

Unit 7

Know Yourself: What Kind of Language Learner Are You?

Cast:

- 4-5 Students
- Teacher Zhang Dong

Scene 7.1. Students sitting in a teahouse talking about language

Student #1: What do you think is the best way to learn a foreign language?

Student #2: I think grammar is necessary before everything else. Once you know it, then you can begin speaking.

Student #3: No, I don't think so. All those grammar rules just confuse me! Give me some examples and let me talk!

Student #4: Actually, I want to enjoy learning. There should be plenty of fun and games. A foreign teacher I once had made us do lots of games. That was fun!

Student #5: I find languages only useful to discuss ideas. I don't want to waste time learning to make social conversation.

Student #2: Yea, I can learn more from a good textbook than from most discussion groups and oral practices.

Student #5: The teacher knows best. I don't mind what I learn.

Student #2: I want to know why. I can't learn without explanations.

Student #3: Language is all about communication, isn't it? I like people and knowing another language means I can meet more people! Making mistakes isn't really important if I can communicate!

Student #5: Why should I have to listen to other people's mistakes? The teacher should talk most of the time...

Cut

Scene 7.2. Teacher Zhang Dong in front of class

Teacher Zhang Dong: Do you agree or disagree with any of the student's statements?

Students nod affirmatively

Teacher Zhang Dong: What problem does the students' statements highlight?

Student #2: People have different ideas of what is going to work for them.

Teacher Zhang Dong: That's right. But there is more to it than that. You see, people have different learning styles. Knowing HOW you learn best will enable you to design a program that fits you.

In other words, you will enjoy your language learning much more, stay much more motivated and be much more successful if you take your learning style into account. Note, however, that you sometimes have to operate OUTSIDE your comfort zone in order to progress as a language learners.

First of all, let me give you some general guidelines to follow when deciding on an approach based on your overall learning style. First of all, be sure your approach—no matter who you are—includes the following essentials:

- Lots of exposure to understandable input
- Opportunity to observe and participate in a variety of real communication situations
- Opportunities to explore what native speakers think and believe

Now let me describe 4 different types of learners for you: We'll call them 1) Relational Learners, 2) Analytical Learners, 3) Structured Learners and 4) Energetic learners.

Fade and Cut

Scene 7.3. Teacher Zhang Dong sitting around a table with his class of 3-4 in a café or tea house

Title on screen: The Relational Learner

Teacher Zhang Dong: Let's begin with Relational Learners. Do you remember the comment by one of the students, "Language is all about communication, isn't it? I like people and knowing another language means I can meet more people! Making mistakes isn't really important if I can communicate!" That is a comment typical of relational learners.

Relational learners are interested in people. Close relationships enable them to communicate both verbally and non-verbally. Their sympathetic nature and their desire to make close

relationships with people helps them communicate verbally and non-verbally. Their intuition helps them grasp the language system and infer meaning.

Relational people tend to adapt more easily to different situations and cultures. They tend to be sympathetic people who are good at judging other people's reactions. They will stay motivated for the long haul as language learners,

- If they can develop relationships with people
- If the program is varied
- If they can help other people develop and grow
- If they can understand the underlying meaning (what is really going on?)
- If they can learn while living in a community of people who are accepting and open to relationships and to letting the learner be involved in their activities and lives
- If they can participate in learning activities that allow the learner to observe and understand people and their culture
- In classroom setting that incorporates lots of variety, creativity, group-work and communicative activities

Relational learners can face certain problems as well. For instance, they may be overly sensitive to rejection, may be so adaptable that they lose their personal identity, may be easily distressed by lack of harmony and may have a short attention span if the subject or person does not engage their interest.

There are certain learning environments which relational learners will tend to find difficult. For instance, if there are cultural or psychological barriers to spending time with people, as when people are naturally reserved or xenophobic. Relational people also find repetitive activities and language drills boring.

