

TUTORIAL
6.12

Becoming equipped to communicate 2

This tutorial continues to look at the *Becoming Equipped to Communicate* program, specifically:
Level 1: Relating through the Common and Familiar. We will introduce and practice the first two learning activities - *Participant Observation*, and *Listen and Act (listening comprehension)*.

Introduction

Read: *BEC* Preface and Pages 13-18

Pages 13 to 15 explain some of the principles in setting up a routine for yourself as you begin to learn. *BEC* is not like most language programs where you go to a class and then go back to the rest of your life once class is over. It is designed to make the most of your normal life activities - including work, social activities and other things that you enjoy doing - so that they are all part of the learning experience. In a new cultural setting, these kinds of activities will take time and planning to become established, and eventually to become a routine part of your life. It is important to plan and think carefully from the beginning as your routine develops because it has a profound effect on how you will learn.

Page 16 describes the four different levels of the program - each level is designed to build on the skills and abilities learned in the level before, in the areas of language, culture and depth of relationships.

The note that page 18 touches on an important learning principle; *listen first, speak later*. This is something that doesn't come naturally to people learning a language, because most of us want to try say the words we are hearing straight away. It is generally agreed that people who are able to listen much more than they speak in the beginning stages of learning, have a much better chance of learning the natural intonation and pronunciation of the language, and that listening builds a solid foundation for speaking later on. As you will see, the first Level 1 activities do not require you to speak at all - only to listen.

Level 1: Relating through the Common and Familiar

Read: *BEC* Pages 19-26

These pages give an introduction to the three learning activities used during level 1:

- Participant Observation,
- Listen and Act (listening comprehension),
- Listen and Act (listening comprehension and speaking).

In the assignment for this tutorial you will try both a Participant Observation exercise (Learning activity 1), and a Listen and Act exercise (Learning activity 2). If you look at the time schedule on page 25, you will see that most of your time during this early part of Level 1 is spent in Participant Observation exercises. Participant Observation is not just for the beginning stages of learning, it is something you will continue to do throughout your whole learning time, but what is it?

Participant Observation

Basically, Participant Observation is learning to relate to others by experiencing their everyday lives with them in culturally appropriate ways. Sometimes it is described in more “scientific” terms by anthropologists:

- DeMUNCK and SOBO (1998) describe participant observation as “the primary method used by anthropologists doing fieldwork”.
- “Participant observation is the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities”. (DeWALT & DeWALT, 2002).
- SCHENSUL, SCHENSUL, and LeCOMPTE (1999) define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting”.

The major difference in the way we would define participant observation in comparison to the anthropologists’ definitions above, relates to the differences in the way we see ourselves in the setting. We don’t consider ourselves “researchers” doing an academic “study” of a culture or group of people. Our goal, on the other hand, is to become insiders in the culture and community, to get to know people and to develop real and close relationships with individuals there - to grow to understand what people think and how they feel from their perspective - to see through their eyes.

Participant Observation during Level 1 is simply joining in, or just being there, with people when they are doing the normal activities of life. Showing an interest in them and their lives and letting them know that you want to learn their language and culture by being a part of the things they are doing. This is easier in the beginning if you find one or two people who are willing to have you accompany them as they do various activities - shopping, leisure activities, visits, sports, work, family times, visit their home, paying bills, getting their car fixed, going to a wedding or funeral - then you can gradually meet more people through them.

So, Participant Observation is as much about you getting to know people and interacting with them, as it is about gathering language and cultural material from an objective point of view. But, you do have to be intentional in the situation, not just cruise along, but be purposefully observing, listening, jotting down questions or notes, and responding to the people there as you are able to.

Listen and Act

The Listen and Act learning activities used in Level 1 are based on a learning method called 'TPR' (Total Physical Response). TPR was developed by an American professor, James Asher, and is the combination of language and physical movement. A language helper or tutor gives commands in the target language, and learners respond with physical actions - like pointing, or doing the action ("Point to the basket", "Put the cup on the table", "Stand up", etc.). It is a very effective way of learning to hear and understand basic vocabulary for objects and actions, and then later to be able to use these yourself.

