

# **Ideas For Vocabulary And Sentence Patterns**

## **To Learn To Comprehend**

### **In Order To Become A Basic Speaker**

#### *Chapter 4, Kickstarting Your Language Learning*

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### ***Introduction***

When I described your typical daily activities during the early weeks of language learning, you may have been wondering how you would ever come up with enough ideas for vocabulary and sentence patterns to fill all those daily language sessions. Most of the rest of what I have to say is my way of filling in those details. These details may help to clarify much of what I've said about the daily sessions of your early weeks. It might be good to go back and reread those earlier sections after you have surveyed my suggestions.

As I give you this long list of suggestions for vocabulary and sentence patterns to learn, don't expect to remember it all after the first reading. It will be there for you to return to over and over while planning your daily language sessions.

First, let's see where we've been. I have attempted to give a picture of your first two months as a language learner in which your first major emphasis is on learning to understand the language, believing that your short term and long term progress will be increased if you approach the language in that way. Using TPR, pictures, and simple role-play, you can quickly acquire enough vocabulary items and sentence patterns to qualify as a basic speaker of the language. Gradually you put increasing emphasis on using the language to

talk, using vocabulary and sentence patterns that you have already learned to understand. By the end of the second month, your sessions may last for two or three (or more) hours during which you may devote half of the time to comprehension activities and half of the time to two-way conversational activities.

Now, regarding the areas of vocabulary and sentence patterns I am about to survey, unfortunately, I cannot be totally concrete. I cannot truly suggest vocabulary items and sentence patterns, since the ones that exist will vary considerably from language to language. Rather I will attempt to cover a healthy range of general categories of vocabulary and sentence patterns. I'll have to give English words and phrases and sentences in order to be concrete, but realize that the actual details of how English works will not match up very often with the details of how another language works.

To take just one example, we have past tense forms in English which are different from present and future forms. In some languages there will be no such thing as tense. Nevertheless, you need to know how to describe events which happened in the past. In other languages there may be two or three different kinds of past tense, such as remote past and recent past. I cannot foresee every such distinction you might encounter, and I won't even try. What I will do is provide enough possibilities so that if you learn to deal with everything I suggest, any other absolutely essential matters will come to your notice in the process. Remember, you're just trying to become a basic speaker right now. There are tons of details which you will not master during your first two months. I am trying to steer you toward the most important ones that you can reasonably master in that time period if you concentrate heavily on learning to understand and accept more modest goals when it comes to learning to speak.

#### ***4.1. Some ideas for vocabulary to learn to understand***

Remember, you are not simply collecting and compiling vocabulary for eventual memorization. You are learning to recognize the vocabulary items when you hear them in speech. You want to be prepared to learn to recognize around thirty new items per day. If these are the names of common objects, then you will want to use the actual objects in the language session, if possible. Your LRP will have you manipulate these objects as a means of learning their names or as a means of learning the words for the actions that can be performed on, or with, those objects. To learn other kinds of vocabulary, you may need to prepare drawings or diagrams. You can plan to learn a wide variety of words by means of acting them out in TPR activities. For example, if you are learning words for emotions, you may respond to commands such as "Act happy; act sad; act disappointed," and so forth.

##### **4.1.1. Which vocabulary items should I learn first?**

Learning a language means learning thousands of vocabulary items. During your kick-start phase of language learning, you might aim to learn your first thousand vocabulary items. Remember, you will start out as a poor speaker and gradually improve. So the first vocabulary you'll want to learn will be the vocabulary that even a poor speaker would know. Think of English for a moment. Some words would be important even for a poor speaker, while other words would be suitable only to a more advanced speaker. Consider the following words for facial expressions or facial movements: blink, grimace, and smile. Which of those would

be the most important for a poor speaker to learn first? Which would be least important? If you are like me, you feel that smile is more important than blink which in turn is more important than grimace. I can almost bet that you feel exactly the same as I do about this. In using English, people use smile more frequently than they use blink, while they do not use grimace very often at all. Native speakers of a language will probably have a good sense for which words are high frequency words, and which are less frequent, and, hence, less important. Hopefully, you'll be able to convey to your LRP your desire to learn high frequency words at first.

Even without the help of your LRP, you will have some sense of what words are important. If you are aware of some area of vocabulary that you will have the opportunity to use in the near future, that will be a good area of vocabulary to work on. Suppose that vegetable vendors come to your door every day. Then it would make sense to learn to recognize the words for all the vegetables they sell. Buy a few of every vegetable, and use them in your sessions until you easily recognize all of their names. You are then free to speak them to the vendors, even if it is just a matter of showing the vendors what you have learned. While you are doing your daily planning, it is good to ask yourself what specific areas of vocabulary you can work on that are relevant to daily activities.

However, you cannot limit yourself to vocabulary items that obviously fit into your daily activities, or you will never learn a lot of high frequency, important vocabulary. For example, unless you are doing medical work, you may not need to talk about body parts all the time. But what sort of a "speaker" would you be if you didn't know what a foot or hand is called? Follow your own instincts and those of your LRP in deciding what are the essential vocabulary for even a poor speaker like you. (Perhaps instead of calling you a poor speaker, I should call you an on-the-way-to-becoming-a-good-speaker, or maybe a temporarily challenged speaker.)

#### **4.1.2. Some Categories Of Vocabulary**

I am going to suggest some categories of essential vocabulary for you as a basic speaker of the language. However, I encourage you to only refer to this list when you run short of ideas from other sources. Keep examining every aspect of your daily life in the situation where you will be using the language and identify the objects, places, and activities that will be important to you. Let those be your inspiration in choosing vocabulary to learn. If you are preparing for a session and you run short on ideas, scan the following suggestions.

According to my most conservative tally, if the language you are learning is that of a group of people with a rudimentary material culture, these suggestions should yield five hundred vocabulary items. In most situations they should yield at least a thousand. It would be a good exercise for you, as homework, to flesh out these categories by listing a number of common English words that would fall under each one.

Some "words" will actually be phrases. For example, old man could be treated as a vocabulary item, since it is such an essential category of human beings. By way of contrast, tall man would not be considered a vocabulary item, although both tall and man would be important items.

If you keep a log of the vocabulary you learn, the items in your log will suggest new possibilities for vocabulary. The word for water may be in your log. Then think of all the things you can say about water: it

flows, drips, freezes, boils, soaks into things, soaks through things, leaks out of things, people pour it, splash it, spray it, etc. etc.

#### **4.1.2.1. Words For Referring To Human Beings**

- Personal pronouns (I, you, them, we, etc., etc.--see discussion below)
- Major categories of humans by age and sex (man, girl, adult, youth, etc.)
- Major ethnic categories of humans (names for other tribes, nationalities, language groups)
- Categories of friends, acquaintances, and relatives (for relatives, a family tree diagram can be used, or pictures of someone's various relatives. Don't expect the terms to correspond to the ones used in English. The whole kinship system may be wildly different.)
- Occupational or sociopolitical categories of people (plumber, president, beggar)
- Common personal names (It is a big help to be able to recognize and repeat, and easily remember, the names of people you meet.)

#### **4.1.2.2. Items Used By Human Beings**

- Animals (draft animals, herded animals, pets, etc.)
- Items used for transportation (and their parts)
- Items used in building and construction
- Cooking and eating utensils
- Food items
- Items for growing or acquiring food
- Household items
- Items found outside of houses
- Items related to education, learning, and communication
- Items used for recreation or entertainment
- Clothing, make-up, jewelry, etc.
- Items used for religion or magic
- Items used for curing or healing
- Items used in trade or business

#### **4.1.2.3. Places Frequented By Humans**

- Homes and their parts
- Locations near homes and residential areas
- Locations where food is gathered or grown, and their parts
- Locations where recreation, socializing, religious activities take place
- Locations where business transactions take place (for example, different types of shops and their parts)
- Place names (well-known villages, towns, cities, countries, lakes, rivers, etc.)

#### **4.1.2.4. Common Substances Not Yet Covered**

- Water, earth, glass, rubber, plastic, paper, wood, stone, grass, thatch, etc.

#### **4.1.2.5. Nature**

- Geological objects (rivers, islands, mountains, etc.), and related phenomena (flowing rivers, landslides)
- Astronomical objects
- Meteorological phenomena
- Common plants and their parts/substances
- Common wild animals
- Common insects
- Body parts (major external and internal ones)
- Body substances

#### **4.1.2.6. Time**

- Today, tomorrow, morning, evening, hours of the day, days of the week, months, seasons

### **4.1.3. Words Used To Further Describe All Of The Objects Covered So Far**

- Terms used in describing human beings' appearances
- Terms used in describing character/personality
- Terms used to describe emotional states, attitudes
- Other terms that come to mind in connection with all of the categories of humans mentioned above (Look them over in your vocabulary log!)
- Colours, sizes, shapes, textures, conditions, values, etc. of objects
- Quantities, including numbers (many, a few, ten, etc.)
- Qualifiers of adjectives (very, slightly, etc.)