If you are a relational type of person, use your observational skills to observe and to understand what is going on around you, and your social skills to make relationships.

In the early stages of language learning the relational learner should try to learn as many survival phrases as possible. Survival phrases are basic sentences you need to know that enable you to meet your basic needs, as well as meet people and get acquainted with them. As you do so, make it a point to notice nonverbal aspects of communication, and start making notes. Keep a notebook handy to note down new words and phrases you hear.

If the language you are learning is not too far removed from your own you will learn a lot from interacting with people from the beginning. If the language is unrelated you may get frustrated because it will take time before you can begin to communicate effectively.

The Look and Listen technique, and Total Physical Response are also useful techniques for the relational learner. You should also consult a grammar checklist. That way you will expose yourself to a wide range of grammar.

Once relational learners get beyond the beginning stage of language learning they could try the series technique. The series technique is when you break an activity down into lots of little steps and then do those steps together with your language helper. You could try doing such things as preparing food, washing clothes, planting crops, learning a local craft, playing a sport, etc. and learning simple sentences which describe each aspect of the activity you are doing, as you do it.

It is important for relational people to participate in activities to give them the opportunity to observe and listen while doing things with people: group work events, community meetings, funerals and weddings, sports. Eating out, doing a town survey, use public transport, whatever it takes to mix with people! Once their language is beyond the beginner stage, they could even try to take a course in a subject which interests them at a local community college!

It is important for relational people not to rely all the time on their basic vocabulary to get their message across. They have to remember to keep expanding their language! As they are able to communicate better and more accurately with people, they will feel more and more a part of the community.

Fade and Cut

Scene 7.4. Teacher Zhang Dong with students in a computer lab

Title on screen: The Analytical Learner

Teacher Zhang Dong: Now lets talk about a different type of language student: the Analytical Learner.

The motivations, strengths and potential pitfalls of an Analytical Learner are quite different from those of the Relational Learner.

The advantage of Analytical Learners is their ability to analyze and understand grammatical aspects of a language. They tend to be critical thinkers which can help to solve problems, and are usually good at self-evaluation.

Analytical Learners will stay motivated if they:

- have opportunities to work independently
- have opportunities to solve problems
- have opportunities for intellectual freedom
- can do independent and self-paced work
- have intellectual stimulation involving problem-solving, reading and research
- have a classroom where the teacher's intellectual ability and command of the subject matter is perceived as superior and worthy of respect.

Analytical Learners must also include enough interaction with native speakers to ensure real conversational fluency.

Some potential problems which Analytical Learners might face are:

- They may be unable to meet high personal standards and become discouraged
- They may spend too much time at the desk or computer and not relate to people
- They may be unwilling to speak because of fear or dislike of making mistakes
- They may be less interested in the culture than in the structure of the language

Traditional classroom situations that call for doing things in a rote or mechanical way, or classes that call for a lot of unrehearsed activities and unstructured and disorganized environments are difficult for analytical learners to cope with.

If you are an Analytical Learner, here are some general guidelines to remember:

- Base your learning on lots of written or audio texts.
- Use techniques that require you to actually process mentally what you are doing.
- Don't just study the language as an intellectual activity.
- Apply your analytical ability to understand cultural themes, the way people think and the language itself.
- Spend time doing things with people.

In the early stages of language study here are some things you might try to do:

- Focus on the basic building blocks (sounds, grammatical structures, vocabulary). Work with your Language Helper using the following techniques: Look and Listen, grammar analysis, and pronunciation practice.
- Learn some Survival Phrases and Power Tools to help you meet people and get acquainted with them.
- Introduce "silent periods" in which you concentrate mostly on understanding instead of speaking.
- Spend time with people: watch, interact and form relationships to enhance your long-term effectiveness in the community.
- Encourage others to correct your mistakes.
- Expose yourself to a variety of grammatical structures using a grammar checklist.
- Identify common communication situations you can expect to experience.
- Make notes about what you observe to analyze later.

