

A Guide to the Study of Southeast Asian Languages

Kathie Carpenter, Carol J. Compton, Elizabeth Riddle, and Julian Wheatley

“It’s a long and winding road”

1. INTRODUCTION

This guide is meant to provide you with a range of answers to the following question:

What is it that good language learners *do* ...
... *that makes* them good language learners?

Notice the emphasis on *do* and *make*. Many Americans believe that language learning ability is an inborn talent (“you either got it or you don’t”) and if you’re not good at languages, there’s just not much you can do about it. This belief is overly pessimistic, perhaps even completely wrong. Fortunately most of the world’s people have never been told they can’t learn another language, and so most of them do. Approximately half the people on the earth have been estimated to be bilingual (Reich 1986:206), and this figure doesn’t even count the number of people who speak a second language fluently because they learned it in school. In many parts of the world, the ability to speak three or even four languages is taken for granted.

Two billion people can’t be wrong! It’s *possible* that there is some inborn knack that makes some people better language learners. But it’s *certain* that people who are good at languages work hard at it, and they use strategies that work. For successful language learners, hard work using appropriate strategies probably contributes far more to their success than any mysterious inborn gift. Whether or not you have “the knack,” you can duplicate the strategies of successful learners, and in so doing, make up for whatever you think you lack in terms of that elusive, mysterious and possibly spurious “gift.”

1.1 How to Use This Guide

You can use it ...

... *as a sourcebook*

You don’t need to sit down and read it cover to cover in order to get the most from it. It’s organized to be useful as a reference. It contains bibliographies, resources, and lists of places you can go for information, language materials, workshops and other support.

... *as a “topo-map”*

A map provides you with the big picture, and both situates you and directs you. You will be able to see how far you've come, and how far you have to go. One of the most frustrating things about learning a language is how nebulous and abstract it is, and how so often you feel like you're on a plateau not making any progress.

Keep this guide. Learning a Southeast Asian language is a lifelong endeavor, and your needs, goals and abilities will be different at different points in your career. Different sections will be more or less useful to you at different times. As a beginner, you may find for instance that you need to concentrate on schema-building and good language lab use. As an intermediate, perhaps you will feel your knowledge of grammar needs strengthening. As a fieldworker or as some other professional, your needs will be different in a variety of ways. Some of the strategies you will need to follow may be very different depending on whether you are taking an academic class, trying self-study, or working in-country with a tutor.

... *as a blueprint*

Southeast Asian language learning takes place under a wide array of conditions and situations. Regardless of your particular learning environment, however, you will need to take an active role in tailoring the learning situation to meet your needs. This guide can help show you how to design your own language learning environment if there are no classes available, or how to make the most of a class that may not fully meet your needs.

2. LEARNER GOALS

2.1 Introduction

As you set out to learn a new language, you will assist yourself and your instructors greatly by articulating your language learning goals and objectives. Determine both your long-term goals and your short-term objectives. Language learning is a lifelong process, so your long-term goals may indeed be far off and difficult to achieve. Some of the points along the learning path are more easily attainable; these points become your short-term objectives. For example, your long-term goal may be to become an interpreter, but your short term objective may be to improve your pronunciation by the end of the semester.

Make your instructor or tutor aware of both your long-term goals and these short-term objectives. Teachers can facilitate your learning best when they know what your personal goals and objectives are. Because teachers must consider all of the students in

their classes, they may be able to make only minor adjustments in their classroom teaching to help you reach your goal. If enough of the students in any one term share similar goals and objectives, however, your instructor may indeed adjust the focus or emphasis of her teaching. In addition, your instructor may provide you with language resources and professional advice on ways to work toward your personal language goals outside of the classroom. Since some instructors do not ask their students about individual student goals in learning a language, it may be necessary for you to arrange an appointment with your instructor to discuss your long-term language goals and short-term objectives.

We know from the research that motivation to learn a language is an important factor in success in learning. Different types of goals require different types of knowledge and different levels of achievement. A tourist doesn't need to know the same things in a language as a person trying to do research. It is important to have realistic expectations about how much language one needs to know and how long it will take to learn it. Recognize that people have mixed goals and goals can evolve over time.

Goals affect how you learn and what you learn well. How effectively you learn certain things may well be affected by your goals. Bear in mind that a two-year language requirement does not give you the tools to achieve some of the higher goals you may have. Two years might be enough to help you out as a tourist or help you explore your ethnic heritage, but usually it will not be long enough to give you the fluency you need to conduct research in the language.

Consider carefully or in consultation with your language instructor the language skills and degree of fluency necessary to achieve your goals. Then adjust your emphasis in studying and learning, both in and out of the classroom, to facilitate the achievement of the language skills most important to you. Keep in mind, however, that if your personal goals are widely different from the general goals of the specific course you are taking, your grade in the course could be affected. Decide which is most important to you, your long-term goal or the immediate grade. With your personal goals and the course goals in mind, decide on the priority of the skills you need to achieve the goals you select.

2.2 Possible Types of Goals

Learners come to Southeast Asian language classrooms with a wide variety of goals. An individual learner may have more than one goal. We will discuss some of these possible goals below, but do not be surprised if your particular reason for studying a Southeast Asian language does not appear on this list. What is important is that you are clear about your goals for learning so that you and your teacher can devise short-term objectives that will help you reach those goals.

2.2.1 Employment

Some students study a Southeast Asian language in order to enhance their employability or to improve their opportunities for advancement in positions they already hold. If this

is one of your goals, it is important to be realistic about job opportunities and the language skills necessary to do particular types of jobs. Your language skills may enhance your employability but may not make it possible to conduct actual business in the language, at least initially. After some time, you should be able to comprehend a great deal of what is going on around you as well as gain an entrée into the culture. However, actually conducting business in the language successfully on your own may require much more study than you probably anticipated. Discuss with your teacher and possible employers what level of fluency is required in your job; then analyze carefully with your teacher the skills you will need and the amount of time it will take for you to satisfactorily learn those skills.

2.2.2 Research

For some students, the goal is to become proficient enough to conduct research in the language they are studying. There are a number of questions you need to ask yourself if research is your goal. What matters to you in doing your research? Is the kind of research you will be conducting quantitative or qualitative? Will you make use of written materials and questionnaires to obtain information or will you be collecting oral data? Will you be working alone or with a research assistant?

As you answer these and other questions about the research you are planning, you can begin to focus on the language skills that you will need to acquire in order to do your work. For instance, an anthropologist may have a great need for good pronunciation in order to collect data without the aid of an interpreter. Reading skills will be far more important, however, to an historian who plans to work on nineteenth century materials. In addition, great differences occur in most Southeast Asian languages between the vocabulary and aspects of the grammar in written documents, particularly those of a religious or political nature, and the vocabulary used in everyday speech to discuss similar topics.

2.2.3 Ethnic heritage language learning

If ethnic heritage is your reason for learning the language, your dialect loyalties may affect the form of the language you wish to learn, the way you learn the language, and your interactions in the classroom. Many Southeast Asian-Americans are now studying heritage languages or languages of the region. Most of the programs in the United States may be teaching a dialect of a language which is not the one spoken in the homes of students from the ethnic communities in the U.S. For tone languages, this can cause particular difficulties for ethnic heritage students.

For example, the Hanoi dialect of Vietnamese may be taught, but the student or the student's family may use a southern Vietnamese dialect. Or an intermediate class may use the Vientiane or the Savannakhet dialect of Lao, but the student may be a speaker of the Luang Prabang dialect. Such students may be asked to “correct” their tones in order to be successful in the classroom, unless the teacher and the student can come to a clear understanding of goals and acceptable progress.

In addition, Southeast Asian language teachers may have certain sociocultural expectations for ethnic heritage students which are unrealistic for students who have grown up primarily in the United States. Thus, both students and teachers need to be aware of learner goals and together set realistic expectations and objectives for ethnic heritage learners.

2.2.4 Translating and interpreting

Among the long-term goals that require some of the most sophisticated language skills are translating and interpreting. In order to be a translator or an interpreter, you will have to pay attention to detail and be aware of details that wouldn't be necessary if you were learning language for another purpose. There are specific skills involved in translating and interpreting that are not often taught until very late (third or fourth year) in a language program, if at all. Check with your language teacher to see if and when such skills are introduced in the program, or where you will need to go for further study.

Studying a language for three or four years won't automatically prepare you to be a good interpreter or a good translator. There are many kinds of interpreting such as consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, and whispered interpretation; each of these requires different skills of the interpreter. Similarly, there are different kinds of translation such as prepared translation, sight translation, and summary translation. You have to know something about the subject you are translating as well. Nida (1945) provides an outline of knowledge which translators must have which includes the following major topics: 1) ecology, 2) material culture and technology, 3) social organization, 4) mythic patterns, and 5) linguistic structure. In addition, Bennani (1981:135) says,

...the translator must ... be willing and able to bridge gaps not only between the source and the target languages, but also between the corresponding elements and forces that constitute their respective cultures and societies.

Both interpreting and translating are very high level skills and will take a long time to acquire. If your goal is to be an interpreter or translator, your commitment to language study must be strong, for these roles require exceptional language skills and abilities.

2.2.5 Language requirements and grades

Some students may be motivated to take a Southeast Asian language simply to meet a university program's language requirement. Others may sign up for the class because they have heard that the classes are small, so a student can get more individual attention and thus probably get a good grade. If one of these goals is yours, think it over carefully; you may find that most Southeast Asian languages are really challenging, and you will have to attend classes regularly, do your homework and go to the language lab regularly in order to obtain a respectable grade. In addition, you will find many of the other students are highly motivated to learn these languages, and the competition will be stiff. If you stay in the class, you will probably learn a lot and meet the language requirement, but that good grade will require a great deal of hard work.

2.2.6 Other goals

There may be many other motivations for learning a Southeast Asian language. You may have a friend or relative from the culture with whom you would like to communicate; you might wish to enjoy literature in the original. You may simply find the culture interesting. You may have done volunteer work or professional work with members of this ethnic community and wish to get to know their language, or you may be one of those people who simply enjoys learning languages and wants to “learn” another. Many of these goals will take you many years to achieve, while others will require less time and effort on your part.

2.3 Mapping Your Language Learning Journey

Since you may have more than one major goal or reason for learning a Southeast Asian language, you might find it useful to prepare a “map” or schedule for each major goal. Chart carefully when and where you are on your journey toward each goal, look at the points at which the journeys converge and diverge, and how it may be necessary to adjust one or both of the goals and their respective objectives in order to learn the language, given the resources and teaching-learning opportunities available to you. Review your language learning map from time to time with your teacher or teachers so that you can avail yourself of their professional knowledge of the terrain over which you plan to travel.

2.4 Learning about Language Learning

As an adult language learner you may wish to read additional books and articles which are designed to help you succeed in achieving your language learning goals. An annotated list of books for language learners (Jackson 1993) has been published in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Language Teaching*, and included in Appendix I at the end of this issue. Also, consider reading the materials suggested in this guide in the sections on language learning strategies (4.6 through 4.9), as well as some of the items from the strategies bibliography in Appendix II, so as to become more familiar with who you are as a learner and what learning strategies may be appropriate for the goals you have selected.

2.5 Conclusion

As you prepare to learn this language, take the time to assess and evaluate your goals and the fit of the language program and the language skills being taught to those goals. If you do indeed decide to study this language, work with your teacher or a linguist to design an approach and a program of study that will help you move toward your goals. With a carefully planned set of long-range learner goals and short-term study objectives, you have completed an important first step in acquiring the language of your choice.

3. THE LANGUAGE LEARNING TASK:

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

3.1 What You Are Learning: Knowing and Doing

Cognitive psychologists distinguish between two kinds of “knowing,” knowing *about* something, or **declarative knowledge**, which is the ability to discuss, explain and analyze something, and knowing *how* to do something, or **procedural knowledge**. If you want to be able to use a language to communicate, then your ultimate goal is more procedural than declarative. The best way to perfect procedural knowledge is by doing, repetitively but mindfully.

While grammar explanations, verb paradigm analysis and memorizing vocabulary or exceptions to rules may help in various ways, none of these is your ultimate goal. They are simply a few steps among many possible steps along the way. In language teaching, we refer to these two ways of knowing as FACT and ACT. FACT is declarative knowledge - the rules of grammar, the analyzing about the language, often done in English. ACT is the procedural knowledge, the doing, speaking, reading and writing in the language that you are learning. This distinction is especially important for Southeast Asian languages, because their grammars and cultures are very, very different from English, usually in complex and subtle ways. You may be frustrated because you don't understand why a grammatical construction works the way it does; however, if you concentrate on the ACT while practicing and observing the patterning of the construction in order to determine the FACTS, it should eventually become clearer.

Language learning is a developmental process, and it is often not possible to fully understand and completely master an aspect of a language before you need to use it. Conversely, some things which may have seemed clear at first may actually turn out to be more complicated. It is important to keep an open mind about the FACTS of the language and realize that you will go through many stages of understanding. Highly successful language learners display a certain amount of tolerance of ambiguity, especially at the early stages, for they realize that deeper understanding of the full workings of a language will come with time. Ultimately, the goal is to be able to use the language rather than simply to know facts about it that can be displayed on a classroom test.

3.2 What You Are Learning: The Nature of Language

All languages are very complex. The difficulty of learning a foreign language increases when the complexities in the language one is learning are very different from those of one's own language. In this guide your attention will be drawn to a number of important ways in which Southeast Asian languages differ from English.

Awareness of some of the kinds of complexities to look out for and the differences to expect can make your task more manageable. Often learners are frustrated by such differences. The ways of a new language may seem arbitrary or even illogical as

compared to one's own language. It is important to realize that ALL languages are arbitrary, in the sense that there is for the most part no inherent connection between meanings and forms. At the same time, languages are also systematic and rule-governed, although there may be exceptions to a number of the rules. The trick is to figure out the patterns that native speakers of a language take for granted. This is a task which has occupied linguists for many years and will continue to do so for generations to come.

A textbook or a teacher may be able to offer fairly complete explanations of some things but not others. As a student, it is important to look for generalizations whenever possible, but realize that good explanations may not be available for many things. Sometimes this is because the feature is ultimately arbitrary. Other times it may involve an exception to a rule. Sometimes there may be a potential explanation, but it has not yet been articulated by researchers on the language.

3.3 The Language Learning Process

3.3.1 The Place of Errors

One of the biggest obstacles to learning a language is the fear of making mistakes in public. Yet no mistake is fatal in language learning. Of course, this fear is compounded if you are learning a language in a class and you are being graded on your performance. However, in terms of your learning, you must give up the fear of making mistakes. The more you feel like talking, the more you will learn. And of course, conversation is a two-way street; the more you hold up your end of the interaction, the more “comprehensible input” you will get from your teacher and your classmates.

An important notion here is *interlanguage*. Your mind isn't simply a black box that takes a foreign language in through your ears and passes it out through your mouth. You are actively making sense out of the structure of this foreign language, and you do so in a series of successive approximations or hypotheses that you are constantly updating and revising. Each successive mental model of your new language is an interlanguage — an intermediary linguistic system that is your current hypothesis of the structure of your new language, containing some ideas that are correct, some overgeneralizations and some assumptions based on what you know about your own language. The crucial point here is that you are constantly revising and updating your interlanguages. Just because you make one kind of error one day based on an overgeneralization or a faulty guess, doesn't mean that you will continue making that kind of error for the rest of your life.

