

## PREFACE

This experimental lecture text introduces the undergraduate students to some aspects of linguistics and some methods of learning a language other than their own. The course is intended to be taught in a single semester with 3 credits (meeting three hours per week for 14 weeks).

Students are introduced to the basic principles, techniques, and methods of learning a second or foreign language using modern linguistic principles and methods of linguistic description. The goal is to equip the students with the perspectives and the resources they need to successfully learn another language and to minister effectively in another culture. It is expected that through this course the students will develop a basic understanding of the processes, techniques and methods of first and second/foreign language acquisition.

The focus is on helping students to acquire some important concepts and tools to start learning another language on their own.

Students at Bethany College of Missions have found this course to be a useful introduction to the subject. I plan to bring out a revised edition of this text in due course, giving more information from the South Asian languages.

I am thankful to my friend and colleague, Mike Leeming, a missionary to Mexico for many years, presently on the faculty of Bethany College of Missions, who cheerfully read the entire text and helped improve its presentation in many ways. I am thankful to Kelly Stuart who helped to put the pages together in order so that the text could be brought out in a book format. I am thankful to my wife Swarna, who read parts of the book and encouraged me to complete the work with several suggestions.

Thanks are due to Professors Ed Dudek, Paul Hartford, Tony Hedrick, Mike Leeming, Tom Shetler, Nita Steiner, and Paul Strand for their love and unfailing encouragement in my academic ministry.

Learning a language is always a complex activity. Because it is often “difficult” to learn another language, we soon give up learning the other language, or feel satisfied with what we have accomplished and make no further progress. I would like to encourage our students that learning another language is a great and rewarding experience. Indeed, we can succeed in our effort to learn another language! Language learning is also culture learning!

M.S.Thirumalai

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## CHAPTER 1 WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

## **DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE**

What is **language**? All of us know what language is, just like we know the palm of our hands. We all acquired a language early in life. There is no human being, ordinarily speaking, who does not “have” a language of his or her own. There are societies which do not have a written language, but there is no society which does not have a spoken language.

The word *language* is often used to refer to several kinds of human activity, such as the language of music, language of circus, and so on. However, in its ordinary sense, it primarily focuses on the oral and written medium that we use to communicate with one another. We use it especially to refer to human language and thus we tend to distinguish between language and other forms of communication.

A general definition characterizes language as *a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which members of a society interact with one another.*

This definition points out several of the essential characteristics of the human language:

### **1. Language is a system.**

There is always some orderliness about the use and function of language. Sounds occur in some order within a word, words occur in some order within a sentence, and the sentences occur in some order matching the intent and content of the sentences in speech. Moreover, the elements of language such as sounds, words, sentences and combinations of sentences, and the meaning constitute their own systems within the overall system of language. In fact, language is a system of systems. Each system has its own building blocks and may often function independent of one another.

### **2. Language consists of vocal symbols.**

In day to day language, language manifests itself more often than not through vocal symbols. In this sense, language consists of sounds. The sounds used in human language are produced through the vocal organs. The sounds which we may produce through other means are not considered part of language communication. When we mention language, we generally mean the sounds produced by the vocal organs.

### **3. Language is symbols.**

The sounds (and the words) we produce stand for something else. They are symbols for objects and phenomena in the external world. They stand for the mental images. We use the sounds and the words to refer not to themselves, generally speaking, but to refer to other objects and phenomena.

### **4. Language symbols are arbitrary.**

Consider the relationship between you as a real person and a photograph of yourself. The relationship between you as a real person and your photograph is an iconic relationship. There is some semblance between you as a real person and the photograph which represents you.

Now, consider the relationship between the object tree and the word tree. Is there any semblance between the object tree and the word tree? There is no semblance between the two. The relationship between the word tree and the object tree is an arbitrary relationship. The object tree is referred to as tree in English, maram in Tamil, thingphung in Thadou, and ped in Hindi, and so on. There is no one-to-one correspondence or relationship between the word and the object referred to by that word. All the words used in a language are arbitrary symbols.

### **5. Language is used by a social group.**

It is true that a language may be used by a single person and still could be considered a language in its proper sense. There were several Native American languages in the past which disappeared when the last few speakers died. Anthropologist A. L. Kroeber and Linguist Edward Sapir worked with a Native American who was the only survivor of his tribe. That language now “lives” only in printed form and in phonograph records.

Even when there was only one speaker, the speaker’s internal thought processes and his inner speech always assumed the presence of others. Language in monologue is also social. In ordinary circumstances, language is always used by (and for) a social group.

### **6. Language is a means to the interaction between members of a social group.**

While there may be also other ways of communicating what one thinks and what one wants to do, and so on, the chief means of communication between members of a social group is language. Language is a social institution. It reflects the social values its speakers have. Niceties of speech spring from and reflect such values. A language may have geographical and social variations reflected in the varieties of speech (dialects) used in the language. Professional groups may speak specific profession-oriented speech variety. In some languages the speech used by men and women may differ so drastically that there may special women’s dialects.

## **SOME IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF LANGUAGE**

**Inter-translatability.** All languages are mutually translatable. Communication between persons and diverse communities becomes possible because of this trait. Progress in civilization is made possible because of this trait.

**Linearity.** No one speaks an utterance all at a time. We begin with one word and then proceed to complete the utterance in all its parts. We begin with a sound and then proceed to complete the word with all its component sounds. There is a progression from one end to the other in all linguistic utterances. Because of this trait we are able to organize our thoughts and words, compose them in some order, and produce them one after another.

**Discreteness.** This characteristic is related to the characteristic of linearity. It is possible to dissect an utterance into smaller units. A sentence may be decomposed into discrete phrases and words. A word may be composed into discrete sounds. Every native of any language has this ability.

**Patterning.** Utterances of a language fall into set patterns. There is some orderliness about the occurrence of words in a sentence, the occurrence of sounds in a word. The pattern adopted by a language is often peculiar to itself and distinguishes it from another language at the outward, surface level. The sentence pattern in English follows the Subject-Verb-Object order, whereas the sentence pattern in Kannada, a language of the Dravidian family spoken in South India, follows the Subject-Object-Verb order.

**Levels.** This characteristic is related to the characteristic of language as a system. Language is, indeed, a system of systems or a system consisting of several levels. The sounds of a language constitute a level by themselves. Likewise the words of a language constitute another level. The sentences of a language constitute yet another level. The sounds go into the making of words, and the words go into the making of sentences, and so on. Each level has its own constituent units (such as sounds, phonemes, morphemes, phrases, sentences - we discuss these concepts in subsequent chapters).

**Displacement.** More often than not, only in the human language are we able to talk about someone or something that is not present in time and space. This is a very important characteristic. Because of this it is possible for us to have history. This characteristic makes language a powerful medium of communication.

**Prevarication.** We can lie deliberately using a human language. Imagine - if we did not have the capacity and an adequate medium to "lie," inventions, art, and literature would not be possible at all.

**Creativity.** You can be very creative in a human language. You can generate an infinite number of sentences in a human language. Your life span is the only limitation, generally speaking. Creativity allows us to generate novel and innovative responses to the new situations. In every language, things that have not been said before could be said.

**Meaningfulness.** Sentences uttered in a language always have some meaning. There is a durable or stable, identifiable and isolatable association between the linguistic utterance and the real world.

**Recursiveness.** Using this property, a short sentence can be made into a longer sentence. Each sentence has a potential to generate still longer sentences. Sentences of a language can be made into sentences of infinite length.

**Reflexivity.** We can talk about a language using that language.

**Learnability.** All languages are learnable. There is no truth in the statement that one language is more difficult than another. Every language is complex, equally complex. Every language meets the needs of its speakers.

It is important for us to recognize that “all languages have developed to express the needs of their users, and that in a sense all languages are equal.... All languages are arguably equal in the sense that there is nothing intrinsically limiting, demeaning, or handicapping about any of them... there are (no) such things and ‘primitive’ languages - languages with a simple grammar, a few sounds, and a vocabulary of a few hundred words, whose speakers have to compensate for their language’s deficiencies through gestures... The fact of the matter is that every culture which has been investigated, no matter how ‘primitive’ it may be in cultural terms, turns out to have a fully developed language, with a complexity comparable to those of the so-called ‘civilized’ nations. Anthropologically speaking, the human race can be said to have evolved from primitive to civilized states, but there is no sign of language having gone through the same kind of evolution... All languages have a complex grammar: there may be relative simplicity in one respect (e.g. no word endings), but there seems always to be relative complexity in another (e.g. word-position)..... Simplicity and regularity are usually thought to be desirable features of language; but no natural language is simple or wholly regular. All languages have intricate grammatical rules, and all have exceptions to those rules..... Similarly, there is no evidence to suggest that some languages are in the long term ‘easier for children to learn’ than others - though in the short term some linguistic features may be learned at different rates by the children of speakers of different languages” (Crystal 1987:6-7).

**Effability.** Humans can express all their thoughts through their language.

## **ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE**

There are at least three major theories of origin of language: **divine origin, evolutionary development, and language as human invention.**

All religions and mythologies contain stories of language origin. Often these stories end up giving a place of primary importance to the language in which the sacred texts were composed. They also claim, more often than not, that the language of their sacred texts is not only the original language of the humans but also is the very same language used by the gods, Supreme Being, etc.

In some communities, language was considered to be a fundamental force in the creation of cosmos. Language or speech comes to assume the role of the Creator in some religions. “The supreme deity of Hindu Tantrism, Siva, is pure consciousness and thus silent. But in his first manifest form he unites with his consort, **Vaac** “speech”, who is also termed Siva’s sakti “power”, the female agency through which the process of creation will proceed. Creation begins with a subtle vibration that develops into the “mothers of the letters” of the Sanskrit alphabet, then into the words of speech, and finally into the referents of those words, namely, the concrete objects of the word” (Wheelock 1985).

The Thadous living on the Indo-Myanmar border have their own myth to explain why their language does not have its own script whereas a community living in the plains has retained the same. God called the three communities living in Manipur to the heavens and gave each a script system in a leather scroll. On way back from the heavens, the Thadou was so hungry that he ate the leather scroll, the Naga was so lazy that he forgot to remove the leather scroll and went to sleep with the scroll still on his back. In the morning he found that the termites had already finished eating the leather scroll which contained the script system. It was only the diligent and miserly Meithei who carefully preserved the leather scroll and brought the script system safely to his country, Manipur.

“In Egyptian mythology, the god Thoth is the creator of speech and writing. It is Brahma who gives the knowledge of writing to the Hindu people. Odin is the inventor of runic script, according to the Icelandic sagas. A heaven-sent water turtle, with marks on its back, brings writing to the Chinese. All over the world, the supernatural provides a powerful set of beliefs about the origins of language” (Crystal 1987:384).

Contrary to common belief, there is no specific story or process mentioned in the Bible which tries to explain how human language was created. There is an initial naming process initiated by God when he called the light “day” and the darkness “night” (Genesis 1:5). The first naming process had the function of separating the good (light) from darkness. A process of knowing begins with the naming process. This process is continued when the Lord God brought the beasts of the field and the birds of the air “to the man to what he could name them; and whatever the man called each living, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field” (Genesis 2:19-20). The episode assumes that Man had the ability to use language, that this ability was inherent, and that language was not created separately and given to Man. Language is part of Man.

The story of Babel is the story of how the multiplicity of languages came into being, not a story of how language itself came into being. The whole world had one *language* and a common *speech* at that time. (Note the distinction between language.) To bring humility and obedience in humans to God, God confused their language so they would not understand each other, says the Bible (Genesis 11:7).

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost and resultant speaking in tongues was a sign unto all of us that what had been lost had been restored in the Holy Spirit, what had been confused could be re-possessed with clarity in the Holy Spirit. The multiplicity of languages is no more a barrier if we anchor ourselves onto the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Language plays a very important role in Christian theology. The Son of God is called the Word. “When one speaks a word, it comes from within and reveals his thoughts. The second person of the Trinity is called Word because He is the Son of God, begotten of the Father from eternity; He reveals thoughts of God about us, for example, His love and gracious plan of salvation” (*Lutheran Cyclopedia*, p. 477).

As the theological history of the Israelites unfolds in the Bible, there is a progressive recognition of the multiplicity of languages. Consider the references to Syrian language in 2 King 18:26, to

the Jews' language in 2 King 18:26, to the scripts of every province and the language of each nation in Esther 1:22, to the people of obscure speech and difficult language in Ezekiel 3:6, and the use of the phrase *every people, nation, and language* in Daniel 3 and subsequent books.

Israelites mastered many languages especially Greek and Latin, the languages of power in the Roman empire. The world was no longer a list of unconnected nations. Learning languages other than one's own, and translation from one language into another for various purposes had become normal. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek (John 19:19-20).

Finally, in the Book of Revelation, we see the phrase *every tribe, people, language, and nation* often used. From the Unity of language, we go to the diversity and multiplicity of languages, and, from there with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, oneness of humanity is restored.

***Evolutionary Development.*** Not satisfied with the Biblical position that language is a distinguishing part of Man, so-called scientific approaches have tried to reconstruct the human language from various animal communication systems, without success. There is a qualitative gulf between human language and the animal communication system which cannot be bridged with available evidence. So several scientists have suggested that there must have been a mutation which led to the emergence of human language capability in humans.

Scientists have also approached the problem from other angles - to reconstruct the bony cavities within the skulls which have been found as fossils. They raise the question: "Might it be possible to deduce, from the fossil record of early man, the point at which speech began?" (Crystal 1987:290). They also raise the question "whether primitive man had the physiological capacity to speak." They conclude that there is no evidence to infer that speech in its richness existed even in Neanderthal man, who is assumed to represent an intermediate stage in the gradual evolution of speech.

The physiological mechanism used by humans in the production of speech is not matched in its elegance, details, structure, and functions in other species. While the so-called scientific approaches acknowledge this fact, the effort is still on to find an evolutionary chain for the emergence of human language.

The organs used for speech are used also for breathing, eating, and swallowing. Speech is not incidental to breathing, eating and swallowing. It is a primary function for the humans. The survival value of speech outweighs the other functions. (Remember what Jesus said, "Not by bread alone".) Animals have better provisions for breathing, eating, and swallowing. For example, "man can choke from food lodged in the larynx; monkeys cannot" (Crystal 1987:291).

The Bible does not visualize the existence of Man without language even for a moment. More than anything else, the use of language distinguishes humans from animals. "The gap between human language and the communication systems of the nearest primates remains vast, and there is no sign of a language-like increase in communicative skills as one moves from lower to higher

mammals” (Crystal 1987:291). While “scientists” acknowledge this, their paradigm of science allows them only to talk and do research within the bounds of the theory of evolution.

**Language as Human Invention.** Crystal (1987:291) speculates that cultural development necessitated the use of some “way of transmitting information about skills from one generation to the next. Any degree of social interdependence..... would seem to require a communication system.... An elaborate gesture system is one possibility. The early development of language may well have been assisted by some kind of signing..... such as how to use tools..... in an indirect way, tools could have promoted the development of speech. Sounds made at the same time as the gestures might have come to be associated with various activities...”

There are five other theories of origin of language: the **bow-wow** theory suggests that “speech arose through people imitating the sounds of the environment”; the **pooh-pooh** theory suggests that “speech arose through people making instinctive sounds, caused by pain, anger, or other emotions”; the **ding-dong** theory suggests that “speech arose because people reacted to the stimuli in the world around them, and spontaneously produced sounds, which were in harmony with the environment”; the **yo-he-ho** theory suggests that “speech arose because, as people worked together, their physical efforts produced communal, rhythmical grunts, which in due course developed into chants, and thus language”; and the **la-la** theory suggests that speech arose “from the romantic side of life - sounds associated with love, play, poetic feeling, perhaps even song.”

Modern linguistics is not concerned with the origin of language. It is concerned more with the study of the structures of languages.

Since views about how one’s own language came into existence is widely prevalent, and since such views are often tied to the theology of the people group, we need to have an understanding of the basic issues relating to the origin of language.

At present, almost all the linguists believe that “language” is innate to human beings, and that the human language cannot be reconstructed from the animal communication systems.

## **DIVISIONS OF LINGUISTICS**

Modern linguistics is **descriptive linguistics**. Descriptive linguistics is the study of the structures of a language without reference to its history. Description of a language is made as it is spoken, and **not as it should be spoken**. On the other hand, the school grammars often seek to study and present the structures of a language from a **prescriptive** point of view. Prescriptive linguistics or prescriptive grammars do not aim at describing the rules people know, but to tell them what rules they should know and use. Descriptive linguistics is also called **synchronic linguistics**.

**Historical linguistics**, also called **diachronic linguistics**, describes the historical stages of a language. It studies the description and explanation of language change. **Comparative linguistics** aims at making a comparative analysis and description of two or more genetically related languages. In **contrastive linguistics**, we contrast the structures of two or more languages, generally not related genetically, for the purpose of identifying points at various



levels of language which might prove difficult for those who wish to learn it as a second or foreign language.

**Sociolinguistics** is the study of the social aspects of language use. It studies the interaction between language and the structure and functioning of society - how social parameters affect the acquisition, use, and functions of language in social contexts. Psycholinguistics studies the interrelationship between language and mental processes.

There are several other inter-disciplinary fields such as **biological linguistics, computational linguistics, educational linguistics, ethnolinguistics, geographical linguistics, mathematical linguistics, neurolinguistics, philosophical linguistics, statistical linguistics, stylistics, lexicography, language teaching methods** and **theoretical linguistics** in which the concepts and theories of linguistics are applied with great insight.

Our focus in this brief introduction to linguistics is on the methods of description and principles of analysis followed in descriptive linguistics as an aid to learn a language other than one's own. We avoid elaborate theoretical discussions, but focus on basic facts about language and on practical use of linguistics for learning a second or foreign language.

We approach the study of language and linguistics in several incremental stages: the study of the sound system is called **phonology**; the study of the rules of word formation is called **morphology**; the study of the rules of sentence formation is called **syntax**; the study of the meaning system is called **semantics**; and the study of the vocabulary of words is called **lexicon**.

## **KNOWING A LANGUAGE**

A language consists of all the sounds, words, and possible sentences. Knowing a language means knowing what sounds are in that language. It also means knowing what sounds are not used in that language. When you know a language, you know the sounds, the words, and the rules for their combination. You know which sounds may start a word, which sounds end a word, and which sounds follow each other. Knowing a language means knowing that certain sound sequences signify certain meanings.

Knowledge of a language enables us to combine sounds into words, combine words to form phrases, and phrases to form sentences. It enables us to judge what sentences are appropriate in various situations. Not all strings of words constitute sentences in a language, and knowledge of a language determines which strings of words are sentences and which are not. It enables us to produce new sentences never spoken before and to understand sentences never heard before. This is called the creative aspect of language use.

Linguistic knowledge is, for the most part, not conscious knowledge. The linguistic system is learned subconsciously with no awareness that rules are being learned. Linguistic knowledge is **linguistic competence**. On the other hand **linguistic performance** is how we use this knowledge in actual speech production and comprehension. Performance is conditioned by factors such as memory span, mood of the speaker, the characteristics of the audience, the topic

of focus in a particular context, and so on. Grammar of a language focuses upon the linguistic competence, and not on linguistic performance.

## **WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LANGUAGE IN GENERAL?**

1. Wherever humans exist, language exists.
2. There are no “primitive” languages – all languages are equally capable of expressing any idea in the universe. The vocabulary of any language may be expanded to include new words for new concepts.
3. If something can be expressed in one language or one dialect, it can be expressed in any other language or dialect.
4. All languages change through time.
5. The relationship between the sounds and meanings of spoken languages and between the gestures (signs) and meanings of sign languages are, for the most part, arbitrary.
6. All human languages utilize a finite set of discrete sounds (or gestures) that are combined to form meaningful elements or words, which themselves form an infinite set of possible sentences.
7. All grammars contain rules for the formation of words and sentences of a similar kind.
8. Every spoken language includes discrete sound segments n or a, which can all be defined by a finite set of sound properties or features.
9. Every spoken language has a class of vowels and a class of consonants.
10. Similar grammatical categories (for example, noun, verb) are found in all languages.
11. There are semantic universals, such as “male” or “female,” or “human,” found in every language of the world.
12. Every language has a way of referring to past time, negating, forming questions, issuing commands, and so on.
13. Speakers of all languages are capable of producing and comprehending an infinite set of sentences.
14. Any normal child, born anywhere in the world, of any racial, geographical, social, or economic heritage, is capable of learning any language to which he or she is exposed. The differences we find among languages cannot be due to biological reasons.

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## **CHAPTER 2 LANGUAGE LEARNING**

### **LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Neuroscientists, the people who study the form, structure, and function of human brain, tell us that human language capacity is ingrained in the cerebral cortex which is a grey wrinkled mass. The human cerebral cortex is like a cap over the entire brain. Reptiles and amphibians have no

cortex at all, whereas other animals do not have as rich a cortex as the humans do. is like a cap over the entire brain. Reptiles and amphibians have no cortex at all, whereas other animals do not have as rich a cortex as the humans do.

Generally speaking, the human brain may be divided into two hemispheres, left and right. The left hemisphere controls and regulates the muscle movement and sensation in the right half of the body, and the right hemisphere controls and regulates the movement and sensation in the left part of the body. Again, generally speaking, the left hemisphere is identified to be the control center for human language capacity for most of those who are right-handed. However, recent researches show that not all the aspects of human language are represented in the left hemisphere. Jokes and metaphors in every day conversation seem to be represented in the right hemisphere.

Children learn their first language without much effort. However, children must be exposed to the language. They do not acquire a language without being exposed to it. Early on children have an ability to distinguish between some speech sounds. They distinguish between human speech and other sounds. However, they do not have an ability to distinguish between meaningful words. The child's babbling is his launching pad to acquire the language of his environment.

The child seems to follow some order in his acquisition of speech sounds. For example, vowels are acquired before consonants by age three. Stops (such as p, t, k) are acquired before other consonants. Among the consonants, labials (sounds produced with lips) are acquired first, followed by velars (sounds produced with the back of the tongue such as k and g), alveolars (t, d, s, z), and alveopalatals (ch, j). Interdentals (th in nothing, thank) are acquired last. Such orders are not much relevant when we learn a language subsequent to the learning of the first language.

Exposure to the second or subsequent language and continuous practice to use that language are highly essential, however. When we first hear another language it all sounds gibberish. When we listen to the utterances several times, we slowly begin to recognize at least some of the sound combinations or structure to some extent. In this process we match the sounds we hear with those sounds we are familiar with in our first language or in the languages we are comfortable with.

Children master the contrasts between various sounds more easily in the word-initial position. The child finds it easier to master a sound that occurs in many different words than those sounds which occur only in fewer words. Another interesting fact that is highly relevant for learning a subsequent or second language is that children recognize more sounds than they can produce. They recognize more words than they can or actually use. They understand more sentences than they can actually produce and use on their own. Recognition always precedes and is greater than production even while learning another language.

The utterances produced by children do not closely resemble the structures found in the adult speech. They seem to extract from the utterances they hear what perhaps seems to be essential elements for them and produce those elements as their sentence. The role of imitation and correction in first language acquisition seems to be very limited. Parents do not correct the speech of their children as a routine. They know that their children will be able to produce correct sentences in their own time. They seem to be more concerned with appropriate terms of address, etc., than with the correctness of sentence patterns, since errors are seen to be an integral

and inevitable part of acquiring the native language. Children have great difficulty in imitating the structures that they have not yet learned.

The speech addressed to children (caregiver speech or Motherese) has some special characteristics which help in children understanding the language of the adult. For example, the caregiver's speech is often clearly articulated, with exaggerated pauses between phrases, exaggerated intonation contours to signal questions, imperatives, and statements. Moreover, the parental speech tends to concentrate on the here and now. Second language learning may be facilitated if we adopt some of these features in teaching methods and materials.

Apes have many of the cognitive skills of two-year-old children, but they do not acquire language even when they are exposed to speech. This suggests that the humans have some inborn capacity to acquire, and use the intricate and highly complex system of human language and speech. The capacity to acquire the native or first language is universally found among all the human beings. Related to this is the capacity to learn a language other than one's own.

## **SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

The term *second language* is used to mean a language that is learned after the first or native language is relatively established. It is not applicable to the case of a child learning two languages simultaneously, during a bilingual setting.

This term is used also to refer to learning a foreign language. Learning a new language in a *foreign language context* (studying English in Japan) as well as learning a new language in the host environment (learning French in France) are covered by this term. This term may refer to a second, third, fourth, or even fifteenth language.

Some distinction is maintained between *learning* and *acquisition*.

Learning is defined as a deliberate, conscious attempt to master a language. Acquisition is defined as a less deliberate, subconscious process of mastering a language, and is often associated with the manner in which children acquire their native or first language. First language is also referred to as L1 in the literature. L2 is the second language. *Source language* is the first language/native language of the learner. *Target language* is the second language, the language being learned by the learner.

### **Some important questions**

It is common knowledge that children learn another language effortlessly on the play ground, or some such similar contexts. They seem to be less inhibited in learning the second language to which they are exposed in natural contexts. There may be some initial hesitation, shyness, reluctance and/or irritation on their part because in the beginning they may find themselves frustrated with the exposure to the new language. Their pronunciation soon matches that of the other children who speak that language as their native language.

1. What makes it possible for the young children to learn another language effortlessly, and what makes it more difficult for the adult to learn the very same second language?
2. Is learning a second language at all similar to learning the first or native language?
3. What is the effect of age on the language learning process?
4. How is the L2 learner's progress affected by the language learning environment and the type of linguistic input he or she receives.

Researchers report that there is a critical period or optimal age for second language learning. This period ends around the age of puberty, around 13 years of age. Beyond this age or critical period, individuals demonstrate or face difficulty in learning another language with ease and in an effortless manner. This is also the time during which the left hemisphere of the human brain comes to be the center that more or less controls language use.

There are three different arguments presented regarding the optimal issue. The biological argument says that a child's brain is more "plastic" and thus is more receptive than the adult's brain. Thus, certain aspects of language acquisition especially in the area of pronunciation are facilitated by this plasticity. The adult's musculature is hardened in some sense or set in place in some manner after puberty and this makes it difficult for the adult to acquire a native-like pronunciation.

However, the cognitive argument says that an adult is superior to a child when it comes to abstract thought. Learning another language involves generalization, discrimination of differences and similarities, and abstract categories, and mastery of patterns. Since the adults seem to have an edge over children in this, language learning is done better with reason. At the same time, children are generally less inhibited about mimicking sounds than are adults, and this may positively affect their pronunciation. Normally, children do not have negative attitudes towards the second language culture, and they usually have a strong desire to be part of a group or community, which enhances their desire to learn the language. In my opinion, this could be rather the best conclusion: The number of years of exposure to the second language and the starting age of the learner affect the ultimate level of success, especially regarding pronunciation. Although children learn more slowly than adults, they eventually surpass them. Both the contexts share similarities and differences. It may not be possible to replicate all the conditions of learning that a child is exposed when we as adults learn another language.

There are a variety of language learning environments: natural, classroom or a combination of both. Learning a language in the host country or in an immersion program (in which no language other than the one being learned is allowed to be used) involves natural environments because the focus is on communication.

