

TUTORIAL
4.16

Culture/Language Acquisition 1

This tutorial introduces Culture/Language Acquisition. It looks at how your purpose and long term goals of learning another culture and language should change the way in which you learn.

Introduction

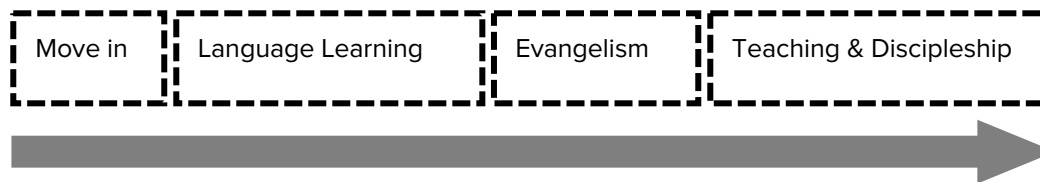
There are many language learning programs available today, especially if you plan to learn one of the major languages of the world. So when you consider second language acquisition, you could potentially choose from any of the following types of language courses:

- General courses based on language structure (grammar)
- Reading, writing and vocabulary courses
- Speaking and listening courses
- Intensive courses offered by language schools
- Short-term immersion courses
- Software courses
- Classroom or university programs
- Language for specific professions (medical, business, law, teaching, etc.)
- Courses for academic purposes
- Courses for children
- Courses for over 50s
- One-to-one courses
- Online or video courses

So how should someone decide which kind of language learning program is the best one for them? Before you decide *how* to learn a language you should first think about *why* you are learning it - what are your long-term goals?

Long term goals

Imagine that someone had the long-term goal of planting a church in a community with a different language and culture to their own. They might draw a timeline for the next five or so years of their life that would look something like this:



This focus on their own *personal tasks* would be a very typical way for a person to begin to think and make a plan for such a long and complex process as planting a church cross-culturally. After deciding that the end goal is “me being able to minister in the community”, then they might move on to think more specifically about “the things I need to do” or “the steps I need to take” in order to reach that goal. For some large undertakings this may be the best way to go about things, such as building a house for example where a list of tasks would be a help in bringing the project to completion - but not surprisingly, church planting is different to building a house. Why? Because church planting is something that is done in partnership with God and it is essentially about Him communicating Himself to people through other people - so from the very beginning those people and the way they understand things and communicate things needs to be in focus.

In order for a “church” - a group of people who believe the truth about God and have become His children - to be planted in a community, there must first be church planters who are genuinely motivated by the love of Christ *for people*. Obviously they must be able to speak to people in a way that they understand, in their language, but along with that, there must also be people in the community who know and love these church planters, or at least respect them enough to have listened to what they have to say. This takes more than just knowing the right words to say in the right order. It takes relationships - where there is a degree of friendship and trust - because if there are no relationships, there will be no ministry.

A focus on people is something that the church planter must have practised as he learned the language and culture while living his life as part of the community. Someone who is not engaged with people and has not developed relationships with people that draw them to the Lord will often find that when they try to share truth, people show a lack of interest, or ‘hardness of heart’ toward what they are wanting to share with them. An essential element in communicating the Gospel is communicating God’s love and care for people. God sent His own Son to save people, and so those communicating that message must actively show His love through their own lives, as His representatives. The Gospel is a personal, relational message of love from God to man and cannot be effectively communicated simply through theoretical facts in a formal way.

So, we said that church planting is a different undertaking essentially because it is God’s work and anyone engaged in it is actually in partnership with Him. God is intimately involved and has been doing things already in the hearts of people to prepare them for the “arrival” of their opportunity to hear the Gospel.

He has purposes that He wants to accomplish in their midst – these are the things that develop into the Church that *He* will plant there. A church planter should be conscious enough to notice these things, even from the very beginning when they are learning language and culture, and not be too caught up in their own plans to see His purposes. Many of the relationships that begin during culture and language learning may become important later on as a church develops.

What kind of program?

The best time to begin to live a life of interest and involvement in people's lives is when you first move into a community - which also happens to be when you start learning culture and language! This is the time when people will be most curious about you, and when you are the most vulnerable and will need the most help and support from them. It is a never-to-be-repeated time of opportunity to lean on people in the community to help you settle in, to help you find your feet and begin to learn about them, and for them to get to know you and begin to trust you.

So, for the long term goal of church planting, a language and culture learning program that requires a lot of community involvement and development of relationships is of great benefit to the final goal. A culture/language learning program like this would have the following overall features:

- A central focus on relationships with people as part of the learning process.
- The arena of language and culture learning activity is the life of the people.
- The means of reaching your goal of fluent communication is through activities that require relationships, first-hand experience with people, focusing on comprehension and communicative activities.
- A program that results in functional fluency - so you can speak in a natural way with people and have an intuitive understanding of how they are thinking and feeling as you speak.

What kind of learner?

The type of program is very important as it guides the activities and type of interaction that the learner might have in the community during the process of learning language and culture. But, perhaps an even more important, or foundational, aspect of the process of learning to communicate in a cross-cultural situation is the *attitude* of the person who is learning. Here are some notes made by a team leader who has worked for many years with cross-cultural church planters. He pinpoints some of the things he sees as being crucial for people as they go through the initial process of culture and language acquisition.

“Some of the ‘heart attitudes’ necessary for a cross-cultural learner:

- *A high regard for culture* – this time is seen as an opportunity to comprehend the wide diversity in human existence and to find new opportunities for relationships.
- *An eagerness to learn* - welcoming the challenge in hopes of learning new facts, gaining new understandings, changing old opinions, shaping new interpretations, and making new commitments.
- *A desire to make connections* - being willing to persevere and use skills to build bridges and find common cultural ground, making an effort to form connections.
- *A readiness to give as well as receive* - not thinking in terms of personal gain, but in terms of opportunities for sharing.

We highly value language and culture learners who are:

- Curious (asking questions, rather than just passive)
- Trusting (rather than reacting with suspicion)
- Brave (rather than fearful, willing to take planned risks)
- Secure (confident in new situations, not afraid of failure)
- Relaxed (willing to adapt rather than being impatient)
- Teachable (ready for new experiences, to change and grow)
- Friendly (giving the first place to people, genuinely warm)
- Communicative (verbally and non-verbally - listening, observing, responding)
- Humble (and genuine)
- Compassionate and empathetic
- Motivated (for the correct reasons)

One last point that is a key to success in cross-cultural learning is the ability to both *accept* and *learn* from failure. When a person is in that position he can relax, accept failure as a normal part of the process and try things he knows will be flawed, for the purpose of learning and improving. He or she will be tolerant of his or her own mistakes and willing to learn from them.”



DISCUSSION POINTS *Culture/Language Acquisition 1*

1. When you read the comments in the tutorial from the team leader about what he believes are helpful attitudes in a new learner, how does that make you feel? Are there particular

- characteristics mentioned there that you think you might be naturally more gifted in, or find easier, than others?
2. Do you think everyone can learn another language? Why or why not?



ACTIVITIES

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1. Imagine that you have decided to learn one of the world's major languages. Look online and list all of the different courses you could possibly take to learn that language if you chose to do so. Choose one course and give three reasons why you might choose that one.