Some people think that making mistakes will lead to “bad habits”, which can never be overcome. Actually, mistakes along the way are natural and can eventually be resolved if you continue to work on refining your language skills. Sometimes, however, learners seem to peak out, or plateau, making the same mistakes for years despite efforts to correct them. You may find that you have reached a point as an advanced learner where you really don't seem to be progressing, or where you cannot overcome making a particular mistake that really interferes with your ability to communicate with native speakers. What can you do?

No one really understands why this “fossilization” occurs, but the reasons may lie inside the learner. For example, there is a tendency to be satisfied or pragmatic once a certain usable proficiency level is reached. It may be threatening to go any further in sounding like a native speaker because the learner may fear losing his or her own identity. Whatever the reason, the best cure is to slow down and do more intensive listening and reading. Pick out one or two points to work on at a time (e.g. for a week or a month) and pay focused attention to them when listening and reading in order to build your understanding of how they work. Then monitor your own speaking and writing for those few features until you have control over them. After that you can move on to others.

3.3.2 First vs. second language learning

Language learning the second time around: is it the same? This is one of the great mysteries of language learning. You have all done it once - expertly, natively. Why does it seem so much harder to learn a language as an adult than as a child? Few would argue that the only way for an adult to learn a foreign language is to do it exactly as a child does, starting with the listening and babbling that infants do. But, there are some things to keep in mind:

- Children accept making mistakes (and their mistakes are accepted by the adults around them)
- Children spend a long, long time just listening to the sounds of the language
- Children concentrate earliest on rhythm and intonation
- Children bring a playful, experimental approach to the task
- Children put in enormous amounts of time, exposure and practice (they devote virtually every waking hour during the first five years of their life to it)
- Children are content to use simple language to discuss simple content
- Children concentrate more on getting comprehensible input than they do on performance
- Children get a lot of practice in make believe, pretend situations (e.g., talking to their toys)
- Children elicit tolerance and support from the adults around them
- Children tie language to context, to specific people and to specific situations

Learner alert: Overgeneralization.

It will be surprising, even frustrating, to you when you hear yourself making crazy mistakes on things that just last week you were consistently getting right. In all human learning, there is a phenomenon known as the “U-shaped curve” which refers to the fact that progress doesn’t always appear as a simple steady ascent. While making progress, you can seem to be temporarily losing ground. However, this doesn’t mean you are losing ground. It means that you are progressing to the next level of complexity of organization and integrating into a system things that previously were unsystematic. When you add complexity, something has to give, and at first you may seem to be getting worse. Remember that language learning is a matter of learning to apply rules, not a matter of simple sheer mindless imitation. For that reason, part of knowing how to use a rule is knowing when not to use it, as well as how to use it. When you first learn a new rule, it is inevitable that you will sometimes overuse it, until your system settles down. Although these errors of overgeneralization can be disturbing, they are actually a sign that learning is proceeding as it should.

3.4 Expectations

3.4.1 Pronunciation

Since languages are complex and since you are trying to learn to use a new language rather than simply learn about it, it is necessary to have realistic expectations about what you can achieve and how long it may take.

Adults who learn a foreign language virtually always have a trace of a foreign accent, even after years and years of living in the country where the language is spoken. Although the goals of individuals may vary, most learners are better off concentrating on speaking intelligibly and fluently rather than with a perfect native accent. Think about the people you know who speak English with a foreign accent. You expect them to have an accent and you may even find it charming. It is certainly a fundamental part of who they are. If you think of the nonnative speakers that you like to converse with, chances are that you would much rather speak to someone who speaks fluently, smoothly and animatedly, and talks about topics you find interesting, than someone who labors over every word, perhaps getting individual words and sounds perfectly but never really holding your interest with engaging intonation or sophisticated topics. Of course you want to be understood, and of course you don’t want to irritate native speakers with bad pronunciation, but between native-like pronunciation and incomprehensible pronunciation, there is a huge acceptable middle ground of having a recognizable accent but being perfectly understandable and enjoyable to talk with.

3.4.2 Comprehension

Language learners often mistakenly think that they are expected to understand every word of what is being said in a class from the start or that when they are reading, every unknown word must be looked up in order to derive benefit from the activity. However, listening comprehension involves special skills that develop over time, even in the case of words and structures you have already studied. Just understanding the general topic, or getting the gist of what's going on is an important first step in the development of listening comprehension. The same is true for reading. Often stopping to look up every unfamiliar word hinders the comprehension process by distracting you from the overall gist. Plus it can discourage you from doing much reading. Yet doing lots of listening and/or reading is one of the best ways to learn new vocabulary and structures. The key is to be tolerant of some ambiguity at the early stages, pay close attention to the context, and make some educated guesses at times, and at other times to pay more attention to particular details. It is simply impossible, especially for novice learners, to pay attention to all features of the language all of the time.

At the same time, it is best to maximize the amount of comprehensible input you are exposed to. Listening to and reading lots of material that is slightly above your level can stretch you while still providing some success. Because comprehensibility depends on the state of your own interlanguage, you will need to take responsibility for getting as much comprehensible input as you can. A good way to do this is to ask your teacher questions. That way, you know what the general topic is about, and you constantly create your own reference points by asking questions that bring the focus back to you. One way to make sure it's comprehensible is if you control it. This is probably what small children are doing when they plague adults with repeated questions of "Why?" This is something that little children learning their first language do unconsciously but effectively; a child's constant use of the question "Why?" is a way of keeping the adult talking (i.e., providing comprehensible input) about a topic so that the child knows what it is, and using and recycling the same vocabulary and structures because the topic remains essentially the same.

You can think about the process of language learning as a matter of finding the "rules" of a language, internalizing them, and learning to use them to generate your own original sentences and utterances. In order to do this, you need to be exposed to lots of samples of the language used in situations where you have some clue as to what is going on; then you can use those clues to help you draw new conclusions about how the language works.

3.4.3 Time

Many language students expect to be able to communicate well with native speakers after a few months of study, especially if it is in-country study. However, the complexity of language and the language learning process make this an unrealistic expectation, even for people with "a good ear" for languages. Although some communication can take place immediately, it is important to have a realistic understanding of how long it generally takes to achieve a certain level of skill in different areas, and to realize that you will not

necessarily progress at the same rate in the different skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Southeast Asian languages pose special challenges to learning that may make them more difficult and time-consuming to learn than other languages you may have studied in the past. Because they are so different from English, Southeast Asian languages are harder for speakers of English than the more commonly taught European languages. The Foreign Service Institute, responsible for teaching U.S. diplomats, has grouped the languages of the world into four classes, depending on how difficult they are for English speakers to learn, and how many hours it would take to reach a level of skill necessary for performing professional duties. As you can see from the table below, Southeast Asian languages mostly fall into classes 2 and 3, making them markedly more difficult than the more commonly taught European languages such as French, German and Spanish. The good news, though, is that they are not the hardest languages; that honor is reserved for Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Arabic.

FSI Class	Languages	Hours required for professional working proficiency
1	French, German, Spanish	720
2	Indonesian, Malay	1320
3	Thai, Burmese, Khmer, Lao, Filipino, Vietnamese	1320
4	Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Arabic	2400

For instance, according to the Foreign Service Institute (cited in Omaggio 1986), it takes 1320 hours for a learner of Thai to reach a level of ability that a learner of say, French could reach in just 720 hours. In other words, it takes nearly twice as long to reach an ability level suitable for professional use in a Southeast Asian language as for Spanish, French or German. Figuring on a 30-week academic year program with instruction every day for one hour, it would take almost nine academic years (8.8 to be exact) for a person with superior language learning aptitude to reach professional working proficiency in most Southeast Asian languages.

Another problem is that most institutions do not offer the variety and high levels of language courses in Southeast Asian languages that may be available in the more commonly taught languages (which students may have started studying in high school or even elementary school). That is why the most important thing you can learn in a Southeast Asian language classroom is how to go on learning outside the classroom. Both as a supplement to your in-class time, and as a continuation after you complete formal language study, it is crucial for you to learn how to learn. Even if you learn everything the class has to offer, it's just not going to be enough. Thus the concepts, *self-managed learning and lifelong learning*, are keys to your success as a learner.

4. SELF-MANAGED LEARNING

4.1 Introduction

Adult language learners of Southeast Asian languages undertake that language learning in a variety of contexts using a variety of strategies. In this section we will discuss who is learning where with whom and how. We will consider some of the characteristics of individual learners discussed earlier, the settings in which language learning takes place, the teachers, tutors or models of the language, and some of the strategies which learners have found useful in various learning situations. An understanding of these factors will help you to manage or “take control of” your own learning.

4.2 Characteristics of the Individual Adult Language Learner

Language learning is an intimate experience, neither totally the same nor completely different for each adult student. Adult students bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom or other learning environment. At the same time the wide variation in experience and background that adults bring to a language classroom makes it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all learners. Variables such as age, aptitude and intelligence, motivation, attitude, needs, cognitive style and personality can affect the ways in which people learn a language and the strategies which will be most effective for them. For this reason, adult language learners need to consider the role of “self-directed learning” as discussed by Knowles (1975) in their approach to the acquisition of a Southeast Asian language. It is the primary strategy suggested in this section, that is, the strategy of taking responsibility for one’s own learning.

4.3 Language Learning Settings

Language learning takes place both inside and outside of classrooms. Formal, nonformal and informal settings combine to provide a many-faceted arena for the adult language learner. We usually think of formal education as referring to schooling: structured, teacher-centered, set curriculum, standardized tests, specific periods of study, and with terminal certificates, diplomas or degrees. Nonformal education refers to education that is structured as well, but it is usually conducted outside of school settings, is learner-centered, may be ad hoc in nature, is usually low cost, and has instructors who may be volunteers. Informal learning refers to incidental or deuterio learning which takes place in natural environmental and social contexts in a spontaneous fashion and accounts for the majority of the learning that takes place in our lives.

Adult language learners may begin and later continue their learning of a language in an informal or nonformal setting. The formal classroom setting with a teacher and a group of students, usually ten or less for most Southeast Asian languages, is the common setting for most adult learners of Southeast Asian languages in the United States. However, it is not always the most appropriate or helpful setting for some adults. In this section we present strategies which can be used in informal and nonformal settings, as well as strategies designed to be used within a formal classroom by the adult learner.

4.4 Teachers, Tutors, and Language Models

Just as there are three basic educational settings — formal, informal and nonformal — in which most language learning will take place, there are at least three types of people who may provide the linguistic information that learners need: teachers, tutors, and language models.

Teachers, as we are defining them here, are those who have knowledge of the language in question and teach in a formal educational setting. In Southeast Asian language classrooms, teachers can range from those specifically educated in linguistics and language teaching (who may or may not be native speakers of the language) to those who are native speakers of the language but may have their education in other disciplines.

Some teachers see themselves as directors of your learning, while others see themselves as facilitators of learning. When you are studying in a formal setting, it is important to be aware of who your teacher is, what training and educational background your teacher has, and what sociocultural and personal expectations your teacher brings to your Southeast Asian language classroom. It is useful to find out from the very beginning what testing and evaluation strategies your teacher prefers, so that you can prepare yourself for the inevitable: the teacher will test and evaluate you and give you a grade.

Knowing who your teacher is as a teacher is part of your responsibility as an adult language learner. As an adult, you are able to communicate your needs and goals and discuss appropriate learning objectives with your teacher. It may not be possible for your teacher to meet all of your learning needs in the classroom, for he or she does have other students as well. However, there are others with knowledge of the language who may help you achieve any of those language learning objectives that are not being met in the classroom.

Speakers of most major Southeast Asian languages can be found now in almost every large university and urban area in the United States and in similar locations in a number of other countries as well. In many of these places, good-sized Southeast Asian communities exist. Both Nunan (1988) and Purnell (1994) have discussed the value to language learners of forging links with local target language speech communities. Consequently, even though you may be studying in a formal classroom setting, you may want to find a tutor from the local Southeast Asian community to work with you on particular skills or you may find a language model for help with other aspects of the language and culture.

Tutors can provide appropriate help for some adult language learners, particularly for those who are more comfortable and more successful in nonformal learning environments. However, it is important to consider carefully what your learning objectives are and to **communicate those objectives clearly to the tutor** you select. If you want to create a less stressful, less formal environment for learning, you don't want to select a tutor who will simply attempt to replicate a traditional classroom setting. Once again, take responsibility for your learning. Design with the tutor the way your sessions

will be set up. Help select the materials you will use and the ways you will approach those materials. If you are a beginner, you may not know a great deal about the language, but you do know yourself and what approaches are least successful for you.

Language models can be another, more informal way of creating additional learning opportunities for you. Within the Southeast Asian community, there are probably one or two people at least who would be appropriate to serve in this role for you. You could choose to have a conversation partner to serve as your language model, or you might simply select someone in the community whose language you wish to imitate or use as a model for your own speech. If you have the luxury of choosing from a large group of people, try to get some help in finding someone of approximately your own age and gender whose interests are similar to yours. That way, the conversations you have will be in language that is appropriate for who you are; at the same time, you will be building vocabulary on topics that interest you and ones you hope to be able to talk about with others in the future.

If you choose the **conversation partner** approach, the two of you might meet for a snack or lunch from time to time to chat in the language; these informal meetings may be more successful without any particular agenda. You are two people trying to communicate, using the Southeast Asian language that one of you is learning. However, some learners may prefer to take the more focused approach described in section 4.8.3. Your conversation partner needs to know that language learning is your objective in these meetings, so that if a friendship does not develop, the conversation partner will not be hurt or disappointed. In some universities, there are organizations that will help students locate appropriate conversation partners. Check with your teacher or with the student activities bureau to find out if such a group exists at the place you are studying.

If the Southeast Asian community is large, you may simply choose to use an even more informal approach to the language model idea. As you meet people in the community, listen carefully to the speech of speakers of your gender who are of a similar age and have an appropriate educational background. The speech of these speakers can serve as a **mental language model** for you when you are speaking the language in the classroom or with others in the language community. If you choose this approach, you will want to be sure that the dialect and personal speech characteristics of the speakers you select are seen as pleasant within their own speech community.

When speaking to you, many speakers will simplify or modify the language they use; they will use a version of the language meant for foreigners. As Odlin (1989:166) notes, “repetition, the use of simple words, and a slow rate of speech are among the most frequent characteristics” of such speech. This use of “foreigner talk” may be because native speakers feel you won’t understand them if they use more complex or even common, everyday language. Preston (1989:49) says that “simplification of input, whether in structure or conversational organization, is one way of making it comprehensible.” Consequently, you may wish to listen to your language model speaking with another native speaker so that the language you use for your mental model will be more authentic. Also, you may want to ask your conversation partner to think of

you as a classmate or officemate and to try to use the same language with you that would have been used with native speakers in similar circumstances; these approaches to limiting foreign talk are particularly appropriate for second-year and third-year students.

4.5 Know Thyself: Learning Styles of Adult Learners

There is a fourth person who is integral to your success in language learning, and that is you. It is important that you, the adult language learner, know yourself and what things hinder or enhance your learning. As Rubin and Thompson (1994:59) point out, “unless you can take charge of your own learning, you will probably not succeed in mastering the new language. You know yourself best, so you should use your self-knowledge to guide your studies....”