Once you are past the beginner stage you should:

- Start using the language in real life situations as much as possible. Just knowing all about the language isn't any good, if you cannot actually use it!
- Use techniques that cause you to process oral or written texts and dialogues: Series techniques, shared experiences techniques, text analysis.
- Continue to expand the amount of information you can effectively communicate.
- Try to analyze how you think people feel about what you are saying. Try to interpret their body language.

- Participate in activities that give you opportunities to observe and listen while doing things with people: group work projects, community meetings, funerals, weddings, sports events....

Fade and Cut

Scene 7.5. Teacher Zhang Dong addressing his students in a class room

Title on screen: Structured Learners

Teacher Zhang Dong: Now let me introduce you to a third type of student, the Structured Learner. Structures Learners learn best in a thoroughly structured program. He or she needs an organized and sytematic approach to learning. Language classes and structured sessions with a Language Helper will appeal more to them than the unstructured and unprepared times of informal activities with people.

Structured Learners tend to persevere well, plan well, are thorough, and are systematic and careful. They will stay motivated if they:

- can approach language learning in a systematic and organized way.
- are given a chance to apply concepts in a practical way. They will enjoy hands-on practical activities. They like finding practical solutions to problems. They are pragmatics who enjoy problem-solving activities.
- accuracy is important to them.
- They will enjoy a typical classroom setting with a well-ordered syllabus, clearly presented materials and clear instructions
- They enjoy exercises and drills.

There are certain things that Structured Learners need to be aware of. For instance, they:

- May be more concerned with problems or tasks than with people
- May be so concerned with accuracy they are inhibited from talking
- May find learning a language in its natural context too chaotic for personal taste. They will find unstructured, disorganized, or chaotic environments difficult. In other words, language learning in natural communication settings may a problem for them.
- May block out input they are unable to control, thus making it difficult to catch the gist of conversations. Situations with diverse activities and lots of interpersonal interaction may be difficult for them.
- May have more difficulty achieving an authentic pronunciation than some other learning types.

Structured Learners should plan their lessons well. Their approach should include a structured component: going to school, if possible, is probably a good thing for them. When they are just beginning as language learners they should make a detailed plan that includes interim goals, so they have some idea as to where they are headed.

If the language they are learning is related to one they already know, informal interaction with people from the beginning is helpful. If not, formal language learning sessions will be more helpful.

Structured learners need to work on the basic building blocks of language learning, like learning the sounds, getting their minds around the grammatical structures, and drilling vocabulary during their structured time at school or with a language helper. These will eventually enable them to communicate effectively with people.

It is important that Structured Learners remember that spending time with people (watching them, interacting with them, forming relationships) is very important. The Structured Learner should try to notice non-verbal aspects of communication, and keep notes of what they see.

At the start the Structured Learner should try to elicit and learn some Survival Phrases in order to give them something to say, so they can meet and get acquainted with people.

Doing the Look and Listen techniques and Total Physical Response techniques with a language helper will expose the Structured Learner to a variety of grammatical structures, particularly if they consult a grammar checklist.

Later, as they get beyond the beginner stage of language learning, they need to work on fluency and accuracy using the Series Technique, Shared Experiences, Structure Practice, Eating Out, Doing a Town Survey, exploring the Public Transportation, and other skills that will be taught in this course.

They should try to carry out basic conversations with people patient enough to try to listen to you. They can also try to participate in work projects, community meetings, wedding, funerals, sports. As a Structured Learner you shouldn't be so concerned to get it right that you're not conversing with people!

Fade and Cut

Scene 7.6. Teacher Zhang Dong at a soccer match (or other public event) with his students

Title on Screen: The Energetic Learner

Teacher Zhang Dong: *(Talking loudly, above the crowd)* The last basic type of learner we want to talk about is the energetic learner.

