

Rotary Youth Exchange Florida

Learning a Foreign Language

Workshop Notes

Why bother?

What the heck! You don't need to start to learn your "target language" right now. After all, you are about to enter one of the greatest language courses in the world: The Rotary Youth Exchange Program and Language Immersion Institute! While this is very true, keep in mind that you will "lose" (miss, be in the dark for...) 3 - 6 months because of adaptation alone. For most, language is one of the key elements of adapting to a culture. If you are at least familiar with the basics of the language, you will make the turn toward cultural adaptation sooner and you can begin to assimilate into your culture sooner. And for those of you who have taken three, four or even five years of a language, don't think that you can just step into the culture and begin speaking fluently. The students who can do that with ease are really rare. Even the best high school language students need time to adapt. You have the chance to step into your "target culture" much sooner if you do extra preparation in your target language than if you go in "cold" (or at least "cool"). So what does all this "adaptation" and "assimilation" mean? Your hosts can know who you really are only if you speak their language. As one of our former outbound students said, "I wish my friends here could know me in English." Well, you all have the chance to achieve that reality sooner by doing some work before you leave for your countries. And remember, the highest compliment you can pay to someone is to speak their language.

Your Assignment

Of course applying your language to a real life activity is what makes learning a new language worth the time. Because we don't want you to feel like you have all the time in the world to prepare, we have an assignment for you to **complete for the next orientation session.**

You are going to be meeting a lot of people during your exchange. The situations where these introductions will occur will vary from casual introductions with classmates and host families to introducing yourself to your Rotary Club, the Rotary District Governor and maybe even the President of your host country (it has happened in the past). **Your assignment is to prepare a thorough introduction for yourself in your target language.** You may get help from anywhere you like but you need to know what you are saying and you need to be able to adapt the introduction to fit the situation. Try not to just give your name and your sponsor / host Rotary Club. Add something that will set you apart from the other exchange students these people have met. Remember, you only have one chance to make a first impression. As part of your assignment, you will need to write to the current outbounds in your countries and call the current inbounds from your countries (you should have their addresses and phone numbers) and introduce yourself to them in your target language to test your introduction. Ask them for their opinion and some help but don't be so lame as to ask them to do the assignment for you. You will not learn anything unless you do this yourself. At the next orientation, we will ask you to stand and give your introduction. It should be smooth.

The System

Tools

Basic Textbook

Find a basic book (textbook, workbook) that gives you a good grounding in the grammar of the language. It may seem a little one dimensional but you will still be able to get what you need out of it. The excitement of reading and conversation will come from other sources. This book is just for foundation. University bookstores and some of the larger stores like Barnes and Noble have good selections of these kinds of books.

Phrase Book

There must be hundreds of phrase books, especially phrase books for travelers. These books lack grammar and some other basic elements of language but they are stuffed full of useful words and phrases, listing the English followed by the foreign language and then a transliteration. The words you will find popping into your vocabulary and these phrases not only have a practical use by themselves, but they will also serve as a model for sentence structure.

Dictionary

Make sure the dictionary you buy for your language is two-way. For example, most dictionaries for French are English-French/French-English in one book. However, there are dictionaries that are in two books, one English-French and the other French-English. Make sure you are buying the two-way dictionary (in single book type). (Note: Japanese and other character languages tend to only be one way with English to Romanji and Kanji being the most useful for your purposes.) Make a list of some complicated words in the newspaper and use them to test the adequacy of the dictionary. When you go into the store to buy the dictionary, look up the words on your list. Past that, check to see if the form the dictionary is in suits your situation. I have always preferred the plastic covered dictionaries, especially those by Langenscheidt, to be most suitable for stuffing into a book bag, suitcase or even a pocket. Remember, the dictionary is going to need to last more than a year of intense usage.

Newspapers/Magazines

Find a newspaper or magazine in your language. Most big cities have newsstands where you can buy publications in a wide variety of languages. Otherwise call the nearest consulate or embassy of the country whose language you are learning. Usually they're proud to help. If you have the choice, go for a publication from that country itself, rather than one published by immigrants from that country in America. There are also services in the US where you can buy newspapers and magazines from other countries. You can also get in touch with the current out-bound to your country and ask them to get you a newspaper or magazine.

