

Kick-starting Your Language Learning: Becoming a Basic Speaker Through Fun and Games Inside a Secure Nest

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Languages are big. They are complicated too. But brains are good at learning them, provided they are given the chance. A child learning a second language is often given the chance for his or her brain to do what it needs to do. The brain of an adult often gets less than it needs, because the world of adults is different from the world of children. In addition, adults are commonly under time pressure, and have a psychological need to observe clear and steady progress.

It is often said that children learn languages from their environment. They get into an environment where language learning can happen, and language learning happens. What I have to say here is about creating an environment where language learning can start happening for an adult. These are suggestions for beginners, ideally, for people who are just about to begin learning a new language. I'm especially concerned to help people who have to, or wish to, learn a language on their own, in the location where it is spoken, without the advantages and disadvantages of a formal language course. The techniques I will suggest will be especially helpful during the first two months of language learning. Eventually, other approaches will be needed. Even if you start out employing the techniques I suggest, you may end up modifying them, or inventing new techniques of your own. Think of this as one way to learn a lot of language in a short time.

What is a beginning language learner trying to do?

If we ignore a whole bunch of problems, we can say that a language learner faces two main problems. The first is to *get started*. The second is to *keep from stopping*. We are focusing here on the first of these problems. You may intend to become an outstanding speaker of your new language one day. Your first problem is to become any kind of speaker, period. First you must go from being a total non-speaker to being a struggling speaker. Then you can go from being a struggling speaker to being a comfortable speaker. Way down the road, if things work out, you may come to speak the new language almost as easily as you speak your mother tongue. Right now, you'd be happy with a lot less than that. When you can basically get along in the language, given enough effort on your part and enough cooperation on the part of the person who you are talking to, you will be a "basic speaker" of your new language.

You are entitled to call yourself a basic speaker of the new language when you meet two conditions. First, your ability to understand the language (commonly referred to as *comprehension ability*) is adequate so that a typical speaker of the language can always get her point across to you, given a bit of effort, and provided the topic is fairly mundane.

Second, your ability to speak the language is such that you can always get your point across to other people, given a bit of cooperation, and provided the topic is mundane.

Get the picture? You and a typical speaker of the language work together cooperatively to make communication successful. It is hard work for both of you, but you usually succeed. A *mundane topic* is any topic involving ordinary concrete experience, but not including things like philosophy, theology, and punctuated equilibria. The cooperative effort between a fluent speaker and a new speaker is called the *negotiation of meaning*. A lot of the burden falls on the fluent speaker to make this communication successful. The fluent speaker must simplify her speech, and speak slowly and clearly, and help you to find the words you are groping for. Both of you often will need to guess at what the other is saying, or meaning to say.

We now have an idea of your first target: to be a basic speaker, able to negotiate meaning with a cooperative conversational partner. So that's what I want to help you do—to go from being unable to speak this language at all to being able to negotiate meaning with a cooperative native speaker.

And when I say speak, I really do mean speak. A tape recorder can't speak. Neither can a parrot, in the sense I have in mind. By "speak a language", I mean that you can start with an idea that you want to get across, and go on to express that idea in words that someone else can understand. In addition, you will often understand what they say in response, or at least the gist of it, and if you don't understand, you can work with them conversationally until you get the point they are trying to make.

You may have had experiences attempting to learn other languages. Those experiences may have been successful or unsuccessful. Whether or not you have had experiences learning other languages, you will have beliefs about language learning. What is it to know a language? What is it to speak a language? How do people learn languages? Is learning a language like learning a poem, like learning chemistry, like learning to play the piano, like all of these, like none of these? How is it normally accomplished (in cases where it really is accomplished, as opposed to only attempted)? Take a few minutes (or hours, as the case may be) to jot down your beliefs about language learning.

DO NOT PROCEED WITHOUT JOTTING DOWN
YOUR BELIEFS!

Done? Good. Here are some of my beliefs. I believe that I must work at learning to understand a language just as much as I must work at learning to talk in it. At one time, I believed that if learned to talk, I would automatically be able to understand. Today, I believe that I must also learn to understand. Another belief I have is that I will only become familiar with a language if I have extensive exposure to it. But I believe that for that exposure to do any good I must be able to understand at least some of what I am hearing. Another thing I believe is that when I am first learning a language, both understanding it and speaking it will be hard work. I expect to speak the language poorly at first, and then, as I keep using the language with people, both in talking and in

listening, I believe that my ability will gradually improve. That is, I will go from speaking the language brokenly to speaking it fluently. Another important belief I hold is that I am far more likely to be successful if I can devote myself full time to learning the language, than if I have another full-time job and attempt to do language learning on the side. Learning a language is tiring, so “full-time” might mean five or six hours per day. Or it might mean eight hours. But I believe that I am less likely to be successful if I try to learn a language as a side-line, than if I see language learning as my central responsibility. During my six or eight hours per day of language learning, I believe that I need to devote most of the time to actual communication and conversation. But I also believe that unstructured, real-life conversation is not enough for me. I need to engage in structured communication activities which will help me to learn the language. These structured communication activities are especially important during the early weeks of language learning. Without structured language learning activities, I may not succeed, and even if I do succeed, my progress will be slower, and my ultimate achievement lower, than might have been the case.

How do your beliefs compare to mine? Probably, you thought of things which I did not think of, and I reminded you of things you did not think of. That illustrates an important principle. If you want to have a positive experience learning a language, get together often with friends who are also trying to learn a language, and share ideas with them. They may be learning the same language as you, or they may be learning different languages. If it is the same language, you can share discoveries related to that language. In any case, you can share discoveries related to what helps you as language learners. You can also share your woes. You can laugh together and cry together. Hmm. Guess that’s another belief of mine that I forgot to mention in the preceding paragraph. I hate lonely language learning. I believe that I need encouragement from people who have some idea of what I am up against.

Learning about the language versus learning the language

One common belief about language learning is that to learn a language is to learn a body of facts. In Chemistry class you learn facts such as *a carbon atom can form four bonds with other atoms*. In German class you learned facts such as *the first person singular present tense form of möchten is möchte* and facts such as *the word meaning “dog” is Hund*. Learning a language is seen as learning hundreds or thousands of facts about grammar and vocabulary.

Another common belief is that to learn a language is to form a set of habits. A common comparison is to riding a bicycle. When you first try to ride a bicycle, or type, or play the piano, you struggle to do it at all. But with practice it becomes an automatic habit.

No doubt there is truth in both of these beliefs. However, there is also little doubt that these are gross over-simplifications. Any kind of learning, whether it is like learning chemistry or like learning to play the piano, is incredibly complex. But learning a language is uniquely complex. Fortunately, you didn’t have to understand how your muscles worked, or even what exactly they were doing, in order to learn to ride a bike. It is even more fortunate that your brain will deal with most of the complexity of learning a

language without you (or anyone) understanding how it does it. Otherwise it would be a rather hopeless situation.

But you need to set your brain to work. I'm not talking about learning facts about language, much as that may help some people. I'm talking about your brain actually using language as language. In the final analysis, that is the only thing that will get your brain to acquire the language. There are two main ways you use your language ability. You use it to express your own ideas, and you use it to understand other people's ideas. When you are just starting to acquire your new language, that is, when you're at the absolute point zero, it is impossible to use it to express your own ideas in it. But it is possible even at that point to begin understanding someone else's ideas in it, especially when those ideas are centered around that other person's desire to help you start learning the language. You can start understanding the language before you know how to talk in the language.

Alternatively, some people like to begin by memorizing sentences in the new language. That's O.K. too, but when you memorize a sentence, it doesn't involve you in using language as language. Remember that to use language as language means to put your own ideas into words or to understand other people's ideas from their words. You may learn to say "Where is the bathroom", and whenever you need to know where the bathroom is, you pull that sentence out of your hat. And you may also be able to use it as a master pattern for asking where other things are. You want to know where the kitchen is, and you know the word for "kitchen", and you think to yourself, "Now let's see, to say 'Where is the bathroom?' I say 'XYZ', where Z means bathroom; and let's see, mm, W means kitchen, so if I want to say 'Where is the kitchen?', I'll just substitute W for Z and say 'XYW'." So then you say "XYW?", and the person you said it to tells you where the kitchen is. Your thought process might not be quite as laborious as that, but do you get the idea? That is one way a lot of people start out learning a language, and many of them end up being successful. However, it takes most people a long time to memorize what amounts to a tiny taste of the language they are learning.

Fortunately, it is also possible to start out from the outset learning the language in ways that are more language-like. In this case, you will get someone to talk to you in the language as your initial means of learning the language. Suppose you want to learn to ask where the bathroom is, and where other rooms are. You might draw a simple floor plan of your house. Your friend, who is your Language Resource Person (LRP), will point to the different rooms in the floor plan, and tell you (in her language), "This is the kitchen; this is the bathroom; this is the entry way". Since she points at each part of the house as she tells you what it is called, you can understand what she is saying, even if you have never heard these words before. You are already *processing* the language *as language* in your own brain. That is a central concept in all that follows. You learn the language by processing the language as language.

You can learn the language in the language before you know the language: an example

Let's use this example of learning the names of rooms in the house to illustrate some key principles involved in learning the language through using the language. You

as language, it is necessary that your LRP ask you the questions in random order. That way you won't know for sure what she is going to ask. You will have to listen to what she says to you and process it in order to understand. This involves what has been called the principle of *uncertainty reduction*. You are uncertain what she wants you to point at until you have used what she said as a means of determining what she wants you to point at. This is real communication. Here you have just begun, and you are already using the language for real communication! You are learning the language by processing the language.

So we started with just two items, the kitchen and the bathroom. You want to get to the place where your LRP can ask you to point to different parts of the house and items of furniture, and you can point correctly. Once again, it is essential that you not overwhelm your mental processor. You avoid overloading your mental processor by

- 1) introducing new items one at a time,
- 2) having the new item repeated along with several familiar ones *many* times, and
- 3) having the new items questioned ("Where is the X?", or "Point to the X", or "Show me the X", etc.) *many* times, but always randomly, along with questions about other items (otherwise no processing will occur).

Now as you are going along, you may be on your tenth item, which is, let's say, the verandah. Your LRP says, "This is the verandah". In order to keep your mental processor processing, she says this several times but always randomly interspersed among other items you have already learned: "This is the verandah; this is the sitting room; this is the verandah; this is the front yard; this is the back yard; this is the verandah; this is the kitchen; this is the verandah; this is the door." I have yet to see an LRP who appreciates the amount of repetition I need in order to learn new items. At this point I may want to hear *verandah* twenty or thirty times, interspersed among familiar items as illustrated. The LRP may think that five repetitions is plenty. Fortunately, most LRPs will soon come to accept the need for repetition, as long as you keep gently reminding them.

Now imagine that you are working on your fifteenth item, say the kitchen sink, and your LRP is asking you "Where is the kitchen sink?" randomly interspersed among questions such as "Where is the bathroom?", "Where is the kitchen", etc. Frequently, you will discover that you can no longer remember an item which you knew a few minutes earlier. Suppose while the LRP is working with you on "Where is the bathroom?", she asks you "Where is the sitting room?" A few minutes earlier, it appeared that you had learned *sitting room*. Now you find that when she says the word for *sitting room*, you cannot remember what it means. What your LRP does at such points is to act as though you now need to learn *sitting room*, and she asks you the question "Where is the sitting room?" many times, always interspersed randomly among other questions. Once you are again able to consistently recognize *sitting room*, she will emphasize *kitchen sink* a few more times, since that is the new item you were working on. If you aren't having any problem with *kitchen sink*, the LRP goes on to item sixteen, perhaps, *stove*.

At times you may have special difficulty with two items which strike you as similar in pronunciation. This happened for me in Urdu with *kira* which means 'cucumber', and *kela*, which means 'banana', since we were learning the word for cucumber and the word for banana in the same session (using real cucumbers and

bananas, along with other pieces of fruit and vegetables). These two words may not look all that similar to you, but I have seen learners become confused over choices involving words that were considerably less similar than these. When this happens, you should have the LRP focus on the two items which you are confusing. At first she can just concentrate on those two items: “Pick up a banana; pick up a cucumber; pick up a cucumber; pick up a banana; pick up a cucumber; pick up a banana; pick up a banana; pick up a banana; pick up a cucumber...” She should then add one or two items that you already know well, along with cucumber and banana. Then add one or two more familiar items. Gradually, she’ll get back to using all of the items you have learned so far during the current activity.

Now suppose you had never heard this language before the session with the floor plan. You’ve been processing the language *as* language, and doing so for, say, one hour. Your session ends. You have to go to the airport to pick up a friend who is just arriving from your home country. Your friend tells you, “I need to visit the restroom.”. You say to the security guard, in your new language, “Where is the bathroom?” You’ve never said that before. In your session you only learned to comprehend it and didn’t try to say it. But you now needed it, and it came out, and it felt like natural communication. That is, you had an idea that you needed to express, and you expressed it. Your visiting friend is impressed. The security guard points to the bathroom and says something which you don’t understand. You don’t realize that you used a word that only means “bathroom” in a home, and a different word is used for the airport restroom. But it just doesn’t matter at all at this point. The security guard knew what you meant and knew that you were doing your best. After all, you’ve only been learning the language for an hour. I’d say you’re doing pretty well.

Now alternatively, you might have learned to say “Where is the bathroom” without processing the language as language in the way I described. For example, you might have taken a 3x5 card and written on one side of it “Where is the bathroom?” in English, and written on the other side of it “Where is the bathroom?” in the new language. Then you could have tested yourself on that over and over, and repeated the sentence to yourself hundreds of times until you had it memorized. You still could have said it to the security guard.

The way you learned it was quite different. You learned it by being asked where the bathroom was (on your little floor plan). When you were asked, you had to determine what you were being asked. That is, you actually had to understand the new language. Then you indicated where the bathroom was, conveying to a speaker of the language the fact that you had understood what she asked.

In the early days of language learning, many people, perhaps most people, are able to learn much more quickly if they learn the language by processing the language than they can learn by memorizing expressions from on 3x5 cards, or from tape recordings. More importantly, they will be giving their brain the chance to start developing genuine comprehension ability. You start out small, and by using appropriate techniques, you steadily and rapidly expand your comprehension ability. You’ll be amazed at how much you will be able to comprehend by the end of a month. It will be considerably more than you could have memorized in the same month. If you choose rather to learn primarily by memorizing sentences, it will do very little for your comprehension ability. You only learn to comprehend by comprehending, and you learn to talk by using the language to

formulate and utter sentences which put your own ideas into words as the need arises. You can create situations in your language sessions in which needs arise. You can also plan your language sessions so that they relate to the communication needs that you are facing in real life settings.

As I say, the approach I am suggesting is not the only approach. You may well succeed by memorizing a lot of sentences and using them as patterns for constructing new sentences. As you do this, it will cause people to talk to you in the new language, and sometimes you will understand some of what they say and thus have the chance to process language as language and thereby start developing your comprehension ability. But I believe you'll be off to a much slower start than if you use your times with your LRP to do heavy-duty, large scale language processing.

Getting started with your Language Resource Person

Now you have some idea of what I mean when I speak of learning the language by using the language *as* language. Let's get to it. You need a language resource person. That is the same as saying that you can only learn to communicate if you have someone to communicate with. Often, the best way to find the person or people you need is to go through people whom you already know. If you don't know anyone, you may need to just start asking around. It is better if you do not make a long term arrangement with anyone to help you in this way at the outset. If you make a long term arrangement, and then the person turns out to be unsatisfactory, you have a problem. If several people help you once or twice, not expecting to do more, and out of them one or two become regular helpers, no one's feelings are likely to be hurt, especially if you continue your friendship with all of the people who initially helped you.

It may be good to make it clear that you do not want someone to "teach you the language". Otherwise, they may send you to an esteemed expert on the "high" language. You may have difficulty learning mundane every day language from such a person. In addition, such a person may have very strong ideas about how languages are learned, and those may not be the most helpful ideas. You might tell people that first you need to learn the common language, and then when you can speak the common language you will go to that person to learn about the high language.

As people help you during your early struggles with their language, you need to be sure that it isn't a one-sided arrangement, where you get a lot out of it, and those who help you get little out of it. Realize that if people exert themselves for you, you owe them something. Fortunately, many fruitful language learning activities can go on in the context of friendship and social visiting. To the extent that you need a regular, scheduled format with an LRP, you need to take care that your helper is adequately rewarded.

When you are seeking people to help you, you are likely to find that some people automatically light up at the idea. If this doesn't happen, you may need to do some careful relationship building first. Start with people you know, and become friends with their close friends and relatives, and then in turn with those people's close friends and relatives. Spend time with people. As people are people together they tend to do things for each other, and soon there is a sense of mutual obligation. Get it? Mutual! At that point you should be able to get someone to at least give an hour to serving as an LRP.

You might do that with a few people. Hopefully, someone will enjoy it enough to want to do it often. If you end up arranging a regular schedule, you should consider paying a fixed amount. If you don't pay a fixed amount, then try to make sure that the benefits to the LRP cost you at least as much as you would pay if you did pay a fixed amount. In many parts of the world, the going hourly wage may be low by your standards, but it is best to stay close to it. In other parts of the world you may pay five or ten dollars an hour. In that case, you'll surely want to have a powerful strategy for using the time to the full, and come to your language learning sessions well prepared, and tape-record all that you do in the sessions, and make extensive use of those tape-recordings following the sessions.

For further thoughts on the language learner's approach to relationship building, see Thomson (1993b).

Your very first language session

O.K., you now have your LRP with you sitting at the table in your kitchen. What do you do now? Well, you could draw that floor plan of your house. But we had better reflect for a moment. As a matter of fact, you never start a language session without considerable prior reflection and planning. It should occur to you that the first thing you need to do is to put your LRP through the ropes. As I talk about your first session, in which you are putting your LRP through the ropes, I'll probably keep getting side-tracked by the ropes, if you don't mind.