Energetic Learners are opposites to Structured and Analytical Learners. They will not enjoy a highly structured program. Energetic learners need freedom. They need to include lots of unstructured time and variety into their language exposure. Energetic learners are adaptable,

willing and ready to get involved in community life, have a desire, even a need, to get involved with people, and are willing to take risks.

They will be motivated if:

- there is lots of activity going on. They like being involved in enjoyable activities
- they have a chance to do things with people. They will learn best in a community setting with opportunity for involvement in people's lives,
- there is lots of variety, personal involvement in activities
- there are hand-on activities, adventure and risk
- They may be able to cope with a classroom setting if it allows for lots of variety, flexibility, action, group work and field trips.

Because Energetic Learners do not enjoy structured programs, they need help in planning a program which includes lots of unstructured time and variety. Some of the things an Energetic Learner needs to be aware of is that they:

- May ignore accuracy
- May act too quickly
- May be unwilling to take time to plan a program
- May be satisfied with speaking incorrectly, as long as the message gets across
- May have gaps in knowledge because of unsystematic language learning

They will find traditional classroom situations that require spending time doing repetitive exercises and working with pencil and paper difficult, as they will any program that is rigidly structured and does not allow for variety and spontaneity. If they end up going to a people who are naturally reserved or xenophobic they may struggle, as there may be cultural or psychological barriers to having them joining in activities with local people.

In general, Energetic Learners should:

- build their base language learning program on events they can participate in
- build basic vocabulary skills using action-based approaches and games
- use their social skills to make relationships; they should try to spend lots of time doing things with people
- try to be creative and make up games and communicative activities

When they are just beginning as language learners they

- will need to talk to people. They should go out and do as much as they can with people.
- If the language is related, informal interaction with people right from the start is good. Use Survival Phrases to meet people and get acquainted with them.
- During structured times they should work on sounds, grammar and vocabulary using Total Physical Response and Look and Listen Techniques.

Once they have learned a few basic of the language they should:

- Use the series technique, shared experiences, role play, eating out, town survey, taking public transport, doing shopping trips, getting involved in some community projects, or taking part in a sports activity.
- Explore cultural themes with their new friends; ask lots of questions
- Try to understand the values and assumptions behind the way people act
- Investigate the culture in depth
- Conduct interviews with people
- Record simple readings with you Language Helper and then record yourself reading the same passage so you can check your own accuracy
- pay attention to the way people say things as well as to what they say
- keep a journal

The structured learners shouldn't rely on their basic vocabulary and knowledge of basic structures to get their message across. They will need to expand their repertoire. That will make a big difference in how effectively they can communicate with people and in how people will feel about them and what you say.

Fade and Cut

Scene 7.7. Teacher Zhang Dong back in classroom with his students

Teacher Zhang Dong: Well, people learn languages in different ways. There are Relational Learners, Analytical Learners, Structured Learners, and Energetic Learners. In fact, however, most people are a mixture of two, sometimes even three learning styles. Yes, sometimes someone is totally relational, or really energetic, or really structured or very, very analytical, but most of us are a mixture. However, it is still important to recognize in which directions we tend to lean, and what our strengths and weaknesses are as a result.

Sometimes people want to know how they can find out what type of language learner they are. Well, there are tests which people can take to help nail it down, but usually people know themselves well enough that they can figure out what they are after they've heard the descriptions. It might help to discuss the different learning styles with some friends who know you well, to find out from them what they think your learning style, or learning styles are!

Fade and Cut

Scene 7.8. Things learned in this lesson

Scroll by on screen. Voiceover: Teacher Zhang Dong

- People have different learning styles, which means they learn best in different ways.
- Knowing HOW you learn best will enable you to design a program that fits you.

- Some people learn language best by relating directly with people, others need to analyze the language and understand it before they are comfortable speaking, others learn best in a structured environment, while others learn best on the job. However, most people are a mixture of two, sometimes even three learning styles.
- No matter what your learning style is, you sometimes have to operate OUTSIDE your comfort zone in order to progress as a language learners