Student Reader

Sometimes you can locate a schoolbook or some reading material from the country at about the sixth-grade level. Such books are obviously excellent bridges from the basics of language study to the real world.

Portable CD Player (or iPod)

When you buy an audio course, you will need a portable CD player (or iPod) to play it on. Don't count on using the CD player in the car or on your stereo. You need to have something to take with you. The invention of the Walkman® gave language students the ability to move through language material at a vastly more rapid pace than in the past. The evolution to CD players and iPods makes it even easier.

Audio Courses

There are many different courses you can buy to learn your target language. It may seem that there is only one difference, cost. However, the more expensive courses are usually the ones that use “multiple rep” methods where the words are repeated several times. The FSI (Foreign Service Institute) courses are very good. The one many have found to be the best is the SyberVision courses because they use the Pimsleur method of teaching. This method requires you to participate in the lesson and also requires you to remember back to previous lessons for words and phrases. This is the method we (as well as many other language experts) recommend, where you can use only the CDs and gain a high level of proficiency in the language. The FSI and the SyberVision courses are expensive but they are about the same price per level as one semester at a community college language course. It may not be possible to buy these courses either because of the selection of languages they offered or because of the cost. That shouldn’t deter you. You can get a sufficient course for under \$50. Pimsleur audio courses are also excellent, and can be purchased at a discount from various online sources.

Audio Recorder (Digital or Cassette)

Audio recorders and blank cassette tapes allow you to work on your pronunciation after you have gotten used to the sound patterns for the language. You can use these to compare your pronunciation with that of the native speakers on the audio course.

Flash Cards

These are available in most major languages. Usually they have words printed in the target language on one side and English on the other. When you are learning your target language, you should grab a handful of them in the morning before leaving for school or wherever you are going. When you have a moment, you can learn three or four words easily.

Blank Flash Cards

Some language professionals may have a philosophical difference in opinion about making your own audio tapes, but no one will have a problem with you making your own flash cards. All you need for this is a stack of index cards. When you run into a word that you don’t know, you can jot the word down on one of your blank flash cards and then look it up when you have a minute. Gradually you will build a library of flash cards. The real secret isn’t in making the flash cards but using them as a learning tool and learning from the cards.

Highlighter

Make sure the highlighter doesn’t obscure the word you are marking but other than that, color is up to the user.

Computer Courses

Obviously, some of you are much into technology. You have iPods, cell-phones, and portable computers so you can keep in touch with your world. So, why not use a computer course to learn a language? When it comes to language learning, there are some positives to using a computer course but there are also several drawbacks to the computer courses. First, you have to have your computer with you in order to use it. This isn’t always possible. The bottom line is that you shouldn’t use a computer course because you think it is better than the audio courses. If the computer course fits your situation and you have access to a computer most of the time, go ahead and use a computer course. But, we would recommend that you use the computer course in addition to these other tools and not in place of one.

Videos

There is something about seeing your target language in action. It makes more sense to see the use of the language in real life. Most of the videos language courses available allow you to follow characters using the language and are more three dimensional than audio courses. For the most part, you need to choose a video language course like you would the audio courses as there are some that are better than others. Also, if you are learning Spanish, Italian, Japanese, French, or German, you have a good chance of finding a good video course. However, if you are trying to learn another language, very few are offered in video form simply because of the economics of producing a language video for such a small market. If your target language is available in a good video, don't make that your main or only tool. For one, video equipment is not completely portable. You basically have to be home to make use of these courses. In this program, you will need to use every free moment to work on your target language. So, using the videos as a supplement is best. You will also gain a better "ear" for the language by using an audio course primarily. The videos will help fill in the "blanks" you may have with the language. Just like any other tool, you need to make sure the video course will allow you to progress. It should not be too far over your head but should be in tiers so that you can continue to gain from the course as your ability in the language improves. Be sure you are getting a video of the language and not just a travel video about the country or a movie in the language. Video language courses can cost anywhere from \$30 to more than \$500. Cost is not necessarily an indication of the quality of the course so research the video before you take out your wallet.

