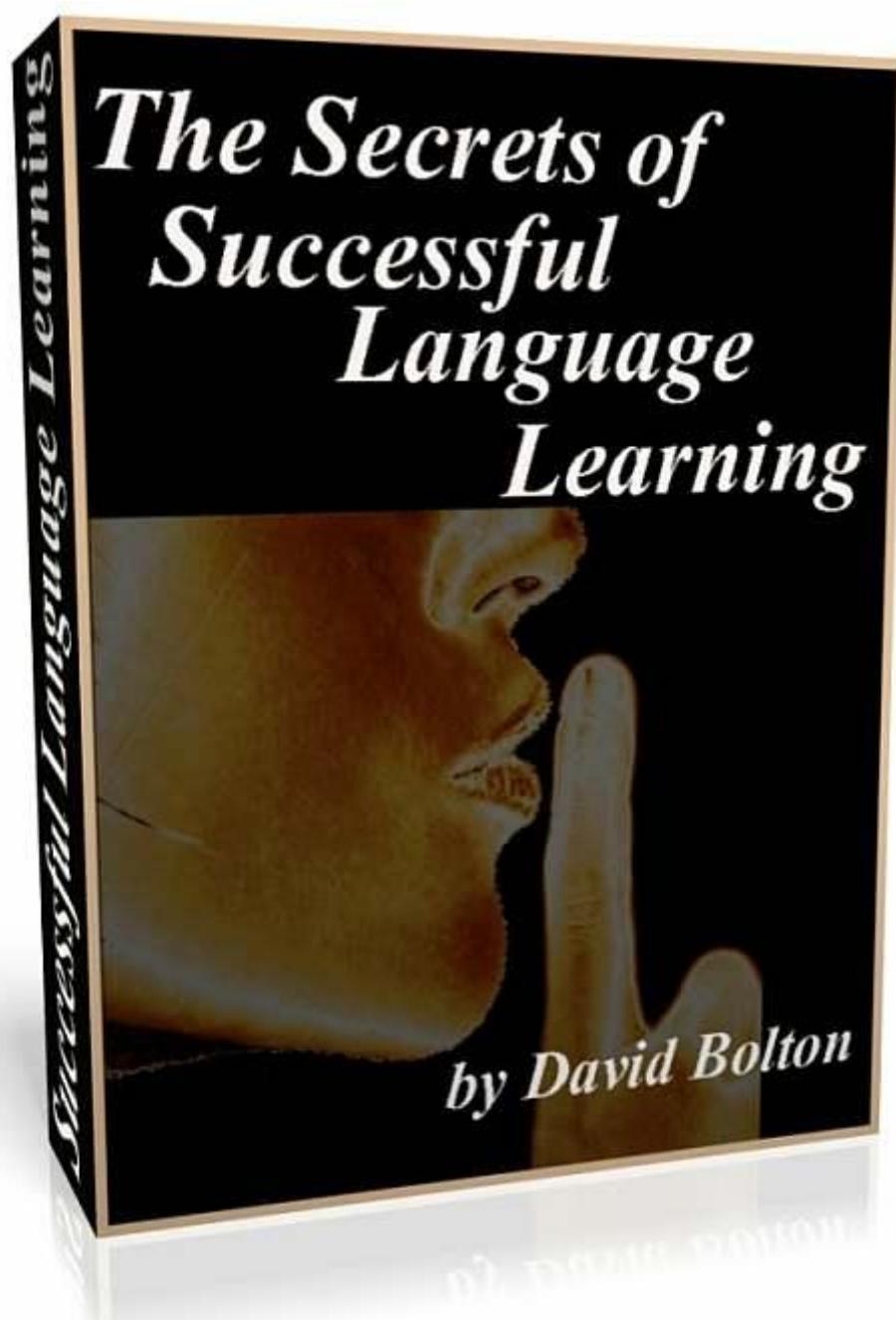


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Note to those who have already read the first edition of this Guide: The new chapters that have been inserted into this second edition can be found starting at Chapter 20.

The Secrets of Successful Language Learning

by

David Bolton

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David Bolton

The Secrets of Successful Language Learning

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So you want to learn a language....

The world seems to be shrinking at an ever-increasing pace. More people travel abroad than ever before, visiting countries whose languages remain mysterious for any who haven't taken the time to learn their fundamentals. Thanks to the Internet, we can find and cultivate new friendships with people from practically any land. Even in your own county, you have probably noticed an increase in the number of immigrants who speak a language different from your own.

Many of us would like to learn at least one language other than our mother tongue, yet all-too-often, our educational institutions don't seem to be able to do the job of helping us reach true fluency in a second language. In addition, many non-native speakers of English - perhaps you who are reading these lines - have achieved a certain degree of proficiency in their English studies, but just can't seem to become totally fluent.

No matter which language you have chosen to learn, you've no doubt often asked yourself the question:

"What can I do to learn faster, to acquire correct pronunciation, a good-sized vocabulary, sufficient grammar, and above all, to learn to really *talk* in the language I'm learning?"

Hi, I'm David Bolton, of www.language-learning-tips.com. For over thirty years now, I have been helping people learn English, and have seen the difficulties that they face. Theirs are the same problems that I myself had to solve when I learned German and Spanish. Let's face it: learning to speak another language is no easy task. The good news, however, is that by using a sound strategy, almost anyone can indeed learn a foreign language well, and can even have a surprising amount of fun doing so!

The purpose of this guide is to help you to successfully overcome the many-faceted obstacles that you will meet along the way. Don't expect a lot of "theory" here: all of the advice I give is highly practical, and has been tested on the hundreds of pupils I've had over the years - and of course, also on myself.

The knowledge you will gain from this book will not guarantee that you will master a second language; knowledge isn't the key, but rather, the **use** of that knowledge. Yet I can assure you that if you follow the advice given here, the road to mastery of another language will be shorter, and almost certainly more pleasant!

Sincerely,



P.S: I welcome feedback. You can contact me at: dbolton99b@yahoo.es

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Chapter 1

Envision your goal, plan your strategy... and go for it!

There was a man in Japan of about 60 years of age, who for many years had not engaged in much physical activity. Not only couldn't he bend over and touch his toes, he could just barely reach down to his knees. He decided that he was going to gain the flexibility that had been lost since his youth, without putting undue stress on his body. He put together a stack of paper, thousands of sheets, that reached up to his knees. Then, he bent over and touched the top of the stack with his fingertips, holding the position for a little while, which wasn't at all hard to do. The next day, he removed two sheets from the stack, and did the same thing.

Yes, you guessed it: every day from then on, he removed two more sheets of paper from the stack. The difference from one day to the next was so slight as to be practically imperceptible, so he never had any problem bending over, touching the top sheet, and holding the position for a minute or two. Of course, after many months of doing this, the stack was considerably lower, until eventually, there was no paper at all left, and he could easily touch his toes. He had achieved his goal, with no strain, no pain, and no stress on his system. All it took was patience and perseverance.

Now perhaps you have no problem touching your toes, or if you can't, maybe this doesn't bother you in the least. But I'll bet there is *something* you would like to achieve - for example, learning a foreign language - and haven't yet. So why not apply the same principles that the Japanese gentleman used?

- Set yourself a clear goal
- Develop a plan to go about reaching it.
- Do a little something every single day that will move you a step further towards your goal.

To get by in a language in most situations, you need a vocabulary of about a thousand words. That sounds like a big number, doesn't it? Well, what about three words? It can't be so hard to learn a mere three words, can it? Why, you could easily do that in a few minutes, couldn't you?

And if you learn three words today, another three tomorrow, and so on, in a year you will have acquired a vocabulary of almost 1,100 words, without stress or undue pressure. This approach is so simple that it doesn't take a genius to figure it out. Countless people have no doubt thought of it before. The question is, then, why don't so many people actually *do* it? The answer, of course, is that they do not persist. Let's put it more plainly: they lack discipline.

Discipline is a word that doesn't ring too pleasantly in the ears of many. Perhaps it reminds you of the military, or of an overly-strict parent. The truth is, most people tend to want to avoid doing those things that they know they "should" do. The majority of children find it easy to sit down and watch TV for an hour, or two, or even more. But if their father told them they *must* sit there for

three hours, watching television without a break, no doubt many of them would rebel, and try to sneak away at the first opportunity they got!

As soon as something fun becomes an *obligation*, the fun evaporates almost at once, and the activity can soon turn to drudgery. As everyone knows, it isn't always possible to escape from our "duties", and when we do, we often feel guilty about it. Thus it would seem reasonable to ask ourselves how we can transform this type of situation, so that we act with discipline, doing what we know we "ought to" do, with an absolute minimum of displeasure.

Let's assume that you have set a language-related goal. You want to expand your vocabulary in a foreign language by 1,000 words within a year. You know this means learning only three words a day, a prospect that certainly wouldn't terrify anyone. Sure, you'll have to spend some time each week reviewing the words previously learned, but since your daily "quota" is only three words, you should readily be able to find the time to review several others within a day's session. The big question is now simply "But will I *really* get around to learning three words every single day?"

The technique I am going to suggest to you will almost surely allow you to answer that question with a **YES**. And it's quite simple, maybe even deceptively so. Let me tell you how I've been implementing it in my life.

One of the necessary daily routines for a musician is practice. Being a musician as well as a language teacher, I *love* music, and I usually enjoy sitting down at the harpsichord and studying new works, or polishing up ones I have learned before. But let me assure you that there are days when I don't have the least desire to play anything. After all, there are so many other things to do in life! This isn't a problem if it's only a matter of not practicing a day or two. But the danger is always that you may simply lose the habit of regular practice: days turn into weeks, weeks into months, your instrumental technique goes downhill; you forget works you used to know rather well ... you get the picture.

Another thing that I determined many years ago to do regularly was run. Back in my school days, I was one of the worst runners in the class. I had suffered from asthma and bronchitis as a child, and my lungs had always been weak. When I was in my early thirties, I told myself that that situation had to change. I knew I would never be a really good runner, but at least I should be able to run a couple of miles without collapsing after the first three blocks!

Of course, if it isn't always a pleasure to play your favorite instrument, *running* can be said to be a real torture by comparison. Yet for over 20 years now, I have been running religiously every two days, all year, rain or shine (health permitting).

Where did I get the discipline? By using that simple technique I mentioned earlier and which I will now reveal...

I have a notebook in which I always write down the time I spend practicing every day, and also the times I go running.

Maybe you're disappointed, since you may have been expecting some quasi-metaphysical, earth-shaking revelation. But don't let the simplicity of this habit fool you:

By taking note of a certain regular activity, you will soon constantly be aware of whether or not you've done what you wanted to do that day. If I *don't* practice on a certain day, I still list that day's date, and fill in a big ZERO next to it. Doing so is, to be sure, frustrating, but that's the effect I want: if I get somewhat frustrated because I was lazy that day, it's all the more likely that I will *not* be lazy the next day!

When I do practice, I write down how long I did so. For example, if I practice an hour in the morning, and another hour and five minutes in the afternoon, I'll note: "60 + 65 = 125 minutes". (I like to be precise). True, it really doesn't matter much whether I practice two hours and five minutes, or just an even two hours, but by writing down *exactly* how much time I spend practicing, it's easier to note trends: for example when, during the course of a week or so, my rehearsal time slowly declines. Seeing this in writing gives me the motivation to put in some more time over the next few days to "make up for the loss".

On my "Running" page, I'll note the date, the total time I ran, along with other data such as the route I took, and my heart rate upon finishing. Thus, this list not only motivates me to continue running, but also shows me whether my physical condition is improving.

Compared to practicing an instrument for a few hours, or running a few miles, the goal of learning three new words a day should seem like child's play - and it is! But your daily list will make sure you **never** skip a day - and if you do, looking at that blank entry in your list on the following day will motivate you to learn six new words instead of three, to make up for lost time.

Your list could be as simple as this:

Nov 1 X

Nov 2 X

Nov 3 X... etc., with each "X" meaning that you learned your three words for the day. But why not write down the three words themselves in this list (I'll assume you're learning Spanish)?

Nov 1 el perro=dog; el gato=cat; trabajar= to work

Nov 2 hacer= to do; bajo= low; alto = high

Nov 3 la cara= face; tonto= silly; el edificio= building

Nov 4 ----- oops! I visited Great Aunt Maude today, and just didn't get around to learning any new words! But just wait till tomorrow...

Nov 5 La mesa= table; La silla=chair; el suelo= floor; volar=to fly;

el bolígrafo= pen; el lápiz=pencil; el papel=paper; la lámpara=lamp

There! I did **seven** today!

The power of such a notebook is not to be underestimated. There are many things I like to do: read about any number of subjects, work on various computer/Internet-related projects, do astrological research, and so on. But the two things I almost never fail to *consistently* do on a regular basis are - that's right, practice the harpsichord, and run. Precisely those two activities that I also never fail to take note of. Hmm... I think I'll start a notebook for some other activities as well...

After you have been adding to your list for a few months, it will soon be growing automatically, since you will be learning those words *every day* without even thinking about it too much. But until then - that is, until your daily word-learning routine has become a **habit** - you'll have to be on the lookout for any sort of distraction that threatens to make you forget to learn the words of the day.

Are you determined to start towards your goal of a thousand new words? Then **go get a notebook now**, or if you don't have one at hand, a piece of paper will do (you can always copy the first few days' results into the notebook when you get one). The idea is to *start now*, lest you simply decide to "put it off" till another day... all-too often, that "other day" never arrives, and we haven't progressed at all!

May I assume you have learned your words for the day, and have duly taken note of this first step? Fine! So now we can move on to our next, oh-so-crucial subject. But first...

Chapter 2

How to form positive habits that will help you reach your goals

If you've already read the previous section, "Envision your goal, plan your strategy... and go for it!", you now know one way to form a positive habit: by *writing down*, on a daily basis, that which you've done on that day, and making it a point to look at this list every day, in order to make sure you continue doing what you've set out to do, as well as to track your progress.

But there will be times when you're tempted on occasion to *not* learn your daily words. You'll hear yourself thinking up all kinds of excuses: "I'm so tired now, I couldn't learn anything anyway"; "I can do it later, maybe before going to bed"; "I really have better things to do right now", or whatever else you can come up with.

We often have the tendency to make up reasons to not do what we know we should do; this is "only human", you might say. I know in my case, when it's really cold outside, and maybe even raining as well, I do *not* generally feel like going out to run, and if I stop to think about it for a minute, I'll no doubt be able to devise at least 10 good reasons why I should stay indoors and do something else. The solution to this problem? Well, it lies within the previous sentence: "if I stop to think about it for a minute".

Do you want to make *sure* that you do what you planned to do each day? Then when the time comes, **don't stop to think about it**. Or, as Nike puts it quite aptly, **just do it!**

The value of this slogan cannot be overestimated. You have *decided* you want to do something - for example, learn three new words a day. You *know* you can do this in a short time, almost effortlessly, *once you start*. If you plan to learn those words at a certain time of day, then when that time comes, get out your word list, select three new ones, and **learn** them. No thinking about it first. No asking yourself whether it wouldn't be better to do it later. No procrastination of any sort. **Just do it.**

Of course, you may well hear a little voice within yourself thinking up excuses. Let it talk, but while it does, begin to take action, get out your word list, and start to learn. Don't pay any attention to what the little voice is saying. Treat it as you would someone who habitually nags at you: don't try to think up counter-arguments, just **do** what you know you must. And when you do, the little voice will disappear, for it'll know that **your will** has won the game!

When you first start learning the foreign language of your choice methodically on a daily basis, you will often be in danger of listening to that dissenting voice within, and may be tempted to take its arguments seriously. In this phase, as I've already said, simply **ACT** before you have time to decide not to. But after a couple of months or so, you'll discover that once your habit has been formed, that little voice may well continue chatting away, but the effect it has on you is different: you'll find that the more it tries to dissuade you, the **firmer** your will becomes, and the more

decided you are to get your task accomplished. When you notice this happening, you can be sure that you have turned your learning routine into a positive habit, and it becomes less and less likely that you will give it up.

At some point while reading the last couple of pages, you may have thought that all this talk about determination, willpower, and so on is somewhat exaggerated. How much willpower does it take to learn three words a day? That's a cinch! No need to worry about forming habits, acquiring discipline... Ah, but here, I would disagree. You have made a decision to learn something *every* day, and even if it's just three words, doing it *every* day will occasionally be quite difficult indeed.

Decide when you want to start. Today, if possible, tomorrow, at the latest. Then...

- When you start, tell yourself you will do it every day.

- When the time comes to learn, **don't think** about whether you should or shouldn't, **simply**

begin to act: do it!

- Once you've learned your words, add the day's date (and the words you've learned) to your list in the notebook. *Then* do anything else you may have planned for that day.

Follow these steps on a daily basis, and before you know it, learning something every day will have become a positive habit. Now nothing can stop you from mastering your favorite foreign language!

Chapter 3

Memory Techniques: How to learn faster, and remember better

I have been a musician for many years now, and my experiences in that area have often helped me in the field of language teaching. It often happens to me that I will be walking down the street, and a piece of music is constantly going through my mind, on a semi-conscious level. When I then think consciously about it, I realize that the piece in my mind was the one I had been rehearsing several hours before. When you practice an instrument, your session doesn't really stop when you get up and leave the instrument; rather, your mind continues to "work" on the piece throughout the day. Usually, it's the *last* piece you work on that sticks in your mind the most.

The same thing happens with foreign languages. When we learn, for instance, a list of ten vocabulary words in a foreign language, we can expect to think about them again during the day, though we may not be fully conscious of this.

However, there are two major differences between a vocabulary list and music:

1) A vocabulary list consists of words, of course. After learning the list, we will probably talk to someone, watch TV, or simply think. All of these are activities that involve words - and most likely, the words in our foreign-language vocabulary list will not be heard, spoken or thought during the course of our normal daily activities. As a result, the "sub/semi"-conscious learning effect will usually not be as great as in the case of music, since....

2) Music is a much more *emotional* expression than are mere word lists. We *move* to music, we *feel* when we hear it, it *inspires*, *elates* and *touches* us directly on an emotional level. It is comforting, pleasant and pleasurable... usually much more so than a list of vocabulary words!

Nonetheless, it IS possible to apply this knowledge about the effect music has on us when learning words.

I remember when I had my first French class back when I was in college. The professor was an elderly European gentleman who had the liveliness of a Spaniard and the charm of a Frenchman (He had been born and raised in Spain, but had lived the greater part of his life in France).

One day, he was teaching possessive adjectives. Instead of simply reading us the list, he chanted it in a "sing-song" way, with the following rhythm:

("^" = short, -- = "long", --- = "very long")

^ ^ -- ^ ^ --
mon ton son notre votre leur

^ ^ -- ^ ^ --
ma ta sa notre votre leur

-- -- -- --- --- ---
mes tes ses nos vos leurs

I remember the looks on some of the students' faces when the old fellow started rattling this off, his hands keeping time during his little "recital": some thought he was half crazy!

But do you know what? Many years later, I could *still* remember *all* the forms of those possessive adjectives in French. If he had simply read us the list, I would have forgotten them by the next day. But the fact that he **acted out** that list, chanting them as if they were part of a nursery rhyme, helped to implant that list into my mind in a way that no simple reading could have. Now, over 30 years later, I still remember them whenever I think of that unorthodox, yet excellent teacher.

Such methods are infinitely more effective in helping you memorize lists than mere reading and repeating.

Of course, it may be difficult to apply such a method when learning large numbers of vocabulary words. After all, if we chant every list we have, they will soon become confused in our minds, and this would defeat our purpose. However, the main principle can still be applied, that being, that **if we add emotion and imagery to the material to be learned, we will remember it much better.**

Here are a few tips:

If you must learn a small list of grammatical forms - such as the possessive adjectives above - chanting them rhythmically is a great way to help you implant them into your memory.

Where new vocabulary is concerned, I recommend the following:

1) When you first read the words, **say them aloud**. That way, your mind will not only receive the impression of the printed word on the page, but the **sound** of that word as well, and it will thus be easier to recall later.

2) **Combine and Conquer**. Never learn lists of words by simply reading them over and over again. Instead, *combine* groups of words to make sentences. Here's an example, using a list of Spanish words.

el escritorio = the desk

el suelo = the floor

la chica = the girl

delgado/a slender

la caja = the box

caerse = to fall

coger = to get, pick up

Let's make a sentence:

Cuando la caja se cae del escritorio al suelo, la chica delgada la coge.

When the box falls from the desk to the floor, the slender girl picks it up.

Seven new words are in that a single sentence. Now, learn this sentence by memory in Spanish, imagining the situation it describes as vividly as you can: A box on the desks falls to the floor, and a slim girl picks it up.

(Of course, for the two verbs, you would have to know - or look up - the correct forms in order to make such a sentence yourself.)

The fact that the new words appear in a **context** will be of great help in remembering the individual words. Weeks later, perhaps you'll see the word "delgado", and won't remember what it means. But you *might* remember the "chica delgada" that was picking up the box...and when you do, you'll most likely recall the meaning of "delgado", when you think of that slender girl with the box.

Of course, sometimes we will have to learn lists of words that don't combine as easily. "basura" (= trash), "filósofo" (philosopher) and "gotear" (= drip) for instance. Combine them anyway to form a sentence: you'll soon see that the more ridiculous the sentence turns out, the **better** you'll remember the words in it:

"La basura está goteando encima del filósofo"

"The trash is dripping onto the philosopher".

Certainly not a very practical sentence, but the unusual image evoked will assure that you don't forget those words easily!

It's better to keep such sentences simple at first, and not try to fill them with more complicated grammatical structures. You should be able to include 3 to 5 new words in a sentence, maybe even more. Once you write the sentence, memorize it, imagining vividly the "picture" it conveys. Then form another one, using more new words.

You'll want to go over these sentences a few days later, then maybe again in a couple of weeks - after all, as the ancient Greeks said: "**Repetition is the mother of learning**". And learning your vocabulary words in such a way will not only make them easier to remember, but more fun to learn as well.

Before we continue with the next chapter, allow me to give you a couple pages of shameless publicity for a new product of mine - it's worth reading if English is not your native language and you've been having problems learning the phrasal verbs, or if you teach English to foreigners.

Chapter 4

Divide and Conquer

Learning a language can, on one level, be compared to putting together a rather large jigsaw puzzle. Imagine that somebody gives you a puzzle that shows a panoramic view of the Grand Canyon - that is, if you ever manage to put all the pieces together. For there are several thousands of them, and many look aggravatingly similar. So how do you do it? Little by little, with patience and perseverance. You know you can't do it in a day, maybe not even in a week or a month, but if you do something on a regular basis, connecting just a few pieces daily, you *know* you'll finish sooner or later.

Admittedly, the analogy isn't perfect. After all, the puzzle does have a limited number of pieces, and depending on how many there are altogether, you can calculate exactly how many days it'll take you to finish if you manage to put together, say, 3 pieces a day. A language, on the other hand, is constantly growing, developing, changing, evolving... Nobody in the world knows everything there is to know about his or her native tongue, let alone a foreign language.

But then, when you set out to learn a new language, your goal isn't to know everything about it (since you are aware that that isn't possible). It is instead to **master a vocabulary** consisting of the most commonly used words, to **learn to use the grammar** correctly, and, in the end, **to be able to understand and to make yourself understood** in that language. This is an aim that can indeed be divided up into a few thousand parts.

Working with a list of the 1500 most frequently encountered words in your target language, as well as a good grammar book, you might theoretically be able to determine, for instance, 2500 "elements" that are to be learned: the 1500 vocabulary words, plus 1 thousand grammatical units. (One grammatical unit being, for example, the present tense of the verb "to be" in your target language; another one being the past tense, yet another could be a rule concerning word order, etc.)

Now, if you learn 5 parts of this "puzzle" every single day, you know you will have achieved your goal in 500 days, or about a year and a half (2500 "elements" divided by 5 = 500). That's not really so long, is it? Sure, you'll have to review material already learned, but if your daily "quota" of new elements isn't too large, you'll easily have enough time left over for review.

Working in such a way not only *guarantees progress*, but just as importantly, it serves to all but completely eliminate one of the most formidable obstacles to learning any subject of wide scope: the frustration you can feel when you think about *all* the things you'll have to learn in order to reach your goal.

When you first begin to learn a language, it can seem a bit overwhelming. Learning how to say "Buenos días", or "Wie geht es Ihnen?" isn't so bad, but as soon as you want to express just about anything else, you realize that you don't know how to do so. Even after a couple of months, you still

might have trouble speaking in tenses other than the present, and this severely limits your ability to communicate with others. It's as if you were climbing a mountain: if you look down, you may be delighted to see that you have already climbed the first few hundred meters, but when you look up, the peak may still be very far away!

By "dividing and conquering" - learning just a few little "pieces" at a time, but on a consistent and regular basis, you will reach your goal, with an absolute minimum of frustration.

For your daily goal will not be "to be able to speak this *+!#* language NOW!", but rather, to simply learn a few elements, and then do the same thing tomorrow, the next day, and so on.

Patience, discipline, perseverance... and before you know it, you will find that you can handle yourself quite well in your new language, without ever having felt that your head was going to explode!

A piece of practical advice: when you are learning a language, be sure you have a book that fulfills these requirements:

1) It should teach the grammar in a clear, orderly fashion, concentrating on the most important grammatical features, without dwelling on useless information. By "useless", I mean elements of grammar that are antiquated, extremely rare, etc. Once you have reached an advanced level, you can always buy another book that goes into such details. But in the beginning, you should concentrate on *useful* grammar, with the goal of **mastering** it.

2) It doesn't give you a vocabulary of thousands of words. During my years of teaching English in Spain, I have often seen books used for teaching English to Spanish high-school students that contained words that even I have seldom, if ever, used. This is senseless. Get yourself a list of the 1000 most common words (preferably ordered according to frequency) in your target language, and use this as a basis for vocabulary. In your grammar book, concentrate on memorizing the useful vocabulary; if you see a word that you would seldom ever need, don't bother with it, unless you're feeling ambitious!

3) It contains exercises as well as an answer key in the back. There's nothing more frustrating than to do grammar exercises, and then to have no way to check your answers. Of course, if you are working with a teacher, he/she can correct your mistakes. Nonetheless, since you'll no doubt be learning alone a lot, it is a comfort to know that when you are finished the exercises, you can immediately see if and where you went wrong.

Of course, languages cannot be learned with books alone: you will also have to **LISTEN** and **SPEAK**. For this purpose, besides learning vocabulary and grammar, you must learn good pronunciation, so that you will understand others when they speak, and so that you yourself will be understood. This takes us to our next subject...

Chapter 5

Be a parrot - don't think, talk!



I have taught English to hundreds of foreigners - mostly Germans and Spaniards, but also French, Russian, Polish, Czech, Italian, Brazilian, Japanese, Chinese, Arabs... the list goes on. My pupils are usually advanced when they begin lessons with me, in that they can carry on a conversation in English - which doesn't mean that I can always understand what they're saying!

Take the Spanish, for example. Do you know what "go - at" means? When a Spanish girl said this once, I almost corrected her, since I thought she meant "go to", such as "go to church", or whatever. But then I realized she was trying to say "goat". Where in the world would she get the idea that the word "goat" is pronounced as two syllables, "go" plus "at"? Well, it's pretty obvious, isn't it? She was trying to pronounce the word "goat" as if it were a Spanish word, not an English one. Apparently, years ago, when her high school teacher first taught that word, this girl either wasn't in class, or wasn't paying attention (or the teacher herself pronounced it incorrectly, something that occurs all-too frequently in Spanish public schools).

Thus we see the first source of problems as far as pronunciation is concerned: using the rules of pronunciation of your *own* language to try to pronounce a *foreign* word. This will only rarely turn out well! I once saw a quotation (whose author I unfortunately do not remember) that put it quite clearly:

"Language cannot be separated from sound, and that is the heart of the matter."

When you learn new words, you will ideally first encounter them aurally, that is, *hearing* them. Learn to recognize them first by their **sound**, and then to say them correctly. After that, you can deal with how they are written.

Of course, I know that this is often not practically possible. You learn vocabulary from a list (one of those lists containing the 1000 to 2000 most frequent words in the language), and are thus forced to try to read them *before* you hear them. Not very natural, is it? After all, when you took your first steps in your own language way back in early childhood, you *heard* your mother talking, and tried to imitate her. You certainly did *not* begin by picking up a book and trying to *read* your first words, did you?

If you have access to a native speaker of your target language (and perhaps already have lessons with that person), I think a good investment would be to pay him or her to record, word for word, *all* the words in your basic vocabulary list, speaking *slowly* and *clearly*, of course, perhaps leaving a few seconds between the words, so that when you listen, you can *repeat* the word you've just heard. Then, you can *listen* to that recording again and again. True, it might take the person a

few hours to record a list of a couple of thousand words, but maybe you and a few friends can chip in to pay him/her for the effort, and then you can make copies of the recording for each of you. When listening to the recording, you can simultaneously *look* at the list. This way, you are learning the sound of the words along with their correct spelling. When you yourself say each word, **BE A PARROT!**

Consider parrots. Some of them know quite a few words. How did they learn them? Certainly not by reading. They learned simply by hearing and repeating. No thinking was necessary. When you repeat the words your teacher says, you should strive to be a parrot as well. Don't *analyze* (for example, don't ask yourself: "Let's see, was that sound the teacher said like *this*, or like *that*...?")

Simply try to absorb the sound and repeat it as closely as possible.

By not thinking, you will be able to avoid censoring what you yourself say, which can lead to mental blocks. For instance, some pupils, when they hear a word in a foreign tongue, hesitate before trying to say it themselves. They first want to think about how it is written, how to form the mouth when pronouncing it, etc. Yet the best thing to do at first is *just say it*. Your pronunciation wasn't on the mark? Fine. **Then say it again - and again, and again...** Keep repeating it until what you say sounds like what the teacher said. Insist that your teacher not be satisfied until you say it right. Usually, you will get it after a few tries at most. If not, **then** is the time to analyze. *Now*, you can think. Ask yourself what you are doing wrong. Are you positioning your lips and tongue correctly? Could it be that you didn't listen well in the first place, so that you aren't really sure *how* the word sounds yet? Have the teacher say it again (or rewind your recording a bit). **Listen more closely.** Then try to say it again. In any case, **don't be satisfied until you are able to pronounce the word as closely to the native speaker's pronunciation as possible.**

If your mind seems "blocked", that is, if you can't seem to get it right no matter what you try, then it's time to take a step back. *Don't* tell yourself you just *can't* get it right, that you are a failure, or whatever. Even if you're learning a foreign language as difficult as Chinese, always remember: There are *millions* of people who speak that language, and they certainly aren't all geniuses! It **can** be done.

When it isn't going well, the first thing you should do is **RELAX**. Seriously: **Sit back in your chair, breathe deeply.** Inhale, exhale, slowly. Feel your body relaxing, your mind opening up. Tell yourself that you will now listen to the word again, in this relaxed state, and that you will then be able to say it yourself. Listen again, and repeat. I have seen countless times that when a pupil relaxes, he or she can suddenly listen much better, and is thus better able to repeat what is heard. Try it out when the going gets rough, and more likely than not, you'll surprise yourself at how much easier it is when you are relaxed.

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