What kind of a learner are you? By investigating the literature on learning styles or completing the Learning Style Inventory (Kolb 1984) or one like it, and through introspection and self-assessment, you may gain increased insight into your own dominant learning style. What is the fit of your preferred learning style or styles with the kind of teaching taking place in the Southeast Asian language classroom in which you find yourself? If the fit is not good, look to the sections on strategies provided here for increasing your learning both inside and outside of class. You might also wish to read some of the materials provided in the references and appendices.

How well do you learn in group settings and through group activities? How well can you learn while cooperating with others? Coelho (1992:37) states that

A primary requirement for second language acquisition is the provision of opportunities for frequent and extended interaction in the target language. Language learners need to interact on meaningful tasks with one another and with native speakers of the target language.

In most Southeast Asian language classrooms you will be expected to interact with other students in both large and small groups. You will need to cooperate with others in accomplishing language tasks, in constructing and performing dialogues, in role playing, and in reading and writing assignments as well as in speaking and listening activities. If you have difficulty in speaking in front of a group of peers or in working on group tasks, you may wish to talk with your teacher before classes begin to find a mutually satisfactory way to accommodate your needs while at the same time meeting the course standards.

How well do you study on your own? Language learning is a complex task, and the time spent in solitary or small group study outside of the classroom is important to the overall growth and development of your abilities in the new language. Some adults prefer to study alone, while others simply do not have the luxury of putting one more thing, such as a study group, on their schedules. If you prefer to or must study alone, go over the suggestions in the following sections to find ways for making that study time more valuable. If you learn more effectively when studying with others or the pressure of peers helps you to focus when studying, then take the initiative to form a language study

group. The study group should agree from the outset what its objectives are and when and where it is meeting. The group needs to agree upon the study procedures which will be most helpful to its members.

4.6 Language Learning Strategies for Various Types of Learners

There are a number of ways to categorize the strategies which learners apply to the language learning task. For instance, language learning **strategies may be cognitive in nature**, that is, they may make use of different ways of thinking about language. Language learning strategies may also be **metacognitive** in nature, that is, they may involve ways to look at how you are planning, monitoring or evaluating your own language learning activities. Most of the activities suggested in this section involve cognitive strategies, though some metacognitive activities are also included.

Learners may be categorized in many ways as well. We have attempted to provide some of the more obvious categories of types of learners, and then we suggest activities they might use for language learning which involve a variety of strategies. However, we do not provide an example of every strategy in each category. Many of the activities presented in one section may also be useful for other learners, so don't just read the ideas in the sections that you think represent you best; take a look at other sections as well. In addition, you may wish to refer to other books and materials on language learning strategies mentioned in the references or found in the appendices of this guide.

4.6.1 Audio Learners.

Those who are good at receiving new information through their ears may want to try some of these strategies. Increase your exposure to the sounds of the language even when you are not focusing on it per se by listening to language tapes and CDs. **Surround yourself with sound.** You might choose dialogue tapes, tapes or CDs of popular or traditional songs with lyrics, narratives of stories, or tapes of radio broadcasts and listen to them in your car on the way to work, school, home or the store. If you don't have a car, use a tape recorder or CD player to listen to these same kinds of audio materials while jogging, working around the house, or exercising.

If you are a beginner, you might simply wish to listen to the sounds at first. Later you might also wish to produce some language as you listen by repeating the dialogues after the speaker on the tape or singing along with the music CDs after you become more familiar with the lyrics. Intermediate or advanced students may give themselves certain language questions to focus their listening. For instance: What pronouns are the singers using? Who are the main characters in the narrative? What is the position of the various speakers in the radio broadcast on the topic they are talking about?

In some areas of the country such as California, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, local radio and television have programs in Southeast Asian languages on public access stations and/or channels. Listen to these each week with your class, your tutor or your conversation partner or another classmate. Design questions or things to listen for, and then discuss them with your classmates or friends immediately afterward.

Record and listen to yourself presenting a dialogue or a story in the language you are studying. Then listen carefully to your own tape, and make note of the tones, sounds or words which you produced that seem blatantly incorrect to you. (This is a self evaluation strategy). Ask your teacher, tutor, or language model for follow-up help on those areas in which your pronunciation seems particularly weak.

You can create or find out about many other language listening activities. Consult your teacher, tutor or native speaker friends about what kinds of tapes and radio and TV programming are available. Finally, you may wish to combine listening activities with writing activities. You might simply listen and list the vocabulary items you recognized and can spell, or you might be able to write out a summary of a story you heard or even write down all the lyrics of one of the songs, depending on how advanced you are in your language study.

4.6.2 Action Learners

Those who learn better when they are actively doing something with their language may benefit from the following suggestions.

Say what you are doing while you are doing it. Talk to yourself in the language as you perform an action. If you are at the beginning level, you may be able to produce only verbs or short sentences: “Jump” “Run” “Walk” “Cook” “Read.” As you progress in your language learning, try saying what you have just done: “I read the paper.” “I just got home.” “I took the dog for a walk.” “I fed the cat.” Having talked about the past, try working on the future. As you pull a blouse out of the closet say, “I’ll wear this blouse tomorrow.” As you put a check in your billfold say, “I will take this check to the bank on Tuesday.”

Say what you are feeling while you are feeling it. Either out loud or under your breath, comment on what you are feeling at the moment. “I’m happy.” “I’m tired.” “I’m worried about the test.” “I hate this book!”

Describe what you are seeing. Give a play by play description of what is going on in a sports event or movie on television with the sound turned off. “He hits the ball.” “She makes a basket.” “Susan is getting in the car. She is driving away.”

These same activities can also be done while studying with a classmate. You can play games such as “Simon says” to practice new vocabulary appropriately. “Boon says “Open the door.” “Boon says, “Please open the door.” In this version, you respond only to appropriately polite commands for action.

Experiment with and explore other ways of combining language and physical activity or response. For instance, you might also try acting out scenes from a play, translating the label on a can, interpreting dialogues from language tapes to your children or classmates,

questioning or trying out language on native speakers, exploring new places with a Southeast Asian friend, chanting poetry or reciting song texts.

4.6.3 Visual Learners

Those whose learning is enhanced by visual representations of what is to be learned may benefit from some of the following activities.

Watch films and videos in the language, and give yourself certain learning tasks: observe who speaks first in each interaction; note what people are saying about what they are doing; record what kinds of polite language are used by the actors; note how the narrator's language differs from that used by other participants.

Make lists, charts, graphs or drawings to categorize and sort the information you are receiving in class. For instance, draw a representation of all the nouns or shapes you know. Then color each drawing appropriately, naming the color in the language to yourself as you fill in the shape.

Use color to represent vocabulary items having particular tones by using magic markers of separate colors for each vocabulary flashcard you make.

Put pictures of the nouns you are learning on flashcards, and say the words alone, or under your breath or in your head if you are riding on the bus or subway.

You might also try visualizing yourself in a conversation with a native speaker, analyzing how a page of text is laid out, or observing a group of native speakers interacting to gain insight into patterns of movement that accompany speech.

4.6.4 Older Learners

Not only do older learners bring a wealth of knowledge and experience into the classroom, they also carry with them many responsibilities and obligations. The load that they carry may be so heavy that they have little margin left to devote to study. McClusky (1970:28-29) says that *margin* is surplus *power*. It is the *power* available to a person over and beyond that required to handle his *load*. Efficient language learning strategies for older learners may often be those that require short amounts of time, but can be repeated frequently. If you are an older learner, it is helpful to integrate learning activities into your daily schedule. For instance, try counting the repetitions of an exercise or the number of steps as you walk in the new language. Listen to language tapes in the car as you move about town. Give the Southeast Asian name of each food item out loud as you unpack your groceries. You can easily come up with a dozen more activities for language practice on your own as you go about your daily life.

Sometimes for older learners the hardest thing to do is to clear one's mind in order to focus on the language learning task at hand "When a mind is trained and pacified thereby divested of outer disturbances, more power ... will be accumulated" (Punyanubhab 1965:33). Try a strategy such as one of the following before settling down to study: Go for a walk. Meditate. Garden. Play the piano. Try yoga. Then return to your language

learning task in a peaceful frame of mind. You may find that you are now able to accomplish a great deal more learning in a shorter period of time.

Similarly learn to recognize the signs of unproductive language study. “Know when to fold them.” Take a break when you begin to become frustrated. Give yourself downtime when appropriate. A fresh mind learns better than an oversaturated one.

Seemingly small things can slow down the learning of older learners. Often the lightness or size of print in dialogues, textbooks, handouts, and overheads and even that used on the blackboard makes it difficult to see. If this is a problem for you, you may mention it to your teacher. However, your best bet is probably to use a copy machine to enlarge the dialogues and handouts that you will be spending the most time with, and adjust your seating to view the overheads and blackboard.

Poor quality or low volume on tapes used in the language lab or on films and videos can be problems for all learners. Work with language lab and media center staff and teachers on the adjustments to audiovisual materials that are necessary to facilitate your learning.

4.7 Strategies to Use in Various Learning Settings

4.7.1 In the Classroom

Have the teacher or your tutor help you learn the basic language of the classroom: how to say you don’t understand; how to ask the teacher or another student to speak louder or more slowly; how and when to ask questions politely; how to ask for clarification, explanation or expansion; how to express disagreement or anger appropriately; how to praise or compliment another student.

Learner alert: Know your textbook
Fashions in textbooks come and go, and there are many different ways yours might be organized. It doesn’t matter so much what the specific organization is; what really matters is that you understand it so you can make the most of its strengths and compensate for its weaknesses. The two basic divisions are between a book that is presentation-controlled so that you master everything before you move on to the next, versus one that favors cycling and recycling, so that you may receive several exposures to the same thing, with mastery not expected until you’ve been exposed to it several times.

Be observant in the language class. Note the teacher’s use of kinesics or the body movements that accompany speech. What gestures are used when the teacher is excited, pleased or angry? What is being said at the same time? What kind of gestures that you use with English never seem to appear when the Southeast Asian language is being spoken? What differences do there appear to be between the gestures of male and female

speakers? Note when it is culturally appropriate to be silent and when to talk. Check your observations with your teacher during office hours.

Develop strategies which help you overcome poor teaching. You can **change the nature of an activity** for yourself, or you can **choose your own focus**. For example, if a teacher goes on at length and you don't understand, focus on listening for the tones, or the endings, or on a particular set of sounds you want to learn to distinguish more readily; when one student is allowed to dominate the conversation, listen critically for grammar and pronunciation errors, as well as for things that the student is doing well; if an exercise is too easy, think about what would make it more challenging or appropriate for you, and redo the exercise that way, in your head or on paper, while you wait for others to complete the work. Make the best of the time to think about and analyze the language you do understand or can manipulate.

In most formal learning situations, you will be given quizzes and tests by your instructor or others. Read the syllabus carefully; if it does not make it clear how your language progress will be tested and evaluated, arrange a meeting with your instructor to clarify the situation. In addition, prepare yourself beforehand for those inevitable tests; learn about foreign language test-taking strategies. For instance, you might read the chapter on "Taking Tests Successfully" in Brown-Azarowicz, et al (1992).

4.7.2 Outside of Classroom

Observe native speakers talking with each other. How close or how far away from each other do they stand or sit? What are the culturally appropriate gestures for greeting, leave taking or thanking? Unobtrusively and/or with their permission, listen to native speakers talking with each other. Absorb the sounds of the language when you can't follow the topic. Read in the language the things that you enjoy, the topics that you like, or the information you want to acquire. Mentally dub a movie in the language you are studying.

Many other suggestions for strategies and activities for individual learners to use on their own are given in section six, "Maintenance and Growth," in this guide.

For additional suggestions on language practice outside of the classroom, see Purnell 1994; you might also want to follow up by pursuing some of the references provided in his article.

4.8 Strategies to Use for Specific Skills

According to Okada, Oxford and Abo (1996: 107), “language learning strategies are the often conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance their learning. These strategies help learners take in aspects of the language, store them in long-term memory, and use them when needed.” In this section, we make some general suggestions for strategies you can use to help you acquire specific language skills. We also provide some suggestions for further reading in each area.

4.8.1 Reading

One of the most important ways to improve your reading skills is actually putting in **time** specifically devoted to reading. We are all short of time, but there are some simple strategies for adding reading time into your day. For instance, carry a copy of a short story, the lyrics of a favorite song or a short poem around with you and read it when you are waiting for your meal in a restaurant or riding the bus on campus. Have an article you are interested in and a current newspaper in the language you are studying right next to your bed; then, read from these for a few minutes just before you go to sleep.

Another useful approach is to use strategies that help you **focus** on a particular aspect of the material you are reading. Don’t try to get everything there is out of a text the first time you read it through; for instance, you might focus on finding out who the main participants are the first time through. The next time you might focus on the sequence of events or determining the settings for each event. Later on, your focus might be on some grammatical aspect, such as what pronouns or kinship terms, names or titles are used to refer to each participant. These repeated tours through the text can eventually help you increase the speed with which you are able to read it, for by now certain words and phrases have become more familiar to you.

Motivation to read is important; select the extra things you read outside of class carefully. Make sure that what you read is helping you achieve your personal language learning **objectives**. There are different strategies you can use to increase vocabulary, to improve reading speed, or to obtain specific information from a text. Reading can also be a way to learn more about the culture, and it can be enjoyable once you begin to be comfortable with the new system. Your teacher may be able to help you find the reading materials you need at your reading level or slightly above it, if you make your reading objectives and interests clear to her.

Using bilingual materials can be helpful, particularly at the intermediate level. There are a variety of types of bilingual texts to choose from for Southeast Asian languages. Many languages have bilingual collections of folk tales. Other bilingual text types include a collection based on oral interviews with Hmong elders (Mattison, et al 1994), collections of short stories such as that of the Lao author Outhine (1999), or classical poetry such as the Vietnamese *The Tale of Kieu* by Nguyen Du translated by Nguyen Sang Thong (1983).

There are a number of strategies that you can use in reading bilingual texts to improve your reading comprehension. For instance, if you are a high level intermediate student,

read the text or a portion of it first in the Southeast Asian language. Then go back and read the English version of that same portion to provide yourself with confirmation and/or clarification of what you have just read. Now return to the Southeast Asian portion and read it again; this time you will most likely be able to understand more of what you read and be able to read the material somewhat more quickly as well. Another strategy is to read the whole piece through in English one time and then set it aside; later go back and try to read the entire piece from beginning to end in the Southeast Asian language. Reading the English text first can give you a set of expectations about the material that will facilitate your reading of the Southeast Asian version.

In Chapter 13 of their book, Rubin and Thompson (1994) provide a number of useful strategies, such as the use of advanced organizers (titles, illustrations and format), to help improve your reading skills. There are also materials that have been produced for the teaching of reading in Southeast Asian languages that will introduce you to a variety of strategies. These include Chadran et al (1991) and Rafferty et al. (1997). To find out about the latest texts and activity books that introduce reading strategies for the Southeast Asian language you are studying, consult your teacher.

4.8.2 Writing

Southeast Asian languages exhibit a variety of writing systems. The most commonly encountered writing systems are either Indic based (such as the Burmese, Thai, Lao, and Khmer systems), or Roman (e.g. Tagalog, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Hmong).

