

# LEARNING BY LISTENING

By Eugene Nida

Perhaps there is no place in the world where so many people speak more than one language than in Africa. Tens of thousands of Africans speak a trade language or a colonial language as well as their own tribal tongue. Thousand more speak two or more tribal tongues. In learning various African languages, these people have never enjoyed the presumed benefits of printed grammars, a study of phonetics, or instruction in how to learn other languages, but they master diverse tongues with apparent ease. I have personally inquired of a number of African polyglots just how they learned the languages of neighboring tribes. Almost without exception the story is the same: they went to live in a neighboring village, or on some plantation, or in the mines they were working with people who spoke another language. But instead of trying hard to learn the language, they seemed just to take it for granted that after listening to the language long enough, then he would find that they could “hear” it. “We just live there and listen, and before we know it, we can hear what they say. Then we can talk,” one African explained. This does not mean that he expected to be able to understand (i.e. “hear”) everything in the language before he said anything but his whole attitude was one of passive absorption, confident that his ears and brain would take in the language and that, without particular worry or concern on his part, he would be able to understand and speak sooner than even his imagined.

This African way of language learning is ultimately the best way to acquire a foreign tongue, for it is the natural way – the way children learn. Children do not worry about genders, declensions, conjugations, and subjunctives. They just listen, repeat, and put together words which they have heard (often with mistakes, but these are corrected by later hearing.) Listening is the basis of this learning process, repeating is the inevitable response to listening, and putting words together in different combinations is the natural outgrowth of anyone’s desire to communicate his desires and observations. The initial step in this process of language learning we call “passive listening.”

## Passive Listening

The seemingly effortless way in which children and many indigenous people learn foreign languages can be designed as “passive listening,” though in a sense it would be quite wrong to imagine that our brains are idle – by no means. What we mean by passive listening is the absorption of a language without the conscious effort which usually characterizes one’s attempt at boning, cramming, memorizing, drilling, and mastering a language. Our brains are amazingly active in registering noise, smells, and sights, even when we seem to have directed our attention to something else or are even sleeping.

The capacity for the brain to assimilate, sort, and store information is strikingly illustrated by what happened to a missionary’s child in Thailand. This small girl did not leave Thailand until she was about one year of age. Up to that time she had not spoken any Thai or English, though she had heard Thai constantly from her nursemaid and from the other children. She had heard some English from her parents, but not much. About two months after returning to the States, she began to speak, but the language she used was Thai, not English. Naturally the vocabulary was restricted, as is the vocabulary of any small child, but the sounds (including complicated tones) and the order of the words were a baby’s close approximations to correct Thai usage and were far better than the usage of many foreign adults. Precisely how the brain can assimilate and store such information we do not know, but we are sufficiently aware of the end-results of such unbelievable capacity of our brains that we need to be more alert to the possibilities of better use of these latent abilities.

The fact that our brains work for us even when we are not conscious of such activity is recognized by anyone who has ever gone to live in a foreign country. At first all the people seem to look alike. For example, we can’t distinguish Koreans from Chinese or Japanese, even though we soon discover that the Koreans themselves can almost always can tell the national origin of any oriental looking person. After a

few weeks or months we can distinguish Koreans from other Orientals. What has happened to us? Must we study books on physical anthropology or anthropometry in order to make such judgments? Of course not! What has happened is that our brains have been registering thousands of impressions and without our realizing it the brain has sorted, classified, and stored such impressions. We could not define precisely what are the distinguishing characteristics of different Oriental types but we can make the distinction, nevertheless.

What our eyes help our brains do with visual images, our ears help our brains to do with acoustic impressions. When we first arrive in any place where a foreign language is being spoken, we are usually impressed by the speed with which everyone seems to talk. But if we stay around a while, we begin to begin to think that people are speaking quite a bit slower, even though we may not understand a word of what they say. Of course, people are not talking any slower; it is just that our brains have been assimilating those sounds – even when we are not conscious of the process –and have begun the process of identifying and sorting them. Since the sounds are more familiar and hence more quickly recognized (even though imperfectly), the rate of speech seems slower.

