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ABSTRACT

The second language learning methods of Southern Baptist missionaries in Zambia are described. Instead of studying the new language in a school setting, the student receives a week of orientation and is then placed in the community and expected to practice communicating with the native speakers at every opportunity. The student follows a course prepared by the Foreign Service Institute and uses textbooks for self-teaching. The emphasis is placed on observation of and involvement with the native population as well as frequent practice speaking the new language with native speakers. A native language informant is employed by each missionary to assist in intonation and pronunciation. A series of language drill tapes and a self-paced program titled "First Lessons in Bemba" provide support for language practice. The student prepares a speech related to daily living and then practices it in the community as often as possible during the course of a day. This language learning approach has been successful and widely accepted by the Zambians. It is seen as a means of combatting the ethnocentrism and cultural myopia prevalent in the United States and learning about the diverse languages and cultures of the world. (RW)

Deschooling Language Study in East Africa:

The Zambia Plan

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Abstract of

Deschooling Language Study in East Africa:

The Zambia Plan

Deschooling language study is the most effective method of improving the second language acquisition of missionaries and others living in the Bantu-speaking countries in East Africa. Using the first language acquisition techniques of children, the student is thrust into the bush and crowded towns from the first day. Programs like the one described have been successfully implemented in several countries. When not used as the primary method of second language acquisition, "deschooled" programs similar to the Zambia Plan may supplement more traditional classroom/laboratory approaches.

The Zambia Plan is a prescription for monolingual myopia, a unique disease of the tongue that affects the vision. Americans in particular suffer from this malady because of our geographic and linguistic isolation; the latter is a result of having English as our primary language, which prevents the masses from recognizing the reality of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the world. With deschooled programs like the Zambia Plan, the prognosis is good.

The paper includes some remarks about the need for American schools to produce "world citizens", applications of second language acquisition theory, and samples from FIRST LESSONS IN BEMBA - which is the core of the program this writer devised for learning (as opposed to teaching) Chibemba in Zambia and Chichewa in Malawi.

The Zambia Plan

This paper deals with the language acquisition methods of Southern Baptist missionaries in Zambia as being more or less typical for Southern Baptists.

On arrival in Zambia, the new missionary family is provided a week of orientation to the country and its capital. The new missionary is introduced to the Zambia Baptists of the Lusaka area for their first experience with Bantu-speaking people. During his orientation in Lusaka, the new missionary is encouraged to move among the people in the townships, the markets, at the bus stops, and at every opportunity to listen to the language and observe the actions of the Bantu to begin acquiring the culture and the language.

After the short period of orientation in Lusaka, the new missionary and his family move to a language area determined by the Mission to learn one of the languages indigenous to Zambia. Currently, Southern Baptist missionary work is confined to the following language areas: Chibemba on the Copperbelt and in the Serenje area, where a Chibemba dialect, Chilala, is spoken; Chinyanja in the Central Province, especially in the Lusaka area; Chinsenga/Chichewa in the Eastern Province towns of Chipata and Petauke; Chilozi and Shishona, spoken along the border of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). The dozens of tribal tongues are grouped by the seven major tribes; Luvale, Bemba, Nsenga, Tonga, Lunda, Kaonde, and Lozi.

A missionary learning Chinyanja would follow a course prepared by the Foreign Service Institute of the U. S. State Department.

Additionally, he would have some materials I prepared to encourage him to move out of the classroom and away from the electronic laboratory in order to more quickly become familiar with the people with whom he intends to spend the rest of his life. Textbooks have a distinct place in language learning, as do language tapes, but since there is no substitute for involvement with the people of the country, those who fully utilize a deschooled study plan receive the most positive reinforcement from their Zambian and American associates.

Close association and identification with the nationals is of utmost importance for several obvious reasons. One is the increased ability to learn the language of the people, not the language of a textbook. To my knowledge, no one ever learned to fluently speak any language from studying a text. Children and illiterates learn to speak their mother tongues by practice and trial and error with fellow speakers; no textbook is required for the effective acquisition of any language.

Because Americans are schooled from early childhood right through adulthood they have great difficulty understanding why they should not rely solely upon textbooks for the learning of another language. Many foolishly believe no learning can take place outside the classroom. The truth is that everyone learns every day without entering a classroom. Language and culture acquisition are no different; in fact, language and culture acquisition actually came faster outside the classroom than in.

While I was learning Chibemba, I spent less than 20 percent of the language study time in the classroom. The remaining 80 percent

was beneficially spent, first listening to, and later talking with Zambians in the Luanshya area: Mpatamatu, Mikomfwa, Misaka, Ndola's townships and Kitwe's townships, as well as many villages where we made dozens of friends. Most of the time, Ba Kunda accompanied me on excursions into the villages and townships during the early stages of my language study. Later, as I was able to understand directions and could make myself understood in simple ways in Chibemba, I gained confidence in my newly found linguistic abilities and ventured out alone rather often. A deschooled language study program requires independence and involvement: independence from texts and other artificial sources of security and involvement with native speakers of the target language.