As Okell notes

Learning a new script poses a heavy load on your memory, not at the very beginning, but after a few Lessons, when your mind begins to bulge under the strain. You feel your recognition of the writhing mass of symbols and sounds is rapidly diminishing, and each new arrival weakens your hold on the old. Don't despair: persevere. There comes a phase after that, when you wonder why you thought it was difficult. (1994: vi)

Repetition is very important in acquiring writing skills in a new language. As a beginner learning a new script, surround yourself with the new alphabet and new words. Make very large cardboard cards with the letters of the new script or even whole words, and arrange and sort these letters or words in various ways. For instance, for Thai or Lao sort letters by tone, by similar or same initial sounds, by letters which stand for one thing initially and something else when in final position. Turn the letters upside-down and select one. Then write all the letters you can remember that a) represent the same sound with the same tone or b) that immediately follow after the letter in the alphabet or c) all the words you know that begin with that letter. For words, turn the cards upside down and select one; then, on a separate piece of paper write all the words you have learned which are a) the same part of speech as the word you have selected or b) rhyme with this word or c) have the same tone as this word.

As an intermediate student, you might try writing down simple telephone messages which you and your classmate give each other over the phone such as “Read chapter two.” or “Take the bus home tomorrow.” Take notes in the language you are studying, even in other courses, wherever possible. Write your grocery list in the language you are learning; write postcards or short notes to Southeast Asian friends who are willing to comment on your language. If you are able to send and receive email in the language, exchange messages with classmates or friends. Keep a simple diary in your new language in which you make an entry every day, whether it be a short comment, a sentence, or a paragraph.

In the intermediate stages you may be writing friendly letters and short narratives. Memorize and practice writing out a few salutations and farewells appropriate for friendly letters; then vary them in writing actual letters to classmates, friends or even to yourself! Learn the primary connectives of sequence for the written form of the language you are studying; then consciously employ them when writing short narratives for class or in your language diary.

As you become more confident with your ability to write in the language, challenge yourself to write a summary of a story you have read; focus on a specific element of formal writing such as the use of appropriate connectives or the presentation of the temporal aspects of the story. Evaluate and revise your own writing before asking a native speaker to read and comment on it. Then revise it again.

For more suggestions on writing strategies, see Chapter 15 of Rubin and Thompson (1994). There are also materials and workbooks for some of the Southeast Asian languages designed to help you learn to write the Indic-based scripts. Your instructor will probably have a recommendation as to which publication best fits with the course.

4.8.3 Speaking

Just as with writing, **repetition** is crucial in the early stages of language learning. What sounds in the new language are difficult for you to pronounce but appear with high frequency in everyday speech? Sounds that are difficult for you but occur frequently need your attention right away. On your own, or with the help of your tutor or teacher, select a number of common words and phrases containing a challenging sound and try to incorporate them into your speech each day. Some sounds, such as the initial *ng* found at the beginning of syllables in many Southeast Asian languages, may take you many months to master whereas you will be able to command other new sounds rather quickly. But you actually have to practice using them; some learners try to avoid difficult sounds by finding ways to get their ideas across without using words that contain them (circumlocution). Having a model in your mind or on tape of the sound you are trying to master can be an important tool in learning to pronounce words having that sound.

Once you have begun to produce words and phrases in your new language you have entered the area of conversation. Consider who you are as a speaker in your first language. Are you someone who jumps right in to a conversation, or do you wait to be invited to talk? Once you have entered the conversation, how do you know when it is your turn to talk? You will have to learn the linguistic and cultural clues for turn-taking in your new language as well. What are some polite ways to begin and end conversations in the new language? Memorize a few of these early on.

One of the best strategies for improving your spoken language is to use it for actual communication in as natural a context as possible. With the help of your teacher, a local language organization or friends, locate a conversation partner who can meet with you at least twice a week. Plan carefully for these sessions; have a speaking objective for each meeting that you agree to focus on. Try to choose topics that are of some interest to both of you so that the conversation has a better chance of flowing naturally. At the end of each session, take a few minutes to discuss and evaluate with your conversation partner the areas of your spoken language that you need to improve on. Then select one of these as the focus for your next conversation session.

If you don't have a language conversation partner, ask and answers questions of yourself. Compose dialogues in your head or say them out loud. Talk to yourself in the new language as you drive to and from work. If you have a classmate or friend who is willing to have a daily telephone conversation with you, you can choose a topic for each day and see how long you can keep a reasonable interaction going in the language. At the end of the phone call, plan with your friend or classmate for the time and topic for your next phone conversation. You may need to consult your teacher or tutor and your language dialogues or tapes to prepare for the next session.

For more strategies for improving your speaking, see Chapter 14 of Rubin and Thompson (1994) or consult some of the other texts for language learners found in Appendix I.

4.8.4 Listening

As a language speaker, you already make use of listening strategies on a daily basis in your native language. For instance, when people on the bus or in class are talking about a subject you are interested in, your ears perk up; that is, you are motivated to listen to what is being said because of the topic. This is a kind of subconscious *scanning* of the audio environment for the topics which are meaningful to you. Similarly, when you are flipping the stations on a radio, you are scanning the audio material for the sounds (speech or music) which you want to hear. You can also scan a listening event for specific information. When you listen to the weather report, you may ignore the information which is unimportant to you, listening only for the forecast for your local area. You can use these scanning strategies as you listen to your new language as well.

There are two general kinds of categories of listening that you should be aware of: *interactive* listening (that is listening situations in which you interact with others) and *noninteractive* listening (listening done independently).

Every time you participate in a face-to-face conversation, a phone conversation or a role play in your new language, you are involved in interactive listening, for your own responses and comments are based upon what you have just heard. Strategies that you can use in conversational situations (when you are not sure about what you have just heard) include questioning, asking for clarification or restatement, and asking the speaker to speak more slowly.

Noninteractive listening situations include listening to language tapes, CDs, and radio programs, as well as watching and listening to television programs and films. In these situations, you can use strategies which focus your listening on particular topics, vocabulary items or parts of speech, or even specific tones or intonation patterns. Your listening focus should have a clear learning objective. For instance, as a beginning student of Thai, you may benefit from listening to tapes designed to help you focus on tone contrasts.

If your university has a language lab or multimedia center to support language learning, make use of it, even if it isn't a required part of your course. You may find the staff there very helpful in suggesting strategies for using the equipment and materials productively. The language lab or multimedia center also may have a library that will contain a variety of audio materials, such as tapes, CDs and videos, for the language you are studying. In addition, they may have written listening exercises and guides you can use. At some institutions, some of the listening materials have been digitized and are available online for students. And don't forget to consult your instructors about their suggestions on how can best make use of the audiovisual resources available for your language to improve both your listening and your speaking skills.

Listening exercises for some Southeast Asian languages can be found on the world wide web at the site developed by George Henry, John Hartmann and Patricia Henry (1992) and others at Northern Illinois University. Go to www.seasite.niu.edu to locate these language learning materials.

For more strategies for improving your listening skills, take a look at Chapter 12 in Rubin and Thompson (1994). You may also find the strategies suggested for listening (and for reading) found in Oxford (1990:90-94) helpful.

4.9 Strategies for Combinations of Skills

There are many different combinations of reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that can be used in learning outside of the classroom. For instance, a first-year student or an intermediate student may wish to increase the language environment at home in order to build vocabulary. Simply writing out sticky tabs or masking tape labels to place on furniture and other concrete nouns such as dishes, silverware and household textiles is an exercise in both writing and vocabulary building. Now, if every time you pass by that labeled object in your home, you either read its label silently or read it out loud, both reading skills and pronunciation skills can be practiced. By either composing silently to

yourself or saying out loud simple sentences using the labeled objects in your environment, you are working on grammatical patterns. Check with your teacher and/or a dictionary to make sure your labels are spelled correctly and the vocabulary items are the appropriate ones for each item so that your learning is productive.

If you are an advanced student, you might try to listen to a Southeast Asian language radio program on the internet or on a local public access station or watch one of the television news programs on late night television which are available in some of these languages in some areas of the United States. Or you could go to an Asian grocery store or bookstore in many large urban areas and rent or buy a video of a movie in the language you are studying. Before you listen to the radio program or watch the video or television program, determine a language learning focus for your experience. For example, you might try to listen for new vocabulary and write it down as closely as possible in the language. Or you might watch for gestures or facial expressions that accompany certain aspects of the speech, such as those that go with strong emotions or those that are used to emphasize a point. Take notes in the language you are studying as you watch. Then check later with a teacher, a language model and/or a dictionary or textbook to explore the questions that listening or watching with such an objective has raised.

Oxford (1990:57-133) in her chapter on “Applying Direct Strategies to the Four Language Skills” provides both theoretical perspectives and practical activities for language skill acquisition. As you look through that chapter, you may find a number of activities and strategies that you can adapt for use at home or with a study partner.

4.10 Conclusion

As you probably can tell by now, the possibilities for creating strategies and activities which can help you learn a language are endless. If you are having a problem learning a particular aspect of a language, talk to other students who are further along in their study of the language. Find out what strategies they have found helpful for learning that and other aspects of the language. Your teacher may be able to suggest a number of learning tips which have helped students with similar problems in the past. You may also turn to some of the books designed specifically for language learners which are found in Appendix I of this document.

5. BUILDING AWARENESS OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN LANGUAGES

As you prepare yourself to undertake your Southeast Asian language study, it can be helpful to develop a general awareness of the kinds of contrast you may find in **pronunciation**. Learning how to **listen** and what to listen for in the new language is also important. An introduction to some of the **forms of words** to be found in these languages, and an overview of the general contrasts in **grammar** and **vocabulary** can also assist you in your language learning. Finally, developing an awareness of some of the **cultural patterns** and issues you may encounter both inside of and outside of the classroom can better prepare you for your language learning experience.

5.1 Pronunciation

“I hear the sound I love, the sound of the human voice...”

Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself” (1855 [1959:44])

5.1.1 Introduction

If some Southeast Asian languages have a reputation (amongst speakers of European languages, at least) for being difficult to learn, it is probably because of their sounds. The vowels of Vietnamese, the consonant combinations of Khmer or the tones of the mainland languages such as Thai and Burmese, these are the stuff by which reputations are made or lost. However, not all Southeast Asian languages have such “difficult” sounds. In fact, Indonesian and Tagalog and most of the insular languages have rather simple sound systems, so that virtuosity is a question of rapid articulation of syllables (e.g. ‘papapagparikitin,’ a Tagalog word) rather than producing exotic sounds.

What follows is a brief discussion of some of the pronunciation challenges that you may face as a student of a Southeast Asian language.

5.1.2 Why is pronunciation important?

Where frogs are croakers, their silence is becoming.

Burmese proverb, from the *Lokaniti*

Southeast Asians are extremely tolerant of foreigners speaking their languages, and it is probably true that pronunciations that would be socially stigmatized (as rural, uneducated, or unrefined) if they were spoken by native speakers often are not judged the same when issuing from the mouth of foreigners. But speaking Vietnamese without tones, Thai without the full inventory of vowels, or Indonesian without paying attention to stress certainly affects how people respond to you in some way. Good pronunciation will not only make you easier to understand, it will raise your esteem; and at very least, it is a way of expressing respect for the language and culture of the country that you are studying.

5.1.3 Whose pronunciation?

“We’ve howdied but we ain’t shook.”

Hendrickson, *American Talk* (1986:91)

As we know from English, pronunciation varies with region and social class. However, in the media, in the language of educated urban elites, in formal instruction in schools, the range of variation is narrower. The same is true of the Southeast Asian countries. Regional and social differences in speech are even more pronounced, but varieties associated with particular regions--often the capital city or main urban centers--have been elevated by use in formal communication, in the media, and in schools and universities so that they now serve as points of reference for the speech of the whole population.

Thus in Burma, the Central dialect associated with the capital Rangoon and the historical center, Mandalay, is the basis of the standard; in Thailand, it is the language of Bangkok; in Indonesia, the language of Jakarta. Non-standard varieties (distinguished by other features besides pronunciation) may have wide currency and considerable prestige within regions in the country or outside, e.g. Lao in northeastern Thailand (as well as in Laos), but will not normally be taught. Textbooks and teaching materials are also generally based on the standard. Vietnam is the main exception.

The speech of Vietnam is characterized by a chain of dialects stretching from the north to the south, each one similar to its immediate neighbors, but distinct from those dialects farther along the chain. Important urban centers stand out as distinct speech varieties: Hanoi, Vinh, Hue, Danang, Saigon, and Travinh. Traditionally, speech and usage based on that of Hanoi has been accorded the highest prestige, but during the time that South Vietnam was independent from the north, Saigon speech was a standard in the south, and it is the Saigon pronunciation that is most commonly encountered amongst the Vietnamese who immigrated to the United States. The two varieties can be regarded as mutually intelligible, but that is not to say the differences are innocuous. They still reflect deep political loyalties.

Whatever the language you are studying, your pronunciation target will most likely be determined by the dialect of your teacher. However, it is good to be aware of the possibility of variation and what these variations may imply.

5.2 Listening

People differ in their ability to imitate sounds. What makes a good mimic? It is probably not simply better hearing; and it is probably not better coordination of the organs of speech either. Confidence, the way you view the task, and your emotional state are all important factors, but knowing what to look for can be equally important.

Mycologists (experts in mushrooms) will tell you that they had to learn to notice the mushrooms along the trails. It was not that they were hidden; it was simply that they could not at first pick them out of the background. Learning a new language, one has, in a similar way, to learn to listen. Good mimics probably listen to all aspects of the

utterance — the tone, the intensity and rhythm as well as the vowel and consonant sounds; then they monitor their own speech very well, comparing their own production with the image of the original that they retain in their short term memory. If this is indeed the case, then imitation is a skill that can be learned by attentiveness; learning to pay attention to the full spectrum of sound; learning to monitor one's speech as it is produced.

5.2.1 Listening to the whole language

Just as a good musician listens to a musical piece played through before beginning to perfect his fingering, so a language learner needs to step back and listen and watch the language in use at some point early on in the study of the language. The actor Peter Ustinov had the knack of producing nonsensical soliloquies that imitated the various European tongues. He not only had a sense of the individual sounds, he also knew the phrasing and the body language, both gesture and expression.

5.2.2 Southeast Asian Englishes

Habits of articulation are difficult to break, as Sapir noted:

... while our ear is delicately responsive to the sounds of speech, the muscles of our speech organs have early in life become exclusively accustomed to the particular adjustments and systems of adjustment that are required to produce the traditional sounds of [our own] language (1939: 451).

One way to highlight features of a language is to listen to its speakers speaking English. For example, listen to a Vietnamese speaking English, and you will notice the tenser quality of the speech, how the “b’s” and “d’s” explode (‘bbut it’s not ddone yet’), how restricted and abrupt the final consonantism is (word > ‘wut’; first > ‘fu’; gulf > ‘gup’; change > ‘chan’); you will probably hear a slight ‘sing song’ quality to the speech and an evenness of stress uncharacteristic of native English speech. These features are carried over from Vietnamese; their appearance in English may make them easier to observe.