Even a person who makes a “flying tip around Europe,” spending no more than a few days in each capital (in order to “do the place”), discovered that he has learned a great deal about the language of which he has been totally ignorant. If before going on this trip he ever listened to short-wave radio, he probably could not tell French from Italian, German from Dutch, or Spanish from Greek. But after the trip something happened. He finds that he can recognize certain languages. He usually does not know quite how, but he is able to distinguish between them, although he did not pay the slightest attention to the foreign languages.

Since even without conscious effort our brains can do a great deal for us in mastering a foreign language, we might as well take full advantage of this hidden resource. We should give our brains every opportunity to work at full efficiency, To do this we need to employ certain helpful techniques.

**1. *Provide the brain with plenty to listen to.***

The big advantage which Africans have in learning another indigenous tongue is that African community life is characteristically very talkative. In the average African village there are few hours in the day or night when one cannot hear from any point in the village at least five different conversations. If we cannot duplicate the ideal conditions of an African village, we can nevertheless provide by means of radio programs, recordings, and listening to lectures sufficient raw material for the brain’s use in assimilating, shorting, and storing important data on the language.

**2. *Be relaxed.***

Anxieties, even about learning the language, seems to short-circuit the efforts of our brains to do their work.

**3. *Do not erect barriers to sounds.***

People who live near a noisy railroad tend to protect themselves by a mentally erected “sound” screen,” so that they rarely hear the train when it passes. Some people tend to erect barriers to foreign languages, and as a result they do not assimilate the language in such a way that it ever seems to be of much help to them on a conscious level. In some instances, however, these people, when they are drunk or mental deranged, have been known to use the foreign language with considerable fluency.

**4. *Give the brain enough time.***

By the end of the week most people think they should be starting to speak a foreign language. Of course, they can no doubt use a few expressions, but for the full benefits of “passive listening” one must let the brain go about its work for several months.

**5. *Let the brain work while you are doing something else.***

It is a good technique to put on a recording in a language while one is shaving, eating, reading the evening newspaper, or even playing with children. One does not have to pay attention all the time. All this may seem quite ridiculous, if one does not take into consideration that this is precisely the manner in which many people become familiar with pieces of music. Even without paying attention to the music, one may become thoroughly acquainted with even the most complicated musical numbers by the process of passive listening. Many of us have had the experience of learning a song (often one we didn’t even care

to know simply by hearing it over and over again on some neighbor's radio or from a drugstore jukebox. What applies to this inadvertent learning of music, is also applicable to learning a foreign language.

It is even possible to learn a great deal while one's sleep. Perhaps some professors who have worried about students sleeping in their classes can have some consolation, for now they are assured by psychologists that even when students are sleeping they are learning – particularly if the information is repeated frequently (and fortunately for the sleepy listeners most lectures are highly repetitious.) Some people have taken advantage of this “learning while sleeping” to have recordings played during their sleep. Others have discovered that sleeping in the noisy hubbub of conversation has certain compensating advantages as far as language learning is concerned.

### Selective Listening

As effectively as passive listening is and can be, it is not usually regarded as sufficient. Our characteristics activism would not let us be content to employ such a passive technique even if we had ideal condition and were convinced it would work. In addition, however, to the psychological problems posed our activism, there are two valid reasons why we need to supplement passive listening with selective listening: (1) we rarely have an opportunity to participate completely in a foreign culture, and hence our dual lives greatly impair our capacity to absorb, and (2) our present speech habits tend to make us reinterpret the acoustic stimuli which our ears relay to our brains, and accordingly we get a skewed impression of the foreign tongue.

Selective listening, however, should not supplant passive listening, but should be supplemental to it. We should attempt to employ both the techniques and by this means compensate for our cultural isolation from the foreign language society and our tendency to reinterpret all that we hear in terms of the language we already know, namely, English.

