

Language Notes: 5

The Enemy Within: Part II

Have you ever thought of starting a diet? Before you do, you might want to know that about 85% of people never succeed with their plan. Is it the diet plan's fault? Dwight Gradin (PILAT instructor) says that there are two kinds of language learning approaches: You can either ride along on as a passenger on the "language learning train," or you can drive the train yourself. What do you think is a connection between what Dwight has said and the people who fail on their diets? People who do not take control of their own lives end up needing other people/programs to do it for them, which rarely works.

Here are some quiz questions: Who is going to solve your grammar problems, getting to the next language-level problem, accent problems, comprehension problems, conversation problems, and problems with fluency? I hope you do not think your teacher or your language program will. Here are some warning signs of not being in control: "I have a _____ (fill in the blank) problem because my teacher does not give me phonetic drills, does not help me with everyday language needs, does not explain grammar well, does not drill me on numbers and common questions, and does not want to work with memorized texts. My teacher just covers the material in the book." All these statements reflect the fact that the student is not in control, and will have a hard time learning the language.

Without getting too deep into the psychology of all this, why is it that we want others to solve all our problems for us? Why do we not want to be in charge of our own lives? Someone suggested it is due to an education system that really does not require much on our part expect passing exams. If you memorize well, you can pass the exam. I believe there is something more basic, and consistent with revealed truth: we do not like to be responsible. Think of the college students today who are blaming their professors for the fact that they cannot understand physics. Who fault is it? Calculus cannot be learned by just using a computer, and you cannot understand physics without calculus. The mind-set today is that it the professor's fault if the student cannot learn. I personally like how the military addresses this issue with new recruits: "You ain't got no mama now! What you gonna do?" So, my question for you is, given that you have language learning problems like everyone else, what are you going to do? Get into the driver's seat!

Tape Recorder (Now a Digital Recorder)

The most important tool you have is your tape recorder. There are much better uses for your tape recorder than listening to tapes that go along with your textbook (although that is helpful too). Here are four ideas:

1. Write out a ***one-minute script*** about something you want to learn. For example,
 - a. directions to your house
 - b. what organization you work with
 - c. your address phone number and occupation
 - d. what you like about your new home country
 - e. saying common words like hello, please, thank you, your welcome

Have it written perfectly and then record it. You can use a one-minute loop tape or record the one-minute segment 10 times over on a regular tape. Listen to it 15 minutes a day for a month. You will end up with a great accent.

2. Use the same principle as above, but write out a simple ***one-minute series***.
 - a. this is how I brush my teeth
 - b. this is how I start the car
 - c. this is how I make tea/coffee
 - d. this is how I make muffins
 - e. this is where I go for a walk every day
3. Write out and record ***longer scripts***:

Language Notes: 5

- a. your personal story that is important to share with others (short and long versions)
- b. longer version of why you are in that country
- c. your family background describing each family member
- d. your personal educational background and major life events
- e. interesting things about your home country
- f. what your organization does in general, etc...

Write them out perfectly, usually at a higher level of grammar structure than what you are at now, and record them. This is probably the most useful technique that helped me progress to higher levels of Hungarian.

4. Finally ***record yourself***. If you have never does this, do this right away. You need to hear how YOU sound. If you are already teaching, record a lecture you give. If not, say the following into the tape recorder, "My name is _____. I have come from _____ and I/we now live in _____. I/We have been here for _____ and right now I am studying the language. I enjoy learning, but it is difficult." After you have recorded yourself, have a national record the same text and listen to the difference. You will learn a lot from this. Have your teacher point out the differences in accent, rhythm, and intonation. If you are already giving lectures, listen for your typical grammar mistakes. Try not to get discouraged with this one.