



Five College Center for World Languages

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1B: Target Language

1B: Using the Target Language

Pronunciation

Even though students may only know a few words, such as “hello” “how are you?” “goodbye” and “my name is,” you can still keep the entire session in the target language. The key is to speak slowly, enunciate your words, and make sure your pronunciation is very clear. Before your first session you need to practice your pronunciation in order to make sure that you are pronouncing every letter and syllable when speaking.

Speaking in Simple Sentences

Even if students can’t understand everything you say they will pick out certain words they have heard before in order to understand the context. In the beginning, you will need to speak in simple sentences and use a lot of hand gestures and body language, sometimes even drawing on the blackboard, in order to make sure you are being understood. Again, this takes practice.

Before your first session you should write down a list of simple sentences and phrases you will use during your conversation session. Practice your pronunciation of these sentences and think about what kind of body language you can use to articulate your meaning. For example, when saying the word “hello” one can wave one’s hand to signify the action’s meaning. If the language learners have studied the phrase “my name is,” then during the session, when you say your name, you can point to yourself, say your name, and then say the entire phrase together.

Use emphatic gestures in order to help the students make connections between the words you are saying and their meaning. Expect to say phrases slowly about three to four times before the connection between what you are saying and what it means is made. Prepare a list of simple and useful words and phrases that can be referred to when someone wants to ask a question or if something was not understood. You may want to make sure that each person is able to say phrases such as: “Can you please repeat?” “I don’t know” “I didn’t understand.” You can also review these quickly during the first session.

Also remember to only use the vocabulary currently being studied based on the study materials. It is okay on the first day of the session to practice the phrase “my name is” or “how are you?” but other

than those basic greetings and partings, it is extremely important that the conversation partner adheres to the vocabulary that the conversation participants are learning. You can always review the vocabulary everyone is learning by referring to the study materials or syllabus.

How Fast Do I Speak?

Speak slowly in the beginning. You can eventually quicken your speech, but not by much. You want those in the conversation session to gradually become adjusted to the normal speaking velocity in the target language, but this transition must not be rushed. You will need to gauge when you can start introducing a quicker speaking velocity based on how easily you are being understood. It is best, however, to keep it slow until they are more advanced.

Body Language and Gestures

In elementary conversation sessions body language and gestures are crucial in communicating what you are saying in the target language. When practicing greetings such as “hello,” use the appropriate gesture that corresponds to the word so the connection is made to the word “hello.” For example in English one would wave his/her hand. Point to objects and give their name in the target language, ask students to repeat by pointing to them. Students may not understand the first or second time, however if you are patient and keep repeating and using the appropriate gestures, students will eventually understand what you are asking or saying. Remember that repetition is very important in the first few sessions since those in the session are still getting used to hearing the language and understanding it.

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