When we first try to listen to a language, we are usually completely bewildered, for it sounds like a chaotic jumble. We cannot make head nor tail of it. Even if we are given a relatively short phrase and asked to pay strict attention to it, we usually get hopelessly lost in the multiplicity of unfamiliar sounds. We no sooner think that we have grasped one part of a phrase than we realize that we have blanked out as far as the succeeding syllables are concerned. At this point most students despair of trying to learn by an oral approach. They would rather retreat into an old-fashioned textbook – regardless of how inefficient it may be – for there the syllables and words remain in the same spot on the page. They can be looked at time and time again. Never do they disappear into thin air as does the fleeting pronunciation of a native speaker. Our inability to seize with our ears the whole phrase or sentence tends to discourage us. What we need to realize is that we should not be expected to grasp the entire acoustic phrase. It comes too fast (at an average rate in most languages of between three and five syllables in a second). The only possible way in which we can become familiar with the acoustic form of language is to listen selectively first to one feature and then another. In the same way as we examine written words from many standpoints – sometimes in terms of shapes of letters, their order, ways in which they come into syllables – so also we need to examine the acoustic forms of language from many perspectives by listening first to one and then another feature. Only in this way can we hope to hear the language properly.

If, however, we are to listen intelligently to the various features of language, we need to follow an order which will help us to find our way in the maze of seemingly unordered elements. Some languages require certain adaptations to the following suggested order of procedure, but for the most part these successive features of languages should be listening to selectively in the order given here:

#### **1. *Tone of the voice***

The tone of the voice, whether it goes up or down or remains level, is apparently one of the first things which a child notices about a new language, but it is usually the last thing which an adult learns. A child almost inevitably uses the right intonation of a foreign language, even when babbling with badly distorted consonants and vowels. But an adult seems to be almost incapable of learning the intonation of a foreign language. In fact, he may speak a foreign tongue with absolutely correct grammatical forms, excellent choice of words, and almost impeccable pronunciation of consonants and vowels, but his faulty intonation

usually betrays him as a stranger. It is highly possible that the completely unconscious manner in which he assimilated the intonation of his mother tongue makes him unaware of basic difference between languages. But be this as it may, selective listening to intonation is exactly where everyone should start in listening to a foreign language.

Most people assume that they cannot listen to the tone of a language until they understand the words, but then it is too late. In order to hear the changes in the tone we usually need to be able to blank out all the rest and hear only the tone. That is why listening to tone modifications should begin the very first day. One convenient device for noting tone is to draw the contours on a pad of paper. When the voice goes up, one can draw the line going up; if the voice goes down, then the line goes down. If the voice gradually falls off in tone, the line can slope gradually, but if it pitches off precipitously, the line should reflect this abrupt drop.

Some people have assumed that they could not do much about the differences in pitch used in speaking unless they had mastered the so-called tones of the language, e.g. as in Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Burmese, Zulu, Yoruba, or Navaho. But all this knowledge is not necessary before beginning to listen selectively for the contrasts in pitch. Of course, in a language such as English, German, Spanish, Swahili, Hindi, or Tagalog the variations in pitch are usually spread out over several syllables, while in the so-called tonal languages they are many abrupt shifts from one syllable to another and numerous glides on single vowels, even short ones.

A person first listens to a foreign language, he usually gets the impression that there absolutely no limit to the variations in the pitch of the voice on various words, phrases, and sentences. But gradually, the more one listens to a language the more one becomes aware that there are some very strict limits to what the speakers do with their voice. For example, after comparing a number of contours drawn on a scratch pad, one may realize that there are only four or five principal patterns, with a number of relatively rare exceptions. In listening to some languages of West Africa one is impressed with how the speakers voice jumps up and scoots down rapidly between three difference levels. However, at the beginning of a sentence these modifications are in a relatively higher range than they are toward the end of the sentence. It is almost like a fast-moving roller coaster, shooting up and down, but constantly going toward a lower level.