TPR-TOTAL (AND MINIMAL) PHYSICAL RESPONSE

The method I described in connection with the floor plan of your house falls into a broad category of activities which are called Total Physical Response, or TPR (Asher 1982; Silvers 1985). In the case of the floor plan, the physical response was merely to point at the bathroom when the LRP said "Where is the bathroom?" There was nothing very "total" about that response. But people still call it TPR. The original idea was that the more you put your whole body into responding, the better you learned. That may make sense. Learning a language means learning to relate patterns of words to aspects of experience. So if the LRP said "jump", and you jumped six inches, the "experience" side of the equation might be less than if you jumped two feet.

Personally, I wouldn't make a big deal of that in general. (As a matter of fact, I would change the meaning of the abbreviation TPR to stand for, "Tune in, Process, Respond". That is, as the LRP tells you something, you tune in to what she said, figure out what it means, and demonstrate to her that you understood her by responding appropriately.) However, for training your LRP on the first day, it may be good to do *total* TPR. In order to help your LRP get the hang of things, you can begin with simple commands that involve a gross physical response (in the best sense of the word *gross*). These include things like *stand up, sit down, walk, run, stop, go back, turn around, clap, talk, be quiet, go to sleep, wake up, eat, drink*. In some cases you will mime the activity (as with *sleep*). In other cases you will perform it literally (as with *sit down*).

Here's some homework: Come up with an additional fifty simple instructions you might use for TPR at this point. You need to start learning to prepare for language sessions. So start.

I SAW THAT. DO YOUR HOMEWORK!

BACK TO YOUR FIRST LANGUAGE SESSION

Now, back to your session. You will have your LRP give you these instructions in the manner described earlier, namely, starting with two instructions, adding one new one at a time, with considerable repetition, always ordering the instructions randomly so that you will be forced to process what you are hearing and decide what to do in response. You might aim to learn ten or twenty instructions your first day. The vocabulary is likely to be basic, essential vocabulary, so the time is well spent from the standpoint of vocabulary learning. But you will also have helped your LRP to get an idea of how you will be learning during the early weeks. You are trying to get a foothold on the language by getting enough basic vocabulary and sentence patterns to function with as a basic speaker. And you are trying to jump start your learning by becoming thoroughly familiar with *a lot* of basic vocabulary and sentence patterns.

This system may be a bit complicated for the LRP initially. One good way to train the LRP is to have a second language learner participate with you. I hate doing language learning by myself, anyway. Besides that, you can have a lot more flexibility in communication if there is at least one other person. I enjoy working with my wife. In that case, we have used the following technique with a new LRP. The LRP and I sit facing each other, and my wife stands or sits behind me so that she is visible to the LRP, but not to me. She does the actions, and that is what prompts the LRP to instruct me to do them. A new LRP is unlikely to give twenty repetitions of the instruction "stand up". But my wife knows that I need that much repetition, and so she prompts the LRP accordingly. She takes care of complicated details like starting out with only two instructions, adding new ones gradually, keeping them in random order, and so on. Whatever she does, the LRP instructs me to do. Eventually the LRP gets the idea. Whenever you use a new variety of TPR you can train your LRP in this manner.

You or the LRP should also keep a written record (either in words or simple drawings) of what you have covered. Otherwise she may forget to keep going back to earlier items while introducing later ones.

At first, the LRP may find the whole business of TPR bizarre. If she is someone who has "tutored" other language learners, she will soon be surprised at your rate of progress compared to others she has helped, and that is likely to encourage her to press on playing games with you. In addition, she is likely to find such language learning sessions fun and interesting, as opposed to dull and boring.

You yourself may have trouble with such activities, feeling that you are being silly or foolish. It may be that some people will simply be unable to get past this, and will prefer to learn a language by memorizing sentences and so on. But why don't you give it

a try. You may not believe that you can be developing real communication skills through what seems like game-playing. But one expert on how children learn their first language, Jerome Bruner, has observed that game-playing can play a central role in that process (Bruner, 1983). Games are fun. Playing games involves less stress than behaving proficiently for real-life purposes. And you really can develop a lot of comprehension ability through game-like activities. In a month or so you can learn to recognize many hundreds of common vocabulary and understand many types of sentences. You can start developing genuine speaking ability, as well. You will then be in a strong position to rapidly become proficient in using the language in a wide variety of real life situations.

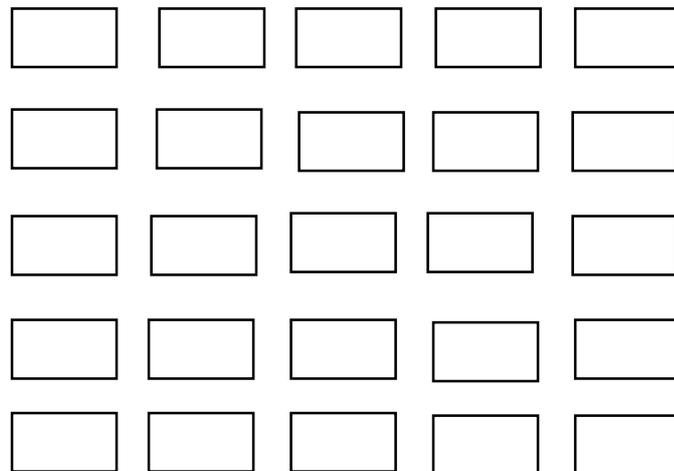
TPR WITH LOTS OF JUNK (OBJECT MANIPULATION)

You need to do more than simple TPR. Despite the fun-and-games nature of TPR in its classical form, it will probably get boring for your LRP if that is all you do. Besides that, there may be limits to how much you can learn this way. Strong proponents argue that every grammatical construction can somehow be embedded in TPR instructions. This is more likely if you broaden your range of activities to include some in which the physical response is less than total. As I say, people still refer to such activities as TPR.

One easy twist to add is to use lots of physical objects in connection with TPR activities. You can find a large number of common objects around the house, or in the market. And many objects will suggest actions. What actions can be performed with a piece of cloth? A piece of paper? A piece of rope? Get it? Manipulating objects in compliance with the LRP's instructions falls within the broad category of TPR activities. I will also refer to this simply as *object manipulation*.

TPR AS ROLE-PLAY

Another twist is to base a TPR activity on some real life communication situation. For example, you can lay out a number of sheets of paper or envelopes in a format such as the following:



Pretend the papers are city blocks, and the spaces between them are streets. You hold a small toy car in your hand, and pretend that it is a taxi, and you are the driver. Your LRP gives you instructions such as “Drive three blocks and turn right”, and you comply by moving the toy car appropriately. This is a simple variety of role-play. By combining TPR with role-play, you can learn to understand expressions that you will need to use in real life communication situations. When you get into those situations you will be surprised how many of the expressions will come to you naturally, and you will use them in speech, even though you did not memorize them by rote. You learned them by hearing them repeatedly and each time processing what you heard and responding to it.

PICTURES—THE LANGUAGE LEARNER’S GOLD MINE

Another twist can further extend the potential of TPR. Use pictures, either photos, or line drawings (or even video recordings) as the basis for communication. In the long run, pictures have far more potential than simple actions. Pictures make it possible to learn to talk about the whole range of daily activities and experiences. You can repeatedly use the same pictures to learn to understand sentences of a variety of patterns. Suppose that during your eighth language session you are focusing on learning to understand sentences which describe an ongoing process in past time. Each sentence begins, “When this picture was taken...” and goes on to say what was happening when the picture was taken. “When this picture was taken, this man was ploughing. When this picture was taken this woman was making bread. When this picture was taken, this man was fixing a chair.” Etc. The LRP makes up these sentences on the fly. You have to process what you hear, and respond by indicating which picture she is describing. There are a hundred pictures (though only a few are in view at any given moment). The verbs themselves (*ploughing, making, fixing, etc.*) are not new to you, since you have been through these same pictures with the LRP many times. What is new is the form of the verbs used to describe an ongoing process in past time. By the time you get through the hundred pictures, you will have processed and responded to a hundred sentences which describe a past ongoing process. You’ll be surprised how familiar you will have become with that sentence pattern.

While listening to a hundred sentences in a given form (and responding by pointing to the picture being described), you may get lazy, and not attend to the form of the sentence, but only catch one or two key words which are enough to allow you to respond. It may therefore be good to go through the pictures again, allowing the LRP to use two contrasting patterns. For example, she might use a pattern that begins “After this picture was taken—” along with the pattern beginning “When this picture was taken—”. Using two or three contrasting patterns will increase the chances that you thoroughly attend to and process what you hear.

There are many sources for pictures. You can clip them from local magazines, travel brochures or old *National Geographic* articles related to your host country or to neighboring countries. It is far better if you can take your own photos of local scenes. It may be that your LRP can help with this. On one occasion in Pakistan, my wife and I were able to take over a hundred photos (three rolls of film), capturing a wide variety of common daily activities, in the space of about two hours. It actually took longer to

arrange the pictures into a good sequence and pasting them in the book took several hours!

For the early stages of language learning I recommend pictures with certain characteristics. Each picture has one or more people in it who are the central characters. In addition there are one or more inanimate objects which the person is using or doing something to. For example, the person may be using a hammer to build a table. Thus, in addition to the person, there is both a hammer and a table. Another person might be riding a bicycle. Another might be standing at a cash till. Two people might be simply sitting on a bench. The objects the people are involved with need not always be inanimate. Someone might be feeding an animal or nursing a baby. And it is not necessary that every single picture meet these criteria, but it is good if many of them do. I would consider having two or three identical sets of the pictures developed. Then I could glue one set in a notebook and have one or two sets loose. For different activities you might find it preferable to either use the pictures in a notebook or loose. Or you might want your co-learner and yourself to have the same pictures. For example, your co-learner might show a picture to the LRP from her set. The LRP then tells you something about the picture, and you respond by pointing to the same picture in your own set. Loose pictures can be manipulated and sorted. There are also advantages to the consistency of order and arrangement which a picture book provides.

A variety of commercial resources are also available. Harris Winitz has prepared a number of books of drawings for language learners aimed at highlighting specific vocabulary and sentence patterns. This series, *Language Through Pictures*, is available from the International Linguistics Corporation, 401 89th Street, Kansas City, MO, 64114. Both Longman and Oxford University Press publish books of pictures for language learners, grouped according to topics or settings, which they misleadingly call dictionaries. These are *The Longman Photo Dictionary* and *The New Oxford Picture Dictionary*. They are available in a number of major languages, but can easily be adapted to other languages, although they are based around Euro-American themes and settings for the most part. A variety of visual aids for language learners are available from Sky Oaks Productions, Box 1102, Los Gatos, California 95031

Finally, at any point you can resort to drawing sketches, stick figures, or diagrams to use in a given language learning activity. I suspect that having the actual objects in hand is better than using sketches of them, but sketches are a whole lot better than merely using your mind's eye, since sketches still allow you to respond to what you process by pointing or by manipulating them. Without such aids it is hard to be sure you process what you hear. More importantly, these external aids are often what enables you to understand the language in the first place, so that you have a chance to process what you hear. If you can't process what you hear, it is of little use to you.

I will have many suggestions below regarding using pictures to highlight specific sentence patterns. A wide variety of sentence patterns can be highlighted by having the LRP take a pattern and use that pattern to make a comment about each picture in succession. In that way you will quickly hear and comprehend a hundred examples (if you have a hundred pictures) of a single sentence pattern. In addition to the examples I will give below in connection with specific sentence patterns, I have given a concise overview of this approach in Thomson (1989). I suggest a slightly different approach in Thomson

(1992). Both approaches assume the pictures you use are pasted in a book, and that you make repeated passes through the book with the LRP telling you things about the pictures on each pass. The two approaches differ mainly in the third pass through the book. On the first pass through the book the LRP teaches the words for human beings (*man, woman, boy, girl, etc.*). On the second pass the LRP teaches the words for the inanimate objects which the people are using or acting upon. On the third pass, in the first approach, the LRP uses a single verb repeatedly in describing every picture. The verb might be *holding*. The descriptions would then go, “This man is holding a hammer. This woman is holding a spatula. This child is holding a toy; Etc.” for perhaps a hundred pictures. (It may be necessary to use two or three verbs in some cases.) The point is to have the experience of comprehending a lot of sentences which contain subjects and objects (such as *child* and *toy*, respectively). The approach suggested in Thomson (1992) is a little less artificial. After talking about the humans on the first pass through the book and talking about the most salient objects on the second pass, the LRP simply makes what she feels is the most natural descriptive statement of what each person is doing on the third pass. Often, the learner will not understand what the LRP says on this pass, but the learner and LRP tape-record it all, and go over the tape together, discussing whatever the learner did not understand. I fluctuate as to which of these two approaches I prefer.

BACK TO YOUR FIRST SESSION AGAIN

Now, back to your first session with your LRP. In order to keep your session interesting, you might include three different types of activities. You can begin with classic TPR using simple actions (“stand up,” “jump,” etc.). Then for your second activity, why don’t you learn the names of a whole bunch of common objects that are present in the setting where you’ll be having your language sessions. You can respond to questions like “Where is the churn?” by pointing to the churn, or whatever. Why not go for another ten or twenty vocabulary in this manner during the session. Then you can do something with pictures.

During this first session, the LRP can get the basic idea of describing pictures for you. If I were the language learner, I would start with the set of pictures that are glued in a notebook, rather than with a loose set. I will have arranged them in the notebook in such a way that the first few pictures have a man as the central character, and the next few have a woman, and then in subsequent pictures men and women are randomly interspersed. Then children are added, and then perhaps youths, and old people.

Now, my LRP would begin telling me which type of person is in each picture. “This is a man. This is a man. This is a man. This is a woman. This is a woman. This is a man and a woman. This is a woman. This is a man. This is a boy. This is a boy and a woman and a man. This is another boy. This is a boy, too. This is a girl. This is a girl and a boy. This is a girl and a woman and a man. These are some boys. These are some girls. This is an old man. These are some children and some women. This is an old woman...”

These first picture descriptions may sound pretty simple minded, but I encourage you to start out this way. Language learners find it gives them a real sense of hearing and understanding the language right off the bat. You realize that you are genuinely learning the language from day one. It also gives the LRP a clear sense of communicating with you

in the language, which helps to overcome preconceptions she may have about how languages should be taught.

FOR THOSE WANT TO START TALKING IN THE FIRST SESSION

Your major focus during the early days of language learning should be on learning to *understand* the language. Of course, learning to *say* things like *hello* and *good-bye* at the very outset is unavoidable. But some language learners tell me that as soon as they start learning to understand the language by means of TPR, picture descriptions, etc, they simply must start attempting to *say* all those things that they are learning to understand. For some learners, this may well be true. In other cases, language learners simply cannot imagine learning to comprehend without attempting to speak, because they have never given it a try. In any case, the issue is controversial, with worthy supporters on both sides. I am a strong believer in what is called *delayed oral production*. I believe that most people will learn far more quickly if they concentrate heavily on learning to *comprehend* during the early days of language learning. But you may not agree. If you prefer to start speaking during your first session, you should still follow the sequence of first learning to understand words and sentences, and then basing your speaking attempts on what you have learned to understand. For example, once you understand the expressions which the LRP has used in describing the pictures, you can say those things yourself, perhaps in reference to new pictures where those expressions make sense. In some of my suggestions I recommend you respond to the LRP by pointing at pictures or objects. You may prefer to respond orally, using words and phrases such as *here*, *there*, *this one*, *that one*, rather than merely by pointing. In connection with TPR activities, once you understand the TPR instructions, you can start learning to *say* what it was that you did when you responded to an instruction. For example, if the instruction is “Take off your glasses”, you can take off your glasses, and then say “I took off my glasses.” Or the LRP can perform the actions that you have learned the words for, and you can tell her what she did. But I don’t really recommend this during the early period of language learning, and I’ll have more to say about the issue shortly.

After your language session is over

Now you have finished your first session. You spent an hour or more preparing for it. The session itself lasted for one or two hours. And you tape-recorded the whole thing. Take a breather. Your work isn’t done.

USING TAPE-RECORDINGS OF YOUR SESSIONS

You can extend the value of your session considerably by wise use of the tape-recording you made during the session. You did make a tape, didn’t you? I find I get very clear tape recordings if I use lapel microphones. I like to use a stereo recorder with two lapel microphones in case I want to record two native speakers interacting, or to record myself and a native speaker interacting. I also like to use a double cassette recorder so

that I can copy sample bits of the session onto a second tape. This second tape will grow from day to day, as I add key excerpts of each day's session. I don't need to save all fifty instances when the LRP said "stand up" during the session. But during the final part of the initial TPR activity I had learned to respond to fifteen commands, and the LRP was rapidly using all of them (in random order), and I was rapidly responding to all fifteen (or however many) commands. Therefore, by dubbing the final few minutes of TPR instructions onto a new tape, I can save a complete record of the expressions I learned in the initial TPR activity of that session. I will similarly dub excerpts of the second (pointing) activity onto the same tape.

With the picture descriptions I may just dub the whole works over onto the abbreviated tape. I can listen to that several times: This is a man, this is a woman, etc. Keeping up with the descriptions and not losing my place is enough of a challenge at this point to force me to keep processing what I am hearing.

As I listen to the recording of the TPR activities, I can actually respond, or I may just recall how I responded during the session. I may even listen to the tape of each entire session a few times during the days following the session. I would hope to be adding a new session every day, but it is important to keep cycling through the taped excerpts of previous sessions.

In the coming weeks, you will be systematically focusing on a large variety of sentence patterns. You will always learn to understand the sentences during your session. However, you could easily forget much of what you learn, were it not for the fact that you keep cycling through the taped excerpts of your earlier sessions. As you listen to excerpts of an earlier session, you can recall what you were doing in the session as you processed and responded to what you heard. If you have difficulty maintaining concentration while listening to the tape, then you can actually perform the responses (for example, point to the appropriate picture upon hearing a sentence about it), as you listen to the tape.

