

ESSEX

Rotary Youth Exchange

PREPARING FOR LANGUAGE & CULTURE IMMERSION:

LEARNING STRATEGIES, TIPS & RESOURCES

**By: Thomas W. Barton
Trainer - District 7390 Youth Exchange
Revised: November 2013**

Introduction:

With only 7 or 8 months until departure, language preparation and cultural awareness training for your new host country is one of the most critical aspects of being a successful Rotary International Exchange Student and having an outcome of what many previous Rotex students have called the “greatest year of their life”. Upon arrival in your new host country your ability to quickly integrate, adapt and to continue learning your new language depends on the investment of time you are willing to make before leaving. The purpose of this paper is to provide you with some general strategies and resources to help you get started on this learning process. If you discover other valuable resources that you would like to share with the rest of our Youth Exchange team please e-mail me at tbarton@trolaindustries.com and I will share the information with everyone.

Language learning for some students may come easy and for others it may be more challenging, however *everyone* can do it. But, just like learning to play a new sport or musical instrument there must be motivation and commitment to practice in order to achieve results. Some research has indicated that learning a new language may require a minimum of one hour and ideally two hours daily of practice to keep your brain “engaged”, allowing you to expand your language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing while improving comprehension. This learning process is not something that you can “cram” into the brain a month before you leave. For many of you the arrival in your host country will be in a 24/7 environment where there is minimal or no English spoken, so the immersion process of language learning will be greatly enhanced by your investment in language practice in advance along with the research of the culture. In some countries English is spoken some of the time, making it more challenging to immerse; making any advancement in language learning slower when there is a default to your natural language of English. A similar challenge may be that your fellow Inbound exchange students, once in your new country may default to English as a means to communicate among each other. A final important concern will be getting your family and stateside friends not to bombard you with phone calls, emails, Skype sessions, etc in English. These topics will be explored in our future training sessions.

Besides spending time learning your new language, it is important to do extensive research on the culture of your host country. This knowledge will allow you to anticipate your appropriate behavior in both casual social and formal settings. When you arrive in your host country your goal as an ambassador is to move through the stages of integration including “observer”, “reporter” and finally “participant” as you become “native-like” to enjoy and understand the uniqueness of this new culture. Besides some of the internet resources listed below, your best resource would be to talk with previous exchange students who went to your host country and if given the opportunity speak directly with a native Inbound exchange student presently being hosted in your sponsoring Rotary District.

General Strategies:

1. Playing a new sport requires one to learn and understand the rules. Learning a language is no different. Start out by learning the grammatical rules and structure of your new language.
2. Study the alphabet characters of the language along with any punctuation marks or references to constants and vowels.
3. Examine the unique sounds of the language. Listen to the annunciation of the alphabet characters, words and phrases. With Asian languages listen for low medium and high pitch “tonal” changes in pronunciation.
4. Establish a schedule for training. Similar to a runner training for a marathon, maintaining a consistent schedule of practices will result in incremental improvement of cognitive skills.
5. Provide yourself with adequate resources to match your particular style of learning. Seek expert advice from language teachers at school, Rotex students, In-bound Exchange Students or other natives from your hosting country. The internet provides the access to a wealth of resources on language and culture.
6. Do not worry about what you can not remember, understand or pronounce. It does not matter because you are in a process of learning over time. Many students report that with strong preparation and after approximately 3 months of intense language immersion, they begin to dream in their new language !

Tips & Suggestions:

1. Begin by listening to the sounds of the language that may be different than English. Download songs from your new host country to your iPod or MP3 player. Many internet websites offer downloadable Apps for smart phones and tablet PC's providing a more mobile way to access and practice. You will find alphabets, pronunciation, flash cards, translation dictionaries and grammar to aid in your learning.
2. Practice reading out loud. (This is so your brain gets used to the unique sounds.) Focus on words, then phrases. Notice any pattern on how words come together to form phrases.
3. Invest in a *grammar guide* and *dictionary*. Also, it would be beneficial to find some “dual language books” which has the foreign language on the left page and English translation on the right page. (This will save you a lot of time looking words up in your dictionary.) These books are good for learning idioms, expressions and verb tenses.
4. Write vocabulary words on **Post-it Notes** and place them on objects in various rooms of the house. (Rooms might make good categories for Item #7 below.) Please get your parents ok on this one. Highly recommended by Rotex !
5. Check your local library for any foreign language books, especially children's books with pictures. They may also be a source of digital language resources.
6. Build up your vocabulary. Do not worry initially about pronunciation until you have accumulated plenty of words through listening and reading.