Learning a second language in a classroom situation or in any situation where a prescribed course of study is followed involves formal environments. The combination of a formal and a natural environment might entail studying the second language in a classroom in the host country.

**Motivation** is the need or desire the learner feels to learn the second language. **Integrative** motivation is defined as a desire to achieve proficiency in a new language

in order to participate in the life of the community that speaks the language. **Instrumental** motivation is identified as the desire to achieve proficiency in a new language for utilitarian reasons. Most language learning situations involve both types. However, the notion is helpful in choosing the content and focus of our study.

L2 learners' **attitudes** are said to reflect their beliefs or opinions about the second language and culture, as well as their own culture. The extent to which learners prefer their own language over the ones they are learning is an important attitudinal factor. Negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and in all likelihood failure to attain proficiency.

**Empathy** is defined as the ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes. An empathic L2 learner has the capacity for participation in another's feelings or ideas, to project his or her personality into the personality of another. Empathic people are favorably predisposed to learning languages in a natural environment. They may more easily emulate a native-like pronunciation since they are usually less inhibited than others.

The most traditional method for teaching/learning is the **grammar translation** method. This method emphasizes reading, writing, translation, and the conscious learning of grammatical rules. Memorization is the main learning strategy. The students often spend more time in talking about the language or the rules than in talking in the language or using the rules through producing sentences. While this method does not appeal to many these days, we should remember that neither grammar nor translation nor memorization can be altogether done away with. Some people may dislike mechanical recitation or repetition of patterns. But this cannot be avoided, because just by a single reading or performing a sentence one is never able to retain it in memory and use it appropriately when the need arises.

The users of the **direct method** say that adult L2 learners can learn a second language in essentially the same manner as a child. Natural settings are created for the learner to talk. The major emphasis is on communicating. Classes are carried out totally in the second language with no reliance on the first language of the learner. No translation is used. Since adults do not learn exactly like children, they express the need for explicit instruction in grammar and other aspects of the second language. Direct method in these situations becomes less effective.

The **audiolingual method** has been a very popular derivative of the direct method. The goal is to develop a native-like speaking ability in the learners. Translation and reference to LI are not permitted. Language learning is treated as a mechanistic process of habit formation. Audiolingual learning comprises dialogue memorization and pattern drills, thus ensuring careful control of responses. Patterns are not explained. Patterns are learned through mechanical drills. Repeated and mechanical of patterns that are graded from the simple to the complex and from the familiar to the unknown are given to students. Through this intense repetition students automatically internalize the structures. The method has several points that could be of great help to us in learning another language.

There are several methods which fall under the category of **Communicative Language Teaching/Learning**. Merely knowing how to produce a grammatically correct sentence is not enough. A communicatively competent person must also know how to produce an appropriate,

natural, and socially acceptable utterance in all contexts of communication. An illustration given in Fromkin and Rodman (1993) illustrate this point effectively. *Hey, buddy, you fix my car!* is grammatically correct but not as effective in most social contexts as *Excuse me, Sir, I was wondering whether I could have my car fixed today.* It is assumed that if the students interact with second language speakers using real-life subject matter, the language will be acquired subconsciously.

**Total Physical Response** takes into consideration the silent period deemed necessary for some L2 learners. During the first phase of total physical response, students are not required to speak. Instead, they concentrate on obeying simple commands in the second language. The commands eventually become more complex. For example, *Walk to the door* becomes *Scratch your head while you walk to the door at the back of the classroom.* Students later become more actively involved, verbally and creatively. The objective of this method (Total physical response) is to connect physical activity with meaningful language use as a way of instilling concepts. Proponents claim that it is very effective in the initial to early intermediate stages of L2 acquisition.

L2 teachers and researchers are realizing that one method alone will not satisfy the demands of language learners of different ages, different learning styles, diverse backgrounds, and varying degrees of motivation.

Research studies reveal that L2 learners, whether children or adults, follow a developmental route, experimenting with their linguistic knowledge. Achieving fluency in a second language is evidently a creative process, one of trial and error, revision and reconstruction.

Early researchers came to believe that by comparing and contrasting the learner's native language with the second language, new insights could be gained into the language learning process. This approach is known as **contrastive analysis (CA)**. It was claimed that the errors produced by the learner would occur at those points at which the two languages were dissimilar. Contrasting structures of two languages would help predict the potential trouble spots and to focus on them in the L2 lesson.

**Interlanguage** is the language of approximation that a learner actually uses when he learns another language. This is similar to but not identical to the native speakers' speech. Through a series of approximations or interlanguage the learner progresses through a theoretically infinite number of states of grammatical development along a continuum. The learner starts with his own native language and continuously revises and extends rules until fluency in the second language is attained. Each L2 learner's interlanguage is unique. As learners progress towards native-like proficiency in the second language, their interlanguage is characterized by fewer and fewer errors.

**Interlingual errors** are the result of L1 interference, implying that some structure from the native language has been transferred to the second language. A comparison of adult and child L2 learners shows that adults tend to exhibit more first language influence in their errors than do children – about 30% of adult errors are from the influence of their first language. Thus L1 is not the only or primary cause of learner errors. Development errors result as part of the learning

process. These may be caused by the inadequate mastery of the structure being learned. These may be caused by the strategies the learner has adopted to learn the structures. Sometimes one may not be able to find a reason for the developmental errors.

Within the interlingual and developmental errors categories, errors can also be classified according to the grammatical subsystem involved: phonology, syntax, morphology, and semantics.

Errors can be further classified as errors of omission, addition, or substitution (the L2 learner may omit certain items, add unnecessary ones, or exchange one element for another). Items may also be misordered or misformed.

## **LANGUAGE SKILLS**

There are four language skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Often it is recommended that we begin with the listening skill before we focus on the speaking skill; and begin with the reading skill, before we focus on the writing skill. Some researchers divide the language skills into two broad groups: receptive and productive skills. Listening and reading are considered receptive skills, and speaking and writing are considered productive skills.

Language learning is largely a mastery of the four language skills, in terms of the phonetic, phonological, morphological (word), syntactic and semantic aspects of the target language. It must cover also the communicative appropriateness of the structures used, in addition to a mastery of related sociolinguistic information.

The best way to learn a language on the field is to use it unhesitatingly on all occasions. This demands a lot of nerve on the part of the learner, though. There are several ways to prepare oneself to meet the linguistic deluge in the field!

- i. Look for a linguistically graded textbook which teaches your target language as a second language.
- ii. Many languages in the world have been described by competent linguists. Many well-known and populous languages have several second language teaching textbooks.
- iii. Most of these books are available in several university libraries in the United States. Get on to some university library online and get the relevant information.
- iv. Look for a second language teaching textbook with the gloss and introduction in English. These books are generally well-graded. And thus you are better advised to follow the textbook lessons in the order in which they are presented.
- v. Most books are accompanied by language teaching tapes. Try to get a set of these tapes. Listen to every lesson several times before you begin to produce the sentences on your own. In the absence of these tapes, try to locate a language speaker who could pronounce the words and sentences of some of the lessons at least. If you are not able to get a native speaker to pronounce the words and sentences for you, follow carefully the phonetic descriptions given in the textbook and produce the words and sentences on your own. You should, however, be always willing to modify your pronunciation whenever you come across a native speaker who could produce these utterances for you.



- vi. Note that pronunciation is not every thing in learning a language. There is more to language learning than impeccable pronunciation. What you should aim at is “a tolerably good” pronunciation, which would communicate easily what you mean to say.
- vii. Remember that language learning is a laborious exercise. If you do not have a consistently high motivation you will have difficulty in learning your target language. Motivation must result in a daily routine of doing some language as demanded by your textbook. Daily and routine contact with the material will result in better learning of the target language.
- viii. There is no room for being shy, when it comes to learning another language! You must “blurt” out all the time in the target language. If you do not have someone to speak to, please set up an imaginary character and involve him/her in conversations you!
- ix. I strongly recommend that you memorize the words and their meanings. Memorization is important, although many may not approve my strong insistence on it. Words must be memorized and sentence patterns must be practiced over and over again.
- x. Simultaneously learn the culture represented by the language, in its words, in its sentences, in its idioms and phrases, in the stories given in your text book, and begin to make a contrast between yours and that of the target language. This contrast is pursued not to make yourself feel superior but to caution you where you should be extra careful.
- xi. Developing a conscious contrast between English and the target language structures is another area which would help you understand the target language better.
- xii. Voice of America and BBC broadcast in many foreign languages. These are free materials for listening in the absence of a native speaker of your target language. Also look for ethnic stores in the big cities. These may even carry video cassettes of culture of your target group. If you can get some movies, watch them. This will be total immersion for you.
- xiii. If you get any reading material in your target language ( you can get them in ethnic stores, or in the university libraries), try to read headlines, headings first.
- xiv. I can go on listing so many practical ways by which you not only acquire some aspects of the target language but also strengthen what you have learned. It is only your common sense and diligence that would guide you to success. Put your trust in the Lord to give you abundant common sense and diligence.

So, now we will go on to the next possibility - that is, what would you do when you are confronted with a language which may have no second language teaching textbooks.

Any self-initiated language learning process should necessarily revolve around the methods of linguistic data collection and analysis. Several researchers have worked out methods of learning a second language using these techniques. *Language Acquisition Made Practical* by Brewster and Brewster is a popular book among the missionaries who venture out to learn the language of their field on the field. The method adopted in this book is often called the LAMP Method.

Brewsters base their method on what they call the Daily Learning Cycle. “Each day’s work, whether for six hours or two hours, should contain four general activities. They may be thought of as four parts of a learning cycle. As the cycle is repeated daily, your language will spiral upward.

The four parts of each daily cycle are:

1. Prepare what you need for the day.
2. Practice what you prepare.
3. Communicate what you know.
4. Evaluate your needs and your progress, so you will know what to prepare for tomorrow.”

Some of the suggestions made by the Brewsters are as follows:

1. From the first day, you should start using your new language as a means of communicating and interacting with people.
2. You will need the help of a native speaker who understands some English.
3. The Preparation part of the learning cycle is made up of six specific activities:
  - i. Obtain: Get the phrases to express the message you want to learn to say today.
  - ii. Check: Make sure it sounds natural to your helper, and is suitable for your use.
  - iii. Transcribe: Write down the phrases.
  - iv. Understand: find out the general meaning of each phrase.
  - v. Note and Classify: Make careful notes of opportunities and problems. In the Practice part you can design drills to respond to the opportunities and overcome the problems.
  - vi. Record: Make a tape recording of the message, in various ways, for use in the Practice part of the cycle.

There are three stages in **Practice what you prepared**.

- i. The first stage is listening.
- ii. The second stage is mimicry.
- iii. The third stage is production.

There are a number of drills suggested for the three stages.

1. In **Communicate what you know**, you will first demonstrate to the nationals that you really want to learn their language. You may become the talk of the town! You may feel shy and reluctant. But you should gather courage and talk! Every person you see is a potential individual to talk with with, on the field!

Give your talk to your landlord!

Talk with children.

Talk with people in the park or town square.

Talk in the market.

Talk with many vendors.

Talk with the shopkeepers of many stores near your house and so on, and so on!

In the **Evaluate your needs stage**, make an evaluation of your methodology every day, note and classify problems, decide on the next step, and prepare to organize material.

Brewsters give us a list of topics that would be useful for the collection of data and for the organization of the daily learning cycle lessons. Note that following the list would give you most of the basic words in your target language, most of your sentence patterns and would help you monitor your progress.

## **BAREFOOT LEARNING APPROACH/GLUE METHOD**

Donald Larson, an author of several reputed manuals which help individuals to master the method of learning languages other than their own, suggest a barefoot learning approach to learning languages. He quotes Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, television preacher of the 1950s, who said, "There are certain things that man has to do for himself, like make his own love, say his own prayers and blow his own nose." And Larson goes on to say that "I would add one to his list— learn his own language. No one can do it for you."

*"Barefoot language learning is not what children do. Nor is it the kind of language learning done by people in warm climates who run around without shoes. ... Barefoot language learning depends on what you do for yourself to learn from people who know the language that you need to know, not just to study from people who are trained to teach it. Barefoot language learning is 'learner-intensive appropriate technology' for use in communities where an outsider needs to know the language of its insiders. ... It is a wedding of the best of human potential for language learning to insights into language developed by linguists and other specialists "* (Larson 1994, "Barefoot: A way to learn another language," *Training for Cross-cultural Ministries*, Volume 94, Number 2).

Larson's barefoot language learning approach is similar to that of the LAMP approach we discussed earlier. Larson calls his method a GLUE method (Larson 1984: 72-73):

**G** "Get what you need: As a rule-of-thumb, spend 10% of your time in getting the new material that you need. If you get more material than you can learn or use, you will increase your frustration needlessly."

**L** "Learn what you get: Allow 40% of your time for learning what you get in the first hour. If two hours isn't enough, you are getting too much material. If you can't fill these two hours with profitable drills and exercises, sooner or later it will have a negative impact on your use of the language."

**U** "Use what you learn: Allow 40% of your time for putting what you have learned to use in the community. allow another hour for passive listening and reading."

**E** "Evaluate what you use: Allow 10% of your time to make a systematic evaluation of what you have used."

## **FIELD METHODS IN LINGUISTICS**

These approaches take their cues and ideas from the field methods adopted by linguists in collecting and analyzing the linguistic data mostly from unwritten languages. Several factors that

help the collection and analysis of data from and learning of unwritten languages on the field may be fruitfully used in our efforts at learning another language.

The linguist on the field is constantly exposed to the language which is spoken around him. He hears the language constantly. He is interested in hearing the natural language, not a language tailored to suit his learning levels. He is faced with the problem of recognizing and producing sounds, sound patterns, words, and sentences he has never heard before. He has to listen carefully and makes sense of the patterns that underlie the speech he is exposed to. It is a very personal effort.

This personal effort can become successful only with the cooperation and collaboration of the people, the native speakers of the language, around him. The linguist needs to develop a personal rapport with a few people, who would be willing to work with him and supply the data in some graded fashion. That is, from short sentences to longer sentences, from words for familiar and concrete objects less familiar objects and relations, and abstract notions.

He needs to listen, talk and write down what he has just heard. He needs to imitate the speaker, repeat after him for the speaker's benefit, elicit the native speaker's assessment of the quality of reproduction, did it approximate the native speaker's utterances, and how could he further improve this approximation, and what is the meaning of this utterance, and how and under what contexts the utterance could be used, what are the social implications of this utterance, could he (the linguist-student) use the same utterance for this or that, how about this word in place of that word, how about adding, deleting, or changing the words, or the word order, I am making some new utterances based on the words and the word order in this sentence, tell me whether these new utterances make any sense, and whether such sentences are acceptable to you, how about an elliptical sentence like this one, do you think that this is understandable and acceptable, and so on.

A series of questions which help the learner to approximate his performance to that of the native speakers of that language. It is not easy for every one to imagine and ask questions of this nature. However, by trial and error and with sufficient motivation one could really learn another language.

The linguist on the field listens to the people, talks to people, and invariably writes down what he heard in some form for his recollection, and analysis. Hearing the language helps the learner to improve his pronunciation even as it gives him or her a subconscious introduction to the structures and sounds.

Without talking, one can never learn to use another language. Talking helps improve the pronunciation, helps you to work out the necessary sentence patterns to meet your needs, and projects a friendly image of yourself to the native speakers.

It is also important to memorize useful phrases and sentences which could be used in your day to day interaction with the people around. It is difficult to remember everything that was said to you, and in the manner it was said. So, it is important to write down what you hear in your native

script perhaps to begin with, and then to switch over to the phonetic script, and finally when you are ready you can write down the expressions in the script of the native speakers.

Remember that no cut and dried method can ever be suggested. You need to take a broad view of the problem and devise methods that suit your time, goal, and your your inclination. Good pronunciation is not the ultimate goal, as we explained. But at the same time one should not ignore the goal of acquiring good pronunciation in the target language., because it helps in establishing a good image of yourself and helps in the communication process.

## **SOME BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES**

Elson and Pickett (1988) suggest that we smile, talk, gesture, listen, and use what we hear while working with the language helper on the field. Their practical suggestions include the following: The language helper is not a machine, like a cassette tape. He has real feelings. So, treat him with great concern for his time and comfort.

1. "Imitate the pronunciation of each utterance. Ask the speaker to correct your pronunciation; insist that it would be a favor to you. accept any correction with appreciation and laugh at yourself for your mistakes. If you show any unhappiness or even embarrassment over your mistakes, people may soon stop correcting you."
2. Ask for repetition and make any necessary corrections in the first transcription. But don't ask for a specific form to be repeated too many times at one sitting. if you can't get it easily, leave it until later.
3. Don't work too long at a time. Be careful to watch the helper's reactions to ascertain how much he can take.
4. In determining areas of meaning, ask questions that will lead to usage in the local language—not just equivalents in a second language.
5. Expect minor differences in the same form when elicited from different speakers. Make careful notes of these differences, as they may represent area dialects, male vs. female speech, or simply individual differences.
6. Expect differences in specific forms or translations from one day to the next as given by the same person. Alternate forms may be possible; or the speaker may be focusing on a different area of meaning of the same form. Remember that the native speaker is always right. ...
7. Don't ask why the language helper says things the he does. he probably doesn't know. every language is a unique and complex system. The fact that things are said differently than he analyst expected should not require explanation from the native speaker. ...
8. If the language helper seems confused by one of your questions, leave the subject and go on to something else. We should not leave the impression that the speaker ought to know something which he doesn't seem to know. Or if the question seems to embarrass him, it may be you have said something which is not said in polite society of the culture. Later, as one learns more of the language, one can probably find out what it was that embarrassed the speaker."

## **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ELICITING UTTERANCES**

Consider also the following important steps when you start eliciting utterances from the target language. These steps are suggested by Elson and Pickett (1988):

1. Get some useful phrases that you should babble in order to get used to the rhythm of the language.
2. Get the expressions which that are used to continue the conversation, and elicit more words. Greetings and leave takings, etc. will be useful. Translation of these expressions may not be natural, so you need to actively enact the situation to get these expressions
3. Questions and answer-frames such as What is this? and This a . . . ., How do you say . . . ? What am I doing? What is s/he doing?
4. Elicit nouns first. Local situation and local context should be the background from which the names of objects should be elicited. Be aware that words that are common such as newspaper may not be found at all in a preliterate language. What is apparently relevant for the culture you are in should decide what words you would elicit.
5. Ask for the names of natural objects: sun, moon, star, sky, cloud, stone, tree, leaf, branch. flower, water, mountain, stream/river, . . . .
6. References to people or animals: man, woman, boy, girl, baby, horse, dog, snake, bee, etc, . . . .
7. Articles of food: bread, meat, fish, corn, beans, rice, fruit (or specific fruits), vegetables (or specific vegetables) . . . .
8. Names of parts of the body are usually easy to get. In some languages these words will always have some prefix to indicate possession. For example, in place of *hand*, the expression may be his hand, her hand, my hand, etc.
9. Get the words other than nouns in context. For example, noun phrases for numbers, adjectives, etc., are better collected in linguistic contexts.
10. Never ask for verbs out of context. You will see that the verb form may change according to the context more frequently, and that there may not be pure and simple verb roots in some languages.
11. Ask for simple sentences first. Then use these simple sentences to derive other possible elicitation sentences, "beginning with transitives and going on to intransitives and statives." Herebelow are some model derivations using a simple sentence, and these sentences are based on the market scene.

That lady is selling apples.

That lady is selling chickens.

That lady is selling corn.

A chicken is eating corn.

A dog is chasing the chicken.

The chicken is running.

The dog is barking.

The lady is yelling.

The chicken is fat.

The lady is fat.

The dog is skinny.

The apples are small.

## TO CONCLUDE

To conclude, the learner needs to get actively involved in the collection, analysis, and use of sentences, phrases, and words. He or she should master the sounds and their combinations, and suprasegmental elements such as stress or tone. Start with the simple element. (Although it is difficult to define what is simple and what is not simple, still you can start with something and be watchful as to whether your procedure could be further simplified. Length of the element or elements may be used as a simple criterion to begin with.) If you are not actively involved in the processes of learning, your performance and competence in the target language will not be impressive. Remember that language learning is easier for children, but, if you are an adult, you need to have better motivation and empathy for the target language.

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## CHAPTER 3 LEARNING THE SCRIPT OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE

### SCRIPT IS A HUMAN INVENTION

How do we learn the script of another language? How did we learn the script of our own language? Did not our parents, teachers, and siblings hold our hand and help us to draw the letters? Did they not show that p and d are different, that g and q are different, when we failed to notice the difference? How many times we wrote s the wrong way? How we were confused when good is pronounced one way, but cool is pronounced in another way? We knew all the twenty six letters of the English alphabet, and yet were unable to write or pronounce some words correctly! Was it not frustrating?!

Remember that not all the languages spoken in this world are written. There are hundreds of languages still out there which do not have any script system. In the past, individual enterprising missionaries took devise script systems for many of these unwritten languages. Printing was introduced into many languages by these missionaries. Presently, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Wycliff Bible Translators, and Bible Societies all over the world are the premier missions agencies involved in the scientific study and description of unwritten languages in order to give these languages suitable writing systems. In addition to translating and publishing the Word of God in lesser known languages with or without script systems, mastery of the written language helps us to be meaningful participants of the culture of the society.

While language is the gift of God, writing systems are invented by the humans. Writing systems may or may not have focused on the representation of the spoken language when human groups had begun to fashion the “scripts” and to use them to express and communicate their ideas and actions. In other words, although we often seem to correlate writing to speech, in their origin the scripts may have had nothing to do with this aspect of correlation between speech and writing.

There is no society which does not have a spoken language, but there are hundreds of societies which do not have any writing systems at all. It is also a fact that many societies had borrowed writing systems from other languages they came into contact in some way or the other. Sometimes a language may have borrowed some letters from another script system while maintaining its own script system. The script system of a language may include the signs for the numerals. It is also a fact that a script system may include some special symbols such as @, #, \$, %, &, etc. Furthermore most languages may need punctuation marks, which also need to be learned. Another interesting fact is that the script systems may allow certain variations for the individual letters and their combinations. For example, cat is the same as cat, or Cat, or CAT, or cAt, or caT. We shall see some other variations a little later.

### **THREE TYPES OF WRITING SYSTEMS**

Three types of writing systems appear to be widely in use. The logographic writing system is followed in languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. The characters are not individual letters representing individual and distinct sounds. These stand for words or parts of words. Sometimes there may be some visual similarities between words or parts of words and the object or objects they refer to. Often the pronunciation of the words cannot be inferred from the characters by the learners. We need to learn the character as a whole, and associate the pronunciation of the word with the character. If you are learning modern Chinese you may have to learn about 2000 characters to meet the needs of day to day use. About the same number of characters (1850) needs to be learned in Japanese. Japanese children learn around 900 characters in their elementary school stage.

We often use logographic symbols along with the alphabet of the English language. For example, the signs for plus, minus, multiplication, division, equivalent/equal, lesser than, greater than, plus or minus, etc., are all logographs. These are logographic symbols, these do not indicate in their shape their pronunciation.

In syllabic writing, each letter stands for a syllable. The syllable is usually a combination of consonant and vowel. For example, the Japanese *katakana* syllabary, which may be used along with the *karanji* script, follows the syllabary system: ka, ga, sa, za, ta, da, na, ha, ba, pa, ma, ra, wa, fa, ki, gi, shi, ji, chi, ji, ni, hi, bi, pi, mi, ri, etc. Learners are required to master the character for each of the distinct syllables used in the language. They will spell a word not in letter as we do in English or German, but in syllables. And each syllable functions as a “letter.”

In the semi-syllabic and semi-alphabetic writing systems such as the ones followed in most languages of the Indian subcontinent, the learners are required to learn the symbols for vowels, consonants, and the combinations of vowels and consonants. In these languages the primary letter of the consonant may be so modified as to indicate its co-occurrence with the vowels. Each vowel has a simpler form which is combined with the consonants to form syllables. In this semi-syllabic and semi-alphabetic writing systems, we may be required to learn about 12 to 14 or even 15 primary vowel symbols, about the same number of their secondary symbols, and 18 to 30 primary consonant symbols. A total of about 250 to 350 symbols may be involved. Since these fall into a general pattern which is easily discernible, and since each syllable has the constant and unchanging pronunciation, depending upon the vowel it has, it may not be too difficult to master



such systems in a short while. In fact studies indicate that one can master a script system of this type in about 2 to three weeks.

In the alphabetic system such as the one we use in writing English, there should be direct correspondence between the letters and the sounds they represent. While it is true that “instead of several thousand logograms, or several dozen syllables,” the alphabetic “system needs only a relatively small number of units, which it then proves easy to adapt to a wide range of languages” (Crystal, 1997:204), often the script systems tend to acquire complexity in several ways. We will illustrate this in a moment using the English alphabet. “The smallest alphabet seems to be Rotokos, used in the Solomon Islands, with 11 letters. The largest is Khmer, with 74 letters. In a perfectly regular system, as in some of the alphabets that have been devised by linguists to record previously unwritten languages, there is one grapheme for each phoneme. However, most alphabets in present-day use fail to meet this criterion, to some degree, either because the writing system has not kept pace with changes in pronunciation, or because the language is using an alphabet not originally designed for it. Languages vary greatly in their graphemic/phonemic regularity. At one extreme we find such languages as Spanish and Finnish, which have a very regular system; at the other, we find such cases as English and Gaelic, where there is a lack of correspondence between graphemes and phonemes is inevitably reflected in the number of arbitrary ‘spelling rules’ that children have to learn” (Crystal 1997:204).

“There are also many alphabets where only certain phonemes are represented graphemically. These are the ‘consonantal’ alphabets, such as Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic, where the marking of vowels (using the diacritics) is optional” (Crystal 1997:204).

Reading and spelling are closely related. It is my personal experience that reading does help spelling. However, it cannot be asserted that one leads to the other. In the past, there had been great insistence on mastering spelling, with the assumption that if one mastered spelling, reading automatically followed. In recent times, the trend has been to assume that if children are taught to read, spelling would automatically follow. Neither position seems to be wholly true.

While reading and spelling are somewhat connected with one another, research indicates that one does not necessarily entail the other. For example, “there are many people who have no difficulty in reading, but who have a major persistent handicap in spelling.... It is commonplace to find children who can read far better than they can spell” (Crystal 1987:213). However, in the early stages of learning, children tend to spell more correctly than they read correctly.

There are several reasons as to why the spelling in English seems to be nearly chaotic. There are more letter alternatives for a sound than there are sound alternatives for a letter in English. “For example, **sheep** has really only one possible pronunciation . . . ; whereas the form could be written in at least three different ways – **sheep, sheap, shepe** (Crystal 1987:213). Researchers have suggested that in English there are 13.7 spellings per sound, but only 3.5 sounds per letter (Dewey 1971).

There are other reasons as well why spelling and pronunciation appear to be so divergent from each other in English. The history of the language, and the history of borrowing and printing provide many reasons for this divergence.