### **4.1.4. Things That Happen To All Of The Objects Covered So Far**

- Ways that the objects change their location or position (fall, roll, etc.)
- Ways that the condition of objects changes (burn up, wear out, etc.)

### **4.1.5. Actions Of Human Beings**

- Bodily actions (Look over all of the body part terms in your vocabulary log, and think of everything you can do with each body part, or what they do, as well as whole-body actions.)
- Things people do with or to any of the objects covered so far (go over all your object words for ideas)
- Things done by people according to their occupational categories (farmer, beggar, etc.)
- Things which people do to or for other people

#### **4.1.6. Additional Sources For Basic Vocabulary**

-- Have several people remember every single action they performed, from rising in the morning to retiring at night on a given day.

-- Observe common activities of daily life with all of the stages or steps in those activities; take photos if possible.

With the right activities in your daily sessions with your LRP, assuming you spend adequate time planning and preparing for those activities, you should find it possible to learn thirty new vocabulary items per day until you have learned your first thousand items. Don't forget to keep a log of all the vocabulary you learn to recognize, and add to it during your daily record keeping period.

### ***4.2. Sentence Patterns You Need To Be Able To Understand As A Basic Speaker***

As you plan your sessions with your LRP, you are thinking about more than vocabulary. You are also learning to understand sentences which contain the vocabulary items. You plan your sessions so that in most of them one or more segments of the session highlights a particular sentence pattern or more than one pattern (perhaps two or three contrasting patterns). In the process, you will get exposure to many sentence patterns that you didn't specifically plan on. For example, the sentence patterns for various types of questions ("Where did you go?" "What did you see?" "When did you return?") may be on your list as something you plan to tackle at some time in the future. When that time comes, you may discover that you have already learned many of those question patterns while you thought you were working on something else. You may have learned to understand questions about locations while you were learning to talk about the rooms in your house with the aid of your sketched floor plan. The suggestions below are intended as a checklist. If you come to one of my suggested types of sentence patterns and feel that you have already learned to understand such sentences, then just check it off. I really don't intend for people to cover the suggestions exactly in the order given. It is good in general, just the same, to gradually move from simpler patterns to more complex ones, as I have done.

#### **4.2.1. General Principles About Sentence Patterns**

What we are dealing with now takes us into--gasp--grammar. At a very broad level, there are similarities in the grammar systems of different languages. An expert can see that. It may be far less obvious to the language learner, who may be unable to see the forest for the trees. For many languages, published descriptions of the grammar do not exist. If a published grammar description does exist, it may seem overwhelming the first time you look at it. Once you are well on your way into using the language as a communicator, you'll find that all that grammatical detail is not as bad as you thought it was when you first looked at it. As your speaking ability grows, you'll be amazed how much of that grammar just becomes a part of you. What is left will be easier to tackle. You don't need to worry about everything all at once. You want to start with simple things, and build up gradually to more complex ones.

You may hear comments about the complexity of some aspect of the language you are learning, comments such as, "There are hundreds of verb forms." What exactly that means depends on the language. But I suspect it

is never as bad as it sounds. There will be certain forms that are the most important ones, and the less important ones will follow patterns. It is impossible to go into detail on this, but take my word for it.

There may be a lot of irregular forms. In English we form the past tense of a verb by adding -ed. For example, walk becomes walked, and talk becomes talked. However there are some verbs that have an irregular past tense. That is, they don't follow any rule. The past of go is went. No matter. Just learn the irregular forms as separate vocabulary items. So what if it adds a few dozen vocabulary items?

In some languages there may be a lot more irregularity. So, for example, given the present tense form of a verb, it may be impossible to predict exactly what the past tense form will be (though there will be some similarity). That would mean that for every verb you would have to learn two forms, one for present tense, and one for past tense. Even then, it is likely they will fall into groups that behave similarly. (The irregularity may not necessarily have to do with tense--I just use that as an example of irregularity in general, even irregularity in words other than verbs.)

Yes, some parts of some languages can be very complex, but you don't have to get everything perfect to become a basic speaker. You'll have lots of time to grapple with the complexity, little by little. In general, this complexity will not make it harder for you to learn to understand the language. Once you are hearing the language with good understanding, you'll hear those complex forms over and over, and they will start to become familiar. Later on you may really want to get every detail right in your own speech, but remember, we are only considering the initial month or two. Right now your goal is to learn to understand enough basic sentence patterns that people can generally get their meanings across to you, with effort, and you can generally get your meanings across to them, with their help.

Another area of complexity has to do with nouns falling into different classes. For example, in French every noun is said to be either masculine or feminine. Some languages have several classes of nouns that are largely unpredictable. The noun class is important because you need to know it in order to know which form of adjective or verb or some other word to use with that noun. Fortunately, you don't have to know the class a noun belongs to in order to understand the language. The native speaker who speaks to you will do it correctly, and you will be able to understand what is said. Over the long term, it will be challenging for you to develop accuracy in using noun classes when you are the speaker, but while you are just a basic speaker you can expect to make mistakes, knowing that they will not usually interfere with communication.

In general, no matter how much people howl over the alleged complexity of some language, that complexity will affect the ease with which you learn to understand the language far less than it will affect the ease with which you learn to produce it in speech, and your ability to speak intelligibly will be affected less than your ability to speak accurately. So have no fear. You can move right ahead with rapidly learning to comprehend a lot of the language. Then you can move right into being a struggling, inaccurate, but intelligible speaker. Finally, you can gradually move on to being a fluent and accurate speaker. Remember, all we're concerned with right now is becoming struggling speakers, albeit genuine speakers.

Before talking about different categories of sentence patterns, we ought to think for a moment about the different functions of sentences. The patterns serve the functions. Three of the major functions of language are

to get people to do things (this involves commands and requests), to get people to give you information (this involves questions), and to give people information (this involves making statements). As you work on the types of expressions described below, using the types of methods described above, you are likely to involve yourself in all three of these broad functions of language. However, at this stage there is an overriding function in the LRP's use of the language with you, and that is to enable you to learn the language. The LRP is saying much of what she says with a view to helping you to learn things you did not know before, to strengthen your knowledge of things you have previously learned, to find out what you have successfully learned, and to allow you to demonstrate your learning and to feel good about it. The LRP will not have thought all of this through in these terms, but I can just about guarantee you that these will be among her main concerns, and increasingly so as you increasingly train her.

When it comes to the actual details of the grammar systems of different languages, there is no way I can give specific suggestions of things to cover in your sessions with your LRP, since languages vary widely at just about every point. Fortunately, I can give suggestions that are likely to lead you into learning to comprehend a good variety of sentence patterns in any language. That will help you to become a basic speaker. From there on, the language will lead you more and more deeply into itself. You just have to get a foothold. Become some kind of a speaker. Then communicate a lot with people for a long time. You'll become a good speaker eventually.

So let's consider some of the kinds of sentence patterns that you will want to learn to understand as a basic speaker of the language. In each case I will give examples of sentence patterns that might be used with TPR (usually object manipulation) and/or pictures (either loose, or pasted in a book). These two techniques tend to be enough to cover just about any sentence pattern. I find that either technique by itself is not enough, but where one technique fails, the other typically comes to the rescue.

My suggestions (usually in the form of English sentences such as "When this picture was taken, it was about to rain") are mainly there to show you that it is possible to learn these sentence patterns by these comprehension learning techniques. If you come up with your own techniques and approaches to specific patterns, that's even better. If you attempt to follow my suggestions, you'll need to extend them to include numerous examples. You will do that during your preparation for your language sessions. As an exercise, why don't you make up a few of your own example sentences each time you read one of mine. That will increase your confidence that you can do it. In your sessions you'll give your LRP a few illustrative examples (in English, say) of the sentence pattern you are interested in. She will then make up sentences for picture after picture, following the general pattern you suggested. Thus, if you have a hundred pictures, she may make up a hundred sentences. She will be describing the pictures to you or referring to them in one way or another, and you will hear what she says, process it in your brain, and respond in some way.

#### **4.2.2. Learning To Understand Simple Descriptions And Instructions**

Remember, you are not going to use the following suggestions as a guide to collecting pretty sentence patterns for your notebook. Your activities are aimed rather at enabling you to understand them when you hear

them in speech. And you learn to understand them in speech by having the experience of understanding them in speech over and over during your language sessions.