7. Start a "Phrase Book" and organize it into logical categories that you can add new phrases as you learn them. (i.e. an interesting category could be food. Some travelers say the first word you should learn is "delicious".)
8. Psychology author, Tony Buzan writes that 100 words make up 50% of all words used in conversation. (See Attachment A for the list.)
9. Find yourself a language partner who is preferably a native of your new host country. Check with your high school language teacher or with the local university in your area. There are some on-line resources to do this, but get permission from your parents.
10. Invest in language learning software. There is also a lot of free resources on the internet such as digital flash cards with audible pronunciation. Many of these free websites offer premium versions for a fee. (See below.)
11. Change the default start-up page of your web browser to an on-line newspaper of your new host country. This will also allow you to see a little of what is going on each day besides providing you with new vocabulary.
12. Buy a crossword puzzle book in your new language to test your comprehension.
13. To enhance your listening skills use your computer to connect via the internet to radio stations in your new host country. (Visit www.omniglot.com/links/radio.htm)
14. Many DVD movies are multilingual. See if you can get them with English subtitles. A children's film would be helpful to build up vocabulary. (See www.kiddomusic.com for examples.) www.Netflix.com has a very good offering of multilingual DVD movies.
15. You should go beyond the spoken and written language. It is important to learn about the application of the language in context to cultural practices and customs. The following are suggested areas for country specific research:
 - Body and hand gestures: Gestures are not universal around the world.
 - Cognitive styles: How do they organize and process information. Are people generally open minded or close minded ?
 - Negotiation Strategies: How do the people deal with feelings, faith and facts when negotiating. Are they risk takers and willing to accept change.
 - Formality: Citizens of the United States (including US Rotarians) generally address others informally by first name, a practice that most of the world does not follow.
 - Protocol: Research the types of greetings, titles and forms of address, gestures, giving of gifts and appropriate dress code. Also investigate the use of manners and the importance of time punctuality.
 - Holidays: Research their importance and purpose.
 - Money & Measurement: Get to know the currency, as well as units of measure. (The US is the only country that uses the foot-pound-second units of measure.)

The answers to these topics can be found in the book Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands written by author Wayne A. Conaway. Look for the latest version.

Language Resources:

1. <http://translate.reference.com> English to 54 languages translation.
2. <http://www.200words-a-day.com> Vocabulary, limited to Spanish, French, Italian, German and Welch.
3. <http://www.foreignserviceinstitute.com/>- audio based language courses on MP3, DVD, CD's with discounted prices.
4. <http://www.multilingualbooks.com> - 145 languages available from The Foreign Service Institute with discounted prices.
5. <http://www.teachyourself.com> 60 languages.
6. www.RosettaStone.com – Has a reputation of being one of the best. Expensive.
7. www.transparentlanguage.com- Free resources, premium products and blogs.
8. www.openculture.com – Select “foreign languages” under Audio & Podcasts list.
9. www.interpolyglot.com Word translation with sound & pictures.
10. Visit iTunes Music Store, Odeo.com and The Podcast Directory for Podcasts
11. Pimsleur Language Programs – Memorization techniques with 30 minute lessons. (search Amazon.com at approx. \$20.00) or visit www.pimsleurapproach.com
12. www.omniglot.com/links/radio.htm - list of international radio stations
13. www.tunein.com International radio stations. Has mobile App.
14. www.transparent.com – free and premium resources.
15. www.bki.com – free and premium digital flash cards. (very nice free list with pronunciation)
16. www.livemocha.com- Connect with native speakers, source of free on-line lessons.
17. www.mangolanguages.com- Only 12 languages, some free samples.
18. www.vistawide.com – Select Languages & Cultures. You will find a smorgasbord of available language learning software programs.
19. www.italkie.com A strong recommendation by Rotex. Has both free and premium materials.
20. Some on-line bookstores have some very good CD/Book combinations that you can both listen and read along. Can be down loaded to an iPod, etc.
21. Franklin Pocket Dictionaries have been recommended by our Rotex as being fairly inexpensive.
22. Some ethnic restaurants may be a good location to meet someone who would be willing to be a language coach.
23. www.childrenslibrary.org ICDL Children's books in 37 languages. Jump to the country look-up page.
24. www.jgram.org JGRAM Japanese Grammar Database.
25. www.alc.co.jp Space ALC (dictionary with largest database of example sentences on the web)
26. www.voseospanish.com Spanish training focused on Argentina. Provided by a 2009 outbound.
27. www.forvo.com A free site with pronunciation in many languages.
28. www.duolingo.com Offers 5 languages and has a mobile App.
29. www.50langu.com Offers 50 languages.
30. www.babbel.com Offers 13 languages.
31. www.busuu.com Offers 12 languages.
32. www.pimsleurapproach.com Has free trial lesson on over 50 languages.
33. www.internetpolyglot.com Offers 36 languages.