It is easy to teach the letters of the English alphabet, but very difficult to teach the association between letters and sound, mainly because a letter may represent many sounds, and a sound may be represented by more than one letter. I learned all the 26 letters, their sequence, and their citation pronunciation within a few days when I was in my fifth grade, and I also concluded that by this act I had completely mastered the English language! Soon I recognized how foolish and hasty I was in coming to such a conclusion! Even today I wonder how children all over the world are able to succeed in learning spelling in any language!

It is a good strategy to keep in mind the characteristics and the complexity of our own language when we attempt learning the script system of another language. This does not mean that we should expect the same types of difficulties and characteristics in the writing system we try to learn. For one thing it would help us to frame our questions about the script system we learn in an intelligent manner. We will compare and contrast our script with the script of the language we try to learn, and in the process we will have a better understanding and appreciation of the script systems in general. For another, through a proper understanding and analysis of our script system and how it operates, our ethnocentric ideas of our language (that it is the easiest to learn) will be kept under check. Mastery of every script system requires some disciplined approach and hard work. Moreover, we do not just learn the script, we learn the spelling of words, and how words might change shape and pronunciation under certain contexts (for example, *sign* and *signature*, *idiotic* and *idiocy*, *electric* and *electricity*).

Let us consider some of the complexities of the writing system used in English.

More often than not, the letters of the English alphabet are taught associating with a word in which the sound (or one of the sounds) represented by the letter is prominent. Ultimately, however, the students need to associate a primary sound with the letter, and to master the order in which the letters are presented in the alphabet.

Mastering the alphabetical order of letters is of practical importance. Without the knowledge of this order, students will not be able to use the dictionaries.

English has adopted the Roman script as its script. Long ago there were 27 letters used in the English alphabet. Now we have only 26 letters.

This number is small indeed when we consider the other languages in which the letters of the script may run into several dozens, if not more. However, in spite of the small number of letters in the English alphabet, the writing system presents several complexities which a second or foreign language learner may find hard to cope with. Diligence is certainly needed when you wish to learn spelling in any language.

The following are some of the features of the Roman script used in English. Because you are used to these features you may expect the same in the language you are about to learn. However, it is possible that the language you are about to learn may use a different set of features and this difference may cause some difficulty in learning the new writing system.

1. **Left to Right direction.** Languages in the Middle East, such as Hebrew, Arabic, and Persian, and languages of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan such as Pashto, Kashmiri, Punjabi, Urdu, Sindhi, Baluchi, and so on, with a variety of dialects, covering millions of people, use the right to left direction in writing their words, phrases and sentences. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean use top to bottom direction. Thus, there is a need for you to identify this distinction in the beginning. If you are learning a language which adopts a different direction in writing you will have some initial difficulty.
2. **Writing on the line.** English is written in straight line. A four-lined notebook helps students to learn which letters go above and which go below. Chinese characters or Persian/Arabic/Hebrew letters will demand a re-orientation in this respect from you. Perhaps you should find out how native children learn or are taught writing the letters. Perhaps you may be able to adopt the same strategy to some extent. There may be specially devised copy writing books in the language. Remember that a small change in the curve may lead to a different pronunciation. Compare d and b, o and p in your alphabet.
3. **Shape and size of letters in the handwritten form.** You may find it difficult to form the basic shape of some letters. You may have some difficulty in distinguishing between the shapes of some letters. Before you practice learning any letter, give yourself some practice with the special characteristics of the shapes of letters in the language. For example, second language learners of English benefit by practicing the curvy lines which closely resemble i, u, l and t. They are taught to look for the distinction between o, p, b, and d. They distinguish between p, g, and q, between l and t, between n and m, between l and k, between u, v, and w, and between y and g.
4. **Hand movements.** English uses both clockwise and counter-clockwise movements, top to bottom, and bottom to top movements. For every letter, there is a conventional way of moving the hand while writing the same. This conventional way is taught, and students encouraged not to deviate from it as much as possible. Following the conventional hand movements helps in joining letters and in gaining a good speed in writing. Likewise, you should identify and learn the conventional hand movements in writing and joining letters in your target language. Do not try to devise your own hand movements. As far as possible follow the steps and hand movements used in writing the letters in the target language. There may be some freedom allowed, however such freedom is not unlimited.
5. **Subscript and Superscript.** Many traditional script systems in Asia employ subscript and superscript additions to their normal writing. Handmovements may be confusing, but with a little concentrated effort such problems may be overcome easily. In addition, the order in which the subscript or superscript sound should be read would also pose some problems.
6. **Capital letters.** There is a complete set of capital letters in English. Except in the case of a few letters, capital letters and their corresponding small lower case letters are quite distinct from each other. As a result, the second or foreign language learners of English are taught to recognize the capital and small letters. Many languages may not have any provision for capitalization of letters. They may use some other ways to highlight the prominence of letters for meaning and/or ornamental purposes. In some languages, there is a clear distinction maintained between the handwritten form and the printed form of the letters. A diligent conversation with your language helper will bring out such differences and peculiarities. What is most important is that you develop a keen sense of pattern

perception of the printed, display, and handwritten materials.

The first word of a sentence in English must begin with a capital letter. Some words such as I must be written only in a capital letter whether it occurs in the beginning or middle or end of a sentence. Proper names must begin with a capital letter. There are several such important conventions which require the second/foreign language learner to master the use and writing of capital letters. Hand movements for the capital letters are different from the hand movements used for writing small, lower case letters. Students need to practice using capital letters by writing their own names and the names of towns, countries, months, etc. Look for any such conventions in the target language.

7. **Small/lower case letters.** More often than not, the beginners in English are first taught the small/lower case letters. By far these letters are more frequently used than the capital letters. Once again, the small letters form a set by themselves. The main focus of teaching the script revolves around the mastery of recognizing, writing small letters and associating them with their sound or sounds in English. What is the main focus of teaching the script of the target language you are about to learn? Is it that each letter be written distinctly, or is it that letters are to be joined in a word as in English? Is each letter pronounced clearly and prominently, or is it some letters are simply silent? Is the linear order maintained in writing the letters of a word the same as their order of pronunciation of these letters?
8. **Joining letters.** Conventional way of writing letters in English is to join them within a word or word-like unit. Joining one letter with another requires practice and adoption of hand movements conducive to joining. There are several combinations of letters which are more frequent than others. For example, combinations of ta, ti, et, ot, th, nt and dt appear to be more frequent than the combinations found in words such as *scythe* and *shotgun*. A traditional way to teach joining is to ask students to join all the 26 letters of the alphabet. Students were asked to write the model provided by the teacher many times, so that the students mastered the joining process. These days teachers prefer to give any and every language learning task in meaningful contexts. Accordingly, individual words are given to students and while they copy the word, they learn the letter joining process as well. Remember that it is important to show clearly how we make joins from the end of one letter to the beginning of the next. And this joining is not always the closest point. "You may follow the following model steps: Write c and h separately on the board. Point to where c ends and h begins and draw a line joining them. Then draw the joined letters several times, and describe the shape ... then up to the top of the h, then down.... Ask students to copy the joined letters several times." Can you adopt some such method for the mastery of the letters of your target language, or for the mastery of characters in Chinese and Chinese-like script systems?
9. There are three styles of handwriting: **Printing, Simple Cursive, and Full Cursive.** In printing, we keep the letters separate, and they look the same as in printed books. In simple cursive, most letters are joined, but the same basic shape as in printing is maintained. I understand that in Britain most children learn this style, and most adults use it. However, in the United States, full cursive continues to be more popular. Is there any such distinction between styles of writing in your target language? In full cursive, all the letters are joined, and many have different shapes from printing.
10. **Italics** is another style used in printing for achieving certain effects. This style or convention also needs to be learned by the second or foreign language learner. Does your

target language have any system of italics? If italics is not followed, is there any other device applied in your target language to show emphasis.

11. **Ornamental writing** is hardly practiced these days. However, it continues to be used in the titles of movies, mastheads of newspapers, in degree certificates, etc., in English. What is the position in your target language?

### **When do we start learning handwriting?**

My suggestion is that we start learning to write the letters and words as early as possible. Do not wait until you have learned enough of the language to speak and read. You should begin to learn individual letters from the very beginning. This will help you not only to get more practice in learning to write your target language but also to reinforce what you have learned. If you have learned to speak and comprehend some words and sentences, you should transfer these to the written level through copying exercises. And this process will reinforce what you have learned. Copying and writing is another form of memorization. Early mastery of the alphabet will help you to develop your reading skill.

### **What order to learn the letters?**

It is not absolutely necessary to learn the letters of your target language in alphabetical order. Some have introduced letters, rather groups of letters, based on the similarity they have perceived in shape, and hand movements in writing the letters. For example, they may first introduce o, then p, then b, and then d. The basic underlying shape is assumed to be a circle in these letters. Or letters may be introduced based on the hand movements – how one letter can be extended from a simple hand movement to another.

**The most popular way to learn the letters** is to associate the first sound or the prominent sound of a word with a letter and then introduce the letter: a for apple, b for bat, c for cat, etc.

Yet **another way to learn the letters** is to associate the letter with an object in which the letter can be easily embedded. For example, the letter S will be embedded in the picture of a swan, and taught/learned.

**Sesame Street** TV program uses some of these techniques.

All these methods are useful for one reason or another. However, you need to choose that method with which you and your language helper are comfortable. The traditional methods of teaching and learning the letters of your target language may be sometimes “too difficult and laborious” to you. You may not be convinced about the efficiency and appropriateness of such methods. You may be even tempted to tinker with the script and offer some instant improvements to the system! You may also become involved in how to adopt your English alphabet in the target language so that the burden of learning the target language could be reduced or eliminated.

All these things may have been motivated by your frustration with learning a strange script and language! So, do not rush to make any drastic judgement of the traditional methods. Do not focus

on script reform. Focus on learning and mastering the script. Remember that a script is a human invention. So, naturally like all human institutions it is subject to change and be left with the relics of the past which may or may not be relevant for the present. However, it is a historical and social product. It becomes deified in some sense. The Qur'an is no Qur'an if it is not written in the Arabic script. Hindus refused to write their languages in the Perso-Arabic script, when the Mughuls encouraged using that script to write the languages of north India. Buddhists consider the Pali script as the most authentic script for their scriptural texts. Of all the linguistic reforms, the script reform is the slowest and most difficult to accomplish.

An adult class would prefer a straightforward teaching of the letters with the citation pronunciation for each letter. On the other hand, children would be more interested in learning through games.

Generally speaking, letters with similar shapes are taught together. This helps students see important differences between them (for example, between “n” and “h”). Vowels are introduced near the beginning. This is useful as they are common, and can be joined to other letters to make words. Remember that whatever method is to be adopted, you must ultimately master the alphabetical order of the script system. Without this you cannot use reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, thesaurus, phone books, bibliographies, etc.

When do we learn the **name of the letter**? Just like knowing the alphabetical order, knowing the name of the letter is also important. When spelling words aloud, we need to use the name of the letter.

Copying is the best form of exercise for handwriting. You don't have to worry about producing the words. You simply focus on copying the letters one after another to write the words. You will have good practice joining the letters while copying. Let your language helper write words on the blackboard, and/or in your notebooks and ask you to copy the words several times. Let him check. You may write the letters and ask the language helper to judge whether your hand movements are appropriate. Let him not focus on the final product. Let him closely observe how you arrive at the final product.

Doff (1988) suggests a technique called **delayed copying**. The teacher writes a word on the board and asks students to read it. Then she erases the word and students are asked to write the word from memory. Students think of the word as a whole in this process. You may adopt this process also. Explain it to the language helper and let him devise a suitable strategy for this session.

Handwriting includes not only the mastery of letters but also the styles in which the alphabet is written. You will continue to commit several errors such as mixing small and capital letters within a word, mirror image problems, wrong joins, failure to insert the necessary elements of a letter, failure to keep the words separate, introducing gaps where not needed, especially within a word, improper slanting of letters, improper use of capital letters or non-use of capital letters, etc.

Exercises should be devised to reduce, if not eliminate, such errors. For example, if your target language has the distinction between capital and small letters, your language helper may write a

list of words on the board, including some names of towns, people, etc., but all with small letters. He will ask you to decide which words should begin with a capital letter, and say why. Then he may rub the words from the board, and then dictate them. You will write them down.

Very soon you will begin to recognize the problems you face and the problem letters and words that you should focus on. Remember to maintain a diary of your errors. This will help you avoid the errors in future.

### **KEEP THE FOLLOWING IN MIND:**

1. There are many methods of learning the script system of a language. Choose the one that best suits your ability and needs.
2. These methods may or may not follow the traditional arrangement as the focus of teaching. However, ultimately you need to learn the traditional arrangement of the letters in your target script, because without a mastery of the traditional arrangement you will not be able to use reference materials such as dictionary, phone books, etc.
3. Sometimes it may be better to follow the method of learning the letters based on the shape similarity of the letters being learned. In this method you will learn a few limited number of letters as a single group, but you will use these letters immediately because the words will be simultaneously introduced along with the letters used in these words. So, you not only learn the letters but also a number of words.
4. Letters may be learned based on the arrangement of their frequency of occurrence also. It is not necessary that all the letters of a script system will be equally used. For example, the letter s occurs more frequently than many other letters of the English alphabet. In other words, the words beginning with or using s may be more numerous than many other letters in the English language. If there is already a study on the frequency of letters in your target language, then based on such study you may first learn the most frequent letter followed by the learning of less frequent letters of the target script.
5. In syllabic script systems and semi-syllabic and semi-alphabetic systems it may be useful to focus on the derivations of vowel and consonant combinations. A consonant may be suitably modified and in a consistent manner when a vowel is attached to it. Learning such patterns is easier and will help learn the script faster and better.
6. You should always focus on the hand movements used in writing the letters. As already pointed out, left to right, right to left, subscript, and superscript features need to be learned.
7. If the script system focuses on the classification of letters into vowels and consonants, learn the distinction. In some languages there may be some overlapping between the consonant and vowel letters. This overlapping must be learned. A separate chart for the consonants and vowels with illustrating words would be good help.
8. Each letter has mnemonic pronunciation attached to it. These pronunciation or citation sound for each letter may or may not be identical to the sound it represents on most occasions. Yet you need to learn the mnemonic pronunciation attached to each letter along with the other real pronunciations attached to the letter. For example, the letter c has the mnemonic pronunciation si, but its real value on most occasions is k or ch.

9. A letter may have different shapes depending upon the context of its occurrence with other letters. The primary letter as well as its secondary representations should be learned.

## **SPELLING**

A few points at the outset itself: variation in pronunciation within a society is tolerated, but variation in spelling within a society is prohibited. If you spell words wrongly, you will be committing a “serious social error.” You may be considered as an illiterate or an ignorant person. So, it is important for you to master the spelling of words.

O’Grady et al (1993) list the following as illustrative of the problems with English orthography:

1. Some letters do not represent any segment in a particular word. Thorough, sign, give.
2. A group of two or more letters can be used to represent a single segment. Think, ship.
3. A single letter can represent a cluster of two or more segments. Saxophone, exile.
4. The same letter can represent different segments in different words. on, bone, one.
5. The same segment can be represented by different letters in different words. /uw/ in rude, loop, soup, new, sue, to, two.

Remember that such problems may not be found in other languages. You should, however, look for problems of spelling specific to your target language. Many languages display alternative spellings for the same word. One and the same sound may be represented by two different letters. Two sounds may be represented by one letter. The letter may be pronounced in one way in the beginning of a word, in another way at the end of a word, and still another way when the letter is associated with another letter.

The relationship between the oral and written language (including the relationship between the sounds and their combinations, and their representation in writing) is rather complex. Fortunately for the native speakers of English, there is greater similarity between the oral and written styles, if these native speakers are educated. However, in many other languages, especially the languages spoken in the Third World countries, the gulf between the oral and written styles is often very wide. We talk about the implications of this gap for speaking in our chapter on how to learn the sounds of another language. Often it is better to start learning the spoken style first and then switch over to the written style. The spelling to be learned in such contexts poses some complex difficulties. You should anticipate such problems. There are possibilities for inconsistencies: one letter -- many sounds, many letters -- one sound, etc. No script system is ever perfect; script is a career of culture, both secular and religious. There are sociolinguistic rules relating to the use of script systems. You need to ask for and identify these rules, and then learn to use them.

Look for the possibility of deriving one letter from another. Look for the similarities and differences in the shape of letters introduced. Look for the hand movements: clockwise and anticlockwise movements, crisscross movements, etc.



If you are charged with the responsibility of devising a script for the target language, prefer to go for the alphabetic writing. However, there may be political, sociolinguistic and religious considerations which may pose the need to adopt the script of the dominant language of the area. Use some modified form of the Roman script because of the advantages it would bestow upon the people group in terms of technology of all sorts.

Always remember that learning a script system is not just learning the letters of the script. You need to learn the spelling as well, apart from other tasks.

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# CHAPTER 4 LEARNING THE SOUNDS OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE

## REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING

1. No two languages have the same set of sounds.
2. No two languages have the same sounds which occur in the same positions all the time.
3. Spelling may hide the sound values. Spelling may misguide you as to their pronunciation. sign, clap
4. Contexts may change the value of the letter/sound. electric/electricity
5. Native speakers' pronunciation is the correct pronunciation, not yours.
6. It may be easy to pronounce the sounds correctly in isolation, but it may be difficult to pronounce them correctly when they are used in words and sentences. azure
7. Exact and native-like pronunciation is never the goal of learning another language.
8. Using a language for communication is the goal of learning that language. However, good pronunciation is important for communication.
9. You will never be able to speak another language if you do not open your mouth, if you feel shy, or feel afraid that you will be mimicked and laughed at, and that you will be committing errors in your speech.
10. Signs, gestures, and written language have their own limitations. They may not be an effective substitute for the oral language. So, open your mouth and blurt out in the new language.
11. Get as many minimal pairs as possible and practice using them.

## SPEAKING

On most occasions, speaking in a language is synonymous with the knowledge of that language. For most of us, learning and mastering another language means mastery of speaking in that language. Speaking is the most natural thing to do in our first language. When you want to learn another language also, we generally tend to emphasize speaking over reading or writing.

While speaking in our first language comes to us in a natural manner, speaking in another language past our childhood often requires some conscious effort in recognizing, identifying, producing, combining, and using the sounds of that language. Without sounds no real speech in the ordinary sense takes place. Language is often transmitted and received via sounds.

## IMITATION AND REPETITION

In learning the sounds of another language, the following three steps are highly useful: **imitation** of the sound or sounds, **repetition** of the sound or sounds, **comparison and contrast** of the sound or their combinations being learned with the sound or sounds of your first language.

As you begin to get exposed to and learn the new language:

1. You will notice that some new sounds not found in your first language are used in your target language.
2. Some sounds that you consider to be simple and essential, for example, the sounds *sh* and *z* in English, may not be used in your target language.
3. You may have only two or three nasal sounds in your first language such as [m] and [n], but your target language may have six or seven nasal sounds such as [m], [n],[ñ],[ŋ] etc., posing great challenges to your capacity to discriminate between and identify distinct sounds. similar things may happen to other groups of sounds such as s-sounds, r-sounds, and l-sounds.
4. Some sounds that are used in your first language may assume certain colorings in the target language which are not common in your first language.
5. You may also notice that the sounds that are to be kept distinct in your first language, for example, *k* and *g* in English, may not be kept distinct and may be used interchangeably in your target language, following some context-sensitive rules. For example, if you are learning Tamil, a language spoken in south India and Sri Lanka, *k* may be used in the word initial position, and *g* may be used immediately following a nasal sound.
6. Certain sounds that are commonly and easily combined and used in words in your first language may not be combined at all in your target language.
7. The target language may have entirely different types of stress patterns, or tones, or even intonations.
8. You may also find that the number of sounds in your target language may not be the same as the number of sounds in your first language.

There are many other features by which the sound patterns of your first language may differ from the sound patterns of your target language.

You must approach the new language with the assumption that it may be different from your first language, but you should also assume that there may also be similarities. It is possible to use your first language speech habits to master and use the common sounds between the two languages, but the new sounds would demand developing new speech habits.

Imitation of individual sounds and their combinations is best done by obtaining minimal pairs of words from the target language. For example **tin** and **din**, **sip** and **ship**, **fill** and **full**, **mud** and **mad**, **pit** and **bit**, **mill** and **kill**, **pill** and **bill** are minimal pairs of words in the sense that each pair has contrasting sounds in the same position in the words, and this contrast results in or signifies the meaning difference.

By *imitation*, you try to produce the words with some acceptable pronunciation. By *repetition*, you are able to internalize the procedures to produce these sounds. By *contrast and comparison*, you become aware of the similarities and differences and begin to use the sounds in an acceptable manner.

## AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION

It is important for you to develop correct and acceptable auditory discrimination of the sounds used in your target language. That is, when you listen to the sounds, words, phrases and sentences in the target language, you should be able to discriminate and correctly recognize the individual sounds and their combinations. For example, if a second or foreign language learner of English has difficulty in auditorily discriminating between [r] and [l], words such as **rice** and **lice** would seem to be the same to him. And he will have great difficulty in producing these two as distinct sounds. In other words, correct auditory discrimination and recognition of sounds helps you to produce these sounds correctly. Remember that not every sound in your target language would be a stranger to you. However, each language has a few sounds “peculiar” to itself, or so think the native speakers of your target language. Sometimes success in learning and mastering the target language may be measured by the native speakers of your target language in terms of your skill in using these “peculiar” sounds and their combinations!

Auditory recognition and discrimination of the sounds and their combinations is better achieved by attentive listening with help from your language helper as to the distinctions you should look for. This help is better presented through a list of minimal pairs, with meanings for the words specified in some manner. Sometimes the linguists do not encourage you to focus on the meaning of words used for auditory discrimination. While there is a lot to recommend for this approach, some indication of the meaning is always helpful. So, ask for some gloss, but do not worry about the exact nature of the meaning of the words used for auditory discrimination and recognition.

Learners are generally discouraged from trying to learn to produce and recognize the target language sounds in isolation. They are encouraged to imitate and repeat meaningful words, phrases or sentences for every language exercise.

Auditory discrimination and recognition of sounds and their combinations should be done every time you meet with your language helper or teacher, perhaps in the beginning of your “class.” Record the minimal pairs on audio cassette and at home, listen to the tape repeatedly until you feel that you are comfortable with the recognition of the target language sounds and their combinations.

## MINIMAL PAIRS

Minimal pairs are hard to get for all the sounds and their combinations in the target language. Sometimes your language helper may have difficulty in understanding the concept of minimal pairs of words/sounds. You may have to demonstrate what you mean by minimal pairs of sounds/words by giving some simple examples from English, and/or by drawing pictures of objects which these words mean. It will do good if you can make it a habit to list the minimal pairs of words as and when you come across these in the target language.

Some minimal pairs from English are given below. Can you add to this list? pill, bill, mill, nil, fill, till, dil, pill, sip, ship, kill, bill, gill, lip, lid, lick, slip, grip, trip, fight, sight, night, might, east, feast, nap, nab, tap, top, seal, chill, Jill, zeal, leaf, reef, feel, veal, shill, cap, gap, gab.....

How many minimal pairs of words you can make from out of the following Tamil words?

mudi	'hair'
adi	'beat'
talai	'head'
madi	'fold'
ma:di	'terrace or upper floor'
ta:di	'beard'
talai	'bondage'
pal	'tooth'
pa:l	'milk'
kal	'stone'
va:l	'tail'
ka:l	'leg'
va:l	'sword'
a:di	'mirror'
ja:di	'jar'
pa:du	'sing'
pa:si	'moss'
ma:du	'cattle'
padu	'lie down/sleep'
masi	'ink'
mu:di	'lid'
kalai	'art'
kalai	'weed'
ka:lai	'morning'
ma:lai	'evening'

ka:lai	'bull'
pasi	'hunger'
udai	'garment'
o:dai	'stream'
malai	'mountain'
malai	'rain'

## APPROXIMATION

From minimal pairs, you may go to the production of meaningful short phrases and sentences. Imitate and repeat after your language helper. Ask your language helper to judge your pronunciation/production of these sounds as to their *comprehensibility* and *acceptability*. It is possible that your language helper may not like to offend you by saying that your pronunciation is awful. You should ask him to let you know whether the way you produce the sounds would be comprehensible to average native speakers of the target language.

It is possible that in spite of many repetitions you may still be unable to approximate the native speakers' pronunciation with regard to some special sounds of the target language. You should not linger on to solve this problem once for all. Move forward to the other items for imitation, repetition, and comparison and contrast.

## SOME HELP FROM LINGUISTICS

When you find out that your pronunciation of some sounds, their combinations, and other aspects of pronunciation is not up to the acceptable and comprehensible level, you need to discuss the matter with your language helper in some detail.

Your helper may recognize the differences in pronunciation, but may not be in a position to specify why this happens to be so. In other words, he may have no technical tool to pinpoint the problem and help you with some techniques to master these sounds. If you have some knowledge of the general principles and techniques of phonetics and phonology, you will be able to offer suggestions or alternative explanations to your helper and then he would choose the best that describes your problem. This would help you to work on the problem you face and solve it ultimately.

Suppose that you are learning one of the languages of the Indo-Aryan family or of the Dravidian family spoken in the Indian subcontinent. You will come across **t-like** sounds and you will often be unable to pronounce these sounds correctly because your first language [English] does not have these sounds. These t-like sounds are pronounced by curling back the tip of the tongue and making a closure of the air passage in the middle part of the palate. On the other hand the *t-sounds* (t, d) in English are pronounced with the tip of the tongue touching the fleshy part immediately behind the upper teeth. You describe in general terms where your tongue is placed, whether you make a complete blockade or closure of the airstream, and how you release your tongue from the position it took at first instance. Ask your informant what he does when he

produces the t-like sound. Then try to emulate his description in the production of that particular sound. You may not succeed at first instance. You will make several attempts approximating the description given by him or elicited by you from your language helper. Approximation is the key word. Your goal is not perfect production, but approximate production! Perfect auditory combination is desired, but not perfect articulation of the sound!

## **VOWELS: PLACES AND MANNER OF ARTICULATION**

Sounds in every human language may be classified into various categories based on the manner these are produced and on the points or places inside the mouth where the speech is produced. For example, two overarching major classification of the speech sounds in any language is between the *vowels* and the *consonants*.

In the production of the vowel sounds, there is practically no interruption of the air stream. The air pumped out of the lungs is released with out interruption.

The tongue takes several levels such as high (for [i] and [u]), mid (for [e] and [o]), and low (for [a]) in broad terms.

The quality of the sound produced may be modified by the fact whether the lips are protruded in their production. For example, the vowel [i] uses the same height of the tongue (high) as the vowel [u], but in the production of the latter the lips are rounded.

In the production of the vowel i, in addition to the high position the tongue is placed within the mouth, the front of the tongue is employed. On the other hand, in the production of the vowel [u], in addition to the high position the tongue is placed in the mouth, the back of the tongue is employed along with the rounding of the lips.

