

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION and READING

By Bryce Hedstrom, 2005

- Time spent in reading for pleasure is more valuable for foreign language development than time spent in direct instruction, so if you really want to learn a new language quickly, thoroughly and fluently, **READ!**
- More than 70% of a literate person's vocabulary in her first language comes from reading. You can apply the same principle to your foreign language learning process. You can increase your foreign language vocabulary by reading.
- Ideally, beginning language reading material should be:
 - **Interesting** You have to enjoy what you are reading or you will not stick with it long enough for it to do you any good. Find material that is interesting to you and read it. Often.
 - **Comprehensible** You need to be able to understand most (but not necessarily all) of what you read:
95%+ is ideal, 90% may be OK, 80% may be OK with the help of a group, 70% is not enough—find something that is more appropriate for your current reading level.
 - **Culturally Authentic** Ideally, what you read should help you to understand the culture (history, art, customs, mannerisms, music, business practices, films, religion, literature, philosophy, sports, and/or geography) of the people groups that speak the language.
- **Narrow Input:** Comprehension and language acquisition increase when a person reads narrowly, because the reader sees the same words used over and over again. Narrow input (or narrow reading) can mean:
 - Reading a great deal on **one topic** (intensive reading), or
 - Reading several works by **one author** (extensive reading).

Basic Reading Strategies

Start Reading. Gaining vocabulary through reading is 10 times faster than studying word lists alone. If you want to increase the number of words you know, it is a better use of your time to read than to study and memorize.

Keep Reading. Each time you see a word used in context you acquire more of its correct meaning and usage. Through context you will learn what it means and its grammatical application. You will learn if the word is a noun, an adjective, a verb, etc.

How to Deal With an Unfamiliar Word as You Read:

Skip it. Just skip over the word and keep on reading. Any one word is probably not all that important. With fewer pauses you will read more and understand more. Remember that you are focusing on the overall meaning not necessarily on trying to get every single word. If the word seems to be essential to understanding the passage...

Guess. Go ahead and just guess the meaning of the word. If your guess doesn't seem to fit...

Guess again. If you still cannot seem to make sense of the word, and it seems like you need to understand it to get the gist of the passage...

Look it up. Go ahead and look it up in the dictionary if you cannot get the meaning from context, but don't make a habit of looking up every single word you do not understand—in the long run it will actually slow down the language acquisition process because it will slow down your reading, interrupt the flow, muddle the context, and give you less total exposure to the language.

Sources:

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