#### **4.2.2.1. Bare Bones**

Since languages are complicated, it helps to begin by restricting yourself to a small subset of the more essential sentence patterns. These then serve as a skeleton. Some complexity cannot be avoided even at the outset. Our goal is to keep it manageable.

##### ***4.2.2.1.1. Learning to understand sentences that identify and describe***

This is a logical starting point. When the LRP tells you in the new language "This is a man," she is not really telling you that the person is a man, since you can see that for yourself. Rather she is informing you that men are called "X" or "Y" or whatever they are called. Likewise, when she asks you "Where is the man?" it is not because she wants to know where the man is. She is looking at him. She wants you to show that you understand the word by which men are referred to. (Such questions are sometimes pejoratively referred to as "display questions," since the point is to get you to display your understanding rather than to get you to supply information that the speaker needs.)

There may be languages in which it is unnatural to say, "This is a man" when what is meant is "These guys are called 'men'." Assuming this is not the case, your early lessons will contain many simple descriptions of objects. At first, this may simply involve naming the object, as in "This is a man."

#### ***Techniques:***

You will be hearing lots of identificational sentences from your first language session. Going through your photos, the LRP can tell you "This is a man, this is a woman, etc." There will also be plural cases: "These are some boys."

The LRP can also use simple identificational sentences with the objects you manipulate in your sessions. "This is a pencil. These are some pencils."

##### ***4.2.2.1.2. Combining descriptive words with names for objects***

In addition to learning to recognize names for objects, such as pencil, cup, string, you can easily learn to recognize complex descriptions which include things like colour, size, shape, condition, or quantity of objects. This is also a good time to cover words like this and that, if they exist.

You will also want to learn to understand sentences in which combinations of objects are named together: "Take a green pencil and a red pencil".

#### ***Techniques:***

The LRP will use object manipulation instructions such as "Take a green pencil. Take two red pencils. Take a long yellow string. Take ten small nails, and a large nail. Take some of the screws and all the nails."

##### ***4.2.2.1.3. Simple instructions***

Before going on with identifications and descriptions, we need to parenthetically think about instructions, since they are one of the main means by which the LRP will teach you vocabulary and sentence patterns. For example, while teaching you by means of the descriptive sentence "This is the bathroom," she may test your understanding by saying, "Point to the bathroom". Giving instructions involves sentence forms that are used to issue commands and requests. These are dangerous sentence forms. I don't mean to make you paranoid, but in real life language use, it is in the area of issuing commands and requests that people are the most cautious about not offending one another, and not embarrassing themselves (see Brown and Levinson 1978). If I were teaching someone English by

TPR, I would be tempted to use simple command forms: "Stand up; Sit down; Stand up when I step in front of the girl wearing a green blouse," and so forth.

But now imagine that the people I am teaching go into a restaurant and want someone to hand them a newspaper that is lying on a vacant table. They can say "Gimme that newspaper." But that would sound abrupt and rude. A native speaker of English would say something such as "Could I bother you to hand me that paper?" However, it would be strange if my TPR sessions consisted entirely of sentences like "Could I get you to stand up? Would you mind sitting down? When I stand in front of the girl wearing a green blouse, I'd appreciate it if you would stand up, if you don't mind." In terms of how we use English, such polite forms of request would be odd during TPR exercises. That is because it would sound as though I, the speaker, needed the person I was addressing to stand up, sit down, etc., and that I felt I was imposing on the person. That is, it would sound as though I were trying to get the person to do these things for my benefit.

In many languages similar dilemmas will arise. Depending on the language and culture, there may be far more concern for politeness than there is in English. In other languages the ways of being polite may be less obvious, but they will still be there. I have two suggestions for coping with this dilemma. First of all, have the LRP use the most polite forms that still sound natural when giving you instructions. There is no point in having the most impolite forms be the main ones you hear. Second, use role-plays for some of your TPR exercises. The LRP might instruct you to remove books from your bookshelf pretending that they are items in a shop which she wishes to look at or purchase. Now it will be more natural for her to use more elaborate polite forms: "Could you please show me the red book on the top shelf? And I'd like to see the brown one just below it."

Apart from these concerns about politeness, learning to recognize the command forms of sentences should not be too difficult.

### ***Techniques:***

TPR. You may find that there is a different form depending on whether the command is issued to a single person or to two people. If you have a co-learner, then this contrast will emerge naturally. The LRP can vary the command between the singular form and the plural form, and the two of you can respond accordingly.

#### ***4.2.2.1.4. Identification and description of actions and experiences***

This is where you go beyond hearing "This is a man" and "This is a hammer", and hear things such as "This man is holding a hammer".

### ***Techniques:***

Recall that I suggested that ideal pictures for this stage of language learning would involve people as central characters, and the people would be involved with inanimate objects or other people. If you began by using the pictures to learn to recognize the words for people and then the words for objects they are using or are otherwise involved with, you will be in a position to use the same pictures to learn expressions which describe what the people are doing with or to the inanimate objects.

The words for man, woman, boy, girl, etc. are easier to learn than the words for the objects they are using or otherwise involved with, since every picture has a man, woman, boy, girl, etc. and there are only five or ten words to learn (including plural forms). Learning to recognize words requires lots of repeated use of each word. Since there are lots of pictures of men, women, etc., you are guaranteed lots of repetition by the time you have gone through fifty or a hundred pictures. In the case of the objects the people are using or otherwise involved with, there may be only one picture of a given object. Here the LRP will need to drill you by asking you questions: "Where is the hammer, where is the saw, where is the stove? The saw? The hammer? The table? The stove?" You follow the principle of only introducing one or two new items at a time, and drilling on them until you respond easily when you hear the new items randomly interspersed among items you have learned earlier.

Once you are familiar with the words for the people in your pictures and the objects they are involved with, it will be a simple step to understanding statements about what those people are doing to, or with, those objects.

#### ***4.2.2.1.5. Understanding who is doing it to whom.***

Consider the sentence "This dog is chasing this cat." (I'm assuming you have a picture of a dog chasing a cat, of course.) This sentence involves a dog, a cat, and an act of chasing. One animal is doing the chasing. Linguists would say that the animal who is actively, willfully, doing the chasing is the agent. The other animal is getting chased. That animal is the patient. Technically, the cat is an experiencer, since it is aware that it is being chased, but we can use the term patient broadly to mean "the one or thing directly affected by the action of the agent". So we have an agent chasing a patient. Since the cat is the one directly affected by the action (chasing) of the agent (the dog), the cat is the patient. Without looking at the picture, going only on the basis of the sentence "This dog is chasing this cat," how can we know that the agent is the dog and the patient is the cat? Of course, we already know that dogs chase cats and cats don't chase dogs. This is called real-world knowledge. Real-world knowledge will often help you to understand sentences in the new language. But you can also tell that the dog is the agent and the cat is the patient from the way the sentence is put together, and in the long run that is more important for you as a language learner. Simple English sentences typically have the agent (this dog) followed by the verb (is chasing) followed by the patient (this cat). Thus, even though it violates your real world expectations, you can still understand a sentence such as "That cat is chasing that dog." You will understand that the cat is the agent (doing the chasing) and the dog is the patient (getting chased), because of the order in which they occur in the sentence.

Now different languages will use different means of indicating who is doing the chasing and who is getting chased. The evidence may be found in the order of the words, as in English. It may be found in special markings on the nouns (called case markings). It may be found in markings on the verb which somehow tell you which animal is doing the chasing and which one is getting chased. If you are interested in more detail, you need to take a linguistics course that deals with grammar from a cross-language standpoint. My main point here is that you need to learn how to tell who is doing what to whom in sentences in the language.

There are some sentences which appear to have a subject and an object in English but where the subject is not doing anything to the object. An example is Margie likes my sister, where the subject is Margie and the object is my sister. In this sentence the subject, Margie, is an experiencer, and not an agent. Make sure you include such sentences among those you learn to comprehend, as they may behave differently from other sentences with subjects and objects.

In sentences with subjects and no objects (intransitive sentences), there are at least two types of subjects to consider. Some subjects are agents, that is, doers, like Margie, in the sentence Margie shouted. Other subjects do not do anything, but rather they have something happen to them. An example is tree, in the sentence The tree fell. In some languages words like sick, and angry, are actually verbs with non-agent subjects. (In other languages they are adjectives.)