Internet Radio

One of the tools that can serve as a supplement to my language training is internet radio, through which you can listen to radio stations from around the world. Using internet radio is a good tool normally for someone familiar with a language and is good to sharpen your "ear" for the language.

Internet Education

There are many websites dedicated to helping those who are learning a new language. You can find something basic like travlang.com, or interactive online communities like LiveMocha.com. You're sure to find something that you'll like and that will benefit you.

The Multiple Track Attack

Just like a balanced diet requires you to eat more than one kind of food, when you learn a language you need to use more than one approach to most effectively learn your target language. This goes directly against the absurd notion that you only use a grammar book or an audio course or a phrase book. Go to the language department of any bookstore and you'll see language books, grammars, hard-cover and paperback wordbooks, readers, dictionaries, flash cards and handsomely bound courses on CD. As you work with each of these elements, you will feel how the "rub-off" effect works. Words or phrases that you learn from your flashcards will appear in the newspaper you are using. A grammatical structure will move from the audio course you are using to the reader you bought. Each time you see a word repeated, it becomes more a part of your vocabulary. You don't have to buy everything you find. You can still use the multiple track attack by using three or four approaches. The real secret is to consistently study your target language every day.

How to start

Begin by picking up a grammar book. Start at the beginning. Try to make it through the first lesson. Do you understand the first paragraph? If you do, then proceed to the second paragraph. If you do get stuck, take the paragraph apart to find out what is preventing you from comprehending. Use a pencil to identify the words that are getting in your way. Don't let these stay in your way. Try to keep moving forward. Don't even think about moving to another set of materials until you get through at least five lessons in your grammar book. This will give you the jump on the language so that when you use another material, you will have at least a basis to continue your learning and build your knowledge of the language.

Jump into the real world

Take your newspaper that you bought. Go to the front page in the upper left corner. Using your highlighter, begin with the first article and highlight all the words you don't know in the first paragraph. You may have to highlight every word, but you have only had a few lessons in the grammar so the language is still new to you. For those of you who have taken classes in the language, you will not be highlighting every word but you will probably be surprised at how much you do need to highlight. Once you have gone through the first paragraph, take out your index cards. Take the index cards and turn them vertically. At the top of the card, write the first word. Then take your dictionary and look up the word. One of three things will happen at this point. You might find the word exactly as it is written in the article. In this case you flip the card from bottom to top and write the English translation at the top of this side. The second way you might find a word is that it starts out just as it is in the article but the word changes at the end. In this case, you might be able to judge the meaning by the base word you found in the dictionary. Or, you can create a question card where you put words that you are not sure of the meaning. The third thing that might happen is that you don't find a trace of the word in the dictionary (even though you checked the dictionary before you bought it to make sure it was sophisticated enough). In this case too, you will put the word on your question card. These words on the question cards will be reduced gradually as you learn the language. Once you finish with this exercise, you will have begun to acquire words and develop your own set of flash cards. These cards with you and study them when you have a free moment. Don't mix the question cards into the others. Use the English side with which to study. Start with the English word and try to remember what the word is in your target language. Don't let yourself off so easily. With practice, you will remember these words.

Progress

In most cases, traditional language teachers will not endorse throwing a student directly into the newspaper of a language with only five grammar lessons behind them. For many of you taking high school language class, this "honor" is only reserved for fourth or fifth year students. By using the newspaper consistently, you will notice that your highlighting becomes less and less. The tough part is to charge forward and not let the slow pace deter you. Soon you will find that your comprehension has made some amazing leaps in only a short time. The point is that to make progress toward speaking and comprehending a language in the real world, you have to keep pressing forward and to work consistently with your tools.

Repeat after me...