As we shall see from later chapters, the detailed analysis of precisely what happens to the voice pitch in different languages may be very complex, and one may never succeed in fully analyzing it. But that is not actually necessary for one to learn to reproduce the tonal differences. If we listening sufficiently one becomes aware – consciously or unconsciously – of the meaningful distinctions, and is able to reproduce them, that is all that is required of the practical user of a language. Very few people understand the highly complex structure of English intonation, but all of us as native speakers and all others who have learned English so well as to imitate our intonation can use this intricate system even though we are incapable of analyzing it or even explaining it to others.

## **2. *Strange Sounds***

As one is listening selectively to the tonal variations in a language (something which one should concentrate on for at least a week or more), certain strange sounds, either consonants or vowels, inevitably attract one's attention. Accordingly, the next feature in language to which we should selectively listen should be these unusual sounds. If a sound is quite frequent, then it is a good policy to concentrate on only that one sound. Everything else should be erased from one's mind, while attention is concentrated on hearing each occurrence. Within a very short time it will be noticed that this sound is not always the same. There are slight differences, but enough of the basic characteristics are present so that one can recognize what seems to be really the same distinctive sounds.

The identical process can be followed in listening to other sounds which are strikingly different from those of English.

As anyone listens carefully to the sound of a language, almost without exception he finds that he is moving his tongue, lips, and jaw in imitation of the sound in question. All this happens without any conscious effort to move the various parts of the speech mechanism. When one first hears a sound there is often some confusion as to just how to reproduce it, but after listening carefully to each such a sound

for a number of times, it seems as though the various speech organs almost automatically move in the right direction and at the right time in order to reproduce the sound. We do not have to study phonetics to be able to make a “stab” at imitating a sound. In fact, we don’t even know what parts of our mouths have moved. All of this highly organized activity is taken care of by our brains, which we may say are already “wired” for just such corresponding signals between acoustic impressions and the motor mechanisms involved in reproducing the sounds.

This almost automatic relationship between acoustic impressions and the mechanisms for reproduction explains how children learn languages in the first place and how adults may learn foreign languages without knowing a thing about the intricate mechanism and fine adjustments in position and timing which are necessary for the production of speech sounds. These built-in neural connections between hearing and speaking are one of the principal reasons why we insist upon the priority of listening in the process of language learning. Reading, on the other hand, presents a quite different situation. There is absolutely no relationship between the graphic forms of symbols used to represent a sound and the way in which it is reproduced in speech. No amount of merely looking at Hindi or Arabic alphabet could tell one how to pronounce the sound which are represented by the different symbols. We have to hear the sounds or have them described in terms of other sounds with which we are familiar. There is a built-in “wiring” between the graphic impression signed to our brain by the eyes and the motor mechanisms which have to be employed in producing the sound. Accordingly, we may be able to read a language well and not be able to say a thing while anyone who can understand anything which he hears in a language can always say something, and with some practice can become quite a fluent speaker. All this means that listening and speaking are very closely related processes, but reading is far removed from the central function of language – hearing and speaking.

### **3. Similar Sounds**

After listening selectively to strange sounds, we should begin to direct our attention to sets of similar sounds. We do not refer here to the similarity of such sounds to English, but the similarities between the sounds in foreign the foreign language. For example, one may hear what seems to be several sounds, some like English *p*, others like *b*, and still others which appear to be halfway between English *p* and *b*. Careful attention to this grouping of sounds will make it possible to isolate the first *p* like English (one which usually has puff of air after – compared pea with bee) and the *b*. The intermediate sound, which sometimes seems to be like *p* and at other times like *b*, may very well turn out to be a *p* without any puff of air. It does not matter, however, whether we can make a proper scientific description of each sound. We are more concerned with is that we can detect these sounds accurately each time they occur. If we hear them correctly, we are likely to be able to reproduce them correctly. If it should happen that we have trouble because of our own English language habits, we can correct our faults by attention to some of the helps provided by the study of phonetics, as outlined in Chapter 5. But the practical purpose of phonetic study is primarily to help us hear and reproduce sounds correctly, that is, in terms of the similar and different sounds in the language in question. Whether they happen to be similar or different from those in other languages which we have studied is usually of very minor concern to us. What counts is how they work in the language which we are learning.

