

## Unit 6

- **Working with a Language Helper**
- **More Picture Book and TPR**
- **What about Language Schools?**

### Cast:

- Missionary Li Wei
- Teacher Zhang Dong
- 4-5 students

**Scene 6.1. Missionary Li Wei talking into camera.** *Vary camera angle every so often*

**Missionary Li Wei:** I have told you how I came to be interested in the people of Islamistan, and how I met Mr. Ahmet. I also told you how the Lord used these events to speak to me and to my house church, convincing us that I should go as a missionary to Islamistan. After I arrived and settled in Islamistan, the Lord led me back to Mr. Ahmet.

Before Mr. Ahmet, however, I tried a couple of other language helpers who didn't work out—they were really quite bad experiences! I think it is important that I share those experiences with you. That may keep you from making some of the same mistakes I made!

Let's first talk about the kind of things you should look for in a language helper. What, in other words, is the ideal Language Helper? Well, no one is perfect, but here are some things to look out for.

First of all, they should speak the language clearly, in a nationally understand manner. In other words, you don't want someone with a thick country dialect, because then you will end up speaking with a thick country dialect as well! You don't want someone who comes from an ethnic minority either, for they often speak the national language with a peculiar accent. For instance, you don't want to learn Turkish from a Turkish Kurd. You end up speaking like them and that could prejudice many Turks against you. You want someone who is not looked down on by the community.

Your language helper should be someone who will talk, even if you don't understand everything they are saying. You also want someone who will let you take the lead. In other words, they will work with you in what you want to learn; they will limit themselves to your agenda. One of the mistakes I made when I first came to Islamistan was to find a language teacher to help me. That person came with his own agenda; he hadn't grasped that I wasn't a very intellectual person, that I was learning the way children learn. He soon lost me with his difficult explanations of grammar. It is much better to get a simple person who will let you take the lead. Eventually the ideal language helper will tune into your intents.

Your language helper should be someone who will consistently, but not obnoxiously, correct you. If you and your language helper have a common language, like Chinese or, for some of you, maybe English, they should use it only hesitatingly. It may be helpful to give initial instruction in a common language, but you should use that common language as little as possible.

A good language helper is also someone who really wants you to learn their language, and is ready to take you into his/her world. Of course the individual should also be available. You will need to decide how often you want to meet, something which may depend on whether there is a language school for you to attend or not. Language study is very tiring. However, you will want at least three two hour session a week.

You may well wonder where in the world you can find a good language helper. Well, there may be other missionaries where to are who can help you. Remember, though, that asking a “friend” to find someone for you could lead to difficulties if the language helper doesn’t work out. For the same reason, it is probably not a good idea to have someone from church, if there is one, helping you. If things don’t work out with that person it is very difficult to get rid of them! Remember, you will be paying these language helpers for their services. If someone from the church thinks they are getting a good deal, and then you drop them because it doesn’t work out with them, you may be setting people in the church against you!

Make sure you get a language helper of the same sex as yourself. You will spend a lot of intense time with your language helper, and you need to avoid every appearance of evil. Also, you sometimes have to get very close to your language helper to try to figure out how certain sounds are made: you sometimes have to see where they put their tongue, or how rounded their lips are, or if their voice box is turned on or off and things like that. That is easier to do with someone of the same sex.

Don’t commit yourself to a long committment with a language helper until you see how well you can work together. You may have to experiment a bit until you find a language helper that is really suitable for you. That’s why it is important to arrange a trial period of 1-2 weeks. If you think someone is suitable, ask them to help you for a couple of weeks. Then, if things don’t work out, you can say farewell to them without anybody losing face. If they turn out to be good language helpers, then you ask them to keep going for, say, a couple of months. If, after that, they are still good, then the Lord has blessed you with a really good language helper.

People often wonder how much they should pay their language helpers. Well, things vary from one place to the next, of course. It is probably best not to decide on your own how much to pay—both overpaying and underpaying will cause you to lose respect. A good rule of thumb, particularly if your language helper is a university student, is to pay them what a local grade school teacher might be expected to get per hour. If the lesson is at your house and you live in a big city, you should also pay for their bus fare.

There are also certain things to keep in mind when working with a language helper. Remember that your helper is your source of data, not your analyst. Most native speakers are not linguists, and have never been asked objective questions about their language. They just speak it.