5.2.3 Consciousness-raising

Perception of sound is guided by one's own language. In English, the difference in initial sounds that distinguish, for example, the two Burmese words *pauq* ‘burst out (as in blisters)’ and *bauq* ‘dandruff’ is not linguistically significant. Finding minimal pairs (that is, pairs of words that differ in only one sound or component) is the traditional way of discovering which sounds of a particular language are significant. Another way is drawing attention to sound variants in English that usually remain unobserved by native speakers because they are conditioned by other sounds, and therefore automatic. Thus teachers will often refer to the variant of the ‘p’ sound that occurs after s- in words like ‘spit’; in this environment the puff of air (‘aspiration’) that usually follows English ‘p’ (pʰit) is suppressed. The result is quite like the Burmese sound. This kind of process could be described as an attempt to raise consciousness by making one's native language seem strange.

Other factors can influence perception. The English sounds usually written *d* and *t* are similar to those written *t* and *th*, respectively, in the Vietnamese alphabet. Yet beginning students frequently pronounce *tôi* - 'I' ('doy') as if it were written *thôi* 'to stop' ('toy'). Correction may not help. Why? Here the answer is certainly that students may be influenced by the writing system. Seeing 't' in Vietnamese, they think of the value of English 't' with its characteristic puff of air at the beginning of stressed syllables. It is important to try to shift gears when studying a new language and to develop new associations for familiar letters.

5.2.4 Mental images

The last example demonstrates the power of images. The mental image of the letter 't' is powerful enough to suppress the perception of a distinction that is significant in English, and should therefore be clearly perceivable! If mental images can affect perception and production in this way, then perhaps good pronunciation can be achieved by careful construction of mental images. This seems to be quite true. Pointing out that 't' in Vietnamese is more like the sound of English 'd' than 't'--changing the mental image--is usually enough to correct the problem.

So imitation is useful because it is, presumably, part of a more complicated process that involves adjusting the organs of speech on the basis of intuited or, where difficult sounds are involved, explicitly constructed mental images. This is yet another area where teachers can be of assistance. Through years of teaching they will have observed what kinds of images serve students best.

What role would imagery play in the previous example, *bauq* versus *pauq*? I have found the following successful in this particular case: think of the initial of bauq as a particularly heavy 'b'--which we can symbolize iconically as 'bb'; now think of the initial of pauq as a light 'b', which can be symbolized as 'b' to distinguish bbauq 'burst out' and bauq 'dandruff'.

5.3 Forms of Words

5.3.1 Introduction

Southeast Asian languages are put together in very different ways from the European languages that you may have studied in the past. In order to discuss some of these differences, we need first to develop some common vocabulary.

Morphology is the way a language builds words.

Morphemes are the building blocks of words, in other words the meaningful units that are put together to form words. So, "bird" is just one morpheme; "birds" is two morphemes "bird" + "-s" and "blackbird" is also two - "black" and "bird"

Morphological is the adjectival form of morphology, so it means "having to do with word formation". For example, it is a morphological rule of English that you form plurals by adding 's' to the noun.

Learner alert: Language families of Southeast Asia

There are seven language families of Southeast Asia that are important for learning purposes. Each one has its own distinctive morphological style.

Hmong-Mien: Hmong and Mien. Tonal, monosyllabic.

Tai: Thai, Lao, and many related languages throughout Thailand, Burma, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and China. Tonal, primarily monosyllabic.

Austronesian: Indonesian, Malay, Filipino, Tagalog and many related indigenous languages throughout the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Complex morphology.

Mon-Khmer¹: Khmer, Vietnamese. Prefixes, infixes common; suffixes rare, except for Vietnamese. Not tonal, except for Vietnamese.

Tibeto-Burman: Burmese: Derivational morphology and compounding.

Papuan: Many indigenous languages of Irian Jaya, Eastern Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Complex morphology: prefixes, suffixes, noun classes, case.

Some other key concepts and terms

Isolating languages — In these languages, one word equals one idea and often has just one syllable. Words typically don't have a lot of prefixes or suffixes or markers of things such as gender, number, case, tense, etc.

Root/stem/base — These are all different terms for the primary morpheme of the word, that is the base that you add prefixes and suffixes to, or that you change in various ways. For example, in English “eating” has two morphemes, the root “eat” and the suffix “-ing.”

Affix — Little morphemes that you add to root words. These can go in different places:

prefix — goes in front of the root, e.g., “re”- as in “renegotiate”

suffix — goes on the end of the root, e.g., “-ed” as in “walked”

infix — goes in the middle of the root. English doesn't have these, but Austronesian languages and Papuan languages do.

5.3.2 Typical Characteristics of Words in Southeast Asian Languages

The Austronesian languages and the Papuan languages have rich morphology, and use prefixes, suffixes and infixes to mark a wide range of notions, some of which are very different from what prefixes and suffixes are used for in English. Most of the other language families of Southeast Asia are isolating and primarily monosyllabic. We

¹ (Austro-Asiatic)

provide examples below for Thai and Indonesian to illustrate these general differences in morphology. Compare the primarily monosyllabic Thai sentence with the Indonesian morphology in the sentence that follows it.

Thai

khǎw cá² tǎŋ phaa lûuksit

he/she WILL must lead student

pai hǎŋsamùt chái mǎi

go library right QUESTION MARKER

He/she's got to take the students to the library, right?

Indonesian

Laut bukanlah menjadi pemisah melainkan penghubung antara pulau-pulau yang beratus-ratus itu

laut	bukan-lah	men-jadi	pe-misah
sea	NEG-_____	ACTIVE-become	AGENT-separate

me-lain-kan		peng-hubung	antara	pulau-pulau
CONTRASTIVE CONJ-but rather		AGENT-connection	between	island-island

yang	be-	ratus-ratus	itu
which	INTRANS-	hundred-hundred	DEMONST

“The sea became not a divider but rather a means of communication among those hundreds of islands.”

In the following paragraphs, we point out some places where the Southeast Asian language you are learning might give you a bit of a challenge.

5.3.3 Notion of the word

Little in language is clear cut. In Southeast Asian languages, the line between words is fuzzy and ambiguous. Although this may disturb you, bear in mind that this isn't so very different in English; it's just that you're used to it. For example, is “clear-cut” one word or two? Should you spell it “clear-cut” or “clear cut”? What about “pinetree” or “pine tree”? Do you catch yourself saying “sister-in-laws” instead of “sisters-in-law”? It will bother you more in the Southeast Asian language that you are studying because

- 1) It's new and unfamiliar. Whatever the fuzziness and ambiguities of English, you're used to them. By and large, you no longer get tested on them, and you have learned that one reason they no longer provoke anxiety is because many of them really don't matter.

- 2) Spelling is often not fully standardized in many Southeast Asian languages. The line between words is really only important for spelling, so that you know where to put the spaces. But many Southeast Asian languages do not put spaces between words. Many others still have no written system, or have one that was developed so recently that many of the rules are not fully conventionalized yet.
- 3) The line between words is less clear in monomorphemic languages because nearly anything has the potential to stand on its own in some contexts. For example, you know that in English it is clear that “clearly” is one word with two morphemes, rather than two words, because you know that “-ly” never occurs on its own. In contrast, it is less clear whether a compound like “windowpane” is one word or two, because “window” and “pane” also have the possibility of occurring in sentences on their own. In Thai, compounds behave similarly. In Burmese [Noun + Adjective] sets are treated like a single word.

Word classes —(nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, articles, quantifiers, etc.)
 These are not going to map onto English categories in any kind of way that is intuitive to you at first. Don't worry about it, because word classes are really only generalizations about the behavior of words, and as long as you understand how they behave, it really doesn't matter what you call them. Especially, the line between verbs and adjectives is not clear, stative verbs, adverbs and verbs, particles, question words, negatives and indefinites, nouns and classifiers, prepositions and verbs, complementizers and verbs, nouns and adjectives, pronouns and nouns, prepositions and nouns.

As mentioned above, many of the things that would be suffixes and prefixes in English will be their own whole words in Southeast Asian languages, often resembling words of different classes.

5.3.4 Compounding

Compounding is extremely popular in most Southeast Asian languages. This is something you can work to your advantage, too. Most compounds in Southeast Asian languages are transparent, meaning that the meaning is equal to the sum of the meanings of the parts, so if you know the elements, usually you can guess the meaning of the compound word. This also means that if you don't know the word for something, usually if you try circumlocution or attempt to coin a compound, often you will find that you have independently invented the correct word! In Thai, for instance, the word *cai* ‘heart’ appears in many compounds; an example is the compound *khâwcai* ‘to understand,’ which consists of *khâw* ‘to enter’ plus *cai* ‘heart.’

Often in Southeast Asian languages, the sounds of the words that go together may be as important as the meaning. Two words may be chosen to go together because they rhyme, or because they begin with the same sound (alliteration or “chime”). It is also common in many Southeast Asian languages to intensify with pairs of compounded synonyms instead of with an adverb like “very”. Again, this just “sounds better” to native speakers,

and is one of the things that will mark you as a sophisticated speaker, rather than one who just gets by.

5.3.5 Reduplication

Making a compound out of the same word, in other words doubling a word or part of a word, is known as “reduplication,” and it too is very popular among Southeast Asian languages. It is the conventional way to perform many important grammatical functions that might be done with a suffix or prefix in English.

Learner Alert: Grammaticalization

Nouns and verbs can become markers of grammatical information. In these cases, their meaning and pronunciation tends to become somewhat “bleached”. Because this is an ongoing process through time, it’s usually hard to draw a line between the different meanings and functions of a single form. Example: In some Southeast Asian languages, the verb meaning “to give” has come to mean “direction towards,” “for the benefit of,” or “by” when used with other verbs. Similarly, the noun meaning “thing” often becomes a marker of possession when it is used with other nouns for specific things that are possessed.

5.3.6 Acronyms (and other abbreviations)

These are very popular throughout the region, and encountering acronyms and abbreviations will probably be quite frustrating when you get to be an advanced student and try to read the newspaper. Often, the acronyms are not set off with punctuation as they usually are in English (like *AIDS* or *WASP*) or are not even pronounced letter by letter (for example, *VIP* or *ASAP*) but rather written out and read like a regular word (such as *snafu*, which was originally an acronym.) Usually, the best strategy is to buy and use a good dictionary. For example, the Echols & Shadily Indonesian-English dictionary (1989) has many acronyms. For Thai, there are several dictionaries of abbreviations that you will find extremely helpful for reading the newspaper. New acronyms are coined frequently in some Southeast Asian languages. If you encounter a word that isn’t in the dictionary, don’t panic because it could well be an acronym. Check with your teachers or tutors to see if they are familiar with the word in question.

5.3.7 Spelling Systems and Dictionaries

The system of spelling used for a language can have an impact on how you go about acquiring reading, writing, vocabulary and dictionary skills. The existence of **variant spellings and spelling reforms** can be an important issue for some languages. For instance, for Lao, the spelling system currently taught in the schools in Laos differs in a number of respects from the one taught in Lao government schools before 1975. Older Lao adults now in the United States may not be familiar with the new spelling system. A number of other Southeast Asian languages, such as Hmong, make use of a variety of systems for spelling words. It may be that your teacher (and your textbook) will present

one spelling system to you, but your tutor will use another one. In addition, the books and materials that you may need to read for your own research may require that you be familiar with more than one spelling system.

You will need to learn to write words consistently in one system, but eventually you will need to recognize alternative ways that words can be spelled if you want to be able to read widely. If you are learning a Southeast Asian language that has significant variations in the spelling of words, discuss with your teacher or tutor which spelling system to learn initially and at what point in your learning spelling alternatives should be presented.

The systems for organizing and presenting words in **dictionaries** and glossaries may vary from language to language and even within some Southeast Asian languages. Usually, the introductory section of most bilingual dictionaries will provide you with a good overview of the spelling system used and the ways words are organized and presented in that volume.

Your instructor or tutor may also be helpful in introducing you to the organizing principles of the dictionary you will be using. In addition, look to see if exercises in developing dictionary skills are included in your textbook or other materials, and try them out. Finally, as you look up words in your dictionary, make notes about the words or types of words you have trouble finding or are just unable to locate and what you think made your search difficult. Then ask your teacher or tutor to help you discover the patterns or principles you need to understand in order to locate similar words in the dictionary in the future.

Since a bilingual dictionary is an important tool for you as a beginning language student, it is important to select the dictionary that will be the most useful tool for use as a language learner. Get the advice of your teacher and that of more advanced students in your specific language as to which dictionaries will be most helpful to you at this point in your studies. Later you may wish to acquire other dictionaries that can provide you with more linguistic information, including some designed for native speakers.

5.4 Grammar

There is a certain amount of comfort and usefulness in discovering the grammatical similarities between the new language you are learning and your native language. And you will find such similarities. However, there are also some general aspects of grammatical differences between English and Southeast Asian languages that you can learn about to help prepare you for your learning experience.

Southeast Asian languages vary in grammatical type. These range from the predominantly isolating structure found in languages such as Hmong, Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, Khmer and Burmese (some of these languages are genetically unrelated but nonetheless exhibit similarities due to areal influence) to the more inflected Indonesian

and the highly inflected Tagalog. Each grammatical type presents some different problems for language learners. At the same time, though, there are some common problems that Southeast Asia languages present for learners.

An obvious problem is the existence of types of *grammatical structures that do not exist in your native language* or distinctions that are not formally marked in your native language. For instance, as an English speaker you may find the existence of two different negatives in Indonesian or the Tagalog topic-focus morphology and basic comment (or predicate)-topic (or subject) word order a challenge. Similarly, the lack of a copula (the verb 'to be') in many Southeast Asian languages in certain contexts, and the corresponding use of stative verbs (verbs which describe the state of the subject) to express what are adjectival meanings in English can be difficult to get used to. A Lao example would be *laaw³ di²* 'He/she is good' in which the first word is the pronoun and the second word, *di²*, is the stative verb.

In addition to knowing the grammatical forms themselves, you must also learn the *conditions under which they are used*, as well as the situations when they should not be used. These may involve sometimes subtle discourse conditions. This is an area that has received considerable attention in the field of foreign language teaching in recent years and is especially important for the students of Southeast Asian languages. For example, besides learning the forms needed to express topic-focus relations in Tagalog, you must learn the contexts in which it is deemed necessary to express five different types of focus.

You will also want to be aware of the existence of *apparently similar structures in the native and target languages that are put to different use* or for which there are different discourse conditions, stylistic preferences or frequencies of occurrence. A typical problem in Indonesian, for instance, is the choice of active versus passive sentence structure. The biggest problem for learners is not failure to learn the passive forms per se, but rather failure to use passives in the *appropriate* discourse contexts. Thus in Indonesian, the passive is used much more regularly than in English in cases where an object of a verb has already been introduced and is now the topic of the discourse.

Some mainland Southeast Asian languages make use of *extensive verb concatenation* (serial verbs or verbs linked together in a series or a chain). If you are studying one of these languages, you will need to learn the conventions for how verbs are concatenated and what kinds of meanings are expressed in this way. For example, it may be literally possible to express a meaning with one verb, but a language may have a convention or preference for expressing it with a construction consisting of two or more verbs in a row.

Contextual considerations will also be important for you in learning to use *classifiers*, a category found in many Southeast Asian languages. Not only must you learn which classifiers go with which nouns, but also the syntactic and discourse functions classifiers serve (Riddle 1989). *Pronominal systems and kinship terms* that make distinctions of number, gender, age or social status in ways not found in English will also present challenges. And, in languages such as Thai and Lao, once you have learned the major

pronouns and kinship terms, you need to learn under which discourse conditions these terms should be left out (*zero anaphora*) so that your language will not appear redundant.

