mental image before both the memory for the sound form and the link to the mental image will be strong. At first, your native speaker friend will have a hard time believing how many times you need to understand a word in a meaningful context before it becomes strong enough in your head to function properly there.

We have found certain ways to increase the amount of exposure we get to whatever we are learning. For one thing, since there are four of us, two adults and two kids, our native speaker friend can do everything once with each of us, while the others watch and listen intently. Then we can engage in a "race": Our friend says the word and we race to see who can point the most quickly. This provides a lot more repetition. Finally, we can have more than one friend whom we visit, and do the same activities with different friends. Or we could let our friend read this section, and then take our word for it that we need a lot of repetition. There is a Russian proverb which says that repetition is the mother of learning.

O.K So far we've been building a large vocabulary of words that we can at least understand when we hear them in context But obviously, we need to be able to say some practical things too.

Simple method 2 will help us with that.

### 2.2. Simple activity 2: talking about stuff in Moran's Lexicarry

It might seem odd, when we have such a small number of simple activities to share, that we should devote a whole activity to a single book that you'll have to order if you want to do the activities. But Moran's Lexicarry (details above) is the best single all in one language learning resource that we have come across. Now the nay sayers will rise up and shout, "But it is too culture specific". Well, as soon as they produce better tools that are more appropriate to specific parts of the world, we'll stop recommending Lexicarry for those parts of the world. For reasons we can't figure out, we decided to demand considerably less than perfection in such matters. And actually, the pictures are plain enough that in many instances culture specific changes could easily be made using a pencil.

The first lengthy portion of Lexicarry contains comic style story strips. Typically there are three frames per story, and the stories have comic style bubbles with the words missing. The stories illustrate approximately sixty common language functions and communication situations. During our first month, we like to concentrate on learning to understand, and so we can use the story strips in the manner of simple activity 1. Our native speaker friend begins by telling us what each person might be saying in the stories and then asks us questions like "Who is saying, 'May I help you?'; who is saying, 'I'm sorry?'". In a few moments, by using activity 1 with the Lexicarry, we can recognize ten new useful expressions.

But simple activity 2, really kicks in once we start talking more (in month two). You can still begin the Lexicarry activity as with activity 1, but then adding a talking step. You learn to understand half a dozen new story strips (the number that can typically be viewed at once). You each take your turn at pointing in response to your friend's questions. Then you have your race. Finally, and this is the new step, you can each take a turn at trying to tell each of the half dozen story strips. You don't tell them verbatim from memory. Rather, you tell them in your own words as best you can. It is a struggle, but your native speaker friend helps you out at every step by expanding or recasting your broken utterances. For us, once again, we get to do this four times, if we wish, each taking a turn while the others watch and intently listen. If you are all alone, then you really will want to have three or four separate friends to visit and do this with. And/or you can tape record ybur visit and listen to the tape over and over.

That's it for activity 2. Simple, eh?

So now you're growing this huge vocabulary of concrete nouns and verbs (and adjectives too), using activity 1, and you're learning all sorts of useful things to say in activity 2. But the world of experience that you are communing around is not just a matter of objects and actions, or nice things to say in social situations. It is a story in the making. And so you might as well start learning to relate language to stories. But they need to be stories that unfold as you talk about them. You are not nearly at the point where you can cope with stories about what you cannot see.

2.3. Simple activity 3: working your way through books monolingually

This is the simplest activity yet. You go through children's picture story books, page by page, with your native speaker friend. You verbally point out anything that you can describe in your own words in the new language (even if you can only make a stab at it). You ask about things you cannot say, (by month two you can easily say "What is this?" or "What is s/he doing?" in your new language). Set your timer or stopwatch and tell your friend, "For the next twenty (or thirty) minutes we are only going to use your language." After the twenty (or thirty) minutes are up, you can use another language that you share (such as English) to ask about things that puzzled you. For but for those twenty minutes, no matter how much of a struggle it is, you do not depart from the new language.

You may question the importance of sticking to the target language. Well, we find it extremely helpful. As soon as we let English in, the whole exercise goes out the window. We must be forced to try hard to do as much as we can in our new language. Otherwise it quickly becomes a conversation about the language rather than one in the language. Now once you are gaining some fluency this may be less of an issue. But while you are seriously needing to develop some fluency, it is an issue.

For this activity you need to collect children's books. At least we've not yet seen an adult book that serves the purpose. The ideal books have a sequence of pictures which tell a complete story without words. If there are lots of words, even if the pictures are wonderful, the pictures alone will probably not tell the whole story. You want the pictures to tell most or all of the story by themselves. Actually, the best book we found for getting this started did have words, but very few, and we covered them with Post It note papers. The title was Hallo! How are you? It was the story of a little bear who was on his way home from somewhere, attempting to greet all and sundry. Various other events occur along the way and at home.

This is really a month two activity, when you already have a vocabulary of a few hundred items, and have been understanding them in context in simple sentences for a month. You may not be sure exactly how much you know or how well you know it, but whatever it is, you want to put it to work as you get into serious talking. You should be able to come up with children's books either by visiting bookstores (there are tons of children's books in bookstores in Pakistan, for example), and by raiding the collections of friends whose kids have outgrown the books. We found Hallo! How are you? in a city library book sale. New children's books can be quite expensive, but you might be able to share with other language learners. Two of our early books were

Hallo! How are you? By Shigeo Watanabe, illustrated by Yasuo Ohtomo. (1980, The Bodley Head, London, Sydney, Toronto; first published by Fukuinkan Shoten, Tokyo.)

The Big Fat Worm by Nancy Van Laan, illustrated by Marisabina Russo (1987, 1995, Alfred Knopf.)

A book we spent two or three hours in was a version of Goldilocks:

The Three Bears, by Paul Galdone. (1972, Houghton Mifflin)

Then we were able to talk much more readily about the following book:



Deep in the Forest, by Brinton Turkle.(1987, Dutton Children's Books)

Other good wordless books include the following:

Pancakes for Breakfast, by Tomie dePaola (1978, Harcourt, Brace & Company)

Good Dog, Carl, by Alexandra Day (1986 also, other books in the Carl series. Simon & Schuster)

And these Puffin Pied Piper Books by Mercer Mayer

Frog on his Own (1973)

Frog Goes to Dinner (1977)

A Boy, a Dog, a Frog and a Friend (With Marianna Mayer, 1971)

One Frog Too Many (With Marianna Mayer, 1975)

Hiccup (1976)

Ah Choo (1976)

Oops (1977) (Dial Books for Young Readers, 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014)

(We don't recommend that you use Mercer Mayer's Frog, where are you? since we have a secret purpose for that, which would be fouled up if you were to use this as a language learning book.)

At a later point, some books by Japanese children's illustrator Mitsumasa Anno will provide an enormous number of language learning opportunities. The one we have used is Anno's Journey (1977, Putnam & Grosset, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016).

But these are just ideas. We're sure you can come up with children's books that we'll wish we had come up with.

#### 2.4. Simple activity 4: Role cards

For this you need a partner, or other helpful person, in addition to the native speaker friend with whom you are going to be practicing the language. If you are a solo language learner, you can adapt it. In the form we do this one of the learners writes on two cards. One card is then given to the native speaker, and one to the other language learners. A simple example might go like this:

It is crucial that neither the native speaker nor the language learner know what is on the other one's cards. Now here is another one which we used for Russian:

The basic concept here we have taken from Strategic Interaction, by Robert J. DiPietro (1987, Cambridge University Press). The role cards have some shared information and some unshared or conflicting information that will add a problem that must be solved in your new language. Our ice cream example could be used quite early. At advanced stages, the role cards can be as complicated as you like.

At all stages, once you have finished the activity you can trade role cards to see what the other person was trying to achieve. Then discuss what both of you did (early on, this discussion can be partly in English or some other language that you and your native speaker friend know well.) It is helpful if you taped or videoed the activity. Then you can go over the tape or video with your native speaker friend and tell her "This is what I was trying to say at this spot. How might I have better expressed myself?" And she can explain things to you that she had said during the activity and you were unable to figure out, even with her best efforts to clarify for you. But the activity itself should be strictly carried out in the new language as a way of forcing you to talk.

#### 2.5. Communicating across information gaps

Simple activity 4 is really the first of our four which incorporates the important principle of the "information gap". That is, this activity creates a need which can only be fulfilled through the exchange of information in the new language. We do other activities which meet this condition. For example, we sometimes have two identical sets of objects on the opposite sides of a barrier

(such as a cardboard box). Learners on one side of the barrier arrange the objects. The native speaker describes what they do, and the learners on the other side of the barrier attempt to arrange their objects in the same way based on what the native speaker tells them. We do the same thing with something called TPR kits (described in the catalogue of Sky' Oaks Productions, P.O. Box 1102, Los Gatos, California, 95031 1102). These contain a plastic picture, for example, of the interior of a two story house or the main street of a town. In addition there are reusable plastic stickers of many objects and people found in such locations. Again, we ignore the instructions that come with the kits, and just use them for information gap activities. That means we always need two of each, although you might find ways to achieve the same thing with a single kit.

At a later stage, we do our information gap activities in such a way that the native speaker is on one side and the learners are on the other. The learners have information which the native speaker needs in order to perform the task. In addition to arranging objects behind barriers, or TPR kits, you can use simple line drawings. Make two drawings that are partly the same and partly different. Your native speaker friend must ask you questions to find out all the ways in which your drawing is the same or different from the one you gave her. We find it is less demanding if the native speaker is the one needing the information to perform the task, and the learners are the ones providing the information in response to the native speaker's probing. This provides a lot of opportunity to understand language that you have never heard before, and thus to notice ways that native speakers express themselves. At an even later stage, you can reverse these roles, and the balance will shift from this being more of an understanding activity to being more of a talking activity.

### 3. Odds and Ends

The main meat of this paper is over. But we feel we need to address a few questions readers may be wondering about.

#### 3.1. Can technology help in all of this?

Some helpful tools for enriching and extending the above activities are tape recorders, cameras, and camcorders. If you tape record many of the activities above while they are being performed, you will be able to add many hours of listening pleasure to your few hours each week with your native speaker friends. This can be a wonderful reinforcer, increasing the rate at which those sound forms and links to mental images become strong in your brain. For example, you can go to bed half an hour early, and listen to the conversation you and your native speaker friend had over one of your children's books. You can also have your native speaker friend tell the stories (in the straightforward sense) of any children's books you have worked through, and record those as well.

Cameras are also a wonderful tool. On one occasion in Pakistan we were able to take about 100 photos of normal every day life settings and activities in two hours. With a little planning, most of the simple activities above can be adapted for use around photos.

Camcorders have an even richer potential for making sound to experience links available for repeated exposures. But although the potential is impressive, we don't want to push this beyond many of our pocketbooks and living situations.

#### 3.2. Grammar and pronunciation?

Some people will have a hard time believing that doing these simple activities will result in language learning unless there are also grammar lessons. In fact there may be mild evidence in support of a limited role for "focusing on form" as a means of improving one's accuracy in the new language. However, grammar may be more important than this for some people, since they seem to have a psychological barrier to language learning without grammar study. For such

people, we recommend our paper *Kick Starting Your Language Learning: Becoming a Basic Speaker Through Fun and Games Inside a Secure Nest*. People with this need can also read grammar descriptions in addition to their normal language learning activities. However, if there are no descriptions available, they will need to postpone producing one until they learn the language! They might keep brief notes of the aspects of grammar that they notice while learning the language.

If some people feel a need to "understand the grammar", other people are in the opposite position. Rather than the absence of a focus on grammar being intimidating, they find that grammar is intimidating. They will be relieved to know that language learning can proceed steadily through the above activities without their "learning the grammar".

You might have wondered where grammar fits into the above picture of mental links between sound forms and mental images. We talked as though you understand a noun by connecting it to a simple mental "picture" of sorts. What is popularly called "grammar" involves aspects of language that are used 1) to organize simple images into simple "scenes", and 2) to orchestrate "movies" that are built out of connected sequences of simple scenes (what is you get when you understand a story, for example). Your language learning cannot depend on your understanding how this works, because no one really does. You mostly need to trust your brain, believing that sort this all out. And for the most part it will, without a lot of help from you, as you keep improving your ability to understand increasingly difficult speech. It is a natural growth process, at least for the most part.

As for pronunciation, it is important to develop a thorough and crisp awareness of what the language sounds like when spoken by native speakers. People who attempt to learn languages by memorizing and drilling tend to do a lot of speaking before they are hearing the language clearly. Their own pronunciation then becomes the basis for the memory of the sound forms of the language. We don't recommend that. We think that throughout early language learning understanding should predominate over speaking, and especially during the first month. This way you can at least be aware of the fact that your speech differs from that of native speakers, and gradually tune your instrument. Beyond this, some training in phonetics is great, especially if it is oriented toward the language you want to learn. If you do not have such training you might benefit from the help of someone who does, and who has learned this language as a second language. However, not having phonetic training in no way cripples you.

### 3.3. Reading and Writing?

We are a bit unusual here. We distinguish between language learning in the narrow sense, and second language literacy and composition skills. Certainly the development of literacy and composition skills are closely tied to, and significantly effect, language learning in the narrower sense. Reading often feeds directly into speaking, provided you are at the point where you can figure out new words from context, and the writing system is fairly closely tied to the pronunciation system. And literacy and composition skills may be essential (eventually) for you as an educated member of your new speech community. For beginners, you may have difficulty finding any reading materials appropriate to your level of language ability. We see no need to rush into reading at this stage. Once you know more language you can develop reading fluency more quickly, primarily by just reading a lot. If the language has a complex writing system, then you might prefer to postpone reading and writing a few months anyway, until you know enough of the language to understand what your literacy teacher is saying. We don't recommend receiving your literacy instruction in English (or any other language except for the language you are learning). But these are topics for another day.

### 3.4. These activities are impossible in your situation?

Now, you tell me, the speakers of the language you are learning are all monolingual, and they cannot understand pictures or photos, plus they believe that photos steal people's souls, and therefore they kill photographers, as well as people who make tape recordings (they torture people who make videos). Furthermore, it is against their cultural rules to talk to you until after you know their language.

A few thoughts on situations where structured language learning activities are impossible. Our first thought is that it is a characteristic of severe discouragement to feel that "all is hopeless; everything is impossible; and nothing can possibly work." If you are in this condition, then I wouldn't pressure you. Think about what you have read, ruminate over it, pray. Go fishing (and reread this when the fish aren't biting). You may come up with some small solutions which will grow into big ones.

But no. You aren't at all discouraged. You just know that structured language learning activities are not possible in this monolingual situation. This need not be tragic as long as you stick to the principles of communing, understanding, talking and evolving. People will talk to you in ways that make it possible for you to understand what they are saying with the help of what you see, and the general context. So just engage in such communication for many hours a week. You will progress.

But in many other difficult situations, structured activities such as those described above will make the difference between learning a language and not learning it. This is especially true if you cannot be immersed in a community where the language is spoken, and even moreso if you only have sporadic access to native speaker friends (in which case the use of the technological aids takes on some urgency).

### 3.5. But you're a language TEACHER!

Wonderful. You probably chose that line of work because you enjoy seeing language learners succeed. You can easily apply the CUTE principles, because you're the teacher. Now in many cases, you will already have a raft of ideas for language learning activities which are similar to our simple activities and you use them regularly. You are already into "leamercentered" ways of doing things, and you train your students to take responsibility for their own learning. Nothing more need be said.

But if you are a more "traditional" teacher, then you may want to consider re educating your students with regard to what your role is, that is, if you decide that you would like to start helping them to join with you around experience using language. You may also want help them to develop leamer autonomy. That is, as time goes on, the students would increasingly take responsibility for how they want to join together with you around experience using language. You can begin by giving them some experiences to build on. For example, you might do simple activity one with them the first day, using a pile of objects that you provide. After that, each student can bring several objects that they would like to learn to talk about. Or students can make role cards for other students to use, either with one another, or with you taking one of the roles. Some students will have learning goals that are important to them right from the beginning. By responding enthusiastically to their goals, you can use them as models for other learners who need to learn to take more responsibility for planning their learning.

### 3.6. Or you're a STUDENT in a language school or language course?

Depending on the nature of your course, you may want to go ahead and do something like our simple activities on your own, outside of class. If you do this, say, two hours per week with a native speaker friend, you may find that you progress more quickly in the language than is the case when you limit yourself to your course activities.

God bless busy moms.

We have noticed that language learning can be a special challenge for busy moms. We feel our approach can make a big difference. For one thing, Dad can do all the work of getting language learning visits set up and prepare the language learning activities. If both desired and possible, the native speaker friends can come to the learners' home for the language learning visits. If Mom can manage, say, an hour a day for such visits, they will give her a refreshing break from other activities. Now if the baby starts to fuss right in the middle of an activity, it is up to Dad to get distracted, making sure that Mom remains free to enjoy the activities to the hilt. If the activities are tape recorded, Mom can listen to the tape later, while Dad prepares supper or does the dishes.

If there are older kids or teens~ then they should participate in the daily hour (or two) of language learning activities. This means that the activities must be designed to be interesting and engaging for all ages. That is O.K, because the extra effort to make things fun and interesting may benefit the adults' learning more than the kids'. Having children involved is a good way to force yourself to do good language learning!

Now every couple and family is unique, and it may often be the case that Mom and the kids will want an equal chance to plan and direct the language learning activities. That is fine too. It is just that Mom needs to be assured that if need be, all she has to do is be present when the visits happen, and take part, and she will make good progress.

### 3.7. What it's like to keep evolving

We think it is amazing how language ability grows. For your early language learning visits, it will take a lot of planning in order to have rich experiences of understanding and talking. But in a few months you will be hearing volumes of language that you can understand, as long as your native speaker friends are making a good effort to be understood by you. Yet even then, structured activities can be beneficial, helping you to quickly fill in gaps. But as you continue to join with people around experience using language, you will move out into the open plains of culture learning. You will find suggestions in our paper *Language Learning in the Real World for Non- Beginners*. In brief, you tend to move from being able to understand speech about the here and now, to being able to understand other language with familiar content (such as stories about events that are familiar to you), to being able to understand concrete language with unfamiliar content (such as stories about events that are unfamiliar to you), to being able to understand "fancy" language, like oratory, poetry, academic language, etc.

But don't make language learning too complicated. Simple activities 1 3 can keep you profitably busy for months, moving you steadily forward. We recommend that you at least do those activities. Some people can provide you with much longer lists of language learning activities. We prefer to suggest a smaller number of carefully chosen ones ones that we feel are especially powerful and relatively pleasant for a wide variety of people (including some of you who were supposed to have quit reading on the first page).

When you meet for an hour or more with a native speaker friend, it is good to switch activities fairly steadily. Other activities like Total Physical Response (see the books and materials available through Sky Oaks Productions, P.O. Box 1102, Los Gatos, California, 95031 1102) for lots of ideas. And once you're into this, you'll be inventing your own activities that fulfil the CUTE principles. Changing activities can make the time more fun and interesting for both you and your native speaker friends. Evaluate the quality of each language learning visit by the "laugh ratio".

And that's it. We have suggested five simple activities that you can use on a regular basis. Now you will need to follow the following five steps:

1. 1) Establish contact with one or more native speakers.

2. 2) Schedule a language learning visit
3. 3) Plan your language teaming activities for your visit.
4. 4) Conduct your visit.
5. 5) Repeat 2 5 (and sometimes 1)

Five activities. Five steps. And you're on your way.

#### Author note

One of the authors was primarily responsible for drafting this paper, but the content arose out of the shared experience of all, and would be different apart from the contribution of each. The authors went through the paper together, discussing and revising it until reflected their shared beliefs and experiences. We are indebted to Steve Spinella for the term "communing" as the label for the first of the CUTE principles

#### Dedication

Carole, Kay, and Lisa, all of whom are soon to get busier.

#### Kick-starting Your Language Learning:

Becoming a basic speaker through fun and games inside a secure nest

by Greg Thomson

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[Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response), beginning learners, comprehensible input, comprehension, comprehension-led acquisition, developmental approach , vocabulary]

#### Summary

This book describes a developmental approach to language learning for beginning language learners developed by Greg Thomson. It describes how a beginning learner can work with a speaker of the target language to learn to understand basic language structures and vocabulary to be ready to become a basic speaker of the language. This information can be helpful to anyone wanting to do self-directed language learning working with a speaker of the target language.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Languages are big. They are complicated too. But brains are good at learning them, provided they are given the chance. A child learning a second language is often given the chance for his or her brain to do what it needs to do. The brain of an adult often gets less than it needs, because the world of adults is different from the world of children. In addition, adults are commonly under time pressure, and have a psychological need to observe clear and steady progress.

It is often said that children learn languages from their environment. They get into an environment where language learning can happen, and language learning happens. What I have to say here is about creating an environment where language learning can start happening for an adult. These are suggestions for beginners, ideally, for people who are just about to begin learning a new language. I'm especially concerned to help people who have to, or wish to, learn a language on their own, in the location where it is spoken, without the advantages and

disadvantages of a formal language course. The techniques I will suggest will be especially helpful during the first two months of language learning. Eventually, other approaches will be needed. Even if you start out employing the techniques I suggest, you may end up modifying them, or inventing new techniques of your own. Think of this as one way to learn a lot of language in a short time.

Chapter 1.1. What is a beginning language learner trying to do?

[Keywords: beginning learners]

If we ignore a whole bunch of problems, we can say that a language learner faces two main problems. The first is to get started. The second is to keep from stopping. We are focusing here on the first of these problems. You may intend to become an outstanding speaker of your new language one day. Your first problem is to become any kind of speaker, period. First you must go from being a total non-speaker to being a struggling speaker. Then you can go from being a struggling speaker to being a comfortable speaker. Way down the road, if things work out, you may come to speak the new language almost as easily as you speak your mother tongue. Right now, you'd be happy with a lot less than that. When you can basically get along in the language, given enough effort on your part and enough cooperation on the part of the person who you are talking to, you will be a "basic speaker" of your new language.

You are entitled to call yourself a basic speaker of the new language when you meet two conditions. First, your ability to understand the language (commonly referred to as comprehension ability) is adequate so that a typical speaker of the language can always get her point across to you, given a bit of effort, and provided the topic is fairly mundane. Second, your ability to speak the language is such that you can always get your point across to other people, given a bit of cooperation, and provided the topic is mundane.

Get the picture? You and a typical speaker of the language work together cooperatively to make communication successful. It is hard work for both of you, but you usually succeed. A mundane topic is any topic involving ordinary concrete experience, but not including things like philosophy, theology, and punctuated equilibria. The cooperative effort between a fluent speaker and a new speaker is called the negotiation of meaning. A lot of the burden falls on the fluent speaker to make this communication successful. The fluent speaker must simplify her speech, and speak slowly and clearly, and help you to find the words you are groping for. Both of you often will need to guess at what the other is saying, or meaning to say.

We now have an idea of your first target: to be a basic speaker, able to negotiate meaning with a cooperative conversational partner. So that's what I want to help you do—to go from being unable to speak this language at all to being able to negotiate meaning with a cooperative native speaker.

And when I say speak, I really do mean speak. A tape recorder can't speak. Neither can a parrot, in the sense I have in mind. By "speak a language", I mean that you can start with an idea that you want to get across, and go on to express that idea in words that someone else can understand. In addition, you will often understand what they say in response, or at least the gist of it, and if you don't understand, you can work with them conversationally until you get the point they are trying to make.

You may have had experiences attempting to learn other languages. Those experiences may have been successful or unsuccessful. Whether or not you have had experiences learning other languages, you will have beliefs about language learning. What is it to know a language? What is it to speak a language? How do people learn languages? Is learning a language like learning a poem, like learning chemistry, like learning to play the piano, like all of these, like none of these? How is it normally accomplished (in cases where it really is accomplished, as opposed to

only attempted)? Take a few minutes (or hours, as the case may be) to jot down your beliefs about language learning.

**DO NOT PROCEED WITHOUT JOTTING DOWN YOUR BELIEFS!**

Done? Good. Here are some of my beliefs. I believe that I must work at learning to understand a language just as much as I must work at learning to talk in it. At one time, I believed that if I learned to talk, I would automatically be able to understand. Today, I believe that I must also learn to understand. Another belief I have is that I will only become familiar with a language if I have extensive exposure to it. But I believe that for that exposure to do any good I must be able to understand at least some of what I am hearing. Another thing I believe is that when I am first learning a language, both understanding it and speaking it will be hard work. I expect to speak the language poorly at first, and then, as I keep using the language with people, both in talking and in listening, I believe that my ability will gradually improve. That is, I will go from speaking the language brokenly to speaking it fluently. Another important belief I hold is that I am far more likely to be successful if I can devote myself full time to learning the language, than if I have another full-time job and attempt to do language learning on the side. Learning a language is tiring, so “full-time” might mean five or six hours per day. Or it might mean eight hours. But I believe that I am less likely to be successful if I try to learn a language as a side-line, than if I see language learning as my central responsibility. During my six or eight hours per day of language learning, I believe that I need to devote most of the time to actual communication and conversation. But I also believe that unstructured, real-life conversation is not enough for me. I need to engage in structured communication activities which will help me to learn the language. These structured communication activities are especially important during the early weeks of language learning. Without structured language learning activities, I may not succeed, and even if I do succeed, my progress will be slower, and my ultimate achievement lower, than might have been the case.

How do your beliefs compare to mine? Probably, you thought of things which I did not think of, and I reminded you of things you did not think of. That illustrates an important principle. If you want to have a positive experience learning a language, get together often with friends who are also trying to learn a language, and share ideas with them. They may be learning the same language as you, or they may be learning different languages. If it is the same language, you can share discoveries related to that language. In any case, you can share discoveries related to what helps you as language learners. You can also share your woes. You can laugh together and cry together. Hmm. Guess that’s another belief of mine that I forgot to mention in the preceding paragraph. I hate lonely language learning. I believe that I need encouragement from people who have some idea of what I am up against.

Chapter 1.2. Learning about the language versus learning the language

[Keywords: processing language]

One common belief about language learning is that to learn a language is to learn a body of facts. In Chemistry class you learn facts such as a carbon atom can form four bonds with other atoms. In German class you learned facts such as the first person singular present tense form of *möchten* is *möchte* and facts such as the word meaning “dog” is *hund*. Learning a language is seen as learning hundreds or thousands of facts about grammar and vocabulary.

Another common belief is that to learn a language is to form a set of habits. A common comparison is to riding a bicycle. When you first try to ride a bicycle, or type, or play the piano, you struggle to do it at all. But with practice it becomes an automatic habit.

No doubt there is truth in both of these beliefs. However, there is also little doubt that these are gross over-simplifications. Any kind of learning, whether it is like learning chemistry or like



learning to play the piano, is incredibly complex. But learning a language is uniquely complex. Fortunately, you didn't have to understand how your muscles worked, or even what exactly they were doing, in order to learn to ride a bike. It is even more fortunate that your brain will deal with most of the complexity of learning a language without you (or anyone) understanding how it does it. Otherwise it would be a rather hopeless situation.

But you need to set your brain to work. I'm not talking about learning facts about language, much as that may help some people. I'm talking about your brain actually using language as language. In the final analysis, that is the only thing that will get your brain to acquire the language. There are two main ways you use your language ability. You use it to express your own ideas, and you use it to understand other people's ideas. When you are just starting to acquire your new language, that is, when you're at the absolute point zero, it is impossible to use it to express your own ideas in it. But it is possible even at that point to begin understanding someone else's ideas in it, especially when those ideas are centered around that other person's desire to help you start learning the language. You can start understanding the language before you know how to talk in the language.

Alternatively, some people like to begin by memorizing sentences in the new language. That's O.K. too, but when you memorize a sentence, it doesn't involve you in using language as language. Remember that to use language as language means to put your own ideas into words or to understand other people's ideas from their words. You may learn to say "Where is the bathroom?", and whenever you need to know where the bathroom is, you pull that sentence out of your hat. And you may also be able to use it as a master pattern for asking where other things are. You want to know where the kitchen is, and you know the word for "kitchen", and you think to yourself, "Now let's see, to say 'Where is the bathroom?' I say 'XYZ', where Z means bathroom; and let's see, mm, W means kitchen, so if I want to say 'Where is the kitchen?', I'll just substitute W for Z and say 'XYW'." So then you say "XYW?", and the person you said it to tells you where the kitchen is. Your thought process might not be quite as laborious as that, but do you get the idea? That is one way a lot of people start out learning a language, and many of them end up being successful. However, it takes most people a long time to memorize what amounts to a tiny taste of the language they are learning.

Fortunately, it is also possible to start out from the outset learning the language in ways that are more language-like. In this case, you will get someone to talk to you in the language as your initial means of learning the language. Suppose you want to learn to ask where the bathroom is, and where other rooms are. You might draw a simple floor plan of your house. Your friend, who is your Language Resource Person (LRP), will point to the different rooms in the floor plan, and tell you (in her language), "This is the kitchen; this is the bathroom; this is the entry way". Since she points at each part of the house as she tells you what it is called, you can understand what she is saying, even if you have never heard these words before. You are already processing the language as language in your own brain. That is a central concept in all that follows. You learn the language by processing the language as language.

Chapter 1.3. You can learn the language in the language before you know the language: an example

[Keywords: comprehensible input, comprehension-led acquisition, language associates, learning strategies, memorization, processing language, repetition]

Let's use this example of learning the names of rooms in the house to illustrate some key principles involved in learning the language through using the language. You probably wouldn't start out with this in your real language learning situation, but it is something you could do



So we started with just two items, the kitchen and the bathroom. You want to get to the place where your LRP can ask you to point to different parts of the house and items of furniture, and you can point correctly. Once again, it is essential that you not overwhelm your mental processor. You avoid overloading your mental processor by

1. introducing new items one at a time,
2. having the new item repeated along with several familiar ones many times, and
3. having the new items questioned (“Where is the X?”, or “Point to the X”, or “Show me the X”, etc.) many times, but always randomly, along with questions about other items (otherwise no processing will occur).

Now as you are going along, you may be on your tenth item, which is, let’s say, the verandah. Your LRP says, “This is the verandah”. In order to keep your mental processor processing, she says this several times but always randomly interspersed among other items you have already learned: “This is the verandah; this is the sitting room; this is the verandah; this is the front yard; this is the backyard; this is the verandah; this is the kitchen; this is the verandah; this is the door.” I have yet to see an LRP who appreciates the amount of repetition I need in order to learn new items. At this point I may want to hear verandah twenty or thirty times, interspersed among familiar items as illustrated. The LRP may think that five repetitions is plenty. Fortunately, most LRP s will soon come to accept the need for repetition, as long as you keep gently reminding them.

Now imagine that you are working on your fifteenth item, say the kitchen sink, and your LRP is asking you “Where is the kitchen sink?” randomly interspersed among questions such as “Where is the bathroom?”, “Where is the kitchen”, etc. Frequently, you will discover that you can no longer remember an item which you knew a few minutes earlier. Suppose while the LRP is working with you on “Where is the bathroom?”, she asks you “Where is the sitting room?” A few minutes earlier, it appeared that you had learned sitting room. Now you find that when she says the word for sitting room, you cannot remember what it means. What your LRP does at such points is to act as though you now need to learn sitting room, and she asks you the question “Where is the sitting room?” many times, always interspersed randomly among other questions. Once you are again able to consistently recognize sitting room, she will emphasize kitchen sink a few more times, since that is the new item you were working on. If you aren’t having any problem with kitchen sink, the LRP goes on to item sixteen, perhaps, stove.

At times you may have special difficulty with two items which strike you as similar in pronunciation. This happened for me in Urdu with kira which means ‘cucumber’, and kela, which means ‘banana’, since we were learning the word for cucumber and the word for banana in the same session (using real cucumbers and bananas, along with other pieces of fruit and vegetables). These two words may not look all that similar to you, but I have seen learners become confused over choices involving words that were considerably less similar than these. When this happens, you should have the LRP focus on the two items which you are confusing. At first she can just concentrate on those two items: “Pick up a banana; pick up a cucumber; pick up a cucumber; pick up a banana; pick up a cucumber; pick up a banana; pick up a banana; pick up a banana; pick up a cucumber...”. She should then add one or two items that you already know well, along with cucumber and banana. Then add one or two more familiar items. Gradually, she’ll get back to using all of the items you have learned so far during the current activity.

Now suppose you had never heard this language before the session with the floor plan. You’ve been processing the language as language, and doing so for, say, one hour. Your session ends. You have to go to the airport to pick up a friend who is just arriving from your home country.

Your friend tells you, “I need to visit the restroom”. You say to the security guard, in your new language, “Where is the bathroom?” You’ve never said that before. In your session you only learned to comprehend it and didn’t try to say it. But you now needed it, and it came out, and it felt like natural communication. That is, you had an idea that you needed to express, and you expressed it. Your visiting friend is impressed. The security guard points to the bathroom and says something which you don’t understand. You don’t realize that you used a word that only means “bathroom” in a home, and a different word is used for the airport restroom. But it just doesn’t matter at all at this point. The security guard knew what you meant and knew that you were doing your best. After all, you’ve only been learning the language for an hour. I’d say you’re doing pretty well.

Now alternatively, you might have learned to say “Where is the bathroom?” without processing the language as language in the way I described. For example, you might have taken a 3x5 card and written on one side of it “Where is the bathroom?” in English, and written on the other side of it “Where is the bathroom?” in the new language. Then you could have tested yourself on that over and over, and repeated the sentence to yourself hundreds of times until you had it memorized. You still could have said it to the security guard.

The way you learned it was quite different. You learned it by being asked where the bathroom was (on your little floor plan). When you were asked, you had to determine what you were being asked. That is, you actually had to understand the new language. Then you indicated where the bathroom was, conveying to a speaker of the language the fact that you had understood what she asked.

In the early days of language learning, many people, perhaps most people, are able to learn much more quickly if they learn the language by processing the language than they can learn by memorizing expressions from on 3x5 cards, or from tape recordings. More importantly, they will be giving their brain the chance to start developing genuine comprehension ability. You start out small, and by using appropriate techniques, you steadily and rapidly expand your comprehension ability. You’ll be amazed at how much you will be able to comprehend by the end of a month. It will be considerably more than you could have memorized in the same month. If you choose rather to learn primarily by memorizing sentences, it will do very little for your comprehension ability. You only learn to comprehend by comprehending, and you learn to talk by using the language to formulate and utter sentences which put your own ideas into words as the need arises. You can create situations in your language sessions in which needs arise. You can also plan your language sessions so that they relate to the communication needs that you are facing in real life settings.

As I say, the approach I am suggesting is not the only approach. You may well succeed by memorizing a lot of sentences and using them as patterns for constructing new sentences. As you do this, it will cause people to talk to you in the new language, and sometimes you will understand some of what they say and thus have the chance to process language as language and thereby start developing your comprehension ability. But I believe you’ll be off to a much slower start than if you use your times with your LRP to do heavy-duty, large scale language processing.

Chapter 2. Getting started with your Language Resource Person

[Keywords: language associates]

Now you have some idea of what I mean when I speak of learning the language by using the language as language. Let’s get to it. You need a language resource person. That is the same as saying that you can only learn to communicate if you have someone to communicate with. Often, the best way to find the person or people you need is to go through people whom you already know. If you don’t know anyone, you may need to just start asking around. It is better if you do

not make a long term arrangement with anyone to help you in this way at the outset. If you make a long term arrangement, and then the person turns out to be unsatisfactory, you have a problem. If several people help you once or twice, not expecting to do more, and out of them one or two become regular helpers, no one's feelings are likely to be hurt, especially if you continue your friendship with all of the people who initially helped you.

It may be good to make it clear that you do not want someone to “teach you the language”.

Otherwise, they may send you to an esteemed expert on the “high” language. You may have difficulty learning mundane everyday language from such a person. In addition, such a person may have very strong ideas about how languages are learned, and those may not be the most helpful ideas. You might tell people that first you need to learn the common language, and then when you can speak the common language you will go to that person to learn about the high language.

As people help you during your early struggles with their language, you need to be sure that it isn't a one-sided arrangement, where you get a lot out of it, and those who help you get little out of it. Realize that if people exert themselves for you, you owe them something. Fortunately, many fruitful language learning activities can go on in the context of friendship and social visiting. To the extent that you need a regular, scheduled format with an LRP, you need to take care that your helper is adequately rewarded.

When you are seeking people to help you, you are likely to find that some people automatically light up at the idea. If this doesn't happen, you may need to do some careful relationship building first. Start with people you know, and become friends with their close friends and relatives, and then in turn with those people's close friends and relatives. Spend time with people. As people are people together they tend to do things for each other, and soon there is a sense of mutual obligation. Get it? Mutual! At that point you should be able to get someone to at least give an hour to serving as an LRP. You might do that with a few people. Hopefully, someone will enjoy it enough to want to do it often. If you end up arranging a regular schedule, you should consider paying a fixed amount. If you don't pay a fixed amount, then try to make sure that the benefits to the LRP cost you at least as much as you would pay if you did pay a fixed amount. In many parts of the world, the going hourly wage may be low by your standards, but it is best to stay close to it. In other parts of the world you may pay five or ten dollars an hour. In that case, you'll surely want to have a powerful strategy for using the time to the full, and come to your language learning sessions well prepared, and tape-record all that you do in the sessions, and make extensive use of those tape-recordings following the sessions.

For further thoughts on the language learner's approach to relationship building, see Thomson (1993c).

#### Chapter 2.1. Your very first language session

[Keywords: language sessions, planning]

O.K., you now have your language resource person (LRP) with you sitting at the table in your kitchen. What do you do now? Well, you could draw that floor plan of your house. But we had better reflect for a moment. As a matter of fact, you never start a language session without considerable prior reflection and planning. It should occur to you that the first thing you need to do is to put your LRP through the ropes. As I talk about your first session, in which you are putting your LRP through the ropes, I'll probably keep getting side-tracked by the ropes, if you don't mind.

##### Chapter 2.1.1. TPR -Total (and minimal) Physical Response

[Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response), commands]

The method I described in connection with the floor plan of your house falls into a broad category of activities which are called Total Physical Response (Asher 1982; Silvers 1985 ). In the case of the floor plan, the physical response was merely to point at the bathroom when the LRP said “Where is the bathroom?” There was nothing very “ total” about that response. But people still call it TPR. The original idea was that the more you put your whole body into responding, the better you learned. That may make sense. Learning a language means learning to relate patterns of words to aspects of experience. So if the LRP said “jump”, and you jumped six inches, the “experience” side of the equation might be less than if you jumped two feet. Personally, I wouldn’t make a big deal of that in general. (As a matter of fact, I would change the meaning of the abbreviation TPR to stand for, “Tune in, Process, Respond”. That is, as the LRP tells you something, you tune in to what she said, figure out what it means, and demonstrate to her that you understood her by responding appropriately.) However, for training your LRP on the first day, it may be good to do total TPR. In order to help your LRP get the hang of things, you can begin with simple commands that involve a gross physical response (in the best sense of the word gross). These include things like stand up, sit down, walk, run, stop, go back, turn around, clap, talk, be quiet, go to sleep, wake up, eat, drink. In some cases you will mime the activity (as with sleep). In other cases you will perform it literally (as with sit down). Here’s some homework: Come up with an additional fifty simple instructions you might use for TPR at this point. You need to start learning to prepare for language sessions. So start.

**I SAW THAT. DO YOUR HOMEWORK!**

Chapter 2.1.2. Back to your first language session

[Keywords: language sessions]

Now, back to your session. You will have your LRP give you these instructions in the manner described earlier, namely, starting with two instructions, adding one new one at a time, with considerable repetition, always ordering the instructions randomly so that you will be forced to process what you are hearing and decide what to do in response. You might aim to learn ten or twenty instructions your first day. The vocabulary is likely to be basic, essential vocabulary, so the time is well spent from the standpoint of vocabulary learning. But you will also have helped your LRP to get an idea of how you will be learning during the early weeks. You are trying to get a foothold on the language by getting enough basic vocabulary and sentence patterns to function with as a basic speaker. And you are trying to jump start your learning by becoming thoroughly familiar with a lot of basic vocabulary and sentence patterns.

This system may be a bit complicated for the LRP initially. One good way to train the LRP is to have a second language learner participate with you. I hate doing language learning by myself, anyway. Besides that, you can have a lot more flexibility in communication if there is at least one other person. I enjoy working with my wife. In that case, we have used the following technique with a new LRP. The LRP and I sit facing each other, and my wife stands or sits behind me so that she is visible to the LRP, but not to me. She does the actions, and that is what prompts the LRP to instruct me to do them. A new LRP is unlikely to give twenty repetitions of the instruction “stand up”. But my wife knows that I need that much repetition, and so she prompts the LRP accordingly. She takes care of complicated details like starting out with only two instructions, adding new ones gradually, keeping them in random order, and so on. Whatever she does, the LRP instructs me to do. Eventually the LRP gets the idea. Whenever you use a new variety of TPR you can train your LRP in this manner.

You or the LRP should also keep a written record (either in words or simple drawings) of what you have covered. Otherwise she may forget to keep going back to earlier items while introducing later ones.

At first, the LRP may find the whole business of TPR bizarre. If she is someone who has “tutored” other language learners, she will soon be surprised at your rate of progress compared to others she has helped, and that is likely to encourage her to press on playing games with you. In addition, she is likely to find such language learning sessions fun and interesting, as opposed to dull and boring.

You yourself may have trouble with such activities, feeling that you are being silly or foolish. It may be that some people will simply be unable to get past this, and will prefer to learn a language by memorizing sentences and so on. But why don't you give it a try. You may not believe that you can be developing real communication skills through what seems like game-playing. But one expert on how children learn their first language, Jerome Bruner, has observed that game-playing can play a central role in that process (Bruner 1983). Games are fun. Playing games involves less stress than behaving proficiently for real-life purposes. And you really can develop a lot of comprehension ability through game-like activities. In a month or so you can learn to recognize many hundreds of common vocabulary and understand many types of sentences. You can start developing genuine speaking ability, as well. You will then be in a strong position to rapidly become proficient in using the language in a wide variety of real life situations.

#### Chapter 2.1.3. TPR with lots of junk (Object Manipulation)

[Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response)]

You need to do more than simple TPR. Despite the fun-and-games nature of TPR in its classical form, it will probably get boring for your LRP if that is all you do. Besides that, there may be limits to how much you can learn this way. Strong proponents argue that every grammatical construction can somehow be embedded in TPR instructions. This is more likely if you broaden your range of activities to include some in which the physical response is less than total. As I say, people still refer to such activities as TPR.

One easy twist to add is to use lots of physical objects in connection with TPR activities. You can find a large number of common objects around the house, or in the market. And many objects will suggest actions. What actions can be performed with a piece of cloth? A piece of paper? A piece of rope? Get it? Manipulating objects in compliance with the LRP's instructions falls within the broad category of TPR activities. I will also refer to this simply as object manipulation.

#### Chapter 2.1.4. TPR as role-play

[Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response), communication situations, role-playing]

Another twist is to base a TPR activity on some real life communication situation. For example, you can lay out a number of sheets of paper or envelopes in a format such as the following:

Pretend the papers are city blocks, and the spaces between them are streets. You hold a small toy car in your hand, and pretend that it is a taxi, and you are the driver. Your LRP gives you instructions such as “Drive three blocks and turn right”, and you comply by moving the toy car appropriately. This is a simple variety of role-play. By combining TPR with role-play, you can learn to understand expressions that you will need to use in real life communication situations. When you get into those situations you will be surprised how many of the expressions will come to you naturally, and you will use them in speech, even though you did not memorize them by rote. You learned them by hearing them repeatedly and each time processing what you heard and responding to it.

#### Chapter 2.1.5. Pictures - the language learner's gold mine

[Keywords: comprehensible input, descriptions, photographs and photo books, pictures and picture books, video, vocabulary]

Another twist can further extend the potential of TPR. Use pictures, either photos, or line drawings (or even video recordings) as the basis for communication. In the long run, pictures have far more potential than simple actions. Pictures make it possible to learn to talk about the whole range of daily activities and experiences. You can repeatedly use the same pictures to learn to understand sentences of a variety of patterns. Suppose that during your eighth language session you are focusing on learning to understand sentences which describe an ongoing process in past time. Each sentence begins, “When this picture was taken...” and goes on to say what was happening when the picture was taken. “When this picture was taken, this man was ploughing. When this picture was taken, this woman was making bread. When this picture was taken, this man was fixing a chair.” Etc. The LRP makes up these sentences on the fly. You have to process what you hear, and respond by indicating which picture she is describing. There are a hundred pictures (though only a few are in view at any given moment). The verbs themselves (ploughing, making, fixing, etc.) are not new to you, since you have been through these same pictures with the LRP many times. What is new is the form of the verbs used to describe an ongoing process in past time. By the time you get through the hundred pictures, you will have processed and responded to a hundred sentences which describe a past ongoing process. You’ll be surprised how familiar you will have become with that sentence pattern.

While listening to a hundred sentences in a given form (and responding by pointing to the picture being described), you may get lazy, and not attend to the form of the sentence, but only catch one or two key words which are enough to allow you to respond. It may therefore be good to go through the pictures again, allowing the LRP to use two contrasting patterns. For example, she might use a pattern that begins “After this picture was taken— ” along with the pattern beginning “When this picture was taken—”. Using two or three contrasting patterns will increase the chances that you thoroughly attend to and process what you hear.

There are many sources for pictures. You can clip them from local magazines, travel brochures or old National Geographic articles related to your host country or to neighboring countries. It is far better if you can take your own photos of local scenes. It may be that your LRP can help with this. On one occasion in Pakistan, my wife and I were able to take over a hundred photos (three rolls of film), capturing a wide variety of common daily activities, in the space of about two hours. It actually took longer to arrange the pictures into a good sequence and pasting them in the book took several hours!

For the early stages of language learning I recommend pictures with certain characteristics. Each picture has one or more people in it who are the central characters. In addition there are one or more inanimate objects which the person is using or doing something to. For example, the person may be using a hammer to build a table. Thus, in addition to the person, there is both a hammer and a table. Another person might be riding a bicycle. Another might be standing at a cash till. Two people might be simply sitting on a bench. The objects the people are involved with need not always be inanimate. Someone might be feeding an animal or nursing a baby. And it is not necessary that every single picture meet these criteria, but it is good if many of them do. I would consider having two or three identical sets of the pictures developed. Then I could glue one set in a notebook and have one or two sets loose. For different activities you might find it preferable to either use the pictures in a notebook or loose. Or you might want your co-learner and yourself to have the same pictures. For example, your co-learner might show a picture to the LRP from her set. The LRP then tells you something about the picture, and you respond by pointing to the same picture in your own set. Loose pictures can be manipulated and sorted.



There are also advantages to the consistency of order and arrangement which a picture book provides.

A variety of commercial resources are also available. Harris Winitz has prepared a number of books of drawings for language learners aimed at highlighting specific vocabulary and sentence patterns. This series, *Language Through Pictures*, is available from the International Linguistics Corporation, 401 89th Street, Kansas City, MO, 64114. Both Longman and Oxford University Press publish books of pictures for language learners, grouped according to topics or settings, which they misleadingly call dictionaries. These are *The Longman Photo Dictionary* and *The New Oxford Picture Dictionary*. They are available in a number of major languages, but can easily be adapted to other languages, although they are based around Euro-American themes and settings for the most part. A variety of visual aids for language learners are available from Sky Oaks Productions, Box 1102, Los Gatos, California 95031.

Finally, at any point you can resort to drawing sketches, stick figures, or diagrams to use in a given language learning activity. I suspect that having the actual objects in hand is better than using sketches of them, but sketches are a whole lot better than merely using your mind's eye, since sketches still allow you to respond to what you process by pointing or by manipulating them. Without such aids it is hard to be sure you process what you hear. More importantly, these external aids are often what enables you to understand the language in the first place, so that you have a chance to process what you hear. If you can't process what you hear, it is of little use to you.

I will have many suggestions below regarding using pictures to highlight specific sentence patterns. A wide variety of sentence patterns can be highlighted by having the LRP take a pattern and use that pattern to make a comment about each picture in succession. In that way you will quickly hear and comprehend a hundred examples (if you have a hundred pictures) of a single sentence pattern. In addition to the examples I will give below in connection with specific sentence patterns, I have given a concise overview of this approach in Thomson (1989). I suggest a slightly different approach in Thomson (1992). Both approaches assume the pictures you use are pasted in a book, and that you make repeated passes through the book with the LRP telling you things about the pictures on each pass. The two approaches differ mainly in the third pass through the book. On the first pass through the book the LRP teaches the words for human beings (man, woman, boy, girl, etc.). On the second pass the LRP teaches the words for the inanimate objects which the people are using or acting upon. On the third pass, in the first approach, the LRP uses a single verb repeatedly in describing every picture. The verb might be holding. The descriptions would then go, "This man is holding a hammer. This woman is holding a spatula. This child is holding a toy. (Etc.)" for perhaps a hundred pictures. (It may be necessary to use two or three verbs in some cases.) The point is to have the experience of comprehending a lot of sentences which contain subjects and objects (such as child and toy, respectively). The approach suggested in Thomson (1992) is a little less artificial. After talking about the humans on the first pass through the book and talking about the most salient objects on the second pass, the LRP simply makes what she feels is the most natural descriptive statement of what each person is doing on the third pass. Often, the learner will not understand what the LRP says on this pass, but the learner and LRP tape-record it all, and go over the tape together, discussing whatever the learner did not understand. I fluctuate as to which of these two approaches I prefer.

Chapter 2.1.6. Back to your first session again

[Keywords: language sessions]

Now, back to your first session with your LRP. In order to keep your session interesting, you might include three different types of activities. You can begin with classic TPR using simple

actions (“stand up,” “jump,” etc.). Then for your second activity, why don’t you learn the names of a whole bunch of common objects that are present in the setting where you’ll be having your language sessions. You can respond to questions like “Where is the churn?” by pointing to the churn, or whatever. Why not go for another ten or twenty vocabulary in this manner during the session. Then you can do something with pictures.

During this first session, the LRP can get the basic idea of describing pictures for you. If I were the language learner, I would start with the set of pictures that are glued in a notebook, rather than with a loose set. I will have arranged them in the notebook in such a way that the first few pictures have a man as the central character, and the next few have a woman, and then in subsequent pictures men and women are randomly interspersed. Then children are added, and then perhaps youths, and old people.

Now, my LRP would begin telling me which type of person is in each picture. “This is a man. This is a man. This is a man. This is a woman. This is a woman. This is a man and a woman. This is a woman. This is a man. This is a boy. This is a boy and a woman and a man. This is another boy. This is a boy, too. This is a girl. This is a girl and a boy. This is a girl and a woman and a man. These are some boys. These are some girls. This is an old man. These are some children and some women. This is an old woman...”

These first picture descriptions may sound pretty simple minded, but I encourage you to start out this way. Language learners find it gives them a real sense of hearing and understanding the language right off the bat. You realize that you are genuinely learning the language from day one. It also gives the LRP a clear sense of communicating with you in the language, which helps to overcome preconceptions she may have about how languages should be taught.

Chapter 2.1.7. For those who want to start talking in the first session

[Keywords: comprehension-led acquisition, production]

Your major focus during the early days of language learning should be on learning to understand the language. Of course, learning to say things like hello and good-bye at the very outset is unavoidable. But some language learners tell me that as soon as they start learning to understand the language by means of TPR, picture descriptions, etc, they simply must start attempting to say all those things that they are learning to understand. For some learners, this may well be true. In other cases, language learners simply cannot imagine learning to comprehend without attempting to speak, because they have never given it a try. In any case, the issue is controversial, with worthy supporters on both sides. I am a strong believer in what is called delayed oral production. I believe that most people will learn far more quickly if they concentrate heavily on learning to comprehend during the early days of language learning. But you may not agree. If you prefer to start speaking during your first session, you should still follow the sequence of first learning to understand words and sentences, and then basing your speaking attempts on what you have learned to understand. For example, once you understand the expressions which the LRP has used in describing the pictures, you can say those things yourself, perhaps in reference to new pictures where those expressions make sense. In some of my suggestions I recommend you respond to the LRP by pointing at pictures or objects. You may prefer to respond orally, using words and phrases such as here, there, this one, that one, rather than merely by pointing. In connection with TPR activities, once you understand the TPR instructions, you can start learning to say what it was that you did when you responded to an instruction. For example, if the instruction is “Take off your glasses”, you can take off your glasses, and then say “I took off my glasses.” Or the LRP can perform the actions that you have learned the words for, and you can tell her what she did. But I don’t really recommend this during the early period of language learning, and I’ll have more to say about the issue shortly.