While textbooks can ruin an American's acquisition of a foreign language, I found that a few books were indispensable during my journey into the world of the Bantu. BECOMING BILINGUAL by Don Larson and Bill Smalley and MANUAL OF ARTICULATORY PHONETICS by Bill Smalley helped linguistically; A BEMBA GRAMMAR, by E. Hoch of the Chinsali Language Centre, Zambia, and THE WHITE FATHERS' BEMBA-ENGLISH DICTIONARY were most helpful in learning <u>about</u> Chibemba and Chibemba grammar. Note that I stressed <u>learning about</u> Chibemba: I did not learn Chibemba from the textbooks; rather, I was able to take advantage of the near-native fluency of the authors of these last two books. Reliance on other linguists' works was necessary due to the limited time we had in the country. All four of these texts are part of the missionary's tools for learning Chibema, though he or she is clearly instructed

that reliance on texts is detrimental to and actually retards second language acquisition.

But those are not the only tools the new missionary has. He is also equipped with a series of tape recordings designed to provide drill and repetition few people would have the patience to provide. The missionary also has access to some other materials I developed as a guide in the language acquisition journey. It is a self-paced, competency-based plan entitled FIRST LESSONS IN BEMBA. (Of greater use, though, is the language informant each missionary employs to provide the much-needed human reaction and corrections not found in books or in normal musungu-bantu interactions.)

The purpose of the FIRST LESSONS IN BEMBA (FLIB) is to get the new missionary started in his language study by introducing him to some important linguistic principles which will aid him in his language acquisition. The materials were almost named FIRST AID IN LANGUAGE but the acronym (FAIL) would not have been appropriate for our purposes. Most of the lessons were also recorded on tape by native speakers.

Though not new or earthshaking, one of the most important concepts in FLIB is the learning cycle. Proper utilization of the language learning cycle insures the student constant progress in his acquisition of any language.

An entire cycle must be completed each day of the student's language study. The four parts of the learning cycle are PREPARE, PRACTICE, COMMUNICATE, EVALUATE. Or, get what you need, practice what you get,

use what you practice, test what you use. The student is to prepare a text of conversation for the day. The text is to be simple and related to the business of getting along in a common situation in the target culture: asking directions, buying at the market, greeting others, or later on, it may be a conversation about the share-crop method of farming. The text will be most helpful to the student if he keeps it simple at first and then uses sentence combining later. The student's adjustment to the languages and people of the new culture will become complex in a short time so the student is encouraged not to rush into complicated sentence structures.

Practicing the text he prepared is the next step for the independent language student. The student is told in the FLIB materials to practice and practice and practice over and over until he knows precisely how to repeat the text. The text must be learned so well the student can repeat it several times without hesitations, mistakes, or looking at the written text. Over learning is essential because students otherwise tend to revert to use of the native tongue in times of uncertainty. Here, the language helper (informant) is indispensable in helping the student improve pronunciation and intonation.

The next part of the learning cycle is projection. The student must leave the comfort of his home or office to go into the community to project his chosen text as many times as possible before going on to the next day's exercises. The text is projected to as many Zambians as possible in one day. With repeated projection, the text becomes second nature and the student soon begins to converse with ease. The

student is encouraged to project the text at least thirty times to thirty or more different Zambians with whom he comes in contact, taking mental note of each reaction to how he has said his text.

Since the student needs to know his weaknesses and mistakes for effective progress, he is to evaluate what he learned and how he used it. Again, the language helper is especially effective in correcting the student and helping him to correct the pattern and work it up to perfection for the following day. The corrected pattern is used as part of the text for the next day. Grammar and pronunciation drills are prototyped for the student in BECOMING BILINGUAL and in FIRST LESSONS IN BEMBA.

The student must keep his texts simple and the sentences within the texts simple because the kernel sentences are easily learned. As the grammar of kernel sentences is assimilated, sentence combining comes about naturally and the student begins to generate new sentences. (In considering just what materials should be presented in a language learning aid such as FLIB, I first thought of a strictly kernel sentence approach, discussing surface and deep structures, sentence generation and sentence combining, with the title of FIRST LESSONS IN AFRICAN SENTENCE KERNELS (FLASK). I dropped the idea after considering the probability that it would drive the new missionaries to drink.)

You all know a child first articulates kernel sentences before moving on to more complicated ones. So, after a few months of language study, it is not surprising to expect the new missionary to be able to carry on a fairly intelligent conversation with just about any

4-year-old Zambian. Before that time, however, he will be able to generate kernel sentences. The student is warned not to rush into more complicated structures; complications of culture and language rapidly become realities.