The production and auditory recognition of the vowel sounds are usually more difficult than the production and recognition of the consonants in the target language. That is one of the reasons why most second language learners, whose first language is especially from the non-European families of languages, often have difficulty in correctly mastering the vowels of English. The diphthongs (combination of a vowel and a vowel-like sound in English), the subtle reduction in vowel quality, for example, the [i] in **alimony**), the rules relating to the placement of stress, and the rules relating to aspiration in the beginning of a word, etc., often pose problems to the adult second/foreign language learners of English.

The vowels [i], [u], [e], [o], and [a] may be considered as "basic vowels." languages do make changes in the quality of these vowels to derive their own peculiar brands of vowels. Often the vowel [a] is not rounded, but in several languages there may be a distinction made between this unrounded [a] and a rounded version of the same. Similarly, languages do make changes in these 'basic' vowels in terms of the height of the tongue, part of the tongue used, and lip rounding to derive additional vowels for use in them.

The golden rule in such cases is that we make our best efforts to approximate the native speakers' pronunciation in order to make our speech sufficiently comprehensible to the native

speakers. Sometimes, poor or approximate pronunciation could still be used if you can supplement it with writing down the word in question for the benefit of your listener. Or you can show the picture of the object whose name you are trying to pronounce! There are other ways of supplementing your poor and inadequate mastery so that communication between you and the native speakers of your target language is made more efficient for the moment until you consciously overcome your difficulties with specific sounds and words. The point is that you should never allow yourself to be discouraged, because that would lead you to silence and reluctance to use your target language.

## CONSONANTS: PLACES OF ARTICULATION

In English the following places of articulation are used in the production of consonant sounds:

**Bilabial** sounds are produced using both the lips. For example, p, b, and m are bilabial sounds.

**Labiodental** sounds are produced when the lower lip touches the upper teeth. For example, f and v are labiodental sounds.

**Interdental** sounds are produced by placing the front part of tongue between the upper and lower teeth. For example, the word initial sounds in words such as **think, thank, thigh, this, that, thought**, and the word medial sound in words such as **nothing, soothing, mousing, seething**, and the word final sound in words such as **moth, math, path, mouth, Seth**, etc., are produced by placing the front of the tongue between the upper and lower teeth.

**Palatal** sounds are produced by raising the front/middle of the tongue towards the roof of the mouth. For example, the ch in church, search, torch, champion, etc. are produced by raising the front of the tongue (not the tip of the tongue to touch the roof of the mouth (hard palate). In some languages it is the middle of the tongue that is raised towards the roof of the mouth. Other examples of the palatal sounds are the initial sound in words such as **jump, jar, James, just**, etc., and medial sound in words such as **Ajax, ajar**, etc. In the following words the word final sound is a palatal sound: **orange, garage, judge, nudge, package**, etc.

**Alveolar** sounds are produced by raising the tip of the tongue to touch or make a constricted passage with the teeth ridge behind the upper teeth. The initial sounds in the following words are alveolar sounds: **time, dime, lemon, nip, fill, sip, zip, rib**, etc.

In some languages a clear distinction between the alveolar, interdental and **dental** sounds are made. **Dental** sounds are produced by raising the front of the tongue and touching or making a constricted passage with the back of the upper teeth. Note that the tip of the tongue is not used here. Tip of the tongue is used in the production of the alveolar sounds, whereas the front of the tongue is used in the production of the dental sounds. Note also that the tongue is not kept in between the upper and lower teeth as done in the production of the interdental sounds. The front of the tongue is clearly behind the upper teeth in the production of dental sounds.

Another sound type using the front/tip of the tongue is called the **retroflex** sound (not used in English). In the production of the **retroflex** sound, the tip of the tongue is curled back to touch

the mid-part of the roof the mouth. This type of sounds is quite common in the languages of the Indian subcontinent. It is possible that the alveolar, dental and retroflex sounds may sound alike to us. However, there are languages in which these sounds are clearly distinguished.

Initially you may be confused between the recognition and production of these sounds. Slowly by associating the specific place of articulation with the corresponding sound, you will come to recognize and produce the difference between them.

This example or the process of approximation can be applied to all the “peculiar” sounds that you come across in your target language.

**Velar** sounds are produced raising the back of the tongue to the soft palate or velum. For example, the word initial sounds in the following words are velar sounds: **kiss, get, gate, give, cat, clap, catch, kill**, etc. The word medial sound in the following words are also velar sounds: **orchestra, naked, character**, etc. The word final sound in the following words are velar sounds: **fatigue, critique, sick, mug, characteristic, book, shake, take, make**, etc.

Remember our observation in the beginning of this chapter: Spelling may hide the sound values. Spelling may misguide you as to their pronunciation. In the examples given above and elsewhere in this chapter, spelling does hide the actual sound values. For example, in the word *character*, *ch* stands [k], and [c] before *-ter* stands for [k].

There are also sounds produced with the help of the **uvula**, the **pharynx** as well as the **glottal chords**. The r-sound used in French is a uvular sound. The sounds produced with the pharynx, the pharyngeals, are quite common in the languages of the Middle East, such as Arabic, Hebrew, Pashto in Afghanistan, and Persian. The Urdu language spoken in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh also has these sounds. The **h** we use in English may be considered a glottal sound.

The sounds produced with the uvula may be difficult for you to produce at first instance. Begin with an attempt to recognize and discriminate these sounds from the rolled r-sounds in some of the dialects of English. Once you are able to consistently recognize their occurrence, then make attempts to imitate and repeat after your language helper. Several conscious attempts would be needed to manipulate your uvula for the production of these speech sounds. Then the next stage is to use these sounds in actual words and practice these words repeatedly with the help of your language helper. Suddenly you will be surprised that you are able to produce and use these sounds! Note again that this rule of approximation and practice applies to all those sounds you are unable to recognize and produce!

The steps suggested above may be followed for whatever "strange" or "difficult" sounds you come across in your target language. Patient and persistent effort will help you a lot.

## **CONSONANTS: MANNER OF ARTICULATION**

Places of articulation are to be combined with the manner of articulation. Sounds may be classified into various categories based on the manner of their articulation.



A sound may be **voiced** or **voiceless**. A sound may be produced with the vocal cords quite closed or tightly held so that the air passing through it causes vibration. The sound produced in this manner is called a voiced sound. When the vocal cords are loosely held, the air passes without vibration. The sound produced in this manner is called a voiceless sound. Say s-s-s-s and place your fingers against your Adam's apple. No vibration is felt. Now, say z-z-z-z. You will feel the vibration. The sound **s** is a voiceless sound, and the sound **z** is a voiced sound. The voiceless/voiced condition does not apply to the sound which is produced with complete closure of the vocal cords since no air is allowed to be passed. Except in this case all the other sounds in languages may be either voiced or voiceless.

A **stop** sound is produced by a complete closure of the airstream in the mouth with a sudden, abrupt release of the closure. In the production of [p], for example, both the lips are closed tightly and the air is released suddenly. Other stop sounds used in English are **b, t, d, k,** and **g**.

A stop sound may be voiced or voiceless. A stop sound may also be either **aspirated** or **unaspirated**. In the production of an aspirated stop or affricate sound (the description for this sound is given below), there is a heavy puff of air released along with the production of the sound. Keep your palm against your mouth and produce **pit**. There is a heavy puff of air released along with the initial sound in your production of this word if you are a native speaker of English.

Compare **pit** with **cup** or **tip**. The word initial p is aspirated, whereas the word-final p is not. Now, produce the sound **bit**. Comparatively speaking, there is no heavy puff of air released in its production. In English, the word initial **p** is an aspirated sound. It is also a voiceless sound. **b** is an unaspirated sound. It is also a voiced sound.

In many languages, a clear distinction between aspirated and unaspirated sounds is maintained. For example, in Hindi, there is a four-way distinction maintained; p stands for unaspirated, voiceless bilabial stop; p<sup>h</sup> stands for aspirated, voiceless bilabial stop; b stands for unaspirated, voiced bilabial stop; and b<sup>h</sup> stands for aspirated, voiced bilabial stop. This language has p, p<sup>h</sup>, b, b<sup>h</sup>; k, k<sup>h</sup>, g, g<sup>h</sup>, etc.

In the production of a **fricative** sound, such as f, v, s, z, ð, θ, air is released through a narrow opening in the oral cavity, causing turbulence in the airstream. Consider the sounds in the word initial position in the following English words: **full, village, sip, zip, this, thank, thought**, etc.

An **affricate** sound such as [tʃ] in the word **church** or **champion**, is also produced by a complete closure of the airstream in the mouth but the closure is not released abruptly or suddenly. The release of the airstream through the closure is rather slow, and not abrupt or sudden. Some examples of the affricate sounds used in English are as follows: **change, jump, giraffe, orange, cheetah, cheer, Jane, juice, jar**.

An affricate sound is a sort of combination of a stop and a fricative.

In the production of a **nasal** sound, the air passes through the nasal cavity. We may have several kinds of nasal sounds. [m] bilabial nasal, [n] is an alveolar nasal, [ɲ] is a palatal nasal, [ŋ] is a

retroflex nasal, and [ŋ] is a velar nasal. There is also a dental nasal. In English [m] *man*, [n] *name*, and [ŋ] *rang, nothing* are used. The vowels of a language may be **nasalized**. While the nasal twang we hear in some southern speaker is an example of this nasalization process, note that in other languages nasalization may lead to meaning difference. For example, in Tamil, [vara:] means ‘she is coming,’ whereas [varã:] means ‘he is coming.’

In the production of the **lateral** sound such as [l], the tip of the tongue touches the teethridge immediately behind the upper teeth and makes a complete closure. However, the sides of the tongue are kept open, and the air is released through the sides of the tongue. In some languages there are also other types of laterals such as the retroflex and palatal lateral sounds. In the retroflex lateral sound, the tip of the tongue is curled backward to make a complete closure in the middle part/roof of the tongue, and the air is released through the sides of the tongue. The middle part of the tongue and the hard palate are involved in the production of the palatal lateral. The lateral sound is marked bold in the following English words: **lamp, lease, little, title, sell, sold, pull**, etc.

The **trill** sound is produced usually in the alveolar or uvular region by keeping the tip of the tongue against the teethridge and make vibrations using the tip of the tongue. In British English r is rolled and this is a trill. In American English often the r-sound is not rolled.

In the production of a **flap** sound, the tongue makes a single contact with the place of articulation, usually in the alveolar region or the palate or the uvular region, in a “touch and go” manner. Often the t in the middle of a word between vowels in English comes close to this flap sound.

## PHONETICS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

What we have presented so far is only a cursory view of the science of phonetics as it relates to the segmental aspects of the sounds used in a language. Phonetics is an interesting discipline in itself. However, mastery of the science of phonetics or even the mastery of the phonetics of our target language is not our goal. We would like to use certain aspects of the science of phonetics in our quest to learn to recognize, discriminate and produce, in some adequate manner, the sounds of our target language and their combinations. By remembering some of the points we have discussed so far, you should be able to describe, explain, and reason out the characteristics of the “difficult and strange” sound that you encounter in your target language and seek some demonstrations and remedial help from your language helper.

## STRESS

There are several aspects of the sounds and rhythm used in your target language which you should understand and use. We would like to focus on three such aspects in the following paragraphs.

English uses “stress” to distinguish meanings between words and phrases. Stress may be simply defined as the relative prominence a syllable has in a word. Syllables in every word in the

English language must carry a primary stress which is more prominent than the stresses carried by the other syllables of that word.

Often second/foreign language learners of English find it almost impossible to master the stress patterns of English. There are several rules which help the learner to give the right stress on the right syllable of the word. While most English words are subject to such general rules, there are a number of frequently used words which do not follow the general pattern. This causes a lot of heart ache to the second/foreign language learner of English.

Do not expect that your target language follows the same stress patterns as your first language, that is, English. Do not expect that your target language must have a stress system. For, there are many languages which do not have any stress system at all. And if you impose your stress system on that language when you speak that language you will sound funny and strange to the native speakers of that language. So, there are two things you need to be careful about. Master the stress system of your language, if that language has a stress pattern, the way the target language uses it. If that language does not have a stress system, then try to “unlearn” your stress system when you learn that language.

Some example of the use of stress in English is as follows:

cónduct -- condúct  
pérmít -- permít  
cónflict -- conflićt  
cóntèst -- contést  
cóntràct -- contráct

## **TONE**

Many languages in the world use tone instead of stress to distinguish between words. Tone does not make a syllable prominent, but tone is a musical note type. While the consonants and vowels may be identical between two words, the tone for one word may be different from the tone used in the other word. Tone alone makes the difference in meanings between these words.

Remember that the tonal of one language may differ from another. Scholars have identified different types of tonal systems in the tonal languages.

It is easy to detect whether a language uses tones to distinguish meanings or not. But it is more difficult to specify what kinds of tones are used in that language. If you suspect that your target language may be a tonal language, ask your language helper to give you a monosyllabic word and ask him to pronounce it in as many different ways as to bring out all the meanings that word may have in his or her language. This is a crude way of checking the possibilities of tones used in that language.

Notice the changes in the musical tones attached to each meaning of the word, and try to imitate your language helper. The tones may be placed following certain general rules. Often such rules are cumbersome to remember.

The best way is to build your knowledge of the tones by imitation, repetition, and recording the tones of individual words in your note book on top of the letters used to write the word. Each citation of the same word may have different notations for the tones. By context, and by diligent memory you may be able to build a personal dictionary of words along with the correct tones attached to them, in your memory. Constant practice, and a willingness to learn and correct oneself are more than ever demanded when you want to master these suprasegmental features of any language. (Note the distinction I have made between the segmental (consonant and vowel sounds) and the suprasegmental features (stress, tone, and intonation).

Another suggestion often made to help you master the tones of a language such as Thai (or Chinese, Kampuchean, Myanmarese, Thadou, Lushai/Mizo, Tibetan, etc.), is to ask your language helper to act as an orchestra conductor. He or she may move his/her hands in tune with the raising, leveling, and falling tones.

Native speakers of the languages, which use tones to signify differences in meaning, can produce and use the tones easily. They can detect whether the tones are produced appropriately to express a certain intended meaning. They can detect the wrong tones. but it may not be possible for them to describe the tones for your benefit or explain why your tone is wrong. It is through constant imitation, use and internalization you will ultimately succeed in creating a mental dictionary of your own which correctly recognizes, assigns and produce correct and acceptable tones with the words.

It is important that you do not postpone the learning and mastery of the tones used in your target language to a later date. Even as you focus on the segmental sounds, usually by using these sounds in words, focus also on the correct pronunciation of the tones simultaneously. Identify the minimal pairs involving the tonal contrasts and start practicing these pairs of words.

## **INTONATION**

We are familiar with the speech melodies of our language. We make a statement with a "normal" intonation, and may produce the same sentence to give another meaning to it. A statement may be so uttered that it carries the meaning of a question, negation, or exclamation or a combination of some of these elements. Sarcasm, cynicism, exclamation, doubt, question, indifference, etc., may be expressed through the melody or intonation we impose on a sentence we produce. While such intonations are natural to us in our language, it is possible that the target language may make its own intonation patterns to express those meanings.

Remember that in no language talk is possible without intonation. Even though some of the intonations may be universal and may sound alike across languages, we should look for an appropriate imitation of the intonations in our target language. Also with varying emphases and inflections in tone and stress of words, individual languages may have their own specific intonation patterns.

Brewster and Brewster (1976) give some interesting examples of the English intonation system. They point out that the English "system carries a large number of distinctions." Emotion, for

example, is often expressed through intonation. Notice how intonation alone can change the meaning of the word "what" in the following interchanges:

"I just ate it."

"What?" (Slightly rising intonation in - i.e., Repeat your statement.)

"I just ate it."

"What?" (Slight falling intonation - i.e., What did you eat?)

"The caterpillar."

"What?" (Extra high intonation - i.e., Surprise or disbelief.)"

I have often encouraged my students to imitate the intonation patterns right from the beginning. You may even hum the intonation patterns. By memorizing and mastering the intonation patterns, your speech becomes more natural in the target language.

Brewster and Brewster (1976) ask us to pay close attention to the following:

How do questions differ from statements?

How is surprise or emphasis shown by intonation?

How is the tone of voice used to convey emotions - anger, sadness, irritation, sarcasm, amusement?

What intonation indicates the end of a sentence?

What intonation indicates a mid-sentence pause?

## **TO CONCLUDE**

To conclude this chapter on how to learn the sounds of another language, I should once again emphasize that we have tried to present only a cursory outline of the steps that you may take to learn the sounds of your target language. We have not dealt with many other essential technical information on sounds, their combinations, the contexts in which "similar" sounds could be grouped together and used as if the group is a single sound unit, etc. Linguistics is a helpful tool and it should be used as such in the process of learning another language. The study of the subtleties and intricacies of the sound system of your target language is a career goal in linguistics, but not in language learning.

Remember, the sounds are not learned in isolation nor are they used in isolation. Almost always they are part of a word, phrase or sentence. The behavior of a sound in isolation may be dramatically different from its behavior when it occurs with another sound or when it is doubled. Sounds are subject to socio-linguistic rules as well. Even among the native speakers of your target language you could notice glaring differences in the selection, use and combination of sounds in terms of their socio-economic status. Whatever is considered "normal" and "standard" by your target language group should be learned by you.

Remember that when you open your mouth and make an utterance in your first language English, the sounds you use and the way you pronounce them and combine them, and the way by which you substitute one sound for another may reveal your geographical and social positions. It may also reveal your literacy and economic status. It may also reveal your emotional status. These

tiny little elements carry so much information about you! You should expect such things in your target language as well.

And all the sounds of your language are produced within a very small space -- your mouth and nose! How amazingly our God the Father has enabled our apparatus to make such subtle distinctions to make alive our communication tool that is language! The speech apparatus within you has several functions in addition to the generation of speech. The very same apparatus is used for breathing! The very same apparatus is used for feeding! Through this very same apparatus God the Father seems to highlight the identity role of speech in humans. That we are created in the image of God is fully exemplified in the provision and use of language in the wider sense of human communication.

That sounds have great impact on the personality and motivation and salvation of humans is recognized in almost every faith. Our Savior is the Word of God! And faith comes by hearing! Salvation is found in **no other name** than *Jesus*. And we must say the prayer of salvation and **confess** our faith in the resurrected Lord. Jesus is the Word of God: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1).

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## CHAPTER 5 LEARNING THE WORDS OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE

### WHAT IS A WORD?

We all know what a word is. Or do we?

In English, one word is distinguished from another by giving a space between the two when we write or print them. Sometimes two “words” are combined and yet we do treat them as single words: *text* and *book* become *textbook* as a single word; *match* and *box* become *matchbox*. We may justify treating the resultant word as a single word since that word refers to a single object. The word *father-in-law* consists of three different words but function as a single word.

We recognize some potential pause between words. The pause is not distinct or of a long duration, but when some one asks us to repeat the words slowly or asks us to give the words distinctly we insert a pause between words.

If it is a word, we have very limited options of inserting elements into it. If we ask people to add extra words to a sentence, they will add these between words and not within them. An illustration given by Crystal (1997) makes it clear: *Blooming absolutely!* cannot be changed to *Absobloominglutey!*

Words are minimal free forms of a language. That is, words are “the smallest unit of speech that can meaningfully stand on their own.” For example, *dog* is a minimal free form and is a word. On the other hand *dogs* can be split into two elements, *dog* and *-s* (which stands for plural). While *dogs* can occur on its own, the plural form *-s* cannot occur on its own. It always depends on another unit and it is attached to that unit or word. *Dogs* is a word, but not *-s*.

We know intuitively where one word ends and another word begins! That is, we know this for most of our words. Sometimes we have difficulty in clearly identifying the boundaries of words. The meanings the words carry help us a lot in this decision-making process. Some words may carry any specific or clear meaning such as the word *the* in phrases, but then the writing conventions or spelling conventions we have adopted in our language come to our help in making appropriate decisions.

Five tests of word recognition that are often employed, thus, include the following:

1. Potential pause
2. Indivisibility
3. Minimal free form status
4. Phonetic boundaries
5. Words as independent semantic units.

So, when we wish to learn the words of another language, the above information is always available to us. We need to use these tests with some caution, however, taking the help of our native language helper whenever we are in doubt.

Remember that the writing conventions may differ from language to language. Many languages may not have developed or needed to develop an elaborate punctuation system as we find in English. Often the symbols for period (full stop), comma, semicolon, question and exclamatory marks may never be used in some languages. The words may be combined together in writing following certain phonological rules of the language. Just as the Hebrew language does not mark the vowels in words, some languages may not mark the space between words or even sentences in writing. They also have writing conventions that enable them to combine the words into phrases and write these phrases without any space between the words that constitute the phrases. Major Dravidian languages spoken in south India have followed this type of combining words without space between them for many centuries. However, impact of European languages has led several of these languages which have been using traditional script systems to develop their punctuation mechanism similar to that of the European languages. In spite of such differences, your intuitive knowledge of what a word is should help you to make a good beginning in identifying the words of your target language.

## **HOW DO WE ELICIT WORDS IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE?**

There are several ways of eliciting words in another language.

1. You can show an object (real or toy) and ask for the word for that object.
2. You can draw a picture of the object and ask for the word for that object.

3. You can mimic the action and ask for the word for that action.
4. You can describe the object or action in words in English and ask for a word for that object or action.
5. If you know the target language already to some extent, you can describe or paraphrase the description of the object in the target language itself and ask for a simple or direct word to refer to that object or action.
6. You can define the object or action and ask for a word that matches that definition.
7. You can describe the context and ask for a match.
8. You can give a word in English and ask for its equivalent in the target language.
9. If you have learned the target language to some extent, you may be able to guess, to some extent, the meanings of the new words that occur in a sentence that you come across. But then it is always advisable to check with a dictionary or your language help about the correctness of your guess.
10. It is better to have a pictorial dictionary of English or a scrap book of visuals with you so that these visuals could be used to elicit more words. If you can start a scrap book of visuals for those “peculiar” things you see on the field, you will really enjoy learning the words of your target language.
11. If you have elicited a new word, find out the meaning, the spelling, the pronunciation as well as some examples of using that word in some illustrative sentences.
12. Suppose English is your target language (assume that you do not know English) and you get a new word from your language helper, then manipulate that new word to get some similar words out of the new word. For example, if you get a new word pill, then make some new words on your own such bill, gill, mill, etc. and ask the language helper whether such words are there in that language (here, English). If he says yes, get the meaning, pronunciation, spelling and illustrative sentences for these words.
13. Another strategy is to go for the parts of an object for which you got the word. If it is a word that denotes corn, then you ask for the parts of that plant such as leaf, sheath, etc. If it is a word that denotes an animal then ask the names for its body parts.
14. Yet another strategy is to go for the words of similar semantic/meaning domains. For example, if you get the word for water, then go for the words that denote various liquids. In other words, you can focus on the meaning and function of the object and use these to elicit more new words.

### **SOME MORE PRACTICAL TIPS**

When you enter a community whose language you do not know, everything will seem confusing to you. However, by God’s abundant grace, there will always be something which you can recognize and be thankful for, even though you may not know the word for it. For example, such items as water, food, body parts, basic motions such as *walk, drink, eat, stand, sit, run* are easily recognized everywhere.

You should prepare a list of words for such basic items, if possible even before you enter the new community. Prepare a list of 200 “basic” words in English. Then as soon as you arrive, be prepared to revise this list based on the surroundings you are in. Let your word list cover as many “basic” semantic/meaning domains such as food, kinship, natural environment, plants, basic actions, body parts, parts of a house, vegetables and animals commonly found, basic



implements that you come across in your environment, liquids, sickness and medicine, garments/attire, etc.

The word list should focus more on concrete objects than on abstract notions. We proceed from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex, and from the familiar to the unfamiliar. So, have more nouns that would faithfully reflect the availability of the objects in the surroundings. At the same time, you need to have several verbs also included in your basic list of words. Then you need to include some adjectives as well as adverbs. Adjectives qualify the nouns, and adverbs qualify the verbs. This is a simple and easy way to present their functions.

Prepare or get some visuals for the words that are difficult to describe, explain or understand.

Every native speaker of the target language you come across is your language helper. However, it is advisable to get the services of one or two persons of appropriate age, social status, competence in your target language, and meet with that person on a regular basis. So, select or get a language informant, sit with him or her and elicit words from him or her.

Ask him to pronounce the words in a natural fashion several times. Repeat after him. Ask him whether you pronounce the words correctly. Ask him to correct your pronunciation and model the words for you. And, then, after several successful repetitions, write the words in your notebook using the phonetic script.

### **USE THE PHONETIC SCRIPT, LEARN THE SPELLING**

If you are not yet conversant with the phonetic script, you may use the regular English alphabet to write the words you just heard and repeated. However, your spelling should be consistent: consistent not only whenever that word is written down in your notebook, consistent also in terms of the sound values you have given to the individual sounds of a word. The sound value you have ascribed to a letter should be consistently the same value whenever you use that letter even for writing other words.

Consistency in transcription is not easy to accomplish. Your knowledge of the spelling system of English will come to interfere with your consistency in transcription. At times you would use *ch-* as in *church*, and some other time you will use *ch-* as in *incharacter*. Sometimes you may confuse between vowels as in *beat* and *beet*. It takes time to achieve consistency. But you should strive towards this goal all the time.

Next comes the step to find out the spelling for the word in your target language. Ask your language helper to give you the spelling. Find out the spelling conventions to be adopted for the particular word. For example, find out whether it is all right to write this word all the time in lower case letters or should this word begin with a capital letter, etc.

Questions of this nature relating to spelling should be raised following your understanding of the writing conventions in your target language. The discussions we already had in the second chapter of this book, *Learning the Script of Another Language*, should help you to proceed further.

Ask questions about the relationship between the spelling and the pronunciation of the word. Are there any specific or special changes involved in spelling and pronunciation for this word? Or there alternate ways of writing this word? Is there any letter that is silent? Is there any letter that is pronounced differently in this word?

In languages like Hebrew and Persian, markings for vowel sounds may or may not be present. You need to guess the vowel sounds in the word presented to you. Are there any rules followed in this regard? Find out everything you can about the spelling for the word when that word is the focus of your learning.

### **USE A WORD TO GET ANOTHER WORD**

You can use one word to get another word. Try to make contrasting words. For example, if you get a word *pal*, coin a word on your own such as *mal*, *kal*, *pa:l* and *ka:l*, and ask your language helper whether such coinages are indeed words in your target language. If he says yes, get their meanings and pronunciation and record the same in your notebook. Get their correct spelling as well. You will be surprised how easy it is to identify and learn new words once you begin to apply yourself to the learning task.

Another way to elicit new words in your target language is as follows: When you have got the word for “father” in the target language, for example, ask the language helper to give you the other words meaning the same in your target language. That is, you may ask for synonymous words in the target language. There may be no perfectly matching synonyms, yet the meanings may be more or less the same or similar in some sense. Then ask for the differences in the contexts in which each of these words could be used.

Yet another way is to ask for the opposite words (antonyms) for a word you have learned. For example, *light* vs *darkness*; *heavy* vs *light*; *long* vs *short*, etc. Remember to write the meanings for each words. It is possible that there may be some differences in the shades of meanings. It will be interesting to explore such differences. For example, in some languages *depth* and *height* may be expressed by the same word.