DAILY RECORD KEEPING —MORE THAN JUST A FRILL.

It is important that you devote some time at the end of each day to record keeping. If the alphabet of the language you are learning is similar to the English alphabet (or some other alphabet you are already comfortable with), and if the spelling is closely tied to the pronunciation, then you can begin using the writing system at once. It may be that there is as yet no writing system for the language, or that the writing system is very different from any you have known before and quite difficult. In that case, you will be better off to postpone learning the writing system for awhile. For the sake of your record keeping, just write things down roughly using English letters and whatever symbols (say, accent marks) you find helpful. I am personally capable of writing things in a technical phonetic alphabet, but during the first days of language learning I don't worry about writing down the fine details. That is because I do not use what I write as a basis for my pronunciation anyway. My pronunciation (when I get around to speaking) will be based on what I have heard, not on what I wrote. The writing is for the purpose of keeping track of what I learned, and providing some visual reinforcement, which I find helpful.

One important component of your daily records should be a simple log of the vocabulary you have covered, with a rough English translation for each vocabulary item.

This will help you in keeping track of your progress in acquiring vocabulary, and will also assist you as you plan your subsequent sessions, since each session will include some review of previously learned items.

One of your goals can be to learn to recognize thirty new vocabulary items every day. That will be 150 per week. Thus after seven weeks you will be able to recognize over a thousand common vocabulary items. If you're more energetic, you can realistically go for fifty new vocabulary items per day, and thus learn a thousand items in a month. The key is to be well prepared, and to keep listening to your tapes and reviewing previously learned items in subsequent sessions.

You should also write out any observations you may have as to how the language is put together, or why you think certain forms of words may be used in some cases, and different forms in other cases. You can relate this to your goals for covering a broad range of sentence patterns, a matter which I will discuss at length below. You should also mention anything that puzzles you about how the language works.

You will also keep various checklists of ideas for your language sessions. Below I will suggest checklists that you can add to from day to day. You will use them as part of the basis for planning your language sessions. These include a checklist of situations in which you need to use the language, and topics which you need to discuss in the language. You can also have a checklist for special areas of vocabulary that may come to mind. You can go out and look around the community for ideas for vocabulary and examples of daily life situations, and add these to the checklists. I will provide you with many suggestions for vocabulary and sentence patterns to cover. These too should be used as checklists.

Another important component of your record keeping is a diary in which you describe your whole experience as a language learner each day. This will have various uses. For one thing, reading back over your diary as the weeks and months go by will help you to appreciate the progress you have made. For another thing, the diary will help you to share your experience with a language learning consultant who may help you, or with other language learners, who may also share their diaries with you. The discipline of diary writing will help you to maintain a high level of self-awareness, which is important in the ongoing process of planning and self-evaluation.

PLANNING EACH SESSION.

In preparing for every session, you can plan thirty new vocabulary items, and plan to review at least that many that you have previously learned. In your plan, you will want to include at least three different kinds of language learning activities, as we did in your first session. For example, you might do one activity using vegetables. In a second activity, the LRP may have you get up and go to different parts of the house and do things that are characteristically done there. Third, you may do something with pictures. The exact nature of your three (or more) activities will change from day to day. Keep the sessions fun and interesting for both you and your LRP.

In addition to learning new vocabulary, you will also design your sessions to highlight specific sentence patterns. I'll give examples below. Can you see why you need to spend at least an hour per day getting ready for your time with your LRP?

In summary, each session should include

- 1) Activities that increase your vocabulary.
- 2) Activities that increase your ability to understand different types of sentences.
- 3) Review of material covered in earlier sessions, integrated into what you are now learning for the first time.

YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

During this early phase of language learning your daily activities might include:

- 1) Spend one to two hours planning and preparing for your session with your LRP.
- 2) Spend one to two hours with your LRP. Your LRP will follow your instructions and use the new language to communicate with you in ways that require you to *hear, process* and *respond*. You will tape record the session.
- 3) Go over the tapes, and copy summary excerpts to another tape.
- 4) Listen to the abbreviated tape meaningfully (that is, in conjunction with the same pictures, objects, or actions that you used in your session), a number of times.
- 5) Do your daily journal writing and record keeping.

Initially, you will be majoring on learning to *understand* the language. Thus your plan for your session will aim to increase your ability to recognize vocabulary, and to understand different sentence patterns. Later I will give you a lot of specific suggestions regarding vocabulary and sentence patterns to cover in your lessons.

This daily pattern will change with time. Eventually you will be spending more than two hours per day with LRPs, and less time going over the tapes of the sessions. The reason for this is that initially, working with a live speaker is very demanding, and both you and the live speaker tire easily. You can relax with the tape recorder, and process the language input from your session over and over. Once you get rolling in the language, you will feel a need for much more extended live conversational interaction with your LRP.

Some more advanced techniques for increasing your ability to understand the language

The kinds of activities I have been discussing so far may prove fruitful for a month or more. However, they will not quite make you a basic speaker of the language, even in terms of your comprehension ability. What I am about to suggest are techniques for moving to a new level. These activities can be thought of as helping to form a bridge between the time when you are a *bare beginner* and the time when you are a *non-beginner*. For that reason, I discuss them further in Thomson (1993a).

From your very first day, you are understanding statements and instructions in the new language. What is it that makes it possible for you to understand a language that you are just beginning to learn? It is the fact that the things that you and the LRP are seeing

and doing give you the meaning of the words and sentences that you are hearing. The LRP says, "This is a man," and you can *see* what she means.

Once you understand a few hundred vocabulary items and a lot of basic sentence patterns, you will be able to understand much that is said even when you don't "see the meaning" in front of you. But your ability to understand will still be limited, and you still need to use methods which make what you are hearing easy for you to process. Think of how TPR and pictures help you during the early weeks. They help you by drastically narrowing the possibilities you need to consider while processing a sentence. For example, suppose that during one of your first sessions your LRP says "Pick up the banana." You have in front of you a banana, a mango, a pineapple, and a guava. You hear "Pick up the banana" in the language, you process it, and you respond by picking up the banana. There were only a few possible things the LRP might have said at that point. The fact that the possibilities are limited is essential to your early ability to understand what is said. Now suppose three weeks later you are in a language session with four pictures in front of you, and your LRP says, "Before this picture was taken, this man hitched up his oxen." This sentence can only apply to one of the four pictures in front of you, since there is only one picture in which a man is using a pair of oxen. You think about what you heard, process it, and understand it. Once again, you are aided in your understanding by the fact that the possibilities of what might be said are limited to things which could be said about those four pictures. Granted you are now coping with a wider range of possibilities than when you were picking up pieces of fruit, but the possibilities are still restricted by the contents of the pictures, and this is a major aid to you as you seek to process what was said to you.

After a few weeks, you have become adept at understanding isolated sentences that are tied to things you see and do in the session. Now you want to work on understanding longer stretches of speech containing many sentences, and you want to be able to understand them without the aid of things you see and do in the session. This is a natural next step in your development of comprehension ability. The key to being able to understand long stretches of connected speech at this point is the same key that enabled you to understand all those isolated sentences: use techniques that restrict the number of possibilities which you need to consider. Have your LRP tell you things that have a reasonable degree of predictability. Some ways you can do this are to have the LRP tell you stories that you already know (from having heard them in English or another language), have the LRP give an account to a third party of something you and she did together, or have the LRP tell you all the steps in a familiar process.

If your LRP can read, you might have her read over a reasonably short English story, say in a children's book. Or you might read it to her. You should also make yourself familiar with the story, if you aren't already familiar with it. Then your LRP can retell the story to you in her language. On one occasion I had an LRP who was well versed in the Bible, as was I. During my third month of language learning he told me the entire Old Testament story of Joseph, in detail. I was able to follow a large portion of what he said, since I already knew the story. This provided me with practice in comprehending a stretch of speech which went on for a considerable period of time. Another possibility might be to watch a video drama together, and then have the LRP tell you the entire story in her language, perhaps on a subsequent day, to make it less boring.

You can engage in extra-curricular activities with your LRP, so that you will come to have a number of shared experiences. The LRP can recount to you any experience that you have shared. It is even better, certainly more natural, if she recounts it within your hearing to another person, preferably someone with a level of language ability comparable to your own. By all means, tape record it.

Recounting all of the steps in a process is called the *Series Method*. Here again, the speech is made easier to understand by the fact that each step in the process is relatively predictable, which drastically limits the range of possibilities you have to consider as you process what you hear. Consider all the steps in preparing a potato to be fried. You pick up a potato. You turn on a tap. You pick up a brush. You hold the potato under the running water. You rub the brush back and forth against the potato. The dirt that was on the potato is washed away. The water becomes dirty. The dirty water runs down the drain. You turn off the tap. You open a drawer. You take out a potato peeler. Etc. (You can finish the series as an exercise.) Ordinary life provides hundreds of ideas for series. If the series are based on every-day mundane processes, you can bet that the vocabulary you hear and learn will be vocabulary that a basic speaker should know.

Of course, as you listen to such extended stretches with understanding, whether they be familiar stories, accounts of shared experiences or series, or whatever, be sure that you capture them on tape so that you can listen to them many more times, and perhaps go over them with the LRP to identify spots you cannot understand, and learn what you need to know in order to be able to understand those spots.

Getting on with talking

So far I have mainly been talking about learning to comprehend your new language. This is because I take that to be your most crucial concern during your first two months, and especially during the first month. You can go on for days, or weeks, rapidly increasing your ability to understand the language with the help of well planned language sessions. But when do you start learning to *speak* the language in addition to learning to understand it? And how do you move from being someone who understands a lot to someone who speaks a lot?

How soon should I start talking?

As I mentioned earlier, this is controversial, and so there can be no hard and fast rule regarding how soon you should start devoting a portion of your language sessions to producing speech in addition to understanding it. Many people think that it is important to begin speaking from day one and are surprised to learn that there may be advantages to waiting awhile. In general, I encourage people to wait awhile to start speaking, but on the other hand, I try not to discourage anyone who strongly wishes to work at speaking the language right from the start. For myself as a language learner, I do not specifically avoid speaking a language in real-life situations to the extent that I am able to and need to. I even design some of my early sessions so that they feed into my real-life communication situations. For instance, since I found that I was buying vegetables often, I chose to learn names for vegetables in an early session. Since I used taxis, I did the role play described

above as a means of learning expressions which I might use in giving instructions to taxi drivers. So when I encourage you to concentrate exclusively, or almost exclusively, on learning to *comprehend*, I am referring to what you do *in your sessions* with your LRP, not so much in the outside world.

But, in general, you do not need to be in a hurry to start speaking the language during your first few weeks. That is entirely up to you. Postponing your production of spoken language has advantages. It also has disadvantages.

There are several advantages to delayed oral production. First, it takes awhile to begin hearing the new language really clearly. Some people refer to this as *tuning up* to the new language. It may take two or three weeks. It will be harder to use accurate pronunciation before tuning up than after, and you may begin developing poor pronunciation habits if you do a lot of speaking before you are tuned up to the language. Second, for many people, trying to respond to the LRP by speaking the new language significantly decreases the rate of learning. This may be partly due to the increased stress level. It may be partly due to the fact that it takes a lot of brain effort to recall vocabulary and phrases during the early days of language learning, so that the more you speak the language, the less brain energy you will have left for learning to comprehend new material. At any rate, if you are trying to both speak and comprehend during the early days of language learning, you are likely to cover less ground than if you concentrate on learning to comprehend only.

The advantages to delayed production would appear to relate mainly to the internal, psychological aspects of language learning. The disadvantages relate to external, social considerations. First of all, your LRP may not be totally sympathetic with the idea. She may feel that if you're not talking, then you're not learning. As I say, skeptical LRPs can become convinced of the value of what you are doing as they see your surprising progress in learning to understand their language. But this may be a hurdle to get over right at the beginning. Second, you may have real communicative needs that require you to speak already. Certainly, you need to be able to greet people, and show a certain degree of politeness. You may have certain absolutely essential needs, such as telling the taxi driver where you live. Third, you may have to interact with a number of speakers of the language who are expecting to see immediate evidence of your progress as a speaker of their language. Telling them that you can comprehend several hundred vocabulary items and many basic sentence patterns may not mean much to them. They would like to hear you speak, or at least you feel that they would.

I would encourage you to think of yourself initially as a baby bird in the nest. You need to grow before you can fly. To fly you need to be fed. Your nest is your home and other locations where you can work with your LRP or listen to your tape recorder. Your food is all the language material that you are learning to comprehend. You can eventually start flapping your wings in the nest. That is, you can start engaging in two-way communication with your LRP and thus developing basic conversational ability. Finally, you get out of the nest and start flying. With practice you become a proficient flyer. If you try to fly before you've grown feathers, it can be stressful. Why not minimize the trauma by staying in the nest for awhile. Of course, you do not want to stay in the nest more than is necessary, or you'll not learn to fly. It's a matter of balance.

How long then, should you concentrate exclusively, or almost exclusively, on learning to *understand* the language before you start trying to *speak*, assuming you feel like waiting, as I am encouraging you to do? I think that for many people a month may be a good period of time for exclusive, or nearly exclusive, comprehension learning. The second month can be a mix of both comprehension activities and speaking activities. Now it may be that after a week or two (or less [or more]) you find that certain sentences or words just come rolling out of your mouth. You have a need to say something, and what you need to say happens to be right there on the tip of your brain right when you need it. And you just say it. Great. Don't bite your tongue. Do what feels natural.

If you feel that it is important that you *talk* a lot in your early sessions, in addition to learning to *understand* (and in addition to *talking* in real-life situations), then you'll find that you can do a lot with pictures, objects and actions. You'll want to make a point of learning to use *power tools*, as described in the section on *survival expressions*. These enable you to use the language as a means of learning more of the language.

General Principles in Starting to Speak the Language

Two key features of real speech are that it is *creative*, and it is *cooperative*. When I say that speech is creative, I mean that people create the sentences they need as they need them. Many, if not most, of the sentences people utter are ones that they have never heard or uttered before and will never hear or utter again. Such creative speech is spontaneous and, it appears to the native speaker, usually effortless. Speech is cooperative in the sense that the speaker and hearer need to work together. The speaker doesn't speak in a way that will leave the hearer out in the cold. The speaker guesses at what the hearer already knows and bases what s/he says on that. The hearer may give verbal or nonverbal indications as to whether s/he understands the speaker. The hearer may ask for clarification or attempt to confirm that he or she has understood correctly. In the context of second language learning, this cooperative process is what I referred to above as the "negotiation of meaning".

Survival expressions

As noted above, people often feel a need to know how to use certain expressions in the new language right away. This includes greetings (*Hello*) and leave-takings (*good-bye*). One speaker of an African language informed me that the way to greet someone in his language is to tell the person what s/he is doing at the time you meet him or her. Obviously, you would need to know a lot of the language in order to be able to greet people appropriately regardless of what they happen to be doing. But usually, there will be simpler means of greeting people. You may learn other expressions which serve to grease the social gears. A good way to get these is to have two native speakers do brief role-plays. For example, they can pretend they are strangers meeting for the first time, and they can pretend that they are good friends meeting in the market. The first several things they say in each case will probably fall into the category of things that grease the social gears. Another thing language learners are anxious to learn is ways to say *thank you*. But as to when is it necessary or appropriate to thank people, that will vary from culture to

culture. And saying *thank you* may not be as important as you think. It may be that gratitude is shown in other ways, such as by facial expressions. It is also helpful to know simple ways to say *I'm sorry*, though again, each culture will define the exact circumstances under which such expressions are used.

Other survival expressions are ones you need in order need to get around. This might include expressions you need to use in order to use public transportation, to purchase goods in a shop, to eat in a restaurant, to rent a hotel room, to ask directions, etc. A common strategy, which I don't really recommend, is to memorize fifty or a hundred, or perhaps two hundred, survival expressions as your first effort toward language learning. I recommend, rather, that you learn the bare minimum initially. That is because when you don't yet know much of the language, you don't really know what you are memorizing. You just learn to repeat a long stream of sound like a parrot, but you are not really using the words and phrases in the way that a true speaker does. If you really like memorizing, why not wait until you are clearly hearing the words within the sound stream and hearing them with some comprehension? Then your memorizing will be meaningful.

There are two alternatives to memorizing. One alternative is to record your fifty or one hundred survival expressions on tape, each one preceded and/or followed by the English (or other language) translation, and listen to it often. As the language starts becoming more meaningful to you, so will these expressions. You can later make a new tape without the English translation and perhaps relate each expression to a simple drawing that reasonably reminds you of the meaning. You can shuffle the drawings so that it takes some processing effort to relate each taped expression to the appropriate drawing. This will stimulate your mental language processor, and you'll absorb a lot of the detail of the survival expressions. When you need to use the expressions in real life, you may end up using a chopped down version, but it will be a chopped down version that is your very own, and this will probably contribute more to the development of your speaking ability than just spouting a flowery expression like a parrot, not knowing exactly what you are saying. If you follow the procedure I am suggesting, you will quickly acquire a lot of survival language, in synch with your gradually evolving speaking ability.

The other alternative to memorizing survival expressions is to learn them through role-play. That is what was going on in the example above where you set up the model of several city blocks and pretended you were a taxi driver, and that your LRP was a customer giving you instructions. This is reverse role-play. You want to learn expressions a customer would use to talk to the taxi driver. But you do not pretend that you are the customer, even though that is the role you need to be able to function in. The reason you don't pretend you're the customer, is that you wouldn't know what to say. So you take the role of the driver, and thus you get to hear what the customer says, and in the process you learn what customers say. In the pretend driver role you can hear, process, and respond physically by moving the car about the model town. With suitable props you can use reverse role-play to learn expressions which will be useful in just about any communication situation which you face during your early period of language learning. For example, what props might you use with your LRP in performing a role-play aimed at helping you learn how to talk to waiters in restaurants?