Chapter 2.2. After your language session is over

Now you have finished your first session. You spent an hour or more preparing for it. The session itself lasted for one or two hours. And you tape-recorded the whole thing. Take a breather. Your work isn't done.

Chapter 2.2.1. Using tape-recordings of your sessions

[Keywords: audio recordings]

You can extend the value of your session considerably by wise use of the tape-recording you made during the session. You did make a tape, didn't you? I find I get very clear tape recordings if I use lapel microphones. I like to use a stereo recorder with two lapel microphones in case I want to record two native speakers interacting, or to record myself and a native speaker interacting. I also like to use a double cassette recorder so that I can copy sample bits of the session onto a second tape. This second tape will grow from day to day, as I add key excerpts of each day's session. I don't need to save all fifty instances when the LRP said "stand up" during the session. But during the final part of the initial TPR activity I had learned to respond to fifteen commands, and the LRP was rapidly using all of them (in random order), and I was rapidly responding to all fifteen (or however many) commands. Therefore, by dubbing the final few minutes of TPR instructions onto a new tape, I can save a complete record of the expressions I learned in the initial TPR activity of that session. I will similarly dub excerpts of the second (pointing) activity onto the same tape.

With the picture descriptions I may just dub the whole works over onto the abbreviated tape. I can listen to that several times: This is a man, this is a woman, etc. Keeping up with the descriptions and not losing my place is enough of a challenge at this point to force me to keep processing what I am hearing.

As I listen to the recording of the TPR activities, I can actually respond, or I may just recall how I responded during the session. I may even listen to the tape of each entire session a few times during the days following the session. I would hope to be adding a new session every day, but it is important to keep cycling through the taped excerpts of previous sessions.

In the coming weeks, you will be systematically focusing on a large variety of sentence patterns. You will always learn to understand the sentences during your session. However, you could easily forget much of what you learn, were it not for the fact that you keep cycling through the taped excerpts of your earlier sessions. As you listen to excerpts of an earlier session, you can recall what you were doing in the session as you processed and responded to what you heard. If you have difficulty maintaining concentration while listening to the tape, then you can actually perform the responses (for example, point to the appropriate picture upon hearing a sentence about it), as you listen to the tape.

Chapter 2.2.2. Daily record keeping —more than just a frill

[Keywords: journaling]

It is important that you devote some time at the end of each day to record keeping. If the alphabet of the language you are learning is similar to the English alphabet (or some other alphabet you are already comfortable with), and if the spelling is closely tied to the pronunciation, then you can begin using the writing system at once. It may be that there is as yet no writing system for the language, or that the writing system is very different from any you have known before and quite difficult. In that case, you will be better off to postpone learning the writing system for awhile. For the sake of your record keeping, just write things down roughly using English letters and whatever symbols (say, accent marks) you find helpful. I am personally capable of writing things in a technical phonetic alphabet, but during the first days of language learning I don't worry about writing down the fine details. That is because I do not use what I write as a basis for

my pronunciation anyway. My pronunciation (when I get around to speaking) will be based on what I have heard, not on what I wrote. The writing is for the purpose of keeping track of what I learned, and providing some visual reinforcement, which I find helpful.

One important component of your daily records should be a simple log of the vocabulary you have covered, with a rough English translation for each vocabulary item. This will help you in keeping track of your progress in acquiring vocabulary, and will also assist you as you plan your subsequent sessions, since each session will include some review of previously learned items.

One of your goals can be to learn to recognize thirty new vocabulary items every day. That will be 150 per week. Thus after seven weeks you will be able to recognize over a thousand common vocabulary items. If you're more energetic, you can realistically go for fifty new vocabulary items per day, and thus learn a thousand items in a month. The key is to be well prepared, and to keep listening to your tapes and reviewing previously learned items in subsequent sessions.

You should also write out any observations you may have as to how the language is put together, or why you think certain forms of words may be used in some cases, and different forms in other cases. You can relate this to your goals for covering a broad range of sentence patterns, a matter which I will discuss at length below. You should also mention anything that puzzles you about how the language works.

You will also keep various checklists of ideas for your language sessions. Below I will suggest checklists that you can add to from day to day. You will use them as part of the basis for planning your language sessions. These include a checklist of situations in which you need to use the language, and topics which you need to discuss in the language. You can also have a checklist for special areas of vocabulary that may come to mind. You can go out and look around the community for ideas for vocabulary and examples of daily life situations, and add these to the checklists. I will provide you with many suggestions for vocabulary and sentence patterns to cover. These, too, should be used as checklists.

Another important component of your record keeping is a diary in which you describe your whole experience as a language learner each day. This will have various uses. For one thing, reading back over your diary as the weeks and months go by will help you to appreciate the progress you have made. For another thing, the diary will help you to share your experience with a language learning consultant who may help you, or with other language learners, who may also share their diaries with you. The discipline of diary writing will help you to maintain a high level of self-awareness, which is important in the ongoing process of planning and self-evaluation.

Chapter 2.2.3. Planning each session.

[Keywords: daily plans (language learning program), planning]

In preparing for every session, you can plan thirty new vocabulary items, and plan to review at least that many that you have previously learned. In your plan, you will want to include at least three different kinds of language learning activities, as we did in your first session. For example, you might do one activity using vegetables. In a second activity, the LRP may have you get up and go to different parts of the house and do things that are characteristically done there. Third, you may do something with pictures. The exact nature of your three (or more) activities will change from day to day. Keep the sessions fun and interesting for both you and your LRP.

In addition to learning new vocabulary, you will also design your sessions to highlight specific sentence patterns. I'll give examples below. Can you see why you need to spend at least an hour per day getting ready for your time with your LRP?

In summary, each session should include

1. Activities that increase your vocabulary.
2. Activities that increase your ability to understand different types of sentences.

3. Review of material covered in earlier sessions, integrated into what you are now learning for the first time.

#### Chapter 2.2.4. Your daily routine

[Keywords: audio recordings, planning]

During this early phase of language learning your daily activities might include:

1. Spend one to two hours planning and preparing for your session with your LRP.
2. Spend one to two hours with your LRP. Your LRP will follow your instructions and use the new language to communicate with you in ways that require you to hear, process and respond. You will tape record the session.
3. Go over the tapes, and copy summary excerpts to another tape.
4. Listen to the abbreviated tape meaningfully (that is, in conjunction with the same pictures, objects, or actions that you used in your session), a number of times.
5. Do your daily journal writing and record keeping.

Initially, you will be majoring on learning to understand the language. Thus your plan for your session will aim to increase your ability to recognize vocabulary, and to understand different sentence patterns. Later I will give you a lot of specific suggestions regarding vocabulary and sentence patterns to cover in your lessons.

This daily pattern will change with time. Eventually you will be spending more than two hours per day with LRPs, and less time going over the tapes of the sessions. The reason for this is that initially, working with a live speaker is very demanding, and both you and the live speaker tire easily. You can relax with the tape recorder, and process the language input from your session over and over. Once you get rolling in the language, you will feel a need for much more extended live conversational interaction with your LRP.

#### Chapter 2.3. Some more advanced techniques for increasing your ability to understand the language

[Keywords: comprehensible input, context, pictures and picture books, predictability, video, vocabulary]

The kinds of activities I have been discussing so far may prove fruitful for a month or more. However, they will not quite make you a basic speaker of the language, even in terms of your comprehension ability. What I am about to suggest are techniques for moving to a new level. These activities can be thought of as helping to form a bridge between the time when you are a bare beginner and the time when you are a non-beginner. For that reason, I discuss them further in Thomson (1993b).

From your very first day, you are understanding statements and instructions in the new language. What is it that makes it possible for you to understand a language that you are just beginning to learn? It is the fact that the things that you and the LRP are seeing and doing give you the meaning of the words and sentences that you are hearing. The LRP says, "This is a man," and you can see what she means.

Once you understand a few hundred vocabulary items and a lot of basic sentence patterns, you will be able to understand much that is said even when you don't "see the meaning" in front of you. But your ability to understand will still be limited, and you still need to use methods which make what you are hearing easy for you to process. Think of how TPR and pictures help you during the early weeks. They help you by drastically narrowing the possibilities you need to consider while processing a sentence. For example, suppose that during one of your first sessions your LRP says "Pick up the banana." You have in front of you a banana, a mango, a pineapple, and a guava. You hear "Pick up the banana" in the language, you process it, and you respond by picking up the banana. There were only a few possible things the LRP might have said at that

point. The fact that the possibilities are limited is essential to your early ability to understand what is said. Now suppose three weeks later you are in a language session with four pictures in front of you, and your LRP says, "Before this picture was taken, this man hitched up his oxen." This sentence can only apply to one of the four pictures in front of you, since there is only one picture in which a man is using a pair of oxen. You think about what you heard, process it, and understand it. Once again, you are aided in your understanding by the fact that the possibilities of what might be said are limited to things which could be said about those four pictures. Granted you are now coping with a wider range of possibilities than when you were picking up pieces of fruit, but the possibilities are still restricted by the contents of the pictures, and this is a major aid to you as you seek to process what was said to you.

After a few weeks, you have become adept at understanding isolated sentences that are tied to things you see and do in the session. Now you want to work on understanding longer stretches of speech containing many sentences, and you want to be able to understand them without the aid of things you see and do in the session. This is a natural next step in your development of comprehension ability. The key to being able to understand long stretches of connected speech at this point is the same key that enabled you to understand all those isolated sentences: use techniques that restrict the number of possibilities which you need to consider. Have your LRP tell you things that have a reasonable degree of predictability. Some ways you can do this are to have the LRP tell you stories that you already know (from having heard them in English or another language), have the LRP give an account to a third party of something you and she did together, or have the LRP tell you all the steps in a familiar process.

If your LRP can read, you might have her read over a reasonably short English story, say in a children's book. Or you might read it to her. You should also make yourself familiar with the story, if you aren't already familiar with it. Then your LRP can retell the story to you in her language. On one occasion I had an LRP who was well versed in the Bible, as was I. During my third month of language learning he told me the entire Old Testament story of Joseph, in detail. I was able to follow a large portion of what he said, since I already knew the story. This provided me with practice in comprehending a stretch of speech which went on for a considerable period of time. Another possibility might be to watch a video drama together, and then have the LRP tell you the entire story in her language, perhaps on a subsequent day, to make it less boring. You can engage in extra-curricular activities with your LRP, so that you will come to have a number of shared experiences. The LRP can recount to you any experience that you have shared. It is even better, certainly more natural, if she recounts it within your hearing to another person, preferably someone with a level of language ability comparable to your own. By all means, tape record it.

Recounting all of the steps in a process is called the Series Method. Here again, the speech is made easier to understand by the fact that each step in the process is relatively predictable, which drastically limits the range of possibilities you have to consider as you process what you hear. Consider all the steps in preparing a potato to be fried. You pick up a potato. You turn on a tap. You pick up a brush. You hold the potato under the running water. You rub the brush back and forth against the potato. The dirt that was on the potato is washed away. The water becomes dirty. The dirty water runs down the drain. You turn off the tap. You open a drawer. You take out a potato peeler. Etc. (You can finish the series as an exercise.) Ordinary life provides hundreds of ideas for series. If the series are based on every-day mundane processes, you can bet that the vocabulary you hear and learn will be vocabulary that a basic speaker should know. Of course, as you listen to such extended stretches with understanding, whether they be familiar stories, accounts of shared experiences or series, or whatever, be sure that you capture them on

tape so that you can listen to them many more times, and perhaps go over them with the LRP to identify spots you cannot understand, and learn what you need to know in order to be able to understand those spots.

### Chapter 3. Getting on with talking

[Keywords: comprehension-led acquisition]

So far I have mainly been talking about learning to comprehend your new language. This is because I take that to be your most crucial concern during your first two months, and especially during the first month. You can go on for days, or weeks, rapidly increasing your ability to understand the language with the help of well planned language sessions. But when do you start learning to speak the language in addition to learning to understand it? And how do you move from being someone who understands a lot to someone who speaks a lot?

#### Chapter 3.1. How soon should I start talking?

[Keywords: communication situations, production, pronunciation, role-playing]

As I mentioned earlier, this is controversial, and so there can be no hard and fast rule regarding how soon you should start devoting a portion of your language sessions to producing speech in addition to understanding it. Many people think that it is important to begin speaking from day one and are surprised to learn that there may be advantages to waiting awhile. In general, I encourage people to wait awhile to start speaking, but on the other hand, I try not to discourage anyone who strongly wishes to work at speaking the language right from the start. For myself as a language learner, I do not specifically avoid speaking a language in real-life situations to the extent that I am able to and need to. I even design some of my early sessions so that they feed into my real-life communication situations. For instance, since I found that I was buying vegetables often, I chose to learn names for vegetables in an early session. Since I used taxis, I did the role play described above as a means of learning expressions which I might use in giving instructions to taxi drivers. So when I encourage you to concentrate exclusively, or almost exclusively, on learning to comprehend, I am referring to what you do in your sessions with your LRP, not so much in the outside world.

But, in general, you do not need to be in a hurry to start speaking the language during your first few weeks. That is entirely up to you. Postponing your production of spoken language has advantages. It also has disadvantages.

There are several advantages to delayed oral production. First, it takes awhile to begin hearing the new language really clearly. Some people refer to this as tuning up to the new language. It may take two or three weeks. It will be harder to use accurate pronunciation before tuning up than after, and you may begin developing poor pronunciation habits if you do a lot of speaking before you are tuned up to the language. Second, for many people, trying to respond to the LRP by speaking the new language significantly decreases the rate of learning. This may be partly due to the increased stress level. It may be partly due to the fact that it takes a lot of brain effort to recall vocabulary and phrases during the early days of language learning, so that the more you speak the language, the less brain energy you will have left for learning to comprehend new material. At any rate, if you are trying to both speak and comprehend during the early days of language learning, you are likely to cover less ground than if you concentrate on learning to comprehend only.

The advantages to delayed production would appear to relate mainly to the internal, psychological aspects of language learning. The disadvantages relate to external, social considerations. First of all, your LRP may not be totally sympathetic with the idea. She may feel that if you're not talking, then you're not learning. As I say, skeptical LRP s can become convinced of the value of what you are doing as they see your surprising progress in learning to

understand their language. But this may be a hurdle to get over right at the beginning. Second, you may have real communicative needs that require you to speak already. Certainly, you need to be able to greet people, and show a certain degree of politeness. You may have certain absolutely essential needs, such as telling the taxi driver where you live. Third, you may have to interact with a number of speakers of the language who are expecting to see immediate evidence of your progress as a speaker of their language. Telling them that you can comprehend several hundred vocabulary items and many basic sentence patterns may not mean much to them. They would like to hear you speak, or at least you feel that they would.

I would encourage you to think of yourself initially as a baby bird in the nest. You need to grow before you can fly. To fly you need to be fed. Your nest is your home and other locations where you can work with your LRP or listen to your tape recorder. Your food is all the language material that you are learning to comprehend. You can eventually start flapping your wings in the nest. That is, you can start engaging in two-way communication with your LRP and thus developing basic conversational ability. Finally, you get out of the nest and start flying. With practice you become a proficient flyer. If you try to fly before you've grown feathers, it can be stressful. Why not minimize the trauma by staying in the nest for awhile. Of course, you do not want to stay in the nest more than is necessary, or you'll not learn to fly. It's a matter of balance. How long then, should you concentrate exclusively, or almost exclusively, on learning to understand the language before you start trying to speak, assuming you feel like waiting, as I am encouraging you to do? I think that for many people a month may be a good period of time for exclusive, or nearly exclusive, comprehension learning. The second month can be a mix of both comprehension activities and speaking activities. Now it may be that after a week or two (or less [or more]) you find that certain sentences or words just come rolling out of your mouth. You have a need to say something, and what you need to say happens to be right there on the tip of your brain right when you need it. And you just say it. Great. Don't bite your tongue. Do what feels natural.

If you feel that it is important that you talk a lot in your early sessions, in addition to learning to understand (and in addition to talking in real-life situations), then you'll find that you can do a lot with pictures, objects and actions. You'll want to make a point of learning to use power tools, as described in the section on survival expressions. These enable you to use the language as a means of learning more of the language.

### Chapter 3.2. General principles in starting to speak the language

[Keywords: speaking proficiency]

Two key features of real speech are that it is creative, and it is cooperative. When I say that speech is creative, I mean that people create the sentences they need as they need them. Many, if not most, of the sentences people utter are ones that they have never heard or uttered before and will never hear or utter again. Such creative speech is spontaneous and, it appears to the native speaker, usually effortless. Speech is cooperative in the sense that the speaker and hearer need to work together. The speaker doesn't speak in a way that will leave the hearer out in the cold. The speaker guesses at what the hearer already knows and bases what s/he says on that. The hearer may give verbal or nonverbal indications as to whether s/he understands the speaker. The hearer may ask for clarification or attempt to confirm that he or she has understood correctly. In the context of second language learning, this cooperative process is what I referred to above as the "negotiation of meaning".

### Chapter 3.3. Survival expressions

[Keywords: greetings, memorization, power tools, reverse role-play, survival phrases]



As noted above, people often feel a need to know how to use certain expressions in the new language right away. This includes greetings (Hello) and leave-takings (good-bye). One speaker of an African language informed me that the way to greet someone in his language is to tell the person what s/he is doing at the time you meet him or her. Obviously, you would need to know a lot of the language in order to be able to greet people appropriately regardless of what they happen to be doing. But usually, there will be simpler means of greeting people. You may learn other expressions which serve to grease the social gears. A good way to get these is to have two native speakers do brief role-plays. For example, they can pretend they are strangers meeting for the first time, and they can pretend that they are good friends meeting in the market. The first several things they say in each case will probably fall into the category of things that grease the social gears. Another thing language learners are anxious to learn is ways to say thank you. But as to when is it necessary or appropriate to thank people, that will vary from culture to culture. And saying thank you may not be as important as you think. It may be that gratitude is shown in other ways, such as by facial expressions. It is also helpful to know simple ways to say I'm sorry, though again, each culture will define the exact circumstances under which such expressions are used.

Other survival expressions are ones you need in order need to get around. This might include expressions you need to use in order to use public transportation, to purchase goods in a shop, to eat in a restaurant, to rent a hotel room, to ask directions, etc. A common strategy, which I don't really recommend, is to memorize fifty or a hundred, or perhaps two hundred, survival expressions as your first effort toward language learning. I recommend, rather, that you learn the bare minimum initially. That is because when you don't yet know much of the language, you don't really know what you are memorizing. You just learn to repeat a long stream of sound like a parrot, but you are not really using the words and phrases in the way that a true speaker does. If you really like memorizing, why not wait until you are clearly hearing the words within the sound stream and hearing them with some comprehension? Then your memorizing will be meaningful.

There are two alternatives to memorizing. One alternative is to record your fifty or one hundred survival expressions on tape, each one preceded and/or followed by the English (or other language) translation, and listen to it often. As the language starts becoming more meaningful to you, so will these expressions. You can later make a new tape without the English translation and perhaps relate each expression to a simple drawing that reasonably reminds you of the meaning. You can shuffle the drawings so that it takes some processing effort to relate each taped expression to the appropriate drawing. This will stimulate your mental language processor, and you'll absorb a lot of the detail of the survival expressions. When you need to use the expressions in real life, you may end up using a chopped down version, but it will be a chopped down version that is your very own, and this will probably contribute more to the development of your speaking ability than just spouting a flowery expression like a parrot, not knowing exactly what you are saying. If you follow the procedure I am suggesting, you will quickly acquire a lot of survival language, in synch with your gradually evolving speaking ability. The other alternative to memorizing survival expressions is to learn them through role-play. That is what was going on in the example above where you set up the model of several city blocks and pretended you were a taxi driver, and that your LRP was a customer giving you instructions. This is reverse role-play. You want to learn expressions a customer would use to talk to the taxi driver. But you do not pretend that you are the customer, even though that is the role you need to be able to function in. The reason you don't pretend you're the customer, is that you wouldn't know what to say. So you take the role of the driver, and thus you get to hear what the customer

says, and in the process you learn what customers say. In the pretend driver role you can hear, process, and respond physically by moving the car about the model town. With suitable props you can use reverse role-play to learn expressions which will be useful in just about any communication situation which you face during your early period of language learning. For example, what props might you use with your LRP in performing a role-play aimed at helping you learn how to talk to waiters in restaurants?

One special group of survival expressions are sometimes called power tools. These are expressions in the language that help you to learn more of the language. Examples are “What is this called?”, “What is that person doing?”, “What is that thing used for?”, “How do you say X”, “Could you repeat that?”, “Could you say it more slowly?”, “Could you say it a few times in a row?”, “Could you say it into the tape recorder?”, etc. You may be surprised to learn that you can acquire these entirely through comprehension activities. You use reverse role-play. You pretend that your LRP does not know English and that you are her LRP, helping her learn English. She asks you the power tool questions in the language you are learning, perhaps in connection with pictures, and you respond by telling her how to say things in English. She says (in the language you are learning), “What is this called?” and you respond (in English), “It’s called a hammer.” She says (in her language), “Could you say it more slowly?”, and you respond (in English) “It’s a h-a-a-a-mer-r-r.” Follow the familiar principles of comprehension learning activities: only introduce one new power tool at a time; use lots of repetition of each new expression, randomly dispersing it among already familiar expressions, etc. It will be good if you do this role play before your first hour of heavy duty two-way communication.

Chapter 3.4. Heavy duty two-way communication: a new phase begins

[Keywords: conversation, speaking proficiency]

It is common for people to take formal language courses, perhaps for several semesters, and then find that when faced with a real live monolingual speaker of the language they thought they were learning, they are able to open their mouths, but they have difficulty getting anything to come out of those wide open mouths. Recall that to be able to speak a language means to be able to take a thought and express it through words, even though you may have never expressed that exact thought through words before. So far, you have been concentrating on learning to understand the language you are learning. Now you have absorbed hundreds of vocabulary items and a good range of sentence patterns. You have the bricks and mortar that you need to make conversation. That is good. What would have been the point of trying to seriously speak the language when you hardly knew how to say a single thing?

However, you only learn to speak by speaking. You may have known children of immigrant parents who could understand the parents' language fluently, but could not speak it at all. The reason they could not speak the language was that they had never tried to speak it. To become a speaker, you must try to speak. You must try to speak a lot, over a long period of time.

Chapter 3.4.1. Biting the bullet, or taking the plunge, whichever you prefer

[Keywords: conversation, language sessions, monolingual]

So far you’ve been minimizing your trauma, mainly learning to comprehend the language by means of fun and games in the nest. Trying to speak too much too soon is believed to raise the stress level and slow the learning process for many people. How would you like a medium-stress experience? You’ve got all those bricks and mortar in your brain. For your baptism of fire, you can conduct a session in which you bar yourself and your LRP from using any English (or any other language besides the one you are learning from the LRP) for a whole hour!

During that hour, there will be numerous times when you will have something you want to say and fail miserably in your effort to say it. Likewise your LRP will have things she wants to say to

you, and despite her best efforts, and the desperate production of sketches, gestures and pantomime, she does not manage to get her point across. But you never break into English (or whatever) at those times. Rather, when you are unable to communicate what you intend, you jot down the idea you were unable to communicate in your notebook. Your LRP does likewise when, due to your limited comprehension ability, she fails to get her point across to you. That is, she makes a note in her notebook as to what she wanted to tell you that you were unable to understand. At the end of the hour you'll have a long list of things that you were unable to say, and she'll have a long list of things you were unable to understand.

I'll come back to those jottings in a minute. First, I want us to think about the experience of that hour. If you were really daring, you came to that hour without any preparation. Your goal is to learn to speak in an unplanned, unpredictable context. If you were nervous, you may have had a list of topics, such as "Life in my country," "What my childhood was like," "The summer of '59", etc. However, you did not spend any time reflecting on how you would discuss these topics. That is because you want to have to cope with your communication needs on the spot, as they arise. If you found you weren't getting anywhere, you may have jumped up and ran and grabbed a photo album, but it will be a photo album that you have never gone through with your LRP before. If you didn't have such a photo album, you may have grabbed a National Geographic or something. Having lots of pictures to scaffold your efforts at speaking and comprehending will make communication quite a bit easier. You may fall back on just doing a lot of language learning using the pictures and power tool expressions ("What is this woman doing? Why is she doing it? What will she do next?").

Now, back to those jottings. You have just come up with a list, rather two lists, of things you need to learn. Wasn't that useful? Those will feed into your next language session. First, you will want to go over those jottings. You'll find it fun to find out what it was that your LRP was trying to say that you were unable to figure out. She'll find it fun to learn what in the world you were trying to say at those times when she was unable to make heads or tails out of your speech. You may find the idea of a whole hour of communication in the new language a bit frightening, especially if this is the first time you have seriously spoken this language. You may prefer to spend a half hour, broken by a ten minute recess when you can discuss the jottings you made, followed by a second half hour. Let the daring among us start with a whole hour, non-stop. The rest, including me, can break it into two halves with a ten minute recess midway.

Chapter 3.4.2. Incorporating heavy duty two-way communication into your daily language learning

[Keywords: conversation]

Let's assume that you have spent a month concentrating mainly on learning to understand the language, and now you are starting some serious speaking. It is time to increase the number of people you regularly talk to. After all, you can use several hundred basic vocabulary and many basic sentence patterns, perhaps somewhat brokenly. Increasingly you will want to spend part of your "work day" in informal visiting. You might visit your LRP's friends or family. Or you might visit neighbors or people with whom you have done business. Don't be embarrassed to tell them that you are looking for opportunities to converse in the language. This may cause people to interpret conversing with you as doing you a favour. That is exactly what it is at this point. Believe me, it is work for them. You will probably end up owing some favours in return. Something else I would urge you to strongly consider at this point is hiring a second LRP, this time one who does not know English (or any other language that you know well). You might then have two sessions per day, one with your first LRP, and one with your new one. This will allow you a lot more opportunity for conversational practice in the security of your nest.

### Chapter 3.4.2.1. Some techniques to help you keep talking

[Keywords: conversation, techniques for language learning]

When you first start trying to carry on extended talk, it can be agonizing. Eventually it gets easier. What makes it easier? Practice. Lots and lots of practice. Now your speech will be—well—it will be your speech. You'll sound like someone who is just beginning, with great effort, to speak the language. Expect to make countless “mistakes”. Believe it or not, the main thing which will decrease your mistakes is not being corrected every time you make one, but simply talking and talking and talking, while all the time continuing to be exposed to speech that you can understand. Constant correction takes the focus away from communication. Encourage your LRP to allow you to make lots of mistakes, and focus on communication rather than on grammatical accuracy. Right now you need to loosen up your tongue. When your tongue is good and loose in your new language, you can start worrying about decreasing your errors. Remember, your goal right now is not to become a perfect speaker. Your goal is to become some kind of speaker. Later you can work on becoming a perfect speaker.

#### Chapter 3.4.2.1.1. Learn to converse on chosen topics

[Keywords: vocabulary]

With your first LRP, you want to continue achieving your daily goals for new vocabulary and sentence patterns, using comprehension learning methods. In addition, you can devote part of each session to free conversation. During your preparation time, decide on a topic—something you would like to be able to talk about outside of your sessions with friends or people you meet. In your session, attempt to conduct a conversation with your LRP on that topic. During the conversation, refuse to switch to English when you get stuck. Both of you should jot down the things you are unable to express or understand. After the conversation, go over these jottings. In some cases the problem will be due to your not knowing specific words or phrases. In other cases there may be a sentence pattern that you need to learn.

Prepare comprehension activities for your next session through which you can learn these words or sentence patterns. (You may want to use home-made drawings, even simple stick figures, in the comprehension activities.)

The next day, you can attempt once again to have a conversation on that topic, or maybe conduct a conversation in which you talk about all you learned in connection with that topic the day before.

If you have a second LRP who does not know English (or any other language you already know well), then you will have another opportunity to have a lengthy conversation on the topic of choice. In addition, as you visit friends, you will have a third context in which to discuss the topic, now that you know how to discuss it.

#### Chapter 3.4.2.1.2. Conversation practice through role-play.

[Keywords: role-playing]

In addition to learning to discuss a variety of important topics, you can now engage in elaborate role-plays. Your role-play with the model town and toy car was extremely simple and artificial. Now you and your LRP can have serious role-plays. Keep a list of all the situations in which you could use the language. One situation might be hiring an employee. You might have your two LRP s do a role-play of that situation, one of them pretending she is hiring the other. You could tape-record this and listen to the tape numerous times. You can go over it with either or both of your LRP s, discussing at length any parts you do not understand, discussing all that is said, and how it is said. Now, in your next session, you can take the opposite role from the one you have in real life and do the role-play with your LRP. Then you can take the actual role you have in real life and do the same role-play again with your LRP.

Chapter 3.4.2.1.3. Use the series method, but you be the speaker.

[Keywords: Series method]

I recommended the Series Method above as a way to keep the speech you hear somewhat predictable and thus easier to process. It is also useful as a means of keeping yourself talking. One problem with speaking is simply coming up with ideas of things to talk about. If you tell all the steps in a process, you will find that each statement you make will suggest the next statement in the series. You can use a series that you have already heard your LRP say, and perhaps tape-recorded and listened to several times. But remember, your point is not to memorize and talk like a parrot. So you would tell the series in your own words. Those will often be very close to the words your LRP used, but you are not saying the whole sentence from memory. Rather you are remembering the next step in the process, and saying it on the basis of your speaking ability. Alternatively, you can make up a series which you have not heard your LRP tell. This will turn up holes in your speaking ability. Don't stop while you're telling the series, but jot down a note as to the nature of any problems you have for later reference. Then go over your jottings with the LRP to find out how to say what you were unable to say.

Chapter 3.4.2.1.4. Tell tales

[Keywords: narrative discourse]

You can tell your LRP any stories you know. These might be familiar children's tales, such as Little Red Riding Hood. Or they can be accounts of experiences from your past or present. It is a good idea each day, for awhile, to recount everything you did the day before. Again, you will make jottings whenever you are unable to say something that you want to say, rather than break back into English.

Chapter 3.4.2.1.5. Focus on structure

[Keywords: grammar]

At times you may feel troubled by some particular aspect of the language which you cannot get the hang of. We gave the example above of sentences which focus on a past process in progress, such as "When this picture was taken, the man was ploughing." Imagine that this is a pattern that you find difficult. Then you should construct a comprehension activity to highlight this sentence pattern. Often this can be done using pictures in the manner I suggested above. Next you can use the same set of pictures, but change roles with your LRP, so that you become the speaker, and she responds by indicating which pictures you are describing. Finally, you can take out a new set of pictures and describe them for her, using the same sentence pattern with picture after picture. If you have fifty new pictures, you will use the pattern fifty times in extemporaneous communication.

With a little planning you can design an activity using TPR, pictures, the series method, or another activity so as to highlight any structure you wish to emphasize. Suppose you want to improve your ability to use a sentence pattern which has a meaning similar to English sentences with "used to", as in, "I used to shop at the Bay." As an exercise right now, think up a conversational context which would allow you to use this pattern over and over and imagine the form such a conversation might take.

It may seem that when you use activities to emphasize specific structures you are not really focusing on the structures themselves. Rather you are using the structure in communication. That is desirable, actually, because your goal is to be able to use the structure in communication, not to just produce it on demand!

Chapter 3.4.3. Biting another bullet, or taking another plunge, as you wish

[Keywords: vocabulary]

Remember how hard it was for you to go cold turkey, abandoning English for a whole hour back when you first got into serious talking? Well, now that you're a couple of months into your new language, take a deep breath. Make a covenant with your LRP that neither of you will use English (or whatever) for an entire week. To make it more fun, have your LRP actually live with you for that week, or you go and live with her. Believe me, it will be a riot.

After that, if you have not already done so, it will be time to develop a rich social life (see Thomson 1993c for detailed suggestions). You are now in a position to begin new relationships entirely in the new language, even with people who know quite a bit of English (or whatever other languages you knew before you started learning this one). These relationships will be substantially different than the relationships you would build using English (or whatever), since you will be the communicative underdog. Good. Anybody can be a communicative overdog. It's a privilege to be able to be the underdog. If you are learning a minority language, its speakers may find it refreshing to finally have the upper hand in communication with an outsider such as you. You may find it painful to be a broken, struggling speaker of a language. But others have lived through it. You will too. If you don't have to, you'll be tempted not to. So if at all possible, develop a good number of relationships with people who do not know English (or whatever). This is possible in most situations, though not all.

Chapter 4. Ideas for vocabulary and sentence patterns to learn to comprehend in order to become a basic speaker

[Keywords: grammar]

When I described your typical daily activities during the early weeks of language learning, you may have been wondering how you would ever come up with enough ideas for vocabulary and sentence patterns to fill all those daily language sessions. Most of the rest of what I have to say is my way of filling in those details. These details may help to clarify much of what I've said about the daily sessions of your early weeks. It might be good to go back and reread those earlier sections after you have surveyed my suggestions.

As I give you this long list of suggestions for vocabulary and sentence patterns to learn, don't expect to remember it all after the first reading. It will be there for you to return to over and over while planning your daily language sessions.

First, let's see where we've been. I have attempted to give a picture of your first two months as a language learner in which your first major emphasis is on learning to understand the language, believing that your short term and long term progress will be increased if you approach the language in that way. Using TPR, pictures, and simple role-play, you can quickly acquire enough vocabulary items and sentence patterns to qualify as a basic speaker of the language. Gradually you put increasing emphasis on using the language to talk, using vocabulary and sentence patterns that you have already learned to understand. By the end of the second month, your sessions may last for two or three (or more) hours during which you may devote half of the time to comprehension activities and half of the time to two-way conversational activities.

Now, regarding the areas of vocabulary and sentence patterns I am about to survey, unfortunately, I cannot be totally concrete. I cannot truly suggest vocabulary items and sentence patterns, since the ones that exist will vary considerably from language to language. Rather I will attempt to cover a healthy range of general categories of vocabulary and sentence patterns. I'll have to give English words and phrases and sentences in order to be concrete, but realize that the actual details of how English works will not match up very often with the details of how another language works.

To take just one example, we have past tense forms in English which are different from present and future forms. In some languages there will be no such thing as tense. Nevertheless, you need

to know how to describe events which happened in the past. In other languages there may be two or three different kinds of past tense, such as remote past and recent past. I cannot foresee every such distinction you might encounter, and I won't even try. What I will do is provide enough possibilities so that if you learn to deal with everything I suggest, any other absolutely essential matters will come to your notice in the process. Remember, you're just trying to become a basic speaker right now. There are tons of details which you will not master during your first two months. I am trying to steer you toward the most important ones that you can reasonably master in that time period if you concentrate heavily on learning to understand and accept more modest goals when it comes to learning to speak.

Chapter 4.1. Some ideas for vocabulary to learn to understand

[Keywords: vocabulary]

Remember, you are not simply collecting and compiling vocabulary for eventual memorization. You are learning to recognize the vocabulary items when you hear them in speech. You want to be prepared to learn to recognize around thirty new items per day. If these are the names of common objects, then you will want to use the actual objects in the language session, if possible. Your LRP will have you manipulate these objects as a means of learning their names or as a means of learning the words for the actions that can be performed on, or with, those objects. To learn other kinds of vocabulary, you may need to prepare drawings or diagrams. You can plan to learn a wide variety of words by means of acting them out in TPR activities. For example, if you are learning words for emotions, you may respond to commands such as "Act happy; act sad; act disappointed," and so forth.

Chapter 4.1.1. Which vocabulary items should I learn first?

[Keywords: vocabulary]

Learning a language means learning thousands of vocabulary items. During your kick-start phase of language learning, you might aim to learn your first thousand vocabulary items. Remember, you will start out as a poor speaker and gradually improve. So the first vocabulary you'll want to learn will be the vocabulary that even a poor speaker would know. Think of English for a moment. Some words would be important even for a poor speaker, while other words would be suitable only to a more advanced speaker. Consider the following words for facial expressions or facial movements: blink, grimace, smile. Which of those would be the most important for a poor speaker to learn first? Which would be least important? If you are like me, you feel that smile is more important than blink which in turn is more important than grimace. I can almost bet that you feel exactly the same as I do about this. In using English, people use smile more frequently than they use blink, while they do not use grimace very often at all. Native speakers of a language will probably have a good sense for which words are high frequency words, and which are less frequent, and, hence, less important. Hopefully, you'll be able to convey to your LRP your desire to learn high frequency words at first.

Even without the help of your LRP, you will have some sense of what words are important. If you are aware of some area of vocabulary that you will have the opportunity to use in the near future, that will be a good area of vocabulary to work on. Suppose that vegetable vendors come to your door every day. Then it would make sense to learn to recognize the words for all the vegetables they sell. Buy a few of every vegetable, and use them in your sessions until you easily recognize all of their names. You are then free to speak them to the vendors, even if it is just a matter of showing the vendors what you have learned. While you are doing your daily planning, it is good to ask yourself what specific areas of vocabulary you can work on that are relevant to daily activities.

However, you cannot limit yourself to vocabulary items that obviously fit into your daily activities, or you will never learn a lot of high frequency, important vocabulary. For example, unless you are doing medical work, you may not need to talk about body parts all the time. But what sort of a “speaker” would you be if you didn’t know what a foot or hand is called? Follow your own instincts and those of your LRP in deciding what are the essential vocabulary for even a poor speaker like you. (Perhaps instead of calling you a poor speaker, I should call you an on-the-way-to-becoming-a-good-speaker, or maybe a temporarily challenged speaker.)

#### Chapter 4.1.2. Some categories of vocabulary

[Keywords: vocabulary]

I am going to suggest some categories of essential vocabulary for you as a basic speaker of the language. However, I encourage you to only refer to this list when you run short of ideas from other sources. Keep examining every aspect of your daily life in the situation where you will be using the language and identify the objects, places, and activities that will be important to you. Let those be your inspiration in choosing vocabulary to learn. If you are preparing for a session and you run short on ideas, scan the following suggestions. According to my most conservative tally, if the language you are learning is that of a group of people with a rudimentary material culture, these suggestions should yield five hundred vocabulary items. In most situations they should yield at least a thousand. It would be a good exercise for you, as homework, to flesh out these categories by listing a number of common English words that would fall under each one. Some “words” will actually be phrases. For example, old man could be treated as a vocabulary item, since it is such an essential category of human beings. By way of contrast, tall man would not be considered a vocabulary item, although both tall and man would be important items. If you keep a log of the vocabulary you learn, the items in your log will suggest new possibilities for vocabulary. The word for water may be in your log. Then think of all the things you can say about water: it flows, drips, freezes, boils, soaks into things, soaks through things, leaks out of things, people pour it, splash it, spray it, etc. etc.

##### Chapter 4.1.2.1. Words for referring to human beings

- Personal pronouns (I, you, them, we, etc., etc.—see discussion below)
- Major categories of humans by age and sex (man, girl, adult, youth, etc.)
- Major ethnic categories of humans (names for other tribes, nationalities, language groups)
  - Categories of friends, acquaintances, and relatives (for relatives, a family tree diagram can be used, or pictures of someone’s various relatives. Don’t expect the terms to correspond to the ones used in English. The whole kinship system may be wildly different.)
  - Occupational or sociopolitical categories of people (plumber, president, beggar)
  - Common personal names (It is a big help to be able to recognize and repeat, and easily remember, the names of people you meet.)

##### Chapter 4.1.2.2. Items used by human beings

- Animals (draft animals, herded animals, pets, etc.)
- Items used for transportation (and their parts)
- Items used in building and construction
- Cooking and eating utensils
- Food items
- Items for growing or acquiring food
- Household items
- Items found outside of houses
- Items related to education, learning, communication



- Items used for recreation or entertainment
- Clothing, make-up, jewelry, etc.
- Items used for religion or magic
- Items used for curing or healing
- Items used in trade or business

#### Chapter 4.1.2.3. Places frequented by humans

- Homes and their parts
- Locations near homes and residential areas
- Locations where food is gathered or grown, and their parts
- Locations where recreation, socializing, religious activities take place
- Locations where business transactions take place (for example, different types of shops and their parts)

- Place names (well-known villages, towns, cities, countries, lakes, rivers, etc.)

#### Chapter 4.1.2.4. Common substances not yet covered

- Water, earth, glass, rubber, plastic, paper, wood, stone, grass, thatch, etc.

#### Chapter 4.1.2.5. Nature

• Geological objects (rivers, islands, mountains, etc.), and related phenomena (flowing rivers, landslides)

- Astronomical objects
- Meteorological phenomena
- Common plants and their parts/substances
- Common wild animals
- Common insects
- Body parts (major external and internal ones)
- Body substances

#### Chapter 4.1.2.6. Time

- Today, tomorrow, morning, evening, hours of the day, days of the week, months, seasons

#### Chapter 4.1.3. Words used to further describe all of the objects covered so far

[Keywords: descriptions, modifiers, numbers]

- Terms used in describing human beings' appearances
- Terms used in describing character/personality
- Terms used to describe emotional states, attitudes
- Other terms that come to mind in connection with all of the categories of humans mentioned above (Look them over in your vocabulary log!)

- Colours, sizes, shapes, textures, conditions, values, etc. of objects
- Quantities, including numbers (many, a few, ten, etc.)
- Qualifiers of adjectives (very, slightly, etc.)

#### Chapter 4.1.4. Things that happen to all of the objects covered so far

[Keywords: verbs]

- Ways that the objects change their location or position (fall, roll, etc.)
- Ways that the condition of objects changes (burn up, wear out, etc.)

#### Chapter 4.1.5. Actions of human beings

[Keywords: verbs, vocabulary]

- Bodily actions (Look over all of the body part terms in your vocabulary log, and think of everything you can do with each body part, or what they do, as well as whole-body actions.)
- Things people do with or to any of the objects covered so far (go over all your object words for ideas)

- Things done by people according to their occupational categories (farmer, beggar, etc.)
- Things which people do to or for other people

#### Chapter 4.1.6. Additional sources for basic vocabulary

[Keywords: vocabulary]

- Have several people remember every single action they performed, from rising in the morning to retiring at night on a given day.
- Observe common activities of daily life with all of the stages or steps in those activities; take photos if possible.

With the right activities in your daily sessions with your LRP, assuming you spend adequate time planning and preparing for those activities, you should find it possible to learn thirty new vocabulary items per day until you have learned your first thousand items. Don't forget to keep a log of all the vocabulary you learn to recognize, and add to it during your daily record keeping period.

#### Chapter 4.2. Sentence patterns you need to be able to understand as a basic speaker

[Keywords: grammar]

As you plan your sessions with your LRP, you are thinking about more than vocabulary. You are also learning to understand sentences which contain the vocabulary items. You plan your sessions so that in most of them one or more segments of the session highlights a particular sentence pattern or more than one pattern (perhaps two or three contrasting patterns). In the process, you will get exposure to many sentence patterns that you didn't specifically plan on. For example, the sentence patterns for various types of questions ("Where did you go?" "What did you see?" "When did you return?") may be on your list as something you plan to tackle at some time in the future. When that time comes, you may discover that you have already learned many of those question patterns while you thought you were working on something else. You may have learned to understand questions about locations while you were learning to talk about the rooms in your house with the aid of your sketched floor plan. The suggestions below are intended as a checklist. If you come to one of my suggested types of sentence patterns and feel that you have already learned to understand such sentences, then just check it off. I really don't intend for people to cover the suggestions exactly in the order given. It is good in general, just the same, to gradually move from simpler patterns to more complex ones, as I have done.

##### Chapter 4.2.1. General principles about sentence patterns

[Keywords: commands, grammar, requesting, statement, tenses]

What we are dealing with now takes us into—gasp—grammar. At a very broad level, there are similarities in the grammar systems of different languages. An expert can see that. It may be far less obvious to the language learner, who may be unable to see the forest for the trees. For many languages, published descriptions of the grammar do not exist. If a published grammar description does exist, it may seem overwhelming the first time you look at it. Once you are well on your way into using the language as a communicator, you'll find that all that grammatical detail is not as bad as you thought it was when you first looked at it. As your speaking ability grows, you'll be amazed how much of that grammar just becomes a part of you. What is left will be easier to tackle. You don't need to worry about everything all at once. You want to start with simple things, and build up gradually to more complex ones.

You may hear comments about the complexity of some aspect of the language you are learning, comments such as, "There are hundreds of verb forms." What exactly that means depends on the language. But I suspect it is never as bad as it sounds. There will be certain forms that are the most important ones, and the less important ones will follow patterns. It is impossible to go into detail on this, but take my word for it.

There may be a lot of irregular forms. In English we form the past tense of a verb by adding -ed. For example, walk becomes walked, and talk becomes talked. However there are some verbs that have an irregular past tense. That is, they don't follow any rule. The past of go is went. No matter. Just learn the irregular forms as separate vocabulary items. So what if it adds a few dozen vocabulary items?

In some languages there may be a lot more irregularity. So, for example, given the present tense form of a verb, it may be impossible to predict exactly what the past tense form will be (though there will be some similarity). That would mean that for every verb you would have to learn two forms, one for present tense, and one for past tense. Even then, it is likely they will fall into groups that behave similarly. (The irregularity may not necessarily have to do with tense—I just use that as an example of irregularity in general, even irregularity in words other than verbs.) Yes, some parts of some languages can be very complex, but you don't have to get everything perfect to become a basic speaker. You'll have lots of time to grapple with the complexity, little by little. In general, this complexity will not make it harder for you to learn to understand the language. Once you are hearing the language with good understanding, you'll hear those complex forms over and over, and they will start to become familiar. Later on you may really want to get every detail right in your own speech, but remember, we are only considering the initial month or two. Right now your goal is to learn to understand enough basic sentence patterns that people can generally get their meanings across to you, with effort, and you can generally get your meanings across to them, with their help.

Another area of complexity has to do with nouns falling into different classes. For example, in French every noun is said to be either masculine or feminine. Some languages have several classes of nouns that are largely unpredictable. The noun class is important because you need to know it in order to know which form of adjective or verb or some other word to use with that noun. Fortunately, you don't have to know the class a noun belongs to in order to understand the language. The native speaker who speaks to you will do it correctly, and you will be able to understand what is said. Over the long term, it will be challenging for you to develop accuracy in using noun classes when you are the speaker, but while you are just a basic speaker you can expect to make mistakes, knowing that they will not usually interfere with communication. In general, no matter how much people howl over the alleged complexity of some language, that complexity will affect the ease with which you learn to understand the language far less than it will affect the ease with which you learn to produce it in speech, and your ability to speak intelligibly will be affected less than your ability to speak accurately. So have no fear. You can move right ahead with rapidly learning to comprehend a lot of the language. Then you can move right into being a struggling, inaccurate, but intelligible speaker. Finally, you can gradually move on to being a fluent and accurate speaker. Remember, all we're concerned with right now is becoming struggling speakers, albeit genuine speakers.

Before talking about different categories of sentence patterns, we ought to think for a moment about the different functions of sentences. The patterns serve the functions. Three of the major functions of language are to get people to do things (this involves commands and requests), to get people to give you information (this involves questions), and to give people information (this involves making statements). As you work on the types of expressions described below, using the types of methods described above, you are likely to involve yourself in all three of these broad functions of language. However, at this stage there is an over-riding function in the LRP's use of the language with you, and that is to enable you to learn the language. The LRP is saying much of what she says with a view to helping you to learn things you did not know before, to strengthen your knowledge of things you have previously learned, to find out what you have

successfully learned, and to allow you to demonstrate your learning and to feel good about it. The LRP will not have thought all of this through in these terms, but I can just about guarantee you that these will be among her main concerns, and increasingly so as you increasingly train her.

When it comes to the actual details of the grammar systems of different languages, there is no way I can give specific suggestions of things to cover in your sessions with your LRP, since languages vary widely at just about every point. Fortunately, I can give suggestions that are likely to lead you into learning to comprehend a good variety of sentence patterns in any language. That will help you to become a basic speaker. From there on, the language will lead you more and more deeply into itself. You just have to get a foothold. Become some kind of a speaker. Then communicate a lot with people for a long time. You'll become a good speaker eventually.

So let's consider some of the kinds of sentence patterns that you will want to learn to understand as a basic speaker of the language. In each case I will give examples of sentence patterns that might be used with TPR (usually object manipulation) and/or pictures (either loose, or pasted in a book). These two techniques tend to be enough to cover just about any sentence pattern. I find that either technique by itself is not enough, but where one technique fails, the other typically comes to the rescue.

My suggestions (usually in the form of English sentences such as "When this picture was taken, it was about to rain") are mainly there to show you that it is possible to learn these sentence patterns by these comprehension learning techniques. If you come up with your own techniques and approaches to specific patterns, that's even better. If you attempt to follow my suggestions, you'll need to extend them to include numerous examples. You will do that during your preparation for your language sessions. As an exercise, why don't you make up a few of your own example sentences each time you read one of mine. That will increase your confidence that you can do it. In your sessions you'll give your LRP a few illustrative examples (in English, say) of the sentence pattern you are interested in. She will then make up sentences for picture after picture, following the general pattern you suggested. Thus, if you have a hundred pictures, she may make up a hundred sentences. She will be describing the pictures to you or referring to them in one way or another, and you will hear what she says, process it in your brain, and respond in some way.

#### Chapter 4.2.2. Learning to understand simple descriptions and instructions

[Keywords: descriptions]

Remember, you are not going to use the following suggestions as a guide to collecting pretty sentence patterns for your notebook. Your activities are aimed rather at enabling you to understand them when you hear them in speech. And you learn to understand them in speech by having the experience of understanding them in speech over and over during your language sessions.

##### Chapter 4.2.2.1. Bare bones

[Keywords: goals (proficiency)]

Since languages are complicated, it helps to begin by restricting yourself to a small subset of the more essential sentence patterns. These then serve as a skeleton. Some complexity cannot be avoided even at the outset. Our goal is to keep it manageable.

##### Chapter 4.2.2.1.1. Learning to understand sentences that identify and describe

[Keywords: descriptions, identification]

This is a logical starting point. When the LRP tells you in the new language “This is a man,” she is not really telling you that the person is a man, since you can see that for yourself. Rather she is informing you that men are called “X” or “Y” or whatever they are called. Likewise, when she asks you “Where is the man?”, it is not because she wants to know where the man is. She is looking at him. She wants you to show that you understand the word by which men are referred to. (Such questions are sometimes pejoratively referred to as “display questions,” since the point is to get you to display your understanding rather than to get you to supply information that the speaker needs.)

There may be languages in which it is unnatural to say “This is a man” when what is meant is “These guys are called ‘men’.” Assuming this is not the case, your early lessons will contain many simple descriptions of objects. At first, this may simply involve naming the object, as in “This is a man.”

Techniques: You will be hearing lots of identificational sentences from your first language session. Going through your photos, the LRP can tell you “This is a man, this is a woman, etc.” There will also be plural cases: “These are some boys.”

The LRP can also use simple identificational sentences with the objects you manipulate in your sessions. “This is a pencil. These are some pencils.”

#### Chapter 4.2.2.1.2. Combining descriptive words with names for objects

[Keywords: descriptions, object]

In addition to learning to recognize names for objects, such as pencil, cup, string, you can easily learn to recognize complex descriptions which include things like colour, size, shape, condition, or quantity of objects. This is also a good time to cover words like this and that, if they exist. You will also want to learn to understand sentences in which combinations of objects are named together: “Take a green pencil and a red pencil”.

Techniques: The LRP will use object manipulation instructions such as “Take a green pencil. Take two red pencils. Take a long yellow string. Take ten small nails, and a large nail. Take some of the screws and all the nails.”