Yes, elicit related words for the words you have already got. This relationship may be in the form of spelling, pronunciation, similarity in meaning, opposite meaning, the fact that they belong to similar or same semantic domains such as *vegetables*, *kinship*, *elements of weather*, *body parts*, etc. Note the special features of usage for these words your language helper may have indicated to you.

### **IDENTIFY THE DIFFICULTIES**

From the beginning, develop a habit to list the difficulties you faced in eliciting words. These difficulties may relate to finding equivalences for the meanings. These may concern the transcription of the target language sounds, (peculiar sounds in the target language, dissimilar sounds in English), strange stress patterns, variations in spelling for some words, etc. Listing your difficulties will help you to ask intelligent questions and get specific answers. Based on the answers you can always improve your skill in eliciting and mastering more words in the target

language. You will notice that the items in the list disappear in proportion to your success in learning the target language.

## **CONTENT AND FUNCTION WORDS**

The words in any language may be classified into two broad categories. Content words refer to some object or action, and function or structural words are used to express the grammatical relations between words in an utterance. This is not a satisfactory definition or characterization. But this will do for our purposes.

There are only a few function words in any language. Examples of function words are *of, is, may, are, would, will, shall*, etc. The vast majority of the words in any language are content words, they carry some substantive meaning. Learning the words of your target language means not only the mastery of content words but also the function words.

Mastery of the function or structural words is demonstrated only when you use them in sentences and phrases appropriately. Often the meanings of these structure words are demonstrated only when they are used in conjunction with other words.

When you begin to put the words together to form phrases and sentences, the role, meaning and function of structure words would become apparent, because this act of putting together demands the use of function words. So, you would learn the function words better in the context of phrases and sentences. On the other hand the content words of various types such as nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives may be learned as independent entities. So, it is possible to present a list of English to your language helper and ask him to give equivalences in the target language. While the equivalences may not be always hundred per cent correct, yet you may get some idea as to their content.

The structure or function words are more frequently used; they are less in number, and are more difficult to master. Hence more practice is needed to master these words.

The content words are more easily learned also. Elicit content words based on the frequency of occurrence and relevance of the words. If you are in a vegetable market, a common sight in many countries in Asia and Africa, you will see that the names of vegetables and words relating to vegetable trade will be frequent. If you are in a fish market, words relating to fish and sale of fish, etc., will be frequent. Often in these contexts frequency and relevance go hand in hand. However, the best and easy criterion would be to follow the relevance of the word for the context.

## **HOW MANY NEW WORDS TO LEARN?**

How many new words you should aim at learning every day? I would suggest five, but often the textbooks have ambitious plans. Say, five to seven words per day or lesson would be easy to handle.

Remember that we are not learning the words per se. Our goal is not to memorize and reproduce the words per se.

We are learning how to use words appropriately, in sentences and phrases, and in appropriate social context. This would demand a lot of exercise, practice. Moreover, we need to integrate what we have learned with what is being learned. That is, if we take a cumulative and cyclical view of the learning process, the number of new words learned in any lesson would be kept to the minimum.

So, plan to learn only about five new words everyday. Use these five words in phrases and sentences and practice them with your language helper and with all those you come across that day. When you add some new words next, practice these new words in such a way that these words are integrated into your mental dictionary in relation to what you have learned earlier.

## **IDIOMS AND PHRASES**

Every language has its own idioms and phrases. Idioms may be defined as a phrase or saying “having a meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meanings of its elements.” The phrase *flew off the handle* is an idiom. The phrase *apple of my eye* is an idiom. While it is important that you ultimately be in a position to understand and use effectively the idioms of your target language, it is not necessary to focus on learning the idioms as a priority.

As you begin to use your language better and as you begin to understand the target language spoken around you better, you will start recognizing phrases whose meanings are not manifest in the words constituting the phrases. You should begin to make some intelligent guesses and ask your language helper to explain the meaning of the new phrase you just heard or heard a while ago. Then, record these expressions in your notebook for review and later use. Since idioms describe a situation or object more succinctly, and use of idioms marks your progress towards the membership of the group, you should take extra effort to recognize and use idioms in your day-to-day language.

I would urge you to memorize the idioms and phrases and use them frequently. To begin with, it may sound strange to use idioms frequently in your speech. In fact none of our speech consists only of idioms. However, as and when the occasion demands the native speaker is able to use the idioms of his language in a natural manner. This is what you should aim at.

## **ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL STEPS**

I give below some practical steps that you should perform with the help of your language helper:

1. Practice the pronunciation of the word in isolation.
2. Practice the pronunciation of the word in combination with other words.
3. Practice the spelling. Perhaps you can copy the word several times and this may help you to internalize the spelling. Or you may “see” the word several times and try to remember what you saw and write the word. Or you make it a practice to read whatever you come across and this may help you to reinforce the spelling of words. Or you simply memorize

the spelling by repeating and reciting it a number of times and by trying to write the word from memory after your recitation.

4. You may ask your language helper to give you a dictation of words every day. Dictation helps you to build up the auditory image of the word in your memory, that is, the correspondence between the written word and the spoken word. Dictation also helps you to remember spelling. Maybe you can spend a few minutes every day solely on the process of dictation. Dictation functions also as a test. If you have mastered the word and its spelling you will perform very well. Success in dictation shows the extent of the quality of your learning.
5. If a word has several meanings, focus on the most familiar, or relevant or frequent meaning for the word. It is not important to know exactly what a word means or what all a word means. But once you identify the relevant meaning, use that word in a variety of contexts, and in a variety of phrases and sentences.
6. Make a mental picture of the word and associate it with the action or object.
7. Have a separate notebook for listing the words of your target language. Write the word as it is pronounced (we already talked about the consistency in transcription), then follow it with the spelling given to the word. This may be followed by the grammatical category label for the word such as noun, verb, or adverb, etc. Then list the meanings for the word. You may focus on the most familiar or most frequent meaning attached to the word. Then list some sentences which may illustrate how the word is used. Additional information as to the sociolinguistic conditions or sociolinguistic meanings may be listed as and when you get such information. A dictionary is, indeed, in the making! Ultimately your list should be reorganized in an alphabetic order.

## **CULTURE LEARNING**

In his writings on linguistic relativity, Benjamin Lee Whorf, a chemical engineer-turned fire insurance agent, (of course a great linguist), took to investigate the interrelation between language, thought and reality. His theory of linguistic relativity states in essence that all higher levels of thinking in human beings are dependent on language and that the structure of language one habitually uses influences the manner in which one understands his environment.

In the course of his work as an insurance agent, Whorf found that many fire accidents which could have been easily averted took place because of certain linguistic assumptions of the individuals involved in these accidents. In a storage of gasoline drums the people tended to be cautious and to refrain from smoking or tossing cigarettes about, whereas in a storage of “empty” gasoline drums, which was more dangerous than the former ones, people tended to be slack. And this had resulted in serious accidents.

A theory such as the one propounded by Whorf runs through every culture as lay belief. But these lay beliefs were not to be taken seriously, until Whorf’s demonstration of differences of grammatical categories, etc., in diverse languages in relation to differences in the way the universe is conceived.

However, experimenters have proved that a human can transcend the supposed barriers set supposedly by the language of his habitual thought and acquire concepts that are not originally part of his language and upbringing.

Speakers of languages differ from each other in giving the names of various shades of color. Even within a group of people speaking the same language this phenomenon is found to occur. This “cultural difference” may lead to a situation in which some people may not be able to discriminate between two or more colors because they do not have the required labels in their language or dialect. However, that does not mean that they cannot learn to discriminate these colors say with the help of translation and other means.

Brown and Lenneberg (1954) concluded: “If we may be permitted a guess it is that in the history of a culture the peculiar features of the language and thought of a people probably develop together. In the history of an individual born into a linguistic community the story is quite different. The patterned responses are all about him. They exist before he has the cognitive structure that will enable him to pattern his behavior in the approved fashion. Simple exposure to speech will not shape anyone’s mind...”

We should avoid hasty generalizations about the underlying implications of cultural differences reflected through the focus, emphasis and differences in meanings of words expressed between your native language and your target language. At the same time every word in any language is a product of history and culture. Words carry features of culture and a careful analysis and understanding of these features reveal how a society has built its own world view. We should accept these views as they come, and not try to evaluate them in terms of our own world views.

Servants of God approach other languages and cultures not their own with a humility and willingness to work with these languages and cultures.

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# **CHAPTER 6**

## **LEARNING THE SENTENCES OF ANOTHER LANGUAGE**

### **WHAT IS A SENTENCE?**

Like several other terms used to describe the elements of language, the word sentence is also difficult to define. In English, punctuation helps us in defining what a sentence is. We insert a period mark between two sentences. At the same time, the semicolon also sometimes functions as a period. The use of semicolon between two “sentences” is permitted.

In English, a sentence always begins with a capital letter, and this happens immediately after a period mark. A proper name also begins with a capital letter. In addition the word **I** is always

written with a capital letter. So, indeed, beginning a sentence with a capital letter is not an exclusive feature of sentence in English. Moreover, there are many languages in which such conventions are not existent.

A traditional definition of sentence states that it is “the complete expression of a single thought.” Another definition proposes that a sentence has a subject as well as a predicate. All these definitions are not flawless definitions of the unit *sentence*. However, our focus is not on how to define sentence, but to learn the sentences of our target language.

We all know intuitively what a sentence is. Generally speaking it is longer than a word or phrase. It is constituted by putting together more than one word. Sometimes even a single word may function as a sentence. Sometimes we may have difficulty in recognizing whether an utterance was intended as a sentence or as a word. And this often happens when we listen to the oral speech. However, we impose certain elements on to what we hear or heard, and readily interpret the utterance as a sentence, to carry on the communication process. We speak in sentences!

## **SYNTAX**

Syntax is the study of putting words together to form phrases and sentences. Syntax represents a speaker’s knowledge of the structure of phrases and sentences in his/her native language.

A normal sentence always carries some meaning. The meaning of a sentence generally depends on the words that constitute that sentence. However, there are very interesting exceptions and processes that come to play in giving the meaning of a sentence.

1. To a great extent the meaning of a sentence depends on the meaning of the words in that sentence.
2. The meaning may depend also on the order of words (word order) in a sentence. For example, *John bit the dog* is different from the sentence *The dog bit John*.
3. A change of word order may have no effect on the meaning of the sentence, sometimes.  
Srivalli stuck in her thumb.  
Srivalli stuck her thumb in.
4. A sequence may be made up of meaningful words, but the sequence itself may have no meaning. That is, a sequence of words is not necessarily a sentence.  
Srivalli danced before Saraswati.  
\*Before danced Saraswati Srivalli.

Thus, every sentence is a sequence of words, but not every sequence of words is a sentence. Sentences are well formed or grammatical if they follow rules of syntax. Sentences are ill formed or ungrammatical if they violate rules of syntax.

## **WORD ORDER**

While sentences are formed by putting together words, the words themselves occur in some specific order in a sentence. Each language adopts some preferred word order for its sentences. The most preferred word order in English is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO). On the other hand

languages like Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Urdu, etc., prefer Subject-Object-Verb word order for their sentences.

## **SURFACE DIFFERENCES**

Languages differ from each other in terms of surface sentence structure patterns. Consider the following examples drawn from various languages (Brewster and Brewster 1976):

English: The brown house is very big.

Hopi: Brown house very big.

Vietnamese: The house color brown is very big.

Farsi: The house brown very big is.

English: This house is not big, it is small.

Hopi: This house negative big, very small.

Vietnamese: The house this is not big, it small.

Korean: This house-(subject) big-not, small.

English: Go away! Go inside the house.

Swedish: Go away! Go into in house-the.

Hopi: You away-future. House-inside-future.

Farsi: Away go! Inside the house go.

Senoufo: Go away, go house the inside.

English: She uses the stick to stir the fire.

Korean: She fire-(object) stir-in-order-to-stick-(object) use- present.

Farsi: She the fire uses the stick to stir.

Senoufo: The stick, she uses the fire stir.

Swedish: She uses stick-the-the for to stir around fire-the.

English: Give the food to the girl.

Korean: The-girl to the-food-(object) give.

Senoufo: The food, give girl to.

Farsi: The food to the girl give.

## **PREFERRED WORD ORDER**

Note, however, that we are talking only of the preferred word order of individual languages. It is not necessary that a language will have only one word order. Among the several orders it may use, a language may prefer to focus on only one order for ordinary purposes.

Crystal (1997) gives an interesting illustration:

SVO	the boy saw the man
OVS	Jones I invited - not Smith
VSO	govern thou my song (Milton)
OSV	strange fits of passion have I known (Wordsworth)



SOV | pensive poets painful vigils keep (Pope)

Indications are that 75% of the world's languages use SVO (as in English, French, Vietnamese), or SOV (as in Tamil, Hindi, Japanese, Amharic, Tibetan, Korean). 10-15% use VSO (Welsh, Tongan, Squamish). Examples of VOS are Malagasy, Tzotzil, and Houailou (Crystal 1997:98).

## **BASIC TYPES OF SENTENCES**

Despite differences at the surface level, there are overwhelming similarities in sentence structures between all the human languages.

Languages have infinite number of sentences. But they generate the infinite number of sentences by using finite types of sentences. Some of these basic types of sentences are as follows. These are presented with reference to the functions each type performs in the language. Remember that, although these are basic types, the word order for these basic types of sentences may differ from one language to another. The basic classification is adopted from Brewster and Brewster (1976).

1. Someone (or something) does an activity.

Goldilocks sat down.  
Charlie coughed.  
The dog sleeps.  
I fainted.  
The book fell.

This is called an intransitive sentence.

2. Someone (or something) does an activity to another person or object.

Goldilocks opened the door.  
The boy ate the cookies.  
The dog is biting Paul.  
I saw Rachel.

This is called a transitive sentence.

3. Someone (or something) acts on himself.

The baby hit himself.  
The tape recorder turned itself off.  
He shaved himself.  
I washed myself.

This is called a reflexive sentence.

4. Someone (or something) is identified.

This is Babybear.

This is a book.

Samuel is a man.

The man is the vice-president.

This is called an equative or classification sentence.

5. Someone (or something) is described.

Babybear was little.

The chair is hard.

Hannah is smart.

The house will be red.

This is called a descriptive sentence.

6. Someone (or something) is possessed.

The skirt is mine.

The book is Ron's.

The baby is Maria's.

The bed was his.

This is called a possessive sentence.

7. The location of someone (or something) is stated.

Goldilocks was in the bed.

The letter will be in the mailbox.

The house is one the corner.

Norman is under the car.

This is called a locative sentence.

There are several other types of sentences as well. For example, conditional sentences, such as "If I get a better salary, I can then buy my first BMW"; interrogative sentences, negative sentences, future perfect sentences, exclamatory sentences, and so on.

An interesting basic type of sentence used in many languages of the Indian subcontinent is called the dative-subject sentence. In the dative-subject sentence type, instead of saying "I feel hungry," the language may require you to say "To me there is hunger." "I want a book" may be expressed as "To me (a) book is desired," etc. In Bengali, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, etc., the equative sentence type does not have the copula or linking verb *is/are*.

## **WE USE MULTIPLE TYPES OF SENTENCES**

We do not speak using only one sentence type in our speech, nor do we write our letters and other materials using only one type of sentences. In our speech and writing, we make a balanced blend of several types of sentences, depending upon the logical relations we wish to present. So, naturally, in a normal situation, when we wish to learn and use the sentences of another language we should be prepared to learn and use several sentence types simultaneously.

This is accomplished by not learning sentences or sentence types in isolation, and by not attempting to elicit sentences or sentence types in a vacuum.

We learn sentences in context in the sense that *our learning situation may be a conversational piece, or a narrative text on a selected topic*. Sentences in this conversational piece or narrative text usually consist of several types of sentences and follow one another. Depending on our need, thought processes and our overall communicative skill, the sentences are produced in some order. We also try not to speak in long sentences, because if a sentence is unduly long, the listeners have difficulty in understanding what we say.

We need to do the same while learning another language. However, we do our best to keep the length of the sentence as short as possible while learning and trying to use a second or foreign language. A long sentence is usually constituted by connecting or embedding several sentences. A long sentence usually tries to convey several thoughts connected in some specific manner. A simple sentence is usually short, has fewer words, and conveys some simple thought or idea. By combining or embedding simple sentences we slowly build our ability to compose, speak, and write longer sentences.

If it is a natural piece, then sentence types required for the content on focus would flow naturally. In any conversation you can expect to have three or four different types of sentences used.

## **MATCH TARGET LANGUAGE SENTENCES WITH YOUR LANGUAGE SENTENCES**

What is important, then, is for you to match these sentences as much as possible with the similar sentence types you are accustomed to in your native language. This may be done intuitively or through a process of translation with the help of your language informant or teacher. The teacher often breaks the sentences into its component parts, shows how the component parts follow one another and what they mean. In this process the grammatical relationship between the parts of a sentence would become clearer to you. Pattern perception, imitation and repeated use of these patterns through appropriate drills go a long way in internalizing the sentence types. Involve yourself actively in this process of self-learning.

## **PRACTICE SENTENCES**

Remember that we do not memorize sentences, we practice sentences to internalize their structure.

The basic principle that we should adopt in mastering the sentences of another language is that we can derive or generate a large number of sentences from each basic type we come across. We can build new sentences on the basis of basic patterns. For example, from *This is a mango*, you can generate *This is a banana*, *This is a hen*, *This is a cock*, *This is a desk*, *This is a bird*, and so on. With some slight changes, you can generate the plural sentences such *These are mangoes*, *These are books*, *These are hens*, *These are cocks*, etc.

What is most important is that you should develop a sensitivity to recognize basic sentence types in your target language. Or ask your informant to give you the basic types of sentences based on the examples from English. Your language helper has an intuitive understanding of the structures and grammatical features of his language, but this understanding is rather subconscious. He is able to use the appropriate word order and structures of his language with ease but he may not be able to explain how and why a sentence is constructed in a particular way. You need to develop your sentence-structure perceiving skills!

## **WAYS TO GET BASIC TYPES OF SENTENCES**

Some explanation on your part will help your language helper to cull out for you the necessary types of sentences from your target language. Another way, perhaps a better way, is for you to write a conversational piece in natural English, and then ask your language helper to give you the natural or dynamic equivalence for these sentences. (We discuss the notion of dynamic equivalence in our chapter on Translation.) This natural conversational piece will give you a number of types of sentences used in the target language. Identify the different types, and ask your informant to reduce the same to the shortest minimum, and then ask for similar sentences in the target language.

If this is difficult for you to pursue, then prepare a list of sentences which you think would meet your immediate need. Ask your informant to give you natural or dynamic equivalents for these sentences. Write these sentences in your notebook, mark the meanings of each word or element, and review these sentences. This review will help you to understand the patterns involved to some extent. It does not matter at all, if you are able to perceive the patterns, at this stage.

## **MORE SENTENCES FROM BASIC TYPES**

Our goal is to produce more sentences based on what we know already. This is accomplished by doing substitution drill. We have already explained the use of substitution.

We can also generate more sentences by applying negation, by applying questions, by applying emphasis, or by applying instructions, or by combining some of the above in a sentence.

Srivalli opened the door.  
Srivalli did not open the door.  
Did Srivalli open the door?  
The boy hit the ball.  
The boy hit himself.  
The boy did not hit himself.

## **DRILLS**

The following types of drills are recommended to generate more sentences from a given basic sentence type:

### **1. Substitution drill**

Substitution drill helps us to generate a large number of sentences using the same pattern. In the sentence *This is a book*, the word *book* may be substituted by a number of suitable nouns such as *cat, mat, house, lake*, etc. The substitution drill helps us also to use the new words we have learned in familiar sentence frames.

Practicing with substitution frames is easy. Learn to substitute one word for another in an appropriate manner.

You can increase the complexity of the substitution task through the choice of items that demand a change in some other part of the sentence in addition to simple substitution of one word for another. If you are asked to substitute the word *cats* for *book* in the predicate noun position in the sentence *This is a book*, you would need to change the copula verb from singular to plural in order to derive a grammatically correct sentence *These are books*. Multiple-substitution is done after you become comfortable with single and simple substitutions of words that fit into the frame without causing changes. From single and simple substitution you go to multiple-substitution drills. You can move over to multiple substitution slots in incremental steps.

### **2. Differential Drill**

Differential Drills help us to make changes in a familiar pattern to derive similar sentence types. For example, from the sentence *The boy runs* you can derive the plural subject sentence *The boys run*, from *The boy walks* you may derive *The boy walked*. Then you can use *I, He, She, They*, etc., to make substitutions for the subject *the boy*. A number of new sentences are obtained in this way. While doing this you learn the grammatical rules governing the use of the frames involved.

Once again the trick is to play with the sentences you come across, modify them in some systematic manner, ask your language helper to judge your performance and the correctness of the sentence you have produced, write down the correct sentences, and then practice all these sentences aloud first with your language helper, and then with others when occasion arises. Remember you can easily play with various categories of words, but not with the function/structure words.

### 3. Transformation Drill

From statement to negation, from statement to exclamation, from statement to interrogation, and vice versa, etc. These basic Transformation drills help you to derive one type of sentence from another sentence type. Substitution drills help you to derive additional sentences within the same sentence type. Differential Drills help you to derive sentences of the same type with suitable modifications within the sentence. Transformation drills take you from one type of sentence to another type sentence. Often a statement sentence may be so modified to derive an interrogative sentence. An interrogative sentence may be transformed to derive an ordinary statement sentence type. Other types of transformation drills which are more complex will help you to combine sentences to derive a longer sentence.

### 4. Expansion Drill

Expansion drills help us to expand the sentences by inserting appropriate qualifiers/words to a noun or a verb in a sentence. For example, the Tamil sentence *adu pustagam* 'that (is a) book' is expanded by inserting a qualifying word *pa:Da* 'text' before *pustagam* 'book' in the following sentence: *adu pa:da pustagam* 'that (is a) text book.' In order to derive the sentence 'that (is a) Tamil text book,' the word *tamil* 'Tamil' is inserted before the word *pa:da*. To derive a sentence 'that (is a) third standard Tamil text book,' two words, one for 'third' and another for 'standard' are inserted: *adu mu:nra:m vaguppu tamil pa:da pustagam* 'that (is a) third standard Tamil text book.(The word textbook is treated as two words in Tamil.)

In some languages, such expansions take place left of the head word; in some others, the preferred form of expansion may take place right of the head word; and yet in some others, both the directions may be used.

Expansion drills help us to produce natural sentences. We always want to add some qualifiers to the objects and events we are talking about. As I said earlier, we use simple sentences a lot, but most of our sentences in speech and writing are not simple sentences. Expansion drills will help you to produce sentences similar to the ones produced by the native speakers of the target language.

Some examples of the Expansion type of drills are given below, adopted from Brewster and Brewster (1976).

1. Adding modifiers of the people or objects.

The boy ran: The little boy ran.

2. Adding modifiers of the event.

The boy ran: The boy ran quickly.

3. Adding Time words.

The boy ran: The boy ran yesterday.

4. Adding Location or Direction words.

The boy ran: The boy ran to the store.

This list does not exhaust all the possibilities. At the same time, it is not necessary for you to focus on all the possibilities in your expansion drills. Your intention is to learn the language and use it to meet your needs, not master its grammar. So, a few expansion possibilities may be adequate for you at the moment. As you get exposed to the language and use it on a regular basis, you will soon learn to expand the phrases in a natural fashion.

## **5. Question-Answer Drill**

The question-answer drill is the most commonly used form of learning another language. Through question-answer drills we develop a natural tool to elicit information, and through this process we learn a lot of new words and expressions. The beginning conversations in any language revolve around asking questions and getting answers.

**6. Producing sentences based on the model sentences** is a good exercise to practice sentences and to internalize their structure. Copying exercises will help a lot in the initial stages to get acquainted with a variety of sentence types.

## **7. Other Operations.**

Other operations upon the sentences you have already come across may be so done as to get new sentences. As already explained above, this may be done *by replacing sentence parts with other kinds of words, by expanding the basic sentence by adding modifiers and other phrases, by deleting items from the sentences, or by rearranging the sentence by interchanging the order of some of its parts.* Types of drills we have presented above may do most of these processes.

## **8. Replacement Drill**

Some examples of the Replacement type of drills are as follows. (Adopted from Brewster and Brewster 1976.)

1. A singular noun is replaced by a plural noun.  
The boy runs: The boys run.
2. A noun is replaced by a pronoun.  
The boy chops the tree: He chops the tree.  
The boy chops it.
3. A noun is replaced by a name.  
The boy chops the tree: Roy chops the tree.
4. A noun is replaced by a question word.  
The boy chopped the tree: Who chopped the tree?
5. An article is replaced by a demonstrative or number.  
The boy chops the tree: This boy chops the tree.  
One boy chops the tree.
6. A present tense verb is replaced by a past tense verb.  
The boy chops the tree: The boy chopped the tree.
7. A completed action verb is replaced by a continuing action.  
The boy chopped the tree: The boy was chopping the tree.

8. Third person is replaced by first person.

He chops the tree: I chop the tree.

9. A definite verb is replaced by an indefinite verb.

The boy will chop the tree: The boy might chop the tree.

Note that it is not necessary for you to have all these replacements done to a sentence. Learning then becomes too mechanical. It is possible to master the necessary replacements without attempting to perform the operations for every element that you have in a sentence. Limit yourself only to the replacement of a few items. As you get exposed to the language more and more, you will begin to acquire the replacement possibilities even without your conscious effort.

### **9. Deletion Drills**

Through deletion you can also generate new sentences.

Where did you go? (I went) To Town.

What are you doing? (I am) shopping.

What are you making? (I am making) A boat.

### **10. Rearrangement Drills**

We generate a lot of new sentences through rearranging the words. Some examples of generating new sentences through Rearrangement are as follows:

He fell down. -- Down he fell!

This book is mine. -- This is my book.

My father is the vice-president. -- The vice-president is my father.

### **SOME HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS**

A few observations are in order here. First of all, remember that we have not exploited all the possibilities. That is, there are several other types of drills and exercises that would help you to generate sentences from the given basic sentence type. You can get additional information on how to do your drills with your language helper if you go through some ESL (English as a second language) textbooks.

The experimental language teaching textbooks prepared and published by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, India, have a variety of exercises and drills.

For information on these textbooks, you may contact Mrs.

Symalakumari, [syamala@ciil.stpmysoft.net](mailto:syamala@ciil.stpmysoft.net) or Dr. B.

Mallikarjun [mallikarjun@ciil.stpmysoft.net](mailto:mallikarjun@ciil.stpmysoft.net), or check their website <http://www.ciil.org>.

The English language textbooks produced by the NCERT and Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages in Hyderabad, as well as leading publishers in India such as Macmillan, will be of good use for this purpose. For want of time, we cannot deal with these things here.



Secondly, it is not necessary for you to try to exercise with every element or structure of the language you are learning. Focus only on those that are immediately recognizable by you. Sometimes, your language helper may draw your attention to some structures which he considers very important for the learners and users of his language. Focus on those structures as well.

