

Success with Foreign Languages

Seven who achieved it and what worked for them

EARL W. STEVICK



ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Prentice Hall

New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore

Contents

General Editor's Preface	ix
Preface	xi
Acknowledgements	xv
Chapter One An Intuitive Learner: Ann learning Norwegian	1
1.1 As language comes in	1
1.1.1 Taking language in through the ear	1
1.1.2 Responding to nuances of pronunciation	3
1.1.3 Transcribing what has been heard	4
1.1.4 Staying afloat in a 'torrent of sound'	6
1.1.5 Nonverbal communication	9
1.1.6 AILEEN: Diversity in what is triggered by intake	10
1.2 The power of context	12
1.2.1 What 'top-to-bottom' listening can do	12
1.2.2 A TECHNIQUE: Selective listening	13
1.2.3 A TECHNIQUE: Examining a whole newspaper	14
1.2.4 A contrasting case of 'top-to-bottom' listening	14
1.2.5 The need for meaningful context	16
1.2.6 Ann's idea of the 'natural' way to learn a language	18
1.3 Notes	20
Chapter Two A Formal Learner: Bert learning Chinese	21
2.1 Audio-lingual-style activities	21
2.1.1 Bert's idea of the 'natural' way to learn a language	21
2.1.2 Massive 'mimicry-memorization'	24
2.1.3 Intensive mechanical drill	26
2.1.4 How important <i>is</i> native-like pronunciation?	27
2.1.5 Memorization of texts	29
2.2 Bert's other activities	30
2.2.1 Memorizing individual words	30
2.2.2 A TECHNIQUE: Imagery with vocabulary cards	32
2.2.3 BOB: Imagery and memorization	32
2.2.4 A TECHNIQUE: Meaningful memorization of texts	34
2.2.5 The value of summarizing reading	35
2.2.6 Paraphrasing as a learning technique	37
2.3 Notes	39

Chapter Three An Informal Learner: Carla learning Portuguese and German	40
3.1 Sources of encouragement	40
3.1.1 Openness and risk-taking: two qualities of a successful informal learner	40
3.1.2 Looking good in the eyes of one's teachers	42
3.1.3 Success with self-directed learning	43
3.1.4 A TECHNIQUE: Originating one's own texts	45
3.1.5 Success in socially mediated learning	45
3.1.6 CHUCK: Alternation between formal and informal exposure	47
3.2 Sources of conflict and discouragement	49
3.2.1 Thoughtful vs spontaneous use of language	49
3.2.2 Links between printed and spoken forms	50
3.2.3 The social side of formal study: lack of confidence	52
3.2.4 How should Carla have started her language study?	54
3.2.5 How is Carla likely to do in the future?	56
3.3 Notes	56

Chapter Four An Imaginative Learner: Derek learning German, Russian and Finnish **57**

4.1 Imagination in mastering fundamentals	57
4.1.1 Devising one's own tables of forms	57
4.1.2 A contribution of 'learning' to 'acquisition'	59
4.1.3 A TECHNIQUE: Learning grammar with cuisenaire rods	61
4.1.4 Sometimes working from chaos to order	62
4.1.5 Mental files and indexes	63
4.1.6 Forming and testing hypotheses	65
4.1.7 Vigorous mechanical drill	66
4.2 Imagination in using the language	68
4.2.1 'Starter words'	68
4.2.2 An imaginary brother	70
4.2.3 Relating available forms and available meanings	72
4.2.4 DEXTER: Making vocabulary stick	74
4.2.5 Two ways of focusing on pronunciation	76
4.2.6 A TECHNIQUE: 'Shadowing' a news broadcast	77
4.3 Notes	77

Chapter Five An Active Learner: Ed learning Korean, Rumanian and Swahili **79**

5.1 Pronunciation	79
5.1.1 Reading aloud to oneself	79
5.1.2 EUGENE: Varieties of systematic repetition	80

5.1.3 Building a set of auditory images	82
5.1.4 A TECHNIQUE: Listening to one's own voice	84
5.1.5 'Top-to-bottom' and 'bottom-to-top' in studying pronunciation	84
5.1.6 One emotional aspect of pronunciation	85
5.2 Vocabulary and grammar	86
5.2.1 'Learning' and 'acquisition' in the study of vocabulary	87
5.2.2 Terminology is not essential to 'understanding' grammar	88
5.2.3 'Top-to-bottom' and 'bottom-to-top' in studying vocabulary	89
5.2.4 Resources: rules, regularities and routines	91
5.2.5 Using drills to promote spontaneity	93
5.2.6 Structured conversation as an alternative to drill	94
5.2.7 The importance of assimilation	96
5.3 Observing one's own mental activity	97
5.3.1 'Shadowing' grammar as well as pronunciation	97
5.3.2 The conditions for 'monitoring'	99
5.3.3 Fluctuating energy levels	101
5.4 Notes	102

Chapter Six A deliberate learner: Frieda learning Arabic and Hebrew

103

6.1 Texts and grammar	103
6.1.1 Reading before speaking	103
6.1.2 The importance of personal involvement	104
6.1.3 Manufacturing one's own meanings	106
6.1.4 Shifting of attention during production	108
6.1.5 A TECHNIQUE: Shifting attention while reading aloud	109
6.1.6 Paradigms	109
6.2 Vocabulary	111
6.2.1 Vocabulary cards	111
6.2.2 A TECHNIQUE: One way to use cards for vocabulary	113
6.2.3 'Stockpiling' new items	113
6.2.4 FRED: Mnemonics	114
6.3 Pronunciation	116
6.3.1 Producing sounds from printed descriptions	116
6.3.2 Perfecting material before moving ahead	117
6.3.3 The social significance of a foreign accent	119
6.3.4 Wanting to sound like the other person	120
6.3.5 Variant pronunciation of one's native language	122
6.4 Cultural considerations	123
6.4.1 The etiquette of using a language with its speakers	123
6.4.2 'Instrumental' and 'integrative' motivations	125
6.5 Notes	126

Chapter Seven A Self-aware learner: Gwen learning Japanese	127
7.1 Working on the mechanics of the language	127
7.1.1 From 'rules' to 'regularities' to 'resources'	127
7.1.2 A TECHNIQUE: Working grammar into real conversation	129
7.1.3 The value of a bird's-eye view	129
7.1.4 GRETA: The need for a 'power base'	131
7.1.5 The value of semi-attentive listening	132
7.2 Other matters	134
7.2.1 Reading for pleasure	134
7.2.2 Developing pronunciation through 'acquisition'	135
7.2.3 Identifying with others while preserving one's own identity	136
Chapter Eight Summary	138
8.1 What worked for these learners	138
8.1.1 An overall pattern	138
8.1.2 Elements in the pattern	139
8.2 Conceptual gaps in this book	146
8.2.1 Some concepts that have been included	146
8.2.2 Some concepts that have been omitted	146
8.2.3 'Strategies'	146
8.3 What I myself would do with a new language	147
8.4 What this means to me as a teacher	149
8.5 Notes	151
Index	153