#### Chapter 4.2.2.1.3. Simple instructions

[Keywords: commands, offending, politeness, requesting, vocabulary]

Before going on with identifications and descriptions, we need to parenthetically think about instructions, since they are one of the main means by which the LRP will teach you vocabulary and sentence patterns. For example, while teaching you by means of the descriptive sentence “This is the bathroom,” she may test your understanding by saying “Point to the bathroom”.

Giving instructions involves sentence forms that are used to issue commands and requests. These are dangerous sentence forms. I don’t mean to make you paranoid, but in real life language use, it is in the area of issuing commands and requests that people are the most cautious about not offending one another, and not embarrassing themselves (see Brown and Levinson 1978). If I were teaching someone English by TPR, I would be tempted to use simple command forms: “Stand up; Sit down; Stand up when I step in front of the girl wearing a green blouse,” and so forth.

But now imagine that the people I am teaching go into a restaurant and want someone to hand them a newspaper that is lying on a vacant table. They can say “Gimme that newspaper.” But that would sound abrupt and rude. A native speaker of English would say something such as “Could I bother you to hand me that paper?” However, it would be strange if my TPR sessions consisted entirely of sentences like “Could I get you to stand up? Would you mind sitting down? When I stand in front of the girl wearing a green blouse, I’d appreciate it if you would stand up, if you don’t mind.” In terms of how we use English, such polite forms of request would be odd

during TPR exercises. That is because it would sound as though I, the speaker, needed the person I was addressing to stand up, sit down, etc., and that I felt I was imposing on the person. That is, it would sound as though I were trying to get the person to do these things for my benefit.

In many languages similar dilemmas will arise. Depending on the language and culture, there may be far more concern for politeness than there is in English. In other languages the ways of being polite may be less obvious, but they will still be there. I have two suggestions for coping with this dilemma. First of all, have the LRP use the most polite forms that still sound natural when giving you instructions. There is no point in having the most impolite forms be the main ones you hear. Second, use role-plays for some of your TPR exercises. The LRP might instruct you to remove books from your bookshelf pretending that they are items in a shop which she wishes to look at or purchase. Now it will be more natural for her to use more elaborate polite forms: “Could you please show me the red book on the top shelf? And I’d like to see the brown one just below it.”

Apart from these concerns about politeness, learning to recognize the command forms of sentences should not be too difficult.

Techniques: TPR. You may find that there is a different form depending on whether the command is issued to a single person or to two people. If you have a co-learner, then this contrast will emerge naturally. The LRP can vary the command between the singular form and the plural form, and the two of you can respond accordingly.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.1.4. Identification and description of actions and experiences

This is where you go beyond hearing “This is a man” and “This is a hammer”, and hear things such as “This man is holding a hammer”.

Techniques: Recall that I suggested that ideal pictures for this stage of language learning would involve people as central characters, and the people would be involved with inanimate objects or other people. If you began by using the pictures to learn to recognize the words for people and then the words for objects they are using or are otherwise involved with, you will be in a position to use the same pictures to learn expressions which describe what the people are doing with or to the inanimate objects.

The words for man, woman, boy, girl, etc. are easier to learn than the words for the objects they are using or otherwise involved with, since every picture has a man, woman, boy, girl, etc. and there are only five or ten words to learn (including plural forms). Learning to recognize words requires lots of repeated use of each word. Since there are lots of pictures of men, women, etc., you are guaranteed lots of repetition by the time you have gone through fifty or a hundred pictures. In the case of the objects the people are using or otherwise involved with, there may be only one picture of a given object. Here the LRP will need to drill you by asking you questions: “Where is the hammer, where is the saw, where is the stove? The saw? The hammer? The table? The stove?”. You follow the principle of only introducing one or two new items at a time, and drilling on them until you respond easily when you hear the new items randomly interspersed among items you have learned earlier.

Once you are familiar with the words for the people in your pictures and the objects they are involved with, it will be a simple step to understanding statements about what those people are doing to, or with, those objects.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.1.5. Understanding who is doing it to whom.

[Keywords: grammar, verbs]

Consider the sentence “This dog is chasing this cat.” (I’m assuming you have a picture of a dog chasing a cat, of course.) This sentence involves a dog, a cat, and an act of chasing. One animal is doing the chasing. Linguists would say that the animal who is actively, willfully, doing the

chasing is the agent. The other animal is getting chased. That animal is the patient. Technically, the cat is an experiencer, since it is aware that it is being chased, but we can use the term patient broadly to mean “the one or thing directly affected by the action of the agent”. So we have an agent chasing a patient. Since the cat is the one directly affected by the action (chasing) of the agent (the dog), the cat is the patient. Without looking at the picture, going only on the basis of the sentence “This dog is chasing this cat,” how can we know that the agent is the dog and the patient is the cat? Of course, we already know that dogs chase cats and cats don’t chase dogs. This is called real-world knowledge. Real-world knowledge will often help you to understand sentences in the new language. But you can also tell that the dog is the agent and the cat is the patient from the way the sentence is put together, and in the long run that is more important for you as a language learner. Simple English sentences typically have the agent ( this dog) followed by the verb (is chasing) followed by the patient (this cat). Thus, even though it violates your real world expectations, you can still understand a sentence such as “That cat is chasing that dog.” You will understand that the cat is the agent (doing the chasing) and the dog is the patient (getting chased), because of the order in which they occur in the sentence.

Now different languages will use different means of indicating who is doing the chasing and who is getting chased. The evidence may be found in the order of the words, as in English. It may be found in special markings on the nouns (called case markings). It may be found in markings on the verb which somehow tell you which animal is doing the chasing and which one is getting chased. If you are interested in more detail, you need to take a linguistics course that deals with grammar from a cross-language standpoint. My main point here is that you need to learn how to tell who is doing what to whom in sentences in the language.

There are some sentences which appear to have a subject and an object in English but where the subject is not doing anything to the object. An example is Margie likes my sister, where the subject is Margie and the object is my sister. In this sentence the subject, Margie, is an experiencer, and not an agent. Make sure you include such sentences among those you learn to comprehend, as they may behave differently from other sentences with subjects and objects.

In sentences with subjects and no objects (intransitive sentences), there are at least two types of subjects to consider. Some subjects are agents, that is, doers, like Margie, in the sentence Margie shouted. Other subjects do not do anything, but rather they have something happen to them. An example is tree, in the sentence The tree fell. In some languages words like sick, and angry, are actually verbs with non-agent subjects. (In other languages they are adjectives.)

Techniques: Early on, you may concentrate on learning to understand sentences with agent subjects and patient objects. Your collection of pictures provides a good opportunity for this. Your LRP can take several dozen pictures in which someone is holding something or someone else. She can describe pictures in random order. Your job is to point to the picture being described. “A woman is holding a baby; a boy is holding a ball; a man is holding a hammer;” and so forth. Other verbs which can be used with many pictures are using, touching, looking at (or seeing). If there is a verb with a meaning similar to the English verb have, it can be used: “A woman has a baby; a boy has a ball;” and so forth. (Even if there is no verb similar to have, there will probably be some way to express the meaning of “This man has a hammer”. It will be an important sentence pattern for you to learn to recognize.) It is good if your LRP can use many sentences with the same verb, or one of a very small number of verbs. That way, only the subject and object (or agent and patient) will vary from one picture description to the next. This will enable you to work on learning to recognize who is doing the action and who or what the action is being done to without having to worry about learning a large number of verbs at the same time.

Often your TPR expressions such as “Pick up the nail” involve a verb with an object. What is commonly missing is the subject, since it is typically understood to be the one addressed (that is, the second person—you), and not explicitly mentioned. Just the same, these sentences give you lots of exposure to the verbs with objects. A slight variation is for you to have your co-learner perform actions and have your LRP describe them. You can later listen to the tape recording of this and try to envision in your mind’s eye what was happening in your session as your LRP uttered each sentence (assuming you didn’t videotape the language sessions).

Chapter 4.2.2.1.6. You and me and he or she or somebody

[Keywords: pronouns, reciprocals, reflexive, verbs]

While you are learning how to understand who does what to whom, don’t forget the most important people: you, your LRP, and your co-learner(s). One of the earliest set of expressions you want to learn are the ones with meanings such as those expressed in English by the words I, we, you, he/she, they. In English, these are separate words which we call pronouns. In other languages they may appear to be attached to the verb. In some languages you will find that they are often omitted. The exact set of pronouns will vary from language to language. It should emerge as you work at learning them.

Techniques: You can learn to recognize the pronoun forms through TPR. For example, the LRP can tell you “Touch me. Touch them.” For second person (“you”) forms, the LRP can use predictions rather than instructions: “She is going to touch you.” Your co-learner would then touch you, in fulfillment of the prediction. Or she could say, “You are going to touch her.” You need to hear each pronoun both as agent (who does the touching) and as patient (who gets touched). There should be a number of verbs in addition to touch which can be used for this purpose: push, pat, pinch, punch, look at. Be sure to also include reflexive forms as in “Touch yourself; pat yourself,” and reciprocal forms, as in “Touch each other; pat each other”.

This is a case where it is good to have several learners involved at the same time. Once when I was doing some beginning Arabic learning with an LRP I found it helpful that my co-learner was of the opposite gender from me, since gender was important in Arabic pronouns, even more so than in English. However, we realized that to work on the pronouns we really needed six co-learners, three male and three female, in order to cover all of the possibilities. I have been known to drag all six of my children into the room to use in a session where the co-learners were my wife and I. (We later wished that our children had been able to participate in all of the learning, rather than just being used as props for learning pronouns or kinship terms.)

Again, you can have the LRP describe what people do in addition to telling people to do things. Thus you, your co-learner, the two of you, the LRP, the LRP and you, the LRP and your co-learner, or all three of you, can perform actions, and the LRP can describe them (“You are doing X” “She is doing Y” “We are doing “Z”). Again, if there are four or five co-learners for this there will be more possibilities and more flexibility.

Chapter 4.2.2.1.7. To whom, where, with what, with whom, from where, to where, for whom and whose?

[Keywords: grammar]

Now, I have so far encouraged you to learn to recognize who is the subject in a sentence and who is the object (or at least who is the agent and who is the patient). You should plan activities with your LRP through which you learn to do this with sentences in which the subject or object is a noun (man), a personal name (John), or any of the pronouns (I, me, you, they, etc.). Remember, you are spending at least an hour in planning before each session. Hopefully, you have a co-learner so the two of you can demonstrate to the LRP what is desired, whenever the LRP gets confused.



You also want to go beyond recognizing nouns and pronouns as subjects and objects of sentences. They can also be indirect objects: “Give the green cup to me, and give the glass to her”. They can be beneficiaries: “Draw a circle for me.” They can be parts of location phrases: “Put the round paper in front of John, and put the long paper in front of yourself.” They can be possessors: “Pick up my banana; Place it beside that woman’s banana”. They can be instruments as in “Pick up the banana with the fork.” Or they can be associates: “Walk across the room with your husband.” Other important functions of nouns in sentences include the source from which a movement begins, and the goal to which a movement is directed: “Walk from the table and to the door.”

Techniques: TPR. Most of this will be object manipulation. Pictures are among the objects that can be manipulated, and illustrative commands are given in the above paragraph.

In connection with pictures, the LRP can make statements involving locations. Many people and objects in the pictures are in front of, behind, beside, near, and far from, other objects in the pictures. The LRP should include statements which simply indicate the location of the object or person: “This man is in front of this tree.” The LRP should also include statements regarding where things are happening: “This man is working in front of this tree.”

Chapter 4.2.2.1.8. More on possessors and possessions

[Keywords: pronouns]

In the previous paragraph, possessor was mentioned as one of the roles a noun can have. Another role is that of possession, as dog in the phrase John’s dog. You need to learn to understand sentences in which the possessor is a pronoun, or pronoun-like (my dog, your dog, our dog, etc., covering the whole range of possibilities you find in that particular language), and sentences in which the possessor is a regular noun (the man’s dog, the woman’s cat, etc.).

Just in case there are any differences in how they are expressed, include three types of possessions: kinship terms (my father, my wife, etc.), body part terms ( your hand, her face, etc.) and typical nouns (our book, your friend’s dog, etc.)

Techniques: You can easily learn to understand this type of expression using TPR: “Point to Joe’s Father” (you can use Joe’s family tree diagram), “Touch her shoulder,” “Take my pencil,” “Put your green pencil in front of her.” Your LRP can also use pictures for this; “Where is the man’s foot?”, “Where is his hammer?”, etc.

Chapter 4.2.2.1.9. The manner of action

[Keywords: grammar, verbs]

Actions are sometimes described with mention of how they are performed: quickly, slowly, sadly, happily, repeatedly, carefully, carelessly, accidentally, purposefully. Here’s some more homework: add as many manner words to this list as you can think of.

Techniques: TPR is commonly used to learn to understand manner words: “Stand up quickly”, “Sit down slowly”. When I use a picture book, I always like the LRP to tell me to turn the page when the time comes that she wants to go on to the next page. This can be combined with manner words: “Turn the page carefully.”

Chapter 4.2.2.2. Adding a little bit of muscle

Suppose you have now learned to comprehend all the language patterns required to express the concepts I have discussed so far. For each pattern you will have heard, processed and responded to scores, if not hundreds, of sentences fitting the pattern. By now, the LRP can tell you about many or perhaps most situations or events, describing them as they occur, provided you know the appropriate vocabulary, and she can instruct you to perform many complex actions, again, assuming you have the vocabulary. This is a good start. Much of what you will learn from now on will be modifications of things you already know.

All this time you're advancing on two fronts. You are doing activities whose central purpose is to increase the number of vocabulary items you can recognize, especially nouns, verbs, and adjectives. You are also engaging in learning activities which will enable you to comprehend a basic range of sentence patterns. More and more, as we go along, it will be likely that some of the things we discuss will be things you have already learned. Then you can just check them off. Otherwise, one by one, you can work these things into your sessions with your LRP.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.1. Dealing with the past

[Keywords: tenses]

Now in connection with your pictures and other activities that required you to hear, process and respond, you will have learned to recognize a good stock of nouns (farmer), verbs (ploughing) and adjectives (wet). It may be that in the language you are learning, pictures are described in a form that you can think of as "present tense", as in "This farmer is ploughing in a wet field".

You also want to start recognizing forms that describe things that happened in the past. The system for indicating such time-related properties of expressions will vary greatly from language to language. It may also be complex, if you worry about all the details. So it may not be a good idea to worry about all the details, or all the possible forms. Rather, at this point, you will concern yourself with the main uses of the main forms.

Techniques: With your pictures, you may be able to get these past time sentence patterns by providing a frame, such as "When this picture was taken—". That is, with each picture, the LRP says things like "When this picture was taken this farmer was ploughing a field." If you have a hundred pictures, you will quickly hear a hundred sentences with familiar verbs in this type of past description form. You may get another type of past description form by using the frame "On the day when this picture was taken—" or "During the week when this picture was taken—". In English, for example, this might yield "During the week when this picture was taken, this man ploughed a field". Can you see the difference in the verb form in these English examples? You may or may not find such a difference in another language.

You can also experience past description forms of sentences in the context of physical activities. For example, your co-learner might perform actions, and your LRP will then tell you what your co-learner just did. Or it might be what you just did, or what the LRP just did, and so forth. In this way you may be able to combine past description forms with different pronouns, which may be interesting in its own right, and is essential to learn in any case.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.2. Talking about the future

[Keywords: tenses]

An early practical need is to understand how people make commitments and predictions. "I'll come visit you tomorrow" is a commitment. "My mother is coming tomorrow" is a prediction.

Techniques: If the LRP naturally describes your pictures in a present time form ("This man is ploughing"), then she may be able to make a statement about what the person will do next. If you are focusing on learning to comprehend the forms used to talk about the future, you might want to keep the other content of what the LRP says relatively simple. For example, you could simply use the verbs for sitting and standing. If a person is sitting, the LRP can tell you that the person will stand up. If the person is standing, the LRP can tell you that the person will sit down.

Similarly you could use the verbs for working and resting. Or if you have already developed a large recognition vocabulary you could have your LRP simply make predictions about what the person or persons in the picture will do next (after they finish doing what they are doing in the picture): "In this picture, this man is ploughing. Soon he will go home."

You can also learn to understand future time forms through TPR and object manipulation. Your LRP can tell you what she is going to do and then do it. Or she can tell you what your co-learner

is going to do, and your co-learner fulfills the prediction. In similar ways, you can learn to understand future forms with a variety of pronouns.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.3. Making general statements about things that happen, or used to happen

[Keywords: aspect, statement]

Some statements do not concern situations or events that are happening at the moment, or have happened in the past, or that are supposed to yet happen. Rather they deal with what characteristically happens. Examples in English are “I shop at Piggly Wiggly” and “Dogs eat meat”. In the case of “I shop at Piggly Wiggly” we see the statement of a general fact about a single individual (me). In the case of “Dogs eat meat” we see a general fact about the general dog. We can also make general statements about things that happened characteristically at some time in the past. An example is “I used to shop at Piggly Wiggly”.

Techniques: Object manipulation: You might take a collection of objects and see what general statements your LRP can make about them. For instance, if you have a collection of objects each of which is bought at a different type of shop, your LRP can make statements such as “People buy it at a book shop”, “People buy it at a dry good shop”, “People buy it at a tool shop”, and you respond by picking up the object you feel is being described. Or the LRP might make a statement about what she typically does with each object.

Picture description: The LRP can make any general statement which is obviously applicable to the main character or other elements in a picture. If a woman is cooking, the LRP might say “She cooks meals for her family”. You respond by indicating which picture is being referred to.

It may help to use a frame such as “Every day—” or “From time to time—”. You can also use frames which will require a characteristic statement about the past: “When this man was young \_\_\_”

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.4. Time words

[Keywords: tenses]

Time words are words like today, this morning, tonight, tomorrow, and so forth. There may also be names for days of the week, for months, for seasons of the year, etc., and there may be words for telling time.

Techniques: Time words can be combined with TPR commands. For example, you may make a paper clock with moveable hands. The LRP can tell you “Go to sleep at 7:00” and then gradually move the hands to 7:00 (at which point you mime going to sleep). Later she can ask “What did you do at 7:00?” and you can respond by going to sleep. Similarly she can say, “Buy a banana on Tuesday,” and then begin pointing one by one at a sequence of days on the calendar until she arrives at Tuesday, and you respond at that point by picking up a banana. If different foods are used at different times of the day, she can say something like “We eat it in the morning,” etc. You respond, for example by picking up the item.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.5. When you don't want to mention who did it

[Keywords: grammar, passive voice, verbs]

Sometimes a sentence is understood to have both an agent and a patient, but for some reason the agent is not important, and you only want to mention the patient. We have already seen an example in the frame “When this picture was taken...”. The picture is the patient. Who is the agent that took the picture? The sentence doesn't tell us that. Such agentless sentences are often a special case of what are called passive sentences. They are probably the most typical kind of passive sentence. By getting some exposure to agentless sentences, you may get some exposure to passive sentences, which may be important to your comprehension ability as a basic speaker.

Techniques: You can use TPR for this. Use several objects which make good patients. Paper is good. Think of all the things you can do with paper. Your LRP tells you to do different things to

different pieces of paper. Now the LRP can describe the different pieces of paper in terms of what was done to each: “It was folded,” “It was torn,” “It was wadded,” “It was cut,” and each time, you indicate which piece of paper was being described. (It may help to restore the papers as nearly as possible to their original condition before the LRP begins saying what was done to them.)

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.6. Asking questions about all this stuff

[Keywords: questions]

You have been hearing questions since your first session. For example, after the LRP said, “This is a carrot”, and “This is a banana”, she might have asked you “Where is the carrot, and where is the banana?”. Many of the activities suggested so far will be most natural if the LRP uses questions. For example, in the previous paragraph, instead of saying “We eat it in the morning”, it would probably be more natural for her to say “What do we eat in the morning?”. Do not hesitate to have your LRP use questions whenever they make the communication more natural. Assuming you have been doing that, we now want to insure that you have covered the main bases in learning to comprehend questions. If I mention a type of question you have not learned to recognize, then you can tackle it by focusing on it in one of your language sessions.

There are two main types of questions. There are questions which can be answered with a simple yes or no, and there are questions which require that you give some specific information in order to answer them. These are called content questions. An example of an English yes/no question is “Did I take three green bananas?”. English content questions are ones with words such as when, where, who, what, why, and how.

Although questions came into play quite early in my discussion, and, presumably, in your language sessions, this is a good place to focus on them, since you now have a variety of notions that can be questioned. Think of your simple descriptions of objects and activities. They can be converted into yes/no questions (“Is this a man?” “Is this man ploughing?”). In order to force you to process what you hear, the LRP must ask questions which you can understand, and which could be answered with yes or no. For instance, if there is a picture of a man ploughing and a picture of a woman cooking in the same group of pictures, the LRP might ask you “Is this man ploughing?” or “Is this woman cooking?”, but she could equally ask you “Is this man cooking?” or “Is this woman ploughing?”

Now you learned to recognize sentences with agents and patients (or subjects and objects). Both of them can be questioned. To question the agent, the LRP would ask “Who is cooking the rice?”. To question the patient, the LRP would ask “What is this woman cooking?”. So if you look back at all of the roles that nouns can have in sentences, they will suggest types of questions. Indirect object: “Who did I give it to?” Location: “Where is the man?” or “Where is the man working?” The thing that was used: “What is she writing with?” The beneficiary: “Who is she cooking for?” The associate: “Who is he working with?” The source of movement: “Where is he coming from?” The goal of movement: “Where is she going to?” And the possessor: “Whose hand is this?”. Questions can also be asked about the manner: “How is she cooking?” And the reason: “Why is she cooking?”. Questions can be asked about things in the past, present, or future.

Do you see how everything we have covered so far feeds into questions? If in your record keeping you are keeping track of all the types of sentence patterns that you have learned to comprehend, based on my suggestions in this section, then you can go over them and see whether you think you already know how questions are formed which deal with all of the other patterns and concepts you have so far covered in your sessions.

Techniques: A technique that I have not mentioned so far is simple verbal response. Early on, it may be better to simply respond in English or another language that you already speak fluently. Saying “yes” or “no” in the new language may seem like a simple matter, but I personally find that it slows my learning, since it interferes with my ability to concentrate on what I am trying to comprehend.

Questions can be asked in connection with pictures or with actions that take place in the language session. Using questions increases your flexibility in learning other things. For example, if you are learning to understand statements about future time, the LRP can vary the time component of questions. Suppose there is a picture of a standing man. Then “Did this man stand up?” gets the answer “yes”, but “Is this man going to stand up?” gets the answer “no”.

Chapter 4.2.2.7. Possible, likely or at least desirable, or maybe even necessary

[Keywords: grammar, mood, verbs]

Things may be possible in the sense that they are not impossible, or they may be possible in the sense that I don’t know whether or not they are true. In simple communication, you do not commonly need to talk about the first kind of possibility (“It could rain on my birthday”). The second kind of possibility (“It could be raining outside”) is very frequently needed in basic communication. That is, you need to be able to express uncertainty. There may be different degrees of uncertainty. Compare “He might come tonight” with “He’ll probably come tonight”. A concept related to possibility is ability. What I am able to do is possible for me, and what I am unable to do is impossible for me.

As with everything else we have considered, there is no reason to expect that the language you are learning will be at all like English in the way that it expresses these meanings. I cannot go into all of the possibilities. One that is worth noting is important because it would take us into a new realm. So far we have mainly been concerned with sentences that consist of a single clause. You may find that these meanings require two clauses. This happens in English in some cases: “It is likely that I will come”. Here the two clauses are “It is likely” and “that I will come”. Notice how each is like a sentence in its own right. We’ll deal below with many types of sentences that have more than one clause.

Some languages put a lot of emphasis on degrees of certainty. They may distinguish between information which the speaker got from hearsay or directly observed. There may be several degrees of certainty that come into play, even in simple sentences.

For saying that something is desirable, a language may employ sentences with more than one clause, as in “It would be good if you left.” However, notice that in English, we can say “You should leave.” Likewise, in saying that something is necessary, a language may employ sentences with more than one clause, as in “He has to leave.” (Here the clause to leave is so chopped down that it may not seem like a clause to you.) But it may also be possible to express such a meaning within a single clause, as in “He must leave”.

Techniques: Use your pictures. Give your LRP some examples in English (or whatever language you are mainly using) of sentences which express possibility or likelihood. For example, if you have a picture of a restaurant, you might say, “Someone is probably eating in here.” If a man is walking by the restaurant, you could say, “This man might go into the restaurant”. Some examples will naturally involve a higher degree of likelihood than others. Your LRP can go through all of the pictures and make such statements. You can respond by pointing to the picture or situation she is referring to. Your LRP can use forms which carry the meaning of ability by looking around and asking you about things you are and are not able to do. Are you able to lift the fridge? Are you able to open the fridge?

To help you to learn to comprehend simple statements of desirability, such as “You should wrap the cloth around the fruit,” your LRP may be able to use these statements in place of command forms in TPR activities. You can combine the forms meaning “should” and forms meaning “must” in a single activity. If the LRP says you should do it, you may start to do it, hesitate, and then either do it or not do it. If she says you must do it, you quickly do it.

In connection with pictures, the LRP should be able to think of fairly simple statements of what people in the pictures should do or must do.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.8. Denying and forbidding

[Keywords: commands, negation (negatives), statement]

All of the types of statements you can now understand can be negated. I’m sure that by this point you’ll have already run into negation, but I mention it here for the sake of completeness. The negation of “This is a man” is “This is not a man.” There are also negative commands and instructions. “Don’t sit down” is the negative counterpart of “Sit down”.

Techniques: Think of the example above of learning the names of rooms in the house using a sketch of the floor plan. Suppose the LRP says “Where is the verandah?” and you point to the entrance way by mistake. The LRP can naturally correct you in the language by saying “No. That is not the verandah. That is the entry way. This is the verandah.” Likewise, if during TPR the LRP says “Turn to the right” and you turned to the left by mistake, then she can gently correct you, “No. Don’t turn to the right. Turn to the left.” If the LRP frequently makes such natural comments in negative forms, you will easily learn to comprehend negative sentences.

#### Chapter 4.2.2.2.9. Starting, stopping, becoming, continuing and remaining

[Keywords: aspect]

Expressions related to the beginning or ending of an event or of a state of affairs may employ simple sentences or sentences with two clauses. Some examples are “I began eating”, “I started to eat”, “I stopped eating”, and “This became dirty”. Related notions are “I finished eating”, “I already ate”, and “I continued eating”.

Techniques: In TPR the LRP can tell you to start or stop various actions (“Start running”, “Keep running”, “Stop running”, “Start writing your name”, “Stop writing”, “Finish writing your name”), and perhaps she can tell you to come into various states (“Become happy”). Picture descriptions can also employ these notions.

#### Chapter 4.2.3. Expressing deeper thoughts-adding a lot of muscle

So far we have dealt almost entirely with simple sentences. By simple sentences, I mean sentences with only one clause. If you’ve forgotten, a clause is a sort of mini-sentence. The following sentences have only one clause each:

- Please pass the salt.
- This tastes good.
- The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

By contrast, the following sentences have two clauses:

- He came after I left.
- Whenever it rains, I stay home from work.

Sometimes one of the two mini-sentences is chopped down or simplified in some way, as in the following:

- Entering the yard, I looked through the window.
- I told her that in order to escape.

Other times the mini-sentences that make up the bigger sentence cannot be clearly separated because one of them is inside the other:

- The man who I told you about is at the door.

Here the two mini-sentences are The man... is at the door, and who I told you about. From here on we will be mainly interested in such sentence patterns containing two or more clauses.

#### Chapter 4.2.3.1. Stringing sentences together

[Keywords: conjunctions]

Both instructions and statements can be strung together in chains. A language may have more than one way of doing this. For instance, in English, it would be natural to say “This man left his house, hitched up his oxen, went to the field, and began ploughing.” (Remember, we have among our hundred pictures one picture of a man ploughing a field with oxen.) However, we could also say “Leaving his house, hitching up his oxen, and going to the field, this man began ploughing”. At this point you want to concern yourself with learning to comprehend sentence chains of the type that are most common in the language you are using. The language may be very different from English in this area as in any.

There may be an important distinction between chains in which all of the sentences have the same subject and chains in which the subject of each sentence is different. The sentence chain “This man left his house, hitched up his oxen, went to the field, and began ploughing” has the same subject for all the sentences in the chain. It is “this man” who left the house, it is the same man who harnessed his ox, it is the same man who went to the field, and the same man who began ploughing. Contrast the sentence “My mother works at the bank, my father works at the factory, and my older brother attends university.” Here there are three chained sentences, and three subjects: my mother, my father, and my older brother. In your language sessions you will want to be sure that you get exposure to both of these kinds of sentence chains, in case there is an important difference.

Techniques: The example of the man ploughing was chosen to suggest ways the LRP might string sentences together in describing pictures. Your goal could be to attempt to identify the picture at the earliest possible moment in the chain. It is also a simple matter for the LRP to give you strings of commands. During your first week this would not be a good idea. Once you are a few weeks down the road, single commands may not be very challenging, and you’ll appreciate the challenge of having a long string of commands to remember and carry out: “Go into the yard, get a brick, bring it back and put it on the table.”

#### Chapter 4.2.3.2. The person who I did it to was not the person who did it to me

[Keywords: grammar, relative clauses]

I gave the sentence “The man who I told you about is at the door” as an example of a mini-sentence (“who I told you about”) nested inside another sentence (“The man... is at the door”). The clause who I told you about contributes to the description of the man. Commonly it is said that such a clause “modifies the noun”. In other words who I told you about modifies the noun man. Clauses that modify nouns are called relative clauses. There are other kinds of clauses that modify nouns, and some languages may use them in situations where English uses a relative clause. As with all of the particular notions I have been discussing in these suggestions, I am not really focusing on the grammar and how it works, but rather on the notions that are being expressed. In any language there will be some way to express the notions that are expressed by relative clauses in English. I will go ahead and use the term “relative clause” for any expression which functions like an English relative clause.

In my experience, relative clauses are one of the most important language devices for increasing my flexibility in speaking a language. Nouns are very general. An expression like “the man” can refer to any of billions of male adults. Yet every person is different, and when I talk about a man, I need a way to tell you which man I am talking about. That is where relative clauses come in. If

I say “the man who lives directly in back of me”, I am able to refer to one very specific man. For the most part, people talk about very specific things, like the man who lives directly behind me. It is possible that your LRP will already have been using relative clauses in order to make the communication more natural during your learning activities. For example, recall when I discussed learning to understand general statements by using a collection of objects which are bought at different shops. The LRP would say “We buy it at the meat shop,” and you would point to the meat. It might be more natural for her to say “Pick up something which we buy at the meat shop,” using the relative clause “which we buy at the meat shop.” Thus you may have had a lot of exposure to relative clauses by the time you get around to focusing on them in a language session. As in the case of questions, I want to help you to determine whether you have learned to comprehend the main types of relative clauses. If I mention a type of relative clause that you have not yet had exposure to, you can then plan to focus on it in a language session. What I am about to say may seem a bit complicated. If you find it confusing, you can wait and come back to it when you think you need it. You should still be able to understand what I have to say here with regard to techniques.

There are three or four main types of relative clauses you will want to concern yourself with at this point. To classify a relative clause, first identify the noun that it is modifying. Consider the case of the duck which I shot. What is the noun which is being modified? It is the duck. Now ask yourself, what role is the duck understood to have in the relative clause? Note I say understood to have. The duck is not actually in the relative clause. The relative clause is simply which I shot. But the duck is understood to have a role in the relative clause. It is understood as the thing that got shot; that is, it is understood as the patient (or object) of the relative clause, even though it is not mentioned there. Because it is understood as the object, this relative clause is called an object relative clause. Now you make up a sentence in which the relative clause is understood as the subject of the relative clause.

**DO NOT PROCEED WITHOUT MAKING UP A RELATIVE CLAUSE IN WHICH THE NOUN WHICH IS MODIFIED BY THE RELATIVE CLAUSE IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE SUBJECT OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE.**

How did you do? Here is an example: The man who shot the duck. The noun modified? Man. Look at the clause who shot the duck, and ask yourself what role the man has in that clause. The man is the one who does the shooting, that is, the agent, or subject. Thus the man who shot the duck is a subject relative clause. You might consider two types of subject relative clauses. The first type occurs when there is no object in the subject relative clause, as in the man who yawned (if you are interested, you can call this an intransitive subject relative clause). The second type occurs when there is an object in the subject relative clause, as in the man who shot the duck, where the duck is the object.

In addition to subject relative clauses and object relative clauses, you will want to be exposed to relative clauses such as the gun with which I shot it, the woman for whom I made it, the kids with whom I played, the house where I live. The main point here is that the nouns gun, woman, kids, and house are not understood as the subject in the clauses with which I shot it, for whom I made it, with whom I played and where I live, nor are those nouns understood as the objects in those clauses. Rather, they have other roles, such as being the instrument used, or the location, or whatever.

It will be helpful if you keep these four types of relative clauses in mind—object relative clauses, two types of subject relative clause, and relative clauses which are neither object relative clause nor subject relative clauses. The reason I recommend you keep them all in mind, is that different languages may handle the different types in different ways.



Now in case you were wondering, this discussion of relative clauses has been the most demanding thing I have bothered you with. If your background in linguistics is weak or lacking, you may need to think it through very carefully. It may turn out that relative clauses are simple and straightforward in the language you are learning. If not, what I have just said may help you to sort things out better.

Techniques: I hope you haven't lost sight of the fact that your main goal right now is to learn to understand sentences which employ the basic sentence patterns of the language. If relative clauses are simple and straightforward, they will be a snap to learn to understand. Even if they are somewhat complicated, it shouldn't be too hard to learn to understand them when you hear them.

For learning to understand relative clauses you can use TPR, object manipulation and picture description. A typical instruction for learning to understand relative clauses by TPR would be "Give three eggs to the woman who is seated". If you have co-learners, especially, it may be possible for the LRP to describe any of them by means of a variety of relative clauses, using vocabulary you already know or are learning during that session. Pictures are especially helpful in covering the four different types of relative clauses. After you give the LRP a few examples in English, or whatever language you share with her, she can go through a hundred pictures using only subject relative clauses and go through the same pictures using only object relative clauses. She can use the same hundred for other relative clauses. For subject relative clauses she might say things like "Here is a man who is ploughing" or "Where is the man who is ploughing?" For object relative clauses she might say things like "Where is the ball which the boy is kicking?" For other types of relative clauses, sentences might focus on, say, locations: "Where is the tree which someone is standing under?"

Chapter 4.2.3.3. If this, then that

[Keywords: conditionals]

Whew! We're done with relative clauses. They're so helpful to the language learner, but a bit complicated to think about. Fortunately, in many languages they are not very complicated to learn. The rest of the types of sentences I discuss are much easier to discuss, though any of them could turn out to be complicated in a particular language.

Expressions of the form "If I come to town, then I will visit you" are another type of expression which you need to be able to understand, and, eventually, to speak, in order to be a basic speaker of the language. There are at least three important types of "if-then" sentences. In one type, the if-clause is understood to pertain to the future: "If I come to town [future], then I will visit you." This is probably the most useful type, and it may be enough for you as a basic speaker. A second type has the if-clause pertaining to the present state of affairs: "If he is not at work today, he may be sick". The third type relates to hypothetical states of affairs which are not the way things are in reality: "If he were here, he could tell us."

Techniques: To learn to comprehend if-clauses which pertain to the present state of affairs, you may be able to combine them with commands, and use TPR: "If I am holding something which we eat, take it from me and put it into your mouth." Future oriented if-then sentences can also be combined with commands in many cases. The LRP first says, "If I fold the cloth, bend the pipe." She then performs various actions, but at some random point she folds the cloth, and that is the point at which you respond by bending the pipe.

You can use pictures to cover the contrary-to-fact variety of if-then sentence. The LRP can look at each picture and imagine what the results would be if the person in the picture had not done whatever s/he is doing: "If this man had not ploughed his field, he could not have planted his corn." Actually, an assortment of these contrary-to-fact sentences can be used with pictures. "If

this man were short, he would not be able to reach that apple”, “If this man had ploughed my field, I could have rested.”

#### Chapter 4.2.3.4. When things happen, other things happen

[Keywords: temporal clauses]

You may have already been exposed to the type of sentence I have in mind here. Recall that in connection with learning to talk about events and situations in the past, I suggested that the LRP use frames, such as “When this picture was taken—” This type of clause, sometimes called a temporal clause, or time clause, provides the temporal setting in which an event occurs.

Temporal clauses can be past oriented (“When I was eating my breakfast—”) or future oriented (“When I eat supper—”). Related notions include “Before I ate supper—”, “Until I ate supper—”, and “After I ate supper—.”

Techniques: After you give a few examples, the LRP should be able to think of a reasonable sentence to say in connection with each picture, using a past oriented temporal clause: “When this man was ploughing, he walked behind his plough”. Future oriented temporal clauses are similar to if-clauses discussed above, and similar techniques can be used. “When I fold the cloth, bend the pipe.” “Keep writing until I smile.”

#### Chapter 4.2.3.5. Just because, or even in spite of, or perhaps in order to

[Keywords: purpose]

Often two clauses are combined in such a way that one clause gives the reason for the other: “I smiled at him because he looked funny.” Here the second clause, “...because he looked funny,” is the reason, and the first clause, “I smiled at him,” is the result. Alternatively, I could say, “He looked funny, and so I smiled at him,” in such a case the reason (“he looked funny”) comes before the result (“so I smiled at him”).

Closely related to reason clauses, are purpose clauses. An example of purpose clauses in English are those that begin with “in order to—” or some that begin with “so that—”: “I bought some meat in order to make stew”; “I bought some meat so that I could make stew”.

Sometimes there are reasons not to do things, but we do them anyway. In English we often express this meaning by clauses beginning with “Even though—”, as in “Even though I was angry, I didn’t say anything.”

Techniques: Pictures are the most helpful tool here. In connection with every picture, your LRP should be able to think of a reason or purpose for which the actor is performing the action. You will give several examples in English, or whatever language you share with your LRP, to get things rolling. You can do the same thing with sentences which express the idea of “even though X, nevertheless Y.” “Even though this man is tired, nevertheless, he is still working.”

#### Chapter 4.2.3.6. He made me do it

[Keywords: causative]

Some sentences have a primary agent and a secondary agent. “John made Bill eat the sandwich.” Bill is the agent who eats the patient. But John is the agent who made the decision to have the patient get eaten, and who acted on that decision so as to get the patient eaten! John could have been less demanding, in which case we might say “John told Bill to eat the sandwich,” or even “John asked Bill to eat the sandwich,” which is the least demanding of all. Or John might have been even more demanding, in the face of Bill’s resistance, in which case we might say “John forced Bill to eat the sandwich.”

Techniques: TPR is the best technique here. You need a co-learner, or at least a willing volunteer, and then your LRP can have you make that person do things. You can decide how you want to distinguish between the extremes of merely asking your friend to do the action and forcing him or her to do it.

### Chapter 4.2.3.7. Making comparisons

[Keywords: comparatives]

Languages use a variety of means of indicating that one item is bigger, darker, longer, nicer, etc. than another item, or that one person runs faster than another, or is smarter than another. I haven't, in general, been discussing the variety of ways in which languages may express particular meanings, because it would be hopeless to cover even a fraction of the possibilities. I would like to take this opportunity to point out to you how important it is to let the language be itself. You may be interpreting things through an English filter, and you want to avoid that. So let's suppose that you have two ropes, both of which are very long, by local standards, but one is slightly longer than the other. You ask your LRP to tell you "This rope is longer than this one." What she says is perfectly clear to you. You hear her say, in her language, "This rope is not long, and this rope is long." You become frustrated. You tell her, "No. You misunderstood me. You can't say 'this rope is not long,' because it is long. It just isn't as long as the other rope." You just goofed. You filtered the new language through your English grid. It just so happens that in that particular language, to say that one rope is longer than the other you do indeed say something which literally sounds like "This rope is not long and this is long."

Techniques: Each time I suggest a technique for learning to understand a particular sentence pattern, I tend to use simple examples which illustrate that sentence pattern and little else. As we have gone along, this has become increasingly misleading. By now your LRP has considerable flexibility, since you can understand all sorts of complex sentences combining many of the notions I have discussed. So for once, I'll exemplify a pattern by embedding it in a complex sentence. Where is the comparison in the following? "Give your friend a book which is heavier than the one I am holding." You need to be encouraging the LRP to use more and more complex sentences as you go along. She will have a sense for what you can understand and can try to use increasingly natural sentences to communicate with you as time goes on.

### Chapter 4.2.3.8. Things I thought, or said or at least wished, and maybe even tried

[Keywords: discourse, indirect discourse, verbs]

There is one last type of sentence pattern involving sentences with two clauses which is essential for you if you are to be a basic speaker. These are sentences with verbs such as "say", "think", "believe", "desire", "want", "wish", "know", etc. as in the following English examples:

- This man said, "Bring me my oxen."
- This man says, "I am ploughing."
- This man says that he is ploughing.
- This man is thinking, "I am tired."
- This man thinks that his field is large.
- This man wants to rest.
- This man is trying to rest.
- This man wishes he could rest.
- This man knows how to plough.
- This man knows that his oxen are tired.

In these examples, the underlined portion is a mini-sentence within the larger sentence. Notice that in some cases the mini-sentence is in quotation marks. This is referred to as direct discourse. The other mini-sentences, the ones not in quotation marks, are examples of indirect discourse. There is a lot that I could say about what distinguishes direct from indirect discourse. Suffice it to say that you may find that another language uses indirect discourse where English uses direct discourse, or vice versa.

Techniques: You can use the pictures you have been using all along, or you might want to get some new pictures that have a lot going on in them, such as those in the children's Waldo series. The LRP will choose a person or animal in the picture and tell you what that animal or person is thinking or saying. For example, she might say "Before this picture was taken, this man said, 'I have a big field to plough'," or perhaps, "This man is thinking that it might rain and he will have to go home," or possibly "This man knows that he has a lot of work to do." Your job is to point at the man who would have made such a statement or thought such a thought.

The example "This man is trying to rest" is a bit different from the others, but an important thing to be able to understand and, quite soon, to use in speech. The LRP can use TPR for this, instructing you to try to do things that are actually not possible ("Try to pick up the fridge").

Chapter 4.3. Suggestions for covering a basic range of language functions and communication situations

[Keywords: checklists (language learning), commands, communication situations, communicative functions, planning, politeness]

I have given you many suggestions for covering a range of vocabulary and sentence patterns. These are your bricks and mortar. Without vocabulary and sentence patterns it is impossible to do anything in a language. I have tried to focus you on essential, central ones which you will need in order to be a basic speaker of the language.

Fairly early you will also want to start thinking in terms of the functions for which you will use the language and the situations in which you will be using the language. I have suggested that you can include such considerations in your plans for your sessions even while you are concentrating entirely, or almost entirely, on learning to understand the language. You become increasingly concerned with functions and situations in which you will be using the language as you work increasingly on speaking it conversationally during your language sessions, say, during the second month.

During the first few weeks, when the focus was mainly on learning to comprehend, you focused on language functions when you had your LRP use different politeness formulas in giving you commands, requests or instructions. For example, suppose you were learning English. During one of your first sessions the LRP may use a simple command form for TPR such as "Stand up, sit down." Later on you may wish to learn the forms that are used in real life for making a request of a socially higher person, such as your employer. Then instead of "Stand up, sit down," the LRP might say "Could I get you to stand up? Would you mind sitting down?" On another day the LRP may act as though you are socially lower. You might pretend that she is your mother and you are her child (whatever roles you pretend, you will try to keep them in mind all through the activity). In that case, she might use the simple command forms. In some languages, there may be less emphasis on relative social standing. In other languages there may be considerably more emphasis, not just in connection with commands and requests, but, possibly in connection with every single sentence!

Keeping in mind such social factors, here is a list of language functions which you might attempt to include in your sessions in order to become a basic speaker of the language:

- requesting a object
- complying with a request for an object
- refusing to comply with a request for an object
- requesting an action
- complying with or refusing to comply with such requests
- requesting assistance (asking a favour)
- complying with or declining such a request

- offering an object
- accepting the offer
- declining the offer
- offering assistance
- accepting or declining the offer of assistance
- giving instructions to an employee
- giving orders to a child
- making a promise or commitment to future action
- making an apology
- expressing regret
- expressing sorrow for the other person's situation
- initiating an encounter
- making initial small talk in an encounter
- hesitating while speaking
- asking for clarification
- interrupting
- terminating an encounter
- making a social introduction
- introducing oneself
- asking permission
- granting permission
- refusing permission
- asking the time
- indicating a desire to enter a home
- bidding someone to enter a home

As you learn to recognize the patterns of language used for each one of these functions, you can check it off. Here again, I can't be exhaustive.

Another area in which you want to make a checklist has to do with the situations in which you use the language and the types of expressions you might use in those situations. Reflect on your life in the new language community, past, present, and/or future. What are all the situations in which you have spoken to people or expect to speak to people? Think through everything you have done during the past few days, from morning to night. Who did you speak to, and in what settings? Do this periodically, and add any new situations that come to mind to your checklist of situations. Your goal is both to learn how people speak in those situations and to learn how they speak about those situations.

You can make another checklist for topics. What are some topics about which you have wanted to converse but were unable, or hardly able? What are some topics that are likely to be important to you in the future? An excellent source of ideas for topics and situations is Larson 1984 (part III), where the selection is related in a step by step manner to the needs of a language learner who is integrating into the language community.

Keep your checklists together with your journal, and use them as a source of ideas as you plan your language sessions and informal conversational activities.

Chapter 4.4. Final thoughts regarding using the above suggestions

[Keywords: language sessions, planning]

The above suggestions are meant to serve as a source of ideas and as a checklist. Each day you spend an hour or two preparing for your language sessions, planning three or more different activities which you will use to achieve specific goals which you will set from day to day. Those

goals include vocabulary you wish to cover, and sentence patterns you wish to learn to comprehend. They may also include specific language functions or situations in which you would like to develop some communication ability through role-play, or through focusing on a special area of vocabulary. You may have ideas which have grown out of previous sessions, or out of experiences in the outside world. You can also refer to my suggestions as a source of ideas. As you plan a session, you will often look over the record of your previous session, so that while you are learning new vocabulary and sentence patterns, you are using all the riches available to you from earlier sessions.

You can use these suggestions as a check-list during your daily evaluation period. Some time after the rest of the day's activities, you reflect on what you did, make written summaries of your observations relating to sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, or anything else you observed. At this time you can go through the above suggestions and check off the ones that you have already dealt with. For example, long before you plan to deal with negations (denying and forbidding), you notice that you already know how to deny (so you check that off), but you do not yet know how to forbid (so you leave that unchecked, perhaps using another mark, such as a small circle, to remind you that it has not yet been checked off). One happy day, you will find that you have ticked off everything in the list. That doesn't mean that you have learned to comprehend every possible way of expressing a particular meaning. For example, you may have learned to express the idea of "must", but there may be other ways to express the same idea or similar ideas which you have not yet learned. Nevertheless, you can check it off when you know at least one main way in which that meaning is expressed.

When you first start using the above suggestions, you may find it difficult to plan an activity around a suggestion. You want your LRP to say only things which you will have some hope of understanding. You do not learn anything from hearing your LRP say things you don't understand. But when you do not yet know much of the language, this may be challenging. That is one reason you will need to spend an hour or two planning your language session. As time goes on, there will be more and more that you can understand, both in terms of vocabulary, and sentence patterns. Therefore, planning your comprehension learning activities will get easier. For example, when you get to the point where your LRP is telling you what someone in a picture might be thinking (and you are trying to guess who might be thinking that), there may be considerable flexibility, since by that point she knows that you have considerable vocabulary and sentence patterns that you are able to understand.

As a matter of fact, it is important that your LRP use increasingly complex sentences with you as you go along. You need to keep stretching your ability to hear, process and respond. Activities in week three should take advantage of all you have learned in weeks one and two. You need to keep trying to include aspects of earlier sessions in your later sessions. For example, in the session where you are working on agentless sentences (the LRP saying "That paper was folded"—you indicating which paper was in fact folded), you may be dealing with a passive sentence form, as I noted. It will be good to learn to recognize such sentences as they relate to past, present, and future situations. Thus even though you have long since dealt with past, present and future situations, and checked that off, you still want to combine those notions with the notion of agentless sentences. You would also need to hear examples of agentless sentences in which a variety of pronouns are used. For example the LRP might speak to you using "true-false" questions such as "I was touched", "We were nudged". If-then sentences and relative clauses can usefully be combined with many other patterns ("If I was bumped, then point to the person who bumped me"). For that reason, you may want to learn to understand if-then sentences and relative clauses earlier than they come in my outline.

Almost any of the notions covered can be combined in this way with almost any other notions. Here is an exercise for you. How many of the notions (sentence patterns) that I have discussed are involved in the following sentence: “He is thinking ‘If this field had already been ploughed, I would not have to plough it’ ”? Quite a few, right? Did you come up with five or ten notions? Of course, you don’t try to combine a whole bunch of topics in your plan for the session. But as you go along, you encourage your LRP to use richer, more complex, and more natural language. Often while covering later topics you will find you are reusing many structures that you dealt with previously, even though you didn’t plan things that way. That is because, as you learn to comprehend more and more, your LRP will automatically tend to use richer and more authentic language with you.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion (Kick-starting your language learning)

### Chapter 5.1. Going on once you’re a basic speaker

[Keywords: audio recordings, corrections, immersion, informal language learning, intermediate learners, language sessions, monolingual, newspaper, pictures and picture books, radio, social visiting, television, video]

You’ll have many months of language learning yet ahead of you. During those subsequent months, you will use the techniques described here less and less. More and more you will be learning the language through informal conversation. You may be able to be in an immersion situation, perhaps living with a family. You can probably become a basic speaker and learn more language with less trauma if you do not attempt your immersion experience until you have developed a bit of communication ability in your secure nest. At that point it will be ideal if you can spend several months in an immersion situation. You may have heard that it is better if you begin living in an immersion situation even before you have learned very much of the language. Actually, that may slow down your initial learning, and it will add unnecessary stress to your life. Once you’re a basic speaker, living in an immersion situation will be a blast. When you don’t know very much of the language at all you’ll get far less benefit out of it. There will be exceptions. For example, if the entire group is monolingual in its own language, and confined to its own communities, then you may need to begin your language learning immersed in one of those communities. I would still attempt to make a lot of tapes, possibly even video tapes, of easy to understand language, well scaffolded by pictures, objects, and activities.

Once you are a basic speaker, a fair bit of your ongoing language learning will happen as a result of informal exposure to the language. You will want to use all the means at your disposal, including print media and electronic media, if such media are used for the language you are learning. But you will also want to continue regular sessions with one or more LRP s. During these sessions you may engage in a wide variety of activities. Here are some examples:

1. If print media and electronic media are used for the language you are learning, you can go over these with your LRP, discussing parts you have difficulty understanding. Or you can give oral summaries which the LRP can correct or confirm. For example, you might read from the newspaper, or have the LRP read to you out loud from it. Or you might make tapes from TV or radio and go over them in your language sessions.
2. You can go over other tape-recorded materials you have collected. These may be discussions of various aspects of the local culture, accounts of recent events, speeches, sermons, stories, etc. You can listen to these together with your LRP, stopping the tape whenever there is something you do not understand, identifying what you don’t understand and why. Needless to say, at this point all of your discussion is in the language you are learning. It is probably best if you do this with an LRP who cannot speak English or any other language that you know well.

3. You can continue to record your own free speech, either in monologue (for example, you may tape-record yourself telling your LRP a story) or dialogue (for example, you may tape-record yourself and your LRP having a conversation regarding a topic of importance to you), and then you and your LRP can go through the tape-recording together. The LRP can point out your mistakes. When you were first trying to loosen up your tongue, I recommended that the LRP not correct your countless mistakes, as that would throw a monkey wrench into the communication process. Now, however, you are interested in identifying the types of mistakes that you make while speaking.