### ***Techniques:***

Early on, you may concentrate on learning to understand sentences with agent subjects and patient objects. Your collection of pictures provides a good opportunity for this. Your LRP can take several dozen pictures in which someone is holding something or someone else. She can describe pictures in random order. Your job is to point to the picture being described. "A woman is holding a baby; a boy is holding a ball; a man is holding a hammer;" and so forth. Other verbs which can be used with many pictures are using, touching, looking at (or seeing). If there is a verb with a meaning similar to the English verb have, it can be used: "A woman has a baby; a boy has a ball;" and so forth. (Even if there is no verb similar to have, there will probably be some way to express the meaning of "This man has a hammer". It will be an important sentence pattern for you to learn to recognize.) It is good if your LRP can use many sentences with the same verb, or one of a very small number of verbs. That way, only the subject and object (or agent and patient) will vary from one picture description to the next. This will enable you to work on learning to recognize who is doing the action and who or what the action is being done to without having to worry about learning a large number of verbs at the same time.

Often your TPR expressions such as "Pick up the nail" involve a verb with an object. What is commonly missing is the subject, since it is typically understood to be the one addressed (that is, the second person--you), and not explicitly mentioned. Just the same, these sentences give you lots of exposure to the verbs with objects. A slight variation is for you to have your co-learner perform actions and have your LRP describe them. You can later listen to the tape recording of this and try to envision in your mind's eye what was happening in your session as your LRP uttered each sentence (assuming you didn't videotape the language sessions).

#### ***4.2.2.1.6. You and me and he or she or somebody***

While you are learning how to understand who does what to whom, don't forget the most important people: you, your LRP, and your co-learner(s). One of the earliest set of expressions you want to learn are the ones with meanings such as those expressed in English by the words I, we, you, he/she, they. In English, these are separate words which we call pronouns. In other languages they may appear to be attached to the verb. In some languages you will find that they are often omitted. The exact set of pronouns will vary from language to language. It should emerge as you work at learning them.

#### ***Techniques:***

You can learn to recognize the pronoun forms through TPR. For example, the LRP can tell you "Touch me. Touch them." For second person ("you") forms, the LRP can use predictions rather than instructions: "She is going to touch you." Your co-learner would then touch you, in fulfillment of the prediction. Or she could say, "You are going to touch her." You need to hear each pronoun both as agent (who does the touching) and as patient (who gets touched). There should be a number of verbs in addition to touch which can be used for this purpose: push, pat, pinch, punch, and look at. Be sure to also include reflexive forms as in "Touch yourself; pat yourself," and reciprocal forms, as in "Touch each other; pat each other".

This is a case where it is good to have several learners involved at the same time. Once when I was doing some beginning Arabic learning with an LRP I found it helpful that my co-learner was of the opposite gender from me, since gender was important in Arabic pronouns, even more so than in English. However, we realized that to work on the pronouns we really needed six co-learners, three male and three female, in order to cover all of the possibilities. I have been known to drag all six of my children into the room to use in a session where the co-learners were my wife and I. (We later wished that our children had been able to participate in all of the learning, rather than just being used as props for learning pronouns or kinship terms.)

Again, you can have the LRP describe what people do in addition to telling people to do things. Thus you, your co-learner, the two of you, the LRP, the LRP and you, the LRP and your co-learner, or all three of you, can perform actions, and the LRP can describe them ("You are doing X" "She is doing Y" "We are doing Z"). Again, if there are four or five co-learners for this there will be more possibilities and more flexibility.

#### ***4.2.2.1.7. To whom, where, with what, with whom, from where, to where, for whom and whose?***

Now, I have so far encouraged you to learn to recognize who is the subject in a sentence and who is the object (or at least who is the agent and who is the patient). You should plan activities with your LRP through which you learn to do this with sentences in which the subject or object is a noun (man), a personal name (John), or any of the pronouns (I, me, you, they, etc.). Remember, you are spending at least an hour in planning before each session. Hopefully, you have a co-learner so the two of you can demonstrate to the LRP what is desired, whenever the LRP gets confused.

You also want to go beyond recognizing nouns and pronouns as subjects and objects of sentences. They can also be indirect objects: "Give the green cup to me, and give the glass to her". They can be beneficiaries: "Draw

a circle for me." They can be parts of location phrases: "Put the round paper in front of John, and put the long paper in front of yourself." They can be possessors: "Pick up my banana; Place it beside that woman's banana". They can be instruments as in "Pick up the banana with the fork." Or they can be associates: "Walk across the room with your husband." Other important functions of nouns in sentences include the source from which a movement begins, and the goal to which a movement is directed: "Walk from the table and to the door."

**Techniques:**

TPR. Most of this will be object manipulation. Pictures are among the objects that can be manipulated, and illustrative commands are given in the above paragraph.

In connection with pictures, the LRP can make statements involving locations. Many people and objects in the pictures are in front of, behind, beside, near, and far from, other objects in the pictures. The LRP should include statements which simply indicate the location of the object or person: "This man is in front of this tree." The LRP should also include statements regarding where things are happening: "This man is working in front of this tree."

#### ***4.2.2.1.8. More on possessors and possessions***

In the previous paragraph, possessor was mentioned as one of the roles a noun can have. Another role is that of possession, as dog in the phrase John's dog. You need to learn to understand sentences in which the possessor is a pronoun, or pronoun-like (my dog, your dog, our dog, etc., covering the whole range of possibilities you find in that particular language), and sentences in which the possessor is a regular noun (the man's dog, the woman's cat, etc.).

Just in case there are any differences in how they are expressed, include three types of possessions: kinship terms (my father, my wife, etc.), body part terms (your hand, her face, etc.) and typical nouns (our book, your friend's dog, etc.)

#### ***Techniques:***

You can easily learn to understand this type of expression using TPR: "Point to Joe's Father" (you can use Joe's family tree diagram), "Touch her shoulder," "Take my pencil," "Put your green pencil in front of her." Your LRP can also use pictures for this; "Where is the man's foot?", "Where is his hammer?", etc.

#### ***4.2.2.1.9. The manner of action***

Actions are sometimes described with mention of how they are performed: quickly, slowly, sadly, happily, repeatedly, carefully, carelessly, accidentally, purposefully. Here's some more homework: add as many manner words to this list as you can think of.

#### ***Techniques:***

TPR is commonly used to learn to understand manner words: "Stand up quickly", "Sit down slowly". When I use a picture book, I always like the LRP to tell me to turn the page when the time comes that she wants to go on to the next page. This can be combined with manner words: "Turn the page carefully."

#### **4.2.2.2. Adding A Little Bit Of Muscle**

Suppose you have now learned to comprehend all the language patterns required to express the concepts I have discussed so far. For each pattern you will have heard, processed and responded to scores, if not hundreds, of sentences fitting the pattern. By now, the LRP can tell you about many or perhaps most situations or events, describing them as they occur, provided you know the appropriate vocabulary, and she can instruct you to perform many complex actions, again, assuming you have the vocabulary. This is a good start. Much of what you will learn from now on will be modifications of things you already know.

All this time you're advancing on two fronts. You are doing activities whose central purpose is to increase the number of vocabulary items you can recognize, especially nouns, verbs, and adjectives. You are also engaging in learning activities which will enable you to comprehend a basic range of sentence patterns. More and more, as we go along, it will be likely that some of the things we discuss will be things you have already learned. Then you can just check them off. Otherwise, one by one, you can work these things into your sessions with your LRP.

##### **4.2.2.2.1. Dealing With The Past**

Now in connection with your pictures and other activities that required you to hear, process and respond, you will have learned to recognize a good stock of nouns (farmer), verbs (ploughing) and adjectives (wet). It may be that in the language you are learning, pictures are described in a form that you can think of as "present tense", as in "This farmer is ploughing in a wet field". You also want to start recognizing forms that describe things that happened in the past. The system for indicating such time-related properties of expressions will vary greatly from language to language. It may also be complex, if you worry about all the details. So it may not be a good idea to worry about all the details, or all the possible forms. Rather, at this point, you will concern yourself with the main uses of the main forms.

#### ***Techniques:***

With your pictures, you may be able to get these past time sentence patterns by providing a frame, such as "When this picture was taken--". That is, with each picture, the LRP says things like "When this picture was taken this farmer was ploughing a field." If you have a hundred pictures, you will quickly hear a hundred sentences with familiar verbs in this type of past description form. You may get another type of past description form by using the frame "On the day when this picture was taken--" or "During the week when this picture was taken--". In English, for example, this might yield "During the week when this picture was taken, this man ploughed a field". Can you see the difference in the verb form in these English examples? You may or may not find such a difference in another language.

You can also experience past description forms of sentences in the context of physical activities. For example, your co-learner might perform actions, and your LRP will then tell you what your co-learner just did. Or it might be what you just did, or what the LRP just did, and so forth. In this way you may be able to combine past description forms with different pronouns, which may be interesting in its own right, and is essential to learn in any case.

#### ***4.2.2.2. Talking about the future***

An early practical need is to understand how people make commitments and predictions. "I'll come visit you tomorrow" is a commitment. "My mother is coming tomorrow" is a prediction.