If you are an English speaker, you may be particularly concerned about how to express *time* reference. Since tense marking is obligatory in English for main verbs, but not for the mainland Southeast Asian languages and Indonesian, you may have difficulty not only in learning to express yourself properly when talking about the past, for example, but also in interpreting the time reference of a native speaker's utterance. In order to understand and/or express time reference properly, you will need to learn both new grammatical ways to indicate time and other situational, contextual and/or discourse markers for time.

You can prepare yourself for some of these grammatical challenges by becoming aware of the grammatical type (isolating or inflected) of the Southeast Asian language you are learning and of the major grammatical structures in that language that do not exist in your native language before you ever enter the language classroom.

If you enjoy interactions and discussions with others, meet and talk with your future instructor, current language students, or graduate students of linguistics about what they know; ask them to recommend introductory materials about the language that you can read and think about between now and the beginning of your class.

If you prefer working on your own, review a copy of the textbook recommended for the course; read the introduction and table of contents; take a look at the references to see if you can find other resources about the language; check out the language program website; and email the instructor or other knowledgeable people to get their suggestions about what you can do to learn more about the language before the term begins.

5.5 Vocabulary

A great deal of language learning involves the acquisition of vocabulary. For the most part, there is no simple one-to-one *correspondence* between words in two different languages. Sometimes, the particular kinds of discrepancies between lexical items in English and those in Southeast Asian languages may be surprising and even hard to grasp. Sometimes it may be that English has no individual word for a particular Southeast Asian concept so the idea would have to be paraphrased in order to express it. And it can be the other way around: the Southeast Asian language you are studying may not have a single word that translates precisely the idea you are trying to express so you may have to use a paraphrase. This may be the case for words for culturally specific artifacts, foods, environmental features, clothing, building styles or abstract religious or philosophical notions.

It may be that a *concept* is represented in both languages, but that the *boundaries* of the words are different. For example, following a pattern found in many Southeast Asian languages, the English word 'rice' can be translated by at least three different words in Hmong, depending upon whether it is cooked rice, husked uncooked rice, or rice still in the husk. Color boundaries may differ in addition to colors having different symbolic

values in particular cultures. It can also be important to understand the current political connotations of words or expressions and to learn what the lexical taboos are.

Though there will tend to be a closer correspondence between *modern technical terms* than in other areas of the lexicon, this is not always the case. Sometimes a word may appear to be a loan word from English when actually it has been borrowed from another language, such as French, and does not have the meaning you expect. In some modern technical fields, many vocabulary items are borrowed, while in other fields a national committee has developed the technical vocabulary to be used. If you plan on doing work in a particular scientific or technical area, begin early to acquire the specific vocabulary that you will need. Though your teacher may be able to help you find some written resources, it can also be helpful to interact with a graduate student, professor or specialist from Southeast Asia to make sure that you are learning the most up-to-date and appropriate terms in your field.

Other vocabulary areas in which you can expect to find differences between Southeast Asian languages and English include kinship terms (and their range of usage), directional words, words for carrying and/or wearing things, and words referring to time and parts of the year, especially in the case where there is a different indigenous calendar system. In addition, word classes or parts of speech may not correspond with your expectations. For instance, many Southeast Asian languages have the word class of classifier. Just learning which classifiers go with which nouns and when and how these classifiers can be used can be a big job in some Southeast Asian languages and an important part of your vocabulary development.

Finally, you will need to become conscious of the *register differences* that occur in various areas of the vocabulary so that you can select the vocabulary item that is appropriate and polite. For example, in Khmer there are ten different words for ‘eat’ differing along various sociolinguistic and register parameters (Huffman 1970). Within a given Southeast Asian language there may also be differences in terms of gender and regional usage. Once you are actually in the country, you can expect to encounter some regional dialect differences in word choice. As a language learner, it is best for you to focus on learning the vocabulary of one dialect initially; however, you may find it helpful to become familiar with the most common vocabulary differences between it and other major dialects before you visit the country.

5.6 Cultural Considerations

Cultures vary in whether or not there is an obligation to say something in particular situations. For instance it is customary to utter a particular formula such as “God bless you,” ‘bless you,’ or ‘gesundheit’ in many areas of the United States after a person sneezes, but a verbal comment on sneezing is not usually made in many Southeast Asian cultures. In some Southeast Asian cultures, on the other hand, it is customary to invite anyone who stops by one’s home at mealtime to share the meal, even though it may be the case that neither side expects this actually to happen. As Tannen (1984) puts it, we need to know when to talk, what to say, how indirect to be, and how formulaic to be.

As a language learner it is important to know that speech conventions may vary greatly, depending upon the sociocultural context. For example, in a number of Southeast Asian languages, there is a formal, spoken greeting; a number of informal spoken greetings such as ‘Where are you going?’; and sometimes even a gesture of respect to acknowledge others that involves no spoken language (such as the Thai *wai* which done by pressing the palms of your hands together and raising them to an appropriate level in front of your face). Not only is it useful to know the various verbal and nonverbal ways of greeting people, it is also important to learn the social contexts in which each of these greetings is appropriate.

Kramsch (1994) offers some thoughts on what it means to be a language learner, reflecting on one’s own self and one’s own culture while trying to acquire a new language and be comfortable in a new culture.

Learning a foreign language offers the opportunity for personal meanings, pleasures, and powers. From the clash between the familiar meanings of the native culture and the unexpected meanings of the target culture, meanings that were taken for granted are suddenly questioned, challenged, problematized. Learners have to construct their personal meanings at the boundaries between the native speakers’ meanings and their own everyday life. The personal pleasures they can derive from producing these meanings come from their *power* to produce them (238-239).

As you begin your study of a Southeast Asian language, you will benefit from becoming aware of the ways that the culture and language interact. As you learn about the new language and culture, you may also want to consider what aspects fit best with your own sense of self and personal identity. Be observant, read widely and step back from your studies from time to time to take your own language learning pulse.

6. MAINTENANCE AND GROWTH

6.1 Introduction

Serious language learning is a life-long process. Most languages change and grow just as people do. If you want to be a competent speaker of the Southeast Asian language you are studying, you will continue to study it on your own once you have exhausted all of the formal language programs available to you. And your language use will change to reflect who you become as a speaker of that language, your relative age, your gender and your role in that society. There are things that you can do that can help you maintain the language level you have achieved through formal study; and you can also design a plan for language growth and change to fit your needs once you have left the classroom.

In this section, we will point out some of the issues to be aware of in promoting your own language maintenance and growth. Then we will provide suggestions of activities and strategies that you can choose from to keep your language skills fresh and growing.

6.2 The Process of Losing Ground

Consider the ways in which your abilities as a speaker of your native language have changed and grown over time. What would happen if you discontinued speaking, listening to, reading and writing your native language? What do you anticipate would happen if you suddenly stopped doing those same things in your newly-acquired Southeast Asian language?

A language can be forgotten; people even forget their native language! There are at least two reasons for this. First of all, **disuse** will make you just plain forget. This is true of everything, even your native language. Defoe's book *Robinson Crusoe* is based on a true story of a shipwrecked mariner who spent four years alone on an island. When he was rescued, he was unable to speak comprehensibly although the skill came back with practice (Reich 1986:214). You have to do something with the language and work at it in order to improve, but also just to hold steady.

Secondly, language is tied to situations and to people. Little is remembered in **isolation**, and especially not an interactive social phenomenon such as language. Language is rich in associations, and intimately tied to the setting in which you learn and use it; it can have signals and reminders (such as music or the smell of nice cooking) of its meaning and function. This is why, if you learn a language in a classroom, you can run into your teacher in the street and not be able to access things that you were using effortlessly the day before in class. Another way of saying this is that the **sociocultural context** can hinder or help you in maintaining your new language.

Southeast Asian languages have fewer associations for you here than do European languages. Many things look, sound and smell different, so there will be fewer Southeast Asian language triggers in the United States than for, say, Spanish, where street signs, grocery stores and an accidental turning to a Spanish radio station will keep the Spanish activated. In order to keep the appropriate contextual cues to tie the language to, you will need to provide your own activators.

6.3 Maintaining the Language Level You Have Achieved

In this section we will discuss issues in maintaining your ability to use the language at about the same level that you have achieved up to a particular point in time. There are two important continuity aspects of language maintenance to consider as a student of a Southeast Asian language. The first concerns maintaining the language level you have achieved *when there are time gaps* in your formal program of study. The second concerns maintaining your language level *after* you are no longer involved in formal, institutional language study.

The shortest time gaps, other than term breaks during the academic year, are those that occur between the end of one academic year and the next, usually a break of two to three months in the summer. Those two to three months when you are not participating in a formal language program can be a time of forgetting. For those whose opportunity to study a Southeast Asian language occurs only during the summer (such as in an intensive summer program in the United States or in an overseas language program), maintaining your language level over a nine-month time gap can present an even greater challenge.

You have made a major commitment to learning a particular Southeast Asian language. You have taken all of the language courses available in your community and at your university. You have participated in an intensive summer program such as the Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute (SEASSI), and you have taken part in an overseas program for advanced language study. What can you do now to maintain the language level that you have achieved?

Whether you are concerned about maintaining your language skills over a short break in the course of your formal language study or after your formal language study has been completed, some of the basic maintenance issues are the same. You need *exposure* to the language; you need opportunities to *use* the language, particularly in communicative situations; and you need a reasonable degree of *repetition and continuity* in your exposure to and use of that language. In other words, great time gaps between periods of use and nonuse can lead to deterioration of your language skills. However, if you *design a plan for using your language skills on a regular basis* (for instance, at least once or twice a week) and you use those skills for communicative or productive purposes, the likelihood of maintaining the language level you have already achieved is greater.

Your plan should take into consideration who you are as a language learner and as a language user. What are your long-term language learning goals and short term objectives? What motivates you to use the language? Consider each of the four major skill areas. For instance, what are you able to read in the language and what have you enjoyed reading the most? Then design a schedule of reading activities you can do on a daily basis or a few times a week to ensure that you not only maintain your reading skills, but that you find some enjoyment in doing so. Consider both your abilities and your enjoyment as you design a regular plan for using your speaking, listening, and writing skills. You may even find that by establishing a regular pattern of studying in the ways

that you enjoy, you will not only be able to maintain a great deal of the language, but you may even begin to improve!

6.4 Improving Your Language Skills After Formal Study

If you have studied a language for many years, that investment of time and effort is very important to you. You have made a major commitment to learning this language, and you are probably planning on using it in your career and your social life for years to come. But your language use will need to change and grow to reflect who you become as a speaker of that language, your relative age, your gender and your role in society. Most likely, you will not be satisfied by just maintaining the language level you achieved as a student; as an adult in the community, you will probably want to improve your language skills to fit your changing roles.

First of all, you will need to take into account the major elements necessary for language maintenance mentioned earlier. That is, you need to plan for adequate *exposure* to the language, you need to *use* your language skills, and you need to ensure *repetition and continuity* in your language use. In addition, you will need to set for yourself *language challenges*, in other words goals and objectives for improvement in each of the language skills. And, you will need to design a personal language plan to help achieve your language improvement goals. If you have the opportunity to do so, share your language plan with a former teacher, another language professional, or your tutor to get some feedback and suggestions. Then do it! You may find suggestions in the following paragraphs, as well as those in earlier sections of this guide, that will help you achieve your language improvement goals and objectives.

6.5 Things You Can Do

6.5.1 Find something that you actually like to do

When you're working on your own, without benefit of syllabus, peer pressure or grades to motivate you, there is a real risk of just letting the language slide. You can plan the most pedagogically sound activity in the world, but if you don't do it ... so what?

“Using language interactively with a native speaker” is a pedagogically popular way to proceed these days. But what if you spend all day dealing with people, and you're tired when you come home, and the last thing you want to do is put out the effort to be vivacious in a foreign language? As a maintenance plan, this is flawed. Either you'll think up excuses not to do it, or you'll do it and resent it. Either way, you'd do better to curl up with a good book.

In contrast, “grammar translation” has fallen out of favor as a major teaching strategy in language teaching circles. But what if you love doing translations? Why shouldn't you? Similarly, reading out loud in class has fallen into disfavor as a way to check reading ability. But what if you like to read out loud? Do it! Minimally, it's better than nothing, and if you really enjoy it, you're much more likely to be open to getting what benefit it potentially can provide. Remember: the alternative here is nothing.

6.5.2 Talk with native speakers

Of course, “using language interactively with a native speaker” is probably the most effective strategy for maintaining your speaking and listening skills, provided you enjoy this. There are ways to help make this more effective, as well as pitfalls to avoid.

Finding the right native speaker

Be sure you find someone who is right for you. Here are some important considerations:

Demographics: Age and gender, especially, can be factors you want to take into account. It should be someone you feel comfortable with, and from whom you feel comfortable insisting that you get the right kind of interaction. One language teacher recommends older speakers who don't know much English. Another recommends speakers who are younger; that way, you may feel more confident directing the interaction so that it meets your needs.

Goals: Do you want a tutor, an informal conversation partner, or an informant who can help you figure out the grammar or help you with translations? These are very different skills, and different people may be good at one, but not good at another. People who are very warm and empathetic may make perfect conversation partners, but that doesn't guarantee they'd be helpful with grammatical analysis.

Language that they use: Be selective. You don't want someone who speaks unclearly, incorrectly or hypercorrectly or unnaturally. You don't want someone with affectations or someone who scatters too much of another language (such as English, Dutch, French or another Southeast Asian language) into their speech. Be sure to find out if they speak the dialect that you want to learn.

Should you pay them?: This is a tough and touchy issue. Think about it carefully and get some advice as to what is appropriate.

What language activities can you do with your tutor?

Use course materials:

Choose a good book and just work through the chapters. (You might phone the university nearest you that offers the language you wish to work on, and see what they recommend.) If the book does not have explicit instructions for how to use it with a tutor, use common sense. Read the chapter ahead of time, prepare questions for your tutor to explain to you, do the exercises as homework, and practice them aloud so that you can perform them for your tutor. Ask your tutor to do as many of them as possible with the book closed, and avoid just reading out loud while your tutor listens.

Summarize and discuss readings:

Reading is the best way to build an extensive vocabulary, but *discussing your readings* can be the best incentive to make sure you do it, as well as the best way to consolidate and activate that vocabulary so it becomes a part of your active repertoire. Also, your tutor can explain important cultural background and idioms to help you learn to “read between the lines.” Be active! Don't just tell your tutor to ask you questions about the

reading. You need to go to your sessions armed with your own questions and a point of view about what you have just read!

Make your own materials:

Because focused practice is essential, and just knowing about something isn't sufficient to bring it up into your active repertoire, it can be very beneficial for you to design your own communication activities or games. Use your imagination! Here are some ideas to help you get started:

Pick situations that are important for you, and have your tutor help you to write out little conversations. Have your tutor tape record them, then memorize them. In your next meeting with your tutor, act out the situations; then do role plays that are variations on those situations.

Make flashcards that focus on where you need practice. Then, have your tutor drill you on them by holding them up for you to pronounce, by having you sort them in different ways, or by turning them over and playing "concentration."