One special group of survival expressions are sometimes called *power tools*. These are expressions in the language that help you to learn more of the language.

Examples are “What is this called?”, “What is that person doing?”, “What is that thing used for?”, “How do you say X”, “Could you repeat that?”, “Could you say it more slowly?”, “Could you say it a few times in a row?”, “Could you say it into the tape recorder?”, etc. You may be surprised to learn that you can acquire these entirely through comprehension activities. You use reverse role-play. You pretend that your LRP does not know English and that you are her LRP, helping her learn English. She asks you the power tool questions in the language you are learning, perhaps in connection with pictures, and you respond by telling her how to say things in English. She says (in the language you are learning), “What is this called?” and you respond (in English), “It’s called a hammer.” She says (in her language), “Could you say it more slowly?”, and you respond (in English) “It’s a h-a-a-a-mer-r-r.” Follow the familiar principles of comprehension learning activities: only introduce one new power tool at a time; use lots of repetition of each new expression, randomly dispersing it among already familiar expressions, etc. It will be good if you do this role play before your first hour of heavy duty two-way communication.

Heavy duty two-way communication: a new phase begins

It is common for people to take formal language courses, perhaps for several semesters, and then find that when faced with a real live monolingual speaker of the language they thought they were learning, they are able to open their mouths, but they have difficulty getting anything to come out of those wide open mouths. Recall that to be able to speak a language means to be able to take a thought and express it through words, even though you may have never expressed that exact thought through words before. So far, you have been concentrating on learning to understand the language you are learning. Now you have absorbed hundreds of vocabulary items and a good range of sentence patterns. You have the bricks and mortar that you need to make conversation. That is good. What would have been the point of trying to seriously speak the language when you hardly knew how to say a single thing?

However, you only learn to speak by speaking. You may have known children of immigrant parents who could understand the parents language fluently, but could not speak it at all. The reason they could not speak the language was that they had never tried to speak it. To become a speaker, you must try to speak. You must try to speak a lot, over a long period of time.

BITING THE BULLET, OR TAKING THE PLUNGE, WHICHEVER YOU PREFER

So far you’ve been minimizing your trauma, mainly learning to comprehend the language by means of fun and games in the nest. Trying to speak too much too soon is believed to raise the stress level and slow the learning process for many people. How would you like a medium-stress experience? You’ve got all those bricks and mortar in your brain. For your baptism of fire, you can conduct a session in which you bar yourself and your LRP from using any English (or any other language besides the one you are learning from the LRP) for a whole hour!

During that hour, there will be numerous times when you will have something you want to say and fail miserably in your effort to say it. Likewise your LRP will have things she wants to say to you, and despite her best efforts, and the desperate production of sketches, gestures and pantomime, she does not manage to get her point across. But you never break into English (or whatever) at those times. Rather, when you are unable to communicate what you intend, you jot down the idea you were unable to communicate in your notebook. Your LRP does likewise when, due to your limited comprehension ability, she fails to get her point across to you. That is, she makes a note in her notebook as to what she wanted to tell you that you were unable to understand. At the end of the hour you'll have a long list of things that you were unable to say, and she'll have a long list of things you were unable to understand.

I'll come back to those jottings in a minute. First, I want us to think about the experience of that hour. If you were really daring, you came to that hour without any preparation. Your goal is to learn to speak in an unplanned, unpredictable context. If you were nervous, you may have had a list of topics, such as "Life in my country," "What my childhood was like," "The summer of '59", etc. However, you did not spend *any* time reflecting on how you would discuss these topics. That is because you want to have to cope with your communication needs on the spot, as they arise. If you found you weren't getting anywhere, you may have jumped up and ran and grabbed a photo album, but it will be a photo album that you have never gone through with your LRP before. If you didn't have such a photo album, you may have grabbed a *National Geographic* or something. Having lots of pictures to scaffold your efforts at speaking and comprehending will make communication quite a bit easier. You may fall back on just doing a lot of language learning using the pictures and power tool expressions ("What is this woman doing? Why is she doing it? What will she do next?").

Now, back to those jottings. You have just come up with a list, rather two lists, of things you need to learn. Wasn't that useful? Those will feed into your next language session. First, you will want to go over those jottings. You'll find it fun to find out what it was that your LRP was trying to say that you were unable to figure out. She'll find it fun to learn what in the world you were trying to say at those times when she was unable to make heads or tails out of your speech.

You may find the idea of a whole hour of communication in the new language a bit frightening, especially if this is the first time you have seriously spoken this language. You may prefer to spend a half hour, broken by a ten minute recess when you can discuss the jottings you made, followed by a second half hour. Let the daring among us start with a whole hour, non-stop. The rest, including me, can break it into two halves with a ten minute recess midway.

INCORPORATING HEAVY DUTY TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION INTO YOUR DAILY LANGUAGE LEARNING

Let's assume that you have spent a month concentrating mainly on learning to understand the language, and now you are starting some serious speaking. It is time to increase the number of people you regularly talk to. After all, you can use several hundred basic vocabulary and many basic sentence patterns, perhaps somewhat brokenly.

Increasingly you will want to spend part of your “work day” in informal visiting. You might visit your LRP’s friends or family. Or you might visit neighbors or people with whom you have done business. Don’t be embarrassed to tell them that you are looking for opportunities to converse in the language. This may cause people to interpret conversing with you as doing you a favour. That is exactly what it is at this point. Believe me, it is work for them. You will probably end up owing some favours in return.

Something else I would urge you to strongly consider at this point is hiring a second LRP, this time one who does not know English (or any other language that you know well). You might then have two sessions per day, one with your first LRP, and one with your new one. This will allow you a lot more opportunity for conversational practice in the security of your nest.

SOME TECHNIQUES TO HELP YOU KEEP TALKING

When you first start trying to carry on extended talk, it can be agonizing. Eventually it gets easier. What makes it easier? Practice. Lots and lots of practice. Now your speech will be—well—it will be *your* speech. You’ll sound like someone who is just beginning, with great effort, to speak the language. Expect to make countless “mistakes”. Believe it or not, the main thing which will decrease your mistakes is not being corrected every time you make one, but simply talking and talking and talking, while all the time continuing to be exposed to speech that you can understand. Constant correction takes the focus away from communication. Encourage your LRP to allow you to make lots of mistakes, and focus on communication rather than on grammatical accuracy. Right now you need to loosen up your tongue. When your tongue is good and loose in your new language, you can start worrying about decreasing your errors. Remember, your goal right now is not to become a perfect speaker. Your goal is to become some kind of speaker. Later you can work on becoming a perfect speaker.

1) Learn to converse on chosen topics

With your first LRP, you want to continue achieving your daily goals for new vocabulary and sentence patterns, using comprehension learning methods. In addition, you can devote part of each session to free conversation. During your preparation time, decide on a topic—something you would like to be able to talk about outside of your sessions with friends or people you meet. In your session, attempt to conduct a conversation with your LRP on that topic. During the conversation, refuse to switch to English when you get stuck. Both of you should jot down the things you are unable to express or understand. After the conversation go over these jottings. In some cases the problem will be due to your not knowing specific words or phrases. In other cases there may be a sentence pattern that you need to learn.

Prepare comprehension activities for your next session through which you can learn these words or sentence patterns. (You may want to use home-made drawings, even simple stick figures, in the comprehension activities.)

The next day, you can attempt once again to have a conversation on that topic, or maybe conduct a conversation in which you talk about all you learned in connection with that topic the day before.

If you have a second LRP who does not know English (or any other language you already know well), then you will have another opportunity to have a lengthy conversation on the topic of choice. In addition, as you visit friends, you will have a third context in which to discuss the topic, now that you know how to discuss it.

3) Conversation practice through role-play.

In addition to learning to discuss a variety of important topics, you can now engage in elaborate role-plays. Your role-play with the model town and toy car was extremely simple and artificial. Now you and your LRP can have serious role-plays. Keep a list of all the situations in which you could use the language. One situation might be *hiring an employee*. You might have your two LRP's do a role-play of that situation, one of them pretending she is hiring the other. You could tape-record this and listen to the tape numerous times. You can go over it with either or both of your LRPs, discussing at length any parts you do not understand, discussing all that is said, and how it is said. Now, in your next session, you can take the opposite role from the one you have in real life and do the role-play with your LRP. Then you can take the actual role you have in real life and do the same role-play again with your LRP.

4) Use the series method, but you be the speaker.

I recommended the Series Method above as a way to keep the speech you hear somewhat predictable and thus easier to process. It is also useful as a means of keeping yourself talking. One problem with speaking is simply coming up with ideas of things to talk about. If you tell all the steps in a process, you will find that each statement you make will suggest the next statement in the series. You can use a series that you have already heard your LRP say, and perhaps tape-recorded and listened to several times. But remember, your point is not to memorize and talk like a parrot. So you would tell the series in your own words. Those will often be very close to the words your LRP used, but you are not saying the whole sentence from memory. Rather you are remembering the next step in the process, and saying it on the basis of *your* speaking ability. Alternatively, you can make up a series which you have not heard your LRP tell. This will turn up holes in your speaking ability. Don't stop while you're telling the series, but jot down a note as to the nature of any problems you have for later reference. Then go over your jottings with the LRP to find out how to say what you were unable to say.

5) Tell tales

You can tell your LRP any stories you know. These might be familiar children's tales, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*. Or they can be accounts of experiences from your past or present. It is a good idea each day, for awhile, to recount everything you did the day before. Again, you will make jottings whenever you are unable to say something that you want to say, rather than break back into English.

6) Focus on structure

At times you may feel troubled by some particular aspect of the language which you cannot get the hang of. We gave the example above of sentences which focus on a *past process in progress*, such as “When this picture was taken, *the man was ploughing.*” Imagine that this is a pattern that you find difficult. Then you should construct a comprehension activity to highlight this sentence pattern. Often this can be done using pictures in the manner I suggested above. Next you can use the same set of pictures, but change roles with your LRP, so that you become the speaker, and she responds by indicating which pictures you are describing. Finally, you can take out a new set of pictures and describe them for her, using the same sentence pattern with picture after picture. If you have fifty new pictures, you will use the pattern fifty times in extemporaneous communication.

With a little planning you can design an activity using TPR, pictures, the series method, or another activity so as to highlight any structure you wish to emphasize. Suppose you want to improve your ability to use a sentence pattern which has a meaning similar to English sentences with “used to”, as in, “I used to shop at the Bay.” As an exercise right now, think up a conversational context which would allow you to use this pattern over and over and imagine the form such a conversation might take.

It may seem that when you use activities to emphasize specific structures you are not really focusing on the structures themselves. Rather you are using the structure in communication. That is desirable, actually, because your goal is to be able to use the structure in communication, not to just produce it on demand!

BITING ANOTHER BULLET, OR TAKING ANOTHER PLUNGE, AS YOU WISH

Remember how hard it was for you to go cold turkey, abandoning English for a whole hour back when you first got into serious talking? Well, now that you’re a couple of months into your new language, take a deep breath. Make a covenant with your LRP that neither of you will use English (or whatever) for an entire week. To make it more fun, have your LRP actually live with you for that week, or you go and live with her. Believe me, it will be a riot.

After that, if you have not already done so, it will be time to develop a rich social life (see Thomson, 1993b for detailed suggestions). You are now in a position to begin new relationships entirely in the new language, even with people who know quite a bit of English (or whatever other languages you knew before you started learning this one). These relationships will be substantially different than the relationships you would build using English (or whatever), since you will be the communicative underdog. Good. Anybody can be a communicative overdog. It’s a privilege to be able to be the underdog. If you are learning a minority language, it’s speakers may find it refreshing to finally have the upper hand in communication with an outsider such as you. You may find it painful to be a broken, struggling speaker of a language. But others have lived through it. You will too. If you don’t have to, you’ll be tempted not to. So if at all possible, develop a good number of relationships with people who do not know English (or whatever). This is possible in most situations, though not all.

Ideas for vocabulary and sentence patterns to learn to comprehend in order to become a basic speaker

When I described your typical daily activities during the early weeks of language learning, you may have been wondering how you would ever come up with enough ideas for vocabulary and sentence patterns to fill all those daily language sessions. Most of the rest of what I have to say is my way of filling in those details. These details may help to clarify much of what I've said about the daily sessions of your early weeks. It might be good to go back and reread those earlier sections after you have surveyed my suggestions.

As I give you this long list of suggestions for vocabulary and sentence patterns to learn, don't expect to remember it all after the first reading. It will be there for you to return to over and over while planning your daily language sessions.

First, let's see where we've been. I have attempted to give a picture of your first two months as a language learner in which your first major emphasis is on learning to understand the language, believing that your short term and long term progress will be increased if you approach the language in that way. Using TPR, pictures, and simple role-play, you can quickly acquire enough vocabulary items and sentence patterns to qualify as a basic speaker of the language. Gradually you put increasing emphasis on using the language to talk, using vocabulary and sentence patterns that you have already learned to understand. By the end of the second month, your sessions may last for two or three (or more) hours during which you may devote half of the time to comprehension activities and half of the time to two-way conversational activities.

Now, regarding the areas of vocabulary and sentence patterns I am about to survey, unfortunately, I cannot be totally concrete. I cannot truly suggest vocabulary items and sentence patterns, since the ones that exist will vary considerably from language to language. Rather I will attempt to cover a healthy range of general categories of vocabulary and sentence patterns. I'll have to give English words and phrases and sentences in order to be concrete, but realize that the actual details of how English works will not match up very often with the details of how another language works.

To take just one example, we have past tense forms in English which are different from present and future forms. In some languages there will be no such thing as tense. Nevertheless, you need to know how to describe events which happened in the past. In other languages there may be two or three different kinds of past tense, such as remote past and recent past. I cannot foresee every such distinction you might encounter, and I won't even try. What I will do is provide enough possibilities so that if you learn to deal with everything I suggest, any other absolutely essential matters will come to your notice in the process. Remember, you're just trying to become a basic speaker right now. There are tons of details which you will not master during your first two months. I am trying to steer you toward the most important ones that you can reasonably master in that time period if you concentrate heavily on learning to understand and accept more modest goals when it comes to learning to speak.

Some ideas for vocabulary to learn to understand

Remember, you are not simply collecting and compiling vocabulary for eventual memorization. You are learning to recognize the vocabulary items when you hear them in speech. You want to be prepared to learn to recognize around thirty new items per day. If these are the names of common objects, then you will want to use the actual objects in the language session, if possible. Your LRP will have you manipulate these objects as a means of learning their names or as a means of learning the words for the actions that can be performed on, or with, those objects. To learn other kinds of vocabulary, you may need to prepare drawings or diagrams. You can plan to learn a wide variety of words by means of acting them out in TPR activities. For example, if you are learning words for emotions, you may respond to commands such as “Act happy; act sad; act disappointed,” and so forth.

WHICH VOCABULARY ITEMS SHOULD I LEARN FIRST?

Learning a language means learning thousands of vocabulary items. During your kick-start phase of language learning, you might aim to learn your first thousand vocabulary items. Remember, you will start out as a poor speaker and gradually improve. So the first vocabulary you’ll want to learn will be the vocabulary that even a poor speaker would know. Think of English for a moment. Some words would be important even for a poor speaker, while other words would be suitable only to a more advanced speaker. Consider the following words for facial expressions or facial movements: *blink*, *grimace*, *smile*. Which of those would be the most important for a poor speaker to learn first? Which would be least important? If you are like me, you feel that *smile* is more important than *blink* which in turn is more important than *grimace*. I can almost bet that you feel exactly the same as I do about this. In using English, people use *smile* more frequently than they use *blink*, while they do not use *grimace* very often at all. Native speakers of a language will probably have a good sense for which words are high frequency words, and which are less frequent, and, hence, less important. Hopefully, you’ll be able to convey to your LRP your desire to learn high frequency words at first.

Even without the help of your LRP, you will have some sense of what words are important. If you are aware of some area of vocabulary that you will have the opportunity to use in the near future, that will be a good area of vocabulary to work on. Suppose that vegetable vendors come to your door every day. Then it would make sense to learn to recognize the words for all the vegetables they sell. Buy a few of every vegetable, and use them in your sessions until you easily recognize all of their names. You are then free to speak them to the vendors, even if it is just a matter of showing the vendors what you have learned. While you are doing your daily planning, it is good to ask yourself what specific areas of vocabulary you can work on that are relevant to daily activities.

However, you cannot limit yourself to vocabulary items that obviously fit into your daily activities, or you will never learn a lot of high frequency, important vocabulary. For example, unless you are doing medical work, you may not *need* to talk about body parts all the time. But what sort of a “speaker” would you be if you didn’t know what a foot or hand is called? Follow your own instincts and those of your LRP in

deciding what are the essential vocabulary for even a poor speaker like you. (Perhaps instead of calling you a poor speaker, I should call you an on-the-way-to-becoming-a-good-speaker, or maybe a temporarily challenged speaker.)

SOME CATEGORIES OF VOCABULARY

I am going to suggest some categories of essential vocabulary for you as a basic speaker of the language. However, I encourage you to only refer to this list when you run short of ideas from other sources. Keep examining every aspect of your daily life in the situation where you will be using the language and identify the objects, places, and activities that will be important to you. Let those be your inspiration in choosing vocabulary to learn. If you are preparing for a session and you run short on ideas, scan the following suggestions. According to my most conservative tally, if the language you are learning is that of a group of people with a rudimentary material culture, these suggestions should yield five hundred vocabulary items. In most situations they should yield at least a thousand. It would be a good exercise for you, as homework, to flesh out these categories by listing a number of common English words that would fall under each one. Some “words” will actually be phrases. For example, *old man*, could be treated as a vocabulary item, since it is such an essential category of human beings. By way of contrast, *tall man* would not be considered a vocabulary item, although both *tall* and *man* would be important items.