Language study in Zambia is a relaxed, loosely set program - and should be for any second-language acquisition objectives. Each program should be competency-based, with specific, obtainable objectives clearly defined for each lesson.

The over-arching objective of foreign language study in U.S. schools should be the creation of world citizens who not only know about, but who understand and empathize with citizens of other nations on this planet. In light of this goal, my years of studying Spanish in high school and college were years of wasted time for I never met a native speaker and learned nothing of the culture; my study of French in graduate school was purely scientific and pragmatic: I had to pass the reading exam; studies of other languages are similar failures for if we do not adequately learn our lessons in world citizenship, all our knowledge will not save us from blowing each other up or from denying one another needed natural resources.

Americans fail to sympathize with the plight of the boat people because we barely acknowledge their existence. It's simple: if they don't speak English, they are somehow inferior. Not only must they speak English, our masses would say, but they must speak the right dialect. Most are unwilling to admit this world-encompassing prejudice in this day of individual rights and human dignity. And when

we do reach out to the oppressed, we are motivated, not by pure altruism, but by greed or some other hideous motivation only thinly disguised.

Don't take my word for it. In the July 30 issue of NEWSWEEK, J. William Fulbright says Americans are tongue-tied by our linguistic and cultural myopia, which is losing us friends, business and respect in the world. Donald N. Larson, Principal of the Toronto Institute of Linguistics, says we suffer from monolingual myopia, a disease of the tongue that affects the vision.

All of this stems from a failure to understand the oneness of all humanity. That failure in part, is born in and supported by linguistic snobbery: after all, if it's worth saying, it can be said best in English. I am sorry to say to you that I have seen this attitude in professionals of "higher" calling - educators, diplomats, and missionaries - not just among residents of the hills of West Virginia.

Language study will be easier for the missionary living in the bush than it will be for the one living in a town where English is widely spoken. In either case, the new missionary must not isolate himself from the people because of the powerful sensation of needing what Americans call book learning. The new missionary must get out among the people of Eastern Africa and listen to them speak their language. Furthermore, the student must watch the actions of the Bantu and analyze their inter-personal relationships, i.e., learn their culture.

Southern Baptist missionaries in language study in Zambia are provided with radios to listen to Zambian language broadcasts, encouraged to listen to Zambian language sermons when preached by Zambians, stand around at the post office, the bus stop and the market to listen to the beautiful grammar of Chibemba. Not only does the new missionary come to love the sounds of Bantu languages, he acquires the grammar of the language by listening. Children learn to speak by first listening; adults should, too. The language student who cultivates an ability to hear a language will soon find himself speaking that language.

Language

Internalizes

Substantially

Through

Ears,

Not mouths. LISTEN!

Problems of Communication

The method of language learning proposed here and the results seem to be widely accepted by Zambians. The methods encourage the missionary to become friends with Zambians from the very first day. Zambians seem to react favorably to the musungu who demonstrates his love for the people. But the program is not without problems.

Because Americans suffer from monolingual myopia, we fail to learn

the reality of the linguistic diversity of the world in which we live. Furthermore, the new missionary sometimes becomes quite discouraged in his language study. Being results oriented as many Americans are, the missionary is anxious to begin preaching. Many times the missionary would rather skip language study and begin preaching right away, using an interpreter. Moreover, distractions come to the language student under many guises: illness, homesickness, culture shock, mission meetings, caring for their children, fatigue - an endless list. Others will take almost any excuse to avoid language study. Diversion is recommended to the new missionaries but many confuse creative diversion with destructive distraction. Far too many are inadequately motivated to effectively learn a second language. Perhaps during the questions and comments period you will have some suggestions to offer in solving these serious problems of communication.

It may come to some as a surprise that English as the official language of Zambia creates communication problems for the native speaker of English. The problem occurs when an American approaches a Zambian on the Copperbelt with the greeting, "Mwapoleni, mukwai, mulishani?" and the reply from the Zambian is, "I'm fine, how are you?" in Zambian English. The American wants to practice his Chibemba while the Zambian wants to practice his English. A solution to the problem is vital to the American's acquisition of Bantu languages.

If the serious language student follows the suggestions and patterns

set forth in FIRST LESSONS IN BEMBA, he will soon find that he is learning the culture of the Bemba along with their language. But it will not come without some effort on the part of the student. The Bemba say, "Ico utemenwe cikoshe mbafu." We say "Where there's a will, there's a way." And, with de-schooled programs like the Zambia Plan, the prognosis is good because the method of learning Bantu languages has been proven successful in Zambia and other countries. American linguists and educators might be well advised to investigate other natural de-schooled methods of language acquisition for the betterment of all societies.

(Examples from FIRST LESSONS IN BEMBA, proficiency evaluation guidelines, and taped lesson recording procedures will be made available on request.)

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