Adapt familiar games to the language that you are learning. For example, "Go Fish" is good for question-asking and for number review. Get a book of "Hidden Pictures" or "What's wrong with this picture?" and do the activities orally, with your tutor asking you questions and helping you do the tasks.

Similarly, if you or a friend travels to Southeast Asia, get board games that are in the language you are trying to learn. Indonesian "Monopoly" is a great way to learn a little about Jakarta place and street names, in addition to being great language practice.

Watch a video together, and ask your tutor to periodically stop the film and ask you questions about what's going on and who's doing what.

Pick a situation or a role and role play it with your tutor. Think of language situations that you would like to be able to handle or ones that you might find yourself in, and work with your tutor to develop realistic role plays about them.

Get ideas from books for language teaching. The field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) has a proliferation of excellent idea books and text books. You can often find them for bargain prices in used book stores, or photocopy pages from copies in the library. Find activities or pictures that look fun, and that focus on things that you want to work on, and explain to your tutor that you want to do the activity in the language that you're learning.

Prepare or anticipate a conversation topic. Although natural conversation with a sympathetic native speaker is an excellent way to learn language, conversation can easily become forced or stale, or even run dry altogether. It's up to you to keep it going, so spend a few minutes planning topics to talk about that interest you such as films you've seen, current events, or family activities. The point is simply to have such topics up your sleeve so that when those awkward pauses occur, you have a new subject to turn to automatically without a lot of casting about or hemming or hawing. For even more benefit, you could look up key vocabulary that is appropriate to that topic, and maybe even prepare a few phrases, questions or opening lines.

A few don'ts

Don't list vocabulary. Don't treat your tutor like a talking dictionary. You can look words up in a dictionary all by yourself. What you can't do with a dictionary is interact appropriately and meaningfully.

Don't read out loud while your tutor looks on. Reading out loud is the best way to learn — how to read out loud. Unless this is something that you specifically want to learn how to do, you'd be spending your time better interacting with your tutor in the language.

Don't come to a session unprepared. Your tutor's time is valuable to both of you. If you aren't prepared for the tutoring session, you are wasting the valuable time of two people.

Learner alert: The perils of English.

It is easy enough to find language exchange partners, or speakers of other languages who are willing to exchange an hour of conversation in their native language with an hour of conversation in English. This can be fun and rewarding, but it comes with some real pitfalls. All too often, this turns into two hours of English, for many reasons: usually, students and many other Southeast Asians who come to the United States speak English better than English-speakers speak the other language, and it's natural to settle on the language in which communication is most efficient. Around the world, especially in developing countries, there is tremendous pressure to learn English, and that pressure may overwhelm your best intentions to stick to the Southeast Asian language. English is often a sign of modernity, internationalism, even education or sophistication, so your conversation partners may feel unconscious pressure to use their English knowledge. Finally, some speakers of Southeast Asian languages simply may never have spoken at length before with a foreigner who was learning their language so they may become tired of hearing your mistakes and accent and just feel more comfortable switching to English. Also, you can expect your tutor to pepper sentences with English words and phrases, because that's how many educated people speak right now. It's real, and it would be pointless and rude to tell them not to do it. Such use of words and phrases from another language in everyday speech is in fact an authentic language pattern for educated speakers of many modern languages. It is not necessarily being done just to help you understand the conversation more clearly.

6.5.3 Places you can look

Email - There are language groups and newsgroups in many Southeast Asian languages.

Computer materials – Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) materials are available for many Southeast Asian languages at the website of the Southeast Asia Program of Northern Illinois University. The location is www.seasite.niu.edu, and you will find materials there for Burmese, Indonesian, Khmer, Lao, Tagalog, Thai, and

Vietnamese. In addition, some universities have digitalized language materials that are available online.

Pen pals - You may be able to get a friend to arrange a pen pal for you, someone who would enjoy writing to you and receiving your letters in the Southeast Asian language you are studying. A variation of this would be to have an *Email pal*. Ask your teacher or a Southeast Asian friend to introduce you, via email, to someone who would enjoy exchanging emails with you in the language you are studying.

Adult literacy - Many towns have adult literacy programs, often sponsored by the public library or the local literacy council. Much of the tutoring is for non-native speakers of English, and program staff will usually welcome volunteers. You could request to work with a Hmong or Lao or Filipino speaker. Of course, you will be doing the tutoring in English, but after the tutoring sessions you may have a chance to talk together a bit in their language.

6.5.4 Reading

At a certain point in your language learning career, you will probably feel that the thing you need most is vocabulary. If you like to read, this is the best way to build and maintain a large vocabulary. Unless you're surrounded by native speakers, it's also the best way to just get massive amounts of comprehensible input. The biggest challenge is finding materials that are interesting. The second biggest challenge is just finding materials period, because they are still hard to come by in many areas of the United States. The following are suggestions for possible sources of and approaches to reading materials.

Realia — Locate social services information (check quality) or pamphlets on health issues or driving rules and regulations which are written in a Southeast Asian language.

Comic books/mysteries — Although some of the comic books may be directed to children, you can still learn a lot of linguistic and cultural information by reading them.

Motivation to finish is important — Choose materials according to your own interests and goals.

Predictability of genre - If you are working on gathering materials to read on your own, a tutor could be helpful by explaining to you the culturally bound genres. Then you can select something that you've already read in English so you understand what to expect.

How to make the most of reading

Just plain reading extensively is inherently beneficial. There are other things you can do for variety though:

- Pick topics and look for them/focus on them.
- Read to look at classifiers or other useful grammatical categories.
- Select readings that help you build vocabulary in your professional field
- Work on other specific semantic fields of interest to you.

6.5.5 Writing about Reading

Diaries and language-learning journals: one of the hardest things about learning outside of class is the fact that there is no one looking over your shoulder to make sure you do it. And, believe it or not, there are no grades to worry about. So you need to find ways to create incentives and rewards, even punishments for yourself. Keeping track is a good

way - if you tell yourself you have to devote some time to reading every day, and then keep a log, you will know what how you are doing; and just seeing those blanks or zeros on the pages in irrefutable black and white can be a powerful incentive to have something to report. By the same token, the smug self-satisfaction you feel as you leaf through page after page of your journal chronicling all the independent study you did can be its own reward. It helps to make deals with yourself, as long as you don't cheat.

When you first begin your language-learning journal, you will probably have to write most of it in English, but as you acquire more writing skills in your new language, you can switch to writing more and more of the journal in that language. Then you are practicing your writing as well as recording your reading. Don't stop with reading! Keep a log of your listening, speaking and writing activities and your responses to them in your journal; write about them in English and/or the Southeast Asian language, according to your writing abilities at the time.

6.5.5 Translating

Translating is not often done in language classes these days, but doing translations can be one of the best things you can do on your own. It draws your attention to detail. A good way to check your work is with bilingual editions or translations.

6.5.6 Talk to yourself

Sounds like a joke, right? One thing about good language learners is they can't help it; they do talk to themselves sometimes in the language they are studying.

7. LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

“Something tells me we're not in Kansas anymore”

“It's all in your mind”

Definition: A learning environment is anywhere that learning takes place.

7.1 Key Notions

You create your own environment.

It matters much less what's "out there" and much more what's "in here" - that is, how you interpret your learning opportunity, and whether you make the most of it, are crucial, far more important than whether or not your class is "optimal" or "pedagogically correct". Affective filters, not bad teaching, are going to be your biggest obstacles. In other words, although it's a cliché, you will get much further, no matter what your situation, if you perceive the glass as half-full rather than half-empty, because it's a guarantee that you will learn nothing if you close yourself off to the input that's available. Although this probably sounds very Pollyanna-ish, it can translate into some very specific behaviors that you can adopt to maximize your learning, which will be discussed in the following sections on different kinds of environments

Schema-building

In order to comprehend and remember any language input, you need to create and refer to a mental representation of situations and how they occur. Consider the following short passage:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important, but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first, the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another fact of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one can never tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is a part of life.

What is this all about? What procedure is this? How easy was it to comprehend the passage? If you are like most readers, you probably found it very difficult to understand, even though taken individually you know every word. And this is your native language! The point is that understanding and remembering language is much easier if you can tie it to a schema, or some notion of the situation in which it is taking place. While it's not clear how much of schemas can transfer from a native language to a new one, it **is** certain that many schemas for your Southeast Asian language have to be developed from scratch. Most Americans do not have any kind of schema for bargaining in an open-air market or for cultivating rice, for example. Even schemas that you have may not be entirely appropriate - a traffic jam in Madison, Wisconsin is quite different from a traffic jam in Bangkok, and a classroom in Jakarta probably looks and feels quite different from one in Seattle.

Familiarity precedes recognition precedes production

Don't ignore the first of the many repeated exposures that are needed for learning. They lay the foundation for everything that is to follow. One of the biggest differences between learning a Southeast Asian language and learning a European language is that the European schemata and language sounds are all around us. For instance, you know what Spanish sounds like from such things as restaurants and street names, films or social studies class. Even a set of words like "taco" "enchilada" "salsa" "burrito" and "chimichanga" are giving you a vital head start in Spanish, because they model for you the sound system of Spanish. From them you know sounds that are typical and how syllables are put together and what Spanish words look like. Even though this doesn't seem like what you would study in a language class, it's giving you an implicit head start that, unless you have traveled to Southeast Asia or your family is of Southeast Asian origin, you are unlikely to have. Without a schema, a new language can seem extra foreign to you and extra difficult to get an initial grasp on.

The first time you hear a new vocabulary item, maybe the only thing that you will be able to learn is that it exists. But you have to know that, before you can know anything else. Build repeated exposures into your learning plan, so that you can be patient with this necessary stage.

You can do this for yourself. Many simple schema-building activities will also expose you to names and words in the language. For instance, simply watching as many videos as you can, will not only provide you with rich visual imagery for schema-building, but it will also give you a chance to hear the melody of the language. Similarly, you can get a map and put it on your wall and read place names to yourself. Or, go to restaurants. Instead of saying "I'd like a number seven," try to read the menu. Say "I'd like a *tom khaa kai*." Chances are, the food server will say it back to you, so you can hear it said with a native accent. Of course, you won't know how to pronounce the words. But it's better than nothing, and it's removing that taint of unfamiliarity.

Classrooms without walls

There are sound practical and psychological reasons **not** to treat your new language as something that happens only within the four walls of your classroom. For one thing, it just plain limits your time. Five hours per week gets you nowhere. For another thing, there are resources that you don't want to deprive yourself of. And finally, presumably, your goal isn't to be able to speak in the classroom.

Learner alert:

In many ways, Southeast Asian language teaching is in its infancy. SEASSI, for instance, has only existed for about fifteen years. There is not a glut of trained and experienced teachers on the market, the way there is in ESL or French or Spanish. This puts more responsibility on you, the learner, to take a more active role in your learning. It also means that you must understand more of the language acquisition process and principles, because your teacher may be new to the field as well.

7.2 Where Does Learning Occur?

Obviously but unconventionally then, the first and most important learning environment is inside your mind, because that is where the learning actually happens...

Inside your head

Your mind is designed to learn language, and languages are designed to be learnable by the human mind. Therefore, it helps to know something of the psycholinguistic process of language acquisition in order to make the most of your opportunity to learn. Use anything you can get your hands on. *It doesn't have to be IN the language.* One of your most important jobs will be to start building schemas in your new language. This doesn't have to be a painful process. Anything you learn about the country and the people will be helpful.

Try to do your recreational reading in English about that country.

Try to rent videos set in that country.

Try to read newspaper articles so you can follow the political developments.

Try to look through old *National Geographic* articles with photos of that country.

Try to acquaint yourself with people from that country,

All of these are relatively painless activities that will be strengthening your schema-building and facilitating your language learning.

The three c's of comprehensible input.

Context: A language is not a list of words. You could memorize a whole Thai dictionary and still not be able to speak Thai, for example. Words are most learnable in contexts, both in linguistic contexts such as sentences and conversations, and in extralinguistic contexts such as shopping or sharing a meal.

Content: Language is about something. Not only does this make it more interesting, but that's what language is. Language that is not being used to convey content might as well be meaningless noise, and it will be equally difficult to remember.

Communication: Language should be directed to someone or used with someone. Even solitary tasks such as writing are done most effectively if targeted to a real audience.

You will find that not only do these factors improve your actual learning, but you will find that they make the process more enjoyable and interesting as well.

Visualize and fantasize. Take responsibility for creating meaning for the language patterns that you hear and use. Even if the pattern drill is something boring like “Put shrimp in the soup. Pork. Put pork in the soup. etc.,” you can make it meaningful. Conjure up the smell of a good steaming soup. See the shrimp going in. Imagine the pork boiling away. You may be a vegetarian, but negative associations, as long as they’re vivid, can be recalled better.

The language

Immerse yourself in the language. The language itself is a learning environment. Immersion is a useful metaphor, and it’s probably no accident that it’s the common term for one of the most successful methods of language teaching and learning. Try to view the sounds of the language itself as an environment. You don’t have to understand it to get value from it. Babies work first on intonation, which provides a scaffolding on which to hang everything else. Having a melody template can help you remember and kind of carries everything else along with it. Adults neglect this at their peril.

You need to become comfortable within the language, and to find it soothing and familiar. Think of the negative ways we refer to speakers of other languages; for instance, we often say that they are “jabbering” away in a language we do not understand. But you want the sound of your target language to be reassuring even in the background. Also, many of the fine phonetic points just take time, mega time. Geologic time. Learn to relax listening to it.

Try to visualize the speaker speaking the language as you listen to it. Don’t ignore the communication matrix. Instructions are meaningful, authentic input. Grammar explanations in the target language are contextualized input. Ask a question about the grammar. Surround yourself with the language.

The classroom

Clearly the most important part of the classroom language learning environment is not the physical classroom itself, but the people in that classroom: you, the teacher and the other students. How you interact with the other speakers in your classroom can affect the quality of your language learning experience there. Here are some things to think about.

Your teacher. It seems self-evident that your teacher is your most important human resource (in addition to yourself, of course), but remember, you must **actively** create your own learning environment. You are not a passive vessel waiting for the teacher to fill you up with knowledge - you have to actively take meaning and information from the environment.

Actively model yourself on your teacher. Many of the most important things to take, especially for Southeast Asian languages, are things that language classes often ignore or that are not taught explicitly. For this reason, being a passive learner won’t get you anywhere because the textbook won’t explicitly mention them, and your teacher probably won’t explicitly drill you on them. However, they are the things that make the difference

between being a sophisticated speaker of Thai versus being an English-speaker who knows some Thai. For example:

- ... *pause fillers and signals of attention*: You will be amazed at how much mileage you can get out of these. Especially when you can't carry your end of the conversation, these can stimulate native speakers to provide you with lots of comprehensible input.
- ... *intonation and rhythm*: One thing beginning textbooks typically are structured **not** to provide you with is pieces of speech long enough to get a sense of the rhythm and intonation. You can get this serendipitously though, by not resisting when your teacher talks and you don't understand.
- ... *timbre and vocal quality*: In Asia these are typically quite different from European speakers, and are one of the clues that you are hearing an Asian language even if you don't recognize it. You will probably resist "imitating" your teachers, because you'll feel like you're making fun of them. Don't fret, just do it. You may have to force yourself, and it may not feel natural, but it can make the difference between fitting in versus being a square peg in a round hole.
- ... *body language*: While conventional gestures such as the Thai *wai* or the Indonesian handshake are often taught (ask your teacher if they're not!), there are many more subtle aspects that aren't, but which also can make the difference between people feeling comfortable with you versus being merely tolerating you. Things like the angle of the head, rules of eye contact, how to coordinate hand movements with speech, how to sit, how to get someone's attention -- these are all crucial, and can be learned only by emulating someone because frequently members of a culture are not explicitly aware of them.