If you keep a log of the vocabulary you learn, the items in your log will suggest new possibilities for vocabulary. The word for *water* may be in your log. Then think of all the things you can say about water: it flows, drips, freezes, boils, soaks into things, soaks through things, leaks out of things, people pour it, splash it, spray it, etc. etc.

WORDS FOR REFERRING TO HUMAN BEINGS

- Personal pronouns (I, you, them, we, etc., etc.—see discussion below)
- Major categories of humans by age and sex (man, girl, adult, youth, etc.)
- Major ethnic categories of humans (names for other tribes, nationalities, language groups)
- Categories of friends, acquaintances, and relatives (for relatives a family tree diagram can be used, or pictures of someone’s various relatives. Don’t expect the terms to correspond to the ones used in English. The whole kinship system may be wildly different.)
- Occupational or sociopolitical categories of people (plumber, president, beggar)
- Common personal names (It is a big help to be able to recognize and repeat, and easily remember, the names of people you meet.)

ITEMS USED BY HUMAN BEINGS

- Animals (draft animals, herded animals, pets, etc.)
- Items used for transportation (and their parts)

Items used in building and construction
 Cooking and eating utensils
 Food items
 Items for growing or acquiring food
 Household items
 Items found outside of houses
 Items related to education, learning, communication
 Items used for recreation or entertainment
 Clothing, make-up, jewelry, etc.
 Items used for religion or magic
 Items used for curing or healing
 Items used in trade or business

PLACES FREQUENTED BY HUMANS

Homes and their parts
 Locations near homes and residential areas
 Locations where food is gathered or grown, and their parts
 Locations where recreation, socializing, religious activities take place
 Locations where business transactions take place (for example, different types of shops and their parts)
 Place names (well-known villages, towns, cities, countries, lakes, rivers, etc.)

COMMON SUBSTANCES NOT YET COVERED

Water, earth, glass, rubber, plastic, paper, wood, stone, grass, thatch, etc.

NATURE

Geological objects (rivers, islands, mountains, etc.), and related phenomena (flowing rivers, landslides).
 Astronomical objects
 Meteorological phenomena
 Common plants and their parts/substances
 Common wild animals
 Common insects
 Body parts (major external and internal ones)
 Body substances

TIME

Today, tomorrow, morning, evening, hours of the day, days of the week, months, seasons

WORDS USED TO FURTHER DESCRIBE ALL OF THE OBJECTS COVERED SO FAR

Terms used in describing human beings' appearances
 Terms used in describing character/personality
 Terms used to describe emotional states, attitudes
 Other terms that come to mind in connection with all of the categories of humans mentioned above (Look them over in your vocabulary log!)
 Colours, sizes, shapes, textures, conditions, values, etc. of objects
 Quantities, including numbers (many, a few, ten, etc.)
 Qualifiers of adjectives (very, slightly, etc.)

THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO ALL OF THE OBJECTS COVERED SO FAR

Ways that the objects change their location or position (fall, roll, etc.)
 Ways that the condition of objects changes (burn up, wear out, etc.)

ACTIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS

Bodily actions (Look over all of the body part terms in your vocabulary log, and think of everything you can do with each body part, or what they do, as well as whole-body actions.)
 Things people do with or to any of the objects covered so far (go over all your object words for ideas)
 Things done by people according to their occupational categories (farmer, beggar, etc.)
 Things which people do to or for other people

ADDITIONAL SOURCES FOR BASIC VOCABULARY

Have several people remember every single action they performed, from rising in the morning to retiring at night on a given day.
 Observe common activities of daily life with all of the stages or steps in those activities; take photos if possible.

With the right activities in your daily sessions with your LRP, assuming you spend adequate time planning and preparing for those activities, you should find it possible to learn thirty new vocabulary items per day until you have learned your first

thousand items. Don't forget to keep a log of all the vocabulary you learn to recognize, and add to it during your daily record keeping period.

Sentence patterns you need to be able to understand as a basic speaker

As you plan your sessions with your LRP, you are thinking about more than vocabulary. You are also learning to understand sentences which contain the vocabulary items. You plan your sessions so that in most of them one or more segments of the session highlights a particular sentence pattern or more than one pattern (perhaps two or three contrasting patterns). In the process, you will get exposure to many sentence patterns that you didn't specifically plan on. For example, the sentence patterns for various types of questions ("Where did you go?" "What did you see?" "When did you return?") may be on your list as something you plan to tackle at some time in the future. When that time comes, you may discover that you have already learned many of those question patterns while you thought you were working on something else. You may have learned to understand questions about locations while you were learning to talk about the rooms in your house with the aid of your sketched floor plan. The suggestions below are intended as a checklist. If you come to one of my suggested types of sentence patterns and feel that you have already learned to understand such sentences, then just check it off. I really don't intend for people to cover the suggestions exactly in the order given. It is good in general, just the same, to gradually move from simpler patterns to more complex ones, as I have done.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

What we are dealing with now takes us into—gasp—grammar. At a very broad level, there are similarities in the grammar systems of different languages. An expert can see that. It may be far less obvious to the language learner, who may be unable to see the forest for the trees. For many languages, published descriptions of the grammar do not exist. If a published grammar description does exist, it may seem overwhelming the first time you look at it. Once you are well on your way into using the language as a communicator, you'll find that all that grammatical detail is not as bad as you thought it was when you first looked at it. As your speaking ability grows, you'll be amazed how much of that grammar just becomes a part of you. What is left will be easier to tackle. You don't need to worry about everything all at once. You want to start with simple things, and build up gradually to more complex ones.

You may hear comments about the complexity of some aspect of the language you are learning, comments such as, "There are hundreds of verb forms." What exactly that means depends on the language. But I suspect it is never as bad as it sounds. There will be certain forms that are the most important ones, and the less important ones will follow patterns. It is impossible to go into detail on this, but take my word for it.

There may be a lot of irregular forms. In English we form the past tense of a verb by adding *-ed*. For example, *walk* becomes *walked*, and *talk* becomes *talked*. However there are some verbs that have an irregular past tense. That is, they don't follow any rule.

The past of *go* is *went*. No matter. Just learn the irregular forms as separate vocabulary items. So what if it adds a few dozen vocabulary items?

In some languages there may be a lot more irregularity. So, for example, given the present tense form of a verb, it may be impossible to predict exactly what the past tense form will be (though there will be some similarity). That would mean that for every verb you would have to learn two forms, one for present tense, and one for past tense. Even then, it is likely they will fall into groups that behave similarly. (The irregularity may not necessarily have to do with tense—I just use that as an example of irregularity in general, even irregularity in words other than verbs.)

Yes, some parts of some languages can be very complex, but you don't have to get everything perfect to become a basic speaker. You'll have lots of time to grapple with the complexity, little by little. In general, this complexity will not make it harder for you to learn to *understand* the language. Once you are hearing the language with good understanding, you'll hear those complex forms over and over, and they will start to become familiar. Later on you may really want to get every detail right in your own speech, but remember, we are only considering the initial month or two. Right now your goal is to learn to understand enough basic sentence patterns that people can generally get their meanings across to you, with effort, and you can generally get your meanings across to them, with their help.

Another area of complexity has to do with nouns falling into different classes. For example, in French every noun is said to be either masculine or feminine. Some languages have several classes of nouns that are largely unpredictable. The noun class is important because you need to know it in order to know which form of adjective or verb or some other word to use with that noun. Fortunately, you don't have to know the class a noun belongs to in order to *understand* the language. The native speaker who speaks to you will do it correctly, and you will be able to understand what is said. Over the long term, it will be challenging for you to develop accuracy in using noun classes when you are the speaker, but while you are just a basic speaker you can expect to make mistakes, knowing that they will not usually interfere with communication.

In general, no matter how much people howl over the alleged complexity of some language, that complexity will affect the ease with which you learn to *understand* the language far less than it will affect the ease with which you learn to *produce* it in speech, and your ability to speak *intelligibly* will be affected less than your ability to speak *accurately*. So have no fear. You can move right ahead with rapidly learning to comprehend a lot of the language. Then you can move right into being a struggling, inaccurate, but intelligible speaker. Finally, you can gradually move on to being a fluent and accurate speaker. Remember, all we're concerned with right now is becoming struggling speakers, albeit genuine speakers.

Before talking about different categories of sentence patterns, we ought to think for a moment about the different functions of sentences. The patterns serve the functions. Three of the major functions of language are to get people to do things (this involves commands and requests), to get people to give you information (this involves questions), and to give people information (this involves making statements). As you work on the types of expressions described below, using the types of methods described above, you are likely to involve yourself in all three of these broad functions of language. However,

at this stage there is an over-riding function in the LRP's use of the language with you, and that is to enable you to learn the language. The LRP is saying much of what she says with a view to helping you to learn things you did not know before, to strengthen your knowledge of things you have previously learned, to find out what you have successfully learned, and to allow you to demonstrate your learning and to feel good about it. The LRP will not have thought all of this through in these terms, but I can just about guarantee you that these will be among her main concerns, and increasingly so as you increasingly train her.

When it comes to the actual details of the grammar systems of different languages, there is no way I can give specific suggestions of things to cover in your sessions with your LRP, since languages vary widely at just about every point. Fortunately, I can give suggestions that are likely to lead you into learning to comprehend a good variety of sentence patterns in any language. That will help you to become a basic speaker. From there on, the language will lead you more and more deeply into itself. You just have to get a foothold. Become some kind of a speaker. Then communicate a lot with people for a long time. You'll become a good speaker eventually.

So let's consider some of the kinds of sentence patterns that you will want to learn to understand as a basic speaker of the language. In each case I will give examples of sentence patterns that might be used with TPR (usually object manipulation) and/or pictures (either loose, or pasted in a book). These two techniques tend to be enough to cover just about any sentence pattern. I find that either technique by itself is not enough, but where one technique fails, the other typically comes to the rescue.

My suggestions (usually in the form of English sentences such as "When this picture was taken, it was about to rain") are mainly there to show you that it is possible to learn these sentence patterns by these comprehension learning techniques. If you come up with your own techniques and approaches to specific patterns, that's even better. If you attempt to follow my suggestions, you'll need to extend them to include numerous examples. You will do that during your preparation for your language sessions. As an exercise, why don't you make up a few of your own example sentences each time you read one of mine. That will increase your confidence that you can do it. In your sessions you'll give your LRP a few illustrative examples (in English, say) of the sentence pattern you are interested in. She will then make up sentences for picture after picture, following the general pattern you suggested. Thus, if you have a hundred pictures, she may make up a hundred sentences. She will be describing the pictures to you or referring to them in one way or another, and you will hear what she says, process it in your brain, and respond in some way.

LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND SIMPLE DESCRIPTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS

Remember, you are not going to use the following suggestions as a guide to collecting pretty sentence patterns for your notebook. Your activities are aimed rather at enabling you to *understand them when you hear them in speech*. And you learn to understand them in speech by having the experience of understanding them in speech over and over during your language sessions.

BARE BONES

Since languages are complicated, it helps to begin by restricting yourself to a small subset of the more essential sentence patterns. These then serve as a skeleton. Some complexity cannot be avoided even at the outset. Our goal is to keep it manageable.

Learning to understand sentences that identify and describe

This is a logical starting point. When the LRP tells you in the new language “This is a man,” she is not really telling you that the person is a man, since you can see that for yourself. Rather she is informing you that men are called “X” or “Y” or whatever they are called. Likewise, when she asks you “Where is the man?”, it is not because she wants to know where the man is. She is looking at him. She wants you to show that you understand the word by which men are referred to. (Such questions are sometimes pejoratively referred to as “display questions,” since the point is to get you to display your understanding rather than to get you to supply information that the speaker needs.)

There may be languages in which it is unnatural to say “This is a man” when what is meant is “These guys are called ‘men’.” Assuming this is not the case, your early lessons will contain many simple descriptions of objects. At first, this may simply involve naming the object, as in “This is a man.”

Techniques: You will be hearing lots of identificational sentences from your first language session. Going through your photos the LRP can tell you “This is a man, this is a woman, etc.” There will also be plural cases: “These are some boys”.

The LRP can also use simple identificational sentences with the objects you manipulate in your sessions. “This is a pencil. These are some pencils.”

Combining descriptive words with names for objects

In addition to learning to recognize names for objects, such as pencil, cup, string, you can easily learn to recognize complex descriptions which include things like colour, size, shape, condition, or quantity of objects. This is also a good time to cover words like *this* and *that*, if they exist.

You will also want to learn to understand sentences in which combinations of objects are named together: “Take *a green pencil and a red pencil*”.

Techniques: The LRP will use object manipulation instructions such as “Take *a green pencil*. Take *two red pencils*. Take *a long yellow string*. Take *ten small nails*, and a *large nail*. Take *some of the screws* and *all the nails*.”

Simple instructions

Before going on with identifications and descriptions, we need to parenthetically think about instructions, since they are one of the main means by which the LRP will teach you vocabulary and sentence patterns. For example, while teaching you by means of the descriptive sentence “This is the bathroom,” she may test your understanding by saying “Point to the bathroom”. Giving instructions involves sentence forms that are used to issue commands and requests. These are dangerous sentence forms. I don’t mean to

make you paranoid, but in real life language use, it is in the area of issuing commands and requests that people are the most cautious about not offending one another, and not embarrassing themselves (see Brown and Levinson 1978). If I were teaching someone English by TPR, I would be tempted to use simple command forms: “Stand up; Sit down; Stand up when I step in front of the girl wearing a green blouse,” and so forth.

But now imagine that the people I am teaching go into a restaurant and want someone to hand them a newspaper that is lying on a vacant table. They can say “Gimme that newspaper.” But that would sound abrupt and rude. A native speaker of English would say something such as “Could I bother you to hand me that paper?” However, it would be strange if my TPR sessions consisted entirely of sentences like “Could I get you to stand up? Would you mind sitting down? When I stand in front of the girl wearing a green blouse, I’d appreciate it if you would stand up, if you don’t mind.” In terms of how we use English, such polite forms of request would be odd during TPR exercises. That is because it would sound as though I, the speaker, needed the person I was addressing to stand up, sit down, etc., and that I felt I was imposing on the person. That is, it would sound as though I were trying to get the person to do these things for my benefit.

In many languages similar dilemmas will arise. Depending on the language and culture, there may be far more concern for politeness than there is in English. In other languages the ways of being polite may be less obvious, but they will still be there. I have two suggestions for coping with this dilemma. First of all, have the LRP use the most polite forms that still sound natural when giving you instructions. There is no point in having the most impolite forms be the main ones you hear. Second, use role-plays for some of your TPR exercises. The LRP might instruct you to remove books from your bookshelf pretending that they are items in a shop which she wishes to look at or purchase. Now it will be more natural for her to use more elaborate polite forms: “Could you please show me the red book on the top shelf? And I’d like to see the brown one just below it.”

Apart from these concerns about politeness, learning to recognize the command forms of sentences should not be too difficult.

Techniques: TPR. You may find that there is a different form depending on whether the command is issued to a single person or to two people. If you have a co-learner, then this contrast will emerge naturally. The LRP can vary the command between the singular form and the plural form, and the two of you can respond accordingly.

Identification and description of actions and experiences

This is where you go beyond hearing “This is a man” and “This is a hammer”, and hear things such as “This man is holding a hammer”.

Techniques: Recall that I suggested that ideal pictures for this stage of language learning would involve people as central characters, and the people would be involved with inanimate objects or other people. If you began by using the pictures to learn to recognize the words for people and then the words for objects they are using or are otherwise involved with, you will be in a position to use the same pictures to learn expressions which describe what the people are doing with or to the inanimate objects.

The words for man, woman, boy, girl, etc. are easier to learn than the words for the objects they are using or otherwise involved with, since every picture has a man,

woman, boy, girl, etc. and there are only five or ten words to learn (including plural forms). Learning to recognize words requires lots of repeated use of each word. Since there are lots of pictures of men, women, etc., you are guaranteed lots of repetition by the time you have gone through fifty or a hundred pictures. In the case of the objects the people are using or otherwise involved with, there may be only one picture of a given object. Here the LRP will need to drill you by asking you questions: “Where is the hammer, where is the saw, where is the stove? The saw? The hammer? The table? The stove?”. You follow the principle of only introducing one or two new items at a time, and drilling on them until you respond easily when you hear the new items randomly interspersed among items you have learned earlier.

Once you are familiar with the words for the people in your pictures and the objects they are involved with, it will be a simple step to understanding statements about what those people are doing to, or with, those objects.

Understanding who is doing it to whom.

Consider the sentence “This dog is chasing this cat.” (I’m assuming you have a picture of a dog chasing a cat, of course.) This sentence involves a dog, a cat, and an act of chasing. One animal is doing the chasing. Linguists would say that the animal who is actively, willfully, doing the chasing is the *agent*. The other animal is getting chased. That animal is the *patient*. Technically, the cat is an *experiencer*, since it is aware that it is being chased, but we can use the term *patient* broadly to mean “the one or thing directly affected by the action of the agent”. So we have an agent chasing a patient. Since the cat is the one directly affected by the action (chasing) of the agent (the dog), the cat is the patient. Without looking at the picture, going only on the basis of the sentence “This dog is chasing this cat,” how can we know that the agent is the dog and the patient is the cat? Of course, we already know that dogs chase cats and cats don’t chase dogs. This is called *real-world knowledge*. Real-world knowledge will often help you to understand sentences in the new language. But you can also tell that the dog is the agent and the cat is the patient from the way the sentence is put together, and in the long run that is more important for you as a language learner. Simple English sentences typically have the agent (*this dog*) followed by the verb (*is chasing*) followed by the patient (*this cat*). Thus, even though it violates your real world expectations, you can still understand a sentence such as “That cat is chasing that dog.” You will understand that the cat is the agent (doing the chasing) and the dog is the patient (getting chased), because of the order in which they occur in the sentence.