4. You can write original compositions in the language on any topic you wish, and the LRP can help you correct and improve what you have written.

During this period of ongoing language learning, it is good if you can devote from twenty-five to forty hours per week to language learning. This may be divided roughly into thirds. One third can be time spent with your LRPs. One third can be time spent in informal visiting (your sessions with your LRPs can be designed to feed into your informal social visiting), and one third can be time you spend working on your own, listening to tapes, reading, planning, reviewing, etc. See Thomson (1993b) for an in-depth discussion of language learning for non-beginners.

#### Chapter 5.2. Other Resources You Might Want to Consider

[Keywords: LAMP (Language Acquisition Made Practical), TPR (Total Physical Response), activities for language learning, approaches to language learning, communicative functions, pictures and picture books, resources, techniques for language learning]

There are a few books for language learners working on their own. Most of the ones that exist take a more old-fashioned approach to techniques and methods. The classic work is Larson and Smalley (1984). Brewster and Brewster (1976) and Marshall (1989) are spin-offs from it. The techniques they recommend have their roots in the Audiolingual Method, which no longer has wide support. However, these books contain much valuable material. Larson (1984) is a good guide to language functions and topics as they relate to the learner's expanding social life and integration into the community in which s/he is using the language. Brewster and Brewster (1976) provides a number of ideas for topics of conversation (chapter two), and some ideas for simple TPR activities (chapter three). As I say, I cannot wholeheartedly endorse the language learning method presented in chapter one, though I am aware that it has been a help to many people, and there was a time in my life when I encouraged people to use it. Its strength, in my opinion, is that it requires the learner to build a large number of personal relationships in which the language is used.

If you are setting out to learn a language independently, a book which proposes an approach to language learning similar in spirit to what I have proposed here is Burling (1984). Burling, an anthropologist, writes from his experience as a language learner in a variety of situations, and shows a good grasp of recent ideas in the field of second language education. In addition to Burling (1984), I highly recommend Brown (1991) which deals with a variety of issues that are important for every language learner to think about.

There are countless books on language learning activities. Sky Oaks Productions, Box 1102, Los Gatos, California 95031 will send on request a free catalogue of books and materials for use with TPR, and for using pictures for language learning.

Language teachers have developed an endless variety of games and other activities for encouraging students to use languages communicatively. These are designed for teachers planning classroom language lessons. I have felt that for the self-directed learner it may be better to have a small number of flexible and productive methods. If you are interested in surveying other possibilities you might start with the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers



published by Cambridge University Press (40 West 20th Street, New York, NY, 10011). The series includes books on the use of drama, games, stories, and pictures in language learning. If you are interested in surveying a number of well-known language learning techniques, and the reasoning behind them, you might refer to Larsen-Freeman (1986), Oller and Richard-Amato (1983), and Richards and Rodgers (1986).

Lists of language functions can be found in Brumfit and Johnson (1979), Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), Munby (1978), and Yalden (1987). A suggestive, if not outright helpful, book which combines the use of pictures with checklists of functions and vocabulary is Moran (1990). Chapter 5.3. A Final Summary and Overview

At every point, I've left you with decisions which you have to make. You have to decide what vocabulary and sentence patterns to cover in each language session, and you have to decide how exactly you are going to cover them, within the confines of the techniques I suggested, or by other techniques that you may invent. You have to decide when you wish to begin relating parts of your sessions to outside communication situations by means of simple role-plays. You have to decide when you wish to begin using the language in heavy-duty conversational activities.

If you are an indecisive character, you may be wishing I had set everything down in black and white. Well, why don't you set some things down in black and white? Write out a rough proposal for your first two months of language learning. I'll give you my proposal for my first two months as a model, but you need to write out your proposal.

Chapter 5.3.1. Greg's First Two Months of Language Learning:

Chapter 5.3.1.1. Weeks 1 and 2:

I will purely work on learning to understand. I won't even think about using the language to speak. I'll learn to understand basic pronouns, and nouns for people, in the context of simple sentences. I will add other vocabulary and sentence patterns from day to day, using my suggestions above as a guide. I will learn to recognize 300 vocabulary items, and a good many of the basic sentence patterns from my suggestions above. Which ones I cover will be determined in my daily planning times, but I'll mainly concentrate on my earlier suggestions, since they are likely to yield relatively simple sentence patterns.

I will spend ninety minutes daily preparing for my language sessions, ninety minutes per day with my LRP conducting the language sessions, three hours per day listening to the tapes made during that day's session, along with my taped excerpts of earlier sessions. I will spend one hour on my record keeping activities.

Chapter 5.3.1.2. Weeks 3 and 4:

I will continue working as I did during weeks 1 and 2, using as a guide my suggestions for areas of vocabulary and sentence patterns, checking off areas of vocabulary and types of sentence patterns as soon as I feel I have covered them to some extent. In addition, I will begin gearing my language learning activities to some of the communication situations which I face in my outside life, such as dealing with vegetable vendors. That means that I am at least thinking about talking, and if I feel the urge, I'll go ahead and use words or combinations of words when they are relevant to the real-life situations in which I find myself. I still will not be trying to talk in my new language during my language sessions with my LRP. I will learn to recognize another 300 vocabulary items, and a sizable portion of the types of sentences patterns found in my suggestions above.

Divide my time as before.

Chapter 5.3.1.3. Week 5:

During my first language session this week, I will begin by spending a whole hour conversing in my new language without ever reverting to English, except during the ten minute recess which

follows the initial thirty minutes. After that, my sessions will continue to include the kinds of comprehension activities employed during the first two weeks, but at least half of the time will be devoted to two-way conversational activities as described above. I'll continue covering sentence patterns in keeping with the suggestions given above, if I have not yet covered them all. I'll do some role-plays and learn to discuss some topics which are important to me. I'll learn to recognize another 150 vocabulary items.

I'll now spend one hour each day in planning and three hours with my LRP. I'll spend two hours listening to tapes, and an hour in record keeping activities.

Chapter 5.3.1.4. Week 6:

By now, I may have covered all of my suggestions for sentence patterns. I will return to my early types of comprehension learning activities whenever I spot new sentence patterns or vocabulary that I wish to emphasize or new areas of vocabulary. I will start using the more advanced techniques I described for increasing my ability to understand extended stretches of speech (for example, having the LRP tell me stories which I already know the content of, but which I have not yet heard in my new language). I will use the full range of two-way conversational activities that I discussed. I will seriously relate my conversational activities in my language session to my outside communication needs and opportunities. I will learn to recognize another 150 vocabulary items, all the time reviewing earlier vocabulary and earlier tapes covering a broad range of sentence patterns, along with newer tapes which are accumulating from my use of the more advanced techniques for increasing my ability to understand extended stretches of speech.

My daily time will be divided as in week 5, except that I will spend one hour per day with a second LRP, and only two hours with my first one.

Chapter 5.3.1.5. Week 7:

I'll continue much as in week 6, except this week my LRP will come live at my house, and we'll go out visiting for two hours per day. We'll use formal language sessions to prepare for our times out visiting. I will not speak a word of English to my LRP during the entire week, nor will she to me. I'll learn to recognize another 150 vocabulary items, of course.

Chapter 5.3.1.6. Week 8:

Like week 7, except my LRP no longer lives with me, and I'm going out visiting on my own. Another 150 vocabulary items, of course.

Chapter 5.3.1.7. Week 9:

Now that I am a basic speaker, I will begin living permanently with a local family, etc., etc.

Chapter 5.3.1.8. Wrap-up

So there you have it. That's my plan. Every day will have it's own plan with all the specific details, and this master plan will keep getting revised as I go. Your plan won't be just like mine.

Don't be embarrassed if your pace is slower than mine, and don't get stuck-up if it's faster.

Happy language learning!

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### Language Learning in the Real World for Non-beginners

by Greg Thomson

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[Keywords: advanced learners, developmental approach , intermediate learners ]

#### Summary

This book is a continuation of the developmental approach to language learning language learners by Greg Thomson started in Kickstarting your Language Learning. It gives suggestions for intermediate and advanced language learners on how to go on beyond a basic knowledge of a language to become truly proficient in it, by learning from a speech community. This essay can

be particularly helpful for people wanting to continue to develop their knowledge of a language beyond elementary proficiency.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

So you've learned a language?

"Sort of," you respond.

Yes, you can sit around with people and make attempts at conversations, but it is hard work for you and it is hard work for them. And you have trouble discussing any but the simplest topics. What's more, when you overhear a conversation between two native speakers, you are often unable to make heads or tails out of it.

Now if I hear you speaking your new language, since I don't know it at all, I will get the impression that you really can speak it pretty well. You're not so sure, yourself. As you say, you speak it—sort of. But the part of the language that you don't know still seems pretty formidable, if not overwhelming.

I don't know the road by which you have reached this point in your language learning. You may have spent a year in a language school. Or you may have taken language courses for several years, always as one academic course among many. Or perhaps you have been living among people who speak the language, and have been forced to start speaking it in order to survive. You may have memorized "grammar rules" and "verb forms" and vocabulary lists, and then applied your knowledge to constructing sentences as you conversed with people, until you got so you could construct new sentences relatively quickly and easily. Or you may have used a self-directed language learning approach, such as the one I proposed in Thomson (1993a), where I outlined ways to become a "basic speaker" of a moderately difficult language in about two months. Whatever the road by which you have come this far, you feel you have a long way left to go. Where do you go from here?

Chapter 1.1. Key principles of design for an ongoing language learning program

[Keywords: language learning program, principles of language learning]

Language learning is at once complex and simple. When I think of the complexity of language learning, I'm amazed that people succeed. As a linguist, I have spent much of my life puzzling over the complexities of language, and I feel I still understand so very little about any language. Yet people do learn new languages, not only as children, but also as adolescents and as adults. Observing that process only increases my sense of wonder. People learn far more than they are aware that they are learning. How do they do it?

Fortunately, the bulk of the complexity of language learning is handled by your brain, without your even being aware of it. You simply need to give your brain the right opportunity, and it takes over from there. That is where language learning becomes simple. "Giving your brain the right opportunity" can be boiled down to three principles which are easy to grasp, easy to remember and easy to apply:

- Principle I: Expose yourself to massive comprehensible input. That is, expose yourself to massive doses of speech (and perhaps writing) that you can understand, while gradually increasing the difficulty level.

- Principle II: Engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking. That is, engage in extensive two-way conversational interaction, and other speaking and writing activities.
  - Principle III: Learn to know the people whose language you are learning. That is, learn all you can about their lives, experiences, and beliefs. Do this in and through the language.
- I'll keep coming back to these three principles. First I will elaborate on them, but that is only so that you can come back to them and remember them as three simple principles. Then I will illustrate ways you can apply them. You may find that the techniques and activities I suggest will appeal to you. But if they do not, they should still help to solidify your grasp of the three basic principles, so that you can go on and devise techniques or activities of your own which apply the three principles. Any techniques and activities which apply these principles will work, if they are conducted on a large enough scale for a long enough time. Mind you, those are big "ifs".

Chapter 1.2. Principle I: Expose yourself to massive comprehensible input

[Keywords: comprehensible input, techniques for language learning]

As you read this sentence, you are exposing yourself to comprehensible input. If you are reading it, then it is input. If you are understanding it as you read it, then it is comprehensible input. If you are still in the process of learning English, then the reading you are doing at this very moment is contributing to your ongoing language learning, since it is providing you with exposure to English that you can understand, that is, it is providing you with comprehensible input. If you are a native speaker of English, what you are reading right now is not helping you to learn English, but it is nevertheless comprehensible input. In the case of spoken language, anything you listen to is input. If you understand what you are listening to, the input is comprehensible input.

Stephen Krashen (1985), (1987) has suggested that the way people acquire languages is, practically speaking, incredibly simple. Instead of three main principles, he boils it down to only one: people acquire language automatically as a result of understanding messages. This is known as the input hypothesis. It is a daring hypothesis, and it has not won wide support in its extreme form. However, it is helpful to realize that simply understanding messages in the language you are trying to learn is a major factor, possibly the major factor, in acquiring that language.

In Urdu, there is a certain construction that is referred to as past perfect or pluperfect. In one language school, the students are taught that this is equivalent to the English past perfect, which is illustrated in the following sentence:

I had eaten all my food.

The idea expressed by the English construction is that the event described by the verb (the eating of the food) occurred before the time under discussion. That is, we are discussing some time X, and my eating of the food occurred prior to that time, and at time X, I had no food left. As a linguist studying Urdu, I noticed that the so-called past perfect in Urdu did not usually have this meaning. Rather, the meaning was that I ate the food exactly at time X, as opposed to any other past time. In other words, it indicates a specific past time rather than a general past. The details aren't important. What is important is that I observed graduates of that language school using the form correctly, rather than using it in the way that they had been taught to use it. More significantly, they were not aware that they were doing anything different from what they had been taught.

This small point about learning Urdu illustrates a large point about language learning in general: however much you may learn about a language in a school, if you ever come to really speak it fluently and extensively, a large portion of what you will be saying will go beyond anything you were taught. No matter how people begin their language learning, in the end, if they really learn the language, it will be in large part because of all the language that they absorb unconsciously.

When do they absorb the language unconsciously? They absorb it unconsciously while they are hearing it (or perhaps reading it) with understanding, which is what Krashen means by “understanding messages”. If you hear the language being spoken, but what you hear is a big blur to you, how can you expect to absorb it? But as you hear thousands of hours of speech that you can understand, you will become thoroughly familiar with the language as it is actually spoken (or written). That is one of your main goals: become thoroughly familiar with the language through hearing (and possibly reading) vast amounts that you can understand. The trick will be to find ways to expose yourself to speech that you can understand. Before learning the language everything you hear is a blur. It is like reading the following sentence in some unknown language:

agsondmhaeoubrgsjnysxgvcblwaqkehhtzxxufirofzlhycsprziutxwswkmlk.

There is no way to tell where one word ends and the next begins, much less what the words mean. At least in this written sentence you can recognize the letters, because they are familiar to you, drawn from a fixed set of twenty-six letters that you already know (though you don't know exactly what sounds these letters stand for in this language). And the letters just sit there on the page and let you stare at them. By contrast, the sounds of spoken language are not only strange and unfamiliar, but they whiz by and vanish as quickly as they appear. Getting beyond the stream of strange sound and hearing meaningful words, and understanding the message they are intended to convey is no simple matter.

In Thomson (1993a) I point out how a person with no knowledge of a language can begin understanding that language, provided what is said is supported by pictures, objects or actions. The pictures, objects and actions help to break the stream of sound up into meaningful words, and you are able to relate the words to the message because you can see with your eyes what the person is talking about. This is typical of the first stage of language learning. Since I am assuming that you are beyond that stage, I won't repeat that material here.

At each stage of your language learning, there will be certain kinds of speech that you cannot understand very well, and other kinds that you can understand reasonably well. If you want to keep hearing masses of language that you can understand, you will need to have some control over the types of speech you are exposed to. Of course, if you are living in a community that uses the language that you are learning, you will also be exposed to a lot of speech that you have no control over. In the more advanced stages of language learning, that exposure will be profitable to you, since you will understand much of it. In the early stages, you will only receive a large amount of profitable exposure if you have some control over the input you are getting. When I discuss language learning techniques and activities below, I will be discussing ways in which you can exercise the needed control.

Your language learning experience can be divided into four phases. As I say, during the first weeks of your language learning, you were able to understand speech provided it was well supported by pictures, objects or actions. For example, if you were learning English, and I merely told you, “The bump in the middle of my face is my nose”, with my hands folded in my lap, and a blank expression on my face, you would not have had a clue what I was saying. But if I pointed at my nose, and said “This is my nose”, and then pointed at my mouth and said “This is my mouth”, and then at my ear and said, “This is my ear”, and then back at my nose and said, “This is my nose,” there would have been a good chance you would understand the meaning of “This is my nose”, etc. That is because the meaning of what you heard would be made clear by what you saw. In the same way you would quickly come to be able to understand simple descriptions of pictures. That's life in Stage I.

Even though you are now beyond Stage I, you will still find that, other things being equal, it is easier to understand someone's description of a picture if you can see the picture than if you can't. That would even be true if you were listening to your mother tongue, but it is much more the case when you are listening to a language that you are still learning. In the case of your mother tongue, even when you can't see a picture that is being described, you can clearly recognize the words that the speaker is using, and understand the spoken sentences in a general way. In the case of your new language, seeing the picture that is being described may mean the difference between being able to hear the words clearly and being unable to catch the words at all. So pictures are still helpful to you in making input more comprehensible, or more easily comprehensible. You might want to refer to Wright (1989) for numerous suggestions as to ways non-beginners can use pictures as an aid to language learning. Still, at this point in your language learning, the advantage of seeing what you are hearing about is not as dramatic as it was during your first few weeks, so I won't say much more about the use of pictures during Stage II.

During Stage II, you can understand speech if the content is fairly predictable. The main contribution of pictures during Stage I was that they made the content of what was being said partly predictable. But, in listening to statements about pictures, you were typically hearing only single sentences, or at best short sequences of sentences. Assuming you now have developed some skill in understanding isolated sentences and short sequences of sentences, you need to start working on learning to understand longer sequences of sentences. However, in order for you to understand long sequences of sentences at Stage II, the content still needs somehow to be predictable. Here is a simple example of how that is possible. Consider the story of Goldilocks. If you grew up in the English speaking world, you probably know this story well. At the beginning of Stage II you can have someone tell you the story of Goldilocks in your new language, and to your delight, you will find that you can follow what is being said with good understanding of most sentences right as they are spoken. And so you are indeed able to follow a long sequence of sentences with good understanding. You have thus moved from understanding isolated sentences and short sequences of sentences to understanding long sequences of connected sentences. We will have more to say below regarding ways to do this.

At Stage II then, you are able to understand long sequences of sentences provided the content is fairly predictable. Getting comprehensible input at this stage may mean continuing to expose yourself to speech which is supported by pictures, objects or actions, but it can also mean exposing yourself to a large amount of speech which has this property of predictability, as illustrated by the story of Goldilocks.

Also at Stage II, you can understand input which occurs in a conversation in which you are interacting with a sympathetic speaker, who will go to the trouble of making the input comprehensible, and who will work with you in helping you to express the meanings that you are trying to express. We will have more to say about this in the next section. Along with listening to predictable stories, and other predictable discourse, engaging in conversational interaction with cooperative conversational partners is a major source of comprehensible input during Stage II.

At Stage III, you are able to follow long sequences of sentences that are less predictable, provided you are familiar with the general topic, and you don't get lost along the way. For example, if you are a welder by background, and you listen to a local welder discuss his work, you will be able to follow most of what he is saying. In order to follow a discussion of a familiar topic, you will first need to be keyed in on what the topic is. In addition, you will often need the full context of what is being said, or your comprehension will suffer. That is, if you come into the middle of a conversation, or a story, or a sermon, you will understand less of what you are hearing than if you had been there from the outset. There is a sense in which this is true even if

the language is your mother tongue. However, in the case of your mother tongue you can at least catch the words and get a general meaning of each sentence even if you don't know the context. With your new language at this point, if you hear a sentence out of context, it will often be difficult to catch what is being said at all.

Since, in addition to the language, the culture and local history is also new to you, there will be many topics which are common, familiar topics to all native speakers of the language, but which are unfamiliar topics for you. Even fairly straightforward accounts of recent events may baffle you because you are unfamiliar with the general nature of such events, and with the general beliefs associated with such events. Thus you will want to spend a lot of time during this stage making yourself familiar with new topics and types of events that are common in the culture. As you do this, you will increase your ability to understand speech to which you are exposed. I will provide suggestions as to how to do this below. But in the broadest sense, your goal remains the same: get massive comprehensible input. That is, expose yourself to masses of speech (and possibly writing) that you can understand.

Eventually you will reach the point where most of the speech that you hear around you in most situations is reasonably intelligible to you. That is Stage IV. At that point, continuing to receive massive comprehensible input will be a matter of lifestyle. If you choose a lifestyle which largely isolates you from people speaking the language, your progress in acquiring the language will slow to a snail's pace, or cease altogether. But since you are well aware of that, you will put a lot of thought and effort into finding a lifestyle which will support your continued progress in the language, right?

So that is Principle I. Expose yourself to massive comprehensible input. With the right techniques, you can insure that you get a lot of input that is appropriate to any stage of language learning. As you are exposed to lots of comprehensible speech appropriate to the stage you are at, your ability to understand the language will continue to grow, with the result that you will reach the next stage, where you will use different, more advanced techniques, so that you can become skilled at understanding more advanced types of input. You move from 1) being able to understand speech that is well supported by pictures, objects or actions, to 2) being able to understand long sequences of connected sentences that are fairly predictable as to their content, to 3) being able to understand less predictable speech on familiar topics (provided you have the full context), to 4) being able to understand just about any speech whatsoever. You will progress from stage to stage, provided you are exposed to a lot of speech appropriate to each stage while you are at each stage. Simple, isn't it?

Chapter 1.3. Principle II: Engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking.

[Keywords: conversation]

In my own experience, Krashen's input hypothesis has been enormously helpful. Yet it appears that few scholars agree with the hypothesis in its entirety. That is because Krashen doesn't just claim that comprehensible input is the most important factor in second language acquisition. He claims that it is the only factor!

Chapter 1.3.1. Comprehensible input is not enough

[Keywords: immersion, negotiating meaning]

Merrill Swain (1985) examined the French ability of children who had been in a school immersion program for seven years. These children, who were from English speaking homes, had received all of their elementary education in French. Yet after seven years of receiving truly massive comprehensible input in French, they still did not control the French language like native French speaking children did. Why not? Probably there were a number of problems, but an obvious one was that the students didn't have much opportunity to speak the language. They



mainly listened to the teacher. When they spoke to one another informally, they used English. When they spoke to the teacher they used French. But then, how much class time is devoted to any one student speaking to the teacher? And the only children they ever heard speaking French were their class-mates, non-native speakers like themselves, and that only happened when their classmates were addressing the teacher. You certainly couldn't say that the children used French in a very rich variety of life situations, or that they used French for a very wide variety of communication purposes. It appears that, since they didn't speak French very much, their speaking ability did not develop as well as we might have hoped. Even their ability to understand French appears to have suffered from the fact that they did not speak it very much. That's not to say they didn't learn French quite fluently. But Swain conjectures that they might have done better if they had been speaking French extensively, in addition to all their years of listening to comprehensible input.

You may know children of immigrant parents who can understand their parents' language quite well, but cannot speak it at all. Nancy Dorian (1981) noticed that although she had learned to speak Gaelic in the course of her research, young people with Gaelic speaking parents, although they could not speak the language at all, could often understand it better than she could. They had grown up with massive comprehensible input, and had developed a high degree of comprehension ability, but little or no speaking ability.

So it appears that massive comprehensible input can result in people having the ability to understand a language without necessarily being able to speak it well, or even to speak it at all. It appears that in order to learn to speak, you have to put a certain amount of effort into speaking. Somehow, I don't find that surprising.

You might ask whether it is possible to learn to speak without receiving much comprehensible input. Some linguists have told me that their speaking ability exceeded their comprehension ability, at least for a long time. Recently one told me that he could plan and execute a very complicated sentence in a certain African language, but that if he heard the same sentence in natural speech he would have difficulty understanding it. My experience in learning Blackfoot was similar. For a long time my speaking ability exceeded my comprehension ability. That is not a very good way to learn a language, for a number of reasons. For one thing, if you can say a lot more than you can understand, people will misjudge your general level of ability in the language, and speak to you in such a way that much of what they say will go over your head. This can make conversational experiences embarrassing and stressful, and discourage you from spending a lot of time conversing with people. So you want to keep the horse of comprehension ahead of the cart of speaking, while bearing in mind that comprehensible input in and of itself is not enough. You also need to speak.

In particular, it appears that you will need to put a reasonable amount of effort into conversational speech. Sure, you could concentrate on monologues, say by making long speeches to large audiences, but you might not know whether anyone understood you. By contrast, when you engage in one-on-one conversational interaction with people, it will often become obvious that you have failed to communicate, or have miscommunicated. What is more, the people with whom you converse will be able to help you to find ways to say what you are trying to say. It seems reasonable to think that this would contribute to your language learning. Conversational interaction is an important source of comprehensible input as well. When you are involved in conversing with people, they will tend to adjust their speech to your level of ability. They may speak more slowly than normal, and use simpler vocabulary and simpler sentence structures, and repeat themselves a lot, and reword their sentences whenever you appear to be having trouble understanding them. Listen to yourself the next time you are talking to someone

with limited English ability. You will probably find that you make these types of changes in your own speech in order to help them to understand you. Michael Long has demonstrated that the types of changes people make in their speech when they talk to foreigners really do make a significant difference in the ability of the foreigners to understand them (Long 1985).

Consider the nature of a conversation between a sympathetic native speaker and you as a language learner. You have a meaning you wish to express. You make a stab at it, but the person with whom you are conversing is either unsure of what you meant, or wonders whether you really meant what you appear to have meant. So she helps you to clarify yourself. Likewise, when she says something to you, it may go over your head, and so you get her to clarify her meaning. This back and forth process of a language learner and a sympathetic native speaker working together to achieve success in conversational communication is referred to as the negotiation of meaning.

During Stage II, the most convenient context for conversational practice may be in structured language learning sessions, where someone is consciously helping you to learn the language. If you have one or more persons who are employed to help you on a daily basis, those people will be accustomed to speaking with you. They will have a good feel for your current level of ability, and thus will be in a good position to make sure that what they say to you is comprehensible. There is a low stress level involved in conversing with a familiar person in a familiar setting, when compared with conversing with all the people you happen to encounter out in the world at large.

In addition to formal language sessions, you will increasingly be able to engage in conversation with friends. For them, conversing with you is hard work at this point, so it requires some commitment on the part of your conversational partners. But again, people who know you well will be able to communicate with you far more effectively and easily than people who do not yet know you. With time, you can systematically expand the number of regular conversational partners with whom you visit (see Thomson, 1993c). So once you are past the very early stages of language learning, an obvious way to increase your comprehensible input is to engage in a lot of social visiting. You may not be a person who normally does a lot of social visiting. If so, it will help if you can view social visiting as part of your daily work routine.

Not all of your early speaking efforts need to be in the form of two-way conversation in the strictest sense. As a matter of fact, while you are first trying to loosen up your tongue and develop some fluency in the language, you will benefit a great deal from activities in which you do most of the talking. These activities are probably best carried out in formal language sessions, where you are employing someone who understands that she is there for the purpose of helping you learn the language. I'll have more to say about these activities below. Once you gain a degree of fluency through such structured activities you will be increasingly comfortable with unstructured social visiting as a means of getting conversational practice on a grand scale. You can use your formal language sessions as a means of preparing for your general social visiting. For example, when you learn to discuss some topic in your language sessions, you can then make a point of discussing that same topic during informal social visits. You can even tell your friends, "This is what I have been learning to talk about with so-and-so", and then go on to talk about the topic with your friends.

To sum up, Principle II is another way of saying that you learn to talk by talking. You might say that you learn how to talk by being exposed to massive comprehensible input, but ultimately you only learn to talk if you talk.

Given what we have said about Principle I, and Principle II, we might consider the following formula to come close to the truth:

Assuming you have a strategy for getting comprehensible input, and for getting conversational practice, the path to powerful language learning could hardly be more simple.

Chapter 1.3.2. You can't speak well unless you can speak poorly.

[Keywords: accuracy, approaches to language learning, communication strategies, interlanguage, mistakes]

Now you may be thinking that I'm ignoring your main concern. You feel that no matter how you struggle, you are unable to get the grammar right. If you have been learning the language through a formal language course, mastering the grammar may seem to be the central challenge. Perhaps you even got low marks because of all your errors of grammar. Well, I have good news for you. Errors are great! From here on in, you get high marks for errors, at least in my book, and hopefully, in your own book, too. If you're not making errors, you're not breaking new ground. The pathway to accurate speech is through error-filled speech. I therefore suggest that you move your concern for grammatical accuracy away from center stage. Concentrate on getting comprehensible input and conversation practice, and watch your grammatical accuracy improve without your even focusing on it. I will later suggest ways that you can focus on grammar, as well, but that will be more with a view to mopping up persistent problem areas.

When I was in High School, a language learning method came into vogue which was based on the belief that from the very outset students should speak the language perfectly. My high school French teacher responded to a student's complaint with the comment "I didn't write the textbook, but if I had I'd be a millionairess." Such was the enthusiasm of many teachers for the new method. That enthusiasm was followed by disappointment, when it turned out that few students developed much ability to use the language extemporaneously for real communication. Have you ever observed a real person learning English as his or her second language? If you have observed such a person over an extended period, you will have noticed that s/he began by speaking English very poorly, and gradually improved until, hopefully, s/he came to speak English well. It always works like that in real life. Granted some people do better than others both during the early weeks, and in terms of their overall rate of progress, and ultimate attainment, but nobody starts out speaking perfectly. Developing good speaking ability is always a gradual process. I can't understand why my high school French teacher and others like her hadn't noticed that.

When you are first learning a new language, your personal version of the language is very different from the version used by the native speakers. Let's suppose you are learning Chukchee, and your native language is English. The new "language" that you speak, say, after a couple of months, is sure not English. But is it Chukchee? It doesn't appear to be Chukchee in the strictest sense. However, it is obviously derived from Chukchee, and not from English. Six months later you will be speaking another "language", which is much more like Chukchee in the strictest sense than the "language" you speak after two months. After a couple of years, the language you speak may be enough like that of native speakers that you can justifiably call it Chukchee.

However the "language" you spoke after two months, and the one you spoke after six months, were quite different from Chukchee in the strictest sense. What were those "languages"?

Chukchee speakers could understand you when you spoke to them, and you could understand a lot of what they said when they spoke Chukchee. What you spoke was a real language (despite all of my scare quotes). More precisely, it was a series of languages, each one more like real Chukchee than the last. You invented these languages as you went along, on the basis of the Chukchee you heard. I have to say you invented these languages, because they were unique to you. You didn't hear anyone else talking like that, so you can't really say that you learned them.

No. You invented them, using as your source of building blocks all of the comprehensible input you were exposed to.

You may prefer to think that you didn't invent anything. Rather, you may say, you only learned something. You learned Chukchee, only you learned it poorly at first. But if we may return to the example of someone learning English we'll see that there is quite a bit of inventing going on.

Wode (1981) examined the forms of negative sentences used by people learning English.

Learners first learned to use the word "no" in response to questions or statements. Then they started adding it to sentences, so that if they wished to say that someone had not finished doing something, they might say "No finish." Later they would use the word "no" in slightly fuller sentences, as in "That's no good", meaning what you would mean by "That's not good." Later they would learn to add a form of the helping verb "do", and say something like "You didn't can throw it" (all of these examples are cited in Cook, 1991, p. 19 ). I think it is fair to say that sentences like "No finish," and "You didn't can throw it," come from an invented language.

They are not simply copied from normal English. Rather the speakers know bits of English, and use those bits to invent their own language. These invented languages that are derived from the language being learned, and which gradually become more and more similar to the language being learned, have been called interlanguage (see especially Selinker, 1992).

The existence of interlanguages is one of the main reasons we know that brains know how to learn languages. The interlanguages of people learning a given language, let's say, learning English, go through similar stages, regardless of their mother tongue. For example most people go through this same sequence of patterns in learning to form negative sentences in English.

Why do different people's interlanguages go through the same stages while learning English negation? The answer is that when it comes to learning a language, your brain has a mind of its own. It will invent the interlanguages, and refine them, until it has succeeded in reinventing the language as it is spoken by natives, or at least some reasonable facsimile.

I say all of this to reassure you that if you keep exposing yourself to comprehensible input, and keep persisting in conversational practice, your speech will keep getting better. Some perfectionistic people don't like this. They would prefer to speak perfectly, or not at all. Well, if you are such a person, swallow your pride. Speak badly. The way to come to be able to speak well is to speak badly for an extended period of time.

So then, speaking the language imperfectly is essential. There is a whole body of research on how people manage to cope while they are still not very good at using their new language. They use a variety of strategies in order to communicate, strategies which have been labeled, appropriately enough, communication strategies.

There have been a number of efforts made at classifying the strategies people use when communicating in a second language (these are surveyed in Bialystok, 1990 ). One well-known system of classification makes a distinction between reduction strategies and achievement strategies (Faerch and Kasper, 1983b, 1984), summarized in Ellis 1986). When you use a reduction strategy, you may simply avoid trying to say something that you would like to say, because you can't think of any way to get your point across. Or you may find a way to say something which is related to what you wanted to say, but not really the same. For example, you may wish to say that you are worried about something, but realizing you don't know how to say that, you may resort to simply saying, "I don't like it."

In using an achievement strategy, you will find a way to express what you wish to express, even though you don't know the normal way to express it. For example, you may not know the word for a crank on a machine, and so you say "this thing" while making a circular motion with your hand. Some people are probably better than others when it comes to using communications

strategies. I mention them here to reinforce the point that it is normal to speak “poorly” first, and gradually improve. That is the name of the game. If you put high demands on yourself for premature excellence, it will discourage you from speaking as much as you need to, and thus hinder your progress. So get out there and start making mistakes. And give yourself extra credit for extra mistakes.

Chapter 1.4. Principle III: Learn to know the people whose language you are learning.

[Keywords: interacting with people, principles of language learning, speech community, techniques for language learning]

It would be easy to think of a language as an isolated body of knowledge. The idea would be that you learn all about a large but fixed set of vocabulary items and grammar rules, and once you have done that, you know the language. Such a view would be sadly mistaken. Suppose you come from a place where Christmas is unknown, and you are learning English. This mistaken view of language learning implies that Christmas is simply a vocabulary item that you learn as one of many thousands of building blocks that you can then use to construct sentences. But what does it really mean to know the word Christmas? It means that you can relate the word to a very elaborate and rich area of the experience of members of the English speaking speech community. Merely sharing a lot of vocabulary items and grammar rules is not what enables members of the same speech community to communicate with one another. Of course, sharing the same vocabulary items and grammar rules is necessary. But successful communication is also based on people sharing a huge body of knowledge and beliefs about the world. Understanding the speech you hear around you, and speaking to people in such a way that they can easily and correctly understand you, requires that you come to know all that they know, or at least a lot of it. I don't mean that you come to know all that any single person knows. But there is a general body of knowledge that is shared by all members of the speech community, and you will not be able to properly understand normal speech until you acquire a large part of that body of shared knowledge.

Principle III says that you must learn to know the people whose language you are learning. All three principles are interdependent. Principle III, like Principle II, is closely related to Principle I (i.e., expose yourself to massive comprehensible input). Take vocabulary building. Other things being equal, if you have a large vocabulary, you will be able to comprehend more language than if you have a small vocabulary. In other words, increasing your vocabulary results in increasing the quantity of comprehensible input that you receive. But as we saw in the case of the English word Christmas, learning vocabulary means learning about the areas of human experience to which the vocabulary relates. Or take the word bottle. What if I say, “She screamed and screamed until her mother stuck a bottle in her mouth”? Or how about, “If my husband doesn't get off the bottle, I'm leaving him”? Or perhaps, “We found a note in a bottle”. What rich areas of cultural experience, knowledge and belief are linked to this word bottle! Even a simple word like rain is associated with the experience and beliefs of the speech community which uses the word. Knowing vocabulary, which is a key to comprehending input, cannot be separated from knowing the world of the people who speak the language you are learning.

Principle III is also relevant to Principle II, (i.e., engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking). You want to learn to talk about any topic that people talk about. The more you know the right words and phrases, the less you will have to rely on communication strategies. And it is not just a matter of knowing the right words and phrases, and the areas of human experience that these relate to. As you get to know the people well, you also come to know the sorts of things that people talk about, and the ways that they talk about those things.

In another essay (Thomson, 1993c), I explain how that to learn a language is to become part of a group of people. Every language defines group of people, namely, the group of people who accept that language as their contract for communication. When people share a language it means that they agree with one another on a grand scale, and in very deep rooted ways, with regard to how to communicate. Take words for colours. While one language may divide the spectrum into seven colours, another may divide it into only three. Thus while the colour of grass and the colour of the sky may be called by different words in one language, they may be called by a single colour word in another language. Of course, all normal people can distinguish the same hues of colour. Think of all the hues that you can refer to by means of the word green. If you need to make finer distinctions you can do so. Likewise, if a language uses the same word for the colour of the sky as for the colour of grass, the speakers are capable of distinguishing those hues if they need to do so. However, for most purposes they don't, just as for most purposes you don't distinguish between the hues of green. Now you belong to a speech community (the English speaking speech community) which thinks of the colour of grass and the colour of the sky as basically different. So that is how you think, as long as you are participating in that speech community. Suppose you are in the process of becoming part of a speech community which thinks of the colour of grass and the colour of the sky as basically the same. If you are going to use the new language in a way similar to the way its normal users use it, then, while you are using it, you too will be thinking of the colour of grass as being basically the same as the colour of the sky. You may feel that you could never think that. Then you are in for a surprise. You really are going to learn to think in new ways. In learning a new language, you learn to think the way the language's normal speakers think. In other words, coming to know a language means coming to know how people think, and being able to think like them at a very basic level.

Vocabulary involves idioms in addition to single words. A good example of an idiom is provided by Spradley (1979) from the language of tramps. The idiom make a flop might be translated into ordinary English as "bed down for the night." However, the concept is much richer than this, as Spradley discovered. Tramps in Seattle shared the knowledge of more than a hundred ways to make a flop. Spradley found that to learn a language—in this case the language was a variety of English shared by the speech community of tramps—is to learn a culture, and to learn a culture is to learn a huge body of shared knowledge and experience, including strategies for surviving. The collection of all the words and idioms known to speakers of a language is what linguists refer to as their mental lexicon. In everyday English, a lexicon is a book, but for a linguist, it is something in the human mind. In connection with the mental lexicon, Givon (1984) goes so far as to say,

"The bulk of generic ('permanent') cultural knowledge shared by speakers/hearers is coded in their lexicon, which is in fact more like an encyclopedia." (p. 31).

So then, learning the lexicon means learning much of what people know and think about the world. I have not even begun to explore all the ways in which learning words and idioms will involve you in learning whole areas of local culture, knowledge and belief. There will be discoveries awaiting you at every turn.

Big as the issue of vocabulary learning is, there is more to getting to know the people whose language you are learning. It should be easy to see that in a more general sense, knowing what goes on in people's life experiences is essential to being able to understand their speech. Suppose I want to tell you of an incident in my life. Let's say it involved getting a traffic ticket. Here is an example of such an account of an incident that occurred in my life, told as I might tell it to a normal speaker of North American English.

One time a friend was driving my pick-up while I dozed off, and this cop stopped us because a tail-light was burned out. It wouldn't have been anything, except that my friend was so short that she couldn't see out of the rear-view mirror, and after several blocks he finally used his siren to get our attention, and he wanted to know what was going on. I apologized profusely, but he was still a bit on the grumpy side when he handed me the ticket, although, to my relief it was just a warning.

Imagine that you are a rural share-cropper in a third world country and have never driven a car, or been pulled over by a police officer. Suppose in addition that you have had some moderate opportunity to learn English, and that you know all of the words in my account (including profusely!), and suppose that I spoke slowly and clearly as I told you this account in these exact words. I can pretty well guarantee that the account will whiz by you in a blur, and you will not be able to make much sense out of it. That is because my story assumes that you share a whole area of life experience with me that you do not in fact share. Notice that in telling the story I left out many essential facts. As the reader, if you are a North American, or from another culture which is similar to North American culture in the relevant respects, you will have filled in the missing details, and will have created a complete picture of what had happened. In your picture, the police officer followed my pick-up truck with his coloured lights flashing. He became upset over the fact that the driver didn't pull over. The ticket might well have involved a fine, but fortunately, it didn't. None of these parts of your picture are mentioned in my story. Yet they are crucial to making sense of the story as a whole, and making sense of the story as a whole is crucial to making sense out of the sentences and words which make it up.

That is how stories work. If you are to understand a story, you must create the whole picture from whatever bits of detail you are given. Assuming you share my knowledge of how traffic tickets are given, as soon as you hear me say the words, "this police officer stopped us" a whole lot of additional detail becomes available to you, since you know what typically happens when a police officer stops a driver. The police officer followed my vehicle on a motorcycle or in a squad car with his lights flashing, and the driver pulled over. You can take all of that to be the case even though all I said was "this cop stopped us" You also assume that the police officer got out and walked to the driver's window of my pick-up. There are a whole lot of details that go into a typical incident of a police officer giving a motorist a traffic ticket. This typical sequence of events has been called a schema. You understand my story easily because you and I, as members of the same culture, share this schema. I take the schema for granted in telling the story, and you use the schema as an aid to understanding the story. This schema, which you can think of as a basic skeleton of the typical traffic ticket incident, is something that you and I share because it grows out of our common experience, either as ticket recipients, or as friends of ticket recipients who have shared their stories with us. As members of the same culture and speech community you and I share countless schemas which arise out of our shared experiences. Examples would be the schemas for a day in an elementary school class, a trip to the supermarket for groceries, a baseball game, and a wedding ceremony. It is widely recognized that the use of such schemas is essential to successful communication (see Rost 1990; Singer 1990).

Now, your new language belongs to a different speech community with a different culture, and different shared life experiences. You may share some of the schemas (or, if you prefer, schemata) which arise out of their life experience, but there will be many that you do not share. The more different the new culture is from your old one, the more serious this problem becomes.

In addition to schemas, there are other kinds of knowledge shared by everyone in the new speech community, such as knowledge of famous people, well-known places and events, etc. The fact that your past life experience is different from that of the speakers of your new language makes it difficult for you to make sense out of much of what you may hear being said around you. The only solution is for you to acquire a large part of the common knowledge that these people already share. This can be done partly through discussing their life experiences with them, but to be done effectively, you also need to share in that life experience.

Finally, learning to know the people whose language you are learning means learning what is appropriate behaviour, and what is inappropriate behaviour. This opens a huge area of complexity which I can't explore here. A trained anthropologist is an expert observer. But a trained anthropologist observing the culture is in the same position as a trained linguist observing the language. True, s/he will notice a lot which the rest of us will not notice. Nevertheless, what s/he can consciously observe and describe is far less than what s/he needs to acquire in order to behave appropriately. Like language, behaviour in general is too complex to learn by first understanding all the facts about it and then applying that knowledge of those facts as you consciously understand them. Here too, an input hypothesis must have some validity. As you are exposed to an enormous quantity of human interaction and behaviour, you acquire the complex cultural system which governs the behaviour.

Getting to know people means getting to know how they act toward one another, including how they act by means of language. Think for a moment about the following two sentences:

If I may make the suggestion, the \_\_\_\_\_ is popular here.

Well there's the \_\_\_\_\_.

These examples are adapted from Munby (1978), who provides twenty different ways to make a suggestion in English, of which these are two. In fact, there are a lot more than twenty ways to make suggestions in English, but let's just think about these two. Who would say each of them? To whom? In what setting? We might imagine the waiter in a fancy restaurant using the first one with a customer. The second one might be said in the same restaurant by one spouse to another. Or the second one might come from a waitress in a diner who has been asked for a suggestion. Isn't it interesting that we can work backwards from the form of a suggestion to an idea of who might have said it to whom, and in what setting?

This example falls into the category that linguists refer to as politeness phenomena (Brown and Levinson, 1978). Certain things people do with words involve some social risk either to the speaker, or the person spoken to, or both. People choose their words carefully based not only on considerations of social risk, but also based on considerations such as the relative social standing of the speaker and the one spoken to, the setting, the topic that is being talked about, and so forth. Thus to be able to speak well, you need to relate what you are saying to complex new facts about social relationships. You do it all the time in your mother tongue. You fine tune your speech depending on who you are talking to, how well you know them, their status relative to yours, etc. In your new language you do not yet have much of a feel for how to do this. Among other things, you need to develop a feel for how people view social relationships. Fortunately, this is another case of complexity which you mainly acquire through massive exposure to, and involvement in, social interaction. But it is another illustration of how learning the language means learning to know the people who speak it. You can also use role-play as a means of focusing on the appropriate use of language in specific situations, as we will see below.

There is much that people will tell you about how you should and should not behave. Be aware, that the cultural value system is more complex than those who follow it are aware of, and often



the “rule” you are told will be an oversimplification. So you need to keep observing as well as listening. You should record your observations in a journal. Be very wary of learning clear-cut, simple rules of behaviour from fellow foreigners who consider themselves to be experts on the local culture. Your behaviour, like your speech, will start out strange and gradually become more native-like. Don’t expect to behave like a native from day one. On the other hand, you need good friends who will speak up at times when you are being unacceptably weird by their standards. And whenever you experience friction or conflict, you will want to discuss it in detail with a sympathetic friend and find out how you might better have behaved in the situation.

This may seem to be getting away from the topic of language learning, but it really is not. The shared body of beliefs which is essential to understanding speech includes many assumptions about how people should and should not behave. If you reexamine my account of the traffic ticket, you should be able to discover examples of such assumptions.

So then, a basic ingredient of successful language learning is learning to know the people who speak the language, learning to know them in depth, and in detail, learning a large body of knowledge and belief which is shared by all normal speakers of the language, learning about the types of social relationships that exist, and learning values that govern behaviour, including speech behaviour. Some of the techniques and activities discussed below will be in part motivated by Principle III.

#### Chapter 2. A few practical concerns

You now know the three basic requirements for continued progress in language learning:

- Principle I: Expose yourself to massive comprehensible input.
- Principle II: Engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking.
- Principle III: Learn to know the people whose language you are learning.

Though I’ve elaborated on each of them, I’d rather you remember the simple principles than all the other things I have said so far. My elaboration was merely intended to make the principles more meaningful. As I discuss language learning techniques and activities below, these three principles should become more concrete. In the end, if all you remember is the three principles, and if you apply that knowledge systematically, you’ll do all right. You should apply these principles in planning your overall approach to language learning, in designing specific activities, and in evaluating the effectiveness of your language learning strategy.

It should be obvious that I am assuming you want to do more than “just let it happen”. Some people feel they will be successful language learners if they simply “hang around with the people” enough. Or some linguists may feel that if they analyze the grammar and sound system of the language linguistically, they will learn to understand and speak the language without giving it another thought. Such people will experience varying degrees of success, ranging from near zero, to fairly high, depending on a variety of factors (see Thomson 1993d).

The fact that you are reading this makes me think that you yourself would like to put some special thought and effort into your language learning, and to do the best possible job given the constraints of your situation and opportunities. Therefore, I have been assuming that you would recruit a speaker of the language to help you on a regular basis, hopefully even on a daily basis. That will allow for a lot of flexibility in your use of language learning techniques and activities. It may be that the language you are learning is relatively easy, in the sense that it is quite similar to a language which you already know well. To make matters better still, it may be that there are extensive resources for getting comprehensible input—newspapers, television, etc. In such a case, it might not be essential that you have someone help you with the language in regular, structured language sessions. But the more difficult the language, and the more distant the culture, the more important this becomes.

A person who meets with you regularly for the purpose of helping you improve your skill in the language is what I call a Language Resource Person (LRP). If you are to make good use of your times with your LRPs, you will need to spend some time daily in planning and preparing for the sessions. You will also spend time afterward going over tapes you made during your sessions, and reflecting and evaluating what you did, as a basis for further planning. You will probably want to do some record keeping in order to stay organized, and to evaluate your progress. The records will be of several types. You may keep a daily journal in which you describe your experiences in using the language that day (in both listening and speaking), along with cultural observations you have made that day. You will want some sort of planning notebook in which you store the results of needs analyses (see below), and a growing list of social situations and topics from which you will choose when planning your language sessions. Since you will be accumulating a lot of tape recordings, you will want to keep an index of what is where on which tape. If you are a linguist or anthropologist, you will want to be keeping a notebook of linguistic observations, and/or more formal and extensive anthropological notes appropriate to your research project. These can easily be integrated into, or better yet, grow out of, your daily language learning activities.

Now I have made numerous references to language learning activities without describing any of them. I will get to that momentarily. However, before I do, a few final practical concerns need to be addressed which will have a major impact on the scope and intensity of your language learning activities.

Chapter 2.1. How much time do you have?

[Keywords: language learning program, language sessions, planning, time allotted for language learning]

I have suggested elsewhere (Thomson 1993d) that if you intend to participate meaningfully in the society which uses your new language, and if you are starting out from absolute zero ability, then you should plan, if at all possible, to concentrate on language learning for at least the first fifth of your total stay in the location where the language is spoken. If you have done some language learning before arriving, you can shorten this period, though it still would do you no harm to spend this amount of time on additional language learning. The more concentrated time you can devote to it the better. Five hours per week for a hundred weeks is less effective than twenty-five hours per week for twenty weeks. For many people, twenty five hours per week of heavy-duty language learning is exhausting enough to be considered full-time, especially at the beginning. Others may thrive on forty or sixty hours per week. However you define “full-time”, the key is that you be largely free of other work responsibilities, so that the bulk of your mental and emotional resources can be devoted to language learning. How much progress you will make in a given amount of time depends partly on what language you are learning and how similar it is to languages you already know well. In the case of difficult languages, you could realistically spend a lot more than twenty percent of your total time in the country on initial language learning. However, in practice this is rarely possible. In any case, your language learning should continue on a part-time basis for as long as you live there.

If you are unable to do full-time language learning, then the challenge will be to keep your motivation high. Some people have done great language learning while holding down another job, but those people were motivated enough to work at it for a few hours every evening. If you are not able to devote the major part of your time to language learning, then you can still follow my suggestions, though where I speak in terms of actual time spent on activities, you will need to make appropriate mental adjustments. Even if you have only limited time for language learning,

I would still encourage you to have explicit goals as to how much time you will devote to language learning activities of the types I will discuss, or other activities that you may prefer. When I speak of X number of hours spent on language learning, I am referring to three types of activities. The central activities involve structured language sessions in which a speaker of the language works with you in communication activities which help you to increase your ability to understand and to speak the language. You should tape record some or all of what goes on in your session in order to listen to it later, and possibly to go over parts of it in a subsequent session.

The second set of activities are private ones. For example, you may spend a lot of time listening to the tapes that you made in your sessions. You may also write up your observations regarding how the language works, and add vocabulary items to your personal dictionary. If there is a body of literature in the language, you may do extensive reading in it as a private activity. You may also watch television or listen to the radio. So long as you can understand what you are hearing, this will contribute to your acquiring the language. You may also spend some time reading books or articles about the language. Reading about how the grammar works can benefit your language learning in various ways.

The third set of activities are those involved in developing and carrying on a social life. For some people this comes easily. For people like me, it doesn't happen unless I make it happen.

Therefore it really helps if social visiting and other social activities can be made a part of my daily work goals. Thus if I spend thirty hours per week on language learning, these thirty hours might include ten hours spent in language sessions, ten hours of private activities (including the time spent planning and preparing for the language sessions), and ten hours of social visiting and other participation in social activities. Different people will have different blends of these three components, but you should devote reasonable attention to each.

To summarize, the three components of your language learning program are

1. Formal language sessions with someone who is providing comprehensible input and opportunities for extemporaneous speaking.
2. Private activities in which you listen to tapes, read, write, and plan.
3. Social activities in which you use the language, either in understanding messages, in uttering messages, or both.

Suppose your time is limited. Let's say that you can only work on improving your language skills in the evenings and on Saturdays. An important question will be how much interaction you have with speakers of the language in your daily life. If your work involves interacting with people in the language many times every day, then the third component, the social one, will be less crucial, and thus you will want to devote more of your designated language learning time to the first two components. As we will see, you can design your formal language sessions so that they feed into your daily life communication situations. To some extent, you may be able to carry out your private activities while doing other things. In particular, you can listen to tapes made during your sessions while you are washing the dishes, or driving your car, or jogging. It would seem then, that if your designated time for language learning is limited, the best use of what time you do have will be for formal language sessions, that is, times in which you meet with someone for the purpose of tailoring the communication activities so that they clearly contribute to your progress in language learning.

Chapter 2.2. Whom do you have?