#### ***Techniques:***

If the LRP naturally describes your pictures in a present time form ("This man is ploughing"), then she may be able to make a statement about what the person will do next. If you are focusing on learning to comprehend the forms used to talk about the future, you might want to keep the other content of what the LRP says relatively simple. For example, you could simply use the verbs for sitting and standing. If a person is sitting, the LRP can tell you that the person will stand up. If the person is standing, the LRP can tell you that the person will sit down. Similarly you could use the verbs for working and resting. Or if you have already developed a large recognition vocabulary you could have your LRP simply make predictions about what the person or persons in the picture will do next (after they finish doing what they are doing in the picture): "In this picture, this man is ploughing. Soon he will go home."

You can also learn to understand future time forms through TPR and object manipulation. Your LRP can tell you what she is going to do and then do it. Or she can tell you what your co-learner is going to do, and your co-learner fulfills the prediction. In similar ways, you can learn to understand future forms with a variety of pronouns.

#### ***4.2.2.3. Making general statements about things that happen, or used to happen***

Some statements do not concern situations or events that are happening at the moment, or have happened in the past, or that are supposed to yet happen. Rather they deal with what characteristically happens. Examples in English are "I shop at Piggly Wiggly" and "Dogs eat meat". In the case of "I shop at Piggly Wiggly" we see the statement of a general fact about a single individual (me). In the case of "Dogs eat meat" we see a general fact about the general dog. We can also make general statements about things that happened characteristically at some time in the past. An example is "I used to shop at Piggly Wiggly".

#### ***Techniques:***

Object manipulation: You might take a collection of objects and see what general statements your LRP can make about them. For instance, if you have a collection of objects each of which is bought at a different type of shop, your LRP can make statements such as "People buy it at a book shop", "People buy it at a dry good shop", "People buy it at a tool shop", and you respond by picking up the object you feel is being described. Or the LRP might make a statement about what she typically does with each object.

Picture description: The LRP can make any general statement which is obviously applicable to the main character or other elements in a picture. If a woman is cooking, the LRP might say "She cooks meals for her family". You respond by indicating which picture is being referred to.

It may help to use a frame such as "Every day--" or "From time to time--". You can also use frames which will require a characteristic statement about the past: "When this man was young--"

#### ***4.2.2.2.4. Time words***

Time words are words like today, this morning, tonight, tomorrow, and so forth. There may also be names for days of the week, for months, for seasons of the year, etc., and there may be words for telling time.

#### ***Techniques:***

Time words can be combined with TPR commands. For example, you may make a paper clock with moveable hands. The LRP can tell you "Go to sleep at 7:00" and then gradually move the hands to 7:00 (at which point you mime going to sleep). Later she can ask "What did you do at 7:00?" and you can respond by going to sleep. Similarly she can say, "Buy a banana on Tuesday," and then begin pointing one by one at a sequence of days on the calendar until she arrives at Tuesday, and you respond at that point by picking up a banana. If different foods are used at different times of the day, she can say something like "We eat it in the morning," etc. You respond, for example by picking up the item.

#### ***4.2.2.2.5. When you don't want to mention who did it***

Sometimes a sentence is understood to have both an agent and a patient, but for some reason the agent is not important, and you only want to mention the patient. We have already seen an example in the frame "When this picture was taken..." The picture is the patient. Who is the agent that took the picture? The sentence doesn't tell us that. Such agentless sentences are often a special case of what are called passive sentences. They are probably the most typical kind of passive sentence. By getting some exposure to agentless sentences, you may get some exposure to passive sentences, which may be important to your comprehension ability as a basic speaker.

#### ***Techniques:***

You can use TPR for this. Use several objects which make good patients. Paper is good. Think of all the things you can do with paper. Your LRP tells you to do different things to different pieces of paper. Now the LRP can describe the different pieces of paper in terms of what was done to each: "It was folded," "It was torn," "It was wadded," "It was cut," and each time, you indicate which piece of paper was being described. (It may help to restore the papers as nearly as possible to their original condition before the LRP begins saying what was done to them.)

#### ***4.2.2.2.6. Asking questions about all this stuff***

You have been hearing questions since your first session. For example, after the LRP said, "This is a carrot", and "This is a banana", she might have asked you "Where is the carrot, and where is the banana?" Many of the activities suggested so far will be most natural if the LRP uses questions. For example, in the previous paragraph, instead of saying "We eat it in the morning", it would probably be more natural for her to say, "What do we eat in the morning?" Do not hesitate to have your LRP use questions whenever they make the communication more natural. Assuming you have been doing that, we now want to insure that you have

covered the main bases in learning to comprehend questions. If I mention a type of question you have not learned to recognize, then you can tackle it by focusing on it in one of your language sessions.

There are two main types of questions. There are questions which can be answered with a simple yes or no, and there are questions which require that you give some specific information in order to answer them. These are called content questions. An example of an English yes/no question is "Did I take three green bananas?" English content questions are ones with words such as when, where, who, what, why, and how.

Although questions came into play quite early in my discussion, and, presumably, in your language sessions, this is a good place to focus on them, since you now have a variety of notions that can be questioned. Think of your simple descriptions of objects and activities. They can be converted into yes/no questions ("Is this a man?" "Is this man ploughing?"). In order to force you to process what you hear, the LRP must ask questions which you can understand, and which could be answered with yes or no. For instance, if there is a picture of a man ploughing and a picture of a woman cooking in the same group of pictures, the LRP might ask you "Is this man ploughing?" or "Is this woman cooking?", but she could equally ask you "Is this man cooking?" or "Is this woman ploughing?"

Now you learned to recognize sentences with agents and patients (or subjects and objects). Both of them can be questioned. To question the agent, the LRP would ask, "Who is cooking the rice?" To question the patient, the LRP would ask, "What is this woman cooking?" So if you look back at all of the roles that nouns can have in sentences, they will suggest types of questions. Indirect object: "Who did I give it to?" Location: "Where is the man?" or "Where is the man working?" The thing that was used: "What is she writing with?" The beneficiary: "Who is she cooking for?" The associate: "Who is he working with?" The source of movement: "Where is he coming from?" The goal of movement: "Where is she going to?" And the possessor: "Whose hand is this?" Questions can also be asked about the manner: "How is she cooking?" And the reason: "Why is she cooking?" Questions can be asked about things in the past, present, or future.

Do you see how everything we have covered so far feeds into questions? If in your record keeping you are keeping track of all the types of sentence patterns that you have learned to comprehend, based on my suggestions in this section, then you can go over them and see whether you think you already know how questions are formed which deal with all of the other patterns and concepts you have so far covered in your sessions.

### ***Techniques:***

A technique that I have not mentioned so far is simple verbal response. Early on, it may be better to simply respond in English or another language that you already speak fluently. Saying "yes" or "no" in the new language may seem like a simple matter, but I personally find that it slows my learning, since it interferes with my ability to concentrate on what I am trying to comprehend.

Questions can be asked in connection with pictures or with actions that take place in the language session. Using questions increases your flexibility in learning other things. For example, if you are learning to understand statements about future time, the LRP can vary the time component of questions. Suppose there is a

picture of a standing man. Then "Did this man stand up?" gets the answer "yes", but "Is this man going to stand up?" gets the answer "no".

#### ***4.2.2.2.7. Possible, likely or at least desirable, or maybe even necessary***

Things may be possible in the sense that they are not impossible, or they may be possible in the sense that I don't know whether or not they are true. In simple communication, you do not commonly need to talk about the first kind of possibility ("It could rain on my birthday"). The second kind of possibility ("It could be raining outside") is very frequently needed in basic communication. That is, you need to be able to express uncertainty. There may be different degrees of uncertainty. Compare "He might come tonight" with "He'll probably come tonight". A concept related to possibility is ability. What I am able to do is possible for me, and what I am unable to do is impossible for me.

As with everything else we have considered, there is no reason to expect that the language you are learning will be at all like English in the way that it expresses these meanings. I cannot go into all of the possibilities. One that is worth noting is important because it would take us into a new realm. So far we have mainly been concerned with sentences that consist of a single clause. You may find that these meanings require two clauses. This happens in English in some cases: "It is likely that I will come". Here the two clauses are "It is likely" and "that I will come". Notice how each is like a sentence in its own right. We'll deal below with many types of sentences that have more than one clause.

Some languages put a lot of emphasis on degrees of certainty. They may distinguish between information which the speaker got from hearsay or directly observed. There may be several degrees of certainty that come into play, even in simple sentences.