Now different languages will use different means of indicating who is doing the chasing and who is getting chased. The evidence may be found in the order of the words, as in English. It may be found in special markings on the nouns (called case markings). It may be found in markings on the verb which somehow tell you which animal is doing the chasing and which one is getting chased. If you are interested in more detail, you need to take a linguistics course that deals with grammar from a cross-language standpoint. My main point here is that you need to learn how to tell who is doing what to whom in sentences in the language.

There are some sentences which appear to have a subject and an object in English but where the subject is not doing anything to the object. An example is *Margie likes my*

sister, where the subject is *Margie* and the object is *my sister*. In this sentence the subject, *Margie*, is an experiencer, and not an agent. Make sure you include such sentences among those you learn to comprehend, as they may behave differently from other sentences with subjects and objects.

In sentences with subjects and no objects (*intransitive* sentences), there are at least two types of subjects to consider. Some subjects are agents, that is, doers, like *Margie*, in the sentence *Margie shouted*. Other subjects do not *do* anything, but rather they have something happen to them. An example is *tree*, in the sentence *The tree fell*. In some languages words like *sick*, and *angry*, are actually verbs with non-agent subjects. (In other languages they are adjectives.)

Techniques: Early on, you may concentrate on learning to understand sentences with agent subjects and patient objects. Your collection of pictures provides a good opportunity for this. Your LRP can take several dozen pictures in which someone is holding something or someone else. She can describe pictures in random order. Your job is to point to the picture being described. “A woman is holding a baby; a boy is holding a ball; a man is holding a hammer;” and so forth. Other verbs which can be used with many pictures are *using*, *touching*, *looking at* (or *seeing*). If there is a verb with a meaning similar to the English verb *have*, it can be used: “A woman has a baby; a boy has a ball;” and so forth. (Even if there is no verb similar to *have*, there will probably be some way to express the meaning of “This man has a hammer”. It will be an important sentence pattern for you to learn to recognize.) It is good if your LRP can use many sentences with the same verb, or one of a very small number of verbs. That way, only the subject and object (or agent and patient) will vary from one picture description to the next. This will enable you to work on learning to recognize who is doing the action and who or what the action is being done to without having to worry about learning a large number of verbs at the same time.

Often your TPR expressions such as “Pick up the nail” involve a verb with an object. What is commonly missing is the subject, since it is typically understood to be the one addressed (that is, the second person—*you*), and not explicitly mentioned. Just the same, these sentences give you lots of exposure to the verbs with objects. A slight variation is for you to have your co-learner perform actions and have your LRP describe them. You can later listen to the tape recording of this and try to envision in your mind’s eye what was happening in your session as your LRP uttered each sentence (Assuming you didn’t videotape the language sessions).

You and me and he or she or somebody

While you are learning how to understand who does what to whom, don’t forget the most important people: you, your LRP, and your co-learner(s). One of the earliest set of expressions you want to learn are the ones with meanings such as those expressed in English by the words *I*, *we*, *you*, *he/she*, *they*. In English, these are separate words which we call pronouns. In other languages they may appear to be attached to the verb. In some languages you will find that they are often omitted. The exact set of pronouns will vary from language to language. It should emerge as you work at learning them.

Techniques: You can learn to recognize the pronoun forms through TPR. For example, the LRP can tell you “Touch me. Touch them.” For second person (“you”)

forms, the LRP can use predictions rather than instructions: “She is going to touch *you*.” Your co-learner would then touch you, in fulfillment of the prediction. Or she could say, “*You* are going to touch her.” You need to hear each pronoun both as agent (who does the touching) and as patient (who gets touched). There should be a number of verbs in addition to *touch* which can be used for this purpose: *push, pat, pinch, punch, look at*. Be sure to also include reflexive forms as in “Touch yourself; pat yourself,” and reciprocal forms, as in “Touch each other; pat each other”.

This is a case where it is good to have several learners involved at the same time. Once when I was doing some beginning Arabic learning with an LRP I found it helpful that my co-learner was of the opposite gender from me, since gender was important in Arabic pronouns, even more so than in English. However, we realized that to work on the pronouns we really needed six co-learners, three male and three female, in order to cover all of the possibilities. I have been known to drag all six of my children into the room to use in a session where the co-learners were my wife and I. (We later wished that our children had been able to participate in all of the learning, rather than just being used as props for learning pronouns or kinship terms.)

Again, you can have the LRP describe what people do in addition to telling people to do things. Thus you, your co-learner, the two of you, the LRP, the LRP and you, the LRP and your co-learner, or all three of you, can perform actions, and the LRP can describe them (“You are doing X” “She is doing Y” “We are doing “Z”). Again, if there are four or five co-learners for this there will be more possibilities and more flexibility.

To whom, where, with what, with whom, from where, to where, for whom and whose?

Now, I have so far encouraged you to learn to recognize who is the subject in a sentence and who is the object (or at least who is the agent and who is the patient). You should plan activities with your LRP through which you learn to do this with sentences in which the subject or object is a noun (*man*), a personal name (*John*), or any of the pronouns (*I, me, you, they*, etc.). Remember, you are spending at least an hour in planning before each session. Hopefully, you have a co-learner so the two of you can demonstrate to the LRP what is desired, whenever the LRP gets confused.

You also want to go beyond recognizing nouns and pronouns as **subjects** and **objects** of sentences. They can also be **indirect objects**: “Give the green cup *to me*, and give the glass *to her*”. They can be **beneficiaries**: “Draw a circle for me.” They can be parts of **location phrases**: “Put the round paper *in front of John*, and put the long paper *in front of yourself*.” They can be **possessors** “Pick up *my* banana; Place it beside *that woman’s* banana”. They can be **instruments** as in “Pick up the banana *with the fork*.” Or they can be associates “Walk across the room *with your husband*.” Other important functions of nouns in sentences include the **source** from which a movement begins, and the **goal** to which a movement is directed: “Walk *from the table* and *to the door*.”

Techniques: TPR. Most of this will be object manipulation. Pictures are among the objects that can be manipulated, and illustrative commands are given in the above paragraph.

In connection with pictures, the LRP can make statements involving locations. Many people and objects in the pictures are in front of, behind, beside, near, and far from,

other objects in the pictures. The LRP should include statements which simply indicate the location of the object or person “This man is in front of this tree.” The LRP should also include statements regarding where things are happening: “This man is working in front of this tree.”

More on possessors and possessions

In the previous paragraph, *possessor* was mentioned as one of the roles a noun can have. Another role is that of *possession*, as *dog* in the phrase *John’s dog*. You need to learn to understand sentences in which the possessor is a pronoun, or pronoun-like (*my dog, your dog, our dog, etc.*, covering the whole range of possibilities you find in that particular language), and sentences in which the possessor is a regular noun (*the man’s dog, the woman’s cat, etc.*).

Just in case there are any differences in how they are expressed, include three types of possessions: kinship terms (*my father, my wife, etc.*), body part terms (*your hand, her face, etc.*) and typical nouns (*our book, your friend’s dog, etc.*)

Techniques: You can easily learn to understand this type of expression using TPR: “Point to Joe’s Father” (you can use Joe’s family tree diagram), “touch her shoulder,” “Take my pencil,” “Put your green pencil in front of her.” Your LRP can also use pictures for this; “Where is the man’s foot?”, “Where is his hammer?”, etc.

The manner of action

Actions are sometimes described with mention of how they are performed: quickly, slowly, sadly, happily, repeatedly, carefully, carelessly, accidentally, purposefully. Here’s some more homework: add as many manner words to this list as you can think of.

Techniques: TPR is commonly used to learn to understand manner words: “Stand up quickly”, “Sit down slowly”. When I use a picture book, I always like the LRP to tell me to turn the page when the time comes that she wants to go on to the next page. This can be combined with manner words: “Turn the page carefully.”

ADDING A LITTLE BIT OF MUSCLE

Suppose you have now learned to comprehend all the language patterns required to express the concepts I have discussed so far. For each pattern you will have heard, processed and responded to scores, if not hundreds, of sentences fitting the pattern. By now, the LRP can tell you about many or perhaps most situations or events, describing them as they occur, provided you know the appropriate vocabulary, and she can instruct you to perform many complex actions, again, assuming you have the vocabulary. This is a good start. Much of what you will learn from now on will be modifications of things you already know.

All this time you’re advancing on two fronts. You are doing activities whose central purpose is to increase the number of vocabulary items you can recognize, especially nouns, verbs, and adjectives. You are also engaging in learning activities

which will enable you to comprehend a basic range of sentence patterns. More and more, as we go along, it will be likely that some of the things we discuss will be things you have already learned. Then you can just check them off. Otherwise, one by one, you can work these things into your sessions with your LRP.

Dealing with the past

Now in connection with your pictures and other activities that required you to hear, process and respond, you will have learned to recognize a good stock of nouns (*farmer*), verbs (*ploughing*) and adjectives (*wet*). It may be that in the language you are learning pictures are described in a form that you can think of as “present tense”, as in “This farmer is ploughing in a wet field”. You also want to start recognizing forms that describe things that happened in the past. The system for indicating such time-related properties of expressions will vary greatly from language to language. It may also be complex, if you worry about all the details. So it may not be a good idea to worry about all the details, or all the possible forms. Rather, at this point, you will concern yourself with the main uses of the main forms.

Techniques: With your pictures, you may be able to get these past time sentence patterns by providing a frame, such as “When this picture was taken—”. That is, with each picture, the LRP says things like “When this picture was taken this farmer was ploughing a field.” If you have a hundred pictures, you will quickly hear a hundred sentences with familiar verbs in this type of past description form. You may get another type of past description form by using the frame “On the day when this picture was taken—” or “During the week when this picture was taken—”. In English, for example, this might yield “During the week when this picture was taken, this man ploughed a field”. Can you see the difference in the verb form in these English examples? You may or may not find such a difference in another language.

You can also experience past description forms of sentences in the context of physical activities. For example, your co-learner might perform actions, and your LRP will then tell you what your co-learner just did. Or it might be what you just did, or what the LRP just did, and so forth. In this way you may be able to combine past description forms with different pronouns, which may be interesting in its own right, and is essential to learn in any case.

Talking about the future

An early practical need is to understand how people make commitments and predictions. “I’ll come visit you tomorrow” is a commitment. “My mother is coming tomorrow” is a prediction.

Techniques: If the LRP naturally describes your pictures in a present time form (“This man is ploughing”), then she may be able to make a statement about what the person will do next. If you are focusing on learning to comprehend the forms used to talk about the future, you might want to keep the other content of what the LRP says relatively simple. For example, you could simply use the verbs for *sitting* and *standing*. If a person is sitting, the LRP can tell you that the person will stand up. If the person is standing, the LRP can tell you that the person will sit down. Similarly you could use the verbs for

working and *resting*. Or if you have already developed a large recognition vocabulary you could have your LRP simply make predictions about what the person or persons in the picture will do next (after they finish doing what they are doing in the picture): “In this picture, this man is ploughing. Soon *he will go home.*”

You can also learn to understand future time forms through TPR and object manipulation. Your LRP can tell you what she is going to do and then do it. Or she can tell you what your co-learner is going to do, and your co-learner fulfills the prediction. In similar ways, you can learn to understand future forms with a variety of pronouns.

Making general statements about things that happen, or used to happen

Some statements do not concern situations or events that are happening at the moment, or have happened in the past, or that are supposed to yet happen. Rather they deal with what characteristically happens. Examples in English are “I shop at Piggly Wiggly” and “Dogs eat meat”. In the case of “I shop at Piggly Wiggly” we see the statement of a general fact about a single individual (me). In the case of “Dogs eat meat” we see a general fact about the general dog. We can also make general statements about things that happened characteristically at some time in the past. An example is “I used to shop at Piggly Wiggly”.

Techniques: Object manipulation: You might take a collection of objects and see what general statements your LRP can make about them. For instance, if you have a collection of objects each of which is bought at a different type of shop, your LRP can make statements such as “People buy it at a book shop”, “People buy it at a dry good shop”, “People buy it at a tool shop”, and you respond by picking up the object you feel is being described. Or the LRP might make a statement about what she typically does with each object.

Picture description: The LRP can make any general statement which is obviously applicable to the main character or other elements in a picture. If a woman is cooking, the LRP might say “She cooks meals for her family”. You respond by indicating which picture is being referred to.

It may help to use a frame such as “Every day—” or “From time to time—”. You can also use frames which will require a characteristic statement about the past “When this man was young—”

Time words

Time words are words like *today*, *this morning*, *tonight*, *tomorrow*, and so forth. There may also be names for days of the week, for months, for seasons of the year, etc., and there may be words for telling time.

Techniques: Time words can be combined with TPR commands. For example, you may make a paper clock with moveable hands. The LRP can tell you “Go to sleep at 7:00” and then gradually move the hands to 7:00 (at which point you mime going to sleep). Later she can ask “What did you do at 7:00?” and you can respond by going to sleep. Similarly she can say, “Buy a banana on Tuesday,” and then begin pointing one by one at a sequence of days on the calendar until she arrives at Tuesday, and you respond at that point by picking up a banana. If different foods are used at different times of the day,

she can say something like “We eat it in the morning,” etc. You respond, for example by picking up the item.

When you don't want to mention who did it

Sometimes a sentence is understood to have both an agent and a patient, but for some reason the agent is not important, and you only want to mention the patient. We have already seen an example in the frame “When this picture was taken...”. The picture is the patient. Who is the agent that took the picture? The sentence doesn't tell us that. Such agentless sentences are often a special case of what are called passive sentences. They are probably the most typical kind of passive sentence. By getting some exposure to agentless sentences, you may get some exposure to passive sentences, which may be important to your comprehension ability as a basic speaker.

Techniques: You can use TPR for this. Use several objects which make good patients. Paper is good. Think of all the things you can do with paper. Your LRP tells you to do different things to different pieces of paper. Now the LRP can describe the different pieces of paper in terms of what was done to each: “It was folded,” “It was torn,” “It was wadded,” “It was cut,” and each time, you indicate which piece of paper was being described. (It may help to restore the papers as nearly as possible to their original condition before the LRP begins saying what was done to them.)

Asking questions about all this stuff

You have been hearing questions since your first session. For example, after the LRP said, “This is a carrot”, and “This is a banana”, she might have asked you “Where is the carrot, and where is the banana?”. Many of the activities suggested so far will be most natural if the LRP uses questions. For example, in the previous paragraph, instead of saying “We eat it in the morning”, it would probably be more natural for her to say “What do we eat in the morning?” Do not hesitate to have your LRP use questions whenever they make the communication more natural. Assuming you have been doing that, we now want to insure that you have covered the main bases in learning to comprehend questions. If I mention a type of question you have not learned to recognize, then you can tackle it by focusing on it in one of your language sessions.

There are two main types of questions. There are questions which can be answered with a simple *yes* or *no*, and there are questions which require that you give some specific information in order to answer them. These are called content questions. An example of an English *yes/no question* is “Did I take three green bananas?”. English content questions are ones with words such as *when*, *where*, *who*, *what*, *why*, and *how*.

Although questions came into play quite early in my discussion, and, presumably, in your language sessions, this is a good place to focus on them, since you now have a variety of notions that can be questioned. Think of your simple descriptions of objects and activities. They can be converted into *yes/no* questions (“Is this a man?” “Is this man ploughing?”). In order to force you to process what you hear, the LRP must ask questions which you can understand, and which could be answered with *yes* or *no*. For instance, if there is a picture of a man ploughing and a picture of a woman cooking in the same group of pictures, the LRP might ask you “Is this man ploughing?” or “Is this woman

cooking?”, but she could equally ask you “Is this man cooking?” or “Is this woman ploughing?”

Now you learned to recognize sentences with agents and patients (or subjects and objects). Both of them can be questioned. To question the agent the LRP would ask “Who is cooking the rice?” To question the patient, the LRP would ask “What is this woman cooking?” So if you look back at all of the roles that nouns can have in sentences, they will suggest types of questions. Indirect object: “Who did I give it to?” Location: “Where is the man?” or “Where is the man working?” The thing that was used: “What is she writing with?” The beneficiary: “Who is she cooking for?” The associate: “Who is he working with?” The source of movement: “Where is he coming from?” The goal of movement: “Where is she going to?” And the possessor: “Whose hand is this?” Questions can also be asked about the manner: “How is she cooking?”. And the reason: “Why is she cooking?” Questions can be asked about things in the past, present, or future.

Do you see how everything we have covered so far feeds into questions? If in your record keeping you are keeping track of all the types of sentence patterns that you have learned to comprehend, based on my suggestions in this section, then you can go over them and see whether you think you already know how questions are formed which deal with all of the other patterns and concepts you have so far covered in your sessions.

Techniques: A technique that I have not mentioned so far is simple verbal response. Early on, it may be better to simply respond in English or another language that you already speak fluently. Saying “yes” or “no” in the new language may seem like a simple matter, but I personally find that it slows my learning, since it interferes with my ability to concentrate on what I am trying to comprehend.

Questions can be asked in connection with pictures or with actions that take place in the language session. Using questions increases your flexibility in learning other things. For example, if you are learning to understand statements about future time, the LRP can vary the time component of questions. Suppose there is a picture of a standing man. Then “Did this man stand up?” gets the answer “yes”, but “Is this man going to stand up?” gets the answer “no”.

Possible, likely or at least desirable, or maybe even necessary

Things may be *possible* in the sense that they are not impossible, or they may be possible in the sense that I don’t know whether or not they are true. In simple communication, you do not commonly need to talk about the first kind of possibility (“It could rain on my birthday”). The second kind of possibility (“It could be raining outside”) is very frequently needed in basic communication. That is, you need to be able to express uncertainty. There may be different degrees of uncertainty. Compare “He might come tonight” with “He’ll probably come tonight”. A concept related to possibility is *ability*. What I am able to do is possible for me, and what I am unable to do is impossible for me.