So you found this really great phrase book with all these interesting ways of saying things. And make no mistake, knowing how to ask where the bathroom is could be critical information for even an exchange student. Start by reading the introduction carefully. Most people tend to skip over this as information for "others". But this introduction can give you the rules of transliteration, that is, the guide to pronouncing the foreign words using the English alphabet. Once you get the hang of the language, you won't need the transliteration guide much but in the beginning, it is going to keep you from saying "you smell like a bear" instead of "I like your hair" in your target language. Most phrase books don't spend a lot of time if any on transliteration or on grammar. What it will do for you is to teach you to say, "Hello", "How are you", "Please", "Thank you" and "It is nice to meet you", as well as "Can you please tell me where the restroom is?". Because these are chunks of real-life conversations, you can use these phrases as a basis for conversations with people you may meet who speak your target language. You can get off the plane in August (or July, or September) and say to your hosts, "Hello, my name is _____. I am glad to meet you. I am sorry that I don't speak your language well. If you speak slowly, I can understand better." (This last one may be quick to come off your lips during your first weeks or months on exchange). If you are only going to be using a phrase book, it may be true that this is just parroting a few phrases. But by using this method with the flashcards, newspaper, reader, grammar book and audio course, you will have a well rounded diet in your target language. The phrase book will help you smoothly say key phrases. You will be piecing phrases together instead of just searching for words from your vocabulary. These phrases will allow you to see the patterns of the language. You can apply these same structures to other situations by inserting different words. You will see this more and more as you continue with your multiple track attack.

Add Audio

Finding the right audio course is not an easy task. There are so many from which to choose, you may find the decision to be difficult. However, if you have purchased an audio language course, unless you have the wrong language, most any course will help you. The difference is the depth in which they take you into the language and the accuracy of the pronunciation of the speakers. If the speaker is a native speaker and you are getting a reasonable amount of information in the course, you will gain from your use of it. It never hurts to ask others what their experience has been. ManyI have found that the Living Language audio courses are good value for the money. Others have also found that the money spent on the SyberVision program was also an outstanding value. The difference is that one is \$40 and the other starts at \$295 for the first level. Shop around. The Pimsleur audio courses are \$275 each direct from Pimsleur, but you can get them, brand new, for less than half that through Amazon.com.

Start with the first lesson. Even if you have had the language in school, start with the first lesson. You will progress quickly if you have had the language before and you will end up at the place in the course that best suits your abilities at that point. Most courses have a guide book with them. Start by using the visual assistance of the guide book while you listen to the audio but after a while, you will not need this help. You will also find that once you look at the words, when you repeat the audio, the words are not needed as much. You will still get stuck from time to time and have to go back to the written guide but this will be less and less as you progress.

Make a game of using the courses. As you get going, see how many words or phrases you know by heart. If there is a conversation, see if you know all of the words and phrases of one of the speakers. And then both of the speakers. See how many words you know in a row. Don't be so quick to back up the lesson and begin again. Take bigger "bites" from the course so you have a better idea of what you know and what you don't know. The key is to know the words and phrases so well that you don't need time to think.

Hidden Moments

In learning another language, it isn't how fast you move through the materials that will help you master the language. It is the relentless pursuit of the language through constantly studying the language that will get you there. Study halls? Take out your grammar book. A long bus ride? Use the audio course. Time to kill after school? Do another paragraph in your newspaper. No matter where you are, these hidden moments in your life present outstanding opportunities to make progress in your language. And this isn't a "once in a while" thing. You have these opportunities to study all the time. This is the power of the multiple track attack, you have all these tools to use so you can use the tool that is most appropriate for your situation at that particular time. You wouldn't be able to read your grammar book if you were driving but you would be able to listen to your audio course. You can't really use a portable tape recorder in study hall but you have other visual tools to use like your flashcards. No matter where you are, you have a tool that would work for you. Look for these opportunities and make them work for you.

Mnemonics - Harry Lorayne's Magic Memory Aid

"I was convinced that this method of memorizing was one of the dumbest I had ever heard. However, I use it every day now. I use it especially with flashcards but it will work with anything."