[Keywords: goals (proficiency), language associates, resources]

To become a speaker of a language is to come into relationships. In the broadest sense, you come into a relationship with everyone who speaks the language, in that a language can be thought of a

contract which all its users have tacitly agreed to follow. But you will have many specific relationships that are essential to your language learning progress. You cannot learn a language without the right relationships with people. For example, you cannot learn a language very well if your main source of input is television and radio, though these can be valuable resources in a balanced language learning program. From the standpoint of your language learning, the important relationships are of three types:

1. Language Resource Person(s) [LRP s].
2. Other people with whom you spend a fair amount of time communicating—friends, fellow employees, your parole officer, etc.
3. People with whom you interact in very specific types of encounters, such as the postman, the butcher, or the judge.

In Thomson (1993c) I outline a strategy for increasing your network of friends, and recruiting LRPs. With regard to increasing your network of friends the principle is quite simple. Keep meeting people until you find a few who seem to appreciate your company. Become their friends. Then, once you have a few friends, become friends of the best friends (and/or close relatives) of your friends, and then become friends with the best friends (and/or close relatives) of your friends' friends (and/or close relatives). It is easier to become friends with the friend of a friend than with someone who has no reason to give you the time of day. If you can tell Bill, "Hi. I'm a friend of Joe's", and Joe happens to be Bill's best friend, then Bill is likely to be nice to you. Probably Joe has already mentioned you to him anyway, and he is glad to meet you. Once you're important to a bunch of people who are all important to each other, you're a believer. If you haven't yet found an LRP, you should be able to at that point.

Recruiting LRPs is a point at which I personally experience anxiety and internal resistance. Even though I am usually offering to pay people, I still feel that I am somehow asking a major favour, and I guess I'm not a very assertive person. It helps to realize that there are people who really enjoy being LRPs, and that if you ask around enough, and people come forward, the people who come forward are coming forward not because you are imposing on them, but because your request has struck a responsive chord in them.

It is a good idea when first recruiting LRPs that you not even so much as hint at any long term arrangements until you have seen that the person works smoothly with you. So initially, you request help on a one time basis. If things go well, you can request help again from the same person. If you are getting "one time" help from several people, and then settle on one or two as regular LRPs, you will avoid causing anyone to lose face.

You may be saying, "Whoa! This is more than I bargained for. I don't want to hire or otherwise recruit someone to help me on a regular, scheduled basis! Sorry. That's just not how I work." Well, I find I can have far more effective communication experiences during the first months of language learning if I can spend time with someone who knows that the reason we are together is for me to improve my language ability. You may manage to do many of the things I will discuss without resorting to this. For me, having regular LRPs helps to make life predictable, and insures I will stick to my intended goals. If you react against this, it may be O.K., unless it is part of a general reaction against getting involved with people. Perhaps you were thinking that you could learn the language as a recluse. Read Thomson (1993c) if you don't think that "recluse" and "language learner" are a contradiction in terms.

The third category of people whom you need, those with whom you interact in specific kinds of encounters, will be built into the situation. It is important that you evaluate your situation in order to determine all of the specific types of encounters in which you interact with people.

Then you can use part of your time in formal language sessions with your LRP to improve your ability to interact in specific types of encounters.

In pursuing relationships of these three types, there is a big advantage in relationships with people who don't know English (or any other language which you already know well). Since I am assuming that you are already able to speak the new language at least minimally, I would suggest that you consider mainly recruiting LRPs from among such people. In addition, aim to build your network of friendships so that it includes many such people. In many parts of the world, you will find that some people want to spend time with you in order to practice their English. You may want to make an exchange with these people—you spend so much time speaking English with them and they spend an equal amount of time speaking their language with you. However, you might find it difficult or unnatural to speak the new language with someone who already speaks English fairly well. With determination you can overcome your feeling of unnaturalness, but it may be easier if you mainly relate to people who can only speak to you in the new language.

When I learned Blackfoot, there were very few people to talk to who did not speak fluent English. That is an extremely challenging context in which to learn a language. Elsewhere I have presented a strategy for coping with this challenge (Thomson 1993d). In such a highly bilingual situation you are only likely to develop fluency if you employ a well thought out strategy such as the one I discuss there. I repeat the relevant portion here:

After you have a vocabulary of many hundred common items, and can construct a reasonable variety of sentences, it is time to bite the bullet. This may be a month or two following the onset of your full-time language learning. You will tell your language helper something like, "Next Thursday, we will not use any English for a full hour." Come Thursday, you spend an hour during which all communication is in your new language. At times you will get stuck and be unable to get your point across. Jot it down. At times your helper will be unable to get her point across. She jots that down. After the hour is over, you go over your jottings together, and try to learn what it was you lacked which made communication difficult. Repeat these "monolingual hours" once or twice a week until you and your helper are comfortable with them. Then tell her something like, "Week after next we will see if we can go a whole week without using any English."

Just as your monolingual hours seemed uncomfortable at first, so your monolingual week may seem awkward. After all, you still communicate only with great difficulty in the new language, and it would be easy or effortless to carry on in English. But after you are comfortable with an occasional monolingual week, do a monolingual month. Then try a monolingual week, not just with your helper, but with all the other bilingual friends you now have. Do that a few times, and then try a month with your friends. All this time, you are steadily increasing your comprehension ability, perhaps by methods like those I outline in Thomson (1992, 1993a). Even though the community to which you have access is 100% bilingual in English (or some other language you know well), you will find that you reach a point where you can largely abandon English once and for all (in your dealings with the speakers of your new language, that is). While I'm on the topic of people who are important to you in connection with your language learning (and hopefully, important to you in general), I should mention one other category of person: fellow-language learners. Many aspects of language learning require a lot of will-power, and I find that it makes things easier if I am not all alone in my struggles. There may be people of a similar cultural background to yours who are at a similar stage in learning the same language that you are learning. If not, there may at least be people of a similar cultural background who are learning some language or other. As you get together with people, you can share ideas and

frustrations. You may be amazed how this can increase your sense of contentment and motivation.

In the earliest weeks of language learning, I think it is best if you can have one or more co-learners who participate with you in your sessions with your LRP. This adds flexibility to your communication activities, and may make those activities more entertaining (or less boring) for the LRP. However, you are now an intermediate language learner, and it may be better most of the time if you work by yourself with your LRP, since no two people's interests, needs, or rate of progress will be the same. If you do have the opportunity to work with other language learners, a word of warning is in order. Competitiveness can be counterproductive (Bailey, 1983). If you are making better progress than your friend, why don't you hold back a bit during your language sessions. Language learners can have a lot of emotional ups and downs. You don't want to contribute to somebody's downs.

Finally, if at all possible, you ought to stay in touch with a language learning specialist. Such a person will be able to give you special help in evaluating your program and your progress. If you relate to such a person while setting concrete goals, this can provide a tacit relationship of accountability. Such accountability can be tremendously helpful in keeping your motivation high. As a matter of fact, even if no language learning specialist is available to you, as is often the case, you should consider working out some sort of mutual accountability system with a fellow language learner.

Chapter 2.3. What should you learn next?

[Keywords: communication situations, Needs analysis, planning]

Perhaps you have all the time you need, and all the help you need in the form of LRPs, and plenty of friends to visit, and other language learners to encourage you, and you have made yourself accountable either to a language learning specialist or to a fellow language learner. You also grasp the three key principles: you need to expose yourself to massive comprehensible input, to engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking, and to get to know the people in depth. You feel pretty secure. Then suddenly a question occurs to you: What do I learn?

A popular catch word in the field of foreign language education is proficiency (see Higgs, 1984; Omaggio, 1986). By proficiency is meant the ability to use the language for authentic purposes in real-life communication situations. A proficiency oriented course will thus be organized around real life communications situations. You might wonder why anyone would want to learn to use the language for any other purposes.

Strange as it may seem, I believe that it is easy to misapply this concept. I knew someone who said that the language learner living in the second language community should never learn anything that s/he does not specifically plan to use in communication. This person offered the example of a friend who had needed to buy shoes. The friend therefore spent several hours memorizing some specific sentences for use in buying shoes, went out and said the sentences from memory to the shoe seller, and returned home excited at having used the language for an authentic purpose. The problem is, how often do you buy shoes? Perhaps some of the sentences will carry over to other situations, but still, it probably isn't realistic to spend several hours memorizing specific sentences for narrowly defined communication situations. There is simply too much to learn and too few hours available for learning it.

There is a related movement for learning languages for specific purposes (Widdowson, 1983). It is recognized that learners will be more motivated to learn material which relates to their area of special need or special interest. For example, if a man is planning to work as a nurse in Thailand, then he will be more motivated to learn if the material he is learning is going to be useful in

talking to patients and to other health professionals. Once again, a word of caution is in order. I once heard a nonnative English speaker fluently lecture and answer questions related to his special academic field. While answering one of the questions he started to talk about a party he had recently been to, and quickly became tongue-tied. He could talk about his specialized field almost like a native speaker, but he was not nearly as capable of talking about everyday life. Consider our nurse once again. Once he is in his hospital in Thailand he will be getting extensive exposure to the language of nurses and doctors as they talk to patients and talk to each other on work related matters. Obviously he will want to have some basic ability in dealing with such communication before starting work, but you can pretty well guarantee that, in the course of his day to day work, the nurse will have extensive opportunity to improve his job-related speaking ability, even if he develops little ability to use the language for any other purpose. So then, if you have extra time off the job to devote to language learning, there is much to be said for using some of it to improve your general speaking ability, rather than working further on your job-related speaking ability.

What I am getting at is that it is important to take a broadly based approach to learning the language, while also emphasizing your specific communication needs. It is a matter of balance. Yes, you should let your specific needs be a source of ideas as you design your language learning activities. No, you should not limit yourself to your most specific needs. So let's think about analyzing your specific needs. But let's also think about learning the language in more general terms.

#### Chapter 2.3.1. Specific Needs

[Keywords: Needs analysis]

There is a lot written about needs analysis for language learners (see, for example Munby, 1978; Brumfit and Johnson, 1979). A simple, practical approach to needs analysis was devised by Allwright (described in Dickinson, 1987). You may find it helpful when you are trying to decide what to focus on in your language learning.

Here is an adaptation of that approach. The first step is to come up with a list of purposes for which you have needed to use the language in the past, or currently need to use it, or expect to need to use it. It is recommended that you begin with a group of fellow language learners and brainstorm together. After the group discussion, you go off by yourself and make your own list. Try to be specific. For example, you could say that you use the language "for shopping." But you could also break this down into specific types of shopping, and within the context of shopping, there will be more specific communication needs, such as asking for help in finding what you want. Some of the situations reflected in your list may only require listening ability. For example, you may wish to be able to understand sermons in church, or the news broadcast on television. Many of the situations will involve two-way interaction such as bargaining over a price. Your goal is to come up with a long list of purposes for which you have wished to be able to use the language in the past, or wish to be able to use it in the present, or expect to want to be able to use it in the future.

Let's suppose that your list of 101 items includes the following five needs:

Once you have produced your list, go over it, and give each item a numerical rating for the frequency with which the need arises. You can use a rating scale of 1 to 5. If a need occurs with extreme frequency, give it a 5. If it hardly ever occurs, give it a 1.

Now, in addition to frequency, you can rate each need with regard to how essential it is. For example, you may have been able to use a go-between to hire a domestic employee. On the other

hand, you have heard that winning the favour of the immigration official may depend on your ability to use the language. Again, you can use a scale from 1 to 5.

Then you will want to consider each item in terms of how important it is to you personally. That is, is it something you place a lot of value on, apart from its urgency? Having such a rating allows you to bump something up in importance even though the need is neither frequent nor urgent.

Now go back and total up the three ratings, to get a composite rating.

You're not done. You have determined the importance of each of your communication needs, but you next need to determine the extent of your current lack in communication ability in relation to each need. For each item, decide what level of ability is demanded of you in order to fulfill the need. For example, in dealing with the immigration official, you may feel you need to have exquisite communication ability. When it comes to responding to marriage proposals, you may be happy to simply get your point across emphatically. Once you have decided what level of ability you need or desire, decide what level you already have, and subtract it from the level of ability you need or desire. Again you can use scales of 1 to 5, where 5 means exquisite ability, and 1 means very limited ability.

Now, compare your two sets of results. In terms of the rating of needs, your strongest need is item 1, followed by item 52. Items 37, and 51 are tied for third place, although in your full list this might not be the case, since there might be other 10s, 9s, or 8s. But let's assume there are not. Now you might cross item 23 off the list on the basis of its only being a weak need. Item 1 is a strong need (the total rating is 12), but the need is already adequately met by the current ability (the difference between current and desired is 0). So scratch that from the list. Item 37 stays on the list, since it shows the greatest lack (that is, the greatest difference between current and desired ability). Item 51 gets scratched even though it is a fairly strong need, because, as with item 1, there is no lack (difference = 0). Item 52 stays on the list, even though the lack is only moderate (difference = 2), since the need is a strong one (total = 10). So we are left with items 37 and 52.

In practice, each time you perform this sort of needs analysis, you may end up choosing four or five items as the ones most deserving of attention. You may want to repeat the process periodically if you are having difficulty thinking of specific communication needs to work on.

Chapter 2.3.2. General communication ability: Topics and language functions

[Keywords: communicative functions, planning]

So much for specific communication needs. I have noticed that when people do this type of personal needs analysis, they typically include a need such as "general conversational ability" or "ability to make small talk with my neighbors and visitors". Of course, that doesn't really constitute a specific need. What it does is to indicate that learning to communicate in connection with specific needs is not enough. You also need to be developing general communication ability. That is, you would like to be able to easily talk about all the things that a typical native speaker can easily talk about. You would like to know all the vocabulary that is known to a typical native speaker. For example, the need for you to know the word for the human navel may not yet have arisen. You have no way of predicting when that need will arise. But the word is one that is known to any four-year-old child, and it is a word that any full-fledged speaker of the language must know. That is, the first time someone uses it, and you indicate ignorance of its



meaning, it will be clear that there are still very basic vocabulary items that, for some strange reason, you don't know. It is not a good idea to wait until you hear such vocabulary in real-life communication before worrying about learning it. A large portion of the vocabulary that confronts you in real life will be in this category, and you'll be better off if you have made the effort to become familiar with it in advance. That will increase the percentage of input that is comprehensible, and decrease your dependence on communication strategies. So in the case of the word for the human navel, why not become familiar with it during a session with your LRP when you deliberately spend a lot of time discussing the human body and most of its parts, and some of their functions. Then the first time that the word for navel arises in real-life communication, say in a story you are listening to, you will already know it, and your comprehension of the story won't suffer as a result.

There are countless topics that fall into the category of everyday topics. One of the best ways to come up with a list of such topics is to frequently walk through the community and take note of items and activities which any typical speaker of the language would be expected to be able to discuss. You can keep this list in the same notebook as your needs list, and refer to it as you plan your daily language learning activities. Van Ek (1975) provides an extensive list of settings and topics which would be important to an adult language learner in a European country. It is reprinted in Brumfit and Johnson (1979) and Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983). In other parts of the world you will need to come up with your own list. Van Ek (1975) also provides a list of the functions which language fulfills (e.g. describing, warning, consoling, etc.). It is also reprinted in Brumfit and Johnson (1979) and Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), and in the U.S. Defense Language Institutes modified form, as applied to Greek, in Omaggio (1986). This list can be taken as more universal, although the details of how the functions are carried out will vary from language to language. A very important source of ideas for settings and functions is Larson (1984), since it is built around a concept of a language learner who is in the process of becoming integrated into a new society.

One useful collection of language functions is found in Moran (1990), where each language function is illustrated by a cartoon strip with empty bubbles. The cartoons are somewhat based on a European setting, though many of them would be applicable in most parts of the world. The functions of language represented in Moran's cartoon strips include greetings, leave-takings, interrupting, apologizing, answering the door, begging, refusing, declining an offer, offering help, requesting help, consoling, thanking, warning, making an introduction, responding to an introduction, asking directions, complimenting, expressing condolences, extending an invitation, expressing distaste, answering the telephone, expressing delight, expressing displeasure, congratulating, expressing pain, expressing fear, requesting permission, getting someone's attention, asking for repetition, expressing ignorance, encouraging, accusing, seeking reassurance, expressing fear, remembering, welcoming, asking about health, requesting permission to speak, reprimanding, expressing disappointment, expressing affection, and calming someone down.

When considering such functions you need to bear in mind that there may be a large number of possible ways to fulfill each function, and your choice among the possibilities may partly depend on

1. your social standing relative to the person you are talking to,
2. how well you know the person,
3. who is listening, and
4. the circumstances under which the communication occurs.

In other words, as you work on specific language functions, don't expect to simply memorize a single sentence for each function! You might consider role-play as a means of exploring language functions as they are carried out with a variety of speakers and hearers in a variety of circumstances.

In summary, as you plan the content of your language learning activities you should be moving forward on two fronts. On the one hand, you should be learning to deal with the specific areas of communication that are most important to you. On the other hand, you should be learning to discuss all the areas of life which a normal speaker of the language is able to discuss, and you should be learning to use the language for all of the functions for which it is normally used.

### Chapter 3. Things to do to keep on keeping on

In discussing comprehensible input, I referred to four stages of language learning. It is a good idea at any given point to gear your overall approach to language learning to your current stage. My assumption has been that the first stage is just behind you. To review briefly, the four stages are as follows:

1. At Stage I, you had difficulty understanding speech that was not clearly supported by pictures, objects or actions.
2. At Stage II, you have difficulty understanding speech unless the content is fairly predictable, or else is carefully and tediously negotiated with a sympathetic native speaker.
3. At Stage III, you have difficulty understanding speech unless the topic is one with which you are familiar, and you have the full context, or the meaning is negotiated with a native speaker.
4. At Stage IV, you are able to get at least a general understanding of just about anything you hear, even if it is totally out of context, and you merely happen to overhear it as you pass by. Now it may be that you are actually past Stage II. In any case, if you are planning to devote a fair portion of your time to language learning for the next two years, you will spend most of that time in Stage III, provided you have an effective means for moving quickly through Stages I and II. In Thomson (1993a) I proposed a program for moving through Stage I and getting well into Stage II. Here I will assume that you are just barely into Stage II. Some of the ideas from Thomson (1993a) are repeated here, since I want to start at the beginning of Stage II.

#### Chapter 3.1. Stage II language learning activities

[Keywords: activities for language learning, language sessions]

You have now learned to recognize many hundreds of common words together with a variety of sentence patterns. You can use a steadily increasing number of these words to construct sentences of your own. But you still don't feel that you can say very much. We'll approach the language learning activities in terms of the three basic principles:

1. Some activities will be aimed at providing comprehensible input at an appropriate level of difficulty.
2. Some activities will be aimed at providing the opportunity for extemporaneous speaking, and
3. Some of the activities will be aimed at helping you to get to know the people in the ways that are necessary for you to speak and comprehend the language easily.

Often, two or three of the principles are combined in a single activity.

In terms of comprehensible input, some of your activities in Stage II will be aimed at exposing you to long sequences of connected sentences in which the overall content of what is being said is fairly predictable. In the process, your vocabulary will continue to grow, and your ability to comprehend speech will continue to improve. In terms of extemporaneous speaking, the main concern in Stage II is to loosen up your tongue, and get you into the habit of managing to get

your point across, often by means of achievement strategies. In terms of getting to know the people, among other things, you will be learning about many simple daily activities—how they are conducted and how they are described.

Recall that your language learning activities are carried on in three settings: some activities you conduct on your own, some you conduct in structured sessions with your LRP, and some you conduct as a part of social visiting or other outside social participation. Sometimes all three settings are used for closely interrelated activities. For example, during your private time you go over earlier language sessions and plan the next one; during your social visiting, you often tell your friends all about what you have been learning to talk about in your formal sessions; during your sessions, you specifically prepare for outside social participation; etc.

#### Chapter 3.1.1. Getting lots of comprehensible input in stage II

[Keywords: audio recordings, comprehensible input, intermediate learners, language sessions, stages of language acquisition, vocabulary]

At this stage, comprehensible input can start to take off. Perhaps you can comprehend many snatches of the speech that you hear around you, but it does not provide you with massive comprehensible input. To get comprehensible input in large quantities you need to get people to talk to you in such a way that the content of what they say is fairly predictable. You may benefit from other input as well. Already, there will be various highly routine events which you have learned to participate in, and to talk about. But in terms of input which will be both comprehensible, and moderately challenging, and which will steadily increase your vocabulary and your ability to understand speech in general, it will be the long stretches of relatively predictable speech that will help you the most. You will probably depend largely on your LRP to provide this concentrated comprehensible input, though other friends can help out.

A typical pattern will be to have your LRP talk to you in your session, and record what she says on tape. You will then listen to the tape on your own time, noting parts you do not understand or have questions about. Then you will go over the tape bit by bit with the LRP in a subsequent session, discussing what she said and getting your questions answered. By that time you will be thoroughly familiar with the taped material and can listen to it again on your own time, repeatedly, with full or nearly full comprehension. A final step might be to attempt to retell the material in your own words. You could do this first with your LRP in the language session, and record your effort. Then, together with your LRP, listen to your recording, and get her to give you pointers on ways you might better have expressed yourself. Finally, retell the material in your own words to various friends during social visits. This basic pattern—tape the LRP, listen to the tape privately, go over the tape with the LRP, listen to the tape privately, retell the material in your own words to several people—can be used with many of the activities I discuss here. So let's get on with getting some comprehensible input.

The first category of comprehensible input has been illustrated already when I talked about having someone tell you the story of Goldilocks. You may not know the word for bear, but I bet you'll catch on to it quickly and remember it permanently. The same will be true of a variety of other new vocabulary and possibly even some new sentence patterns. But just a minute. What if your LRP doesn't know the story of Goldilocks? Well, if she can read, you may be able to provide the story in another language for her to read. If not, you can get a fellow language learner to help out by telling such stories to a bilingual LRP in whatever other language she knows. You can return the favour by telling the bilingual LRP stories which she can retell to your fellow language learner in the same way.

When your fellow language learner has told this bilingual LRP the story of Goldilocks, or Little Red Riding Hood, or The Three Pigs, the LRP doesn't need to let you know which story it is.

When the LRP begins telling you the story in your new language, you will get to guess which story it is. Likewise when you have told the bilingual LRP a story for retelling to your fellow language learner, you can sit and observe as s/he attempts to identify the story.

There won't be a large number of stories that are as familiar as Goldilocks, but you can easily familiarize yourself with a number of simple stories from children's books or other sources which can be used for this purpose. On one occasion my LRP was familiar with Bible stories, as were my co-learner and I, and he used this technique with us. This allowed for some very lengthy stories, such as the Old Testament story of Joseph. (If a modern idiomatic translation of the Bible or any other familiar book exists in the language you are learning, you will find that regular reading provides a good source of comprehensible input, and you can also have someone read such material aloud into a tape recorder for you to listen to privately.)

Such stories are a good means of getting started in understanding long sequences of connected sentences. In addition to fairy stories and stories from long ago, recent events in the community or in the world may be well known to both your LRP and you. Also, you and your LRP can engage in various activities together. For example, you might attend some spectators' event, or a wedding, or go planting or hunting together, or make a trip to the market, or to the big city, or to some special attraction in the big city. Afterward you can get your LRP to tell a fellow language learner, in great detail, all that you and she did together. This may not be all that comprehensible to your fellow language learner, but it will be great comprehensible input for you. Since you are well aware of everything you did together, what she says will be predictable enough to make it good Stage II input.

A well-known language learning method dating from the nineteenth century will be most fruitful during Stage II, since it provides predictable spoken input. This is the Series Method. It can be used for practicing speaking or comprehension, but my main focus at this point is on comprehension. Have your LRP provide you with comprehensible input by telling you in great detail each step in many familiar processes and activities. Such a sequence of details, or steps in an activity or process, is called a series. Consider the example of washing one's hands. How do you do it? First you turn on the cold water tap. Then, you turn on the hot water tap while feeling the water. If it gets too hot, you turn down the hot water or turn up the cold water. Then you hold your hands in the running water. When your hands are wet, you pick up the soap. You rub the soap all over both hands. Suds form on your hands. You put the soap back down. You then rub your hands all over each other, briskly. Then you rinse the soap off your hands. You pick up the towel. You rub the towel briskly over both hands. Then you hang the towel back up.

Another example might be all the steps in making a pot of tea. Moran (1990) provides a sequence of pictures for this particular series, which may help to prime your LRP. However, it seems likely that you could come up with a lot more steps in the process than are illustrated there. The same is true of Romijn and Seely (1988), which provides series-like sequences for use with Total Physical Response; that is, the language learner is actually supposed to act out the series, as each instruction is given by the LRP. If you have a hard time coming up with ideas for series, keep a running list of everything you do throughout an entire day. You will end up with enough ideas for series to keep you going for awhile. For additional ideas, take a walk, and make notes of the human activities that you observe. Some of them will be familiar to you, being similar to activities in your own culture, and others will be unfamiliar. It is the familiar ones that are most useful to you at this point, since they are predictable to you. The unfamiliar ones are more appropriate at Stage III when you will work at becoming familiar with new topics.

If you put a little thought into it, you can use the series method in a variety of ways. To use the example of washing hands, you can have the LRP simply tell you how she does it in general:

“First I turn on the cold water tap. Then, I turn on the hot water tap...” But you can also have her do it right while she performs the activities (or mimes them), “I am turning on the cold water tap. Now, I am turning on the hot water tap...”. Or you can have her tell you how she is later going to wash her hands before eating: “First I will turn on the cold water tap. Then, I will turn on the hot water tap...”. And you can use various complicated patterns: “First I turn on the cold water tap. After I have turned on the cold water tap, I turn on the hot water tap. After I have turned on the hot water tap, I pick up the soap. After I have picked up the soap...”. Get all the mileage you can out of this method in terms of increasing your ability to understand specific types of sentences. What those sentence patterns will be will depend on which language you are learning. But as a new pattern comes to your attention, the Series Method will sometimes provide a means of exposing yourself to a lot of comprehensible input which highlights that pattern.

Recall that you are tape-recording all of this comprehensible input. That way you can listen to it numerous times. There is another important use of these tapes. They will contain a lot of new vocabulary. You can go through them with your LRP and spot each new vocabulary item in context. As you do this, make a second tape—a vocabulary tape. In the vocabulary tape, the LRP first says the vocabulary item, and then repeats the entire sentence in which it occurred, and then says the isolated vocabulary item again. If you are a full-time language learner, and your sessions with your LRP (or LRPs) are two hours long or longer, you may be able to add twenty-five or thirty new vocabulary items to this tape every day. You can privately listen to the new items of the day several times, along with some review items. You may be surprised how easily you learn the new vocabulary and how well you retain it. The LRP may need to choose some basic form of a vocabulary item to use when saying the word in isolation. For verbs, this might be an infinitive form (to slurp) or a first person singular form (I slurp) or a third person singular form (s/he slurps), or perhaps the imperative form (Slurp!). For nouns it might be the third person singular form that is used when the noun functions as the subject of a sentence, as does the word alligator in the sentence Two alligators chased my cat away from the bank. In this case, the tape would go as follows: “Alligator. (Pause) Two alligators chased my cat away from the bank. (Pause) Alligator.” If finding the right form of the word to use in isolation gets confusing, then the LRP can simply use whatever form of the word occurs in the sentence. Note that there is no translation of the new vocabulary item (that is, of alligator). Having the full sentence with the new item in context will be enough to remind you of the meaning, and you will be reinforcing the item in your memory as a part of the new language, rather than as a translation of some English word.

In addition to the types of relatively predictable speech I’ve been discussing, there will be other sources of comprehensible input during Stage II. Conversational interaction, both with your LRP during language sessions, and with friends in general, will be a major source, so in the next section, when we talk about extemporaneous speaking in Stage II, we’ll still be talking about comprehensible input. If you are learning a major world language you might consider watching a movie which has been dubbed from English into that language. First watch the movie in English. Then watch it in the other language. (I’m assuming you can rent the videos.) You may find that the speech in the movie becomes increasingly comprehensible with repeated viewings. (Movies with printed captions are a poor substitute.)

For some languages there may be commercially prepared tapes which were intended for Stage I language learners. In general, these are more appropriate as comprehensible input for Stage II language learners! When I was learning Urdu, I was given a tape with perhaps a hundred “useful expressions” that was intended to be memorized. Memorizing all of that would have eaten up a lot of the time I had available during Stage I for actually learning to comprehend, and to a lesser

extent, to creatively speak, my new language. At Stage II it was easy to listen to the tape, understanding what I was hearing. At that point many of the forms of expression were easily absorbed and naturally used. For many languages there are a variety of commercially prepared tapes, either designed for travelers, or designed to accompany text books. You can use these as additional sources of comprehensible input during Stage II. It may be that the variety of language used in such tapes is overly formal, and not what is used for everyday purposes. Why not listen to such materials together with your LRP and discuss them (in the new language, of course)?

### Chapter 3.1.2. Getting your tongue loose in stage II

[Keywords: communication situations, communication strategies, extemporaneous communication, production, reverse role-play, role-playing, stages of language acquisition]

During Stage I, your ability to speak the language was extremely limited. During Stage II you will reach the point where, by using communication strategies, you can usually succeed in getting your point across to a sympathetic friend. At the end of Stage I, you felt like you did not have a lot of freedom in communication. By the end of Stage II you will feel that you do have a lot of freedom. This change will come as a result of extensive efforts at extemporaneous speaking.

You know many hundreds of the most important vocabulary items, and you are familiar with a wide range of basic sentence patterns. Yet it is a struggle for you to say very much. Here is an exercise. Think of one of the most interesting events from your childhood. It must be one that you have not yet related to anyone in your new language. Find a sympathetic listener. Your best choice would be your regular LRP during your regular language session. Inform her that you are going to tell her a story from your childhood, and that you will absolutely refuse to revert to English (or any other language that you both know well) for even a single word. It is important that you do no advance planning or preparation. Don't spend several days imagining how you will express yourself. You should do this absolutely cold. As you tell the story, make a tape recording of yourself talking. Don't listen to that tape recording, but store it in a safe place. Done? If you are at the beginning of Stage II, you probably found the experience stretching, to say the least. Now forget about that story. Don't try to tell it again to anyone for a few weeks. Then, as you are getting into Stage III, tell this same story to someone else, again taping it. Now compare the new tape with the earlier one. You will notice that your tongue has really loosened up. How did it loosen up? Through lots and lots of extemporaneous communication.

So what you need are activities that will keep you talking. Telling stories from your own past is one good way to do a lot of talking. You may think you have nothing interesting to tell, but you should nevertheless have plenty to tell. You might start by thinking through your whole life story to date. Spend an hour or so making lots of notes. You may find that you will have enough to keep you talking for several language sessions. Whenever you engage in conversational practice with your LRP you should tape record it. I have found that a stereo tape recorder which accepts two microphones is useful for this. Lapel microphones work well, since they stay relatively close to the sound source without being a distraction. Tell your LRP that you want to learn to talk all about your previous life experiences, and also to learn about hers. You can give your family's background, and talk about your earliest memories, describing the setting, and the general details of your early life. As you get stuck, your LRP will attempt to help you. It is good if you don't break into English (or any other language that you both know well) at these points. Rather, you can come back to them afterwards. You and your LRP can listen to those parts of the tape. If she is bilingual, you can tell her, say in English, what you were trying to say, or wanted to say in her language. She can then tell you how you might have said it. You can tape all of this discussion. It shouldn't be too long before you are consistently able to negotiate the desired

meaning without resorting to another language. Early on, you may find this helpful at times. But it is better if you do it after you have finished the story, so that you have the experience of extended extemporaneous speaking without reverting to another language.

At the spots where you did have difficulty getting your point across, you need to identify the nature of the problem. If the problem was that you lacked the necessary vocabulary, have the LRP record the relevant word or idiom on your vocabulary tape in the manner described earlier: first she says the vocabulary item in isolation, then she says the whole sentence which contains the item, then she says the item again. You can record this right onto the tape of your language session and later dub it onto your ever growing vocabulary tape. (I find that I use at least two tape recorders for all the things that I do with tapes, usually a small stereo one for making tapes, and listening to them as I travel about, and a larger double cassette for dubbing, and listening to tapes at home.)

Getting back to your trouble spot, the problem may not have been related to vocabulary. It might have resulted from your not knowing a particular sentence form. Then you can create a communication situation in which you can hear that form over and over as comprehensible input. For example, suppose you needed to be able to express the idea of one person making another person do something. You might have your LRP talk about many situations where one person makes another person do things: school teachers make children read aloud; traffic police make people stop; parents make children be quiet in church; the government makes people pay taxes; etc. After she has come up with many examples, you might come up with many more of your own, attempting to formulate your own sentences. In the case of some sentence patterns, the Series Method will provide a ready-made means of emphasizing the detail that you wish to focus on. In the discussion above I showed how it can be used to provide a lot of repetition of a particular sentence pattern.

As you cover various phases and details of your life, you can encourage your LRP to share similarly. Much of what she says may be a challenge for you to understand, but you can replay those parts of the tape to her. Rather than simply asking, "What does that mean?", why not attempt to explain to her, in the new language, of course, what you think she might have meant, and let her correct you, also in the new language.

Another important source of ideas for discussion in the language is your day to day life while you are learning the language. It is a good idea each day to tell your LRP or someone else everything you did the day before. Tape record your account, and then go over the tape with your LRP or friend. Stop at spots where you had difficulty, and decide whether the difficulty was due to a lack of vocabulary, or sentence patterns, and then handle the problem area in the ways already suggested. You might get your LRP to also give an account of her previous day's activities, and go over that with her.

Remember, it is a good idea if you follow up on whatever you converse about with your LRP by conversing about the same thing with a few friends whom you visit or who visit you.

Remember, if you are a full-time language learner, such social visiting should be viewed as part of your ordinary work day. If you have been working at developing relationships, there should be a small number of people who know you well enough that they can communicate with you successfully. As I say, there is a big advantage to communicating with familiar people as opposed to strangers. You will be more relaxed with them, which will make it much easier for you to process and respond to what they are saying. And they will have a good feel for your current level of ability, and will therefore be able to communicate with you at a level that you can handle. Whereas much of what a stranger attempts to say to you initially may be unintelligible to you, your good friends will be able to rattle on and on to you in language that

you can understand. It is not that they will speak at the same level that you do. Rather they will speak at a level at which you can comprehend, which will be beyond the level you speak at. As you are exposed to speech which is beyond your current speaking ability, but within reach of your current comprehension ability, you will be receiving precisely the level of comprehensible input that you need for your speaking ability to continue to grow beyond its present state. Part of your learning should be related to your specific needs list, as discussed above at some length. These needs may be framed in terms of topics you need to be able to discuss, or in terms of real life situations in which you need to be able to communicate. If a need is stated in terms of a topic, you can use an approach similar to the one I suggested for telling stories from your life. Suppose you want to be able to discuss child care. Make some notes (in English) on the topic of child care. Then attempt to talk about child care to your LRP. You might discuss the topic of child care as it is carried out within your own culture, and ask your LRP for reactions from the standpoint of her culture, tape recording the entire interchange. Then go over the tape, and focus on places where you had trouble communicating in either direction. If the communication problem was due to your lack of vocabulary or sentence patterns, you might focus on these. If the communication problem was caused by your lack of knowledge of this aspect of the culture, then you will want to discuss this area of the culture (in the local language) at some length. Now, having discussed this topic thoroughly with your LRP, you are in a better position to discuss it with friends while on social visits. By the time you have discussed the topic of child care with four or five friends, you should find that your ability to discuss this particular topic has improved markedly.

Others of the needs in your needs list will be stated in terms of situations in which you need to communicate, such as “responding to a proposal of marriage”. For starters, there is much to be gained from treating these situations as topics, that is, learning to talk about these situations and talking about them extensively with a number of people. Another good technique for learning to communicate in specific situations is role-play. In any communication situation there are at least two roles: the role you have, and the role of the person with whom you interact. For example, your role might be that of a bank customer, and the other person’s role might be that of a bank teller. Now you want to learn to talk like a bank customer, not like a bank teller. Therefore, in role-play, you should take the role of the bank teller.

“Just a minute”, you say. “How will I learn to talk like a bank customer if I take the role of a bank teller?” Well, how else do you expect to learn? If you start out by taking the role of bank customer, assuming you are doing this because you don’t yet know how to talk like a bank customer, you won’t know how to talk. True, you don’t know how to talk like a teller either, but that is less important, since that is not what you mainly want to learn. But as you play the role of teller, your LRP or friend will talk to you in the role of a customer. Now you will hear how a customer talks, and even make a tape of it. Of course, you may foul things up by not behaving like a proper bank teller. But now that you have some idea of what a customer says, you can trade roles, and get some idea of what a teller actually says. Then switch back, and have a somewhat more authentic role-play in which you hear a better example of what a customer says, which is what you mainly want to learn. You do also want to learn the sorts of things you might expect the teller to say, since that will make it easier for you to understand the teller in real life. You can repeat this role-play with a number of friends. It is good if you can record any role-play with a number of people, since you want to get a general idea of how to talk in a given role, and what you will have to respond to, rather than just memorizing a single example of how somebody did it during a single role-play. You can listen to the tapes many times.



One special type of role-play is called Strategic Interaction (see Di Pietro 1987). In Strategic Interaction, each role-play is centered around what Di Pietro calls a scenario. In a scenario, there is some complicating factor which demands creative communication. For example, in the case of the bank customer and teller, the bank teller might be given a record of the customer's account which says that it is overdrawn, and the customer is given a play bank book which shows that there is still a healthy balance. The two records could differ in terms of both deposits and withdrawals. The problem might be that there are two account holders with the same name, but different account numbers, and the teller is unknowingly looking at the account record of the other person. The account number is conspicuous enough that it will eventually be noticed by either the customer or the teller. Through spoken interaction they would first become entangled in the problem and eventually find the solution. Obviously, this would require the help of a third party (such as a fellow language learner) who would invent the scenario so that the nature of the complicating factor would be unknown to the participants. An excellent approach to any type of role-play is to first observe pairs or groups of native speakers performing the role-play before you attempt to do so yourself. This should be especially productive in the case of Strategic Interaction.

An excellent way to find weaknesses in your general speaking ability is to attempt to do on-the-spot oral translation of written material. This prevents you from using avoidance strategies, forcing you, rather, to develop new areas of language ability. A wide variety of printed material can be used for this purpose. In Pakistan we found a book that contained a number of first person accounts of people's daily work. Each account was two or three pages long. They were written in English, but the subject matter dealt entirely with life in Pakistan. The idea of this technique is not to translate simultaneously while reading. Rather, you read several sentences which form a natural unit, perhaps a paragraph. When you have grasped this whole unit, look away from the printed material, and tell your LRP or friend what you have just read. You may prefer to think of this as retelling rather than translating. But you are reading the material in a language that you know well, and retelling it in the language that you are learning. In the book about people's daily work in Pakistan, there was one account of a fisherman. At one point the fisherman says that the fish are either sold by weight, or at auction. Consider the phrases by weight and at auction. Both of these could be a challenge to a Stage II language learner. The language learner may initially get the meaning across using achievement strategies. That is, s/he may give descriptions or examples of what s/he means, expressing the ideas in roundabout ways (try it). S/he would then ask the LRP for the correct way to express these meanings. The advantage of translating is that it forces the learner to relinquish control over what s/he is going to say, and to break new ground when the need arises. Otherwise, s/he can get into the habit of staying in comfortable, familiar territory. Being forced to express every meaning on the page that is translated can be a helpful, stretching experience. This technique is appropriate once you are well into Stage II, and in Stage III.

Apart from such focused communication activities, a good part of your speaking efforts will occur in uncontrolled social situations where you have to attempt to cope with whatever comes your way as the need arises. Your ultimate goal is to be able to do just that, easily, and in any situation. However, by employing somewhat structured and focused communication activities with an LRP as a means of improving your ability, you will find that you can progress more quickly than if you leave your communication experiences entirely to the whims of fortune.

#### Chapter 3.1.3. Keeping organized during stage II

[Keywords: comprehensible text corpus, language sessions, planning]

It should be obvious that you need to spend a reasonable amount of time in preparing for your daily sessions with your LRP, and you may also want to put some thought and preparation into your informal social visiting as well. Your ideas for your next day's session will partly emerge as you go over what you did in today's session, and you can supplement this with ideas from your needs list. All of this planning would occur during your private language learning time, which might consume two hours altogether, during which time you will also engage in various other private activities, as I have discussed. Then you might spend two hours working with your LRP, and two hours in social visiting. You can spend additional time listening to comprehensible tapes while you are washing dishes, showering, cycling, skiing, or sleeping. And hopefully, you will be keeping your journal up to date, recording your daily experiences as a language learner and participant observer in the new culture. Make special notes of times of tension or conflict, and of times of communication difficulty or communication breakdown. You may also think of things to add to your needs list while writing in your journal.

The use of your tape recordings brings me back to your concern for massive comprehensible input. As you listen to tape recordings of your language session, it is good if you use a double cassette to dub important bits of the session onto another tape. Periodically, say once a month, you can dub samples of your own speech onto another tape in order to observe the improvement in your performance. Every day you will want to dub key portions of the speech of your LRP or other native speakers onto a more condensed tape. For example, every time your LRP uses the Series Method and tells you all the minute steps in some common activity, you will add this your condensed tape. In general, any stretches of speech by your LRP or other native speaker which contain new content, and which you can understand, should be added. If there are stretches that you cannot understand, you can dub these onto yet another tape, and later go over them with your LRP.

Going over difficult segments will provide the basis for a lot of extemporaneous conversational practice in subsequent sessions. With the help of your LRP, you will come to understand these difficult segments, and will then be able to add them to the collection of material that you can comprehend. The collection of taped material that you can comprehend is what I have elsewhere called a "comprehensible corpus" (Thomson 1992). The term corpus is used by linguists to describe their entire collection of speech samples for a language they have studied. Your comprehensible corpus is an ever growing collection of taped speech segments with which you become familiar by discussing them with your LRP as necessary, and by repeatedly listening to them. By the end of your full-time language learning period, you may have a comprehensible corpus of forty or fifty hours. Being familiar with such a large sample of speech will contribute to your general feel for the language. This general feel for the language will be the basis for continued progress in your ability to speak it yourself.

Chapter 3.1.4. Principle III during stage II: getting to know the people who speak the language you are learning

[Keywords: social visiting]

Most of the activities discussed so far contribute to your getting to know the people who speak the language you are learning. Take the Series Method. On one occasion I wanted a Pakistani man to demonstrate the Series Method to a group of people, using his village language, which we had all been learning for a few days. In order to give him the basic idea of the Series Method, I ran through a series in Urdu. It involved making tea, and I had all of the ingredients and the pot there with me to use as props as I spoke. After I had gone through all of the steps in making tea, describing what I was doing right as I did it, I asked this man if he would now do the same thing using his village language. To my chagrin, he responded, "Is it O.K. if I make the tea the way

we do it here in Pakistan?” I then saw the steps I should have followed. Thus the Series Method led me into sharing this area of human experience with Pakistanis in general.

Or consider the use of familiar stories like Little Red Riding Hood. These may not tell you a lot about how local people think. However, after hearing the version which you already know, you might ask the speaker to retell the story in a localized version, as though the events of the story had occurred in that part of the world, within that culture. This may be necessary even at the first telling in some cases. For example, I found the story of the three little pigs in a published Urdu booklet, but the pigs had been changed to rabbits, since most Muslims are uncomfortable talking about pigs. (The pictures were still pictures of pigs, but in the written story they were always referred to as rabbits!)

As your LRP or friends tell you of familiar recent events, or of activities you have shared together, you will begin learning to see local events through local eyes. And as you relate your past life experiences to the life experiences of your LRP and friends, or discuss topics such as child care, or whatever, you will be expanding your awareness of the world in which your new language is used. Role-play will further contribute to your learning the language as a vehicle of local thought and life, rooted in local experience.

#### Chapter 3.1.4.1. Focusing on Social Skills

[Keywords: culture shock, interactional skills, journaling, role-playing]

During your daily journal writing or at other times of reflection, you will be making note of times when you experienced interpersonal tension, discomfort, or conflict. These are part of a universal phenomenon among language learners who are living in the second language community: culture shock. Furnham and Bochner (1986) are leading experts on this topic. They observe that culture shock is often discussed as if it were some sort of mental illness, or, in their words, an intrapsychic pathology. They argue that the source of culture shock is not inside the individual. Rather it lies in what happens between people. It is not intrapsychic in origin, but interpersonal. The key to overcoming it, in their view, is to discover the interpersonal causes. The interpersonal causes of culture shock can be understood in terms of specific social skills which you need for functioning in the new society, but have not yet acquired. Social skills are the skills you need for behaving appropriately in interpersonal interactions. Furnham and Bochner believe that to some extent, social skills can be consciously learned and practiced. For example, there may be specific social skills related to warding off flirtatious advances. You lack these skills, since you did not grow up in this culture. But you can learn them through role-play. In reflecting on times of interpersonal tension, discomfort or conflict, you want to be especially concerned with recurring causes of interpersonal stress. The fact that a problem frequently recurs is a dead giveaway to the fact that you are lacking a social skill. You can learn a lot about the problem area simply by discussing it with a variety of people and learning their perspective on the situation. But you can also work on developing the specific skill through role-play. In this application of role-play, you might perform in a given role in the manner you typically do in real life. Your LRP can thus see how you approach it. Then your LRP can show you how she would handle the situation. Finally, you can perform the role-play using the LRP's approach. Bear in mind that in any culture, different individuals have different levels of social skills. At this point, however, even people with relatively poor social skills probably have better ones in that society than you do.

#### Chapter 3.1.4.2. Conversational-interactional skills

[Keywords: conversation, interactional skills]

There are certain social skills which are involved in carrying on a conversation. These differ from one culture to the next. For example, in an English conversation, there are a variety of ways

the current speaker can continue to “hold the floor”, and a variety of ways the current speaker can give up the floor. To use a simple example, if the speaker says, “Do you know what happened next?” it means that s/he will continue to hold the floor, though you may insert a quick “Mm-hmm”, or some other appropriate word or phrase, while earnestly shaking your head. On the other hand, if the speaker says, “What would you have done in that situation?” the effect is to relinquish the floor to the listener, who then becomes the speaker. One way to give up the floor is to simply fall silent. But how long does the speaker need to remain silent before the listener is free to start talking? That depends entirely on the language and the culture. And there will be some way to hold the floor while you grope for words. Languages have what are called hesitation devices, such as the ubiquitous English “uh”. These can be most helpful to the language learner! Languages and cultures will differ with regard to the acceptability of interrupting, or talking while the other person is still talking, and each language and culture will have its own ways of interrupting. You will notice that the listeners in a conversation follow social rules. Rather than sit there looking dead, the listeners will respond in various ways, either with words or other vocal sounds, or with non-verbal communication such as head movement and facial expressions, or with both verbal and non-verbal communication. An example occurred above when the listener said, “Mm-hmm.”

Like other aspects of language and culture, you can learn a certain amount about the rules for conversational interaction by careful observation. However, again as with other aspects of language and culture, you will acquire a large amount subconsciously through massive exposure to people who are conducting conversational interactions.

Chapter 3.1.5. Focusing on special aspects of the language

[Keywords: accuracy, drills, grammar, paradigms (grammatical), passive voice, tenses]

If you're at all like me, you probably keep wondering when I will get around to talking about learning the grammar of the language, and improving the accuracy with which you speak the language. How do you find your mistakes? How do you overcome them?

Actually, I haven't been ignoring this issue. First of all, I pointed out that the vast majority of grammatical features of the language, and rules for interaction in the language, you will absorb from comprehensible input in your language sessions and real life situations. As you become thoroughly familiar with the language, you will naturally acquire the ability to use the language correctly with respect to countless details. You will not be aware of most of those details. If you are a linguist, you may be aware of a lot of details. But even if you are a linguist, you will acquire far more than you will be aware of, simply by becoming thoroughly familiar with the language, through massive exposure to comprehensible input.

Secondly, I have talked about things you might do when communication is difficult or when it breaks down. This may happen, for example, while you are relating your activities of the previous day to your LRP. In that case the breakdown may occur because you lack certain vocabulary or sentence patterns. Similarly, if you are unable to understand part of what your LRP or friend says to you, it may be because you lack vocabulary or sentence patterns, or it may be because you lack some area of knowledge regarding local life and culture. When the problem involves a sentence pattern that you have not learned, I suggested that you engage in some communication activity that will provide you with a large amount of exposure to that pattern. For example, Carol Orwig recently told me of learning Nugunu, an African language in which there is a special verb tense form that is used for events which occurred on the previous day, as opposed to events further in the past. It was easy for her to get a lot of exposure to this form by getting people to recount their previous day's activities. And it was easy to get a lot of practice using this form by recounting her own previous day's activities.

Most grammatical details will naturally occur with high frequency in specific kinds of speech. With a small amount of ingenuity you should be able to think of a way to engage in communication which will contain a large number of examples of the particular sentence form you wish to focus on. Or you can just make a point of using a particular form even if it is somewhat artificial. For example, one linguist who was learning Japanese spent a half day per week in the home of a Japanese couple. Part of the time they devoted to using English in order to benefit her hosts' language learning, and part of the time they devoted to Japanese, for the benefit of her own language learning. She would sometimes have a particular sentence pattern in mind and try to use it as often as possible. For example, one week she focused on passive sentences in Japanese. So instead of saying, "Someone helped me", she might say, "I was helped". This gave her a lot of practice with the sentence pattern, but it may have led to an unnaturally high incidence of this pattern in her speech, or she may have sometimes used the pattern when it was inappropriate. Nevertheless, it was like a game between her and her hosts, and it contributed to her ability to use difficult sentence patterns. (This story is told in Stevick 1989, chapter 7).

If you don't have a lot of background in grammar, you may find this discussion intimidating. You may not remember what passive means. Fortunately, knowing the name of a sentence pattern is not necessary. When communication breaks down because the person speaking to you uses a form you don't understand, or because you need to use a form which you don't know how to use, you can summarize the problem on paper in your own words, or by writing out examples of the sentence pattern. Suppose the sentence causing the difficulty is I was helped. You can focus on this pattern without knowing what it is called. Engage your LRP or a friend in communication about times when you, the person you are talking to, and others known to either of you, were helped, as well as times when you or they were hurt, robbed, tricked, etc., etc. While discussing these things, attempt to use the I was helped pattern, that is, avoiding mention of the person who did the helping (or hurting, robbing, tricking, etc.).

A good exercise for you at this point would be to record the speech of someone who doesn't speak English well. Find each place where the person spoke in an unnatural or incorrect way, and design a communication activity which highlights the problem sentence pattern or vocabulary items. You might want to consider using pictures as a conversational aid in some cases. If you go through this exercise, I think you'll get the hang of designing communication activities which highlight particular areas of grammar or vocabulary. You might also consult Thomson (1993a) where I illustrate communication activities which highlight a large variety of possible sentence patterns from the standpoint of learning to comprehend them.

Something else you will want to consider is reading about the grammar of the language, either in textbooks, if there are any, or in linguistic monographs or articles. You may not in general be motivated to read about grammar, but since learning this language seems to dominate your whole life, you may find that such materials are suddenly interesting and rewarding to read. You may not understand all of the technical jargon, but the fact that you already know a lot of the language will help you to figure out the meaning of the jargon from the language examples that are provided as illustrations of what is being described by the jargon! By the way, don't believe everything you read, especially if the writer was not a fluent user of the language for a number of years.

Now you may have the opposite problem. You may love grammar, and feel uncomfortable if you are not trying to consciously think of every aspect of the grammar of the language as you learn it. But remember that in principle that is impossible. And practically speaking, what advantage is there to spending a lot of time thinking about aspects of the grammar that don't cause you any

problem? For example, in English the typical word order in a simple sentence is Subject-Verb-Object, as in “John helped Mary” (here the subject is John, the verb is helped and the object is Mary). In Urdu, as in many languages, the typical order is Subject-Object-Verb (as if we said “John Mary helped”, meaning that John helped Mary). In observing many native speakers of English who were learning Urdu, I did not see a hint of evidence that anyone had any problem with the basic word order, nor have I seen any evidence that native speakers of Urdu who are learning English have any trouble with the basic English word order in simple sentences. People seem to learn the basic word order pattern effortlessly. So then, it wouldn’t be a good use of time to focus on it for several hours. And myriad details of the language you are learning will fall into this category. However, there will be times when you discover that you do not know some sentence pattern that you need in order to express a particular meaning. You can focus on that pattern by using it in communication.