We do not memorize sentences, we only practice using sentences. Practicing sentences (imitation, repetition, substitution, transformation, etc.) will help you to internalize the structures and use them appropriately. Practicing sentences will help you also to generate new sentences.

As already pointed out, one sentence may be derived from another sentence. This key should be used to your advantage. But this would require some initiative on your part. One sentence may embed one or more sentences.

We never speak in simple sentences. Our sentences are almost always either “compound” or “complex” sentences, in the sense that most of our sentences have other sentences attached to them, and this attachment is revealed by using links such as *who*, *which*, *that*, etc. in English. In other languages some such similar links may be used and you need to identify these links with the help of your language helper.

Give him two related simple sentences (related in the sense of meaning continuity: This is a book; this book belongs to Melissa > This is a book that belongs to Melissa), and ask him to combine the same for you. Observe the changes he makes while combining these two sentences, and imitate such changes when you combine sentences in the target language.

These exercises are somewhat difficult to perform in the beginning, so restrict yourself to the practice of simple sentences (with a single main verb) as much as possible in the beginning. However, note that we do not speak in simple sentences. So, if you want naturalness in using the target language, you have to master the technique of combining sentences soon.

Remember that *words are limited, sentences are unlimited*. Also sentences may be of indefinite length. You can easily “elongate” a sentence by embedding a large number of sentences within the main sentence.

Focus on the inflection of verbs when you master the sentences of your target language. Each language may have its own peculiar way of “conjugating” its verbs. In Tamil, for example, a formula Verb Root+Tense Maker+PNG (Person, Number and Gender) helps you to conjugate a large number of verbs in simple sentences. You can identify such formulas with the assistance of your language helper. Give him a sentence and ask him to split the sentence into independent words, and then ask him to split the independent words further into segments for which some meaning (including grammatical meaning such as tense, person, number, gender, etc.) may be attached.

Such simple analyses may help you to have an understanding of the order in which the words occur in the sentences of your target language, order in which the words occur in the sentences of your target language, and also help you to identify how grammatical meanings such as tense, person, number, gender, etc. You have the satisfaction of discovering on your own the structure

of your target language. And this helps you to understand and internalize the structures better. As an adult you are often inclined to seek an understanding of what is going on in the language! You do not wish to memorize and you want explanations! With the assistance of your language helper you can find answers for these things yourself!

## **HOW TO REDUCE BOREDOM?**

Language learning in a conscious way is not all fun. There is bound to be some boredom and a lot of frustration in the beginning stages. Only through a patient and conscious effort will we be able to put up with the boredom and turn our frustration to successful mastery. You need to speak to the native speakers no matter what. You need to listen to the native speakers as they speak among themselves and do your best to decipher the sounds, words, and sentences. If you have already learned a bit of the language, listen for the structures and words that you are not yet familiar with. Sometimes, because of the difficulty in producing some apparently complicated expressions and structures, we tend to avoid using them. This tendency may help in mastering the target language. Give yourself good rest and some interval between various language tasks you have planned for the day or the session. Focus on models and drilling the models. Try to get sentences on topics that are of immediate interest to you. Go from simple tasks to more difficult ones. Do not try to learn more than what you really should.

It is important that you seize every opportunity to practice the sentence patterns. Informal activities such as subvocalizing the sentences in your mind, speaking with children and neighbors through deliberate conversations, playing language games with your partners and native speakers of the target language, listening silently to the language tapes, watching TV programs, dramas, and movies, and listening to radio programs in the language are some of the other activities that would help you immerse in the language of the environment.

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## **CHAPTER 7 LEARNING THE MEANINGS**

### **WORD MEANINGS AND SENTENCE MEANINGS**

There are semantic or meaning domains which need some special attention from us when we try to learn another language. Our focus in this chapter will be on some such domains.

We need to distinguish between word meanings and sentence meanings. Word meanings are generally carried by the words themselves, but the meanings of sentences depend on various other factors in addition to the words used in a sentence. Also the meanings expressed by words are different from the meanings of idiomatic expressions. Examples were already given in the last chapter *Learning the sentences of another language*.

## PERSONAL NAMES

Is there anyone without a name? How zealous are we about guarding our “fair name”? The name of an object or person may not fully reveal all the intricacies of that object or person. Yet it is the name that links that object (or person) to the mental concept we carry about it (or about him or her).

The distinction between common name and proper name is known to us. The word *river* is a common name, but *Kaveri* is **a proper name**. Names are given to a person, place, or thing, or process. Often the names of persons and places are written or printed with a capital (upper case) letter in English. However, there are varying usages. Is it **catholic** or **Catholic**, is it **church** or **Church**, or is it **bible** or **Bible**?

The field which focuses on the study of personal names people carry is called *anthroponomastics* or simply *onomastics*. The study of place names is called *toponymy*

Personal names are dealt with in several ways across cultures. It will be an interesting and rewarding experience for you to know and understand the conventions used in giving and calling personal names in your target language.

Knowing the names of people and using their names correctly is one sure way of gaining friendship. Some Americans refuse to understand this simple fact. When you enter a culture, courtesy demands that you try to adjust yourself to the culture to the best of your abilities and with love and concern for the sensitivity of your friends.

There are several terms we tend to use to describe the structure of proper names. These terms include *given name*, *Christian name*, *family name*, and *surname*. Surname usually stands for that name borne in common by the members of a family. It may also be an added name derived from occupation or other circumstance such as the *caste* or sect you belong to. In this sense family name may become identical to the surname. However, there may be communities wherein the family name may be distinct from the clan name.

Given name is the one that a person generally receives at birth from his/her parents or grandparents, or immediate caregivers. Often the given name and the Christian name (another usage to refer to the given name) may be identical.

A nickname is usually a shortened name which is conventionally used as a familiar form of a corresponding proper name (person or place). It may be a descriptive name used in place of or in addition to the regular name. Some communities and families are fond of nicknames, and in some other communities nicknames may be used rarely.

In North America, the names are referred to in the left to right sequential order: First name, middle name, and last name. This naming convention based on the sequential arrangement is being adopted nowadays in many other nations as well. However, you should not expect this to be the most preferred or familiar form of personal names.

In most European languages, family name follows the given name. However, in Hungarian (and in Chinese) the reverse is true. There the given name follows the family name. In North America, the middle name is regularly used, perhaps as an initial, but expanded on formal occasions and in official records. In Europe the middle names are not common. These are acquired usually on confirmation in a church. In Britain, the first name is the most important. The British people call their knighted persons with the title Sir followed by their first names. Many Latin cultures use the pattern of given name, mother's "maiden" name, and father's family name.

Among the Russians, *patromymics*, that is, a name derived from the father's given name, seems to be the most frequent way of address and reference. Ivan's son is called Ivanovich, and Ivan's daughter is called Ivanovna. In Russian, the patronymic name (patronym) is placed between the child's given and family names. However, among the Icelandic people, patronym is used as the last name. Because of this, the last names of individuals change in every generation. In Amharic, (among the Ethiopians), the child's name is followed by the father's given name. Here also the "last" name changes in every generation. In English, patronymic affixes are used in family names such as Robertson, Johnson, Carlson, etc. (Crystal 1997:112-113).

On the other hand, a name for the parent from the child is rare but not uncommon. In this process, "a parent is often called father of or mother of the eldest son." This practice is widespread in the Arab world. Among other things perhaps the conventions of passing the family inheritance to the eldest son play a part here.

A variety of naming processes is often noticed in pluralistic nations, where many ethnic cultures coexist. Among the people of South Asia, for example, many use the tripartite or bipartite naming arrangement we find in America. Among the Hindu communities in north India, this arrangement is quite common, mainly because the languages of these communities are direct descendants of Sanskrit which is a sister language of Greek and Latin. The last name in such bi- or tripartite arrangements usually stands for the caste or subcaste of the person who bears the name. In south India, where most people belong to the Dravidian family (as opposed to the Aryan or European family), different traditions are followed. For example, my own name runs as follows: Madasamy's son Subbiah's son Thirumalai. Thirumalai is my given name or "first" name. Madasamy stands for my grandfather, and Subbiah stands for my father. Lineage is absolutely important for your identification in this process. Some communities use only the place name as their "first/last" name. For example, instead of having the grandfather's and father's name just as you find in my name, these people may focus only on the place of their origin.

In every culture distinction between the names of males and females is sought to be made. And yet some names may be common to both genders.

From the discussion we have had so far, it is now very clear that the name of a person not only identifies the individual as a person and the person's gender, male or female, but it must include some information also about his family, lineage, and social group. In a melting pot nation such as the United States, the values adopted and preserved in the personal names are quite different from those of the nations of the Old World, especially in Asia and Africa. Protocol demands proper use of the personal names of an individual.

In spite of a wide variety of practices, the choice of a name by the parents for their darling offspring seems to offer some interesting trends. Often children are named after saints, events, places, omens, personal traits, animals and divine names. Children are named after unpleasant notions to make them undesirable to evil spirits. For example, children may be named Cripple. More often than not, parental idiosyncrasy and invention seem to play a crucial role in communities where there is greater freedom to name one's own offspring! The names of movie stars, political leaders, cricketers, gurus, arts, deities, etc. seem to be preferred in South Asia. The Puritans named their children Kill Sin! Movie stars, war heroes, heroes of the folktales, religious figures, relatives – the list is endless! In a world where there is greater concern for environmental protection, names of the natural elements, plants and animals, a favorite of many cultures including the Hindus and the Buddhists, seem to be making a powerful re-entry into the post-Christian secular western world. We also notice that Christians adopt names of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.

The naming process adopted in the Biblical events is quite interesting to study. The Book of Genesis gives several interesting reasons why a person or a place is called by a particular name, or how a person or place got the current name. This trend continues until the very last book, Revelation.

## **PLACE NAMES**

The names given to our surroundings reveal our history and culture. The history of exploration and settlement in the United States gets reflected in the place names used in the country. Place names are always used by historians to trace the history of people groups and their transactions. Everyone knows some funny place name or another. Sometimes we have great difficulty in identifying the source and reason for a place name we come across.

Generally speaking, the place names are derived in the following manner (Crystal 1997).

1. Natural features such as hills, rivers, and coastlines. Dover (water), Staines (stones), Honolulu (safe harbor), Twin Forks.
2. Special sites, such as camps and forts. Doncaster (camp on the Don).
3. Religious significance, such as gods, saints, and churches. Providence, Sacramento, Santa Cruz.
4. Royalty such as Queensland, Victoria Falls.
5. Explorers such as America, Cookstown, Columbus.
6. Famous local people, such as presidents, tribesmen, politicians, etc. Delaware, Baltimore, Washington.
7. Memorial incidents or famous events, such as a battle. Waterloo.
8. Other place names such as a famous city, or a town from an immigrant's homeland. Memphis, Paris (in USA), London (USA), Warsaw (USA).
9. Appealing names of good or ill fortune, such as Wary Bay, Cape of Good Hope, etc.
10. Animal names such as Buffalo, Beaver City.
11. Names of purely descriptive types such as North Sea, South Island.
12. Names with "New" such as New York, Newtown, New Delhi, Naples, etc.

Engage yourself in some study of the personal and place names of your target language. You will learn a lot about the culture of your target language.

## **PRONOUNS**

A pronoun is “a substitute word for a noun or noun equivalent... refers to persons or things named or understood in the context.” There are three categories of pronouns, namely, the first person, second person, and third person. Within each category there may be several subcategories based on gender and number, etc.

Showing politeness and deference does not necessarily depend on the use of pronoun forms in English, but in many other languages appropriate use of the pronouns carries this function. For example, Tibetan, Korean, Javanese, Japanese, Hindi and most of the languages in South Asia use honorific pronouns to show politeness and deference and to mark the social relationship and relative ranking of the individual addressed and referred to.

In English, in addition to stating the person (first, second or third), the pronoun may indicate the form to be either singular, or plural, as well as animate or non-animate condition. The verb in the sentence is suitably inflected to carry this information.

In most languages of the Indian subcontinent, the verb carries not only the information as to the status of the subject as a singular one or a plural one, but also some honorific overtones. The Japanese pronoun system has several forms to show the formal/informal, and honorific overtones. For example, sama is for very polite titular form attached to the names. San is for neutral status. Chan is for diminutive status, for children, etc. Kun is for men only. Sensei is for those born earlier or for those with respected abilities. There are distinct first person forms for very formal male; less formal female; formal male, neutral female; rare male, snobbish female; etc.

The socioeconomic status, age, knowledge, religious position, etc. appear to influence such usage. Remember that this is not uncommon. You need to understand the process with the help of your language helper and try to use the appropriate titles, terms of address, and reference. Also learn to inflect the verb in the sentence suitably for this purpose. It is not easy to master these conventions overnight. These require some real effort, but it is possible to choose the most neutral one to begin with for your practice and then slowly expand your cognitive horizon! Whereas bodily gestures and intonations may be used to show politeness and deference in North America, other cultures often seek explicit words to express politeness and deference.

## **ONOMATOPOEIA**

We all agree that individual sounds do not carry any meaning on their own. When they are combined to form words, meaning becomes attached to them. Or when a meaning originates in us, we seek to code that meaning in words which often are a combination of more than one sound. However, in every language there are word-like expressions which function as words in some sense. Every language has some sound symbolism engraved in combinations of sounds

which may not be generally used as words. For example, *Sh!* This may not be considered a word, and yet it communicates some sense.

Speakers of every language feel that some forms “do have a close relationship to objects or states in the outside world.” For example, *bow-wow*, *Zap!*, *Pow!* English has a number of words which seem to have originated in a sound-symbolism connection. Words of unpleasant associations such as *slime*, *slither*, *slug*, *sloppy*, or words that refer to smallness such as *wee*, *teeny weeny*, etc., seem to have come into existence through associating sounds that the speakers somehow felt had some intrinsic relations with the meanings these expressed.

Onomatopoeia or sound symbolism is defined as “the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it.” It refers to “the use of words whose sound suggests the sense” (Crystal 1997).

While a few and limited number of such words are used in English and in most European languages, African languages, Korean, Japanese, and South Asian languages abound in such sound symbolism. More than a thousand words are used in Korean and Japanese. These words are used to “reflect physical, audible noises relating to the actions or movement of people, animals, and things” (Crystal 1997).

Imitation of the sound produced by an act or object, both animate and inanimate, to describe that particular act is quite common in many languages. Sometimes the speakers of a language may use the processes of sound symbolism to indicate the manner in which an act took place. For example, we tend to make several sounds and gestures to communicate how rapidly we took a turn or went down a hill. Feelings are expressed through such manner in sound symbolism.

The most frequently used form of sound symbolism is through the reduplication process in which patterns of consonants and vowels may “occur twice in immediate succession.” These are expressions like *ding-dong*, *pitter-patter*, *bow-wow*, *razzle-dazzle*, etc. Note that the two syllables in each of these expressions are somewhat related, and that parts of the first syllable get repeated in the second syllable. This repetition process carries several meanings for the native speakers. Sometimes the same word may be used to convey several levels of meaning, related in some sense. For example, the re-duplicated word *barabara* in Japanese may refer to “very strong rain (pelting down), but also to things that have been broken up, scattered, or disorganized” (Crystal 1997:176).

As already pointed out, languages do differ from one another as to the frequency of the use of words based on sound symbolism. If you are learning Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Tamil, or African languages, you can expect to encounter many words based on sound symbolism. For example, almost any word can be changed into a word of sound symbolism in Tamil. *Puli* means tiger, *pulikili* means (abundance of) tiger and tiger-like wild animals. *Me:sai* means table, *me:saiki:sai* means table and table-like objects. However, there are restrictions imposed on the sentence and meaning structures in which these expressions may be used. In addition to this process of re-duplication, Tamil uses the regular words of sound symbolism such as *bow-wow* in English.

More often than not, textbooks that aim at teaching a language as a second or foreign language do not focus on teaching these characteristics. However, in day to day contexts of communication, use of sound symbolism makes communication easier and natural. Often use of such words of sound symbolism signal your competence in your target language. So, watch for the words of sound symbolism used in your target language. Understand the linguistic processes involved in coining the words of sound symbolism in your target language. These processes often choose some specific consonants and/or vowels and have them re-duplicated in some regular fashion. Understand the contexts in which words of sound symbolism are used. Try to get the meanings, although exact meanings cannot always be assigned to the words of sound symbolism. Enjoy using these words of sound symbolism in your conversations with the native speakers of your target language.

The types of meanings are found to be expressed through the process of re-duplication/sound symbolism: distinction between smallness and bigness; plurality; repetition; intensity; scattered distribution; space; continuation; diminutiveness; past; adjectival qualities, etc. There may be crosslinguistic similarities between languages as to the meanings expressed by the words of sound symbolism. And yet there may be radical differences between the languages in the choice of syllables, and how meanings are assigned to individual words of sound symbolism.

## **KINSHIP TERMS**

An understanding of the kinship terms and their use helps us to understand the world of relationships, acquaintances, and strangers. We often try to induct the strangers as our relatives through the use of kinship terms that are originally intended to refer to the members of the nuclear as well as extended family. We try to look at our fellow Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is an extended view of the kinship, based on our theological disposition.

The study of kinship is an interesting field and is pursued in a highly technical fashion in cultural anthropology. However, kinship terminology is both linguistic and cultural. Languages codify the kinship concepts using words and the use of these words reveal the underlying world view of the community.

Ego, family, community/society, and the world at large are the four important components that you should consider when you wish to learn and use the kinship terms. Often the kinship terms focus on the ego and his/her relationship with others. Mother and father, brother and sister, cousin, aunt, uncle, grandfather, grandmother, great grand-father, great grand-mother, etc., are all coined in relation to the ego. While mother and father may be marked for gender, cousin is not marked for gender in English. Brother and sister are common terms which are marked for gender among the sibling. Age does not seem to be important in this classification. Older brother or younger brother, older sister or younger sister, is an important distinction in several other languages. Hungarian, for example, “had no terms for ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ until the 19th century, though it did have separate terms for ‘elder’ and ‘younger’ brothers and sisters” (Crystal 1997:106). This is the same case with Tamil. Tamil uses a borrowed term to express ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ or it uses a phrase to indicate that the persons referred to are born of common parentage. There is no single term for ‘grandfather’ or ‘grandmother’ in Swedish. Father’s father, mother’s mother, father’s mother, and mother’s mother are used to indicate these relationships.



Mother and father with reference to the ego are certainly marked for age, but this factor is assumed and not highlighted. Although aunt and uncle may be often older to ego, there may be instances wherein the aunt and uncle could be younger to ego. In many cultures, husband and wife may be marked for age, husband generally being older than the wife. Although aunt and uncle are inherently marked for closer family relationship, frequency of contact and the quality of relationship may bring others into the aunt-uncle relationship to the ego. While in English we do not have distinct words for maternal cousin, paternal cousin and cross-cousin relationships (all these are referred to by the term cousin), African and Asian communities may distinguish between the above relationships. “In English, there are no single words expressing the notions ‘mother’s brother’, ‘father’s brother’, ‘mother’s sister’, or ‘father’s sister’, and we have to use a circumlocution to make the distinction” (Crystal 1997:102). In some other cultures such distinctions are very important and the languages of these cultures have distinct and independent kinship terms for these relationships. “The same biological relationships are given quite different linguistic treatment between the two languages. Family photographs would look the same, but the words would have different senses” (Crystal 1997:102).

There are crosslinguistic similarities as well as dissimilarities in the coinage and use of kinship terms. In addition to the terms, there are also interesting conventions as to how a stranger or a friend would be accepted or placed in the kinship spectrum. In the United States, it is not important that the friends of your family be incorporated into some notional kinship relations with you and your family. They can always be considered as your friends. The general tendency is to accept uncles and aunts from close friends of the family. The depth of such kinship is often at the level of friendship only. On the other hand, in several other cultures, from the status of being strangers and acquaintances, people graduate to become friends, and from the level of friendship, people seem to graduate to become notional family members. In other words, in these cultures the ultimate goal is to see and treat your closest friends and well-wishers as members of your biological family. You may be treated as a brother or a sister, or an aunt or an uncle, depending upon your age and gender. The terms of address and reference that go with these kinships would be used to address and refer to you.

Perceived close cooperation and friendship, age, generation, gender, socioeconomic ranking, theological disposition, secular tendencies (including first name address and reference) seem to be important factors in inducting strangers and acquaintances into a kinship relationship. When you begin to develop contacts with a family, find out from your language helper or the family itself what terms they would like you to address and refer to them. Find out what terms you should use to address and refer to the older/younger people, and what terms you should use to address and refer to the older/younger members of the opposite sex. Some cultures accept friends as brothers and sisters, and some others prefer to accept the friends as in-laws – brother-in-law or sister-in-law. Some may treat you as an aunt (mother’s sister) and some others may treat you as another type aunt (father’s sister). You may be taken to be father’s brother or mother’s brother! Observe how people address and refer to one another in ordinary conversations. Traditional societies insist on appropriate protocol in communication exchanges between people. It is possible in the United States that the same terms of address may be used for communication between the spouses and parents. In other cultures there may be a strict separation of terms of address and reference between various categories of relationship.

Yes, indeed, study of kinship is not only interesting, but also very useful in getting to know and respond to people appropriately!

## **SEX, SEXISM, AND GENDER**

A woman's voice is different from a man's voice. It is possible that a boy's voice may resemble that of a girl's until a certain age, but soon the distinction, male or female, is easily established. Every language distinguishes between masculine and feminine gender, but the way they employ gender to organize the world around them may be distinct. English does not assign a gender for every word or object. On the other hand, Hindi, Marathi, Spanish, and many other languages specify the gender of every word or at least every noun they use. They do this by attaching some special affixes to the words which refer to persons/things, etc., or by adding some appropriate gender markers to the verb in a sentence.

Some languages go beyond even this stage by insisting that the males use one style of language and the females use another style, even while they speak the same language and understand one another. For example, in Japanese and Thai, to mention a few, males and females learn different styles of speech. The difference in style results in differences in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and context of use.

Some languages may insist on changing verb forms when used by a female. "If a man were telling a story involving a female character, he would use women's forms when quoting her speech." "Japanese female speech is a style over which women have conscious control. It is used when women wish to emphasize their femininity; on other occasions, they adopt a sexually neutral style. Thus a woman may use a feminine style in talking to her friends about her children, but use neutral style when talking to business colleagues. It is also possible for women to use the masculine speech style if they wish to express themselves in an assertive way -- and this is often done these days by many who are concerned to promote notions of sexual equality" (Crystal 1997:21).

Remember that it is not just the Japanese language that makes such distinctions. My friend, the late Professor Francis Ekka wrote a very interesting article years ago on the women's speech in his tribal community, Kurukh, in India. It would be nice to revisit the community and see whether their introduction to more advanced material culture, formal education, and modernization has changed this process. I know that one of the tribal communities in the Manipur Hills, India, especially one of the clans of the tribe, once used the names of genital organs to indicate the gender of persons and other beings. With the introduction of literacy through the good offices of Christian Missionaries in that part of the world in late 19th and early 20th centuries, the affixes were changed.

There are differences in speech styles between men and women noticed among the native speakers of English. These differences often relate to "the contrasting social roles of the sexes in modern society." "The strategies adopted by the two sexes in cross-sex conversation" in English are as follows: "Women have been found to ask more questions, make more use of positive and encouraging 'noises' such as (mhm), use a wider intonational range and a more marked rhythmical stress, and make greater use of the pronouns you and we. By contrast, men are much

more likely to interrupt (more than three times as much, in some studies), to dispute what has been said, to ignore or respond poorly to what has been said, to introduce more new topics into the conversation, and to make more declarations of fact or opinion” (Crystal 1997:21).

Languages help maintain social attitudes towards men and women. Languages provide means to express the relative ranking and power shared between men and women. In recent years, linguistic biases towards men and against women have become subject matter for intense scrutiny across languages. Concerns for equality between genders have led to this scrutiny. Often languages are accused of perpetuating and fostering a male-oriented world view. For example, English does not have a sex-neutral, third person, especially in its use after indefinite pronouns. *If anyone wants a copy, he can have one.* In the plural there is no problem, because *they* is available. You can use *one* in place of *he*, or you may use *he* or *she* in place of *he*, but such options do not sound quite natural. There are more male-items in sex-neutral contexts, such as man. Marital status is another field in which sex-neutral terms are biased in favor of men. You say that so and so is a widow of X, but not that so and so is a widower of Y. In one study 220 items were found in English for sexually promiscuous women, but only 22 for sexually promiscuous men (Crystal 1997:46).

Some of the “sexist” language items quoted by Crystal (1997) are as follows: People would bring their wives, mothers, and children. Rise Up, O Men of God ... Man, being a mammal, breast-feeds his young. Mind that child - he may be deaf! Fromkin and Rodman (1993) reports that “until 1972, the women’s faculty toilet doors in an advanced educational institution of repute were labeled ‘Women,’ whereas the men’s doors were labeled ‘Officers of Instruction.’ ”

Languages are social institutions. Social values are bound to get reflected in the language we use. But people, especially feminists, take the labeling offered by languages more seriously when they start scrutinizing the motives of such usage. Often the motives ascribed to such labeling become a platform to renegotiate the place of women in the society. There is a clear recognition among men of all ranks these days to recognize the role of women in society and this has resulted in the slow but steady changes in the use of “sexist” terms in the United States.

Language change is often slow and steady. As a guest of your target culture, you really do not have much of a choice. You have to follow the conventions adopted in your target language. You should not impose the conventions of your native language upon your target language. It is possible that the native speakers of your target language, both men and women, don’t bother about such “sexist” language use! Do not come to a hasty generalization that because your target language abounds in “sexist” terms, the people who use that language do not have any concern for their women! Grammatical and lexical usage need not fully reflect the thought process and the cultural practices of the users of your target language. Languages will change as the societies change. However, there will always be relics comfortably entrenched within language use even as the societies change! An understanding of the historical process is absolutely important.

Remember that there is no necessary correlation between grammatical gender and sex. In German, ‘spoon’ is masculine, knife is neuter, in French amour ‘love’ is masculine in the singular, but often feminine in the plural. In Telugu, the contrast is between masculine and neuter in the third person. In other words, a woman is referred to as “it” in that language. That does not

mean that the women are treated only as “objects” in that language group. Likewise, almost every noun must be distinguished for its gender in languages like Hindi. ‘Beard’ is marked for feminine in Hindi and Spanish.

## **TIME AND TENSE**

We tend to divide time usually into three major categories: neutral or present, forward (future) and back (past). English divides time into three major categories, present, past and future. However, tense and time do not always correspond. There is an overlap of present and past in expressions such as *Princess Diana Dies*. An overlap between present tense and future is noted in expressions such as *I’m going tomorrow*. In some languages, such as Hindi, one and the same word may be used to indicate yesterday and tomorrow: *kal* stands for yesterday as well as tomorrow. The context will distinguish between yesterday and tomorrow. Within the present, past, and future times, there may be further subtle distinctions maintained in a language. English makes the distinction between the present, present continuous, and present perfect. Such distinctions often relate to the state of the process on hand, and are used in the other two times/tenses as well. In many languages the expression of the past involves more steps of addition, deletion, etc. of the affixes which carry the sense of time. Since there is always an overlap of times and tenses, it is important for you to understand how time is divided by your target language. This is accomplished first by analyzing the use of specific affixes or words used for the purpose. Then observe and seek information as to how categories of tenses are interchangeably used to indicate the time. Then find out how the tenses may be further classified and put under smaller groups such as past and non-past, future and non-future, etc. The grammatical mastery of tense is easier. But the mastery of the time frame in relation to the culture is to be accomplished only with the help of numerous illustrations of the conditions in which time plays an important part.