As with everything else we have considered, there is no reason to expect that the language you are learning will be at all like English in the way that it expresses these meanings. I cannot go into all of the possibilities. One that is worth noting is important because it would take us into a new realm. So far we have mainly been concerned with sentences that consist of a single clause. You may find that these meanings require two clauses. This happens in English in some cases: “It is likely that I will come”. Here the

two clauses are “It is likely” and “that I will come”. Notice how each is like a sentence in its own right. We’ll deal below with many types of sentences that have more than one clause.

Some languages put a lot of emphasis on *degrees of certainty*. They may distinguish between information which the speaker got from hearsay or directly observed. There may be several degrees of certainty that come into play, even in simple sentences.

For saying that something is *desirable*, a language may employ sentences with more than one clause, as in “It would be good if you left.” However, notice that in English, we can say “You should leave.” Likewise, in saying that something is *necessary*, a language may employ sentences with more than one clause, as in “He has to leave.” (Here the clause *to leave* is so chopped down that it may not seem like a clause to you.) But it may also be possible to express such a meaning within a single clause, as in “He must leave”.

Techniques: Use your pictures. Give your LRP some examples in English (or whatever language you are mainly using) of sentences which express possibility or likelihood. For example, if you have a picture of a restaurant, you might say, “Someone is probably eating in here.” If a man is walking by the restaurant, you could say, “This man might go into the restaurant”. Some examples will naturally involve a higher degree of likelihood than others. Your LRP can go through all of the pictures and make such statements. You can respond by pointing to the picture or situation she is referring to. Your LRP can use forms which carry the meaning of ability by looking around and asking you about things you are and are not able to do. Are you able to lift the fridge? Are you able to open the fridge?

To help you to learn to comprehend simple statements of desirability, such as “You should wrap the cloth around the fruit,” your LRP may be able to use these statements in place of command forms in TPR activities. You can combine the forms meaning “should” and forms meaning “must” in a single activity. If the LRP says you *should* do it, you may start to do it, hesitate, and then either to it or not do it. If she says you *must* do it, you quickly do it.

In connection with pictures, the LRP should be able to think of fairly simple statements of what people in the pictures should do or must do.

Denying and forbidding

All of the types of statements you can now understand can be negated. I’m sure that by this point you’ll have already run into negation, but I mention it here for the sake of completeness. The negation of “This is a man” is “This is not a man.” There are also negative commands and instructions. “Don’t sit down” is the negative counterpart of “Sit down”.

Techniques: Think of the example above of learning the names of rooms in the house using a sketch of the floor plan. Suppose the LRP says “Where is the verandah?” and you point to the entrance way by mistake. The LRP can naturally correct you in the language by saying “No. That is not the verandah. That is the entry way. This is the verandah.” Likewise, if during TPR the LRP says “Turn to the right” and you turned to the left by mistake, then she can gently correct you, “No. Don’t turn to the right. Turn to

the left.” If the LRP frequently makes such natural comments in negative forms, you will easily learn to comprehend negative sentences.

Starting, stopping, becoming, continuing and remaining

Expressions related to the beginning or ending of an event or of a state of affairs may employ simple sentences or sentences with two clause. Some examples are “I began eating”, “I started to eat”, “I stopped eating”, and “This became dirty”. Related notions are “I finished eating”, “I already ate”, and “I continued eating”.

Techniques: In TPR the LRP can tell you to start or stop various actions (“Start running”, “Keep running”, “Stop running”, “Start writing your name”, “Stop writing”, “Finish writing your name”), and perhaps she can tell you to come into various states (“Become happy”). Picture descriptions can also employ these notions.

EXPRESSING DEEPER THOUGHTS-ADDING A LOT OF MUSCLE

So far we have dealt almost entirely with simple sentences. By simple sentences, I mean sentences with only one clause. If you’ve forgotten, a clause is a sort of mini-sentence. The following sentences have only one clause each:

Please pass the salt.

This tastes good.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

By contrast, the following sentences have two clauses:

He came after I left.

Whenever it rains, I stay home from work.

Sometimes one of the two mini-sentences is chopped down or simplified in some way, as in the following:

Entering the yard, I looked through the window.

I told her that in order to escape.

Other times the mini-sentences that make up the bigger sentence cannot be clearly separated because one of them is inside the other:

The man who I told you about is at the door.

Here the two mini-sentences are *The man... is at the door*, and *who I told you about*.

From here on we will be mainly interested in such sentence patterns containing two or more clauses.

Stringing sentences together

Both instructions and statements can be strung together in chains. A language may have more than one way of doing this. For instance, in English, it would be natural to say “This man left his house, hitched up his oxen, went to the field, and began ploughing.” (Remember, we have among our hundred pictures one picture of a man ploughing a field with oxen.) However, we could also say “Leaving his house, hitching up his oxen, and going to the field, this man began ploughing”. At this point you want to concern yourself with learning to comprehend sentence chains of the type that are most common in the

language you are using. The language may be very different from English in this area as in any.

There may be an important distinction between chains in which all of the sentences have the same subject and chains in which the subject of each sentence is different. The sentence chain “This man left his house, hitched up his oxen, went to the field, and began ploughing” has the same subject for all the sentences in the chain. It is “this man” who left the house, it is the same man who harnessed his ox, it is the same man who went to the field, and the same man who began ploughing. Contrast the sentence “My mother works at the bank, my father works at the factory, and my older brother attends university.” Here there are three chained sentences, and three subjects: my mother, my father, and my older brother. In your language sessions you will want to be sure that you get exposure to both of these kinds of sentence chains, in case there is an important difference.

Techniques: The example of the man ploughing was chosen to suggest ways the LRP might string sentences together in describing pictures. Your goal could be to attempt to identify the picture at the earliest possible moment in the chain. It is also a simple matter for the LRP to give you strings of commands. During your first week this would not be a good idea. Once you are a few weeks down the road, single commands may not be very challenging, and you’ll appreciate the challenge of having a long string of commands to remember and carry out: “Go into the yard, get a brick, bring it back and put it on the table.”

The person who I did it to was not the person who did it to me

I gave the sentence “The man who I told you about is at the door” as an example of a mini-sentence (“who I told you about”) nested inside another sentence (“The man... is at the door”). The clause *who I told you about* contributes to the description of *the man*. Commonly it is said that such a clause “modifies the noun”. In other words *who I told you about* modifies the noun *man*. Clauses that modify nouns are called *relative clauses*. There are other kinds of clauses that modify nouns, and some languages may use them in situations where English uses a relative clause. As with all of the particular notions I have been discussing in these suggestions, I am not really focusing on the grammar and how it works, but rather on the notions that are being expressed. In any language there will be some way to express the notions that are expressed by relative clauses in English. I will go ahead and use the term “relative clause” for any expression which functions like an English relative clause.

In my experience, relative clauses are one of the most important language devices for increasing my flexibility in speaking a language. Nouns are very general. An expression like “the man” can refer to any of billions of male adults. Yet every person is different, and when I talk about a man, I need a way to tell you *which man* I am talking about. That is where relative clauses come in. If I say “the man who lives directly in back of me”, I am able to refer to one very specific man. For the most part, people talk about very specific things, like the man who lives directly behind me.

It is possible that your LRP will already have been using relative clauses in order to make the communication more natural during your learning activities. For example, recall when I discussed learning to understand general statements by using a collection of

objects which are bought at different shops. The LRP would say “We buy it at the meat shop,” and you would point to the meat. It might be more natural for her to say “Pick up something which we buy at the meat shop,” using the relative clause “which we buy at the meat shop.” Thus you may have had a lot of exposure to relative clauses by the time you get around to focusing on them in a language session. As in the case of questions, I want to help you to determine whether you have learned to comprehend the main types of relative clauses. If I mention a type of relative clause that you have not yet had exposure to, you can then plan to focus on it in a language session.

What I am about to say may seem a bit complicated. If you find it confusing, you can wait and come back to it when you think you need it. You should still be able to understand what I have to say here with regard to techniques.

There are three or four main types of relative clauses you will want to concern yourself with at this point. To classify a relative clause, first identify the noun that it is modifying. Consider the case of *the duck which I shot*. What is the noun which is being modified? It is *the duck*. Now ask yourself, what role is the duck understood to have in the relative clause. Note I say *understood* to have. The duck is not actually in the relative clause. The relative clause is simply *which I shot*. But the duck is understood to have a role in the relative clause. It is understood as the thing that got shot, that is it is understood as the *patient* (or *object*) of the relative clause, even though it is not mentioned there. Because it is understood as the object, this relative clause is called an *object relative clause*. Now you make up a sentence in which the relative clause is understood as the *subject* of the relative clause.

DO NOT PROCEED WITHOUT MAKING UP A
RELATIVE CLAUSE IN WHICH THE NOUN
WHICH IS MODIFIED BY THE RELATIVE
CLAUSE IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE SUBJECT OF
THE RELATIVE CLAUSE.

How did you do? Here is an example: *The man who shot the duck*. The noun modified? *Man*. Look at the clause *who shot the duck*, and ask yourself what role the man has in that clause. The man is the one who does the shooting, that is, the agent, or subject. Thus *the man who shot the duck* is a *subject relative clause*. You might consider two types of subject relative clauses. The first type occurs when there is no object in the subject relative clause, as in *the man who yawned* (if you are interested, you can call this an *intransitive subject relative clause*). The second type occurs when there is an object in the subject relative clause, as in *the man who shot the duck*, where the duck is the object.

In addition to subject relative clauses and object relative clauses, you will want to be exposed to relative clauses such as *the gun with which I shot it*, *the woman for whom I made it*, *the kids with whom I played*, *the house where I live*. The main point here is that the nouns *gun*, *woman*, *kids*, and *house* are not understood as the subject in the clauses *with which I shot it*, *for whom I made it*, *with whom I played* and *where I live*, nor are those nouns understood as the objects in those clauses. Rather, they have other roles, such as being the instrument used, or the location, or whatever.

It will be helpful if you keep these four types of relative clauses in mind—object relative clauses, two types of subject relative clause, and relative clauses which are neither object relative clause nor subject relative clauses. The reason I recommend you keep them all in mind, is that different languages may handle the different types in different ways.

Now in case you were wondering, this discussion of relative clauses has been the most demanding thing I have bothered you with. If your background in linguistics is weak or lacking, you may need to think it through very carefully. It may turn out that relative clauses are simple and straightforward in the language you are learning. If not, what I have just said may help you to sort things out better.

Techniques: I hope you haven't lost sight of the fact that your main goal right now is to learn to *understand* sentences which employ the basic sentence patterns of the language. If relative clauses are simple and straightforward, they will be a snap to learn to understand. Even if they are somewhat complicated, it shouldn't be too hard to learn to understand them when you hear them.

For learning to understand relative clauses you can use TPR, object manipulation and picture description. A typical instruction for learning to understand relative clauses by TPR would be "Give three eggs to the woman who is seated". If you have co-learners, especially, it may be possible for the LRP to describe any of them by means of a variety of relative clauses, using vocabulary you already know or are learning during that session. Pictures are especially helpful in covering the four different types of relative clauses. After you give the LRP a few examples in English, or whatever language you share with her, she can go through a hundred pictures using only subject relative clauses and go through the same pictures using only object relative clauses. She can use the same hundred for other relative clauses. For subject relative clauses she might say things like "Here is a man who is ploughing" or "Where is the man who is ploughing?" For object relative clauses she might say things like "Where is the ball which the boy is kicking". For other types of relative clauses, sentences might focus on, say, locations "Where is the tree which someone is standing under."

If this, then that

Whew! We're done with relative clauses. They're so helpful to the language learner, but a bit complicated to think about. Fortunately, in many languages they are not very complicated to learn. The rest of the types of sentences I discuss are much easier to discuss, though any of them could turn out to be complicated in a particular language.

Expressions of the form "If I come to town, then I will visit you" are another type of expression which you need to be able to understand, and, eventually, to speak, in order to be a basic speaker of the language. There are at least three important types of "if-then" sentences. In one type, the if-clause is understood to pertain to the future: "If I come to town [future], then I will visit you." This is probably the most useful type, and it may be enough for you as a basic speaker. A second type has the if-clause pertaining to the present state of affairs: "If he is not at work today, he may be sick". The third type relates to hypothetical states of affairs which are not the way things are in reality: "If he were here, he could tell us."

Techniques: To learn to comprehend if-clauses which pertain to the present state of affairs, you may be able to combine them with commands, and use TPR: “If I am holding something which we eat, take it from me and put it into your mouth.” Future oriented if-then sentences can also be combined with commands in many cases. The LRP first says, “When I fold the cloth, bend the pipe.” She then performs various actions, but at some random point she folds the cloth, and that is the point at which you respond by bending the pipe.

You can use pictures to cover the contrary-to-fact variety of if-then sentence. The LRP can look at each picture and imagine what the results would be if the person in the picture had not done whatever s/he is doing: “If this man had not ploughed his field, he could not have planted his corn.” Actually, an assortment of these contrary-to-fact sentences can be used with pictures. “If this man were short, he would not be able to reach that apple”, “If this man had ploughed my field, I could have rested.”

When things happen, other things happen

You may have already been exposed to the type of sentence I have in mind here. Recall that in connection with learning to talk about events and situations in the past, I suggested that the LRP use frames, such as “When this picture was taken—” This type of clause, sometimes called a temporal clause, or time clause, provides the temporal setting in which an event occurs.

Temporal clauses can be past oriented (“When I was eating my breakfast—”) or future oriented (“When I eat supper—”). Related notions include “Before I ate supper—”, “Until I ate supper—”, and “After I ate supper—”.

Techniques: After you give a few examples, the LRP should be able to think of a reasonable sentence to say in connection with each picture, using a past oriented temporal clause: “When this man was ploughing, he walked behind his plough”. Future oriented temporal clauses are similar to if-clauses discussed above, and similar techniques can be used. “When I fold the cloth, bend the pipe.” “Keep writing until I smile.”

Just because, or even in spite of, or perhaps in order to

Often two clauses are combined in such a way that one clause gives the reason for the other: “I smiled at him because he looked funny.” Here the second clause, “. . .because he looked funny,” is the reason, and the first clause, “I smiled at him,” is the result. Alternatively, I could say, “He looked funny, and so I smiled at him,” in such a case the reason (“he looked funny”) comes before the result (“so I smiled at him”).

Closely related to reason clauses, are purpose clauses. An example of purpose clauses in English are those that begin with “in order to—” or some that begin with “so that—”: “I bought some meat in order to make stew”; “I bought some meat so that I could make stew”.

Sometimes there are reasons not to do things, but we do them anyway. In English we often express this meaning by clauses beginning with “Even though—”, as in “Even though I was angry, I didn’t say anything.”

Techniques: Pictures are the most helpful tool here. In connection with every picture, your LRP should be able to think of a reason or purpose for which the actor is

performing the action. You will give several examples in English, or whatever language you share with your LRP, to get things rolling. You can do the same thing with sentences which express the idea of “even though X, nevertheless Y.” “Even though this man is tired, nevertheless, he is still working.”

He made me do it

Some sentences have a primary agent and a secondary agent. “John made Bill eat the sandwich.” Bill is the agent who eats the sandwich. But John is the agent who made the decision to have the sandwich eaten, and who acted on that decision so as to get the sandwich eaten! John could have been less demanding, in which case we might say “John told Bill to eat the sandwich,” or even “John asked Bill to eat the sandwich,” which is the least demanding of all. Or John might have been even more demanding, in the face of Bill’s resistance, in which case we might say “John forced Bill to eat the sandwich.”

Techniques: TPR is the best technique here. You need a co-learner, or at least a willing volunteer, and then your LRP can have you make that person do things. You can decide how you want to distinguish between the extremes of merely asking your friend to do the action and forcing him or her to do it.

Making comparisons

Languages use a variety of means of indicating that one item is bigger, darker, longer, nicer, etc. than another item, or that one person runs faster than another, or is smarter than another. I haven’t, in general, been discussing the variety of ways in which languages may express particular meanings, because it would be hopeless to cover even a fraction of the possibilities. I would like to take this opportunity to point out to you how important it is to let the language be itself. You may be interpreting things through an English filter, and you want to avoid that. So let’s suppose that you have two ropes, both of which are very long, by local standards, but one is slightly longer than the other. You ask your LRP to tell you “This rope is longer than this one.” What she says is perfectly clear to you. You hear her say, in her language, “This rope is not long, and this rope is long.” You become frustrated. You tell her, “No. You misunderstood me. You can’t say ‘this rope is not long,’ because it *is* long. It just isn’t as long as the other rope.” You just goofed. You filtered the new language through your English grid. It just so happens that in that particular language, to say that one rope is longer than the other you do indeed say something which literally sounds like “This rope is not long and this is long.”

Techniques: Each time I suggest a technique for learning to understand a particular sentence pattern, I tend to use simple examples which illustrate that sentence pattern and little else. As we have gone along, this has become increasingly misleading. By now your LRP has considerable flexibility, since you can understand all sorts of complex sentences combining many of the notions I have discussed. So for once, I’ll exemplify a pattern by embedding it in a complex sentence. Where is the comparison in the following? “Give your friend a book which is heavier than the one I am holding.” You need to be encouraging the LRP to use more and more complex sentences as you go along. She will have a sense for what you can understand and can try to use increasingly natural sentences to communicate with you as time goes on.

Things I thought, or said or at least wished, and maybe even tried

There is one last type of sentence pattern involving sentences with two clauses which is essential for you if you are to be a basic speaker. These are sentences with verbs such as “say”, “think”, “believe”, “desire”, “want”, “wish”, “know”, etc. as in the following English examples:

- This man said, “Bring me my oxen”.
- This man says, “I am ploughing.”
- This man says that he is ploughing.
- This man is thinking, “I am tired.”
- This man thinks that his field is large.
- This man wants to rest.
- This man is trying to rest.
- This man wishes he could rest.
- This man knows how to plough.
- This man knows that his oxen are tired.