Note: [Parenthetical note for linguist readers: Many linguists have told me that they can only learn to use something in speech once they have consciously analyzed it. Since they must know that it is logically impossible to become truly fluent under such a restriction, I take this claim as a hyperbolic way of saying that they find linguistic analysis to be beneficial to their language learning. That is certainly true of me, and I would always encourage someone facing a difficult, previously unstudied language to get some linguistic training. The most important area of analysis for the language learner is probably the obligatory closed class inflectional morphemes marking categories such as tense/aspect/mood, person/number/class agreement, and case. Most linguists will find it helpful to organize forms into paradigms. Still, learning the paradigms and learning to use the morphemes in extemporaneous communication are very different activities. Now, if any non-linguists are reading this note, please don’t start getting nervous. Just go ahead and get your massive comprehensible input, extensive extemporaneous speaking practice, and knowledge of the people, and you’ll learn the language better than many readers who understand expressions such as “obligatory closed class grammatical morphemes”, but who ignore these three key principles of language learning.]

People learning English typically have difficulty with the word order that is used in questions. Instead of saying, “Who has John been helping?” they may want to say, “Who John has been helping?” For such people, there may be some benefit in focusing on this sentence pattern. For example, someone learning English could have her LRP ask her hundreds of such questions about photographs which they are jointly viewing, and then the language learner could ask hundreds of these questions of the LRP, as a means of practicing the troublesome sentence pattern in the context of real, extemporaneous communication. But the point is, only put this sort of special effort into grammatical features that you have trouble with. Much of the grammar will come to you automatically, without you worrying about it, or even thinking about it, if you are exposed to massive comprehensible input, and engage in extensive extemporaneous communication.

There used to be a widespread belief that the learner would benefit from drilling in various ways on particular sentence patterns in the abstract, apart from using the patterns meaningfully in communication. The benefits of such pattern drills have been generally called into question. Your goal is not to be able to produce the pattern as an end in itself, but to use it in communication. You can get just as much practice using a pattern in communication as you can manipulating it in a meaningless pattern drill. Also, designers of pattern drills tended to have the students drill on patterns regardless of whether or not they were ones that caused difficulty. In current language courses, such drills are not used nearly as much nor as widely as they once were, since it is recognized that students need to be learning to communicate extemporaneously

in the language. When the students' ability to communicate is hindered by their lack of familiarity with a particular sentence pattern, then it is common practice to stop and focus on that pattern. Or if students consistently make certain errors, there may be some focus on the problem. But the more common concern nowadays is to get the students using the language extemporaneously, both as listeners and as speakers.

Closely related to the issue of grammar is the question of whether you should get people to tell you whenever you "make a mistake". There is a near universal belief among language learners that it is desirable to have every error corrected right while they speak. They may tell people, "Please tell me whenever I make a mistake." But does this really make sense? Remember, it is normal to start out speaking very "poorly" and gradually get better and better. How can people correct every mistake? For a long time, unless you only say things that you have memorized, almost everything you say will be a "mistake" in the sense that you will not say it in the best or most natural way. But you'll get better if you keep talking and talking, and keep being exposed to language that is correctly formed, and within the range of what you can currently understand. The widely accepted view today is that you should mainly concentrate on communicating. Concentrate on understanding people, and on getting your point across. If you do that, your speech will improve. But if people really were to correct your every "mistake", you would get very little communicating done, since you would spend most of your time talking about the form of the language, rather than using the language as best you can to convey your desired meaning. Having said this, I want to nevertheless offer a reasonable approach to discovering weakness and problems in your speech. I say this approach is reasonable because it doesn't take you away from real communication. What you do is communicate something to your LRP and record it as you talk. If you've been following my suggestions above, you'll be doing this anyway. But perhaps once or twice a week you might go over a tape of your own speech with your LRP specifically for the purpose of noting ways in which you might have said things more naturally, more precisely, or with greater grammatical accuracy. Suppose you have made a recording of yourself telling a story to your LRP. Play it back, a sentence at a time, and each time ask the LRP if she can think of a better way to say that sentence. Often she will have no amendments to suggest. When she does suggest an alteration, write it down in your notebook. The page should be divided into three columns. In the first, write your original sentence as you said it extemporaneously while telling the story. In the second column, write the LRP's improved version. In the third column write out what you perceive your mistake to have been. In the process you will learn new ways to express old meanings. Some of the discoveries will feed into your own speaking ability at once. In other cases, you may wish to design communication activities which emphasize a particular sentence pattern or grammatical element, providing many examples of the pattern or element in comprehensible input, and many opportunities to use it in extemporaneous speaking. Another point at which you may want to think about the grammatical details of the language is during your daily time(s) of reflection and journal writing. As you listen to tapes of your day's language learning activities, you can write down any new observations you might have about the language. I would encourage you also to be making a simple dictionary into which you can daily add new words that you learn. This will provide you a means of keeping track of your vocabulary growth.

#### Chapter 3.2. Stage III language learning activities

[Keywords: activities for language learning, advanced learners, fossilization, stages of language acquisition]

That was fast! You're already at Stage III. Imagine how much slower your progress would have been if you had left matters to chance. You might have eventually reached Stage III, and you

might not have. You might have developed a certain level of speaking ability, and then become extremely “fluent” in speaking at that low level, without much further improvement. This is called fossilization. But you haven’t fossilized, because you have followed a strategy for exposing yourself to concentrated comprehensible input, and for getting extensive practice at extemporaneous speaking. If in addition to using powerful strategies during Stage II, you also used powerful and appropriate strategies during Stage I, and assuming the language is of average difficulty, then you’ll have only been learning it for three or four months and already you’ll have reached Stage III. Stage III is a long stage. You’ll be in Stage III for many months.

At all stages, the goals are the same: get massive comprehensible input, engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking, and get to know the people who speak the language you are learning. Achieving these goals gets easier as you go. In Stage I, which may not have lasted all that long (depending on how you went about it), achieving these goals required a lot of ingenuity.

Therefore I needed to write at considerable length about Stage I language learning activities in Thomson (1993a), where I also took the reader well into Stage II. The Stage II activities which achieve these same three goals are far simpler, and my discussion of them here is somewhat briefer than my discussion of Stage I activities there. My discussion of the Stage III activities will be similarly brief. This is partly due to the fact that the methods discussed here provide extremely rich comprehensible input and conversational interaction without the sort of semi-artificial “gimmickry” that was needed in Stages I and II. Here in the truest sense, you learn the language by using the language rather than by focusing on the language as such.

#### Chapter 3.2.1. Getting exposure to input on familiar topics

[Keywords: comprehensible input, context, informal language learning, meaningful exposure to language, pictures and picture books]

I have defined the stages in terms of what it takes for your input to be comprehensible. At Stage I, you had difficulty understanding speech that was not clearly supported by pictures, objects or actions. At Stage II, you had difficulty understanding speech unless the content was fairly predictable, or else was carefully and tediously negotiated with a sympathetic native speaker.

Now at Stage III, you still have difficulty understanding speech unless you are familiar with the topic, and you hear everything in its full context. You continue to need to negotiate meaning with your conversational partners, but it is not nearly as difficult as it was at the beginning of Stage II. During early Stage II, you relied a lot on a small number of friends who were specially committed to you and knew you well, and were therefore good at communicating with you. Now you can greatly broaden the number of people with whom you can fruitfully negotiate meaning in conversation, since it is no longer such a taxing experience.

Now you need lots of input in which familiar topics are discussed. Suppose you are a physics student, and you have the opportunity to enroll in a physics course dealing with an area of physics that you would like to learn more about. That will give you a lot of comprehensible input on a topic that is already somewhat familiar to you. (You may get a ‘C’ in the course, but who cares?)

For most languages, taking university courses in the language will not be a possibility, but you may still be able to find people who can talk to you about topics with which you are somewhat familiar. A story that is unknown to you, but drawn from your own cultural background would also qualify as comprehensible input in Stage III. For example, your LRP could learn a story from one of your fellow language learners, or some other friend belonging to your own national background, and then tell you the story in your new language. If you are a church going person, you may find that much of the material in sermons is on topics which are familiar to you.

#### Chapter 3.2.2. Becoming familiar with unfamiliar topics



[Keywords: stages of language acquisition, vocabulary]

However, there is something far more important than getting people to talk to you on familiar topics. There is a severe limit to how far that can take you. What is more important is for you to increase the number of local topics with which you are familiar. This takes us back to the matter of schemas, and the fact that successful communication depends on a large body of shared knowledge and experience. Recall how your understanding of my traffic ticket anecdote depended on your knowing the general schema of how traffic tickets are given in North America. Each culture has a large number of schemas that are partly or wholly unique to it. Also, there will be schemas which are important in your new culture which were far less important in your original culture. I go many years at a time in Canada without ever attending a wedding, and when I do, it is quickly over. In Pakistan, by contrast, weddings are one of the major social events. They are very elaborate, and the activities associated with engagements and weddings go on for days. Now a Pakistani learning my culture would probably think that s/he needed to quickly learn the general Canadian wedding schema. Of course, it is something s/he needs to learn, but it is far less important than s/he might imagine. A Canadian in Pakistan might likewise under-estimate the importance of learning the wedding schema. In either case, it would be a serious mistake to assume that just because the two cultures both have weddings, the schemas are the same, or even similar.

This obviously brings us back to the Principle III. Learn to know the people whose language you are learning. From here on in, Principle III is in the foreground. During Stage III, as long as you are applying Principle III in a major way, you will be exposing yourself to increasing comprehensible input (Principle I), and engaging in extensive extemporaneous speaking (Principle II) without worrying about it.

To some extent, you were learning cultural schemas when you used the Series Method.

However, your point in using the Series Method was to hear speech that was highly predictable. That assumed that in using the Series Method you concentrated on schemas that were already familiar to you. This puts them into the category of gimmicky, semi-artificial communication activities. The advantage was that it made the content predictable, and hence comprehensible, during Stage II. This enabled you to become familiar with a lot of new vocabulary, and gave you a lot of practice in listening to the language with understanding. But in normal communication, a speaker does not tell the listeners the minutest details of things they already know.

You can now use the Series Method with all kinds of schemas that are unfamiliar to you. Your goal can be to become familiar enough with these series that you can produce them yourself, in your own words. That does not mean that you memorize them. Rather, you may have several people tell you a series, and then you attempt to tell the basic series to several people as best you can. Some of “your own words” will be words that you have acquired in the process of learning the series.

#### Chapter 3.2.2.1. Ethnographic interviewing

[Keywords: ethnographic interviewing, interviewing, social situation]

The Series Method brought us to the brink of one of the major Phase III learning activities—ethnographic interviewing. However, ethnographic interviewing is far more like normal everyday communication than the series method is. In authentic communication, it is commonly the case that the speaker has information that the listener lacks, the listener desires the information, and the speaker desires to give the information to the listener. This is often true in ethnographic interviewing. The LRP has information which you lack. You desire this information, and she desires to give it to you. It is still not natural communication in the sense of being exactly like the speech that goes on in conversations between two native speakers. First of

all, you are being told things that native speakers would not need to be told, since they already know those things. Second, your LRP is still using careful, simplified speech in talking to you, in order to enable you to understand her more fully and more easily than you would be able to understand her if she spoke to you exactly as she speaks to native speakers.

The word “ethnography”, in its most general meaning, refers to the description of culture. When people speak of ethnographic methods nowadays, they generally have a more specific meaning in mind: coming to understand a culture from within its own frame of reference, through intensive observation and interaction with members of that culture. A professional ethnographer is first of all a skilled observer, noticing, and recording, a myriad of details in a situation which the untrained observer might miss. After making extensive observations of specific events, the ethnographer attempts to understand the cultural system which gives meaning to those specific events. From the standpoint of a member of the culture, how is each event related to other events, and how is each understood in terms of its causes and its purpose? The ethnographer attempts to uncover the organized knowledge system by which members of the culture regulate their behaviour and interaction. The crucial idea here is that the ethnographer seeks the insider’s perspective on events and relationships within the culture. Can you see why the language learner needs a good deal of this ethnographic spirit? Spradley says that his book on ethnographic interviewing is “in a sense... a set of instructions for learning another language” (Spradley 1980, p. 21).

What you want to do as a language-learner- cum -ethnographer is to get people to reveal to you their knowledge of their culture, and to allow you to start seeing their world through their eyes. Often this will mean getting people to talk about things which they know, but do not often consciously think about. You will need to keep emphasizing to people that you are really ignorant of even the simple details of their lives. Then, as people tell you things that to them are hardly worth mentioning because they are such common knowledge, you should express appreciation, reminding them that you are quite ignorant even of such mundane, common facts of life there.

A challenge you face right off is how to decide which areas of the culture to ask about. You may have already been making a list of social situations, back when you were looking for conversational topics by touring the community. A social situation, in Spradley’s terms, can be understood in terms of 1) a place, 2) actors, and 3) activities. (see Spradley 1980, pp 39 to 52) . By a place is meant either some specific place, such as the village square, or a type of place, such as a cornfield. People use that place or type of place for a particular purpose or set of purposes. For example, the village square might be used for feasts, and for political speeches. When a place is being used for a purpose, that purpose will be defined by who the actors, or participants, are and by what they do. In the case of political speeches, the actors may be the chief, or some other political figure, and the crowd who stand and listen to the speech. The activities include the giving of the speech, which will have certain typical characteristics, and they will also include all that the members of the crowd do while listening.

In any culture there will be a large number of social situations. Think of breakfast. What is the place? Who are the actors? What are the activities? Or how about an interchange between a salesperson with a wagon load of goods, and a potential customer at the door of her home? Or how about a woman at the village well? Or how about two women meeting at the village well? The world is filled with social situations. Even a single day of detailed observations should provide you with a long list of social situations that can form the basis for discussion with your LRP and other friends. In addition, in the course of interviewing people, you will learn of many social situations that you have not yet observed. Your aim is always to discuss a specific social

situation with people who actually participate in it. They are the ones who are certain to possess the cultural knowledge which underlies successful performance in that social situation.

The interview itself makes extensive use of questions. Spradley (1979), pp85-91, describes thirteen different varieties of questions under the general heading of descriptive questions. These fall into five major categories:

1. Grand tour questions
2. Mini-tour questions
3. Example questions
4. Experience questions
5. Native language questions

Native language questions are used to find out how to talk about particular experiences. For example, Spradley wanted to ask tramps in Seattle about the experience of getting arrested, but first he needed to find out their terms for jail, and for getting arrested. It turned out that a jail was referred to as the bucket and being arrested was described as making the bucket. Once he knew the correct terms, he was able to ask people to tell him all about making the bucket. Since he was interested in tapping their knowledge of their world and experience, it was important that he use their terms. Only their terms specifically refer to their experience. If he were to simply ask about “getting arrested and going to jail” he might get a lot of information, but he would be working from his own pre-existing frame of reference rather than from the frame of reference of the tramps.

For you as a language learner, the application of this principle is straightforward. If you want to learn about the experience of using a taxi, you could simply ask about it in some way that is communicatively adequate, perhaps using communication strategies. But why not begin by learning how to ask about using taxis? Then suppose the person you are questioning uses a generic word to describe the person who hires the taxi. The generic word might mean “person” or perhaps “customer”. You should ask if that is the normal word used to describe that person. You may find that there is a more specific word such as passenger. Now you will be better able to ask questions about passengers using the language that is normally used in that culture. You can increase the likelihood of getting the normal expressions by asking people to use the term they would use when talking to a normal participant in that culture. Needless to say, your goal is to ask your questions, and hear the responses, entirely in the new language.

Now let’s go back to the first type of question in Spradley’s list: grand tour questions. You may have observed a number of social situations in the corn field, including some sort of religious ceremony, the ploughing of the field, and the planting of the corn. A grand tour question dealing with the planting of the corn might have the form, “Could you tell me everything you do during a day of corn planting?” This is what Spradley calls a typical grand tour question. It is called typical because it is not asking about a specific day’s planting, but rather about a typical day’s planting. This is a good starting point, because it helps you to start internalizing the general schema which will serve you as you discuss any specific day of planting. Spradley’s second type of grand tour question deals with a specific instance, and is thus labeled a specific grand tour question. You might ask, “Could you tell me everything that you did yesterday as a part of your day’s corn planting?” I find that I get a much fuller answer to a specific grand tour question than to a typical grand tour question. Just the same, dealing first with the answer to a typical grand tour question, and learning the appropriate language for discussing the situation, will improve the likelihood of your understanding a large part of the responses to the specific grand tour questions. Spradley also talks about guided grand tour questions and task-related grand tour

questions. In answering a guided grand tour question, someone might take you to the cornfield, and describe the activities that go on there as you walk about the field together. In the task-related variety, you would ask your friend questions about the activity right as it is being performed.

Perhaps the grandest tour you can ask for is a description of a typical lifetime. Many of the events and stages that are mentioned in a description of a typical lifetime will provide ideas for additional grand tour questions. For example, you might hear that a major ceremony occurs when a child is six months old. Such a ceremony would provide the basis for a grand tour question. You could also ask for a specific description of a specific person's entire life. In most cases, this would involve people telling the story of their own lives. It is good to get such accounts from people of a variety of ages and backgrounds.

In addition to asking about a typical life-time, and a specific life-time, you might ask about a typical year, a typical month or week (if it's relevant) and a typical day, meaning a day in general, as opposed to a day during planting, a day during harvesting, or a market day. You can also ask for specific tours of such time units.

Mini-tour questions arise directly out of grand tour questions. Your common procedure in asking a grand tour question would be to tape record the response and then go over the tape with the person who gave the response. As you go over the recording, you will notice details that could be elaborated on. For example, when a motor-rickshaw driver gave me a grand tour of what he does when he gives a ride to a passenger, he mentioned starting the rickshaw. When we went over the recording, I asked how he starts the rickshaw. That was a mini-tour question. By way of response, he told me in some detail the steps he goes through in starting the rickshaw. Like grand tour questions, mini-tour questions can be typical, specific, guided or task related. For example, I could have asked him to take me to his rickshaw and give me a demonstration, with explanation, as he started the motor. That would have been a task related mini-tour question. In addition to suggesting mini-tour questions, the responses to grand tour questions will also suggest additional grand tour questions.

Like mini-tour questions, example questions grow out of the answers to other questions. For instance, in discussing planting corn, your friend might mention poor cornfields, and you could then ask for some examples of poor cornfields. It may turn out that there are a variety of conditions that can make a particular field a poor one.

Experience questions involve asking the person to tell an interesting experience. You might ask, "Have you ever had an especially interesting experience planting corn?" It is good if you have worked through some grand tour questions and mini-tour questions on the same topic before asking experience questions. That is because the responses to the grand tour questions and mini tour questions will supply you with cultural schemas which will enable you to comprehend the stories that are told in response to experience questions. My rickshaw driver friend told of a time when a female passenger jumped out of his moving rickshaw without his knowledge because she had doubts about his intentions. This story revealed a number of values that go into defining good rickshaw driving, and also opened up wider cultural issues having to do with interactions between men and women.

There is much more to Spradley's method than this. Asking descriptive questions is just the first step. The subsequent steps take you more deeply into understanding how members of the society experience the component parts of social situations. Spradley takes you from seeing a mere social situation, that is, actors performing activities in a place, to uncovering a cultural scene, that is, understanding the meanings that members of the culture attach to the actors and activities, and how those actors and activities are related to one another and to other actors and activities.

An important concept is the cultural domain. You can spot cultural domains within the answers to descriptive questions when the speaker indicates, either explicitly or implicitly, something along the lines of X is a type of Y, or X is a way to do Y. Here you can see that the speaker is assuming a whole category of objects or actions within the culture. For example, in connection with corn-planting, your friend might mention that planting corn on the day someone died can cause bad luck. This might suggest two possible cultural domains: causes of bad luck, and instances of bad luck.

As you spot possible cultural domains, you should try to flesh them out. What are some other things that cause bad luck? You may be able to add to the list by questioning many people. What are some things that happen to people who have bad luck? In addition to noticing possible cultural domains while going over the tape-recorded responses to descriptive questions, you may also notice possibilities through direct observation. Sometimes simply observing complexity is enough to clue you into a cultural domain. If you observed a sweets shop in South Asia, you would notice a considerable variety of sweets. Here is a conspicuous area of knowledge which may be universally shared by members of the culture. What are all those sweets? What meanings are attached to them? You might learn that certain sweets are distributed to neighbors on certain occasions. That could clue you into a cultural domain. This domain might start out as "Occasions when people distribute the sweet called laddu to their neighbors". Once you get a list of such occasions you can then find a better name for the cultural domain by reading the list of occasions to people and asking people for a cover term that refers to all such occasions. People might respond by saying, "Those are all examples of times of celebration." Once you have the cover term, times of celebration, it might prompt people to come up with additional instances of the domain, that is, additional times of celebration, which may go beyond those in which the sweet called laddu is distributed to neighbors. The distribution of laddu to neighbors might then turn out to be itself one instance of a cultural domain of ways to celebrate.

The label for cultural domain might be similar to one of following:

- Ways to do X
- Kinds of X
- Parts of an X
- Stages in doing X
- Places for doing X
- Reasons for X
- Uses of X

A good time to look for possible cultural domains is when you are privately listening to the tape recordings of your interviews. Not all of the possibilities you spot will pay off, but many will. Out the numerous examples of cultural domains that you find, a few will turn out to be particularly fruitful. This was the case when Spradley began learning all the ways to make a flop which were generally known to tramps in Seattle. It turned out that there were over a hundred ways to make a flop, and that this knowledge was generally shared by members of the tramp community. When you stumble onto such an extensive cultural domain, you know that you are dealing with an area of major concern within the culture.

For fuller details, and further steps in ethnographic analysis, you will need to refer to Spradley (1979, 1980). I hope I have whetted your appetite for using ethnographic interviewing as a major means of improving your language ability during Stage III. Ethnographic interviewing achieves the goals related to Principles I and II. Many responses to questions will be lengthy, providing comprehensible input at the time, as well as later when you listen to the tapes. You can go over the tapes in detail with the speaker, discussing what she said, and clarifying what needs

to be clarified. This will stimulate a large amount of extemporaneous communication. Once you are familiar with a lengthy response to a question, you can attempt to say it in your own words. For example, suppose your LRP has given you a verbal grand tour of a wedding, telling of each event in sequence. After going over the tape, you can rewind it, and then attempt to describe a typical wedding yourself. After each few details that you describe, you can play a little bit more of the tape, and see how close your description is to that of your LRP. You would need to do this with that LRP present, so you would actually have someone to talk to.

In addition to satisfying Principles I and II (comprehensible input and extemporaneous communication), through ethnographic interviewing, you will be getting to know the people on a major scale (Principle III). As you become thoroughly familiar with an ever increasing number of areas of local experience, knowledge and belief, you will be increasing the number of topics that are familiar to you. The result of this will be that when you hear people talking in any context or situation, you will increasingly find that it provides you with additional comprehensible input. Thus eventually you will reach the point where much of what you hear said in the course of your life will directly contribute to your language learning (Stage IV).

Chapter 3.2.3. There are so many ways to talk

[Keywords: comprehensible text corpus, discourse, television, varieties of speech]

I mentioned the lecturer who could speak fluent English when talking about his field of expertise, but whose speech became halting when he began talking about a party he had recently been to. This illustrated the importance of learning to talk about all of the normal topics of everyday life. But there is more involved than learning the appropriate vocabulary and idioms for a particular area of subject matter. People would normally lecture in a form of language that is different from the form in which they would chat about the events of Saturday night's party. Within a single language, there are different forms of language, known as language varieties. The fact that you are good at one variety does not mean you are good at them all.

It is often noted that written language is different from spoken language. Some of these differences are related to the fact that a reader has as much time as s/he may desire to process what is on the page, whereas a listener must process speech as rapidly as it is spoken, and attempt to keep up with the speaker. One result of this is that written language may use more complicated sentences. Also, a writer can be much more careful than a speaker, since s/he can slowly edit and revise what she writes. Spoken language, on the other hand, will contain many false starts and incomplete sentences and errors of various types.

But it may be an oversimplification to contrast spoken and written language in this way. Biber (1986) shows that a more basic difference has to do with whether the language used is highly interactive, which is more common with conversational speech, or more carefully edited, which is more common with writing. But some spoken language is relatively careful, as in the case of a prepared speech, and some written language is somewhat interactive in style, as in the case of a note from a child to a classmate. Another factor that Biber shows to distinguish different varieties of the language has to do with whether the content is abstract or concrete. Abstract language occurs, for example, when someone is proposing reasons for making a particular decision, or giving explanations of why something is the way it is. Concrete language deals with specific things, situations and events in the world. Still another of Biber's factors in determining the general variety of language that is used has to do with whether the speaker is discussing some particular displaced situation, as in the case of a story about something that happened at another time and place, or is talking either about the immediate here and now, or about the world in general.

Note: Parenthetical note: I have only dealt with one small aspect of language varieties. Other issues relate to geographical varieties (called dialects), male varieties and female varieties (called genderlects), and varieties based on the social status of the speaker (called sociolects), etc. Characteristics of language of the type discussed by Biber will show up to different degrees in the different situations in which language is used. For example, a news broadcast will be quite edited, and generally concrete, dealing with specific situations, but it may contain interviews which are more interactive, and excerpts of speeches, which are more abstract. More careful, edited varieties of language, such as lectures, may seem more difficult than simple conversation, in that they involve more complicated sentences, and a larger number of distinct vocabulary items. However, less careful, unedited varieties of language may seem more difficult than careful varieties, in that they involve rapid, slurred speech, and leave the listener or reader to supply a lot of implied information. In the final analysis, different varieties of language bring their own varieties of difficulties with them, and so the key is to learn them all, by exposing yourself to comprehensible input in them all, and getting practice in the extemporaneous, creative use of the ones that are relevant to you. In some cases, as with news broadcasts, you only need to worry about comprehension ability.

You may need to look around you once again, and start making a list of the kinds of language events that occur in the community, and the contexts in which language is used. There may be somewhat different varieties of the language used for conversation between strangers, conversation between friends, conversation in a family, school room teaching, university lectures, sermons, stories by the campfire, stories for small children, telephone conversations, personal letters, business letters, newspapers, etc. You probably shouldn't worry too much about what goes into defining every different variety of language. It will have to do with a variety of features of the language including the choice of words, the use of fixed phrases and sentences, the complexity of sentences and the types of sentences and grammatical constructions. If you are a linguist, you may analyze a lot of these details, but once again, it is impossible to analyze as much as you hope to acquire, so you again must put some faith in the input hypothesis: with lots of exposure to comprehensible speech and writing in all of these different modes and situations, you will develop a feel for what variety of language goes with which situation.

Some of these varieties of language will be less important than others. You should concern yourself with the ones that are part of the shared experience of everyone in the society, and those that relate to your special areas of expertise and work. You will want to expose yourself to respectably large samples of language as used in the different situations. To the extent possible, you should tape record samples of the different varieties of spoken language.

In some cases, as with news broadcasts, that is easy. So why don't I use news broadcasts to illustrate the general strategy for learning a special variety of language. (Unfortunately, in the case of most of the world's languages, there are no news broadcasts.) If there are, and if you have not yet learned to understand them, they may impress you as representing a difficult variety of language. Record a few news broadcasts on tape and go over them with your LRP, in the normal manner. That is, discuss the recordings bit by bit, adding new words and idioms to your vocabulary tape as necessary in the manner suggested earlier, and discussing areas of culture and experience that are new to you. After going over these tapes thoroughly with your LRP, continue to listen to them privately. Once you have processed a few fifteen minute news broadcasts, you will probably find that you can now follow brand new news broadcasts surprisingly well, and can often successfully guess at the meaning of new words. So then, this variety of language turns out to be less difficult than you expected. You may find the same to be true of any variety of language you tackle.

Some varieties of language will be less easy to tape-record than news broadcasts, but it will still be worth the effort. For example, you may want to get the preacher's permission before tape-recording a sermon, and even more so the chief's permission before tape-recording his speech. Your comprehension ability has now reached the point where you can work easily with relatively poor quality recordings. It's not that you no longer care about the quality of the recordings, but you can get by with relatively poor quality ones when that is the best you can do. The hardest language to tape record is possibly the most important variety of language for you to learn. It is what Burling (1982) calls rapid colloquial styles. He testifies eloquently to the difficulty language learners can have with ordinary "street speech".

It was relatively easy for me to gain access to formal varieties of Swedish. I learned to read, to understand the news on the radio, and even to understand the relatively formal language of a classroom lecture, but I was often baffled by the language spoken over coffee cups (p. 95). Burling goes on to suggest that rapid colloquial speech is probably not, in principle, more difficult than other varieties of the language. But the learner needs to tackle this particular variety. The methods I have proposed will work here too. Go over tape recordings with your LRP until you can understand them easily. Collect several hours of such speech, going over it with your LRP as each sample is recorded. Once you have thoroughly gone over a sample, and are familiar with it, listen repeatedly to the tape. In addition, with this kind of language, as with any other, you need to continue experiencing it in brand new, real-life situations. In some cases the "informal" variety of the language may be essentially a different language from the "formal" variety. This would be the case with German in Switzerland, for example. With most of the world's languages, the difference between varieties will not be this great. Granted, it is not easy to tape-record the most informal colloquial speech as used in relaxed chit-chat. And it may not be necessary. But if you find that you have the problem that Burling describes above, it may be worth the effort. You might ask your friends to talk with each other in your home about topics like "my most embarrassing moment," or "a time when I was in danger of being killed". With the right topics people will quickly become absorbed in what they are talking about, and forget all about the lapel microphones clipped to their collars. It is also good if you can get two strong minded individuals to interact on a topic with regard to which they hold opposing views. To work on your speaking ability, you can yourself participate in such a lively discussion, and later, with the help of your LRP, go over your own performance as captured on tape, and find ways that you might have been more colloquial. You can do the same with other varieties of language that you use, such as lectures, sermons, telephone conversations, personal letters, stories by the campfire, or whatever.

In deciding which varieties of language to specifically work on, you can use your needs list, or your list of language events that occur in the culture, or simply reflect on your life. Is there some particular variety of language that is difficult, and for which you keenly feel your lack? Perhaps it is stories by the campfire. I'll use this as an example, and you can make appropriate adjustments for your own situation. For example, with you the need might be to understand sermons, or soap operas. But let's assume that you are concerned with stories told by the campfire. You do fine with rapid colloquial conversational interaction, but you really feel left out when the fireside stories begin. Then tackle fireside stories. They may be quite lengthy at times, so you might want to look for several which are reasonably short. Tape record them, in as natural a setting as possible. If you can't record them at the fireside, try at least to have a small audience of native speakers, or at least a single native speaker, for the story teller to talk to as you make the recording. Later go over the tapes with your LRP. Each time you fail to understand something, find out why. It may be that you are lacking many of the cultural schemas which the



story teller takes for granted. When you find this to be the case, stop and do a grand tour question, or a mini-tour question to help fill in this gap in your knowledge of the culture. Explore any areas of the culture which you need to understand in order to understand the stories. Work with new vocabulary or sentence patterns in the usual manner. Once you can understand most of what is on the tapes, listen to them privately many times.

As you work through tapes with your LRP, and become thoroughly familiar with what is on them, you can add any extended speech samples you record, along with the stories themselves, to your ever growing comprehensible corpus. By the end of Stage III you may have fifty hours of tape recorded speech in this corpus. You can pull any tape off the rack, and play any part of it, and listen with understanding. In Thomson (1992) I suggested that your comprehensible corpus might contain an hour of comprehensible material covering the range of what you learned to comprehend during Stage I. During Stage II you might add another four hours of the types of predictable speech which were typical of Stage II: familiar stories, accounts of recent events known to both you and your LRP, Series Method materials, etc. During Stage III, you might add another forty-five hours of material. That sounds like a lot, but fifteen minutes of material three times a week for ten months equals forty-five hours. Fifteen minutes of material from ethnographic interviewing or other sources such as campfire stories should keep you plenty busy with your LRP for an hour or two. If the language has a writing system, and scribes are relatively inexpensive to hire, you would do well to have a lot of this material transcribed, since the written variety can provide powerful reinforcement of the spoken input. If you are a linguist or anthropologist, or folklorist, then you will clearly want to have a lot of the material transcribed, so that you can process it in various ways and archive it. As a linguist with an interest in discourse structure, you will want to attempt to collect five or ten hours of speech from people who have a reputation as outstanding speakers, speaking to real audiences of at least one other native speaker, saying things that are important to them, and which they are wanting to say to the particular audience (see Austin Hale's suggestions described in Thomson, 1992).

Friends of mine have gotten much of their comprehensible corpus by having people read written materials aloud onto tape. This way they could first practice reading, and discuss sections which they found incomprehensible, and add to their vocabulary tape, etc., as appropriate, while working on their reading skills. Then the LRP would read the material into a tape recorder. Much of the material was geared toward children's education, making this a good way for the learners to acquire a lot of the widely shared knowledge of the community.

I place a lot of emphasis on working with tapes. Obviously, most language learners in times past, if they succeeded, did so without the help of tapes. And despite my constant reference to them, you should not forget that they are a supplement to your real-life exposure to the language— conversational interaction and involvement in communication events of various types. Most of your “massive comprehensible input” will ultimately come from such real-life experiences. The value of your language sessions and your use of tapes is that they accelerate the rate at which this real-life input becomes comprehensible. But then you need to keep getting the real-life input.

That is why, if you are a full-time language learner, you are devoting two hours or more per day to social visiting and other involvement in communication events. In many ways your language sessions and tapes feed into this real life language exposure. For example, if part of your real-life exposure involves listening to sermons, you use your language sessions as a means of improving your ability to understand sermons. And while you are visiting someone socially, or being visited, if you have been doing ethnographic interviewing related to “ways to catch a rabbit”, or “all that goes on in a naming ceremony”, then you attempt to engage in conversation about “ways to catch a rabbit,” or “all that goes on in a naming ceremony”. But your language sessions

are not limited to things which will immediately feed into your outside communication experiences. Remember the human navel? You have a huge amount of language to become familiar with in order to be able to cope with the endless variety of unpredictable real-life communication needs that will arise. Your language sessions and tapes, in addition to feeding into specific communication needs which you face in the outside world, also contribute to your general communication ability which you constantly need in the outside world. In any case, in the midst of all of my emphasis on language sessions and tapes, don't lose sight of the fact that the main thing you are concerned about is the outside world, chock full of people communicating in this language in all its varieties.

### Chapter 3.3. What about Stage IV?

That naturally brings us to Stage IV. In this stage you are no longer a full-time language learner. Since most of the language you are exposed to in real life is immediately comprehensible to you, your main concern is to be sure that you are exposed to the language in a major way, on an ongoing basis, in real life. This has a lot to do with the choices you make in relation to your lifestyle. Suppose you are now going to work at a desk forty hours per week, and you have two choices. You can rent a plush, spacious, well-furnished, air-conditioned office of the sort commonly rented by the people who held your job before you did. Or alternatively, you can rent a desk in an office shared by a number of local office workers who interact in your new language off and on through the day. Then suppose you need a secretary. You can hire one with excellent English, or you can hire one who finds it much easier to speak your new language with you than to speak English with you. And you can choose a residence that isolates you from people, or one in which you cannot avoid interacting with people. When people try to visit you, you can drop whatever you are doing and communicate a clear message of "Right now, you are more important to me than anything else", or you can communicate an implicit message of "You're interrupting something important". Such reactions will be part of what determines whether your visitors are many and frequent, or few and far between.

You may not be an office worker, but whatever you are doing, you will face similar life-style choices. If you choose a work situation, co-workers, a residential situation, and a leisure life which keep you immersed in the language, you will continue to progress in the language, since you'll continue to receive massive comprehensible input (Principle I), to engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking (Principle II), and to get to know the people who speak the language (Principle III). But you may also become burned out before your time. Therefore, as part of your highly effective lifestyle you need to allow for adequate escapes and retreats. Have a place that you can get away to whenever you feel the need for a little peace and quiet. Have a private place where you can go to work when you must have a few days of uninterrupted, concentrated work. And have some close friends among people from your own cultural background or a similar one. Don't spend the majority of your time with them, but do spend quality time with them fairly frequently. And when you are with them, don't fall into the trap of talking negatively about the host society. That can quickly get you feeling down in the dumps. True, there is also a point in talking openly with such friends about your frustrations, and knowing that they won't condemn you for it. But some people get into the habit of flippantly running down the host society, making it a major topic of conversation, whenever they are with fellow foreigners. If you have really been serious about getting to know the people who speak the language (Principle III), such talk will make you uncomfortable, since it is most often rooted in a deep lack of understanding of the host people where you are living.

I don't want to give the impression that you will not want to get further help from someone like an LRP during Stage IV. But it will probably be more of an occasional thing rather than full

time. Do you want to perfect your speech? You can continue recording yourself as you use the language in communication, and go over the tapes with an LRP. Almost anybody can serve as an LRP at this point. If you find that you are having trouble with a particular aspect of the language, you can devise a communication activity which will allow you to use the problem construction or vocabulary items repeatedly. Finally, you can work on written composition. When writing the language it is much easier to get all of the grammatical details right than when speaking it, since you have all the time you need to think about what you are writing, and you can easily go back and make corrections. So you may want to write compositions of various sorts and go over them with an LRP to discover varieties of errors you may be unaware of. Actually, it is profitable to work on written composition in this way even during earlier stages, especially Stage III. Similarly, you can benefit considerably from reading, especially if there is a large body of literature in the language. As a matter of fact, to a large extent, you become a good writer as a result of massive comprehensible input which you receive as a reader. When you have difficulty understanding portions of written material that you are reading, these can provide the basis for discussions with an LRP.

#### Chapter 4. Conclusion (Language learning for non-beginners)

As I said at the outset, all you really need to remember are three key principles:

- Principle I: Expose yourself to massive comprehensible input (possibly including written input).
- Principle II: Engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking (and possibly writing).
- Principle III: Learn to know the people whose language you are learning.

The rest of what I have written was intended to make these principles meaningful. First I explained some of the main thinking behind them. Then I showed concrete ways to put them into practice. One additional principle is important: the best way of putting these three principles into practice will depend on your stage of language learning. In Stage IV, merely listening to a story by the campfire provides you with comprehensible input. In Stage II, the same story would be utterly incomprehensible, mainly just a blur of sound, and therefore it would not qualify as comprehensible input.

You may come up with many of your own approaches and activities which put the three principles into practice. No one will do everything exactly according to my suggestions, and some people may end up using approaches that are very different indeed. However you go about it, if you expose yourself to massive comprehensible input, engage in extensive extemporaneous speaking, and get to know the people whose language you are learning, and if you do these three things persistently enough for a long enough time, you won't do badly. You won't do at all badly. I promise.

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[Keywords: beginning learners, comprehension-led acquisition, concord, photographs and photo books, syntax, verbs, vocabulary]

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This essay by Greg Thomson tells you how to set up and use a photo book for second language acquisition. It describes the kind of pictures to take and the way you can use them in various ways with a speaker of another language to learn to understand a variety of vocabulary and grammatical structures. This information, in connection with other writings by Greg Thomson, can help you quickly develop your listening comprehension in a second language.

Setting up the photo book

There are many ways in which a photo book could be set up. Furthermore, different photo books could be designed for different purposes. The set-up which I will describe here is that of a photo book for use from the first day of language learning. It will be especially useful during the first four to six weeks, as the learner attempts to acquire a recognition vocabulary over 1,000, and enough grammatical structure for minimal communicative functionality. The photo book should be used in conjunction with other communicative techniques, such as Total Physical Response. The photo book on display at this conference contains about a hundred photos. It took about two hours to take the pictures, and another hour or two to arrange them in the scrap-book.

The aim in collecting the photos was that each would contain one or more humans as main characters, and that the humans would, in most cases at least, be particularly involved with either

another human, or with a non-human object (typically the latter). This would set the stage for simple transitive sentences.

Nouns, transitive subjects and objects

First pass: Identifying humans in the pictures

Only the more generic nouns are used: man, men, woman, women, boy, girl, people, children, and so on. One statement per picture is plenty. Helper says: "This is a man; this is a woman; this is a man; this is a woman; this is a boy; this is a man; this is a boy and a man; this is a girl; this is a boy and a girl; this is a boy and a girl and a woman and a man; these are some children; these are some men; these are some men and some women."

Second pass: Identify objects which are especially associated with the people in the pictures

Helper says: "This is a pail; this is a shovel; show me the pail; show me the shovel; this is a cart; show me the shovel; show me the cart; this is a bicycle; show me the pail; show me the bicycle; show me the cart; show me the shovel; show me the cart; show me the pail; the bicycle; the pail; the cart...."

Drill on each page until vocab is familiar. The helper will need to spend adequate time on each page.

Third pass: Simple transitive sentences

It may turn out that, strictly speaking, one ends up with something other than transitive sentences. Use only a handful of transitive verbs: have, use, touch, see are good possibilities. Learner answers "true" or "false" in his or her own language: "This man has a shovel. This boy has a pail. These people have chairs. This man is touching a pail. This woman is looking at a pail."

If relative clauses are transparent enough, this pass might even include: Show me the man who is using the pail. Show me the man who is not using the pail. The language learner is now comprehending sentences with subjects, objects, and verbs.

Other basic sentence types, locations, instruments

Fourth pass: Lots of verbs

The comprehension of simple transitive sentences is a good foundation. The next steps build on this foundation. As with the non-human nouns in the second pass, learning a wider variety of verbs from the photos requires spending enough time on each page for vocabulary to become familiar. At this point both intransitive and transitive verbs should be included.

"This man is sitting. This woman is standing. Who is sitting?" (Language learner answers by pointing. "Show me who is standing. This man is working. This woman is resting. Show me who is standing. Show me who is not standing. Show me who is resting. Show me who is working. Is this man standing? Is this woman sitting?" Answers by nod of head, or in contact language.

Important note: in my experience the language helper always finds it hard to believe the amount of repetition that is needed, and so must be trained to provide adequate repetitions, and frequently reminded.

Fifth pass: Existential sentences, more nouns, locations, instruments

At this point the learner may recognize many dozens of words, mostly nouns and verbs. There are potentially a very large number of nouns lurking in these photos. Existential sentences and location phrases provide natural contexts for using these nouns. The "true or false" method can be used. Yes/no questions can be asked. Note that answering in the target language can dramatically decrease retention. In most cases it is best to answer in the contact language. Also, "Show me...", "Point to...", "Touch..." imperatives can be used. The language helper's instructions may require the learner to turn to a different page to search for the appropriate photo.

“In this picture (on this page) there is a man (true or false).” “He is sitting on a bench.” “There is a bicycle in front of him.” “Show me a window.” “Touch the ground in this picture.” “Show me a man who is working with a shovel.”

New vocabulary should be introduced gradually, with lots of repetition, of course. A good goal in the early weeks is a daily increase in “recognition vocabulary” of thirty items.

Summary of first week

We have covered about a week’s use of the picture book. During the same week language sessions will include physical response drills as well, also following a grammatical syllabus, using real props. The learner will spend perhaps an hour preparing for each session, one or two hours in the session, two or three hours reviewing with the tape recorder, and an hour may be left for making notes of a more analytical nature.

Going on—emphasis still on simplex sentences

Now we will no longer talk about individual passes through the photo book. The further grammatical items we will discuss could be covered in various ways and in various orders.

Pronominal categories; agreement categories

Pictures lend themselves most naturally to third person sentences singular and plural. However, given that the photo book is being used in an interactional context, it is easy to involve communication using first and second person sentences.

“I am touching a pail, and you are touching a shovel (true/false)”. “Can you see an old man? Can I see an old man?” (Learner and helper have agreed to look at separate pages—the learner looks at the teacher’s page only in order to answer the question).

It is necessary to have two learners, or a volunteer native speaker in order to most effectively include second person plural and first person plural, inclusive and exclusive. Having a third person in the session, either a fellow learner or another native speaker, provides a number of important advantages. (One learner with whom I worked added imaginary characters to the communication environment by taping papers to the wall around the room. This allowed a lot of flexibility as to who and what they were.)

Further practice with first and second person can come from the helper talking about what the people in the photos might be thinking. This will be especially helpful when combined with tense/aspect distinctions below.

When I speak of agreement categories, I am primarily thinking of gender at this point, and will use masculine and feminine to illustrate. In Urdu, for example, the pronouns do not mark gender, but gender agreement is shown in verbs and in many adjectives.

Learner and helper look at a page of photos together. It is important that there be more than one possible picture to which a statement could conceivably apply, with gender being the decisive factor in determining which picture the helper is referring to. The learner responds by pointing. “He/she is sitting.” “He/she/they are near a baby.” “He/she is tall/short.” “It (object) is red (masculine/feminine).”

As with all of these exercises, the learner can sit down after the session with photo book and tape-recording and respond to the tape as he or she responded to the helper. This is especially helpful in cases where the helper is available for only a limited time each day. It also can spare the helper from boredom and frustration.

Tenses/aspects

There will be one or two tense or aspect or tense/aspect combinations which are natural in reference to the photos. The learner will have had much exposure to these by this point. It is easy to learn to recognize a variety of tense/aspect combinations in conjunction with the photo book.

While following a grammatical syllabus in this way, we always have in mind the minimal needs for communicative functionality by the third month, using his or her “personal pijin”. In this regard, although there may be a wide range of tense/aspect distinctions, the first essential minimum is that the learner be able to speak of what has happened, what is happening, or what will happen. The sentences can relate to what is happening in the pictures and the surrounding (preceding and following) circumstances, or they can relate to what the teacher or learner is doing or is about to do. Frames such as “When this picture was taken”, “Before this picture was taken”, “After this picture was taken” are helpful.

“Before this, this man folded the cloth.” “After this the man will spread the cloth.” If the man is ironing cloth, then for both of these statements the correct response would be “false”, since he would have first spread the cloth, and later folded it. “I am going to touch a man who is working... Did I do what I said?” “I just touched someone old.”

#### Constituents of noun phrases

Much of this sort of thing will come up without special effort to include it. Also, not everything has to be covered by this method. For instance, physical response methods work far better for learning numerals. By using currency, it is possible to cover all the numbers from one to whatever in communicative exercises.

“All of the people in this picture are eating.” “In this picture there are three small boys and three large boys.” “Someone gave this man a cup of tea.” “This lady is cleaning some rice.”

#### Negation, questions, commands, modality, voice

Sentence negation will have occurred without any planning during the first week. Along with this will be words for “no”. Also we have already been using yes/no questions. Content questions, and tag questions (or functionally similar constructions) can be handled easily.

“Who/what is he looking at?” (answers should be in the contact language). “Where is he sitting?” “What is he sitting on?” “What is she working with?” “This man is sitting in front of some firewood, right?”

There will have been much experience with commands by this point, especially since it is assumed that the photo book is being complemented by physical response drills. The learner should not miss the opportunity to begin learning about politeness phenomena. Requests and orders may involve various non-imperative forms. Role play of different relationships during sessions, e.g. mother and child, teacher and student, citizen and governor, etc. allows variety in regard to such phenomena.

Modality refers to probability, possibility, certainty and such things, as in “Perhaps this man might possibly be making shoes.” The construction of relevant exercises is left as an exercise. The main voice we are typically concerned with is passive. There will be plenty of active verbs! Probably the most common use of passive forms involves avoiding mention of the agent. “This tree was cut down.” Complications are typically in the verbal morphology. If the learner learns to understand agentless passives, later learning about adding agents, if that is allowed, will probably be fairly trivial. Using the frames such as “When this picture was taken...” may give lots of exposure to passive forms.

#### Coordination, and related phenomena

Verbs may be conjoined. However, there may be constructions in which there is a string of subordinated events, with a single event marked as the main one. (“He is sitting on a bench and eating an apple” could conceivably take the learner in various directions grammatically, depending on the language.) At the phrase level, Nouns can be conjoined as subject, object, location, instrument, etc. Sentences can be linked by “neutral” conjunctions.

#### Other NP business



A close to maximal noun phrase might be something like “all of those seven frightened children”. Languages differ in what they allow as minimal noun phrases. The learner has enough resources after a couple weeks or a month to experiment with using “all”, “all those”, “all seven”, “those frightened”, “those”, and NULL as possible noun phrases (subject position is best). Once the helper has the idea of shortening noun phrases he can go through the picture book using the range of possibilities the language allows.

If the helper is told to tell a three or four sentence “story” using vocabulary he thinks the learner knows, in relation to each picture, this will allow the learner to observe “definiteness” phenomena and anaphoric reference, as well as features which may distinguish topical from non-topical noun phrases. Remember, the goal is comprehension, not analysis, so these things do not need to be mastered. However, it is good for the learner to be able to check off these sorts of things from the grammatical checklist, meaning that exposure to them is occurring in communication, with good comprehension.

Finally, generic nouns can be used as in “This man likes to drink tea. This man raises cattle.”  
Noun roles

We are more interested in the oblique roles here, since the roles typically filled by subjects and objects will have been exemplified early on.

“With whom is this man talking?” (Interlocutor). “On the next page I will touch beside a lady who is making bread for her husband.” (Beneficiary). “Show me a boy who is standing with his father.” (Company). “The man in this picture is traveling by cart.” (Means). “These people are walking to the well.” (Destination). “They are probably coming from their house.” (Source).

More complex structures

Many complex sentence forms will be used right along. In using the checklist, the goal is to make sure to cover those which have not already come up.

If pictures are discussed in regard to what the people in them are thinking or wanting, or what they might say about what they are doing, this will illustrate complement clauses.

“He is going to tell these children to go away” (Embedded command). “He is thinking, ‘Why is this man taking my picture?’” (Embedded statement). “This person does not know what he is drinking.” (Embedded question). Embedded questions may well provide another frame for providing exposure to all of the question words.

An example of a perceptual verb with a complement would be “This man could not see me taking his picture.” A stative subject clause would be “It is good that this woman is making bread for her family.” A modal main predicate would be “It is certain that this man will buy some vegetables.”

Relative clause also have been used in early examples. At some point the learner will want to see that at least subject relatives, object relatives, and oblique relatives have been covered.

“On this page there are three people who are making things” (Subject relative). “Show me someone whom a child is pushing” (Object relative). “Show me a window in front of which no one is standing” (Oblique relative).

Alternatives to relative clauses (e.g. participles). Expressions are found in many languages such as the italicized part of “A man *eating bread* was sitting across the street.” In such cases the verb is used adjectivally. If this is a common sort of expression, it should be easy to get the language helper to construct sentences with participles modifying the main character in each photo.

Finally, we will consider examples of clauses that are commonly labelled adverbial. As with tense/aspect distinctions, our goal is not necessarily to cover everything at this point in language learning. The goal is for the learner to have enough resources for functional conversational ability by the third month or so. Languages are often over-equipped for such a minimal need.

Reason clauses, for example, may have a form like “He was angry over my coming.” But there may be other options such as, “He was angry because I came.” The italicized portions are examples of what we refer to as “small adverbial clauses”. The learner needs to become familiar with some pattern for expressing the reason relation. By the end of the first year he or she will be familiar with all of the major patterns for such things.

“This woman is making bread because she needs to feed her family” (reason); “Because this lady’s children are thirsty and she needs to wash clothes, therefore she is carrying water” (reason and result); “This woman is making bread in order to feed her family” (purpose); “This woman is taking care of her family by making bread” (means); “Getting up and walking across the street, this man got on his motorcycle” (participial/background).

The following illustrate what we have called “large adverbial clauses” (often called “dependent”). “Even though it is hot, still this man is working” (concession, contra-expectation); “If this man drops his tea cup, then it will break” (conditional); “If this man were rich, then he would not be working in the sun” (counter-factual conditional).