Read: *BEC* Pages 20-28

These pages give some more detail about Participant Observation, and also have the first learning plan for Level 1.



ACTIVITIES

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1. The following activity is adapted from the website <http://www.lifelearner.org/culture>, *Activities In The Neighbourhood*. This activity will help you to observe what people are doing in your local neighborhood or town. As you do this activity, follow the first instruction in *BEC* Daily Learning Plan 1, Participant Observation and *observe, listen,*

respond and *note*. Try to engage people in conversation, even if it is only greeting or asking a simple question - see what happens!

Take a walk down the street and take note of what you see people doing (children going to school or playing, women shopping, someone cleaning the street, people going to work or sitting in the sunshine, shopkeepers at work, tradesmen doing their work, etc.) Take pictures if appropriate.

Where are the activities taking place? In or by a home? In an office? In a store? On the street?

Who is doing each particular activity? Is it being done by a recognized tradesman (e.g., mechanic, painter, silversmith), by either a man or woman? Is it limited to a specific area (e.g., industrial area, shopping area), or to a certain season (grass cutting, fishing, shovelling snow)?

Is the activity essentially individual or cooperative? If the latter, who does what? Is food or payment provided for workers or helpers? Try to join in one or another of the activities and tell about your experience. Note the people's reaction and their instructions to you.

2. Watch the video (available on the accesstruth.com website) on Learning Activities that includes some demonstrations of *Participant Observation* and *Listen and Act* activities.
3. Find anyone you know - family, friend, neighbor - who speaks another language that you do not know (it doesn't have to be their first language, but they must speak it fairly well). Ask if they would help you with a learning exercise - it should take about two hours of their time. The exercise is from the Listen and Act exercise from Daily Learning Plan 1. You will try to learn to comprehend the words for the common types of people - woman, man, boy, girl, baby, old woman, old man, young woman, young man, etc. - in your helper's language. A page with photos is included for you to print out at the end of this tutorial - cut out the pictures so you can show each one separately to your helper. Follow the instructions carefully - remember that your helper should say the words in a sentence, not just the words on their own, and they will need to repeat them many times until you are able to point to them correctly toward the end of the exercise. Relax, because you don't have to say anything, just listen to comprehend. Have fun!

- I. Listen - start with two of the photos in front of you and the helper (choose the baby and the man in the suit). Point to the first photo and have your helper say (in his language) the name of the type of person in a sentence, such as “*This is a baby*”.
 - II. You will listen, but do not repeat what your helper says. Point to the next photo of the man and ask your helper to say it in a sentence, as he did the first time. “*This is a man.*” (For this exercise it will be easier for you if he uses the same form of sentence for each photo - “This is a _____”)
 - III. Then your helper can begin to randomly say the sentences for the two photos present, “*This is a man,*” and you try to point to the picture of the man. Or, “*This is a baby,*” and you try to point to the picture of the baby. Listen for the differences in the sentences - this is the part you are learning to comprehend, and relate to the picture of the person.
 - IV. Once you succeed in pointing correctly to those two first people, you can add a third, then a fourth, and on up till all nine photos are in front of you. Your helper should attempt to go through the items as randomly and unpredictably as possible to maximise your learning. He probably won't realise that you need to hear these things many, many times in order to understand them well. So don't become bored or move on too quickly! Have him continue as long as you need to, before adding another new photo (this can be around 30 times for each picture). Let him decide what each person would be called in his language, don't tell him what to say. If it turns out that two people would be called the same thing (e.g., if there is no distinction between little girl and teenage girl for instance) then just use one of the pictures.
 - V. Finally, when you can point correctly to all the types of people when he says the sentences, make a recording of him saying all the sentences so you can review it on your own later.
4. As an additional exercise, you can repeat the steps above, but have your helper say *different* sentences for each photograph, using the same ‘people’ words (man, woman, baby, etc.) but using a sentence referring to what each person is doing - “the baby is holding the brush”, “the girl is jumping”, “the man is using his phone”, “the old man is reading”, etc. You might still be able to recognise the words

for the various people in these different sentences
(depending on the language) and point to the correct one -
try it and see how you go.