As we begin to distinguish between the similar sounds, we soon discover that such similarities go in bunches. If, for instance, we find in a language a corresponding intermediate sound between *t* and *d*, and another between *k* and *g*. This is to say, the similarities and differences in languages are systematic. Languages are nothing more than very complicated signaling system or we could never remember them.

As we continue listening for various sets of similar sounds – both consonants and vowels – we soon realize that instead of the language having what seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of sounds, there is actually a quite limited number of really distinctive sounds – in some languages only about a dozen and in other as many as sixty – but regardless of their number they are far less than what we first imagined.

It may seem as though up to this time we are advocating that the person listen for sounds without paying the slightest attention to words and their meanings. In a sense this is what we would recommend, for this is almost precisely what a child does. Before being able to say anything in a language, a child usually learns to babble in a language, using most of the consonants and vowels with proper rising and

falling of the pitch of the voice. Many small children acquire an almost complete inventory of the sounds of a language before beginning to talk. But no adult would wait so long. Furthermore, it is not necessary to do so. On the very process of listening for similar sounds we inevitably come across words which are almost identical, except for one difference in a similar sounds. Sets of words such as *peak : break, tick : dick* and *kill : gill* we call minimal pairs, for there is just one significant difference in sound between them. As we learn to distinguish between the significant and meaningless differences between similar sounds, we inevitably refer back to such sets of minimal pairs. By listening to them again and again we can sort out the distinguishing features. This does not mean that we can necessarily describe these differences to others, but if we hear these contrasts in enough places, e.g. *peak* vs. *beak*, *plead* vs. *bleed*, *pray* vs. *bray*, *sip* vs. *sib*, *cab* vs. *cap*, *clabber* vs. *clapper*, *rumple* vs. *rumble*, etc., our brains sort out the differences in such a way that any new word which we hear having *p*- or *b*- like sound is immediately classified as *p* or *b*, depending upon the “models” made familiar to us by these sets of minimal pairs. But even when we cannot find sets of minimal, pairs, our brains are incredibly adept in classifying sounds if we give them only half a chance by listening selectively to sets of similar sounds.

#### **4. Word and Phrases**

As we have already implied in our discussion of selective listening to similar sounds, anyone who is listening carefully to a foreign language will soon pick out recurring combinations of sounds. If one hears over and over an identical combination of two or three syllables, this is very likely to be a word or stem. If one hears recurring combinations consisting of five or six syllables, these are likely to be phrases. But whether such recurring combinations are words or phrases does not really concern the language learner too much. Children certainly do not know the differences between words and phrases and neither do we need to distinguish such units when we are beginning to speak. In fact, we are often better off if we do know such grammatical details, for we are more likely to learn and use the combinations as a unit – just as it is used in the language – rather than breaking it up by artificial pauses corresponding to what are sometimes arbitrary spaces written between so-called words.

One of the most important phases of listening selectively to words, phrases, or sentences is to try to figure out from the context what they mean. This is the way children learn, and we would do well to imitate them. The value of this procedure is that a combination of sounds which one can identify and to which one can assign meaning on the basis of the context has been learned in a manner ideally fitted for instant recall whenever a corresponding context requires. We sometimes think we cannot learn a language without a dictionary, but adults in aboriginal societies never heard of a dictionary. They never write down words, and ask people what they mean. But they learn languages by recognizing words in context. From this they determine their meaning. A dictionary however, can be of great value to a language learner, for, in a sense, a dictionary is a record of concentrated language experience. But a person must not “misuse” a dictionary, by thinking that it is completely in its description of the meanings of a word or that it is always right. The dictionary is only a set of helpful clues for one to follow in tracking down the full significance of a term, that is, what it signals in all the contexts in which it can be employed.