It may be easy to make a distinction between day and night. But the division of day or night into various subcategories may also be required in your target culture. Dawn itself may be further subclassified. Likewise, dusk may be also further subclassified. Consider the following in English: dawn, morning, forenoon, noon, afternoon, evening, night, midnight, wee hours, etc. The categorization of the times within the day or night may be based also upon certain rituals or theological dispositions. The reference to specific times may not always depend upon the clock you have. This may be related to sun rise, moon rise, appearance of the stars, announced times of prayer, cock’s crowing, etc. Even with the introduction of the clock, traditional practices may be observed only by reading the “signs”. Then again, some cultures may follow a solar calendar, some others a lunar calendar. The terms for seasons used in your target language may or may not have anything to do with real weather conditions. Whereas the days of the week used in English and many other European languages follow the pagan nomenclature, because of some deliberate decisions by the Church, the name of days are altered in Portuguese.

We look at time as if it were active and a commodity. We concretize Time and cut it into convenient blocks for us. It is almost like saying that the sun rises in the east. The sun is stationary, but we on earth move around the sun. We get the feeling that it is the sun that is moving around us and giving us day and night, and the directions. Lapse of time is often relative to the matter and people involved in a task. When you are in love, and when you speak to your

boyfriend or girlfriend, time flies, but when you have to listen to some harsh message from your parents, time lingers on for eternity.

Looking at the tenses used in your target language is a good way to look at how your target people group look at time. But this should be treated only as a good beginning. You will learn a lot more once you begin to understand the culture, religion, and theology of your target group.

Some communities and families have a long historical memory. For example, the Jewish nation has extraordinary sense of their history, whereas people from the western nations often are least interested in their ancient social or political history. However, families in the western nations often try to trace their family history. With the increasing loss of the personal family ties, interest in family history may give some comfort to these individuals. In many developing nations, history is an absorbing preoccupation of people groups. Grudges are often held and a vow to vengeance is often the result. Pride in past history should not blind our focus on future developments.

## **LANGUAGE AND PERSUASION**

Our personal testimony comes in different forms. Often our personal life is a silent witness to our faith. However, an important aspect of our personal testimony is expressed through our words and sentences as we speak. It is important for all of us to get some good skills in the art of persuasion. Through persuasion we persuade or sway other people to our belief. Persuasion becomes very effective if the carrier of the message is faithful to what he/she carries and offers to another person. Persuasion is simply defined, among other things, as an opinion held with complete assurance. When a salesperson tries to sell a product, he or she puts out an image of his/her complete assurance and confidence in the product being sold to you. When you persuade, you “move another person by argument, entreaty, or exhortation to a belief.” You may plead with that person when you try to persuade him or her to your belief. In all these language plays a very crucial role. In addition to lexical sentence choice, and manner of communication, you should have the ability to quickly move from one argument to another or change the same argument or fact to suit the changing arguments of the person whom you wish to persuade to your belief.

Traditional grammars and traditional methods of teaching and learning other languages often focused upon aspects of persuasion. However, in recent times, there is not much emphasis on this aspect of language use.

If you wish to buy something in a store, or, if what you want to buy is not available in that store, the owner or salesperson of the store will immediately offer you an alternative product as an excellent buy! They will come up with so many suggestions that you will be somehow persuaded to buy something before you leave that store! This is an everyday experience in the developing nations. The bazaars are full of sellers who persuade you to buy their wares! They will coerce you, but not threaten you. They will counsel you, but will be sensitive to your desires and suggestions. They will come up with something that will finally satisfy you!

In business, love, and diplomacy, deliberate vagueness, deliberate lies, and concealment play a crucial role. The relationship between concealment and what is being revealed is an interesting part of the art of persuasion.

On the field, learn to study how transactions are carried out in small stores around you. Allow yourself to be ‘cheated’ a little bit! You will learn the methods of persuasion adopted in your target culture and language. You will learn words and sentences that will come in handy later on when you wish to persuade people to believe in Jesus Christ.

## **TO CONCLUDE**

To conclude this chapter, we have dealt with only a few aspects of practical meaning that we need to master when we learn another language. Terms of address and endearments, ability to detect skilful prevarication and lying, modes of politeness exchange, terms of address and reference to women, how to tell the truth without offending the sensibilities of your host, and how to participate in the intricacies of expression in your target language are all very important topics that you should focus upon. Perhaps you may not get formal lessons on all these things. But as and when you encounter situations of a difficult nature, try to analyze the linguistic expressions for their hidden meanings. Do this with the help of your language helper. Learn to emulate the examples provided by the context.

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## **CHAPTER 8 LEARNING NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

### **IMPORTANCE OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Learning a second language includes learning the nonverbal communication strategies of the community which uses it as its native language. Often the second language textbooks do not give much information about these strategies. These books are more oriented towards introducing you to the various linguistic structures of your target language. So, it is important for you to keenly observe the nonverbal strategies often employed by the native speakers of your target language, seek explanations and additional information from your language helper, and try to use these in your conversations with the native speakers. Remember that even in your own native language you always use nonverbal strategies along with oral language; without appropriate nonverbal strategies you will not be able to communicate your thoughts and concerns to others successfully.

### **DISTINCTION BETWEEN VERBAL AND NONVERBAL**

The distinction between verbal and nonverbal is somewhat fuzzy on occasions. In general, verbal communication refers to the oral (spoken) aspects of communication with a focus on the use of linguistic items such as words and sentences, and not on action per se. Verbal involves the use of sounds in the form of words, phrases, and sentences of a language. Nonverbal communication involves expressions which may or may not depend on the production of sounds in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. Often nonverbal communication means the use of non-linguistic expressions such as gestures. However, on occasions, some items may be verbal and yet these may be used as nonverbal expressions. Cynicism and sarcasm, for example, are carried through the use of words, phrases and sentences, yet it may become very difficult to pinpoint exactly the oral elements and describe them using linguistic variables. Nonverbal communication is often based on expressions which do not involve use of language, or if language is used at all, it is used minimally. Some actions and expressions at the nonverbal level may involve some verbal language, but the weight of communication rests with the nonverbal aspects.

### **ACTUAL LANGUAGE USE**

Actual language use involves the use of both verbal and nonverbal aspects. A communication strategy is complete only if both these aspects are engaged in an appropriate manner. The nonverbal and verbal aspects of communication complement one another. It is possible to separate them and use them successfully for certain intended purposes. When a mother scolds her naughty child in a dining room of a restaurant, she puts on a smiling face for others to see, but her language carries a stern warning to the child to behave properly in public places. Often we do tend to separate the two for special purposes, but even this needs special attention to details in your target language and target community.

In the early part of second language learning, you will be forced to use a number of nonverbal cues to indicate what you really mean. You do so because you do not yet know the words for things and actions. So, you tend to improvise by expressing yourself through some nonverbal expressions. This is done out of necessity. You would be surprised at this point of time to see how some of your gestures and nonverbal expressions, so familiar to you, are not understood the way you want them to be understood and acted upon! Cultures may have their own specific nonverbal expressions, in addition to sharing some universal expressions.

Once you begin to learn your target language in a systematic way, you will be required to use a number of nonverbal cues for effective and better communication. At this level, your goal is to recognize, analyze, understand and use the nonverbal cues often used by the native speakers of your target language. It is no more a matter of improvisation on your part; you begin to learn what the native speakers do and use these cues in your communication strategies.

Although nonverbal communication cues are, in some sense, independent from the linguistic devices such as words, sentences and intonations you will be using, they are to be seen as an integrated part of language expression. As I said earlier, verbal and nonverbal expressions often complement one another.

It is also possible that one may not understand a linguistic expression without an accompanying nonverbal expression.

Consider the case of demonstrating what went wrong with your car to a mechanic. While most Americans would use elaborate language to describe verbally what went wrong with their cars, some do it successfully by imitating and reproducing the sounds and movements of the car when it came to a halt. In other parts of the world, such as in New Delhi or Karachi or Jakarta, it is communicated more easily with the imitation and reproduction of the sounds emitted and the movements noticed when the vehicle came to a halt! In some cultures nonverbal communication is more often resorted to than in others.

When you learn a second language, look for the nonverbal elements which accompany the linguistic utterances. These features come in several forms: Proxemic, postural, facial, eye, silence, perceptual features, paralinguistic, touch, and gestures, etc.

## **PROXEMICS**

Proxemics is the study of use of space/distance in communication. How the participants in a communicative process utilize the space between them may vary from culture to culture and from context to context. Age, socioeconomic status, and nature of interpersonal relationships (intimate, personal, social, and public) may demand varying utilization of space between the participants in a conversation. Under proxemic features voice loudness, vision and touch may also be considered.

In anger one raises his voice, although the participants are spatially close to one another. Raising your voice in anger is not because the other participant cannot hear you properly, but because you wish to show your anger for an intended purpose. How the eye is used is a function of one's culture. The culture specifies at what, at whom, and how one looks, as well as the amount of communication that takes place via the eye.

Touch is also part of the proxemic communication processes. Touching is governed by very many social factors. In a general communicative context, touching is generally resorted to for calling the attention of the individual who is beckoned through touch. Touch is a very complicated behavior. You need to know the limits to touching as a communicative tool. Touch need not be always physical and immanent. One could be touched by the eye also.

In America, as soon as a person stops or is seated in a public place, there balloons around him a small sphere of privacy, which is considered inviolate. The size of the sphere varies with the degree of crowding, the age, sex and the importance of the person, as well as the general surroundings. For the Arab, there is no such thing as an intrusion in public. Public means public (Hall 1969).

In countries like India, too, public means public, if this constraint is not modulated by the (known) influence or status one bears and is able to exhibit with impunity and support with physical power. If there is no supporting structure behind the individual, the individual will have to put up with the violation of his space. In other words, public space means really public and is to be shared by all. There is also the phenomenon of no one taking the responsibility for the disorder (of various things) found in public; since it is a public place, it is for the institutions of governance to assume responsibility for the removal or amelioration of the disorder. Public



means that it does not belong to anyone in particular and hence one could treat it the way one likes, so long as one is not caught red-handed.

Females require less personal space than men, with members of their own sex. They deliberately create greater distance between them and the members of the opposite sex purely as a social code of behavior between genders, in contrast to men who create deliberate distance between them and members of their own gender on grounds such as status and power.

Individuals seem to demand more personal space as they enter their adulthood.

## **TOUCH**

Some cultures tolerate touching each other when a conversation is in progress between the individuals, whereas some other cultures frown upon such acts. Touching behavior is found among children more commonly if the children belong to lower economic classes. Females have more physical contact on different areas of the body among themselves. Males do not touch one another as often as the females do.

Use of touch on women by males is treated as an impersonal act in certain professional contexts as during a physician's examination. The male bangle seller, salesmen of shoes and jewellers for certain ornaments also come under the same category. However, while the male physician is allowed to touch all the parts of the female body for examination purposes, even an inadvertent touch of the intimate parts of the female body by a male bangle seller or salesman of shoes is considered a violation of personal space.

In Hindu and Buddhist cultures, individuals touch the feet or forearm of the elders, people of higher status, or a guru as a mark of respect, surrender to authority, and a request for blessing.

Laying on hands is one of the ways we show our solidarity to those with whom we pray and to make ourselves a channel of blessing to them.

Touch is a very important nonverbal communication tool, but it is heavily under the influence of culture. Hence, you should take much precaution to study its implications and then use it for nonverbal communication.

## **POSTURES**

Postural relaxation is used for different purposes. If a person is posturally relaxed when you visit with him, he indicates to you that he is confident of his own status or power in relation to yours. Often a person having a more positive attitude toward another does not assume a posture of relaxation while in conversation with another. He positions himself in such a way that he shows you he is attentive to you and is listening to what you try to communicate.

Communication of liking is more by variations in immediacy, whereas the communication of respect is both by variations in immediacy and relaxation. Note also that immediacy toward an addressee is greater when one is truthful than deceitful. Liking is inferred through immediacy.

Violation of distance limits elicits negative feelings. Violation of implicit norms regarding permissible physical closeness generally leads to subsequent avoidance of the communicator. A forward lean conveys greater liking whereas a backward lean or turning away shows a more negative attitude. For women, a forward leaning towards other men is generally associated with intimacy between them.

Arrogance, high status, and slight dislike are associated with postures such as extending legs and hands, yawning, and unresponsiveness to others.

Greeting others is another important area in which friendliness/ arrogance, like/dislike, and socioeconomic status are all revealed.

Identify the processes, analyze them, ask questions about the relevance of nonverbal cues, and then based on the assessment, try to imitate the most essential items in your list of nonverbal cues.

## **COMMUNICATION VIA EYE**

Communication via eye plays a very crucial role in interpersonal contacts. A conscious look is synonymous with a deliberate touch. The eye conveys nonverbal information, and it receives and interprets the same. Eyes signal communication as well as communication avoidance. Eyes also provide information and feedback which regulate speech between individuals.

You can identify seven types of looks: one sided look, face gaze, eye gaze, mutual look, eye contact, gaze avoidance, and gaze omission. One sided look is the gaze by one person in the direction of another's face. Face gaze is the directing of one person's gaze at another's face. Eye gaze is directing of one person's gaze at another's eyes. Two persons gaze at each other's face in mutual look. In eye contact, two persons look into each other's eyes and are aware of each other's eye gaze. Avoidance of another's gaze is called gaze avoidance. Failure to look at another without intention to avoid is gaze omission. Thus eyes perform **monitoring, regulatory** and **expressive functions** in interactions between individuals.

Violation of the social norms against staring has several significant, very violent, consequences for interpersonal behavior. It generally leads one to challenge and quarrel, wordy and/or physical exchanges, especially when the subject of staring by a male is a mixed couple/female. Also by staring, one tries to induce conformity in the subject being stared at. Among animist cultures, the devotee stares at the idol or object of worship with the hope of extracting blessings or boons from the object of worship. In India I have noticed that Catholics often spend hours before the images of saints staring at them, imploring them for the blessings they (the devotees) badly need.

While a major function of the eye is to see all and reveal all, another major function of the human eye is concealment.

## **COMMUNICATION VIA FACE**

More than any other body part, the face instantaneously communicates, and readily reveals and exhibits the emotional states. The parts or processes of the face that are involved in the nonverbal communication are lips movements, lifting/shrinking the cheeks, nose and its movements, eyebrows, and their movements, eye lids and their movements, chin shaking, opening, closing and various postures of mouth, yawning, manipulation of the face with the help of other body parts, overall face, tears, smile, moustache, ornamentation of face, forehead, headgear and hairdos.

## **PARALINGUISTIC FEATURES**

Through paralinguistic communication we express sarcasm, cynicism, silence, implied meanings etc. *John! When did you stop beating your wife?*

Concealment is accomplished through nodding, gesturing, leg and foot movements, immediacy, speed and frequency of talk, quantum of talk, and facial expressions such as smile. A deceitful speaker, generally speaking, nods and gestures less, avoids eye contact, exhibits less frequent leg and foot movements, does not get closer to the other, keeps himself at a distance from the addressee, talks less and slower, and with more speech errors. He also smiles more and inappropriately. You should be careful, however, not to confuse culturally determined behavior with attempts to tell lies! It is indeed a serious problem with many second language learners who are not used to the diversity of cultural expressions in the target language. They come to view certain culturally determined behaviors as symptomatic of the lying disposition of the people they are talking to!

Other paralinguistic features include laughing (when, how, how much, and how frequently, etc.), giggling, snickering, whimpering, sobbing and crying, yelling, muttering, muffled sounds, hesitations and pauses, etc.

## **COMMUNICATION VIA SILENCE**

Silence is another area of nonverbal communication. Often silence communicates! If one is speaking, the other should remain silent at least for a while! A conversation is carried on with speaking and silence, based on decisions as to who will speak and who will remain silent. This decision signifies the status of the individuals and the importance of the content being discussed, among other things.

Conversation is not all speaking, it includes silence and appropriate turns in participation. There are well-laid out criteria in many contexts in a linguistic community regarding who would initiate the conversation by breaking the silence, who would maintain it, who would speak more and who would end the conversation. A person in greater need always takes the initiative to break the silence, but cultures may impose restrictions.

There are several types of silences: short, lengthy, frequent, abrupt and/or slowly progressing type. A lengthy silence on the part of one engaged in conversation with another may signify that one is cautious and/or careful. A close emotional relationship between the two could also be signified. It could also mean snubbing the other. Between those who are in love, silence comes

as a prelude to something more intimate, physical, or mental or both. Glances with affection and changes in facial expressions precede or follow this silence, whereas a stare precedes or follows the silence when two are about to quarrel!

Silence can also be used to hedge and to avoid confrontation. Noninvolvement and noncommittal position is yet another meaning communicated by silence. Anger is also communicated by silence. Silence is used also as a form of social control.

Silence has many theological implications as well. Meditation requires silence.

## **GESTURE**

The real act of smoking a cigarette is action, whereas the movements that one makes as if one is smoking is gesture. Gestures may or may not accompany speech. Humans make gestures without speech also.

In many cases there is some similarity between real acts and the “gestures” that indicate these real acts. However, there are many instances in which gestures do not have any similarity between themselves and the acts or objects they stand for. For instance, in the sign language used by the Native Americans, the sign for a ladle, which is made keeping the palm curved like a ladle, comes to denote drinking and from this meaning it ultimately stands for “water.” There is no physical similarity between “water” and this gesture. Thus, gestures become not only conventionalized, but could also be holding a relationship of arbitrariness between themselves and the acts and objects they refer to.

Gestures are formed by movements of the facial muscles, head, limbs, or body. These movements may express or emphasize a thought, feeling, or mood. They may accompany speech or may be used in place of speech as found among deaf people, among people who do not know each other’s language, or among those who have taken a vow of silence, and so on. In addition to their use as an accompaniment to speech and their use as an independent means of communication (in place of oral language) between individuals and groups, gestures are also frequently used in the aesthetic acts, in theater and dance, and in religious and/or secular ceremonies. (Consider the habit of placing your palm against your chest when you sing your national anthem or take an oath of allegiance.)

Gestures are used not only for communication purposes between individuals, but also for social and religious purposes. Under social purposes gestures are used to establish interpersonal social ranking, good manners, communication or communion with gods, maintenance of social identity, etc. The purely individual goals include maintenance and exhibition of the level of intimacy between individuals, secret communication, etc.

Gesture is, indeed, present and exploited in every walk of human life. Poyotos’ definition of gesture (Poyotos 1975) brings out the salient features of gestures clearly: “By gesture, one understands a conscious or unconscious body movement made mainly with the head, the face alone, or the limbs, learned somatogenic, and serving as a primary communicative tool, dependent or independent from verbal language; either simultaneous or alternating with it, and

modified by the conditioning background (smiles, eye movements, a gesture of beckoning, a tic, etc.).”

I have listed elsewhere (Thirumalai 1987) the following body parts which we tend to use to produce gestures: face, head, eyes, ears, skin, breath, mouth, lips, palm, hands, fingers, tongue, chin, cheeks, moustache, chest, breast, place of heart, arms elbows, hair, forehead, throat, nose, legs, shoulder, back, and torso. Note, however, that it is the upper extremities of the body that are more frequently used for the production and communication of gestures. The utilization of the back of the body is rare, and when the back is used, the gesturer would turn and present the back to the one being addressed to make the gesture seen.

There are at least three variables employed in the production of gestures involving these body parts. The body parts may be combined with one another or may be used singly. Secondly, some body parts are more frequently used and/or combined. Thirdly, the gestures are more generally produced clearly away from the body rather than on the body itself.

Since gesturing is a communication mode, we find that animals also have some sort of gesturing mechanisms. From ants to highly developed vertebrates, all exhibit the ability to produce and functionally use gestures. They make signs for various purposes: to mark their geographical territory, possessions, and even to communicate their “mental” states. Wagging the tail by the dogs of all kinds, signs by pointer dogs, the begging for food by various kinds of dogs, the signs made by cats, horses and other animals are all familiar to us. The dance of the bees is another well-known phenomenon.

However, there is a qualitative difference between the gestures of animals and the gestures of humans. Gestural communication in humans is a product of and a stage in the development of expressive motions. It is a specifically human product in several ways. Gestures in humans reveal a variety of complex structures which is not found in the animals. There is a symbolic meaning, there is the extension of meaning of one gesture to another, there is also the internal extension of the meanings of a particular gesture; there is arbitrariness in addition to conventionality; there is also a syntactic order governed by certain rules. All these are not found in the gestures of animals. Gestures of animals are very much linked with their biological and routine needs, whereas gestures in humans, along with the biological and routine needs, are also elevated into a system fulfilling social functions in human life.

The processes of gesturing are carried out in several ways. These are as follows:

1. Indication by gesturing at the object.
2. Indication by gesturing at the locality of occurrence.
3. Outlining the object.
4. Imitation of action.
5. Substitution. (The index fingers are so placed on both sides of the head to indicate the horns!)
6. Instrument imitation. We imitate the sawing action to convey the meaning of sawing. Swinging the sword in a fighting posture, holding the flag aloft, plucking fruits or flowers all can be mimicked.

7. Imitation of preparation process. (Tea preparation in a tea stall in India, Pakistan, etc.)
8. The imitation of taste.
9. Imitation of posture and other conditions through substitution. To indicate an old man, we may walk with a hunch, leaning posture, pretending to have a supporting stick in our hand.
10. Imitation of counting.
11. Comparison by gesture.
12. Gesturing of repetitiveness. When the gesture for an object is repeated several times, the repetition may mean that there are many objects of the same type.
13. Imitation and addition of distinguishing marks.
14. Sounds.
15. Gesturing at the place of occurrence. In order to indicate the whiteness, one may gesture at the teeth.
16. In order to express complex ideas, the gesturer may combine one or more signs with another. A good example in the American sign language is the sign for “hospital” which consists of the signs for house, sick, and many.

It is important for you to develop an understanding of the meanings of the gestures employed in your target language. It is important for you to master these gestures and use them appropriately along with the linguistic utterances in your target language. It is a lot of fun to recognize, analyze, and use these gestures, making a comparison of these with those found in your own native language. Always find out whether it is socially appropriate for you to use the gestures before you start using them in your conversations.

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## CHAPTER 9 ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION

### WHAT IS TRANSLATION?

Translation means the activity of translating, changing something spoken or especially written into another language. The word *translation* has several subtle shades of meaning. Consider these sentences: *It's time to translate our ideas into action. The Party's favorable image doesn't always translate into votes. Bishop Martin was translated from the country to the city. Tom Shetler has translated Jonah's words into contemporary human terms. Cars are translated into scraps.*

Translation is defined as a process of finding a target language equivalent for the source language sentence, finding a target language equivalent for a source language text. In some extreme theoretical positions, equivalence is sometimes defined as the identity of not only the

content but also of the form and the processes at various levels of the linguistic structure in the translated material in the target language.

Equivalence, as we conceive it here, is the transfer of the content to the target language in a manner that is acceptable to and considered as the “genius” of the target language. This equivalence must be achieved in such a way that ambiguity, interference and variation in meaning are all avoided. Except where the original purposely resorts to polysemy, homography, homonymy, and synonymy, the translated version is generally expected to avoid these.

The translation should aim at seeking the conceptual equivalents; it should define the conceptual equivalents accurately and render them in the linguistic terms of the target language.

## **IMPORTANCE OF TRANSLATION**

As people begin to travel from place to place, from one country into another for various pursuits, and as people groups begin to develop social, cultural and economic contacts with one another, the necessity for translation for effective communication increases. Multiplicity of languages is a fact of life in our world. People all over the world may prefer to learn English as an additional language and to attain some level of achievement in that language, and yet they would zealously continue to hold on to their own languages for socio-political, cultural and religious reasons.

Evangelical Christianity recognizes that this world is peopled by a variety of ethnic groups and that one of the chief characteristics of ethnicity is revealed and adumbrated in the use of distinct languages. We believe that the curse of disobedience brought the multiplicity of languages into existence, but our Lord in His own mercy and wisdom translated this curse into a blessing and as a sign of His presence on the day of the Pentecost when the children of God are given the sign of speaking in tongues. Even though the process of one to many is often an inherently a disorder creating mechanism, true to His own promise that He would never impose on his children a burden that they cannot bear, our Creator left the possibility of equivalence between linguistic codes open and available to us amidst apparent confusion. And this has made translation a possibility between human languages. Translation is, thus, a gift of grace from God to humanity.

Translation makes it possible for us the humans to interact with one another, since we have to translate (in the sense of interpretation of each other’s thoughts and actions) via “language” only. Translation makes it possible for communities to share each other’s institutionalized knowledge. Scientific progress is facilitated by making available the discoveries and inventions, and new theories and models worked out using one language in another. If the possibility of interlingual translation between all human languages is not given to us as a gift, spiritual and material progress of the human race would have been impossible to achieve.

## **NIDA'S MODEL OF TRANSLATION**

Eugene Nida, a great American linguist of the twentieth century, has been the General Secretary of the International Bible Society, for several decades. His impact on the Bible translation all over the world is immense in this century. Nida’s primary focus on translation is two-fold. First he demands that we accept and posit linguistic levels of equivalences between the two languages,

the source and the target languages of translation. Secondly he suggests that we shift the focus in translating from the form of the message (seeking equivalences in matters such as rhymes, rhythms, parallelisms and unusual grammatical structures) to the response of the receptor. The translator should bear in his/her mind the audience for whom he is translating.

Nida argues that each language has its own genius and that if we want to communicate effectively, we must respect the genius of the language. Each language covers the totality of experience with symbols and each language has its own system of symbolizing meaning.

The translator should aim at reproducing the meaning of a text as understood by the writer. In essence, Nida argues in favor of a dynamic equivalence which is “defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose” (Nida 1974).

## ELEMENTS OF TRANSLATION

1. **Transcription.** This denotes the rendering of the sounds of a source language into a target language form. If the source and target languages have similar sound systems, transcription facilitates the retention of the pronunciation of the names, technical terms, etc.
2. **Transliteration.** It is the process of rendering the letters of one alphabet in the letters of another with a different alphabetical system. No transliteration is needed among languages sharing the same alphabet such as German and English. The spelling of names and technical terms, etc., is generally retained if the source and target languages have an identical alphabet system. Note that even with transliteration pronunciation in reality may differ from one language to another.
3. **Borrowing.** Borrowing is generally resorted to when the target language has no equivalent for the source language words. Borrowing may be structural or conceptual or both. Even in languages which generally go in for loan translation (idea translation), the items are first borrowed, in many cases, as they are, and then, in course of time, equivalents through loan translation are coined. In some cases the source language equivalent may be translated using an expression not of the target language but of another adjacent/familiar language.
4. **Literal.** The translation results in one to one structural and conceptual correspondence. One may attempt a word for word, or sentence for sentence, translation. In terms of naturalness, grammatical acceptability, and the quantum of intelligibility achieved, the sentence for sentence translation is better than the word for word translation. However, in both cases, the translated version in the target language may even mislead the reader, if the idiomatic expressions are translated in a literal fashion.
5. **Transposition.** This is a process of translation in which the source language grammatical or lexical structure is given an appropriate rendering in the grammatical or lexical structure respectively of the target language. The content expressed through a word belonging to a particular word class of the source language may be expressed in the target



language through a word of a different word class; the phrase in the source language may be translated into a single word in the target language and vice-versa; the word order of the source language may be changed in the target language and there may be several other internal changes as well.