So:

- Don't put him/her on the spot. Ask "what", "how", and "when", but not "why". Why is a challenge question and puts people on the defensive. Sometimes a language helper will say, "You want an explanation for everything, even when there is none!". If your helper cannot explain why, they may feel stupid or angry. So, don't ask "why"!
- As you learn more about language learning in this course, you will learn some linguistic terms. Be careful not to use these special terms with your language helper. For instance, don't ask, "Is there a glottal stop at the end of that?" Just like you may not know what a glottal stop is yet, they won't either.
- Always keep the onus on you. Don't say, "I don't think you understand". Say, "I don't think I made myself clear" if you have trouble communicating something.
- Remember, your language helper has more than language in mind when he or she works with you. He or she is also very sensitive to their relationship with you. Therefore, he or she will be 'checking' to see if your guard is up regarding correction. Does your face show that you want to be corrected? Does correction upset you? If the message to your language helper is that it does, they will back off, because relationship is more important to them than language. They put their relationship on the line every time they corrects you because they don't know how you will respond. Constantly express appreciation for correction and keep soliciting more. You may have to tell your helper not to be 'spooked' by your frustration when you can't yet say something right—you are only upset with yourself.
- Remember, native speakers tend to talk differently to non-native speakers than to other native speakers. They pay no attention to rate of speed, idioms, contractions, colloquialism, etc., when speaking to other native speakers.
- When working on pronunciation, be careful about asking, "am I saying that right?" That is a very difficult question to answer. What is "right"? That you are saying it like a native? That there is no room for improvement? If your language helper says "yes", what does that mean? It could only mean that they can figure out what you are saying! It is better to assume that you are NOT speaking like a native, that you are in a process that will improve over time. Note too that if your helper says "yes, you are saying it correctly", they get themselves off the hook; they don't have to correct you any more!

**Fade and Cut.**

## **Scene 6.2.      Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet in language session.**

*Title: Learning Purpose and “Reason For”*

**Missionary Li Wei:** Have you noticed that often one clause gives the reason for the other as in, “I spoke to her because she smiled at me.” I could have said, “She smiled at me and so I spoke to her”.

Closely related to reason clauses, are purpose clauses, which begin with “in order to—” or “so that—”, as in “I bought some eggs in order to make pancakes” or, “I bought bread so that you wouldn’t have to go to the store”. Sometimes there are reasons to do things, but we don’t do them. That kind of sentence often starts with “Even though—”, as in “Even though I was angry, I didn’t say anything.”

Let’s practice these concepts using pictures. Would you please think of a reason or purpose for which the person or people in the pictures are performing the action? For instance, “He is running because he want to get fit”. You can do the same thing with sentences which express the idea of “even though”, as in “Even though this man is tired, he is running.”

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

## **Scene 6.3.      Title: Learning the Causative**

**Missionary Li Wei:** Now let’s practice causitives. That’s when a primary person or thing causes a secondary person or thing to do something, as in “Fred made/told/forced Bill to do the work”. Here Fred is the one who made Bill carry out the activity. Please make up sentences that make me do things, as in “I’m making you pick up the pen”. You can vary the intensity of by using words like “telling” and “forcing”, and in “I’m telling you to pick up the pen”, and “I’m forcing you to pick up the pen”.

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

## **Scene 6.4.      Title: Learning Comparatives**

**Missionary Li Wei:** Now I want to learn how to say that one person or object is stronger, weaker, bigger, faster, smarter, shorter, longer, nicer, etc. than another person or object. Look, I’ve got these two pieces of rope of different length. Please tell me how to say “This rope is longer than this one.” Once I know that, change “longer” to “shorter”, “thicker”, “stronger” or “weaker”.

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

**Missionary Li Wei:** We can use the same technique using pictures of two people. See here, this is Miss Chang, and this is Miss Wang. Please tell me how to say that Miss Chang is smarter, dumber, taller, fatter, stronger, weaker, nicer faster or slower than Miss Wang.

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

**Missionary Li Wei:** Look, I have three of different object on the table. Please give me instructions like “Give Miss Wang the pot which is the heaviest” or, “Put on the sweater which is warmer than the one I am wearing”, or “Give Miss Chang the shortest pencil”.

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

### **Scene 6.5.**      *Title: Learning Indirect Discourse*

**Missionary Li Wei:** Mr. Ahmet, now I want to learn something tricky. Before I can claim to being a basic speaker of your language, I need to master indirect discourse. Indirect discourse are sentences with verbs such as “say”, “ think”, “believe”, “desire”, “want”, “wish”, “know”, etc. Look at these examples:

- This man said, “Go to the store.”
- This man says, “I am going to the store.”
- This man says that he is going to the store.
- This man is thinking, “I am going to the store.”
- This man thinks that his store is large.
- This man wishes he could leave his store.
- This man knows how to run a store.