Selective listening to words usually begins by noting any recurring combinations of sound which seems to “stand out” in the flow of speech. If a person has the advantage of listening to a recording over and over again, he can perhaps spot two or three such expressions the first time through. With the help of a translation or a teacher, he can find out what these combinations mean. The next time he listens to the recording, he can spot a few more combinations, and some of these he can no doubt figure out from the context. Gradually, as he goes over and over the same recording, the number of recognized words and phrases increases and the number of unknown ones correspondingly diminishes.

At first one listens selectively to recurring sequences of which the meaning is quite unknown. Once these are identified, one needs to listen for such combinations in other recordings, or in daily conversation. As these words become thoroughly familiar, one continues to add other words that are newly learned, pushing out further and further the limits of one’s receptive control of the language.

## 5. Grammatical Forms

In most languages what we call words do not always appear in the same forms. Sometimes an addition is tacked on to the word, e.g., *walked* vs. *walk* and *roses* vs. *rose*. In other instances something within the word itself is modified, e.g., *ran* vs. *run* and *feet* vs. *foot*. In still other cases, we find that we have to use utterly different words, e.g. *better* (not *\*gooder*) and *went* (not *\*ge-ed*). But whatever the changes (the types are discussed in Chapter 6), we need to direct our attention to them by listening selectively to sets of modifications.

If we find, as in most of the so-called Bantu language, that all the nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs show by prefixes certain distinctions between singular and plural then we need to listen selectively to these contrasts, while trying at the same time to erase everything else in our minds. The concords in Bantu languages (see p. 16) are exceedingly important to anyone who wants to learn such a language. He will of course want to drill extensively to them, but as valuable as drilling is, it cannot substitute for nor should it precede selective listening. By the process of listening attentively to just one type of contrast, we build up in our minds a mechanism by which the brain can begin to classify the respective parts of the complicated grammatical system.

Even without listening selectively our brains do perform part of this function. In many instances we may not be able to remember exactly what form should be used, but have a “feeling” that one form is correct and another is incorrect. Though we may confess that we are not certain, we nevertheless reflect part of the pattern formulated by our brains by saying that one form “sound right” and another “sounds wrong.”

As we learn more and more about the grammatical structure of a language, we should listen selectively to each type of grammatical feature, e.g., genders, tenses, moods, voice, cross-reference of pronouns, order of words, phrases, and clauses, and dependence of clauses. Any and all features of grammar, especially those which may be given the learner any special difficulty, should be listened to selectively.

One of the important advantages of selective listening to grammatical structures is that the patterns of structure absorbed by this process tend to make “ruts in our brains.” Even after we have ceased to listen especially for such forms or arrangements of words, our brains continue to process of automatically classifying what we hear. Accordingly, we can keep right on improving our knowledge of and facility in the language long after we have stopped studying grammar in a formal way.

In our description of selective listening we no doubt have given the impression that one should do nothing else than listen selectively to everything that is said. Of course, this is quite impossible, for by the time we are listening for grammar – a process which should occupy the better part of a year or more – we also need to be using a language in practical communications. We obviously cannot erase from our minds all that someone else may be saying to us in order to concentrate on grammatical forms. Accordingly, we must often restrict our concentrated selective listening to those situations in which we need not rely or are not under special obligation to remember the content., e.g., political speeches, radio talks, recordings, and sermons. It will be amazing, however, to anyone who has tested the techniques of selective listening how easy it is to follow the meaning of what is said, even though we may concentrate on the grammatical forms. It is as though our brains were doing two things at once, classifying the grammatical forms while letting the meaning filter through. This is practically what happens in reverse when we listen to the meaning while the grammatical structure filters through.

There is one more aspect of language learning in which selective listening is important, namely, in listening to ourselves. Quite unconsciously we all listen to our selves speak, that is, we “monitor” our own speech constantly. By this means we are able to speak as others do. The person who becomes deaf loses this power of monitoring and his characteristic distortions of normal speech are soon recognized.

Though we are all quite proficient in monitoring ourselves when we speak our own mother tongue, we seem to be conspicuously bad in monitoring ourselves when we speak a foreign language. One of the reasons for this is that we have never heard the language “correctly.” If, whenever we listen to the language, we unconsciously equate the different sounds with the closest corresponding English sounds. Then in the monitoring of our speech we will automatically make the same erroneous adjustments. However, if by selective listening we are able to overcome this bad habit of equating sounds which are

really quite different, we are then better prepared to correct our speech as we listen to ourselves. The monitoring is, however, twofold. First we monitor the muscular movements – this give us constant control – secondly we monitor the actual sounds as they come out, which gives us a delayed control. But if we are to learn to monitor ourselves properly in a foreign language, we must give some conscious effort to this process. That is to say, we need to listen selectively to ourselves, constantly comparing the acoustic impression which we receive with that which we have heard from others. At first this process of conscious monitoring of oneself is very distracting and confusing. We tend to get so absorbed in listening to what we are saying that we lose the momentum to keep talking. However, with some practice we can achieve good results.

If we have special difficulty in consciously monitoring, it is helpful to make a recording of our speech and then to listen to ourselves. In this way we can identify ourselves with the speaker as well as be the hearer. By a careful comparison of our speech with the models to which we have been constantly listening we can make almost unbelievable improvement in a relatively short time.

It may be that we have difficulty remembering precisely how the foreign language should sound. In such instances it is advisable to make a recording of our own speech (a sentence at a time) followed by a native speaker correctly uttering the same expression. By reversing the order, first native speaker and then our own speech, we may monitor our speech in a situation in which we are constantly trying to imitate a native speaker.

**Learning to speak a language is very largely the task of learning to hear it.**

## Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

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I purchased Eugene A. Nida's 1957 *Learning a Foreign Language: A Handbook Prepared Especially for Missionaries* in 1975. That was one year after I took a course in Mission Linguistics for learning a foreign language on the field. The course was taught by the distinguished linguist and polyglot, Gerald Payden at the Sunset School of Missions in Lubbock, TX. The class included, Articulatory Phonetics, Phonemic Analysis, Morphological Analysis, Grammatical Analysis, and practical language learning techniques.

This chapter on learning a foreign language by listening was great help to me when I taught myself Spanish during a period of two years from 1981 to 1982. I listened daily to Voice of America Spanish shortwave broadcasts. I also listened to the local Spanish radios stations.

My dear friend, Ignacio Zuniga, a local resident born and raised in Mexico, kindly worked with me as an informant. He provided me with the opportunity to hear and speak Spanish on a weekly basis for several years. The learning by listening was so effective that after a mere 2 years of self-study, I was able to clep out of one year of college Spanish. I then took a very enjoyable class in Second Year Spanish Grammar and Literature. A few years later I became a certified public school Bilingual and Secondary Spanish teacher. I hope my experiences following Nida's advance in this chapter will encourage others to follow his sage advice.

Previous to learning Spanish, I had studied New Testament Greek seriously for about ten years. I learned more Spanish in two years than Greek in ten. I believe approaching the language through listening is what lead to the great breakthrough.

In 1987 I published *A Practical Guide to the Pronunciation and Reading of New Testament Greek*. I had 300 copies printed. I hope someday to publish a updated edition. In that book, I applied what I had learned learning Spanish by listening to teaching and learning New Testament Greek.

This year I began a program of self-study to improve my ability to sight-read New Testament Greek by a combination of extensive listening to recording of the Gospel of Mark in Greek and reading the Gospel over and over at about a chapter a day for ten cycles through the entire book.

Here is the chart I am using to keep track of my progress in the program.

[http://donpotter.net/pdf/mark\\_resources.pdf](http://donpotter.net/pdf/mark_resources.pdf)

Last updated on July 11, 2020.

[www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net)

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/094d/977252c154f206861f8fd93f6dbc9bfef14.pdf>

<http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/2012-01/2012-01-038-stine.html>

<https://www.linguisticsociety.org/sites/default/files/0163-169.pdf>

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