6. **Modulation.** While transposition restricts itself to the changes in the formal structures (both grammatical and lexical), modulation is concerned with modifications of meaning so as to suit the genius of the target language. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish always between the processes of transposition and the processes of modulation.

The areas which require transpositions and modulations may be identified through a contrastive linguistic study of the source and the target languages. Note, however, that we cannot and should not restrict the transpositions and modulations only to the differences between the structures of the two languages. One should expect problems even with regard to the structures that are shared by the source and the target languages. The import and application of these shared structures could be differently organized in the source and the target languages.

7. **Adaptation.** In this type, we may obtain in our translation a material not identical, but only analogous, to the source language material. Sometimes this results in the modification even of the concept. Explanations are given using illustrations from the target language. As the target language situation is not identical, it may have certain implications not originally intended by the material in the source language. And to that extent, concept modification could be assumed to have taken place. It is assumed that such adaptations would facilitate comprehension. Note that while adaptation as a translation type may be a valid technique or process in literary translations, it is not a welcome process in the translations of science or theological materials. It is, however, a welcome process if the resultant material is for popularization purposes. In a straightforward translation, adaptation is avoided. Wherever necessary, foot notes are given to elucidate the point under consideration.

To conclude this section we would like to point out the differences generally found between languages used in the processes of interlingual translation: Language A may have grammatical categories that are absent in language B. Language B may have grammatical that are absent in Language A. Language A may have vocabulary that is absent in Language B, and vice versa.

One language may use its grammatical categories and vocabulary in combinations and patterns different from those of another. One language may have no words for a concept expressed in the other language. Such disparities may be related to and found in all the components of the language. In addition, we may point out three other levels of meaning in which such differences exist: *denotative*, *connotative*, and *cultural*.

One is able to translate better if he/she has a good command in both the source and the target languages; he should have this command at all the levels of the language. This knowledge and command enables him to resolve ambiguities which are due to structural features. This enables him also to anticipate and avoid interference between two languages. We should not, however, forget that there is not always an exact parallel between the languages.

**Equivalence** may be identified and ordered in terms of various levels of the linguistic structures (such as sounds, words, phrases, idioms, sentences, meaning, and culture-bound nuances). At the top we have equivalence of the concepts and this equivalence is to be maintained strictly. This equivalence is followed by the lexical and syntactic equivalence at the level of the sentence. There is some scope for flexibility which must be exercised by the translator at this level to suit the requirements of the target language, to meet the demands made by the “genius” of the language. However, all these are to be subjected to the ultimate goal of communicating the content of the original, the source text.

In rough translations we have similarity in meaning but dissimilarity in structure. Over-emphasis on structural can lead to dissimilarity in meaning. Likewise most of the incorrect translations are found to have dissimilarities both in structure and meaning.

### **ACCURACY AND ADEQUACY IN TRANSLATION**

How do we judge whether a translation is accurate and adequate for the purpose intended? First of all, the needs of the readers should be considered. If the translated passage is unreadable or difficult to read, and inaccurate (in the sense to be specified later), the purpose may not be served at all. A translator of literary materials usually aim at perfection, whereas a translator of science or theological materials aims at adequacy. A translator of the Bible aims at accuracy, adequacy, and truthfulness.

Adequacy is determined by the quantum of the coverage of original information in the translated version. The criterion of adequacy also demands that the translated version be in easily readable form and made available as quickly as possible. Since the user is not generally aware of all the details of the original information (if he was aware, he might not bother to seek the information in the translated version except for some special needs), he is generally unable to judge, in full, the adequacy of the translated version as opposed to its original.

Assessment of adequacy is generally made better by a team of persons who have, severally or collectively, competence in the subject, and the source and the target languages.

Accuracy depends upon the quantum of distortion of the original information. Maintaining intelligibility of the original source language material may require some distortion at both the linguistic and content levels. The translation achieved with least distortion must be considered the most accurate version. A source of distortion is maintained by the tendency which favors loan translation (idea translation) in the developing languages.

Accuracy varies also in consonance with the requirements of the audience for whom the translation is intended. Accuracy may at times affect readability. The quantum of accuracy varies in different types of translations.

Accuracy is generally judged better, as in the case of adequacy, by a team of experts in the subject, who know well the translation techniques and who have a mastery of the source and the target languages. Accuracy is assessed using certain techniques such as **back translation** in

which the target language text is translated back into the source language and then the original source text and the translated text in the source language are compared.

The errors that are likely to occur in translation are as follows:

1. Loss and misinterpretation/misrepresentation of information.
2. Lack of intelligibility.
3. Interference between source language and target language.
4. Confusion between registers and styles.
5. Errors in the use of the target language.

Accuracy and adequacy cannot be assessed in a mechanical fashion. In fact, translation as a process is proof par excellence for the species-specific trait of the language propensity of the humans.

### **REQUIREMENTS FOR A BIBLE TRANSLATOR**

1. A sound knowledge of linguistics.
2. Mastery of the linguistic structures of the target language.
3. Mastery of the culture and socio-linguistics of the target language.
4. A sound knowledge of the methods of translation.
5. Knowledge of the original tongues of the Bible.
6. A sound understanding of Christian theology
7. Mastery of the skills of reference.

These are some of the basic qualifications that an enterprising Bible translator should possess. Training programs are offered through the Summer Institute of Linguistics (and Wycliffe Bible Translators). Bible Societies throughout the world have been devoting their efforts at adequate and accurate translations of the Bible.

Note that these requirement may be easily translated as essential requirements for all sorts of translation projects!

When a society has its own Bible in translation, persecution and heresy are resisted better (Paul d. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1999). There are three types of Bible translations. A Primary translation is “a translation rendered directly from the Greek or Hebrew manuscripts.” A Secondary translation is “a translation of a primary translation, or a translation of a translation.” A Tertiary translation is “a translation of a secondary translation, or a translation of a translation.”

King James Version or the Authorized Version is not the first translation of the Bible in English. John Wycliffe (1329-1384) is generally believed to have made the first full translation of the Bible into English. He was proclaimed to be a heretic for this act. His first edition was a word-for-word translation of the New Testament from the Latin vulgate (Wegner 1999:280). “Though

Wycliffe was dead, the council (the Council of Constance in 1415) ordered his bones to be dug up and burned, and his ashes were scattered in the River Swift” (Wegner 1999:282).

## **METHODS OF TRANSLATION ADOPTED**

Translation is not a new field for the students of Indian languages and literatures. Many Indian classics from Sanskrit have been adapted into modern Indian languages in the past. These translators did not appear to be overly concerned about making literal translations. They studied the story, and followed the story line somewhat faithfully. But they allowed themselves to re-create the story according to their understanding and imagination.

It appears that grammatical and philosophical treatises also were translated in the same fashion. Original ideas were absorbed, and translation was made without reference to the original text in any strict manner.

Unlike the modern translators who often make statements about their goal and method of translation, the translators of the past made only some hints here and there about the method they adopted. After the advent of modern Indian fiction, especially in Bengali, translation got a boost in India. It will be interesting to study the methods of translation adopted by various Indian authors and translators. From Tamil, for example, *TirukkuRaL* has been translated into so many languages. The same work has been translated into English by many authors. A structural and functional comparison of these translations in relation to the original text as well as the classical commentators of the original text would make very interesting.

The Bible has been translated into many languages of the world. Evangelical Christians make it a point that God's Word and the story of Jesus should be made available in every language. In addition, English has a good number of distinctive translations of the Bible.

## **METHODS OF TRANSLATION ADOPTED IN SOME WELL-KNOWN BIBLE TRANSLATIONS**

William Tyndale (1494-1536) wrote in his Prologue to the first printed English New Testament: “I have here translated, brethren and sisters most dear and tenderly beloved in Christ, the New Testament for your spiritual edifying, consolation and solace, ... And if (the readers) perceive in any places that I have not attained the very sense of the tongue, or meaning of the Scripture, or have not given the right English word, that they put to their hands to amend it, remembering that so is their duty to do.”

**King James Version** or **Authorized Version** was first published in 1611. The aim of the Version done with the help of fifty four scholars was “to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one, not iustly to be excepted against; that hath bene our indeauour, that our marke.” It, like other previous translations, included Apocrypha. The Apocrypha was dropped in 1826.

### **New King James Version**

In the Preface to the 1611 edition, the translators of the Authorized Version, known popularly as the King James Bible, state that it was not their purpose ‘to make a new translation . . . but to make a good one better.’ . . . In harmony with the purpose of the King James Version, the translators and editors of the present work have not pursued a goal of innovation. They have perceived the Holy Bible, New King James Version, as a continuation of the labors of the earlier translators, thus unlocking for today’s readers the spiritual treasures found especially in the Authorized Version of the Holy scriptures.

For nearly four hundred years, and throughout several revisions of its English form, the King James Bible has been deeply revered among the English-speaking peoples of the world. The precision of translation for which it is historically renowned, and its majesty of style, have enabled that monumental version of the Word of God to become the mainspring of the religion, language, and legal foundations of our civilization. . . . The King James translators were committed to producing an English Bible that would be a precise translation, and by no means a paraphrase or a broadly approximate rendering. On the one hand, the scholars were almost as familiar with the original languages of the Bible as with their native English. On the other hand, their reverence for the divine Author and His Word assured a translation of the Scriptures in which only a principle of utmost accuracy could be accepted. . . .

Complete Equivalence in Translation: Where new translation has been necessary in the New King James Version, the most complete representation of the original has been rendered by considering the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts. This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve all of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form. Dynamic equivalence, a recent procedure in Bible translation, commonly results in paraphrasing where a more literal rendering is needed to reflect a specific vital sense. For example, references to Christ in some versions of John 3:16 as “only Son” or “one and only Son” are doubtless dynamic equivalents of sorts. However, they are not actual equivalents of the precisely literal “only begotten Son,” especially in consideration of the historic Nicene statement concerning the person of Christ, “begotten, not made,” which is a crucial Christian doctrine.

In keeping with the principle of complete equivalence, it is the policy to translate interjections which are commonly omitted in modern language renderings of the Bible. As an example, the interjection behold, in the older King James editions, continues to have a place in English usage, especially in dramatically calling attention to a spectacular scene, or an event of profound importance such as the Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Consequently, behold is retained for these occasions in the present edition. However, the Hebrew and Greek originals for this word can be translated variously depending on the circumstances in the passage. Therefore, in addition to behold is retained for these occasions in the present edition. However, the Hebrew and Greek originals for this can be translated variously depending on the circumstances in the passage. Therefore, in addition to behold, words such as indeed, look, see, and surely are also rendered to convey the appropriate sense suggested by the context in each case. . . .

A special feature of the New King James Version is its conformity to the thought flow of the 1611 Bible. The reader discovers that the sequence and identify of words, phrases, and clauses of the new edition, while much clearer, are so close to the traditional that there is remarkable ease in listening to the reading of either edition while following with the other.

In the discipline of translating biblical and other ancient languages, a standard method of transliteration, that is, the English spelling of untranslated words, such as names of persons and

places, has never been commonly adopted. In keeping with the design of the present work, the King James spelling of untranslated words is retained.

King James doctrinal and theological terms, for example, propitiation, justification, and sanctification, are generally familiar to English-speaking peoples. Such terms have been retained except where the original language indicates need for a more precise translation.

Readers of the Authorized Version will immediately be struck by the absence of several pronouns: thee, thou, and ye are replaced by simple you, while you and yours are substituted for thy, and thine as applicable. . . . However, reverence for God in the present work is preserved by capitalizing pronouns, including You, Your, and Yours, which refer to Him. Additionally, capitalization of these pronouns benefits the reader by clearly distinguishing divine and human persons referred to in a passage. Without such capitalization the distinction is often obscure, because the antecedent of a pronoun is not always clear in the English translation. . . .

The real character of the Authorized Version does not reside in its archaic pronouns or verbs or other grammatical forms of the seventeenth century, but rather in the care taken by its scholars to impart the letter and spirit of the original text in a majestic and reverent style.

### **New International Version**

The New International Version is a completely new translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts . . . . How it was made helps to give the New International Version its distinctiveness. The translation of each book was assigned to a team of scholars. Next, one of the Intermediate Editorial Committees revised the initial translation, with constant reference to the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. Their work then went to one of the General Editorial Committees, which checked it in detail and made another thorough revision. This revision in turn was carefully reviewed by the Committee on Bible Translation, which made further changes and then released the final version for publication. . . .

From the beginning of the project, the Committee on Bible Translation held to certain goals for the New International Version: that it would be an accurate translation and one that would have clarity and literary quality and so prove suitable for public and private reading, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use. The Committee also sought to preserve some measure of continuity with the long tradition of translating the Scriptures into English.

In working toward these goals, the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form. . . .

The first concern of the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers. They have weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words. . . .

Concern for clear and natural English — that the New International Version should be idiomatic but not idiosyncratic, contemporary but not dated — motivated the translators and consultants. At the same time, they tried to reflect the differing styles of the biblical writers. In view of the

international use of English, the translators sought to avoid obvious Americanisms on the one hand and obvious Anglicisms on the other. A British edition reflects the comparatively few differences of significant idiom and of spelling....

As for the traditional pronouns “thou,” “thee” and “thine” in reference to the Deity, the translators judged that to use these archaism (along with the old verb forms such as “doest,” “wouldest” and “hadst”) would violate accuracy in translation. Neither Hebrew, Aramaic nor Greek uses special pronouns for the persons of the Godhead. A present-day translation is not enhanced by forms that in the time of the King James Version were used in everyday speech, whether referring to God or man....

There is a sense in which the work of translation is never wholly finished. This applies to all great literature and uniquely so to the Bible. In 1973 the New Testament in the New International Version was published. Since then, suggestions for corrections and revisions have been received from various sources ....

Like all translations of the Bible, made as they are by imperfect man, this one undoubtedly falls short of its goals ....

### **New American Standard Bible**

The fourfold aim of the Lockman Foundation:

1. These publications shall be true to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
2. They shall be grammatically correct.
3. They shall be understandable to the masses.
4. They shall give the Lord Jesus Christ His proper place, the place which the Word gives Him; therefore, no work will ever be personalized.

In the history of English Bible translations, the King James Version is the most prestigious. This time-honored version of 1611, itself a revision of the Bishops’ Bible of 1568, became the basis for the English revised Version appearing in 1881 (New Testament) and 1885 (Old Testament). The American counterpart of this last work was published in 1901 as the American Standard Version. Recognizing the values of the American Standard Version, the Lockman Foundation felt an urgency to update it by incorporating recent discoveries of Hebrew and Greek textual sources and by rendering it into more current English...

Furthermore in the preparation of this (NASB) numerous translations have been consulted along with the linguistic tools and literature of biblical scholarship. Decisions about English renderings were made by consensus of a team composed of educators and pastors. Subsequently, review and evaluation by other Hebrew and Greek scholars outside the Editorial Board were sought and carefully considered...

**Modern English Usage:** The attempt has been made to render the grammar and terminology in contemporary English. When it was felt that the word-for-word literalness was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom, In the instances where this has been done, the more literal rendering has been indicated in the notes.

**Alternate Readings:** In addition to the more literal renderings, notations have been made to include alternate translations, readings of various manuscripts and explanatory equivalents of the text. Only such notations have been as have been felt justified in assisting the reader’s comprehension of the terms used by the original author.

## **The Living Bible Paraphrased**

(Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, 1971)

To paraphrase is to say something in different word than the one author used. It is a restatement of an author's thoughts, using different words than he did. This book is a paraphrase of the Old and New Testaments. Its purpose is to say as exactly as possible what the writers of the Scriptures meant, and to say it simply, expanding where necessary for a clear understanding by the modern reader... There are dangers in paraphrases, as well as values. For whenever the author's exact words are not translated from the original languages, there is a possibility that the translator, however honest, may be giving the English reader something that the original writer did not mean to say. This is because a paraphrase is guided not only by the translator's skill in simplifying but also by the clarity of his understanding of what the author meant and by his theology. For when the Greek or Hebrew is not clear, then the theology of the translator is his guide, along with his sense of logic, unless perchance the translation is allowed to stand without any clear meaning at all. The theological lodestar in this book has been a rigid evangelical position.

## **Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible**

(by Robert Young (Baker House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Third edition, 1898)

The following Translation of the New Testament is based upon the belief that every word of the original is 'God-breathed.' ... This inspiration extends only to the original text, as it came from the pens of the writers, not to any translations ever made by man, however, aged, venerable, or good; and only in so far as any of these adhere to the original—neither adding to nor omitting from it one particle—are they of any real value, for, to the extent that they vary from the original, the doctrine of verbal inspiration is lost, so far as that version is concerned.... A strictly literal rendering may not be so pleasant to the ear as one where the apparent sense is chiefly aimed at, yet it is not euphony but truth that ought to be sought, ... The following translation need not, and ought not, to be considered, in any sense, as coming into competition with the Common Version but as one to be used in connection with it, and as auxiliary to it; and not a few assurances have been received from clergymen and others that they thus use it, and find it at once interesting and profitable. The change of a single word, or collocation of words, is often found to throw an entirely new shade of meaning over the Scripture.

From the Preface to the First Edition (1862):

There are two modes of translation which may be adopted in rendering into our own language the writings of an ancient author; the one is, to bring him before us in such a manner as that we may regard him as our own; the other, to transport ourselves, on the contrary, over to him, adopting his situation, modes of speaking, thinking, acting,—peculiarities of age and race, air, gesture, voice, etc. Each of these plans has its advantages, but the latter is incomparably the better of the two, being suited—not for the ever-varying modes of thinking and acting of the men of the fifth, or the tenth, or the fifteenth, or some other century, but—for all ages alike. All attempts to make Moses or Paul act, or speak, or reason, as if they were Englishmen of the nineteenth century, must inevitably tend to change the translator into a paraphrast or a commentator, characters which, however useful, stand altogether apart from that of him, who, with a work before him in one language, seeks only to transfer it into another.



## **The Bible in Today's Version**

(Good News Bible: Today's English Version (American Bible Society, New York, 1992, Second Edition.)

**The Bible in Today's Version** is a new translation which seeks to state, clearly and accurately the meaning of the original texts in words and forms that are widely accepted by all people who use English as a means of communication. This translation does not follow the traditional vocabulary and style found in the historic English Bible versions. Rather it attempts in this century to set forth the Biblical content and message in a standard, everyday, natural form of English.

From the preface: A translation intended for people everywhere for whom English is either their mother tongue or an acquired language... Where no Hebrew source yields a satisfactory meaning in the context, the translation has either followed one or more of the ancient versions (e.g. Greek, Syriac, Latin) or has adopted a reconstructed text (technically referred to as a conjectural emendation) based on scholarly consensus; such departures from the Hebrew are indicated in footnotes... Drafts of the translation in its early stages were sent for comments and suggestions to a Review Panel consisting of prominent theologians and Biblical scholars appointed by the American Bible Society Board of Managers in its capacity as trustee for the translation. In addition, drafts were sent to major English-speaking Bible Societies throughout the world... The primary concern of the translators has been to provide a faithful translation of the meaning of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts. Their first task was to understand correctly the meaning of the original. At times the original meaning cannot be precisely known, not only because the meaning of some words and phrases cannot be determined with a great degree of assurance, but also because the underlying cultural and historical context is sometimes beyond recovery. All aids available were used in this task, including the ancient versions and the modern translations in English and other languages. After ascertaining as accurately as possible the meaning of the original, the translators' next task was to express that meaning in a manner and form easily understood by the readers. Since this translation is intended for all who use English as a means of communication, the translators have tried to avoid words and forms not in current or widespread use; but no artificial limit has been set to the range of the vocabulary employed. Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous.

Consequently there has been no attempt to reproduce in English the parts of speech, sentence structure, word order and grammatical devices of the original languages. Faithfulness in translation also includes a faithful representation of the cultural and historical features of the original. Certain features, however, such as the hours of the day and the measures of weight, capacity, distance, and area, are given their modern equivalents, since the information in those terms conveys more meaning to the reader than the Biblical form of those terms....

The revision is restricted to two main areas of concern that have been raised and discussed over the years since the first appearance of Today's English Version: (1) passages in which the English style has been unnecessarily exclusive and inattentive to gender concerns, and (2) passages in which the translation has been seen as problematic or insensitive from either a stylistic or an exegetical viewpoint.

The process followed in preparing this revised edition was one of first inviting and collecting proposals for needed revisions from all English-language Bible Societies ....

In practical terms what this means is that, where references in particular passages are both men and women, the revision aims at language that is not exclusively masculine-oriented. At the same time, however, great care was taken not to distort the historical situation of the ancient patriarchal culture of Bible times.

**New Life Version** (Victor Books, Wheaton, 1993.)

The idea of a very readable and yet accurate version of the Scriptures ... The secret of its readability is in the limited vocabulary. In most cases, each word uses only one meaning. Difficult Biblical words found in other versions were broken down into simple, meaningful phrases. ... Even educated adults who are familiar with the Scriptures find themselves startled into new insights by its blunt simplicity.

Those of us who worked on this limited vocabulary NEW LIFE Version were constantly watching to keep it understandable without sacrificing accuracy. There was no thought to change God's Holy Word to today's street language. In fact, in many places the wording and beauty of older versions have been retained. Paraphrasing, or man's idea of what the Bible says, was ruled. The careful and prayerful use of some basic words can be made to say what the original languages said, thus assuring the reader of an accurate text.

**The Message: New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs**  
(by Eugene H. Peterson, Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1995)

A striking feature in all this writing (writing the Bible) is that it was done in the street language of the day, the idiom of the playground and marketplace. In the Greek-speaking world of that day, there were two levels of language: formal and informal. Formal language was used to write philosophy and history, government decrees and epic poetry. If someone were to sit down and consciously write for posterity, it would of course be written in this formal language with its learned vocabulary and precise diction. But if the writing was routine—shopping lists, family letters, bills and receipts—it was written in the common, informal idiom of everyday speech, street language.

And this is the language used throughout the New Testament. Some people are taken aback by this, supposing that language dealing with a holy god and holy things should be elevated—stately and ceremonial. But one good look at Jesus—his preference for down-to-earth stories and easy association with common people— gets rid of that supposition. For Jesus is the descent of god to our lives, just as they are, not the ascent of our lives to God, hoping he might approve when he sees how hard we try.

And that is why the followers of Jesus in their witness and preaching, translating and teaching, have always done their best to get the Message—the “good news”—into the language of whatever streets they happen to be living on. In order to understand the Message right, the language must be right—not a refined language that appeals to our aspirations after the best but a rough and earthy language that reveals God's presence and action where we least expect it, catching us when we are up to our elbows in the soiled ordinariness of our lives and God is the furthest thing from our minds.

This version of the New Testament in a contemporary idiom keeps the language of the Message current and fresh and understandable in the same language in which we do our shopping, talk

with our friends, worry about world affairs, and teach our children their table manners. The goal is not to render a word-for-word conversion of Greek into English, but rather to convert the tone, the rhythm, the events, the ideas, into the way we actually think and speak. ...

In English translation, the Psalms often sound smooth and polished, sonorous with Elizabethan rhythms and diction. As literature, they are beyond compare. But as prayer, as the utterances of men and women passionate for God in moments of anger and praise and lament, these translations miss something. Grammatically, they are accurate. The scholarship undergirding the translations is superb and devout. But as prayers they are not quite right. The Psalms in Hebrew are earthy and rough. They are not general. They are not the prayers of nice people, couched in cultured language. ... I started paraphrasing the Psalms into the rhythms and idiom of contemporary English. I wanted to provide men and women access to the immense range and the terrific energies of prayer in the kind of language that is most immediate to them, which also happens to be the language in which these psalm prayers were first expressed and written by David and his successors.

### **The Amplified Bible**

(Zondervan Bible Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI., 1965)

The Amplified Bible is not an attempt to duplicate what has already been achieved. Rather, its intent is to progress beyond the point where the others have stopped. Its purpose is to reveal, together with the single word English equivalent to each key Hebrew and Greek word, any other clarifying shades of meaning that may be concealed by the traditional word-for-word method of translation. Now, possibly for the first time the full meaning of the key words in the original text is available in an English version of the Bible.

This concept is fully justified and supported by the countless acknowledgments of Bible translators as to the inadequacy of the customary method. Martin Luther, whose translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into German in A.D. 1534 ‘spiritualized Germany and made the German language,’ stated it plainly: ‘The words of the Hebrew tongue have a peculiar energy. It is impossible to convey so much so briefly in any other language. To render them intelligibly we must not attempt to give word for word translations, but only aim at the sense and the [original Author’s] idea.’ (Table Talk).

This precisely what the Apostle Paul and ministers, teachers and commentators of every generation have attempted to do. But, unfortunately, there is a traditional reluctance to increase the number of English words used lest one ‘add to’ the inspired text. On the other hand, by refusing to consider all the shades of meaning intended in the original language, we have unintentionally disobeyed the admonition not to ‘take from’ God’s holy Word. In a sense, amplification merely helps the English reader comprehend what the Hebrew and Greek listener understood as a matter of course.

For example, Acts 16:31 reads: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved.’ What does the word ‘believe’ mean? Webster defines it: to place credence ... apart from personal knowledge; to expect or hope ... to be more or less firmly persuaded of the truth of anything, to think or suppose.’ In this sense, most people believe in Christ—that He lived; that He was a perfect Man Who sincerely believed Himself to be the Son of God, and that He died on the cross to save sinners. But this is by no means the meaning of the Greek word which twenty-two New Testament versions out of twenty-four consulted render ‘believe.’ They do so because there is no

one English word that adequately conveys the intended meaning. Actually, the Greek word used here for believe is 'pisteuo.' It means 'to adhere to, cleave to; to trust, to have faith in; to rely on.' Consequently, the words, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ...' really mean to to have an absolute personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

'And we are setting these truths forth in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the (Holy) Spiirt ... that His glory may be both manifested and recognized' (I Cor. 2:13; Phil. 1:11).'

## **To conclude**

To conclude, while translation is a helpful crutch in learning another language, sometimes to be avoided, sometimes to be carefully used, it becomes an essential element in serving people. Since any translation is only an approximation, often the full import of the original intent is obtainable through a judicious use of the various translations of the original text. But multiplicity of versions is a luxury, something unthinkable and unattainable in most communities because of economic reasons. Hence the need for extra care and excellent preparation on the part of the translator. You should know what translation is also because you may have to communicate with the people of your target language on many occasions using a translator and you will have a better appreciation of the complexity involved in such work. This will modulate your own preparation and delivery of your message.

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