A few further comments are in order with regard to complex sentences. First, in training learners to use the methods, it is good to have a group of them brain-storm as many reasonable sentences of each type which might be associated with each picture. The more fully predictable the sentence is from the scene in the photo, the better, but as long as the sentence is connected with the photo, the photo serves to provide the context which aids comprehension.

To use these methods so early in language learning assumes, of course, a helper who is bilingual in the trade language. My observations suggest that learners who start out working monolingually experience much slower progress than those who start out working bilingually and then “go monolingual” (even when relating to bilinguals) after three or four months. This should be obvious, but often one gets the sense that field-workers feel “monolingual” is the ideal right from the beginning. It is not that the learning process itself benefits from the bilingualism. The helper does not use the contact language during the actual communication activities. The advantage of the contact language is that the learner can explain and exemplify what he desires the helper to do. When this is possible, my impression is that most helpers can quickly get on with, for example, using a reason and result construction that is fairly obviously related to each picture. This should, of course, employ vocabulary and grammar the helper feels the learner will understand. Every time a sentence is not understood, the helper can supply the meaning in the contact language. A complete pass can be made through the photo book for each such construction, or for a combination of such constructions, or less than a complete pass can be used, depending on how much is required before the learner is convinced that he or she has recognition ability for the construction or constructions being focussed on. When the sentences so used are captured on tape, it provides further opportunity for relaxed comprehension practice using the tape recorder and photo book together.

You can’t get everything by one method

There are some constructions which do not lend themselves well to the photo book method. I would suggest indirect objects (and the related sentence types), reflexives, reciprocals, destination, source, company, and direction as examples of relations and roles which are more easily learned through the Total Physical Response method. In addition, most of the constructions which can be learned by the photo book method can also be learned by the Total Physical Response method. Again, however, some matters included in the grammar checklist may not lend themselves as well to physical response methods as to the photo book method. Between the two methods, the learner can quickly develop the ability to comprehend a substantial core of grammatical constructions.

### Unstructured use

One learner with considerable experience in ESL chose to use a book with pictures (not photos) in a much less structured and more natural way. In connection with each picture, going through them in the order they were found in the book, the helper would point and talk, and the learner would learn to comprehend all sorts of information in connection with each picture. Using such a method, it would be possible for linguistically trained language learners to keep an eye on a grammatical checklist. Others might need more help from a consultant in using such a tool. Also, by using carefully planned line drawings illustrating cultural scenes, it is possible to achieve more detail and ethnographic sophistication than is achieved in my photos. However, it would take longer to produce the same quantity of pictures in that way.

### Monolingual use

Unfortunately, I have not had opportunity yet to employ such a photo book in a monolingual situation. There are ideas I would like to try, but as I have not done so, I will not discuss them. In truly monolingual situations, I am told that some people have difficulty interpreting photos, and that line drawings seem to work better. At any rate, using pictures and the “here and now” principle, I feel the learner has more control over the content of the learning sessions than if he or she tries to learn entirely while sitting by the campfire or working in the crops from the very outset.

### Later use, and better planned photo books

This paper has described the use of a photo book in the early weeks of language learning, as one aid to high-speed comprehension learning. The main advantage is that more is learned more quickly than by methods which involve memorizing, drilling, and learning to speak right from the outset. Another advantage is that all language learning from the first session involves real communication: receiving messages, processing them, and responding to them. Sometimes the response is no more than being able to keep up, connecting each sentence meaningfully to each photo. But even this minimal response means processing the sentences, and means that real communication is taking place.

The initial exercises, as we have used them, are contrived and unnatural. This applies to the physical response methods as well. A sentence such as, “If you are wearing anything green, then your wife would like you to pat her on the head, after which she will pat you on the head” is an excellent Total Physical Response sentence, involving real communication—comprehension, processing, responding. But it is contrived.

The learner will rapidly be able to comprehend a broad range of vocabulary and constructions. After that, things can become much more natural and less contrived. Endless-freewheeling conversation can revolve around those same photos, including talking about them for real, i.e. who the people are in them, various facts about those people, and the situation surrounding the snapping of the photo, and so on. Furthermore, the photo book can be a conversation piece with visitors, and provide a basis for conversation and learning for an indefinite period. This would, however, be a fairly minor language learning activity once the learner is able to follow simple stories and series method texts and so on.

Our first picture book, made of pictures clipped from magazines, was not as useful as a book of photos. We found we did much better by quickly shooting three roles of film and arranging them in a scrap-book. I have long felt a need to approach this in a more planned manner. It would be possible to take photos illustrating all steps in a procedure, or the major events in the daily cycle, yearly cycle, or life cycle. The major differences in stages of the life cycle. Major cultural happenings could be photographed in great detail and the photos arranged in a logical, spatial, or chronological manner. (Such resources could be shared among language learners in the same

culture area.) Alternatively such photos could be loose, rather than pasted in a scrap-book, with comprehension activities (and later, production activities as well) being built around sorting them into order.

### Conclusion

This paper describes a language learning method for linguistically trained language learners. Certainly, a consultant could adapt it to the needs of others as well. It assumes that language is acquired through communication experiences. Thus it contributes to the goal of having all language learning activities consist of real communication, right from the outset. Yet it takes advantage of the analytical ability of the learner. Inevitably, the linguistically trained learner will be noticing patterns and making generalizations. Going through a hundred photos using, for example, oblique relative clauses, contributes to this, and allows substantial observations to be made and conclusions to be drawn. But it aims at optimal monitor use. Discovering the pattern for oblique relative clauses purely through analytical work, and then employing it in speech to consciously construct utterances containing oblique relative clauses, amounts to over-use of the monitor. Linguistically trained language learners are not in danger of being under-users of the monitor. Methods such as this allow the learner to benefit from his analytical skills and ability to generalize, even while experiencing language as communication. (See Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982 for a discussion of the monitor concept.)

Our pre-field training needs to do more to counteract popular concepts still brought to the field by some field-workers. In particular I have in mind, the language-as-subject-matter concept of “language study”, the desire to make “lessons” to be “learned” in non-communicative ways. Learners will say that this is their learning style. Yet there is little evidence that pre-field training provides enough experience with, and confidence in, any other style, to allow them to really make this judgement. Hence methods such as this one are not greeted with uniform enthusiasm, except when major efforts are made on the field to supplement pre-field training in language learning.

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Dulay, Heidi, Marina Burt, and Stephen Krashen. 1982. *Language Two*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Leave me alone! Can't you see I'm learning your language?

by Greg Thomson

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### Summary

This essay by Greg Thomson describes how to build up a social network while learning a language. It shows how important social relationships are to really entering a new language community and culture. This essay is an important complement to the technical information about how to learn a second language.

### Contents

1. Introduction
2. Your entry point into the speech community
3. Branching out: getting a network
4. Coping with some less than ideal situations
5. My network is growing and strengthening—now what?
6. Conclusion (Leave me alone!)

### References

## 1. Introduction

[Keywords: meaningful exposure to language, speech community]

Imagine yourself crashed on a desert island, all alone, with nothing but a radio and, fortunately, a solar powered battery charger and a good supply of rechargeable batteries. The only station you can get on the radio is in Mandarin Chinese. Having discovered and read the journals of several others who were stranded there before you, you realize you may be there for the rest of your life. You've always wanted to learn a foreign language. This is your big chance. Any other pastime available to you seems boring by comparison. So find yourself a cozy sand dune, hunker down, and turn your radio on.

1.1. Learning a language means becoming part of a speech community.

[Keywords: speech community]

I can think of two good reasons you are not going to learn any Chinese. Probably the most obvious reason is that although you hear plenty of Chinese being spoken, you have no way to find out what anything means. The second reason is closely related to the first. It is, I believe, more basic. You cannot learn Chinese because you have no relationship of any sort with anyone who uses Chinese.

1.1.1. No relationships—no language!

[Keywords: interacting with people]

Language implies relationships. The great philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein reasoned that there can be no such thing as a private language, meaning a language which belongs to a single individual (Wittgenstein 1953). His reasons are rather philosophical, and his claim has been, like everything in philosophy, rather controversial. But I have my own (nonphilosophical) reasons for agreeing with Wittgenstein. A language is a means of communication between people.

Suppose I see someone stealing your car, but you are looking the other way. What I see is now a part of my experience but not of yours. Language enables me to describe my experience to you with a statement like, "Hey, that guy is stealing your car". There may be other uses of language, but they are all derivative on this basic one: language lets me make my experience available to you. What would it mean then for me to have a private language, that is, a way of making my experience available to myself? As soon as I have experienced an experience, indeed, while I am in the process of experiencing it, it is available to me. I can't make myself aware of what I'm already aware of by telling myself about it.

So when you talk about language, you're talking about community. You learned your first language within a community, and you learned it as a means of participating in community. The famous linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure compared language to a contract between the people who use it (de Saussure 1959). If I secretly decide to mean cat whenever I say the word dog, I will be misunderstood by all members of the English speaking community whenever I use the word dog. The word dog stand for dogs, but it doesn't stand for dogs in the abstract. It stands for dogs in that it is used by people to talk to other people about dogs. Take away other people, and you take away language. Language is an interpersonal thing, a shared thing, a communal thing. No community, no language.

Now, you want to learn a language. I hope you can see that what you are saying is that you want to become part of a community and function in that community by means of its language, which is its primary means of being a community.

(If you're the argumentative type, you're probably thinking of scenarios where everyone but you has been killed by a meteor, or perhaps you're thinking about people who learn a "dead" language from written documents. If I were argumentative, I'd convince you that even in these cases, language only exists through participation in communities. Good thing I'm not

argumentative. Instead, I'll move right ahead with the discussion of what this all means for us as language learners.)

Think of how you learned your first language. A very small number of people interacted with you. This probably included your mother, and may have included other caretakers and older siblings. They were part of a larger language community, but at that point you did not have a lot to do with that larger community. There may have been a period of several months where your mother and siblings were the only ones who could easily understand what you were saying. As you ventured out farther into the world, your speech had to become more and more like that of the larger speech community.

Let's agree then, that learning Mandarin means (among other things) becoming part of a community which uses Mandarin as its main means of interaction. That community contains hundreds of millions of people. Do you enter into a relationship with hundreds of millions of people? The answer is yes. Recall that a language is like a contract between the people who use it. Everyone in that community accepts certain rules and plays by those rules. Though most of the members of the community will never meet one another; nevertheless, should they meet, they would at once recognize that they are members of the same community insofar as they recognize that their behavior is constrained by the same rules (or at least reasonably similar rules).

1.1.2. Doing unto others, with others also doing unto you

[Keywords: exchange theory, speech community]

For communities to exist, people must share certain rules, or norms, of behavior. People don't usually think about most of the norms that they share with others in their communities. They may think about some of the norms, as when a parent tells a child, "You're supposed to say 'thank you' when someone does something nice for you." However, that same parent may not realize that moments earlier, someone did something nice for her, and she didn't say "Thank you," but instead said, "You're too kind," or perhaps, "How thoughtful of you," or maybe, "You'll never know how much I appreciate that," or possibly, "Hey, great!". In those cases, the parent is following much more detailed, fine-tuned norms for expressing gratitude than the four-year-old who says "Thank you" is aware of at this point. The overwhelming majority of the norms which unite a community are ones that are rarely or never thought about consciously or discussed.

The main purpose of the community-wide norms is to ensure that the behavior of one person does not adversely affect other people. Therefore, someone who is seen to be a non-follower of the community norms is seen to be a potential threat to the community. Of course, in some cases it is clear that someone is still learning the norms. That implies the person is new to the community. That new person may be a baby. Or it may be you.

The norms which define a community become particularly important in the context of transactions. A transaction occurs when two people interact. If I sell you a used car, that is a transaction. If I meet you in the hall and smile, that too is a transaction.

For you to learn your new language is going to require that people talk to you, and listen to you, for thousands of hours. That will involve a very large number of transactions! A popular approach to understanding transactions is called the exchange theory (Homans, 1958, discussed in Milroy, 1987). According to the exchange theory, in every transaction there is a cost and a benefit. If I sell you a used car, you will receive something of value (the car) and so will I receive something of value (the money). (Likewise, we'll both be giving up something of value.) If I give you a ridiculously good deal, say, charging you only half of the true value of the car, and we are both aware that I have given you a ridiculously good deal, then sometime in the future when I

ask a “small favour” of you, you may feel obliged to grant me the favour. That is because when the exchange is uneven, it creates a sense of indebtedness, called an obligation in the exchange theory. If I give you a smile, you can give me a smile in exchange. We both made each other feel warm and fuzzy. No obligation was created because we each gave something of equal value to the other.

The implications of this concept for language learners are enormous. Right now you have zero Mandarin Chinese (or Chukchee, or whatever) in your head. That is, there is an incomprehensibly large goody, i.e. the Chinese language, which you need. It is entirely in the possession of other people. The only way you will get it is if they give it to you. If you are going to be in the process of becoming a functioning part of a community of Chinese speakers, then something equal in value to what you are going to receive (the language, among other things) in the course of countless transactions will need to pass in the opposite direction, that is, from you to them. That should give you something to think about.

And to make matters worse, you’ll start out as a potential trouble maker. Spradley and McCurdy (1984) gave the title *Conformity and Conflict* to their collection of readings in cultural anthropology. They explain that the very set of shared norms which makes it possible for a community to function smoothly (conformity) can become a destructive force when two communities come into contact (conflict). That is because those shared norms define what is good and bad in the eyes of the people who share them. Here you come, into the midst of conformers, a ready made source of conflict, since you operate by different standards of good and bad. You need a massive transaction to occur if you are to learn the language, but the deck is clearly stacked against your being able to hold up your end of the exchange. It will be very kind of them if you end up learning their language!

## 2. Your entry point into the speech community

[Keywords: speech community]

Relax. You will be glad to learn that you don’t have to cope with all of that all at once. You might learn to swim by jumping into the rapids where the water is over your head and icy cold. But that is not the only way to learn to swim. Nor is it necessarily the best way.

What if there is a warm, calm, shallow pool with a soft, sandy bottom where you can get your feet wet and then your knees, etc. And you can try to swim, and make mistakes, and then get the hang of it. Later you can venture into deeper and deeper waters. In the end, you find out that the river wasn’t really all that swift, or deep, or cold—just swift, deep and cold enough for a non-swimmer to drown in!

You are going to become part of the new speech community. For you, starting at the shallow end means structuring your own gentle little speech community in which you can learn to dog-paddle. From there you can venture out little by little into a bigger world.

### 2.1. Finding a mediating person

[Keywords: culture friends (mediating persons), language associates]

You can begin with just one or two people. People like linguists and anthropologists approach a community through a relatively small number of people. Such people have traditionally been called informants. Most linguists and anthropologists quickly discovered that inside every informant there lurked a friend, waiting to emerge.

There is a reason for this. People aren’t forced to be informants. Rather, they want to be. I once wished to learn about the subculture of motor-rickshaw drivers in Hyderabad, Pakistan. I always get stressed out over recruiting an informant. But I recalled a driver who struck me as unusually educated for his profession (I later learned he held a degree in English), and the next time I saw him I told him that I wished to learn of the world of rickshaw-driving from him. He seemed

hesitant but agreed to come to my house at a specified time. That time came, and the gate-bell sounded. I went out and down to the gate, to find a man I did not recognize, standing beside a rickshaw. He told me that his friend was nervous about coming and talking to me, and so he was volunteering.

This man turned out to be a very special person indeed. I recorded about two hours of interviews with him and went over the recordings and asked some questions. He had loads to share on any point I would ask about. After the interviews, he continued to visit and provided us with new entrance ways into Pakistani life.

The key point I want to make here is that this informant was self-selected. If you seek help from within a group, and out of several people, one or more appear to really want to help you, then you are witnessing this self-selection process at work. Self-selection tends to result in wonderful helpers.

The man I have just described could not speak English and was not widely traveled. But within his peer-group, he was an outward-reaching, open-minded individual. Everyone is different. Some people are tightly bound into a spot near the center of their peer-group and do not like to venture near the edges. There is nothing wrong with that. They may be major contributors to the community's welfare. But their place is right near the middle of their group. Some day, you may be deeply inside that group, and then such people may become wonderful friends. But your very first friends will be people who are more comfortable moving at the periphery of the group, where that group interfaces with outsiders. You'll start out as an outsider. People like my rickshaw driver friend are human bridges. Some time after our interviews he asked me to accompany him and a couple buddies to visit his wife in the hospital. As we rode in the back of a covered Suzuki pick-up (public transportation), two young mothers sat across from us wearing burqas (large black over-garments worn for modesty by Muslim women). As is frequently the case, their veils were flipped back, exposing their faces, but not their hair. Their interest was piqued by this obvious foreigner who appeared to be a local insider. This so validated me in their sight that they asked if I would come to their home in the countryside and visit them. They had their elderly father dictate his address to me, which I wrote down with his pencil. He then insisted I keep the pencil. I stood there with my mouth hanging open as I watched these women flip their veils down over their faces and head for a bus to continue their journey. I previously had the impression that rural women in burqas didn't relate comfortably to men other than close relatives. My rickshaw driver friend didn't know where I got that idea. The fact is, he had validated me and led me in a bit more deeply into the larger Pakistani society.

So, as you seek to wade into the shallow water, you're looking for a person who is comfortable at the edge of his or her community and culture. My rickshaw driver friend was the perfect person at the point when he came along. However, he would not have been the perfect person two years earlier. And since we are concerned with your very first contacts, we need to consider people who are even further from the center of their group.

The kind of person I have in mind has been called a mediating person (Bochner, 1981). Taft (1981) describes a variety of people who are near the edge, psychologically speaking, of their society or subculture. Not all of them qualify as mediating persons. Some people may wish they could move away from their culture and adopt yours and some may already have done just that, at least as far as they are concerned. Taft refers to theirs as peripheral membership in the community you are hoping to join. Worse yet, from the standpoint of your needs, are those who Taft calls isolated. These extremely marginalized people have a negative attitude toward their own culture, and toward other cultures as well. Once some strangers standing beside me at a newsstand in Pakistan commented "There is one of those capitalist pigs we were talking about". I



suspect these were marginalized individuals, and they would not have been the ideal choice for my initial entry point to the larger Pakistani community. A better choice would be people who belong to what Taft calls a marginal group. These would be people who have moved out into a different culture (yours in this case), with which they now identify, while retaining a group identity based on their common background. The Chinese community in Calgary would be an example.

True mediating persons, in Taft's typology, are people who remain active in their own culture and are also completely at home in the other culture and have positive attitudes toward both cultures. I met people like that in Pakistan, people who lived part of the year in Canada and part of the year in Pakistan and were happy in both places.

## 2.2. The mediating person as a Language Resource Person

[Keywords: language associates, monolingual, speech community, techniques for language learning]

Ideals are rarely achieved, but it is good to think about them as we seek the to find best options available. We come back now to the fact that you need to become part, not just of a new community, but of a new speech community. That is central to what is meant by learn a language. Let's picture the ideal person to serve as your point of entry to the new speech community. Call her Noju. Noju's language and culture of origin are the language and culture you wish to learn, and she also speaks your language with ease. She has participated extensively in your culture and feels at home in it. She has positive feelings about both societies, and, for that matter, she would enjoy exploring additional new cultures herself if the opportunity arose. She is a true mediating person. But since we have a special focus on language, we also want her to be a person who is enthusiastic about her mother tongue. She's not a trained linguist (I mean, even ideals aren't that ideal), and so she may not have given much thought to the structure of her language, but when you point out a structural observation you have made, such as, "Did you ever notice that no words ever end with b, d, or g," she replies "Wow, that's really interesting". She is not familiar with the latest concepts of second language learning (not that ideal), but neither does she have strong opinions as to how it should be done. She is adventurous, and willing to try whatever language learning methods you wish to use, even if they seem a little silly to her at first. Not only is she an ideal mediating person, but she is an ideal Language Resource Person (LRP).

Now ideals are ideals. You may not be able to get very close to this ideal in every respect, though you may get close to it in many respects. The helpful thing about having an ideal in mind is that it will encourage you to avoid making matters worse for yourself than you need to. For example, someone might think there is a special advantage to begin learning the language from the most conservative, monolingual member of the community. Not recommended. That person may later become your best friend, but you need to prepare for that. Otherwise, you could end up making a worst enemy instead of a best friend.

If at all possible, your first LRP should be someone who shares a language with you. For example, if your mother tongue is English, and your LRP is fluent in English, you will be able to use powerful language learning techniques, because you can clearly explain those techniques to your LRP in a language you both know well. In addition, you can concentrate on rapidly learning to comprehend the language, using appropriate techniques, without feeling a lot of pressure to speak the language before you have some familiarity with it. This can greatly reduce the stress of early language learning.

It is also important that you begin working with monolingual LRPs fairly soon, say after one to four months of initial language learning. If no monolingual LRPs are available to you, then you

will need to begin working monolingually (in the new language, not in English!) with your bilingual LRPs. At the point where you can function somewhat in the language you may find it less stressful to work with monolingual LRPs rather than forcing yourself to work monolingually with bilingual LRPs, since that may tend to feel artificial. 1

Our focus right now however, is on your very first LRPs, and you will prefer that they be bilingual. You will prefer that they not be overly marginalized with regard to their own culture. Hopefully they will be cross-culturally open-minded, outward-reaching people, but nevertheless people with strong and healthy links to many other people within their own community. How do you find such people? Recall the self-selection process. It may be that the right people will emerge quickly. If not, you will need to employ the network building techniques discussed below until you arrive at the right people. For now, let's assume that you have found them.

### 2.3. Language learning at the entry point: no free lunches

[Keywords: exchange theory, language associates]

So here you are. You have located someone who is willing to be your point of entry into the new speech community. I have suggested that initial recruitment may be a simple matter of making your need known and seeing who is interested in helping. There is more to consider. An easy mistake is to make a long-term arrangement with someone who subsequently doesn't work out very well. In working with LRPs in a number of languages, I have noticed that some people catch on really quickly to what I need to do, while others are never going to catch on. If I've made a long term arrangement with someone who doesn't work out, then what do I do? Better to ask someone to help me "for one hour this afternoon" than "for the next three months". Then I can ask, again, and again. Soon I will be able to decide whether a long term arrangement with a particular person will be a good idea. If possible, I should begin with more than one person, so that whoever I work with expects me to work with others and doesn't feel personally rejected if I end up not working with him or her all that much. Bear in mind also that someone who is not ideal for my initial language learning may come to be very helpful at a later stage.

Next comes that troublesome exchange theory we discussed before. Every transaction (including every interaction between you and your LRP) involves something of equal value going in both directions, or else the party who contributes less to the transaction incurs indebtedness to the other. One of my very first LRPs listened to my request that he help me regularly. I clearly remember his response: "What's in it for me?" A fair question. You might ask what's in it for you, but it is better to ask whether, from your LRP's standpoint, the amount of effort is worth the amount of reward.

In my case, I had a simple solution: minimum wage. But I rushed into that a bit precipitously. I wasn't really giving the guy a job. And he was later to become a real friend. If I could go back and start over I might well do things differently. First of all, I wouldn't propose it as a job offer. Rather than, "Will you be my main language teacher?", I would have asked, "Can you help me for a few minutes?" Once he was comfortable with what we were doing, I would say, "Any chance we could do this for a couple hours next Saturday morning?" I would have incurred indebtedness. In that situation, I now realize that opportunities would have quickly arisen for me to reciprocate. Whenever he bought his groceries, he might easily end up paying five dollars to someone to take him home (this was awhile ago), unless, that is, he met someone who had an obligation to take him home. My paying him minimum wage for helping me learn the language sure made it easier for me to refuse him rides. But that risked creating hard feelings anyway. And just the other day, a member of that same culture reminded me, "You know how it is when a friend asks you to lend him money. If he's really your friend, you're not going to be thinking

‘that guy owes me money’. If he thinks of it some time, he might pay you back, but you’re not going to mention it to him.”

How I wish I could go back and start over, knowing what I know now. I had the opportunity to participate in a rich system of rights and obligations, and I opted to pay minimum wage as the easy way out. Mind you, I’ve known people who didn’t want to pay their LRPs minimum wage, but neither did they want to give rides or make “loans”. I suspect if I had done things the way I should have, it would have cost me more than paying minimum wage, but it also would have “bought” me far more than I got by paying minimum wage. There is no stingy way to become part of a new speech community. It costs what it costs. And it’s worth what it costs.

This is not to say that there will not be times when paying a fixed hourly amount will be desirable or necessary. I find it easiest to have a scheduled daily time with an LRP. In many cases, this may best be remunerated by direct cash payments. It may still be possible to start out as though your LRP is doing you a favour, but then at the end of the first week to say, “Here, take this. You’ve been such a great help. I’d feel guilty not to give you something. It’s not much.” But be sure that “not much” is at least minimum wage (according to local standards)! On one occasion, when I wanted to improve my fluency through eight hours per day of semi-structured conversation practice for a whole month, there was no choice but to make it a work-for-wages arrangement. Every case is different. In the end, doing something that works, but is less than ideal is to be preferred over giving up on learning the language because the ideal is unachievable.

It should go without saying that you do also need to take into account the actual value of the exchange to you personally, and be fair from your standpoint. I’ve been envisioning a situation where the payoff to you is that you get to be part of a new community. For some people there will be other rewards, such as an M.A. degree or a Ph.D. partly as a result of the help you are getting. Or perhaps your work will lead to published journal articles, with the accompanying increase in the your professional standing. In such cases you need to be sure that the people who help you receive what will be of comparable value from their perspective. This could indeed be wages, well above minimum wage, as well as other career benefits, along with benefits to the community as a whole which result from your work.

Even if your main payoff lies simply in becoming part of the new community, you must bear in mind that there is going to be a considerable cost to others. Recall what it is like for you to communicate with someone who is just beginning to learn your native language. It is hard work. So if you are going to become fluent in someone else’s language, lots of people are going to work very hard at communicating with you. They must receive something equal in value to the effort they expend. The principle is, something that is perceived by both parties to be of equal value must travel in both directions, sooner or later. You are not allowed to incur a permanent imbalance of payments in your own favour!

Fortunately, material value is not the only value. Milroy (1987) includes such things as “greetings, civilities, jokes, information,...child-minding services, or assistance in times of sickness or poverty” as typical exchange commodities and refers to exchanges in which the LRP’s speech is traded for “sympathy and a boost to the informant’s self-esteem”. Your friendship and time can be an important reward to others, as theirs is to you. It was obvious that my rickshaw driver friend found a variety of rewards in his relationship with me.

2.4. Language learning at the entry point: time to think about doing something

[Keywords: TPR (Total Physical Response), beginning learners, commands, descriptions, formal language learning, language sessions, photographs and photo books, pictures and picture books, social networks, video, vocabulary]

It may sound as though I am assuming that you are a self-directed, independent language learner, learning the language from friends and neighbors, but not taking a formal course. I need to say a word about where formal courses fit in. If a formal language course is an ideal one, it will be your entry point into the new language community. The methods used in the course will involve you in actually using the language creatively from the outset. Some learning activities will focus on comprehension. A native speaker will communicate with you in the new language in ways that require you (and enable you) to process the language (that is, to figure out what is being said) and respond in some way. For example, the native speaker could instruct you to arrange a group of objects in a particular way and you respond by arranging the objects as instructed. As you learn to comprehend more and more, your ability to speak also increases, and you interact in the language with other learners and native speakers, doing role-plays which deal with typical communication situations that you are facing or will face in real life outside of the formal course. The course will also help you to become aware of cross-cultural friction points, and again you may use role-play as a means of gaining the social skills which you need in order to begin functioning acceptably in the new society. From the standpoint of the language, there are two broad challenges in the real world: you must be able to understand the barrage of speech that will come your way, and you must be able to make up new sentences on the spot. An ideal language course will concentrate on developing these two skills.

But some language courses are far from ideal. I can hear at least ninety percent of those readers who are taking formal language courses exclaiming, "But my language course is nothing like that." Just the other day I heard two students preparing for the mid-term examination of their introductory German course. Said he to her, "Do you know the second person plural form of *möchten*?" Welcome to the dark ages. Modern language departments still teach "languages" as though a language were a body of facts, hundreds if not thousands of facts such as "The third person plural subjunctive of X is Y" and "The verb meaning 'to eat' is Z". It is odd that the same modern language departments often offer courses on second language learning theory and practice, in which they describe the *what-is-the-second-person-plural-form-of-möchten* approach to language teaching as something belonging to the 1940's. Well, welcome to the 1990's. In Pakistan I met people who had been "learning the language" for over a year but who were still not becoming part of a speech community to any extent. A language course does not have to be like that. A language course can give you your very first, sheltered entrance into the speech community and guide you as you begin to venture farther afield. But if this is not the case with your course, then you will need to work at becoming part of a speech community on your own.

You may not have enrolled in a formal course, but you may have a formal textbook, perhaps with tapes, which you plan to follow. Once again, there is no guarantee that a textbook and tapes will provide an entry into a speech community. You may indeed learn a lot from a formal course or from a textbook with tapes which will speed your early acquisition of the language and assist your entry into the speech community. But it is important that you realize that you will only learn to communicate by communicating, and the work of entering the speech community still lies before you.

So whether you are taking (or using) a formal course, or have already done formal language study, or are starting from scratch all on your own, your reason for meeting with your LRP is the same: you want to develop communication skills. If you have already done formal study, you have a head start in some ways. You may be able to get right on with conversational practice using pictures or objects of various kinds as focuses of discussion, or struggling to discuss

specific topics of interest to you, noting where you get stuck and making a point to learn what you lack that causes you to get stuck.

If you are starting from scratch on your own, without formal course materials, you can begin with very rudimentary communication skills, exploring the grammar as you go. If formal linguistic descriptions of the language are available to you, they may not make a lot of sense to you at first. If not, don't waste too much time trying to learn and remember everything in them. You can return to them again and again as your comprehension ability and speaking ability continue to grow. Each time you will understand more. You may also find that they are incorrect in some points, unless the linguist who wrote them was a native speaker or someone who learned the language very well.

So let's say you are learning the language from scratch, on your own, without the aid of any linguistic descriptions. This is not the place for a detailed description of all activities you might engage in to start developing communication ability. But here are some suggestions. (See Thomson, 1993a, where I deal with this in detail, as well as Larson, 1984, especially Part III, Stage I.)

You want your LRP to understand that you are mainly going to be learning to communicate, and you will learn to communicate by using the language, and you will provide the needed structure for your language sessions; s/he shouldn't "come prepared". How are you going to communicate when you don't know any of the language? No problem. Your LRP knows plenty of the language. S/he will be the first one to communicate in the new language, albeit under your guidance. One of the best techniques for getting started is the so-called Total Physical Response (TPR) method (Asher, 1982). You begin by having your LRP tell you to do things. S/he can demonstrate what she means by doing the things herself. Better yet, s/he can issue the commands to another speaker of the target language first, and you can learn to comprehend the commands by observing the responses. Then s/he will instruct you to do the same things, and you will respond by carrying out the instructions.

You begin with very simple instructions like "stand", "walk", and "sit". Unfortunately, that is about as far as some people ever go in using TPR. The key is to keep building. You can learn all sorts of complex formations through TPR. Eventually the LRP will be able to tell you something like "If you are holding three dollars, place them in front of him, but if you are only holding two dollars, put them into your pocket." (You can use play money.) That may not seem like very meaningful communication, but you may be surprised to find that it is fun and interesting for both you and your LRP, and that you really do develop the ability to process speech through such activities.

At this stage you want to learn to understand the words for hundreds of common actions and objects. What objects? You can begin by looking around you. Any object which you are likely to want to be able to talk about within the next few months is fair game. (A sample instruction from your LRP to you for learning to understand the word for "stove" is "Walk to the stove"; you respond by walking to the stove.) To get other ideas for objects, visit the market, buy one of everything, and bring it home (sample instruction from your LRP to you: "Pick up the cucumber"). Using TPR you can learn to recognize not only the names of the objects, but other properties of objects, such as size, shape, colour, and quantities, including numbers, and relative locations (sample instruction: "Place two green bananas in front of me, and put a yellow banana between them"). Using a family tree diagram (with photos or drawings of people standing for maternal grandmother, father's brother, etc., etc.) you can learn to recognize kinship terms (sample instruction from LRP to you: "Show me the little boy's sister"). And don't forget body

parts. You can hardly call yourself a “speaker” of even “broken Chukchee” if you don’t recognize the word for “nose” (sample instruction: “Point to your nose”).

Then there are words for actions. Some action words were used in the examples above (“Walk to the stove”, “Pick up the cucumber”, and so forth). Everything (just about) that you can do with your body is worth learning. And you can also learn expressions for anything that you can do with all those hundreds of objects that you have learned the names of in the previous paragraph! What can you do with a piece of cloth, a rope, a glass of water, a carrot? (Sample instruction: “Wad up the piece of cloth, and break the carrot into three pieces”). And try to think of everything a person in that community might do in a typical day, from rising until retiring. Any of these actions can form the basis of TPR activities, even if you have to pretend, e.g. that you are shaving.

One of the most powerful aids to communication at this stage is pictures, either photos or drawings (or even videos). Many scenes from everyday life can be used. (Sample instruction: “Show me the picture of someone who is dressed-up.”) In addition to TPR activities, your LRP can simply describe the pictures at a level that you are capable of understanding. At the outset, this may simply be “This is a man, This is a woman, This is another man. This is another woman. This is a woman and this is a man. This is a boy. This is a girl. This is a girl and a man.” You can build slowly from day to day. As your recognition of basic vocabulary grows, the time will soon come when your LRP can give you detailed descriptions of various aspects of pictures, and you can respond by pointing to the picture you believe s/he is describing. Or she can tell you how the people in the picture would describe what they are doing, or what they might be thinking, and you try to guess which picture she has in mind.

You are probably thinking, what about grammar? Good thought. In your TPR activities, and in your use of pictures, you will plan to emphasize specific sentence patterns and get a lot of repetition of those specific patterns. For pictures, I have described how you might do this in another paper (Thomson, 1989, 1993a).

One thing you will want to learn to comprehend right away is the pronoun system. This may consist of separate pronoun words, like I, you, he, in English. Or there may be special endings on the verbs (suffixes) or special beginnings on the verbs (prefixes) which carry these meanings. For example, if you say *hablo*, in Spanish, the meaning is “I speak”, but the part that carries the meaning of the English word I, is the *o*. Often there will be both separate words, and prefixes or suffixes on the verb. Thus to say “I speak” in Spanish one can also say, *Yo hablo*, where the word *yo* is also translated I. You’ll want to learn to understand such pronouns functioning as subject (“If I am eating peas, pick up a carrot.”), as object (“Pat me”) and in other roles (“Put the pencil near me”; “Write your name for me”; “Pick up the rope with me”). Be prepared for surprises. For example, there may be no difference between “him” and “her”, and there may be differences you are not used to. In Arabic there is a special plural form for two people as opposed to more than two. I cannot begin to prepare you for every possible surprise. This is where published descriptions of the language (or training in linguistics) can be a big help. Using pictures and physical response drills you can learn to comprehend statements about things in the past, present and future. (Sample instruction: “Show me a picture of a man who is going to sell something.”)

You can learn a variety of complex sentences including those with relative clauses (sample instruction: “Show me a woman who is walking”), conditional clauses (sample instruction: “If you have more money than me, give me some of your money”), purpose clauses (sample instruction: “Draw a man to show to her”), etc. Other examples are to be found in Thomson (1989, 1993a), Asher (1982), and Silvers (1985). Winitz (1982) is a source of ideas for pictures.

(Paste blank paper over the English sentences so that they are not a distraction to you or your LRP. You can use the pictures for more purposes than are suggested by the English sentences printed there.) The best source of pictures is photographs of everyday scenes and activities in the community you are entering.

If it is not clear already, you need to carefully prepare for your sessions with your LRP. You will do well to spend at least an hour in preparation for each one hour session with your LRP. The one hour session can then be tape recorded, and you can listen to it several times before the next session and later on for review.

If you are learning a language for which no written grammars exist, or perhaps even if they do exist, you will probably benefit a lot from organizing your observations and thoughts regarding the grammar and sounds of the language. Your own observations, organized your own way, may be more useful to you than the observations of others which may be written in some dense technical jargon. Spend some time each day writing out any new observations. This can be included in your regular journal writing in which you may describe many aspects of your experience as a language learner working with your LRP or using the language in the community. Your journal should also include daily observations of the new culture.

So far I have been concentrating on learning to comprehend. The advantage of concentrating initially on learning to comprehend is that you can make very rapid progress. In a month or two you will be able to comprehend hundreds of the most essential vocabulary items and enough sentence patterns to form the basis of functional speaking ability. If, instead, you concentrate on memorizing whole sentences or dialogues, along with lists of vocabulary, I can just about guarantee you two things. First, you'll learn a lot less in the same amount of time. Second, you won't be very good at understanding real speech, even when it employs a lot of the items that you have memorized from word lists or in sentences you memorized whole hog. You may be able to say "Where is the bathroom?", only to find that you have no hope of understanding the answer you are given.

But you ask, while I am barreling along learning to comprehend so much, when do I start learning to speak? Personally, I think it is a good idea to start speaking when you have something to say and feel like saying it. You may feel a need to memorize a few sentences lock, stock and barrel fairly early. These would be things that you frequently need to say ("Can you tell me where there is a bathroom?"), but which are beyond what you could make up for yourself on the basis of your current ability. These are sometimes called "survival expressions". These will probably include greetings and leave takings, and may include information about yourself, where you are from, and what you are doing.

Once you are well under way in your comprehension learning, you can structure many of your TPR activities around the communication needs you face in real life. For example, if you need to use taxis, your LRP can give you the kinds of instructions you might give a taxi driver, and you can carry them out (charade style, or using a toy car and a home-made map of the city). You'll probably find that the next time you ride in a taxi, you'll just start using some of what you learned to comprehend in your language sessions. It will come out naturally, and you will feel like you are speaking the language genuinely, rather than parroting something that you have memorized lock, stock and barrel. After all, your goal is to be able to make up whatever sentence you need as you need it, not to memorize enough sentences to cover every possible situation you might encounter. If you want, you can use role-play with your LRP to practice what you will say to the taxi driver. So far, your LRP has played the role of the passenger while you, as driver, responded to her instructions. You now change roles with your LRP and pretend s/he is the taxi driver. Now you give the instructions. But don't try to be fancy. You're a brand new

speaker of this language, so speak like a brand new speaker of a language! Don't try to be an unrealistically good speaker for the stage you are at. That may confuse people. You utter an exquisitely memorized sentence, and you get back a torrent of exquisite speech which you can't understand. Utter a halting, simple sentence, and people will speak simply to you, so that you have a chance to understand them and perhaps learn something new at the same time. So, now you're (barely) a member of your new speech community. You may not have communicated with many people yet. The overwhelming majority of your actual communication experiences have been with your LRP (or LRPs) in the sheltered environment of your structured language sessions. Time to think about leaving the nest. To use our earlier metaphor, it's getting hard to remain in the shallow water, because you're trying to dog paddle, but your feet keep bumping the bottom. It's time to spend more time where the water is deeper. As a matter of fact, you have designed your language sessions with this in mind, getting ready for life in the big world.

### 3. Branching out: getting a network

[Keywords: social networks, support group]

Furnham and Bochner (1986) surveyed a wide range of research that had been done on the problems people face when they move into a new culture. They refer to this movement as "culture traveling". I'm really impressed with what they say about the attrition rate among one group of culture travelers, the Peace Corps volunteers:

The figures are quite startling. The world-wide attrition rate exceeded 40 percent in seven of the years listed...an overall figure of 50 percent probably reflects the real situation. Given that the participants were volunteers, mostly young and imbued with a spirit of idealism, these data provide clear evidence that culture traveling was not meant to be easy. (p. 137)

And in their concluding chapter they observe:

...the consensus seems to be that in general terms the negative psychological consequences of culture travel outweigh the positive ones for most categories of travelers...(p. 245)

Hey, don't be a dead hero. Some people really do think they have to jump into those rapids right off the bat. Furnham and Bochner feel you are better off if you initially have a support group consisting of people of similar backgrounds to your own. They admit that such people can be a very poor source of information about the new culture. From my own observations, I would have to warn you that if you allow fellow expatriates (i.e. people like you) to pass on to you negative attitudes toward the society you are trying to enter, it may ruin your whole experience. So you need the support of fellow expatriates who have a positive attitude toward the "host culture". At the same time, having the support of people from your own cultural background clearly reduces the initial stress. Just make sure they are people who love the host society and culture.

At the same time, Furnham and Bochner feel that it will be psychologically damaging to go on and on living in a foreign ghetto (i.e. a ghetto of people like yourself, which might be a physical ghetto, such as a foreigners' compound where you reside and work, or it may be a psychological ghetto, where you depend on foreigners for most of your social support). Personally, I would say that if your only two choices are either to live long term in a foreign ghetto, or else to jump right into the rapids without any support group, then go ahead and jump into the rapids, unless you have no desire to learn the language and become part of the culture. But then, why would you be reading this?

So the ideal, for the non-heroes among us, as well as other people who value their long term mental health, is to begin with a good support group of people who have positive feelings toward



the host culture. Immediately, however, you start developing the communication skills and social skills you need to wean yourself from this support group. You develop your early skills in a protected, secure setting with the help of your mediating person cum LRP. Little by little, with the help and encouragement of your mediating person and your support group, you will move farther and farther out into the new culture. Eventually, you will develop a new support group consisting of members of the host society, and you will largely wean yourself from your old support group of fellow-foreigners.

But I warn you once more, if the “support group” you start out with turns out to consist of fellow foreigners who sit around and ridicule or run down the host culture, flee for your life. That sort of spirit will kill you dead in your tracks in terms of your cross-cultural effectiveness.

Once again, I’m emphasizing the ideal. Suppose you are learning Mexican Spanish. You might do well to live in a U.S. border town and recruit a bilingual LRP on the Mexican side. Of course, you’ll be having a fair number of contacts with other Mexicans while going back and forth, but you’re not yet attempting to be a full-blown participant in Mexican society. You are, however, building the skills you need to start branching out. Or to take another example, you are planning to learn a minority language in an Asian country. You can already speak the major national language, and participate in the general urban national culture. You are able to live in a town which borders the rural area where the language you wish to learn predominates. You may find an LRP who lives in town, or recruit one from a nearby rural village to come into town each day and help you develop the communication skills you need for branching out.

So what you have done so far is to learn a thousand or so basic vocabulary items. You have learned to construct a variety of basic sentences. You have developed some skills for coping with the communication situations you commonly face. You may have been at it for a month, or for two or three months. From the outset, you have been preparing yourself to live in the target language community. As time goes on, you need to think about preparing the community for you. Once people are used to you, and you have acquired some minimal communication skills and social skills, you will be ready to move into the community. One of the ways you will prepare the community for yourself, and help the people to feel comfortable and secure with you in their community is to begin systematically expanding your social network.

Again, your situation may deviate from the ideal. It may be necessary for you to jump right in, without a lot of opportunity to prepare either yourself or the community. At the other extreme, it may be difficult for you to spend time in the homeland of the language you wish to learn.

Whatever the case may be, having an effective strategy for expanding your social network will be to your advantage.

### 3.1. Introduction to social networks

[Keywords: social networks]

What’s a social network you ask? The easiest way to understand this concept is for you to draw a diagram of your present social network. (See See Boissevain, 1974, or Milroy, 1987 for more details.) Begin by writing your name in the center of a blank piece of paper:

Now, think of all of the people you interrelate with on a regular basis, and place their names around the same page. (Your full network would include all the people with whom you associate at all, but that would be unmanageable for our present purpose.)

The lines indicate that you associate with each of these people. Now, if that’s all there is to it, then it means that you associate with all of those people, but none of them associate with each other. Otherwise, in addition to the lines connecting you to them, there would be lines

connecting them to each other. Such a network, in which you are connected to people who are not connected to each other, is referred to as a diffuse network. However, it is unlikely that your network is that diffuse. The next thing you need to do is to connect all the people who regularly associate with each other:

If you haven't guessed, the cluster of people at the top is your family. The lower left hand cluster is the people you work with, and the lower right hand cluster is some people you hang around with on the week-ends.

No doubt I've omitted a number of other clusters, like the people you go to church with. And I've omitted unclustered separate individuals, like people you do business with. A real network of a single individual (which is only part of a bigger network involving the whole society) might contain a thousand individuals. But you now have the idea of what a social network is. If your social network has lots of interconnections, like the one above, it is said to be dense as opposed to diffuse. The separate clusters are called—you guessed it—clusters.

We could make it more complicated by indicating on each connecting line the nature of the relationship, e.g., boss, mother, tennis partner, etc. And you might have several relationships with a single person. For example, your mother might be your boss, and she might also be your tennis partner. Then you have three relationships with her, and your relationship is said to be multiplex.

If your network is generally dense and multiplex, then it is considered close knit. Close knit networks are great. Everyone in them feels a strong sense of obligation to everyone else in them. After all, if you hurt Earl's feelings, you don't just risk your relationship with Earl. You also may affect the way Polly, Nina and Millie feel about you. So you're going to be decent to Earl.

### 3.2. Your new social network at the outset

Now so far, your social network in your new language community may look something like this:

Realistically, there may be more to it than that already, but let's keep things conceptually simple. Let's assume you only regularly associate with two people in the new language community at this point, not counting the various shopkeepers with whom you do business. I am happy to inform you that you already have more of a social network than you realize. That is because all that is shown in the diagram is your first order zone. Those are the people who you associate with. But you have a second order zone! Everyone that your LRP associates with is in your second order zone. So is everyone that your next door neighbor regularly associates with, and everyone that your shopkeepers regularly associate with. I'll just illustrate the case of your LRP. Again, we will limit ourselves to your LRP's most regular associates, rather than with the whole thousand associates she might actually have.

Look at all those people in the second order zone of your social network. Imagine what the third order zone must be like. For instance, it will include all the associates of your LRP's brother, and all of the associates of your LRP's best friend, even though you have yet to meet your LRP's brother, and your LRP's best friend. Nevertheless, their associates are in the third order zone of your social network. (I won't bother you with a diagram of your third order zone. But think how many people are out there in your fourth and fifth order zones. You already are connected to them by chains of people you have not yet met, apart from the very first people in the chains.)

### 3.3. Enlarging and strengthening your network

Your basic strategy for strengthening your social network is to move people from your second zone into your first order zone. You do that simply by establishing contact with them. And you do it in such a way that you become part of one or more clusters.

For example, suppose you were to become friends with your LRP's best friend: Presto! Your LRP's best friend is now in your first order zone, and you've just become part of a cluster. Now you should have some idea of how you are going to go on expanding your social network. You start from the links you have now, and you follow the links from those people to other people. There is a good reason to proceed in this manner. Recall the sense of mutual obligation that exists within clusters. If you just go off and start relationships with a whole bunch of people that have no relationships with each other, then their sense of social obligation to you will be weak. But if you find out who the main people are that your LRP (or some other friend) relates to, and get her to introduce you to some of them, then you inherit a lot of the strength of their relationship with your LRP. If they aren't nice to you, their best friend (that is, your LRP) may find out, right?

It may seem selfish to try to force people into being socially obligated to you. But it's not—because you become obligated toward them at the same time. Remember the exchange theory? You enter into a system of rights and obligations which are shared by the members of the clusters you belong to.

Face it. You only have time for a finite number of relationships. While you are network building, you'll be devoting a lot of time to visiting. You can't visit everybody. So why not approach the task systematically? You visit your LRP's best friend. Perhaps your LRP introduces you, or perhaps you just show up and you say, "Hi. You know Noju. She's a good friend of mine." (Noju is your LRP's name, in case you forgot.) Presto! A second order relationship just became a first order relationship in your social network. Your LRP's friend mentions that her own mother is in the hospital. Now you like to visit the sick. You could visit any old sick person. But can you see that it will strengthen your relationship with your LRP's friend if you visit your LRP's friend's mother? If you are important to your LRP's friend's mother, then you are all the more important to your LRP's friend. Try to become important to the people who are important to the other people who you are already becoming important to. Given the fact that your LRP was a near ideal mediating person, it may be that she has less dense links to her own society (and more links to people outside of the society) than average. Thus, your first good cluster may be two or three steps removed from your original LRP. Eventually you would like to participate in clusters which are very deep in the society, where you are the only foreigner with whom the others in the cluster are linked. This is because people like your LRP may already have a fixed concept of "a foreigner" which is hard for you to overcome. The members of clusters which are deeply embedded in the society may have no fixed concept of the role of a foreigner, and thus it is more likely that they will simply include you as one of them. In that way you'll become a true participant in the society, rather than a hybrid person on the fringe. This concept of network building is simple enough, but if you don't approach it systematically, you may well use up all your social time forming a very diffuse network of a whole bunch of people who have little or no significance to each other. Better to relate to the same number of people, but choose them strategically so that they form a dense network.

You can also work at making your network multiplex. That is, now that your LRP's best friend is your friend, you have the relationship of friend with that person. It may also happen that she is your neighbor, which means that you stand in two relationships to her, friend and neighbor. Suppose you learn that she belongs to a knitting club. You might join it. Now you have the third

relationship of fellow-club member. The point is, besides building your relationships around people who relate to each other, try to relate to some of those people in a variety of capacities. To some extent this follows automatically from spending a lot of time with people.

If you end up belonging to two or three clusters, with a variety of types of relationships in each one, then you have a close-knit network, which means that you are a true insider in the community. You're a believer. You're extra important to people because you're important to people who are important to them independently of you. Nobody's going to take you for granted. Even people that aren't in your first or second order zones will see that you're a believer and will feel more of a sense of responsibility to accept you and protect you than they otherwise might. And they'll be more secure in their recognition that you accept them. I also think that you will find this approach to network building interesting and enjoyable. If you're not very outgoing, you'll probably find this to be a less traumatic approach to building relationships than certain alternatives such as just going out and knocking on doors and saying, "Hi. You don't know me, but can I be your friend?"

We often think of the stress of culture traveling only in terms of what we experience as the culture travelers. You also cause stresses to the community you enter. The metaphor of jumping into the rapids breaks down here, because it is not just hard on the jumper. It is also unkind to the rapids. While you are learning your early language skills and social skills under the shelter and protection of your mediating person, not only do you have a chance to prepare for the community. You also give the community a chance to become aware of you and start getting prepared for your presence.

#### 4. Coping with some less than ideal situations

[Keywords: settings for language learning]

Perhaps you would like to begin learning your new language by finding a bilingual mediating person who will later help you to systematically build a dense and multiplex network somewhere near the core of society, except for one small problem: you find that it is impossible.

##### 4.1. Learning in a truly monolingual society

[Keywords: monolingual, settings for language learning]

It may be that you have no choice but to jump in at the rapids. That is, you are unable to contact any bilingual mediating person and unable to remain on or near the fringe of the community while preparing both yourself and the community for your fuller participation in its life. You should still be able to apply many of the principles I have been describing, if you give it some thought. You will still expect that your first LRP(s) will be people who live nearer the edge of their society, or at least are temperamentally so disposed, being open-minded, outward-reaching individuals. You can also do a lot of comprehension learning, starting with the names of simple actions and objects and using photos or drawings. If you must be exposed to a whole community all at once, you might as well meet everybody. You're probably less of a threat, and source of stress, if you are a known (albeit strange) quantity than if you are some mysterious figure lurking in the shadows. In such situations you need all the preparation you can get in terms of linguistic and anthropological training.

A word of warning is in order. I have seen people behave as though they faced such a situation when they really did not. Some people may believe that it is preferable to live in a monolingual immersion situation from day one. I have seen it done both ways, even by different people learning the same language. The person who worked for several weeks with a bilingual LRP on the fringe of the community and then moved into a monolingual setting had a dramatic advantage over the person who jumped right into the monolingual situation. Now there is a third possibility: you might remain in the bilingual, fringe situation forever and never move into

the monolingual situation. That would be tragic indeed. If the only choice were between this tragic third possibility and the first possibility of immediate monolingual immersion, by all means, go for the immediate monolingual situation. But if you have the opportunity to start out with a bilingual LRP, and you have a definite strategy for moving into the monolingual community in due time, then you have the best possible situation, assuming you don't get cold feet when the time comes to move into the monolingual community. If you make yourself accountable to someone, and take that accountability seriously, you will overcome those cold feet.