For saying that something is desirable, a language may employ sentences with more than one clause, as in "It would be good if you left." However, notice that in English, we can say, "You should leave." Likewise, in saying that something is necessary, a language may employ sentences with more than one clause, as in "He has to leave." (Here the clause to leave is so chopped down that it may not seem like a clause to you.). But it may also be possible to express such a meaning within a single clause, as in "He must leave".

#### ***Techniques:***

Use your pictures. Give your LRP some examples in English (or whatever language you are mainly using) of sentences which express possibility or likelihood. For example, if you have a picture of a restaurant, you might say, "Someone is probably eating in here." If a man is walking by the restaurant, you could say, "This man might go into the restaurant". Some examples will naturally involve a higher degree of likelihood than others. Your LRP can go through all of the pictures and make such statements. You can respond by pointing to the picture or situation she is referring to. Your LRP can use forms which carry the meaning of ability by looking around and asking you about things you are and are not able to do. Are you able to lift the fridge? Are you able to open the fridge?

To help you to learn to comprehend simple statements of desirability, such as "You should wrap the cloth around the fruit," your LRP may be able to use these statements in place of command forms in TPR activities. You can combine the forms meaning "should" and forms meaning "must" in a single activity. If the LRP says you should do it, you may start to do it, hesitate, and then either do it or not do it. If she says you must do it, you quickly do it.

In connection with pictures, the LRP should be able to think of fairly simple statements of what people in the pictures should do or must do.

#### ***4.2.2.2.8. Denying and forbidding***

All of the types of statements you can now understand can be negated. I'm sure that by this point you'll have already run into negation, but I mention it here for the sake of completeness. The negation of "This is a man" is "This is not a man." There are also negative commands and instructions. "Don't sit down" is the negative counterpart of "Sit down".

#### ***Techniques:***

Think of the example above of learning the names of rooms in the house using a sketch of the floor plan. Suppose the LRP says, "Where is the verandah?" and you point to the entrance way by mistake. The LRP can naturally correct you in the language by saying "No. That is not the verandah. That is the entryway. This is the verandah." Likewise, if during TPR the LRP says, "Turn to the right" and you turned to the left by mistake, then she can gently correct you, "No. Don't turn to the right. Turn to the left." If the LRP frequently makes such natural comments in negative forms, you will easily learn to comprehend negative sentences.

#### ***4.2.2.2.9. Starting, stopping, becoming, continuing and remaining***

Expressions related to the beginning or ending of an event or of a state of affairs may employ simple sentences or sentences with two clauses. Some examples are "I began eating", "I started to eat", "I stopped eating", and "This became dirty". Related notions are "I finished eating", "I already ate", and "I continued eating".

#### ***Techniques:***

In TPR the LRP can tell you to start or stop various actions ("Start running", "Keep running", "Stop running", "Start writing your name", "Stop writing", "Finish writing your name"), and perhaps she can tell you to come into various states ("Become happy"). Picture descriptions can also employ these notions.

### **4.2.3. Expressing Deeper Thoughts Adding A Lot Of Muscle**

So far we have dealt almost entirely with simple sentences. By simple sentences, I mean sentences with only one clause. If you've forgotten, a clause is a sort of mini-sentence. The following sentences have only one clause each:

-- Please pass the salt.

-- This tastes good.

-- The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

By contrast, the following sentences have two clauses:

-- He came after I left.

-- Whenever it rains, I stay home from work.

Sometimes one of the two mini-sentences is chopped down or simplified in some way, as in the following:

-- Entering the yard, I looked through the window.

-- I told her that in order to escape.

Other times the mini-sentences that make up the bigger sentence cannot be clearly separated because one of them is inside the other:

-- The man who I told you about is at the door.

Here the two mini-sentences are The man... is at the door, and who I told you about.

From here on we will be mainly interested in such sentence patterns containing two or more clauses.

#### **4.2.3.1. Stringing Sentences Together**

Both instructions and statements can be strung together in chains. A language may have more than one way of doing this. For instance, in English, it would be natural to say, "This man left his house, hitched up his oxen, went to the field, and began ploughing." (Remember, we have among our hundred pictures one picture of a man ploughing a field with oxen.) However, we could also say "Leaving his house, hitching up his oxen, and going to the field, this man began ploughing". At this point you want to concern yourself with learning to comprehend sentence chains of the type that are most common in the language you are using. The language may be very different from English in this area as in any.

There may be an important distinction between chains in which all of the sentences have the same subject and chains in which the subject of each sentence is different. The sentence chain "This man left his house, hitched up his oxen, went to the field, and began ploughing" has the same subject for all the sentences in the chain. It is "this man" who left the house, it is the same man who harnessed his ox, it is the same man who went to the field, and the same man who began ploughing. Contrast the sentence "My mother works at the bank, my father works at the factory, and my older brother attends university." Here there are three chained sentences, and three subjects: my mother, my father, and my older brother. In your language sessions you will want to be sure that you get exposure to both of these kinds of sentence chains, in case there is an important difference.

#### ***Techniques:***

The example of the man ploughing was chosen to suggest ways the LRP might string sentences together in describing pictures. Your goal could be to attempt to identify the picture at the earliest possible moment in the chain. It is also a simple matter for the LRP to give you strings of commands. During your first week this would not be a good idea. Once you are a few weeks down the road, single commands may not be very challenging,

and you'll appreciate the challenge of having a long string of commands to remember and carry out: "Go into the yard, get a brick, bring it back and put it on the table."

#### **4.2.3.2. The Person Who I Did It To Was Not The Person Who Did It To Me**

I gave the sentence "The man who I told you about is at the door" as an example of a mini-sentence ("who I told you about") nested inside another sentence ("The man... is at the door"). The clause who I told you about contributes to the description of the man. Commonly it is said that such a clause "modifies the noun". In other words who I told you about modifies the noun man. Clauses that modify nouns are called relative clauses. There are other kinds of clauses that modify nouns, and some languages may use them in situations where English uses a relative clause. As with all of the particular notions I have been discussing in these suggestions, I am not really focusing on the grammar and how it works, but rather on the notions that are being expressed. In any language there will be some way to express the notions that are expressed by relative clauses in English. I will go ahead and use the term "relative clause" for any expression which functions like an English relative clause.

In my experience, relative clauses are one of the most important language devices for increasing my flexibility in speaking a language. Nouns are very general. An expression like "the man" can refer to any of billions of male adults. Yet every person is different, and when I talk about a man, I need a way to tell you which man I am talking about. That is where relative clauses come in. If I say "the man who lives directly in back of me", I am able to refer to one very specific man. For the most part, people talk about very specific things, like the man who lives directly behind me.

It is possible that your LRP will already have been using relative clauses in order to make the communication more natural during your learning activities. For example, recall when I discussed learning to understand general statements by using a collection of objects which are bought at different shops. The LRP would say "We buy it at the meat shop," and you would point to the meat. It might be more natural for her to say "Pick up something which we buy at the meat shop," using the relative clause "which we buy at the meat shop." Thus you may have had a lot of exposure to relative clauses by the time you get around to focusing on them in a language session. As in the case of questions, I want to help you to determine whether you have learned to comprehend the main types of relative clauses. If I mention a type of relative clause that you have not yet had exposure to, you can then plan to focus on it in a language session.

What I am about to say may seem a bit complicated. If you find it confusing, you can wait and come back to it when you think you need it. You should still be able to understand what I have to say here with regard to techniques.

There are three or four main types of relative clauses you will want to concern yourself with at this point. To classify a relative clause, first identify the noun that it is modifying. Consider the case of the duck which I shot. What is the noun which is being modified? It is the duck. Now ask yourself, what role is the duck understood to have in the relative clause? Note I say understood to have. The duck is not actually in the relative clause. The relative clause is simply which I shot. But the duck is understood to have a role in the relative clause. It is understood as the thing that got shot; that is, it is understood as the patient (or object) of the relative clause,

even though it is not mentioned there. Because it is understood as the object, this relative clause is called an object relative clause. Now you make up a sentence in which the relative clause is understood as the subject of the relative clause.

### ***Stop and Practice:***

DO NOT PROCEED WITHOUT MAKING UP A RELATIVE CLAUSE IN WHICH THE NOUN WHICH IS MODIFIED BY THE RELATIVE CLAUSE IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE SUBJECT OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSE.

How did you do? Here is an example: The man who shot the duck. The noun modified? Man. Look at the clause who shot the duck, and ask yourself what role the man has in that clause. The man is the one who does the shooting, that is, the agent, or subject. Thus the man who shot the duck is a subject relative clause. You might consider two types of subject relative clauses. The first type occurs when there is no object in the subject relative clause, as in the man who yawned (if you are interested, you can call this an intransitive subject relative clause). The second type occurs when there is an object in the subject relative clause, as in the man who shot the duck, where the duck is the object.