Now, most of you are going to attack words with pure rote memorization. You say the word and the translation ten or twenty times and you have committed it to memory...more or less. Harry Lorayne is one of these amazing people you may have seen on TV or you may have read his book. He is a person who can memorize all sorts of information quickly. His method is to make up a story that has key elements that trigger your thoughts to pull the word out of your memory. This method is called mnemonics. In the orientation, you got some examples to prove the point. However, let's just take one example. Let's take the word *pollo* (pronounced polo), which is Italian for chicken. You would use the following story to remember that *pollo* is chicken in Italian: You are looking for something interesting to see while you are in Italy. You hear from a friend that they have an interesting way of playing the game polo in Italy. Instead of using horses, they have these little Italian guys riding chickens when they play polo. So, in Italy, they use chickens to play polo. Therefore, chicken in Italian is *polo* or *pollo*. Don't worry about how stupid the story sounds. You can even get as crude as you like. In languages with nouns that have a "gender", use the main person in the story to determine gender. So, if bandage in German is Binde, use the story about a poor woman who was hurt in an accident and they bind her wounded arm with a bandage. So, Binde is feminine and it means bandage. You may feel stupid to start, but you will fly through vocabulary by using this method. Here are just a few examples:

- 1) Viejo (old - Spanish - vee-AE-ho) - V.A. is old and you can knock it down with a hoe - V.A. - hoe = old
- 2) Colère (angry - French - cool-AIR) - When someone is angry, they walk into the room and the air is cool - cool air = angry.
- 3) Dom (house - Russian- DOME) - You are amazed that when you go to Moscow, all the houses have these domed roofs. house = dome (Dom)
- 4) Pollo (chicken - Italian - PO-lo) - In Italy they play a lot of polo. But they play differently. They ride chickens instead of horses when they play polo. chicken = polo (Pollo).
- 5) Medaber (to speak - Hebrew - MED-ah-bare) - You were walking in the woods when you "med" a bear who could speak. Medaber = speak.
- 6) Moglie (wife - Italian - mole-YEY) - wife, pet, cute fuzzy. She's a babe and you are happy that her pet is only a mole so you yell, "Yey". Mole + Yey = wife.
- 7) Lajar (movie screen - Indonesian- Li-ar) - You went to the movies and you saw a movie on the screen where the man in it was such a liar that you could stand it. The movie screen there was such a liar - movie screen = liar.
- 8) Stafilya (grape - Greek - sta-FIL-ya) - Eating grapes and they are just so tasty. No don't eat me. OK, I wasn't going to each you little grape. Would it be OK if I ju'stafilya? Grape = Just a feel ya (stafilya)
- 9) Loshad (horse - Russian - LAW shod) - Bringing the horse into Russia and you find there is a law that all horses much be shod. Law + shod = horse.
- 10) Kartoffel (potato - German - kar-TOF-el) - You are out shopping and you see a woman with a cart full of potatoes. You buy some and take them home only to find that they are awful. The potatoes you bought from the cart are awful - cart + awful = potato (feminine because you bought them from a woman).

Say something

The biggest problem we Americans have is the fear of looking stupid. That is one of the most important barriers to overcome when you are learning a language. When you have the opportunity to speak with a person who is a native speaker or even someone who has learned the language, you need to use opportunities to speak with them in your target language. In fact, you will really learn a lot through speaking with people. You don't have to rely on chance meetings. You can actively look for someone to talk with to make this happen.

You have teachers at school and other resources available to you that you could use during the time before you leave. Exchange students are also good sources for this kind of practice since they are/were in the same position as you. There are also various ethnic restaurants in our communities where you can find people who speak your target language, or can refer you to people that do. The main point is to get practice by speaking. No matter how bad you feel you speak, you need this kind of practice to round out your learning and sharpen your language skills.

Write!!

To your host families. To your teacher. To the current inbound. To yourself. Learn to put your thoughts on paper.

Know!!

It is one thing to be able to come up with the words but to come up with them quickly and smoothly is another thing all together. That is why all of you should be able to do yourself good by working at your target languages.

Just because you are in your country doesn't mean you can't continue learning your language. In fact, since you will be totally immersed in the language and you will be applying words to your daily living, you can make amazing progress while you are there. Remember you will never waste your time learning a language. But you can waste your year by not learning a language.

From a program by Scott Wisner, Youth Exchange Chairperson, Rotary District 7150, Syracuse NY

Methods adapted from Barry Farber's book, How To Learn Any Language: Quickly, Easily, Inexpensively, Enjoyably and on Your Own