#### 4.2. Learning in a totally bilingual society

[Keywords: settings for language learning]

Another difficult case is the one where there simply is no monolingual community available, period. You may wish to learn the language of a community that is totally, or at least largely, bilingual. Perhaps they are far more proficient in their first language than in the language which you share with them, but it will take you a long time to reach the point where you can communicate more comfortably with them in their first language than in their second language which may be, in the worst possible case, your mother tongue. In this case especially, you may appreciate the possibility of doing extensive comprehension learning (learning to comprehend a wide range of language related to a wide range of topics as used in a wide range of functions). Thomson (1992, 1993a, 1993b) contains some suggestions along these lines.

Once you know a thousand or so basic vocabulary items and are familiar with a range of basic constructions in the language, you will want to have specific times in which you behave monolingually with your LRP. Initially, this might involve a "monolingual hour" once or twice per week, and later it might involve a "monolingual week" once in awhile, and eventually, "a monolingual month". Your LRP will have a much easier time being "monolingual" with you than anyone else, since she has the best possible feel for your current level of language ability, and can gear herself to it. It may be best to do your serious network building after you have reached the point where you can get along (by hook or by crook) entirely in the new language. It may be hard to change the language in which a relationship is conducted once the relationship is well established. Once you are functional in your early "broken" form of the new language, you can build perfectly fine relationships in it. This may make you uncomfortable at first. You may feel that you are making a fool of yourself conversing in the new language when you could be being your old familiar groovy self by speaking your stronger language (which may even be your mother tongue), since they speak your stronger language better than you can even dream of speaking their language at this point. You may have a strong feeling that you are not putting communication first when you struggle to communicate in a language you hardly know rather than easily expressing yourself in a language you both know well. What you need to bear in mind in this situation is that learning a new language means becoming a new "you". The "you" that speaks broken Navajo may be the only you that most of your Navajo friends will ever meet. That does not make you any less of a genuine person. But becoming someone you have never been before may make you awfully uncomfortable! How badly do you want to learn this language?

#### 4.3. Language Learning when there is limited access to the society

[Keywords: settings for language learning, social networks, speech community]

The third less-than-ideal case I want to address is the one where you must learn the new language at a great distance from the homeland of that language. Suppose your LRP and you live thousands of miles from any significant segment of the language community. If you are serious about learning the language, you will want to plan forays into the homeland. Now the

matter of timing becomes crucial. Suppose that in terms of time and finances you can only afford a three month foray into the homeland of the language you are learning. Later on you hope to make additional forays, but the future is not at all clear in that regard. Want to waste most of the potential benefit of those three months? Then why don't you just go on over there before you've even learned the first bit of the language. That way you can spend a good part of your three months grunting and pointing and writing things down in your little notebook. Want to get a lot of benefit out of those same three months? Then before going, make a point of learning to use a couple thousand vocabulary items, both as a comprehender and as a producer of sentences. And perhaps you can learn to communicate (by means of role-play with your LRP) in a wide range of communication situations before you make the trip. In other words, by working with your LRP to develop basic communication skills—i.e., the ability to understand and produce sentences you have never heard before—you can prepare yourself for three months of meaningful communication, during which you can get to know a lot of people and participate in the culture first hand with a lot of understanding.

The point is, you can develop a lot of real communication ability before you go, as long as you have at least one person to communicate with in your cozy little speech community of two people. Don't spend your preparation time mainly reading about the language if you can be learning to use it. And learn about the culture in the language, as you are learning the language, rather than just reading about it in some other language (like English). When you arrive in that distant homeland, do you want to arrive as someone who knows a lot about the language, or do you want to arrive as a communicator (albeit a broken communicator)? So get busy using the language with your LRP. Then when you arrive on the scene you'll be in a position to wring the maximum benefit out of the few weeks in terms of improving your fluency and experiencing the culture.

Besides poor timing, another easy error to make is to spend your time in the homeland of your new language doing things that you could do as well or better in your own homeland. This is not the time to start writing a book, for instance, or to write technical papers about the language or culture (or anything else). It is not even the time to start constructing a fancy dictionary of the language you are learning. If you are a linguist, this is not the time to start typing texts into your computer and interlinearizing them. (If you're not a linguist, forget I said that). You have a few precious weeks to experience the language and culture in its proper setting. Don't get sidetracked. There will be plenty of time later for those other worthwhile projects.

In any of these less-than-ideal situations you can apply the principles of network-building, starting with whatever contacts you have or are able to make and attempting to work out from there. You meet Joe. You learn that Joe has a friend named Bob. Just being able to tell Bob, "I know your friend Joe" is enough to validate you and give you an entrance into Bob's life. At the same time, entering Bob's life strengthens your relationship with Joe. Then you work outward from Bob and Joe, or any other starting points you might have. Don't be afraid to get new, independent contacts as new starting points. But don't spend all your time pursuing new, independent relationships, or you will end up with a diffuse network, rather than ending up as a believer in the new society.

5. My network is growing and strengthening—now what?

[Keywords: culture learning]

Getting back to your social network, recall that what you are doing is becoming part of a speech community. You need to keep in mind both the community part, and the speech part. In Thomson (1993b), I point out that getting to know the people whose language you are learning,

including learning their deep seated feelings of what constitutes right and wrong behaviour, is actually a central part of learning the language.

### 5.1. Bootstrapping your way to good behaviour

[Keywords: culture learning, interactional skills, mistakes, speech community]

In a way, learning to behave in your new community is like lifting yourself by your own bootstraps. The bull needs to follow the rules of the china shop community, but can only learn the rules by first being a part of the community! Poor china shop!

Think about what it means to participate in a community. It means that, to a reasonable extent, you operate according to the unwritten contract that defines membership in that community. You and others in your community share many values and assumptions. For example, you may all share assumptions about which side of the road people will drive on. Someone who follows different assumptions regarding where to drive cannot be considered to be a smoothly functioning participant in the community. There are countless assumptions of less obvious sorts which are shared, usually at a subconscious level, by members of the community. These assumptions form the rules of the game for participation in the social life of the community. The language of the community is a special case of these shared rules. Not only are there rules related to how to form different types of phrases and sentences; there are rules about how and when to use particular types of sentences. In my current community, for example, I can make a statement such as "I'll visit you on Tuesday evening." In some communities such a blunt prediction of the future may be a violation of the rules, especially if I am talking about the distant future, as in, "Next year, I will build a new house."

How do you learn the thousands of rules of the game which make you a participant in the new community? That is where your bootstraps come in. You can only learn the rules through extensive participation. But to participate you are supposed to follow the rules. Fortunately, in most cases, this isn't as difficult as it sounds. When you started participating in your first culture as a baby, no one expected you to behave like an adult from the outset. Early on you learned to get by with some bare bones, like "please" and "thank-you". You'd probably be surprised at how little you actually say "please" and "thank-you" now. In place of "thank-you" as we noted earlier, you have numerous expressions of gratitude: "You shouldn't have!"; "How nice of you!"; etc. The use of these different politeness formulas is finely tuned to factors such as who you are talking to, their status in relation to yours, the nature of the act of kindness, and so on. The rules of social interaction, like the rules of grammar, go far beyond what you or anyone else can hope to consciously analyze and understand. For the most part you will simply absorb the rules through extensive participation in the community. To the extent that you can make conscious discoveries of the rules, you will benefit from doing so. The same applies to reading (with a measure of caution) about the rules, especially in the works of anthropologists, sociolinguists and intercultural communication experts. That may help you to get your initial bare bones, and then some. Learning several formulas for making polite requests, for example, will help you to demonstrate to people that you really do intend to be a properly behaved participant in community life.

But like a new child, you won't start out acting like an adult member of the community. You'll start out acting like a foreign weirdo. A basic rule of culture learning is that you will never be present in a new culture as a normal person unless you are first willing to be present as a weirdo. Weirdness is the only path to normalcy. But you do want to minimize the damage. Minimizing the damage was part of the reason you started learning in the sheltered context of private language sessions with your LRP. You have now developed some communication skills. People can now talk to you with some hope of being understood, at least if they work at it. In addition

you know various ways to signal that you do indeed intend to be friendly and polite. But you have a long way to go to reach the point where you seldom or never act weird.

## 5.2. Systematic language learning in your new speech community

[Keywords: social visiting]

You'll want to continue formal language sessions even while you are branching out in your social life. In addition, you will be able to use some of your social visiting as a means of formally or semiformally working on language and culture learning. However, much of your visiting and participating in daily life should be just that. So then, as you are enriching your social life, you have a three-fold language learning strategy: 1) learning more in formal sessions with your LRP; 2) getting specific help from friends in the context of social visiting; 3) learning through social visiting and otherwise participating in community life.

How do you decide what to learn with your LRP as you keep progressing? First, you will want to put a lot of thought into your specific communicative needs. Second, you will want to continue working on your general communicative ability. 2

### 5.2.1. What should I learn next?

[Keywords: Needs analysis, planning]

Get a pencil and paper. Think of all the communicative needs you have experienced in recent weeks. In what situations have you needed to be able to comprehend the language? In what situations have you needed to speak the language? What topics have you needed to understand? You may find that you have listed things like "dealing with requests for bribes; explaining my reason for being here; listening to political speeches", and so forth. Brainstorm with fellow language learners if possible. Make your list of communication needs as long as you can. Now, having listed your past needs, see if there are any additional communication needs that are currently coming up. Finally, add any needs to the list which you see arising in the intermediate or distant future. Once you've made an extensive list of your own past, present, and future communication needs, make a note for each need as to how serious a need it is in your life at this time. Some needs may not be all that serious, strictly speaking, but they may nevertheless be important to you personally. So for each need, make a second note as to how important it is to you personally. Finally, for each communication need in your list, make a note as to how much communication ability you have already developed in that area. For any area that constitutes a pressing need, or a strong personal desire, and where your current ability is clearly limited, you then design a plan of attack, which may involve activities in your sessions with your LRP, or during social visits, or in other contexts. (This basic approach to needs analysis is found in Dickinson, 1987.)

For example, suppose one of your needs is to read the newspaper in the new language. As you reflect on it, you feel it is not a really pressing need. That is, nothing in your life or work requires that you read the newspaper. At the same time, it is something that is important to you personally, for whatever reasons. You note that at the present time you have very little ability in this area. For your plan of attack you decide that for the next little while you and your LRP will use part of each language session to read the newspaper together. You find that quite a bit of vocabulary is specific to newspaper language, and so you work at using this vocabulary with your LRP in discussing the articles you read. In addition, while visiting socially, you plan to take a few minutes to discuss certain news items with various friends. Finally, you spend time in the evenings reading the newspaper on your own. Of course, this is a hypothetical example. You may never need or wish to read the newspaper in the language you are learning, particularly if there are no newspapers. The point is, identify your needs, plan your attack, and carry it out.



Your communicative needs may relate to situations in which you need to communicate: funerals, feasts, meeting a stranger on the path. Or they may relate to topics that you need to be able to comprehend and talk about: farming, hunting, trips to the city. As you redo your needs analysis once in awhile, you will discover that you have developed some ability in certain areas, but are feeling increased need in other areas. This will help to guide your ongoing language learning activities.

#### 5.2.2. Carrying the language sessions into real-life encounters

[Keywords: audio recordings, language sessions, photographs and photo books, pictures and picture books, planning]

Whatever you learn with your LRP, you now reinforce in your social visiting. Suppose you are learning to talk about farming, or perhaps some small aspect of one type of farming. You have taken appropriate photos and discussed these in detail with your LRP. You now go on social visits planning to reinforce what you have learned. It will not be good to give the impression that this is all you have come for. Remember the exchange theory. You are building relationships. As you give of your time in normal social visiting, there will be intangible benefits to the people you visit. The very interest you show in people's lives and needs can be one of these intangible benefits to them. You may also provide tangible benefits. At the same time, you will make it clear that you are receiving benefits from them whenever they help you to learn more of the language and culture, and during most visits you devote some time to this. This might mean getting out those farming photos and discussing the things you have just learned to discuss with your LRP. As you become really thick with people and incur lots of obligations, you should be more daring in getting help with your language learning from your friends. For example, you might find two of your friends together and clip a lapel microphone on each of them, attached to your pocket stereo recorder, and get them to discuss the pictures. You can make a game of it, for example, where one person "thinks of a picture" and the other tries to guess which one. In this way you can expand your collection of tape recorded conversations which you can listen to privately to reinforce what you are learning. The point is, be a friend. Give a lot. Get a lot (including a lot of help with language and culture learning).

#### 5.2.3. Learning to communicate in general

In addition to working on the specific areas where you know you have special communicative needs, you must also be concerned with your general communicative ability. When I have helped language learners do needs analyses in the manner described above, I have commonly found that people express a certain need which they variously verbalize: ability to chit chat; ability to make small talk; ability to participate in general conversations; ability to socialize with neighbors. This doesn't exactly qualify as a "specific" need. How do you learn to talk with people in general on any of the topics that people generally talk about? That would appear to mean being able to talk about "all of life". How do you get on with learning to talk about "all of life"?

To some extent, you develop this ability through thousands of hours of being with people who are talking about whatever things people talk about, assuming you can understand them if you try hard enough. For a long time, once you can understand people at all, you can only understand when they make a special effort to include you in the conversation. Remember, it costs other people something for you to learn their language. As time goes on, less and less effort will be required for people to include you in conversation. Eventually you will be able to readily follow many conversations which you merely happen to overhear. Extensive exposure to people's ordinary conversations is essential if you are to become an ordinary conversationalist. To the extent that you can tape record people's speech for repeated listening you can accelerate your

learning significantly since you can spend many hours listening to the tapes when you are not able to be listening to people, and some tapes will become increasingly intelligible to you on each hearing.

There are also more specific strategies for improving your ability to deal with “all of life”. Much of people’s ease in communication derives from the fact that they share a huge bank of common knowledge and experience which is specific to members of that community. You need to accelerate your acquisition of that knowledge bank. This means going beyond your specific (and narrow) communicative needs as discussed above and doing a survey of general areas of knowledge in the community. What geographical knowledge do people have? What knowledge do they share regarding the organization of people into groups and the relationships between people? What religious beliefs are widely shared? What are the major events in a day, week, year, and lifetime? What occupational or recreational skills are generally known to members of the community? There will also be areas of specialized knowledge. For instance, motor-rickshaw drivers have a body of shared knowledge that may not be important to me unless I wish to hang around with rickshaw drivers. By contrast, everybody may share a more restricted body of knowledge regarding the use of rickshaws.

#### 5.2.4. Systematically expanding your cultural knowledge

[Keywords: culture learning, social situation]

One helpful concept in tackling the general knowledge bank is the social situation, as described in Spradley (1980). A social situation consists of a place, the actors who act in that place, and the activities those actors perform in that place. An example is boarding a rickshaw. The place is in a street, at a rickshaw. The actors are the driver and the (potential) passengers. The activities include the driver and passenger establishing contact, the approach, the driver stopping the motor (if it’s going), the statement of the desired destination, the driver’s indication of willingness to go to that destination, the negotiation of the fare, the invitation to board, the actual boarding, etc. If you take a tour around your community you should be able to identify scores of social situations which you can then learn to discuss.

Spradley (1979) nicely complements Spradley (1980). I consider these two books to be among the most helpful for intermediate and advanced language learners. Spradley (1979) describes the types of questions which you can ask of your LRP or friends which will generate a lot of discussion of cultural knowledge. For example, in asking a grand tour question of the rickshaw driver, I asked him to tell me everything he did in a typical day. Then I asked him to tell me everything he could remember having done on a recent day. Many of the events he referred to formed the basis of further questions. Some of these were mini-tour questions, such as “What are all the steps in starting the rickshaw?”

I suggested before that this brought out the specialized knowledge of rickshaw drivers, rather than general knowledge shared by all members of the community. In fact, however, I did acquire considerable general knowledge. For example, I learned why some drivers refused to give me a ride, which I’m sure everyone else already knew. In addition, I found that much of what I learned carried over from rickshaws to a variety of other modes of public transportation (horse drawn tongas, minitaxis, Suzuki pick-ups, taxis, vans, and three kinds of busses). Suddenly I could make intelligent small talk with Suzuki drivers. My new share in the local knowledge bank was paying off in my general conversational ability.

#### 5.2.5. Focusing on social skills

[Keywords: culture shock, interacting with people, social situation]

A special group of social situations are the ones which you find particularly stressful or anxiety-provoking. This may include situations in which you have gotten into conflicts, or experienced

unpleasant friction on one or more occasions, or situations in which you have felt especially awkward or embarrassed. Furnham and Bochner (1986) trace the experience of culture-shock to such situations. They suggest that culture-stress or culture-shock results from the fact that the culture traveler is lacking in specific social skills. Working with your LRP or friends, you can go over such situations in detail. A useful technique is to have two friends role-play that they are in the situation that causes you stress. Tape-record (or video-record) them. Listen to the tape a number of times. Then do the role-play yourself with your LRP or a friend. We have moved back into the area of more specific communicative needs, but in the context of discussing social situations, it is important that we highlight this special variety.

#### 5.2.6. Focusing on language functions

[Keywords: communicative functions]

Another aspect of general communicative ability is the ability to use language for a variety of functions. Moran (1990) includes the following examples of language functions: greetings, leave takings, interrupting, apologizing, answering the door, begging, refusing, declining an offer, offering help, requesting help, consoling, thanking, warning, making an introduction, responding to an introduction, asking directions, complimenting, expressing condolences, extending an invitation, expressing distaste, answering the telephone, expressing delight, expressing displeasure, congratulating, expressing pain, expressing fear, requesting permission, getting someone's attention, asking for repetition, expressing ignorance, encouraging, accusing, seeking reassurance, expressing fear, remembering, welcoming, asking about health, requesting permission to speak, reprimanding, expressing disappointment, expressing affection, calming someone down. (For these and other language functions Moran presents comic style story strips with the speech bubbles empty so that they can be used for any language.)

#### 5.2.7. Avoiding fossilization

[Keywords: accuracy, communication strategies, fossilization, mistakes]

A final important aspect of your general communicative ability has to do with your language ability in the narrowest sense. How's your Chukchee? Think of people who have learned your native language as adults. Let's say that is English. There is a general impression that new speakers of English speak "broken English". What is the opposite of broken English? I want to say that the opposite of broken English is "fluent English". Ideally, a new speaker should start out speaking broken English and end up speaking fluent English. Unfortunately, there is a third possibility. Many adult learners of English will end up speaking what we might call "fluent broken English". That is, native speakers of English can generally understand them without difficulty, and they themselves can rattle on in their limited English a mile a minute. In technical terms, such people have fossilized. They have become very fluent in using very limited resources. You can fossilize in your new language if you wish. All you have to do is learn a few hundred of the most frequent vocabulary items and a few dozen basic sentence patterns. You can then develop a special genius for using those limited resources to communicate almost any conceivable meaning. You find roundabout ways to express most meanings, and simply avoid talking about other things, or get people to help you when you get stuck. (These are examples of communication strategies; see Bialystok, 1990.) Since you're using so few words and even fewer sentence patterns, you use them zillions of times, and thus become very "fluent" in your use of them. You really can speak quickly. Since I don't know the language at all, I'll conclude from listening to you that you are very fluent indeed. Native speakers will know otherwise, though they may claim that you speak their language better than they do. People are so kind.

The alternative to fossilizing is to become truly fluent in the best sense of the word. If you are pressing on, learning to talk about all of life, and more importantly, learning to understand most

of what is said around you in most situations (assuming you are in a lot of speech situations), you have not yet fossilized. But one special area of concern is learning to speak the language accurately. Early on, it is hard enough to speak the language at all, without worrying too much about speaking it perfectly. It is widely believed by experts that it would be counterproductive at that stage if all of your friends tried to correct or improve upon everything you try to say. It would be discouraging, if not debilitating. You need the rewarding feeling of successful communication experiences to keep your morale and motivation up. So in many situations it is best to concern yourself with what you want to say rather than to get hung up on exactly how you are saying it. But then, how are you going to learn where your mistakes are and overcome them?

For this I have two suggestions. One useful technique is to record your own speech from time to time. For example, you may tell a story to your LRP. Your LRP listens politely and interacts normally. All of this is captured on tape. Then you go over the tape with your LRP and she points out places where your speech could be improved. This could involve pronunciation or grammar or vocabulary. I find it helpful to write out each instance, placing what I said in one column, and the LRP's corrected version in another column. The other approach to improving your accuracy in grammar and vocabulary is to work on writing, that is on composition. The things that you write sit there forever and stare you in the face. Your LRP can point out errors or suggest improvements. You can keep a log of these errors and suggestions. As you keep at it, your writing will become more and more accurate with respect to grammar and usage.

5.3. But it sounds so hard.

As I have been describing your language learning activities, I have been envisioning you as a deliberate, reflective language learner. Now alternatively, you can just barrel on into the community and let whatever happens happen and live with the results. It should be clear that you are much better off if your life as a language learner is governed by frequent planning, evaluation and strategizing. In closing, I would like to highlight some key aspects of this deliberate, reflective approach to becoming part of a new speech community, including learning its language.

5.3.1. Your time commitment

[Keywords: planning, time allotted for language learning]

First of all, it may have sounded as though I thought you had nothing to do but learn the language. Good. That's how it should have sounded. "Help!" you exclaim. The world doesn't work like that. If not, then do the best you can. In the ideal situation you would spend two full years concerning yourself with nothing except becoming a member of that new speech community. That may be possible if you're planning a long career in that location, and being fluent in the language and comfortable in the culture are essential to your career. But if you only plan to be in the situation for five years, it may be difficult to spend two years doing language and culture learning. A second ideal to fall back to is to use the first one fifth of your projected time in the situation for language and culture learning. Your increased effectiveness and happiness during the remaining four fifths of your time will more than repay the initial time investment. The 1/5 : 4/5 rule would seem to me to be valid whether your total stay is going to be for five years (one year of full-time language and culture learning), for two years (five months full time), for one year (ten weeks full time) or for a month (one week full time language learning at the outset). Of course, if you only plan to be there one month, and have only a week for full-time language learning, you won't be trying to rapidly develop comprehension ability for a thousand words! More likely, you'll mainly memorize a bunch of useful sentences and some of the most essential vocabulary. If you have two or three months for full-time language

learning, you can proceed pretty much as I have suggested. If you are really serious, your full-time language learning will be followed by regular part time language learning.

### 5.3.2. When to start

[Keywords: motivation]

It is extremely important that your concentrated language learning period begin as early as possible during your sojourn. The longer you wait, the more you find ways to function without using the new language and the more you become comfortable as a nonspeaker. It takes tremendous motivation and enthusiasm to conquer a new language. Once you are starting to become comfortable in the new context without the language, your motivation may no longer be strong enough to carry you through to successful language learning. And after culture-stress has had several months to wear you down, your enthusiasm will become hard to muster. When you first arrive in the situation you are on a language learning adrenaline high. Cash in on it. Let the momentum from your early energy carry you as far as possible. This is your best chance.

Things will only get worse. Go for it.

Keep in mind that when I say “full-time language and culture learning”, I am including your network building and extensive social visiting and other participation in the culture as part of what fills the full time. Socializing is not something in addition to your work. It is a crucial part of your work.

### 5.3.3. Staying encouraged

[Keywords: encouragement, support group]

Now even if you do have several months available for full-time language and culture learning, you may find it hard to imagine yourself exercising the self-discipline to carefully plan all of your language sessions, and regularly do your needs analysis, and come up with new plans of attack for new needs, and carefully build your social network, and incorporate your learning into your social visiting. You may even cringe at the idea of doing a lot of socializing (or maybe at the idea of doing a lot of planning). How will you ever pull all that off? If you think you are going to go it alone, you may well lose heart fairly quickly. You need encouragement and accountability. You can arrange this with a fellow language learner who shares some of the basic concepts you are employing. Better yet, you could arrange to make yourself accountable to someone who specializes in encouraging language learners. You will share your plans and goals with this person and get feedback. Your goals will be specific ones, such as “This month I am going to start spending time with these three people, so that I will have a second clear cluster of relationships in my social network.” Then you will report on the steps you took to achieve this goal.

### 5.3.4. Don't get stuck on your way to first base

[Keywords: language associates]

Commonly, the recruitment of the initial LRP can be a big hurdle. If the right person does not easily emerge (or if no person easily emerges), you may need to begin by doing a bit of network building and creating some initial sense of mutual obligations with a number of people. I personally find a lot of internal resistance to doing all I should to recruit the necessary help that I need, and I have observed this same problem in many others. This is another area where specific accountability and even outside intervention can be crucial. Oddly, I would love to recruit the necessary help for you. I only hate recruiting help for myself. I know I am not alone in this.

## 6. Conclusion (Leave me alone!)

Believe me, if you have the right help and encouragement and apply yourself to regular planning, you'll find it isn't as hard as you might think. Once you get good at it, you may never want to do anything else, which would raise other problems. Learning a language is exciting. When you

are first exposed to the new language, it is like a movie that is so out of focus that it is a meaningless gray blur. As you keep learning, it is as though someone is turning the lens, and the pictures start to appear and be recognizable, until you are able to follow everything going on in the movie. It really is fun. You just can't do it by yourself. You don't just learn a language. You become part of a human social organism for which the language is the life blood, and then you live as part of that social organism by means of that language.

I've urged that you let a segment of your old community launch you into your new community and become part of the new community in a sane and gentle manner. You are gently pushed and gently pulled, and you do your part as well. There is no such thing as lonely language learning. Language learning starts with community and ends with community. Each language and culture is a marvelous expression of humanity, another facet of the same jewel. It is an awesome privilege to be able to express one's humanity in new ways. Culture travelers, especially long term sojourners who learn new languages, are a privileged lot. If you have the opportunity, make the most of it.

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Books Back "In Print"

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A Language and Culture Learning Program for Independent Learners: Preliminary Revised Version, by Herbert C. Purnell

Success with Foreign Languages: Seven who achieved it and what worked for them, by Earl W. Stevick

On "humanism" in language teaching, by Earl W. Stevick

Preface

The books in this collection were either first published in print form, and are now out of print, or were informally distributed in pre-publication form but not officially published. We are pleased to be able to make them available to you here.

Language Learner's Field Guide

by Alan Healey (editor)

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Originally published as:

Alan Healey, editor. 1975. Language Learner's Field Guide. Ukarumpa, EHD, Papua New Guinea: Summer Institute of Linguistics Printing Department. 486 pages. 0-7263-0356-9.

[Keywords: Language Learner's Field Guide, analytical approach (to language learning), approaches to language learning]

Summary

This book is a systematic guide to investigating language and culture by Alan Healey, published in 1970. It gives specific guidelines for aspects of the language and culture to explore and also contains some general articles on field language learning. Although this work was mainly intended for linguists who would be investigating and describing unwritten languages, and was originally developed in Papua New Guinea, there are articles which should be of general interest.

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### Previously published articles

Five articles in the appendix have been previously published.

John Beekman, "Eliciting vocabulary, meaning, and collocations" is reprinted from *Notes on Translation* 29:1–11 (1968), by permission of the author and publisher.

T. Wayne Dye, "Stress-producing factors in cultural adjustment" is reprinted from *Missiology* 2(1):61–77 (1974), by permission of the author and publisher.

Aretta Loving, "On learning monolingually" is reprinted from *Philippine Journal for Language Teaching* 1(3–4):11–15 (1962), by permission of the author and publisher.

Eunice V. Pike, "Language learning in relation to focus" is reprinted from *Language Learning* 19:107–115 (1969), by permission of the author and publisher.

Alan Healey, "Handling unsophisticated linguistic informants" is reprinted from *Linguistic Circle of Canberra Publications (now Pacific Linguistics) Series A* 2:1 30 (1964), by permission of the author and publisher.

### Preface

This book has been prepared to help fieldworkers learn the language of the people among whom they are living and working. It is true that many textbooks are available describing how to design a writing system and analyze the grammar for an unwritten language. However, apart from Larson and Smalley's book *Becoming bilingual: A guide to language learning*, very little information has been published on the best methods of learning to speak a language in the field. The present volume has been compiled to bridge this gap. It consists of three sections. The first section is concerned with what preparations should be made before a person settles in a community to learn its language; the next section of 40 units gives day-by-day suggestions on how to discover and begin to use the basic features of the language; and the appendix contains a collection of articles that are referred to throughout the book.

The original idea and the general plan for this volume were conceived by Orneal Kooyers, and it was his drive and enthusiasm that carried the project through to completion. Those who have contributed directly to the contents of the units are

- Amy Chipping
- Irwin Firchow
- Dorothy James
- Robert Litteral
- Elizabeth Murane
- Philip Staalsen
- Mary Stringer
- Helen Wearne
- Jim Henderson, and
- myself.

Many other colleagues contributed their ideas, suggestions, and criticisms both to the first edition and now to this extensively revised second edition with its new title. A considerable number of ladies have shared the onerous task of typing and of preparing the index. My sincere thanks to all who have helped to produce this volume, and especially to Amy Chipping and Jim Henderson for their assistance in editing.

Alan Healey

November 1974

Introduction



There is no way to learn a second language without devoting time to it, not just a good block of time each day but a rather significant segment out of the learner's life.

—Larson and Smalley

What do you expect?

The first edition of this book was oriented to the specific needs of members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics who learn unwritten languages in monolingual, rural communities of Papua New Guinea. When a team of two settle in a village or hamlet to commence their fieldwork, their prime responsibility is to achieve conversational fluency in the vernacular as rapidly and fully as possible, and to gain an understanding of the ways and thoughts of the people among whom they live. Later on, the emphasis of their fieldwork shifts to research into the phonology, vocabulary, and grammar of the language they are learning, and eventually to translating materials into the vernacular.

This second edition is oriented to a wider audience.

- a. Even though a fieldworker may have more limited linguistic goals, he can still profit by using the guide to organize his language learning, especially if pedagogical materials or formal instructions are not available. (See "Learning without analyzing.")
- b. If the language to be learnt is already written, and especially if a dictionary and grammar are available, the learner may simplify his methods as described in "Two starting points."
- c. If the community where the fieldworker lives is largely bilingual and he adopts a bilingual approach to learning, suitable alternative instructions are to be found throughout the book.
- d. If he is living in a thoroughly Westernized community, the suggested day-by-day research into a Stone Age culture should be redirected to facets of the community's culture that are of comparable interest, accessibility, and importance.
- e. Although the guide is designed for the person who has had a beginning course in linguistics, it is sufficiently self-explanatory for the person without linguistic training, provided he first reads carefully pages 86–199 of Nida's book *Learning a foreign language*. (He should also make liberal use of the glossary and index found at the back of this guide.)
- f. On the other hand, professional linguists may find some of the sections on elicitation and analysis elementary and may prefer to use their own initiative at those points.
- g. If the reader is teaching or studying a course in methods of language learning (rather than learning an actual language) he should read "Language learning."

In this revised edition, we have tried to eliminate all features that are unique to Papua New Guinea so that each unit will be sufficiently general to be usable anywhere. For "village" one should freely read "community," "neighborhood," "town," "hamlet," "homestead," "camp" or the like. For any other cultural, geographic, or linguistic feature that seems to be foreign to the reader we ask his patience.

Preparing for fieldwork

It is quite a shock to be suddenly surrounded by people who speak a different language, and to start learning to talk all over again. This shock will be lessened if the following procedures are followed. Check (tick) off each point as you complete it.

Linguistics

If you have had no training in linguistics, study pages 86–199 of Nida's book *Learning a foreign language*.

Information about the language

Study the latest and most reliable linguistic surveys of the area around where you plan to settle. Read everything that is available about the language and culture, making notes. Read similar descriptions of nearby peoples and closely related languages.

The language materials available to you could vary from the minimum of a word list and tape collected on a survey up to a good description of the grammar and sound system, a dictionary, and some texts recorded on tape and transcribed. You may even have a set of language learning lessons. You can make good use of whatever materials you have, even before settling in the village.

If there is no dictionary that you can take to the village, you may be able to type one up from a card file or other unpublished materials. If all that is available is a tape-recorded word list, this can form the basis of your dictionary. You should listen to the recording of the list every day, mimicking the words, until you know the more useful ones and have gained some skill in pronouncing them. You should also write each word down and incorporate it into your dictionary file. Read the three articles in the appendix on “Plain card filing,” “Punch card filing,” and “Page filing,” and decide which method of filing you will follow. Discuss these media with experienced linguists to help you decide and to get any additional practical tips you can.

If there is no description of the grammar, you could analyze some texts and compile grammar notes. The recordings of the texts should also be mimicked (see Section 3.6b). Of course, if you have language learning lessons, you should make good use of them before moving into the village, so you can use the vernacular more and the lingua franca less, even in the early stages while building your house.

Basic expressions

If you will be settling in a monolingual area, try to find a bilingual speaker of the language and elicit the following list of expressions. (Note that some of the questions may appear stupid or embarrassing to the person you are working with. If so, try to find useful questions that will be suitable.)

Greetings—English:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Vernacular:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your name?  
(or What should I call you?)

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

What is his name? \_\_\_\_\_

His name is \_\_\_\_\_

What did you say?

(or Say it again, please.)

Say it slowly. \_\_\_\_\_

Where are you going? \_\_\_\_\_

I'm going to the river.  
(place for getting water.)

\_\_\_\_\_

What is this?  
(or What do you call this?)

\_\_\_\_\_

Where do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

Yes. \_\_\_\_\_

No. \_\_\_\_\_

I don't know. \_\_\_\_\_

I don't understand. \_\_\_\_\_

What are you doing? \_\_\_\_\_

I want to try (it). \_\_\_\_\_

Farewells—English: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Vernacular:

I want food. \_\_\_\_\_

I want to buy food. \_\_\_\_\_

How much? \_\_\_\_\_

That is too much. \_\_\_\_\_

It's good. \_\_\_\_\_

I don't have any. \_\_\_\_\_

Where is it? (the path?) \_\_\_\_\_

When will you go? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is going? \_\_\_\_\_

I want to eat now. \_\_\_\_\_

I want to sleep now. \_\_\_\_\_

After eliciting, try out any of the questions that you can with the speaker of the language; he may have answered the question instead of translating it. If two speakers of the language are available, you can avoid this problem by asking one of them to ask the other one the question you are eliciting.

Record these expressions on tape so you can learn them before settling in your village. For each expression, record English meaning, silence, vernacular expression, silence, then vernacular again.

You should speak the English and the native speaker of the language should say the vernacular expression each time. Practice with the first few expressions, until your helper understands what you want him to do. Play back the recording, mimicking the first vernacular utterance during the silence that follows it. Listen to the repetition of the utterance. When the recording is satisfactory, go on and record the remaining utterances. If you are using a lingua franca, you

could hold down the pause button on the recorder while you say the lingua franca equivalent of the English.

A longer list of useful expressions is given in the appendix, which you may have time to elicit at this stage.

To learn the expressions, go through the tape morning and evening. At first, for each expression, mimic the first vernacular utterance during the gap that follows it, then listen to the repetition of the utterance. Soon you will be able to say the vernacular expression straight after the English meaning. When you settle in the village, use these expressions from the start, observing the people's reactions. It may be that some of the expressions are not appropriate—if so, you will need to learn and use more suitable ones.

If you are unable to find a bilingual speaker before moving into the language area but there are some bilingual villagers where you plan to settle, you could devote the first few days there to recording and learning these expressions, so that your accent will be like those around you. If another linguist helps you settle into the village, he should elicit and record the expressions for you, so that you can concentrate on the language you are learning, not on the lingua franca.

#### Lingua franca

Go through the guide and fill in the lingua franca version of each of the expressions suggested for bilingual eliciting, and have someone who is fluent in the lingua franca check what you have written. If there is an SIL branch in the country where you will be working, they may be able to supply a list of these expressions in the lingua franca of that country.

#### Reading

Read “Language learning” in this guide for a general preview of the various ways you can go about learning a new language.

A few days before moving into the language area, read Units 1–3 so that you will be alert to some of the problems you may encounter with names, greetings, and pointing.

#### Equipment

Assemble the following equipment for the first three months of language learning:

- a. A battery-operated tape recorder with earphones
- b. Ten three-inch magnetic tapes and five three-inch empty spools and/or five C-60 cassettes, five C-30 cassettes, and three loop-tape cassettes of different lengths
- c. Pens and pencils
- d. Five hundred sheets of light bond typing paper 21 centimeters x 27 centimeters
- e. Ten manila folders
- f. Five exercise books for transcribing texts
- g. A copy of the preprinted loose-leaf English-vernacular word list obtainable from the SIL Bookroom, Ukarumpa, PNG.
- h. Three loose-leaf books to take 21 centimeter x 27 centimeter paper
- i. A perforator (punch) for loose-leaf paper
- j. Five small spiral-backed notebooks for carrying in your pocket
- k. Two hundred small (eight centimeter x 13 centimeter) filing cards in a variety of colors
- l. Materials for filing (1,000 filing cards; or 1,000 punch cards plus a hand-punch for notching them; or several extra loose-leaf books and extra paper to fit)
- m. Carbon paper (some for writing and some for typing)
- n. Ten large sheets of paper for maps and displays
- o. Fifty big (43 centimeter x 34 centimeter) sheets of lined or graph paper for genealogical charts, and so forth.

Take with you the following books:

- a. Smalley, William A. (editor). 1967. *Readings in missionary anthropology*. Tarrytown, NY: Practical Anthropology.
- b. Schusky, Ernest L. 1965. *Manual for kinship analysis*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- c. Firth, Raymond. 1956. *Human types*. Revised edition. London: Thomas Nelson.
- d. Either of the following books:  
Herskovits, Melville J. 1955. *Cultural anthropology*. New York: Knopf.  
Herskovits, Melville J. 1948. *Man and his works*. New York: Knopf.
- e. Any one of the following books:  
Nida, Eugene A. 1954. *Customs and cultures*. New York: Harper.  
Hoebel, E. Adamson. 1958. *Man in the primitive world*. 2nd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.  
Fried, Morton H. (editor). 1959. *Readings in anthropology*. Volume 2. New York: Crowell.
- f. Nida, Eugene A. 1957. *Learning a foreign language*. 2nd edition. New York: Friendship Press.
- g. Samarin, William J. 1967 *Field linguistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- h. Pike, Kenneth L. 1947. *Phonemics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- i. Elson, Benjamin, and Velma Pickett. 1962. *An introduction to morphology and syntax*. Santa Ana, CA: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- j. Nida, Eugene A. *Bible translating*. 1947. New York: American Bible Society.
- k. A good grammar and a good dictionary of the lingua franca.

To stimulate conversation in the village, collect pictures of items similar to the artifacts of the culture you are going into. Simple, accurate line drawings are best. Gather other pictures of two or three people in different situations. Possible sources are reading books used in schools and adult education programs, and illustrated dictionaries. Issues of pictorial magazines, such as *National Geographic*, which deal with the country you are working in, and some clear, unambiguous pictures from your own cultural background would also be useful. Photographs of your own relatives will probably be very popular.

Arrange for a library to send you a couple of novels each month to relieve the strain of learning a whole new set of speech and behavior patterns. Assemble some tapes of your favorite music, for the same purpose.

Tape recorder

If you do not already have a tape recorder, discuss with technicians the reliability, servicing and local availability of parts for different models. Ask several experienced field linguists to show you how they record texts, conversations, and drills. Ask their opinions on the best models of recorder for fieldwork.

If you are not familiar with tape recorders, read “Using tape recorders” in this guide and “tape recorders” in Samarin’s *Field linguistics*, 88–102.

Before settling into the language area, practice using your recorder until you can:

- a. Move back and forth between record and playback with confidence and without accidentally erasing recordings
- b. Stop and restart a recording without leaving noisy clicks on the recording
- c. Use the pause button to listen to an individual word or even an individual syllable
- d. Estimate the position and distance the microphone needs to be from a person, and what setting of the recording level knob is needed to get a clear recording—neither too soft and muffled, nor over loud and distorted
- e. Make tape loops, copy or record a stretch of speech onto a loop, and erase unwanted material from the loop without taking off the important material.

### Surveying where to live

Read any available surveys of the area, and make a map showing the boundaries of the language, population centers, and access routes. Read the articles in the appendix by Aretta Loving and George Cowan on monolingual language learning.

Make a trip to the area, visiting its administrative center to meet officials and leaders and to get census figures for each census point. Examine several locations where it seems suitable for you to live, and for each one prepare a page listing both the linguistic and the living factors which will help in your decision. The linguistic factors include:

- a. Number of people in the community
- b. Do they speak a single dialect or are speakers of several dialects present?
- c. What percentage of the people there
  - i. are monolingual
  - ii. are bilingual in the vernacular and a lingua franca, or
  - iii. speak a lingua franca but not the vernacular?
- d. How do the people feel about
  - i. the vernacular language
  - ii. their own dialect of the vernacular, or
  - iii. other dialects of their language?
- e. Can you arrange housing actually within the community's residential area, and physically close (40 feet or less) to some other house?

The living factors include:

- a. An adequate water supply
- b. An adequate method of getting food supplies, fuel, and medical help
- c. Adequate housing and toilet facilities
- d. The community's willingness for you to live there to learn their language and to commence whatever other project you have in mind
- e. The proximity of other outside agencies, such as missions, plantations or government programs, with which you would be competing for food and labor
- f. The degree of communication with others of your own culture and with those who administer your program
- g. Any possible schooling facilities for one's children
- h. All other things being equal, a suitable place for swimming or bathing in a hot climate

At each place you feel would be suitable, elicit and record the basic expressions. Add other details to your map, such as village names and agricultural and hunting areas.

Try to decide which dialect has the greatest prestige, and which has the greatest population. Do some areas show cultural disintegration because of culture contact?

While learning the language, it is a great advantage to live where there are few bilingual people, so you will be forced to use all the vernacular you can. However, bilingual people can help you to get started very quickly, so consider spending the first few weeks at a place where there are more bilingual people, from whom you can elicit material to show the basic structure of the language, especially if you have not previously elicited and recorded the basic expressions. This procedure may give you the best of both bilingual and monolingual approaches to learning the language.

As soon as you have decided where to settle, start learning and using the expressions you recorded there.

Evaluate the names that have been used for the language group. If there is a long-established government name, use it and spell it the same way. If not, is there a long-established linguists' or

anthropologists' name? If there are none of these of long standing, or if the people who speak the language strongly resent that name, then use their name for the language or, failing that, their name for themselves.

How to use this guide

[Keywords: Language Learner's Field Guide]

The body of the guide is divided into 40 discovery units, each of which will help you to make some discoveries about some aspects of the language and culture. It will then help you to analyze and understand those features of the language, and to practice them until you can use them automatically in conversation.

Each unit is divided into several categories or types of assignments. Before beginning work on a unit, you should read through the whole unit, since sometimes there are forward references to other categories in the same unit.

At the beginning of a unit, there is often a paragraph of preliminary activities. Following this, the categories are numbered so that a specific category number always relates to assignments of a similar nature. For example, category three in all units relates to eliciting data, category one to observing. Each unit does not necessarily contain an assignment in every category. References are made to parts of units by naming the unit, category, and then the paragraph within that category. For example, the reference 14.5b refers to Unit 14, category 5, paragraph b.

The categories found in the units are as follows:

Category 1: Observing      Here you are directed to observe some specific activity or objects which will help you in other categories of the same unit as well as in learning much of the culture. A classified list of the topics is in the appendix. They are also listed alphabetically in the index.

Category 2: Conversation      Careful attention should be given to this category from the start. It is designed to help you learn to converse fluently in the vernacular.

Category 3: Eliciting data      You should make the strongest possible effort to use what you already know (and half know) in the vernacular to elicit the data in this category, as this will help increase your fluency rapidly. In most units, more specific methods (for example, miming, and creating social situations) are given for eliciting material monolingually. It is recommended that, in the early months, all data should be elicited from a number of people in a variety of informal settings, rather than from a single, regular, paid language helper.

In units containing material that is particularly difficult to elicit monolingually, bilingual suggestions are given, but these should be used only when consistent efforts at monolingual elicitation have proved fruitless. It is true that if bilingual speakers are available much information can be acquired from them rapidly by using the lingua franca. However, there are several disadvantages of working in this way. Your progress in learning to speak the vernacular is slowed down by failure to use it constantly. Your increasing confidence in the lingua franca will then predispose you to use it in preference to the vernacular. In the face of this vicious circle, it takes considerable self discipline to limit your use of the lingua franca to the few situations where it is really necessary.

Category 4: Description      After gathering data, you will need to process it. You should file your materials so that they are readily available to you for further study. In each unit, you are also instructed to partly analyze your data before proceeding. This helps throw light on the problems being studied in that particular unit. Taped materials should be transcribed with (or by) a language helper as soon as possible after recording them. A massive accumulation of unprocessed data is useless to you.

Category 5: Testing When you have described a linguistic pattern in Category 4, you should test your description by making up new utterances based on it and checking them with several different people. Modify your description if necessary. In later units, this category has detailed practice for translators.

Category 6: Practicing Set time aside to practice and memorize a selection of the data you gather. Each area of language learning which presents special problems to you should be attacked systematically with appropriate kinds of drills.

At the end of each unit there are some questions which will help you to evaluate your progress. Under “comments” you should indicate how well you achieved your aims in this unit. Also list any sections that were too difficult or which need further attention later.

There are two ways to use the material in the units; consecutively, unit by unit, or in a different order as conversational needs and the structure of the language dictate. Whichever method you choose you should at least begin by following the guide consecutively.

The consecutive approach

As you work through the units, your efforts will automatically be balanced without undue emphasis on one area at the expense of other areas that are also important. You will also come across instructions to review drills and decisions made in earlier units.

However, you should not always follow the sequence the guide presents. Since every language and culture is different, there will come a time when some facet is holding back your progress in other areas. Then you should look up that subject in the index and do some sections of later units which concentrate on that point. Mark those sections, with the date you did them, practice that linguistic feature, then start using it in conversation. You should then be able to continue consecutively through the units from where you left the sequence.

If the guide suggests that today you investigate pronouns, but someone wants to teach you the numerals instead, then leave the pronouns and concentrate on what he is interested in. You can ask him about pronouns later, and meanwhile your interest in what he is offering will encourage him to teach you in the future. Back at your house, you can look up numerals in the index and check (tick) off any section on numerals that you have completed, marking it with the date.

If a death or marriage occurs, look up that subject in the index and make the appropriate observations, no matter what unit you are working through. File your observations, and go over them again later when your language fluency is better.

The danger of slavishly following this consecutive approach is that you may not freely and spontaneously mix with people and learn to converse in the language. So remember, this book is a guide, not a straight-jacket!

The need-ordered approach

For the need-ordered approach to be successful, you must spend a lot of time with people, joining in their activities, and talking with them as much as you can. Make a note of customs, words, and constructions that strike you as new and interesting. At least every second day you should copy these words and constructions from your notebook to your dictionary, anthropology, phonology, and grammar files. When some linguistic or cultural feature is blocking your progress, turn to the index and find out which sections deal with it, and work through them, analyzing what you have observed, eliciting more data, analyzing again, checking, and preparing drills. Mark the sections off in the lists of topics following the Progress charts at the end of the appendix.

With this approach, imbalance is a constant danger. It is your responsibility to keep a balance in your work, and not to follow some special interest to the neglect of other facets of language learning. Using the progress charts regularly will help you here. You will also need to structure



your own review of earlier drills so that the patterns in them become thoroughly automatic. For this, you should use the Programmed Review cards presented in the appendix.

In summary, in following the consecutive approach, you are daily aiming at set goals in your language learning, and only as problems arise do you interrupt the sequence of units. On the other hand, following the need-ordered approach, your learning is more spontaneous and you refer to various parts of the guide as you meet cultural and linguistic problems.

#### Two starting points

The guide is designed to help people analyze and learn a previously unwritten language. It is also useful, though, in helping people to learn a language that has already been analyzed.

If the language you will be learning has an adequate writing system, a dictionary, and a grammar, you will need to do very little analysis for yourself. It will be much faster for you to look up troublesome points in the grammar than to try to analyze them yourself; though there may be some things not covered in the grammar, in which the procedures suggested in the guide will help you. Use the index.

Unless you have a good set of language learning lessons, you should follow the guide's suggestions in making up drills so that what you learn about the language can become automatic habits instead of memorized rules. Even if you do have language lessons, it will pay you to make up some drills of your own as well, as this will help you to learn.

#### Kinds of learners

People vary in their approach to language learning from analysts to "sponges." Analysts enjoy describing the patterns of a language but find it hard to put their insights into fluent speech. "Sponges," on the other hand, enjoy being with people, and just seem to soak up language with very little effort, and without consciously understanding the underlying patterns. If two people are learning the same language, it often happens that one is an analyst and the other a "sponge." After a few weeks of language learning you should decide which approach you favor, and then read these remarks again. Analysts run the risk of spending too much time at the desk analyzing the language, and not enough time out with people practicing what they have discovered. If you tend to be an analyst, keep postponing analysis, and go for trips with people so you can practice speaking to build fluency. Use what you hear, even if you do not understand its structure. If, on the other hand, you tend to soak up language easily, you will tend to learn new words and constructions at one or two hearings, without writing them down. This helps your language fluency, but it does not help your partner at all. You should write down your new discoveries, and copy them into the dictionary, phonology, and grammar files at the end of each day. You should also put your discoveries together and describe the patterns in them. Then make drills to teach the patterns. This way you and your partner will both benefit from your quick receptivity. This difference in learning style can easily become a source of tension and misunderstanding, so you and your partner should discuss your discoveries together and help each other.

#### Learning without analyzing

A note for those who wish to learn a language without analyzing it. This is the way we learned to speak as children, and as adults we can learn a new language in much the same way. You will probably find, though, that you will learn more quickly if you do analyze and describe things you cannot understand. Just use the index to find help when you need it. Making drills will also give you concentrated practice in difficult areas.

#### Allocating your time

Do not try to have a rigid timetable while you are living in the village. One day there will be a ceremony to attend and another day a feast in a different village. Take any opportunities to be with people and to help with their work, even if you seem to make no further progress through

the guide on these days, as these occasions are invaluable in learning the language and culture. There will be other days, though, when nothing unusual is happening, and you can catch up with filing new words and constructions and analyzing your discoveries. But on these days too you should spend some time with people, talking together, using expressions you have learned recently, and mimicking to yourself when you cannot understand the general conversation. If you have just settled down to analysis or to drill with the tape recorder and someone comes with vegetables for sale, do not resent the interruption, but seize the opportunity to talk and perhaps to make a new friend. Be happy to “waste” time talking with people; such time is never wasted.

#### The first day

Your initial contacts with the people in the community where you are settling are crucial. Despite the large differences of culture, they are going to sense many of your attitudes on the very first day. So you need to settle it in your own mind beforehand that two of your main goals are forming friendships and learning to converse in their language. Then the very day you arrive in the community, you should begin implementing these two goals. Try to give the least possible attention to baggage, housing, and food (important as these are) and as much attention as possible to the people who come to meet or help you. Be friendly to them in whatever ways seem acceptable, spend time with them, mimic them, accept their corrections, and write down some of their shorter utterances.

If you are in a monolingual situation and have not been able to learn any of the basic expressions before arriving there, then note as many words and expressions you can on the first day. Several of them may prove to be very useful in daily living. By all means attempt to elicit some of the words and basic expressions you need. (A list of words suitable for monolingual eliciting is in the appendix.)

If you have been able to learn the basic expressions, use them right from the beginning in all your contacts with people. Smile, greet people, and learn their names. Start finding out the names of common objects in the village. Mimic them and write them in your data book. And notice how people respond when you use the expressions you have learnt. If any of the expressions do not lead to the kind of response you would have expected, try to elicit and learn new ones. (Units 1–4, 9–12, 14, 16, 18, 19, and 21 give hints for eliciting common questions.)

Now turn to Unit 1. As you work through the units check that any expressions you have learnt are idiomatic.