In addition to subject relative clauses and object relative clauses, you will want to be exposed to relative clauses such as the gun with which I shot it, the woman for whom I made it, the kids with whom I played, the house where I live. The main point here is that the nouns gun, woman, kids, and house are not understood as the subject in the clauses with which I shot it, for whom I made it, with whom I played and where I live, nor are those nouns understood as the objects in those clauses. Rather, they have other roles, such as being the instrument used, or the location, or whatever.

It will be helpful if you keep these four types of relative clauses in mind--object relative clauses, two types of subject relative clause, and relative clauses which are neither object relative clause nor subject relative clauses. The reason I recommend you keep them all in mind, is that different languages may handle the different types in different ways.

Now in case you were wondering, this discussion of relative clauses has been the most demanding thing I have bothered you with. If your background in linguistics is weak or lacking, you may need to think it through very carefully. It may turn out that relative clauses are simple and straightforward in the language you are learning. If not, what I have just said may help you to sort things out better.

### ***Techniques:***

I hope you haven't lost sight of the fact that your main goal right now is to learn to understand sentences which employ the basic sentence patterns of the language. If relative clauses are simple and straightforward, they will be a snap to learn to understand. Even if they are somewhat complicated, it shouldn't be too hard to learn to understand them when you hear them.

For learning to understand relative clauses you can use TPR, object manipulation and picture description. A typical instruction for learning to understand relative clauses by TPR would be "Give three eggs to the woman

who is seated". If you have co-learners, especially, it may be possible for the LRP to describe any of them by means of a variety of relative clauses, using vocabulary you already know or are learning during that session. Pictures are especially helpful in covering the four different types of relative clauses. After you give the LRP a few examples in English, or whatever language you share with her, she can go through a hundred pictures using only subject relative clauses and go through the same pictures using only object relative clauses. She can use the same hundred for other relative clauses. For subject relative clauses she might say things like "Here is a man who is ploughing" or "Where is the man who is ploughing?" For object relative clauses she might say things like "Where is the ball which the boy is kicking?" For other types of relative clauses, sentences might focus on, say, locations: "Where is the tree which someone is standing under?"

#### **4.2.3.3. If This, Then That**

Whew! We're done with relative clauses. They're so helpful to the language learner, but a bit complicated to think about. Fortunately, in many languages they are not very complicated to learn. The rest of the types of sentences I discuss are much easier to discuss, though any of them could turn out to be complicated in a particular language.

Expressions of the form "If I come to town, then I will visit you" are another type of expression which you need to be able to understand, and, eventually, to speak, in order to be a basic speaker of the language. There are at least three important types of "if-then" sentences. In one type, the if-clause is understood to pertain to the future: "If I come to town [future], then I will visit you." This is probably the most useful type, and it may be enough for you as a basic speaker. A second type has the if-clause pertaining to the present state of affairs: "If he is not at work today, he may be sick". The third type relates to hypothetical states of affairs which are not the way things are in reality: "If he were here, he could tell us."

#### ***Techniques:***

To learn to comprehend if-clauses which pertain to the present state of affairs, you may be able to combine them with commands, and use TPR: "If I am holding something which we eat, take it from me and put it into your mouth." Future oriented if-then sentences can also be combined with commands in many cases. The LRP first says, "If I fold the cloth, bend the pipe." She then performs various actions, but at some random point she folds the cloth, and that is the point at which you respond by bending the pipe.

You can use pictures to cover the contrary-to-fact variety of if-then sentence. The LRP can look at each picture and imagine what the results would be if the person in the picture had not done whatever s/he is doing: "If this man had not ploughed his field, he could not have planted his corn." Actually, an assortment of these contrary-to-fact sentences can be used with pictures. "If this man were short, he would not be able to reach that apple", "If this man had ploughed my field, I could have rested."

#### **4.2.3.4. When Things Happen, Other Things Happen**

You may have already been exposed to the type of sentence I have in mind here. Recall that in connection with learning to talk about events and situations in the past, I suggested that the LRP use frames, such as "When

this picture was taken--" This type of clause, sometimes called a temporal clause, or time clause, provides the temporal setting in which an event occurs.

Temporal clauses can be past oriented ("When I was eating my breakfast--") or future oriented ("When I eat supper--"). Related notions include "Before I ate supper--", "Until I ate supper--", and "After I ate supper--."

### ***Techniques:***

After you give a few examples, the LRP should be able to think of a reasonable sentence to say in connection with each picture, using a past oriented temporal clause: "When this man was ploughing, he walked behind his plough". Future oriented temporal clauses are similar to if-clauses discussed above, and similar techniques can be used. "When I fold the cloth, bend the pipe." "Keep writing until I smile."

#### **4.2.3.5. Just Because, Or Even In Spite Of, Or Perhaps In Order To**

Often two clauses are combined in such a way that one clause gives the reason for the other: "I smiled at him because he looked funny." Here the second clause, "...because he looked funny," is the reason, and the first clause, "I smiled at him," is the result. Alternatively, I could say, "He looked funny, and so I smiled at him," in such a case the reason ("he looked funny") comes before the result ("so I smiled at him").

Closely related to reason clauses, are purpose clauses. An example of purpose clauses in English are those that begin with "in order to--" or some that begin with "so that--": "I bought some meat in order to make stew"; "I bought some meat so that I could make stew".

Sometimes there are reasons not to do things, but we do them anyway. In English we often express this meaning by clauses beginning with "Even though--", as in "Even though I was angry, I didn't say anything."

### ***Techniques:***

Pictures are the most helpful tool here. In connection with every picture, your LRP should be able to think of a reason or purpose for which the actor is performing the action. You will give several examples in English, or whatever language you share with your LRP, to get things rolling. You can do the same thing with sentences which express the idea of "even though X, nevertheless Y." "Even though this man is tired, nevertheless, he is still working."

#### **4.2.3.6. He Made Me Do It**

Some sentences have a primary agent and a secondary agent. "John made Bill eat the sandwich." Bill is the agent who eats the patient. But John is the agent who made the decision to have the patient get eaten, and who acted on that decision so as to get the patient eaten! John could have been less demanding, in which case we might say, "John told Bill to eat the sandwich," or even "John asked Bill to eat the sandwich," which is the least demanding of all. Or John might have been even more demanding, in the face of Bill's resistance, in which case we might say "John forced Bill to eat the sandwich."

### ***Techniques:***

TPR is the best technique here. You need a co-learner, or at least a willing volunteer, and then your LRP can have you make that person do things. You can decide how you want to distinguish between the extremes of merely asking your friend to do the action and forcing him or her to do it.

#### **4.2.3.7. Making Comparisons**

Languages use a variety of means of indicating that one item is bigger, darker, longer, nicer, etc. than another item, or that one person runs faster than another, or is smarter than another. I haven't, in general, been discussing the variety of ways in which languages may express particular meanings, because it would be hopeless to cover even a fraction of the possibilities. I would like to take this opportunity to point out to you how important it is to **let the language be itself**. You may be interpreting things through an English filter, and you want to avoid that.

So let's suppose that you have two ropes, both of which are very long, by local standards, but one is slightly longer than the other. You ask your LRP to tell you "This rope is longer than this one." What she says is perfectly clear to you. You hear her say, in her language, "This rope is not long, and this rope is long." You become frustrated. You tell her, "No. You misunderstood me. You can't say 'this rope is not long,' because it is long. It just isn't as long as the other rope." You just goofed. You filtered the new language through your English grid. It just so happens that in that particular language, to say that one rope is longer than the other you do indeed say something which literally sounds like "This rope is not long and this is long."

#### ***Techniques:***

Each time I suggest a technique for learning to understand a particular sentence pattern, I tend to use simple examples which illustrate that sentence pattern and little else. As we have gone along, this has become increasingly misleading. By now your LRP has considerable flexibility, since you can understand all sorts of complex sentences combining many of the notions I have discussed. So for once, I'll exemplify a pattern by embedding it in a complex sentence. Where is the comparison in the following? "Give your friend a book which is heavier than the one I am holding." You need to be encouraging the LRP to use more and more complex sentences as you go along. She will have a sense for what you can understand and can try to use increasingly natural sentences to communicate with you as time goes on.

#### **4.2.3.8. Things I Thought, Or Said Or At Least Wished, And Maybe Even Tried**

There is one last type of sentence pattern involving sentences with two clauses which is essential for you if you are to be a basic speaker. These are sentences with verbs such as "say", "think", "believe", "desire", "want", "wish", "know", etc. as in the following English examples:

- This man said, "Bring me my oxen."
- This man says, "I am ploughing."
- This man says that he is ploughing.
- This man is thinking, "I am tired."
- This man thinks that his field is large.