34. www.lang-8.com Links to 180 countries
35. www.speedlearninglanguages.com Used by diplomats, FBI
36. www.fluenz.com No freebie's here, but a highly rated commercial site.
37. www.rocketlanguages.com Offers a 6 day free trial version.
38. www.instantimmersion.com 120 languages – impressive set of resources.

Cultural & Other General Resources:

1. www.delicious.com – This is a social bookmarking site with its own search engine that will give you web sites recommended by members. (you do not have to be a member to use the search engine). Put in terms like “foreign language” or “xxxxx country culture” and see the most popular visited sites.
2. MIT has free on-line courses.
3. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/eurpe/country_profiles/ - This site is wonderful. Besides lists of newspapers, television & radio it has a country and region Profiles List that provides you a country overview, a list of facts, information on leaders and references to media stations.
4. <http://www.tsa.gov> – This site has up-to-date information from our government's Transportation Security Administration.
5. www.culturegrams.com - For concise, reliable, and up-to-date country reports on 190 cultures of the world.
6. <http://www.usnws.com/usnews> - Try U.S. News and World Report for up-to-date world information.
7. <http://usemassy.state.gov> - Try the United States government website for websites of U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Diplomatic Missions.
8. www.loc.gov/index.html - The US Library of Congress has millions of books, recordings, photographs, maps and manuscripts.
9. Visit the travel section of your favorite bookstore.
10. www.onlinenewspapers.com – Provides a list of thousands of on-line international newspapers. (Use for both language learning and local culture.)
11. www.eric.ed.gov Research on country culture.
12. www.word2word.com Links to many other research sites.
13. www.eutheus.org European Union resources and learning.
14. www.wikitavel.org On main page file in country name behind “Take Me To”. There are over 93,000 pages of information on this site.
15. Begin writing to your host family as soon as you find out their email address. They will be happy to answer a lot of your questions. (Shows you are interested in understanding their culture.)

Final Thoughts & Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank District 7930 (Massachusetts & Salem, NH) for sharing some of their resources that were included in this paper. Also, a big thank you to our District 7390 Rotex who have offered some of their tips and suggestions. Any reference to commercial web sites is not an endorsement by Rotary, but simply a compilation of samples of the many resources that you can use for language and culture preparation. Sometimes these website are taken down.

We welcome other Rotary Districts to use this document and hope that you would share with us any additional resources that you have found beneficial.

The 100 Most Common Words

Tony Buzan, in his book 'Using your Memory', points out that just 100 words comprise 50% of all words used in conversation in a language. Learning this core 100 words gets you a long way towards being able to speak in that language, albeit at a basic level. The 100 basic words used in conversation are shown below:

- | | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. A/an | 2. After | 3. Again | 4. All | 5. Almost |
| 6. Also | 7. Always | 8. And | 9. Because | 10. Before |
| 11. Big | 12. But | 13. (I) can | 14. (I) come | 15. Either/or |
| 16. (I) find | 17. First | 18. For | 19. Friend | 20. From |
| 21. (I) go | 22. Good | 23. Good-bye | 24. Happy | 25. (I) have |
| 26. He | 27. Hello | 28. Here | 29. How | 30. I |
| 31. (I) am | 32. If | 33. In | 34. (I) know | 35. Last |
| 36. (I) like | 37. Little | 38. (I) love | 39. (I) make | 40. Many |
| 41. One | 42. More | 43. Most | 44. Much | 45. My |
| 46. New | 47. No | 48. Not | 49. Now | 50. Of |
| 51. Often | 52. On | 53. One | 54. Only | 55. Or |
| 56. Other | 57. Our | 58. Out | 59. Over | 60. People |
| 61. Place | 62. Please | 63. Same | 64. (I) see | 65. She |
| 66. So | 67. Some | 68. Sometimes | 69. Still | 70. Such |
| 71. (I) tell | 72. Thank you | 73. That | 74. The | 75. Their |
| 76. Them | 77. Then | 78. There is | 79. They | 80. Thing |
| 81. (I) think | 82. This | 83. Time | 84. To | 85. Under |
| 86. Up | 87. Us | 88. (I) use | 89. Very | 90. We |
| 91. What | 92. When | 93. Where | 94. Which | 95. Who |
| 96. Why | 97. With | 98. Yes | 99. You | 100. Your |

(Extract reproduced from *Use Your Memory* by Tony Buzan with the permission of BBC Worldwide Limited, © Tony Buzan)