Treat your teacher with respect. First of all, this is an appropriate cultural behavior. Second, social psychology research shows that we like the people we treat well, rather than the more intuitive reverse. And, third, class will be more pleasant and more productive if your teacher doesn't feel on the defensive. For example, you may wish to bring Southeast Asian friends to class, especially if your class is a large one. Your friend may be interested in seeing U.S. students speaking their language, and you may want to get more native speaker attention in class. You can offer this to your teacher, but only in a sensitive, positive way. Maybe the teacher could get a day off or not have to prepare a lesson because your friend will play "what's my line?" or something similar.

Get your own input. Turn the tables, politely of course. If you learn a new pattern such as how to ask how many brothers and sisters a person has, or what someone did over the weekend, ASK YOUR TEACHER THESE QUESTIONS! Not only does this make it more interesting, but you are really using the language to obtain new information that you didn't know before. You are using language to learn information, rather than just spinning sounds in the air. This is one of the reasons why students get irritated with each other: they encourage the teacher to go off on tangents. AS LONG AS IT'S IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE, IT CAN BE A GOOD THING. If you don't understand, don't say "Let's do drills." Say instead "What's a ___?" Make it comprehensible input, and make it work for you.

Other students. Students have a tendency to view their classmates as “the competition” for resources such as the teacher’s attention or speaking time. However, you will get much further if you view your classmates as another resource. You can learn from their mistakes, and you can learn from their strengths. Here are some specific tips:

Don’t space out when other students are answering.

Answer their question to yourself.

Repeat it quietly to yourself.

Listen critically for errors or correctness.

Stay on task when you’re doing pair work.

*Don’t force the teacher to be the bad guy **all** the time.*

Do tell the other students not to speak English.

The physical environment. All of these help not only with schema-building and setting context, but they also can serve as implicit reminders that class time is time to get down to work, and that you should shed distractions and previous conceptions when you enter the classroom. Plants from the region, posters, writing on the board, or labels on objects, all can be sensory triggers that put students into a learning mode. Behaviors can be useful in the same way. For instance, shedding shoes at the doorway not only might get students into a Thai or Burmese frame of mind, but it could also be a concrete association to remind students to get serious.

Across campus

Your language lab. For some reason, students typically feel that language lab assignments are like being sent to Siberia. However, it is important to realize that there was a time when the language lab was viewed as the panacea to all the ills of language learning. Language labs were going to turn out speakers with native-like accents and be the cure all for their pronunciation ills. It is also important for those of you fortunate enough to be enrolled in classes to know how frequently we get requests for lab privileges from people in the community.

For Southeast Asian languages, both because of their unfamiliarity and because of special pronunciation challenges such as tones, the language lab is especially crucial. Here are some ways you can make it both more interesting and more rewarding.

Remember that the language lab is **distraction free**; you can’t get the same benefit from taking the tapes home and listening in your car or shower. It’s good to do that too, of course, but only as a supplement, never as a substitute. In the lab you can concentrate.

You can make the lab time more pleasant by going easier on yourself.

- Several short stints are better than one long marathon the night before the test.
- Use that repeat button. The goal of lab work isn’t just to mark time. You should listen over and over until you recognize and understand everything. Then, you should listen over and over until you can repeat everything. Then, you should listen over and over until you can SAY EVERYTHING RIGHT ALONG WITH THE SPEAKER ON THE TAPE. This is very important. First, because in order to be able to do this, you have to be paying

attention, and that guarantees you are not spending your lab time sleeping. Second, it gives you training in the correct rhythm and intonation and helps you speak at a normal, non-slowed down rate.

- Make your own assignments. Listen just for vowels, or just for tones, or just for words you recognize
- Have a friend tape-record your readings and anything else that may not already be on the tape. Then, go to listen. The warm feelings and familiarity of your friend's voice will create positive associations in the language for you, and make the lab time less cold and impersonal.
- Listen, both with a closed and an open book. Closed book is good for listening practice; otherwise you never wean yourself from the printed word. Open book is especially good for extensive reading, to train your eye movements to be quicker, to train you not to read word-by-word but rather phrase by phrase. The intonation and expression of the reader can also be a clue to meaning.
- Create positive associations with the sounds of the language for yourself. Make time for yourself to go listen to the sounds of the language in an unrushed, unstressed moment when you feel no pressure to perform or even to understand. Try to develop an appreciation for the sounds of the language. For example, check out the tapes for more advanced level classes and just listen to them to savor the sounds. Higher level tapes will have longer stretches of the language.
- Always make time to review. Don't figure that because that was last week's assignment you don't ever need to listen to it again. Reviewing is important partly because you need to remember all that old stuff, but also, perhaps more importantly, because it can give you tangible proof of the progress that you're making.

Other possibilities. The days when a language lab was just a room with a bunch of audio tape recorders in it are rapidly fading. Many are now called language centers or multimedia centers and have a range of resources that you can use to your advantage. These can include digitalized materials on line, as well as television, CALL programs, and videos. Some examples are provided below.

- Satellite TV reception. Find out if your center can receive channels from Southeast Asia. It may be at weird hours, but frequently if you provide staff members with a blank video cassette, they can record it for you.
- SCOLA. Basically this is a video aggregator service to which some universities subscribe. It takes new programs from around the world and rebroadcasts them. If your university doesn't subscribe to it, consider organizing students and faculty to make an official request for it.
- Videos. Often language labs have video viewing facilities and try to collect tapes. Enjoy them on your own, or better yet, try to organize a regular Southeast Asian video viewing group that could meet every week or every other week. Make it a regular thing, so you will have someone to discuss the film with and also get a chance to interact with people with similar interests. In addition to viewing the videos your university already has, you may be able to buy or rent others through local ethnic grocery stores. If you or a friend visits Southeast Asia, be sure to pick up videos. If you clear this with your language center ahead of time, they might even reimburse you for the purchase price.

WARNING: Video tape formats vary from country to country, depending on tape size and the system used to encode the color information. The possibilities are as follows:

<i>Color system/tape size:</i>	<i>Country</i>
NTSC/VHS (usually referred to just as “VHS”):	United States
Pal/VHS (usually referred to just as “Pal”):	Thailand
Pal/Beta:	Indonesia

Learner alert: “Using” native speakers

Be sensitive! Nobody likes to be used or objectified. Make it clear that you want to treat the native speaker as a person, not as a tape recorder or mere receptacle of the language. Just as English-speakers often complain about the large quantities of people who aggressively try to practice English on them, you can hurt the feelings of Southeast Asians by coming on to them aggressively and then not being interested in following through with friendship. Remember, many of them are far from home, and may misinterpret your signals of interest as signals of true friendship.

The community

Southeast Asian-Americans are increasingly making their presence felt, and many U.S. cities have large Southeast Asian communities. These community members can be a valuable resource for you in your language learning endeavors.

Just going to the neighborhoods and walking around is helpful. The shop signs, the voices overheard, and the labels on the merchandise are all valuable input.

If you live in a larger city, the available resources multiply. Large communities will have religious centers: Buddhist temples or Islamic mosques, for instance. Often these will have festivals or other public events where you can meet speakers and get familiar with the culture. Be sure to find out first what areas and events are open to the public, and what the appropriate norms of dress and behavior are. Buddhist temples, especially, will attract older speakers who don’t know much English and might appreciate your interest in their culture and religion.

In country

It is a tired cliché in language learning that the only way to “really” learn a language is by “being there.” Oddly enough though, when you go to Southeast Asia you will be amazed at the large numbers of expatriates who speak the local language poorly if at all. Sadly, just breathing the air or eating the food won’t do it. However, it’s true that there are unlimited opportunities for learning if you know how to take advantage of them and create them for yourself.

As a beginner: In general, try to put yourself in situations where stereotyped interactions repeatedly take place, so you have an appropriate way to practice the same patterns enough to really master them. For example, don't feel like it's "wrong" to ask several people the same question about directions to your hotel or the price of mangos. You'll understand more, and gain more confidence, each time you ask the question and hear the answer. Think of the four R's: repetition, realism (an authentic situation), responsiveness (interaction), and redundancy (what you're talking about is right there, supported by the environment). You might not know the word for "papaya", but in a fruit vendor's stand, there will be plenty of cues. You do NOT want simply to engage in rote practice.

As a more advanced student: As you become more advanced, of course, being in these same situations will spontaneously result in more complex interactions.

Controlling complexity: You can decide what patterns or functions you want to work on, and then think up situations where you could use them. For example, if you are having trouble using conditionals, you could plan ways to introduce hypotheticals into everyday interactions. For example, at the post office you could say "If I mail a package for my mother's birthday, will I be able to insure it?"

Overcoming your own hesitancy: This may be the time you really can make the most use out of a tutor. For instance, you could pay a tutor to read the newspaper and then discuss it with you. It can be more structured and therefore more valuable than simple conversation practice would be, and you don't really need a trained language teacher, just someone who is willing to put in the time.

Get involved! Consider volunteer organizations or classes. For example, hire someone to teach you batik or join in a campus clean-up campaign.

Media: It may be true that children who just watch TV don't learn much, but as a tool for adult learners, it can be very helpful. Bonus points for watching with native speakers!

Learner alert: "My teacher won't correct me"

For some reason, most lay people believe that the ideal learning environment consists of two things: 1) a native speaker who corrects the students while 2) the students practice. Error correction may not be as important as you think, but in any case there are many kinds of correction which may be more effective than a blunt "That's wrong - repeat after me." Most learners feel that the primary value of native speakers is so they can "correct" them when they say something "wrong". Most are therefore frustrated that Southeast Asians tend not to correct them explicitly, and usually feel this is because they are "too polite". However, bear in mind that it might be because the mistakes you are making don't impair communication or don't bother native speakers.

7.3 What to Do When Your Language Class

Has Specific Problems

Generally

Don't undermine the teacher or ruin things for other students whose needs may be different from yours. Don't get into a negative feedback loop or drop the class. The classes you dislike tend to be the ones that you avoid, skip, go to late, or go to unprepared. But, oddly enough, just as we tend to like the people that we are kind to, rather than the reverse, often we come to like the classes that we put effort into, rather than the reverse. Often people become aversively conditioned to language classes through inappropriate strategies and neglect. Or, they project their own insecurities and inadequacies onto the class.

Do make the best of the situation, get what you can out of it, take initiative to supplement things, and be sensitive when you make suggestions.

Specifically

Here are common failings of language classes, and some specific things that you can do about them. Remember, all of these are pretty common. So if this is what's wrong with your class, you're not alone. Simply identifying the problem can be a step towards improving the situation.

Too much English? Find a tutor. Find a conversation partner. Go to the language lab. Watch movies and videos. Memorize the phrase for "Please speak Thai/Indonesian/Lao/etc," and use this phrase with the other students.

Too much target language? Count your blessings!

Reading aloud from an open book? Defocus or close your eyes and visualize.

Too much rote drilling? Make the drilling more meaningful by working on fluency or picking particular segments to really work on.

Other students are slow, you're medium to fast? Set your own goals and milestones.

You are slow, others are fast? Pick the best student and use that student as a model. Subvocalize the answer when other students are being asked questions to see if your guess is correct. Get a tutor. Study harder and better. Make use of the teacher's office hours.

Inexperienced teacher? Consider this your service to the profession. This goes with the territory. Where do you think experienced teachers come from? They may be nervous or insecure, perhaps defensive, maybe not so great, but there are pluses. They may bond more with students, put more time into their teaching, and be fresher and full of energy.

Too many students? This is a toughie, and it is getting increasingly worse. Often it may cause teachers to fall back on some bad teaching methods. However, there are things you can do: you can try to get to class early and get a front row seat. Be attentive; make the teacher notice you in a positive way. Find a study partner and practice outside of class. Have an active fantasy life to fill dead air time while the teacher waits for students to answer questions. Make use of pair work; don't fight it or waste the opportunities it presents.

Grading policy conflicts with principles of good language learning? This is also a toughie. You want to do as much learning as you can while still getting a decent grade.

Grades do matter. See if the teacher will let you take the course pass/no pass instead of for a grade. Make sure the grading criteria are clear. Read the syllabus. Don't antagonize the teacher.

Most often, poor testing is based on lists of decontextualized vocabulary and picky exceptions to grammar rules. In other words, poor tests are ones that look for what you don't know rather than what you do know or ones that rely on rote memorization. Use specific memorization strategies:

Write tests for yourself that mimic the teacher's tests.

Be active; write rather than stare!

Deep process rather than surface process the material.

Pace yourself; don't cram.

Not enough time? Sneak studying into your daily routine. Label the objects in your home environment with the words in the language you are studying. Practice phrases as you walk to and from class. Listen to tapes in the car.

Other students drag the class down with bad attitudes? Try to talk to the other students about the situation. If that doesn't work, at least get what you can out of the situation by studying hard yourself. Don't let other students determine what you can achieve.

Teacher never gives you a chance to speak ("teacher centered")? Ask the teacher questions; try to practice speaking with others outside of class; get a conversation partner.

Teacher never speaks? Ask the teacher questions.

Teacher doesn't know the language that well personally? Be grateful. It's hard to find teachers of Southeast Asian languages. Just being a native speaker doesn't qualify someone to teach, and likewise not being a non-native speaker doesn't just disqualify someone from teaching. Relax and make the best use possible of the resources available to you.

7.3 Creating Your Own Learning Environment

One of the ways to take control of your own learning is to take control of as many of your language learning environments as possible. In the foregoing material, we have pointed out some of those learning environments: your mind; the language itself; the classroom, the people in it, and the physical environment; the campus; the community; and the country itself. The emphasis has been on pointing out possible adjustments that you may be able to make to enhance those environmental situations so that you can learn more effectively. As you become more familiar with yourself as a language learner, you will be able to create ways to improve and expand your language environments to meet your personal needs. Be creative; experiment with the ideas suggested by others as well as with those you develop yourself.

Surrounding yourself with the sounds, the words and the people of your new language in ways that suit who you are will almost guarantee that you will learn more language both more quickly and more enjoyably. Begin now!

8. SUMMARY

Language learning is a lifelong process involving many people and many environments.

The emphasis in this text has been on introducing you to major issues you need to know about and consider in order to **take responsibility for your own learning** of the Southeast Asian language you are studying. Such issues include determining your *goals* as a language learner, becoming familiar with the language learning *task*, *managing* your own language learning process by becoming familiar with yourself as a learner (both as to the *type* of learner you are and the language learning *strategies* most productive for you personally), becoming familiar with areas of *contrast* between your first language and the Southeast Asian language you are learning, and *maintaining* the language you have acquired and *growing* in your knowledge of that language on your own. Finally, some suggestions are provided for language acquisition in a variety of *learning environments*. The references and appendices to this document will also enable you to explore additional resources to further your language learning.

The authors and the many Southeast Asian language professionals who have contributed to the development of this guide wish you success on the winding road ahead.

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