In these examples, the underlined portion is a mini-sentence within the larger sentence. Notice that in some cases the mini-sentence is in quotation marks. This is referred to as *direct discourse*. The other mini-sentences, the ones not in quotation marks, are examples of *indirect discourse*. There is a lot that I could say about what distinguishes direct from indirect discourse. Suffice it to say that you may find that another language uses indirect discourse where English uses direct discourse, or vice versa.

Techniques: You can use the pictures you have been using all along, or you might want to get some new pictures that have a lot going on in them, such as those in the children’s *Waldo* series. The LRP will choose a person or animal in the picture and tell you what that animal or person is thinking or saying. For example, she might say “Before this picture was taken, this man said, ‘I have a big field to plough’” or perhaps, “This man is thinking that it might rain and he will have to go home,” or possibly “This man knows that he has a lot of work to do.” Your job is to point at the man who would have made such a statement or thought such a thought.

The example “This man is trying to rest” is a bit different from the others, but an important thing to be able to understand and, quite soon, to use in speech. The LRP can use TPR for this, instructing you to try to do things that are actually not possible (“Try to pick up the fridge”).

Suggestions for covering a basic range of language functions and communication situations

I have given you many suggestions for covering a range of vocabulary and sentence patterns. These are your bricks and mortar. Without vocabulary and sentence patterns it is impossible to do anything in a language. I have tried to focus you on essential, central ones which you will need to be a basic speaker of the language.

Fairly early you will also want to start thinking in terms of the functions for which you will use the language and the situations in which you will be using the language. I

have suggested that you can include such considerations in your plans for your sessions even while you are concentrating entirely, or almost entirely, on learning to understand the language. You become increasingly concerned with functions and situations in which you will be using the language as you work increasingly on speaking it conversationally during your language sessions, say, during the second month.

During the first few weeks, when the focus was mainly on learning to comprehend, you focused on language functions when you had your LRP use different politeness formulas in giving you commands, requests or instructions. For example, suppose you were learning English. During one of your first sessions the LRP may use a simple command form for TPR such as “Stand up, sit down.” Later on you may wish to learn the forms that are used in real life for making a request of a socially higher person, such as your employer. Then instead of “Stand up, sit down,” the LRP might say “Could I get you to stand up? Would you mind sitting down?” On another day the LRP may act as though you are socially lower. You might pretend that she is your mother and you are her child (whatever roles you pretend, you will try to keep them in mind all through the activity). In that case, she might use the simple command forms. In some languages, there may be less emphasis on relative social standing. In other languages there may be considerably more emphasis, not just in connection with commands and requests, but, possibly in connection with every single sentence!

Keeping in mind such social factors, here is a list of language functions which you might attempt to include in your sessions in order to become a basic speaker of the language:

- requesting a object
- complying with a request for an object
- refusing to comply with a request for an object
- requesting an action
- complying with or refusing to comply with such requests
- requesting assistance (asking a favour)
- complying with or declining such a request
- offering an object
- accepting the offer
- declining the offer
- offering assistance
- accepting or declining the offer of assistance
- giving instructions to an employee
- giving orders to a child
- making a promise or commitment to future action
- making an apology
- expressing regret
- expressing sorrow for the other person’s situation
- initiating an encounter
- making initial small talk in an encounter
- hesitating while speaking
- asking for clarification

interrupting
 terminating an encounter
 making a social introduction
 introducing oneself
 asking permission
 granting permission
 refusing permission
 asking the time
 indicating a desire to enter a home
 bidding someone to enter a home

As you learn to recognize the patterns of language used for each one of these functions, you can check it off. Here again, I can't be exhaustive.

Another area in which you want to make a checklist has to do with the situations in which you use the language and the types of expressions you might use in those situations. Reflect on your life in the new language community, past, present, and/or future. What are all the situations in which you have spoken to people or expect to speak to people? Think through everything you have done during the past few days, from morning to night. Who did you speak to, and in what settings? Do this periodically, and add any new situations that come to mind to your checklist of situations. Your goal is both to learn how people speak in those situations and to learn how they speak about those situations.

You can make another checklist for topics. What are some topics about which you have wanted to converse but were unable, or hardly able? What are some topics that are likely to be important to you in the future? An excellent source of ideas for topics and situations is Larson (1984, part III), where the selection is related in a step by step manner to the needs of a language learner who is integrating into the language community.

Keep your checklists together with your journal, and use them as a source of ideas as you plan your language sessions and informal conversational activities.

Final thoughts regarding using the above suggestions

The above suggestions are meant to serve as a source of ideas and as a checklist. Each day you spend an hour or two preparing for your language sessions, planning three or more different activities which you will use to achieve specific goals which you will set from day to day. Those goals include vocabulary you wish to cover, and sentence patterns you wish to learn to comprehend. They may also include specific language functions or situations in which you would like to develop some communication ability through role-play, or through focusing on a special area of vocabulary. You may have ideas which have grown out of previous sessions, or out of experiences in the outside world. You can also refer to my suggestions as a source of ideas. As you plan a session, you will often look over the record of your previous session, so that while you are learning new vocabulary and sentence patterns, you are using all the riches available to you from earlier sessions.

You can use these suggestions as a check-list during your daily evaluation period. Some time after the rest of the day's activities, you reflect on what you did, make written summaries of your observations relating to sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, or anything else you observed. At this time you can go through the above suggestions and check off the ones that you have already dealt with. For example, long before you plan to deal with negations (denying and forbidding), you notice that you already know how to deny (so you check that off), but you do not yet know how to forbid (so you leave that unchecked, perhaps using another mark, such as a small circle, to remind you that it has not yet been checked off). One happy day, you will find that you have ticked off everything in the list. That doesn't mean that you have learned to comprehend every possible way of expressing a particular meaning. For example, you may have learned to express the idea of "must", but there may be other ways to express the same idea or similar ideas which you have not yet learned. Nevertheless, you can check it off when you know at least one main way in which that meaning is expressed.

When you first start using the above suggestions, you may find it difficult to plan an activity around a suggestion. You want your LRP to say only things which you will have some hope of understanding. You do not learn anything from hearing your LRP say things you don't understand. But when you do not yet know much of the language, this may be challenging. That is one reason you will need to spend an hour or two planning your language session. As time goes on, there will be more and more that you can understand, both in terms of vocabulary, and sentence patterns. Therefore, planning your comprehension learning activities will get easier. For example, when you get to the point where your LRP is telling you what someone in a picture might be thinking (and you are trying to guess who might be thinking that), there may be considerable flexibility, since by that point she knows that you have considerable vocabulary and sentence patterns that you are able to understand.

As a matter of fact, it is important that your LRP use increasingly complex sentences with you as you go along. You need to keep stretching your ability to hear, process and respond. Activities in week three should take advantage of all you have learned in weeks one and two. You need to keep trying to include aspects of earlier sessions in your later sessions. For example, in the session where you are working on agentless sentences (the LRP saying "That paper was folded"—you indicating which paper was in fact folded), you may be dealing with a passive sentence form, as I noted. It will be good to learn to recognize such sentences as they relate to past, present, and future situations. Thus even though you have long since dealt with past, present and future situations, and checked that off, you still want to combine those notions with the notion of agentless sentences. You would also need to hear examples of agentless sentences in which a variety of pronouns are used. For example the LRP might speak to you using "true-false" questions such as ("I was touched," "We were nudged"). If-then sentences and relative clauses can usefully be combined with many other patterns ("If I was bumped, then point to the person who bumped me"). For that reason, you may want to learn to understand if-then sentences and relative clauses earlier than they come in my outline.

Almost any of the notions covered can be combined in this way with almost any other notions. Here is an exercise for you. How many of the notions (sentence patterns)

that I have discussed are involved in the following sentence: “He is thinking ‘If this field had already been ploughed, I would not have to plough it’ ”? Quite a few, right? Did you come up with five or ten notions?

Of course, you don’t try to combine a whole bunch of topics in your plan for the session. But as you go along, you encourage your LRP to use richer, more complex, and more natural language. Often while covering later topics you will find you are reusing many structures that you dealt with previously, even though you didn’t plan things that way. That is because, as you learn to comprehend more and more, your LRP will automatically tend to use richer and more authentic language with you.

Going on once you’re a basic speaker

You’ll have many months of language learning yet ahead of you. During those subsequent months, you will use the techniques described here less and less. More and more you will be learning the language through informal conversation. You may be able to be in an immersion situation, perhaps living with a family. You can probably become a basic speaker and learn more language with less trauma if you do not attempt your immersion experience until you have developed a bit of communication ability in your secure nest. At that point it will be ideal if you can spend several months in an immersion situation. You may have heard that it is better if you begin living in an immersion situation even before you have learned very much of the language. Actually, that may slow down your initial learning, and it will add unnecessary stress to your life. Once you’re a basic speaker, living in an immersion situation will be a blast. When you don’t know very much of the language at all you’ll get far less benefit out of it. There will be exceptions. For example, if the entire group is monolingual in its own language, and confined to its own communities, then you may need to begin your language learning immersed in one of those communities. I would still attempt to make a lot of tapes, possibly even video tapes, of easy to understand language, well scaffolded by pictures, objects, and activities.

Once you are a basic speaker, a fair bit of your ongoing language learning will happen as a result of informal exposure to the language. You will want to use all the means at your disposal, including print media and electronic media, if such media are used for the language you are learning. But you will also want to continue regular sessions with one or more LRPs. During these sessions you may engage in a wide variety of activities. Here are some examples:

1) If print media and electronic media are used for the language you are learning, you can go over these with your LRP, discussing parts you have difficulty understanding. Or you can give oral summaries which the LRP can correct or confirm. For example, you might read from the newspaper, or have the LRP read to you out loud from it. Or you might make tapes from TV or radio and go over them in your language sessions.

2) You can go over other tape recorded materials you have collected. These may be discussions of various aspects of the local culture, accounts of recent events, speeches, sermons, stories, etc. You can listen to these together with your LRP, stopping the tape whenever there is something you do not understand, identifying what you don’t understand and why. Needless to say, at this point all of your discussion is in the language

you are learning. It is probably best if you do this with an LRP who cannot speak English or any other language that you know well.

3) You can continue to record your own free speech, either in monologue (for example, you may tape-record yourself telling your LRP a story) or dialogue (for example, you may tape-record yourself and your LRP having a conversation regarding a topic of importance to you), and then you and your LRP can go through the tape-recording together. The LRP can point out your mistakes. When you were first trying to loosen up your tongue, I recommended that the LRP not correct your countless mistakes, as that would throw a monkey wrench into the communication process. Now, however, you are interested in identifying the types of mistakes that you make while speaking.

4) You can write original compositions in the language on any topic you wish, and the LRP can help you correct and improve what you have written.

During this period of ongoing language learning, it is good if you can devote from twenty-five to forty hours per week to language learning. This may be divided roughly into thirds. One third can be time spent with your LRPs. One third can be time spent in informal visiting (your sessions with your LRPs can be designed to feed into your informal social visiting), and one third can be time you spend working on your own, listening to tapes, reading, planning, reviewing, etc.

See Thomson (1993a) for an in-depth discussion of language learning for non-beginners.

Other Resources You Might Want to Consider

There are a few books for language learners working on their own. Most of the ones that exist take a more old-fashioned approach to techniques and methods. The classic work is Larson and Smalley (1972). Brewster and Brewster (1976) and Marshall (1989) are spin-offs from it. The techniques they recommend have their roots in the Audiolingual Method, which no longer has wide support. However, these books contain much valuable material. Larson (1984) is a good guide to language functions and topics as they relate to the learner's expanding social life and integration into the community in which s/he is using the language. Brewster and Brewster (1976) provides a number of ideas for topics of conversation (chapter two), and some ideas for simple TPR activities (chapter three). As I say, I cannot whole-heartedly endorse the language learning method presented in chapter one, though I am aware that it has been a help to many people, and there was a time in my life when I encouraged people to use it. Its strength, in my opinion is that it requires the learner to build a large number of personal relationships in which the language is used.

If you are setting out to learn a language independently, a book which proposes an approach to language learning similar in spirit to what I have proposed here is Burling (1984). Burling, an anthropologist, writes from his experience as a language learner in a variety of situations, and shows a good grasp of recent ideas in the field of second language education. In addition to Burling (1984), I highly recommend Brown (1991) which deals with a variety of issues that are important for every language learner to think about.

There are countless books on language learning activities. Sky Oaks Productions, Box 1102, Los Gatos, California 95031 will send on request a free catalogue of books and materials for use with TPR, and for using pictures for language learning.

Language teachers have developed an endless variety of games and other activities for encouraging students to use languages communicatively. These are designed for teachers planning classroom language lessons. I have felt that for the self-directed learner it may be better to have a small number of flexible and productive methods. If you are interested in surveying other possibilities you might start with the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers published by Cambridge University Press (40 West 20th Street, New York, NY, 10011). The series includes books on the use of drama, games, stories, and pictures in language learning.

If you are interested in surveying a number of well-known language learning techniques, and the reasoning behind them, you might refer to Larsen-Freeman (1986), Oller and Richard-Amato (1983), and Richards and Rodgers (1986).

Lists of language functions can be found in Brumfit and Johnson (1979), Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), Munby (1978), and Yalden (1987). A suggestive, if not outright helpful, book which combines the use of pictures with checklists of functions and vocabulary is Moran (1990).

A Final Summary and Overview

At every point, I've left you with decisions which you have to make. You have to decide what vocabulary and sentence patterns to cover in each language session, and you have to decide how exactly you are going to cover them, within the confines of the techniques I suggested, or by other techniques that you may invent. You have to decide when you wish to begin relating parts of your sessions to outside communication situations by means of simple role-plays. You have to decide when you wish to begin using the language in heavy-duty conversational activities.

If you are an indecisive character, you may be wishing I had set everything down in black and white. Well, why don't *you* set some things down in black and white. Write out a rough proposal for your first two months of language learning. I'll give you *my* proposal for *my* first two months as a model, but *you* need to write out *your* proposal.

Greg's First Two Months of Language Learning:

Weeks 1 and 2:

I will purely work on learning to understand. I won't even think about using the language to speak. I'll learn to understand basic pronouns, and nouns for people, in the context of simple sentences. I will add other vocabulary and sentence patterns from day to day, using my suggestions above as a guide. I will learn to recognize 300 vocabulary items, and a good many of the basic sentence patterns from my suggestions above. Which ones I cover will be determined in my daily planning times, but I'll mainly concentrate on my earlier suggestions, since they are likely to yield relatively simple sentence patterns.

I will spend ninety minutes daily preparing for my language sessions, ninety minutes per day with my LRP conducting the language sessions, three hours per day

listening to the tapes made during that day's session, along with my taped excerpts of earlier sessions. I will spend one hour on my record keeping activities.

Weeks 3 and 4:

I will continue working as I did during weeks 1 and 2, using as a guide my suggestions for areas of vocabulary and sentence patterns, checking off areas of vocabulary and types of sentence patterns as soon as I feel I have covered them to some extent. In addition, I will begin gearing my language learning activities to some of the communication situations which I face in my outside life, such as dealing with vegetable vendors. That means that I am at least thinking about talking, and if I feel the urge, I'll go ahead and use words or combinations of words when they are relevant to the real-life situations in which I find myself. I still will not be trying to talk in my new language during my language sessions with my LRP. I will learn to recognize another 300 vocabulary items, and a sizable portion of the types of sentences patterns found in my suggestions above.

Divide my time as before.

Week 5:

During my first language session this week, I will begin by spending a whole hour conversing in my new language without ever reverting to English, except during the ten minute recess which follows the initial thirty minutes. After that, my sessions will continue to include the kinds of comprehension activities employed during the first two weeks, but at least half of the time will be devoted to two-way conversational activities as described above. I'll continue covering sentence patterns in keeping with the suggestions given above, if I have not yet covered them all. I'll do some role-plays and learn to discuss some topics which are important to me. I'll learn to recognize another 150 vocabulary items.

I'll now spend one hour each day in planning and three hours with my LRP. I'll spend two hours listening to tapes, and an hour in record keeping activities.

Week 6:

By now, I may have covered all of my suggestions for sentence patterns. I will return to my early types of comprehension learning activities whenever I spot new sentence patterns or vocabulary that I wish to emphasize or new areas of vocabulary. I will start using the more advanced techniques I described for increasing my ability to understand extended stretches of speech (for example, having the LRP tell me stories which I already know the content of, but which I have not yet heard in my new language). I will use the full range of two-way conversational activities that I discussed. I will seriously relate my conversational activities in my language session to my outside communication needs and opportunities. I will learn to recognize another 150 vocabulary items, all the time reviewing earlier vocabulary and earlier tapes covering a broad range of sentence patterns, along with newer tapes which are accumulating from my use of the more advanced techniques for increasing my ability to understand extended stretches of speech.

My daily time will be divided as in week 5, except that I will spend one hour per day with a second LRP, and only two hours with my first one.

Week 7:

I'll continue much as in week 6, except this week my LRP will come live at my house, and we'll go out visiting for two hours per day. We'll use formal language sessions to prepare for our times out visiting. I will not speak a word of English to my LRP during the entire week, nor will she to me. I'll learn to recognize another hundred and fifty vocabulary items, of course.

Week 8:

Like week 7, except my LRP no longer lives with me, and I'm going out visiting on my own. Another 150 vocabulary items, of course.

Week 9:

Now that I am a basic speaker, I will begin living permanently with a local family, etc., etc.

So there you have it. That's my plan. Every day will have it's own plan with all the specific details, and this master plan will keep getting revised as I go. Your plan won't be just like mine. Don't be embarrassed if your pace is slower than mine, and don't get stuck-up if it's faster. Happy language learning!

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SOME LACKS IN THE NOTIONAL/GRAMMATICAL TOPICS

Need more on stative predicate sentences (noun, adj, loc, poss)

Need adhortative