Do you see the bit of the sentences that are underlined? They are little mini-sentences within larger sentences, some of which are in quotation marks. The sentences with the quotation marks are examples of direct discourse, the other sentences are examples of indirect discourse.

Let’s use our picture book. Please choose a picture of a person, then tell me what you think that individual is thinking or saying.

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

**Missionary Li Wei:** Now please choose a picture without telling me which one you are looking at and say something like, “Before this picture was taken, this man said, ‘I have a busy day at the store today’” or, “This man is thinking that he is going to have a busy day at the store today”. I will then point at the picture with the man who could have made such a statement or thought such a thought.

*Missionary Li Wei and Mr. Ahmet act out the activity*

## **Face and Cut**

### **Scene 6.6. Teacher Zhang Dong in front of class**

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Missionary Li Wei's language learning experience was one-on-one with a language helper. However, in many countries it is possible to go to a language school and learn the national language that way. What, do you think is the better way? Working with a language helper, or going to a language school? Can you think of some of the strengths of learning language in a classroom from a teacher at a language school, if there is one?

**Student #1:** I studied English at a language school for a while. The teacher there taught us lots of English grammar.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Yes, often language schools teach lots of grammar. What were some of your other positive impressions of your language school?

**Student #1:** Well, they made us memorize vocabulary, which was good. We did in-class drills of different little dialogues. There was a foreign teacher there with whom we did some play-acting. We also did translation work; we had to translate business letters into English. They made us do lots of reading, but most of that was just too difficult for me. For homework we had to fill in the blanks in a workbook which took us systematically through the grammar.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Very good. Do you feel you profited from the experience?

**Student #1:** Yes, I learned some things...

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** It sounds like yours was a typical language school experience. You memorize vocabulary, do grammar work, work at translation, do drills to help you remember the newly learned vocabulary and grammar structures. Mimicry and play-acting are also used to create situations in which you are forced to do some speaking.

When you go overseas as a missionary you won't have your regular work to get you out of bed, you won't have much family around, and you may not have a church to serve. One of the very useful things a language school does for you when you first get to the country is that it provides a structure to your week! You have to get out of bed and get to school and do your homework. At a time in your life when so much that is familiar is stripped away, that can be very important to keep you from floundering! People need structure.

Also, teachers are paid to give you feedback. They should correct your language, something which friends may not do. Friends may overlook your mistakes; teachers shouldn't.

What were some of the problems you encountered at the language school?

**Student #1:** Well, I found that we didn't get much talking practice in. There were just too many students in the class for us to be able to talk. Much of what we did was book work.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Yes, that is a common complaint. Schools are comfortable places in which to learn about the language, but not good places in which to communicate in the language. Much is crammed into your head, but it hasn't worked its way out to your tongue! The solution is to get into the community from the start, and to determine to maintain your language learning contacts, even if you cannot do everything required of you at school.

Did you have any other problems?

**Student #1:** I found that students complained a lot about the teachers, and also about other students.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Why do you think that was?

**Student #1:** When students couldn't understand the teacher's explanations everybody got frustrated. Also, some students resented the fact that others were slow learners, some the fact that others wanted to rush ahead while the others hadn't understood things yet. Some resented the fact that other students spoke the language badly. They feared that they were learning bad language by having to listen to these poor students.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Yes, that is very perceptive. Interpersonal relationships at language schools can be very strained. Teachers can treat students' egos harshly and students can complain about and make teachers' lives miserable. Inter-cultural issues among students can cause strain because remember, when you go to a language school in your host country, there will be all kinds of foreigners trying to learn the language! And, as you said, resentments build up when having to listen to other students' bad language!

There is another factor as well. People have different learning styles. That's something we will talk about in a later lesson. The important thing to note at this stage is that some people do really well in a language school. They are structured type of personalities who like things presented in a well-ordered way. The better language schools tend to do that. More energetic personalities, on the other hand, find sitting in a school bench the whole day very difficult. Relational people may enjoy being with others at school, but they may not learn much because there is not much scope for ad-hoc talking and conversations in a classroom full of beginners.

In language schools teachers must “get to the end of the book”. Some students buckle under that kind of pressure, and it prevents them from really going on in language learning. Also, assignments and grades can cause students to clear the wrong hurdles—academic rather than communicative hurdles. Teachers tend to give assignments that can be easily graded, though they may not be best for language learning.

Language is a human, social activity, and should be treated as the LEAST of academic experiences. