The Language Learning Alphabet

How you can learn to communicate in another language

Developed by Howard Culbertson, Southern Nazarene University
God’s gift

- “And God said . . .” (Genesis 1:3)
Jesus

- Incarnational ministry model
- He spoke the language.
  - Some Aramaic phrases so powerful that gospel writers quoted Jesus in that language and then gave translations.
Barrier
The way to their Heart
Filtering

- Linguists say that languages condition or channel our thinking.
- If people of another mother tongue have to speak to you in English, they are limited in what they can express.
Adults
Children

- How do adults learn a language?
- How do children learn a language?
- Which analogy is best?
  - The preciseness of math?
  - The expressiveness of art?
Another “c” word

Charitable

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity . . .”

(1 Corinthians 13:1, KJV)
Dedication
Another “d” word

Discouraged

- Progress between plateaus
Everyone

- Do you say “I can’t learn a language” based on attempts in high school or college?
- Lots of people in the world are bi-lingual; many of those are illiterate!
One more “e” word

**Etymology**

- Using word origins to get at meanings can be both helpful and disastrous.

- For example:
  - “molestar”
  - “embarasada”
Vocabulary test.
A French term for the spray from opening a soda can.
Another “g” word

Gestures

- Be prepared to use a lot of them!
Immersion

- Total immersion: being thrown into the swimming pool!
- Don’t try to have the language explained to you in English.
Kindergarten

- You’re going back to being a kindergartner
- Another “h” word: Humility
Label everything

- Put written labels on everything . . . even the dog.
Fearful of making mistakes and looking stupid?
You’ve got a million mistakes to make. So, get started.
Another “m” word

Memorize Scripture
Learn from native speakers, preferably those who do not speak English!
Obligatory

- Language learning is not a “necessary evil” to get out of the way.
- Don’t give it low priority because you’re only going to be there a short time.
- Build relationships with your language helpers. Maybe the Holy Spirit has brought them to you on purpose!
Proverbs and Prayers

- Learn a couple of proverbs and use them often!

- Memorize three short prayers:
  - Table grace
  - Offering prayer
  - A “general” prayer for a church service
Questions

- Ask lots of ‘em!
- Learn to ask “What is this?” in your target language.
- Hit this button a zillion times.
- Keep your mind turned “on.”
Repetition

- Learn a bit; use it a bunch.
- Learn a little; use it a lot.
By the end of the second day off the plane, you should be saying:

- “Good morning”
- “Good evening”
- “How are you?”
- “I am fine, thank you”
Studying

- “Studying” a language does not equal “learning” it.
- “Studying” the language can become an excuse for not using what you do know.
Translation

- No exact word for word equivalence exists
- Use translation as little as possible!
- Listen to church services in the language without an interpreter (interrupter) talking in your ear.
Use it

- Use it all
- Use it all every day
- Use it all with every person
a. Voracious

b. Vulnerable

- Develop a voracious appetite for words and phrases
- Be willing to laugh at yourself . . . a lot
Language is a window into their soul.

Learn to speak a little bit; they may open the door and invite you all the way in.
Xtra patience
You are the key
Zest

- Put zest into your language learning or you may wind up with zilch.
- Another “e” word: euphoria
“There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every . . . language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb”

-- Revelation 7:9
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