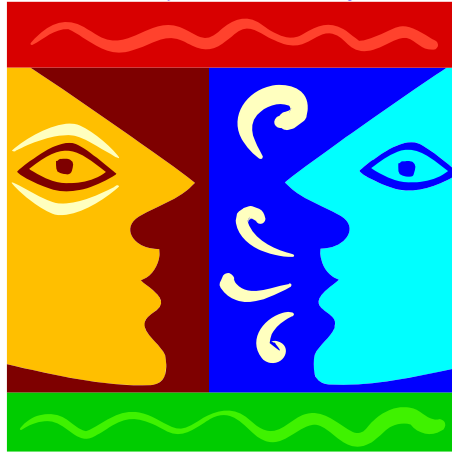


Cross-Cultural Perspectives from the Director



Language Acquisition Made Simple

Brother Scotty Slaydon made this admission in an article he wrote for the *Forward* magazine, "All we missionaries make mistakes while learning the language." A web-based article "Instructional Design for the International Market" provides a list of the nominees for the Chevy Nova Award. "This is given out in honor of the General Motors' fiasco in trying to market this car in Central and South America. In Spanish, 'No va' means, "it doesn't go."

"An American T-shirt maker in Miami printed shirts for the Spanish market which promoted the Pope's visit. Instead of "I saw the Pope" (*el Papa*), the shirts read "I Saw the Potato" (*la papa*). So, please be careful how you translate, "The General Director is coming!"

"Pepsi's "Come Alive with the Pepsi Generation" translated into "Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Grave" in Chinese.

"When Gerber started selling baby food in Africa, they used the same packaging as in the US, with the smiling baby on the label. Later they learned that in Africa, companies routinely put pictures on the labels of what's inside, since many people can't read.

"When American Airlines wanted to advertise its new leather first class seats in the Mexican market, it translated its "Fly in Leather" campaign literally, which meant "Fly Naked" (*vuela en cuero*) in Spanish!" Strongly not advised!

And, by the way, since we are confessing blunders, I made one of my own in this *Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. It is found in my title borrowed from a book on learning languages. The book and the language-learning method are not called, *Language Acquisition Made Simple* but *Language Acquisition Made Practical*.

According to Cecil M. Roebuck, Jr. in his epic book *The Azusa Street Mission & Revival*, some of the early Pentecostals believed, “the tongues they spoke when they were baptized in the Spirit would point them to the country or countries where they would spend what remained of the current age...The faithful at Azusa Street continued to speak in tongues in anticipation that much of this new speech could be used in missionary service.” Many missionary candidates left town within days, if not hours. How disappointed they must have been to reach the field and (in most cases) find they had to learn the language.

Sorry, there are no simple ways or presto methods to learn a language. It takes big doses of discipline, patience, and the ability to laugh at mistakes. Here are a few practical tips: The LAMP method advocates a daily learning cycle and has been very effective for expatriates learning languages in developing nations. Whether language study is for six hours or two hours per day the book’s authors, Brewster and Brewster, encourage the following:

1. **Prepare** what you need for the day.
2. **Practice** what you prepare.
3. **Communicate** what you know (prepared and practiced) with others.
4. **Evaluate** your needs and your progress.

The authors believe “successful language learners learn a little and use it a lot. They get what they need, and practice it, and then use it in actual communication with people. They also spend time in reflection...You were once a child and this is the way you learned your first language. These steps of getting, practicing, using, and evaluating are probably employed spontaneously by all successful language learners.”

A variation of this method is commonly referred to as the GLUE method.

1. **Get** it.
2. **Learn** it.
3. **Use** it.
4. **Evaluate** it.

Brother Slaydon gave this apt overview of language learning, “It took me several months before I was able to preach in Spanish without reading my notes. It took about two years before I felt comfortable with phone conversations. Then there was another milestone that took several years...being able to understand humor, plays on words, or colloquialisms which were often tied to a nation’s history and specific culture. Understanding legal terms and contractual language was another milestone for me. Learning the language was not easy, but it is the only effective way to communicate with the people. And when they see that you have made the effort to learn their language, they are more than willing to talk to you and respect what you have done.”

The bottom line is, learning a language is not simple, but it has globe-reaching benefits. So, keep talking!