- This man wants to rest.
- This man is trying to rest.
- This man wishes he could rest.
- This man knows how to plough.
- This man knows that his oxen are tired.

In these examples, the underlined portion is a mini-sentence within the larger sentence. Notice that in some cases the mini-sentence is in quotation marks. This is referred to as direct discourse. The other mini-sentences, the ones not in quotation marks, are examples of indirect discourse. There is a lot that I could say about what distinguishes direct from indirect discourse. Suffice it to say that you may find that another language uses indirect discourse where English uses direct discourse, or vice versa.

### ***Techniques:***

You can use the pictures you have been using all along, or you might want to get some new pictures that have a lot going on in them, such as those in the children's Waldo series. The LRP will choose a person or animal in the picture and tell you what that animal or person is thinking or saying. For example, she might say "Before this picture was taken, this man said, 'I have a big field to plough'," or perhaps, "This man is thinking that it might rain and he will have to go home," or possibly "This man knows that he has a lot of work to do." Your job is to point at the man who would have made such a statement or thought such a thought.

The example "This man is trying to rest" is a bit different from the others, but an important thing to be able to understand and, quite soon, to use in speech. The LRP can use TPR for this, instructing you to try to do things that are actually not possible ("Try to pick up the fridge").

## ***4.3. Suggestions For Covering A Basic Range Of Language Functions And Communication Situations***

I have given you many suggestions for covering a range of vocabulary and sentence patterns. These are your bricks and mortar. Without vocabulary and sentence patterns it is impossible to do anything in a language. I have tried to focus you on essential, central ones which you will need in order to be a basic speaker of the language.

### **Think Functions**

Fairly early you will also want to start thinking in terms of the functions for which you will use the language and the situations in which you will be using the language. I have suggested that you can include such considerations in your plans for your sessions even while you are concentrating entirely, or almost entirely, on learning to understand the language. You become increasingly concerned with functions and situations in which you will be using the language as you work increasingly on speaking it conversationally during your language sessions, say, during the second month.

During the first few weeks, when the focus was mainly on learning to comprehend, you focused on language functions when you had your LRP use different politeness formulas in giving you commands, requests or instructions. For example, suppose you were learning English. During one of your first sessions the LRP may use a simple command form for TPR such as "Stand up, sit down." Later on you may wish to learn the forms that are used in real life for making a request of a socially higher person, such as your employer. Then instead of "Stand up, sit down," the LRP might say, "Could I get you to stand up? Would you mind sitting down?"

On another day the LRP may act as though you are socially lower. You might pretend that she is your mother and you are her child (whatever roles you pretend, you will try to keep them in mind all through the activity). In that case, she might use the simple command forms. In some languages, there may be less emphasis on relative social standing. In other languages there may be considerably more emphasis, not just in connection with commands and requests, but, possibly in connection with every single sentence!

Keeping in mind such social factors, here is a list of language functions which you might attempt to include in your sessions in order to become a basic speaker of the language:

- Requesting a object
- Complying with a request for an object
- Refusing to comply with a request for an object
- Requesting an action
- Complying with or refusing to comply with such requests
- Requesting assistance (asking a favour)
- Complying with or declining such a request
- Offering an object
- Accepting the offer
- Declining the offer
- Offering assistance
- Accepting or declining the offer of assistance
- Giving instructions to an employee
- Giving orders to a child
- Making a promise or commitment to future action
- Making an apology
- Expressing regret
- Expressing sorrow for the other person's situation
- Initiating an encounter
- Making initial small talk in an encounter
- Hesitating while speaking
- Asking for clarification

- Interrupting
- Terminating an encounter
- Making a social introduction
- Introducing oneself
- Asking permission
- Granting permission
- Refusing permission
- Asking the time
- Indicating a desire to enter a home
- Bidding someone to enter a home

As you learn to recognize the patterns of language used for each one of these functions, you can check it off. Here again, I can't be exhaustive.

### **Think Situations**

Another area in which you want to make a checklist has to do with the situations in which you use the language and the types of expressions you might use in those situations. Reflect on your life in the new language community, past, present, and/or future. What are all the situations in which you have spoken to people or expect to speak to people? Think through everything you have done during the past few days, from morning to night. Who did you speak to, and in what settings? Do this periodically, and add any new situations that come to mind to your checklist of situations. Your goal is both to learn how people speak in those situations and to learn how they speak about those situations.

You can make another checklist for topics. What are some topics about which you have wanted to converse but were unable, or hardly able? What are some topics that are likely to be important to you in the future? An excellent source of ideas for topics and situations is Larson 1984 (part III), where the selection is related in a step-by-step manner to the needs of a language learner who is integrating into the language community.

Keep your checklists together with your journal, and use them as a source of ideas as you plan your language sessions and informal conversational activities.

### ***4.4. Final Thoughts Regarding Using The Above Suggestions - Importance Of Planning Sessions***

The above suggestions are meant to serve as a source of ideas and as a checklist. Each day you spend an hour or two preparing for your language sessions, planning three or more different activities which you will use to achieve specific goals which you will set from day to day.

Those goals include vocabulary you wish to cover, and sentence patterns you wish to learn to comprehend. They may also include specific language functions or situations in which you would like to develop some communication ability through role-play, or through focusing on a special area of vocabulary. You may have

ideas which have grown out of previous sessions, or out of experiences in the outside world. You can also refer to my suggestions as a source of ideas. As you plan a session, you will often look over the record of your previous session, so that while you are learning new vocabulary and sentence patterns, you are using all the riches available to you from earlier sessions.

You can use these suggestions as a checklist during your daily evaluation period. Some time after the rest of the day's activities, you reflect on what you did, make written summaries of your observations relating to sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, or anything else you observed. At this time you can go through the above suggestions and check off the ones that you have already dealt with. For example, long before you plan to deal with negations (denying and forbidding), you notice that you already know how to deny (so you check that off), but you do not yet know how to forbid (so you leave that unchecked, perhaps using another mark, such as a small circle, to remind you that it has not yet been checked off).

One happy day, you will find that you have ticked off everything in the list. That doesn't mean that you have learned to comprehend every possible way of expressing a particular meaning. For example, you may have learned to express the idea of "must", but there may be other ways to express the same idea or similar ideas which you have not yet learned. Nevertheless, you can check it off when you know at least one main way in which that meaning is expressed.

## **Planning Activities Around Needs, Goals**

When you first start using the above suggestions, you may find it difficult to plan an activity around a suggestion. You want your LRP to say only things which you will have some hope of understanding. You do not learn anything from hearing your LRP say things you don't understand. But when you do not yet know much of the language, this may be challenging. That is one reason you will need to spend an hour or two planning your language session.

As time goes on, there will be more and more that you can understand, both in terms of vocabulary, and sentence patterns. Therefore, planning your comprehension learning activities will get easier. For example, when you get to the point where your LRP is telling you what someone in a picture might be thinking (and you are trying to guess who might be thinking that), there may be considerable flexibility, since by that point she knows that you have considerable vocabulary and sentence patterns that you are able to understand.

As a matter of fact, it is important that your LRP use increasingly complex sentences with you as you go along. You need to keep stretching your ability to hear, process and respond. Activities in week three should take advantage of all you have learned in weeks one and two.

You need to keep trying to include aspects of earlier sessions in your later sessions. For example, in the session where you are working on agentless sentences (the LRP saying "That paper was folded"--you indicating which paper was in fact folded), you may be dealing with a passive sentence form, as I noted. It will be good to learn to recognize such sentences as they relate to past, present, and future situations. Thus even though you have long since dealt with past, present and future situations, and checked that off, you still want to combine those notions with the notion of agentless sentences.

You would also need to hear examples of agentless sentences in which a variety of pronouns are used. For example the LRP might speak to you using "true-false" questions such as "I was touched", "We were nudged". If-then sentences and relative clauses can usefully be combined with many other patterns ("If I was bumped, then point to the person who bumped me"). For that reason, you may want to learn to understand if-then sentences and relative clauses earlier than they come in my outline.

### **Try It Out**

Almost any of the notions covered can be combined in this way with almost any other notions. Here is an exercise for you. How many of the notions (sentence patterns) that I have discussed are involved in the following sentence: "He is thinking 'If this field had already been ploughed, I would not have to plough it' "? Quite a few, right? Did you come up with five or ten notions?

Of course, you don't try to combine a whole bunch of topics in your plan for the session. But as you go along, you encourage your LRP to use richer, more complex, and more natural language. Often while covering later topics you will find you are reusing many structures that you dealt with previously, even though you didn't plan things that way. That is because, as you learn to comprehend more and more, your LRP will automatically tend to use richer and more authentic language with you.

(return to article)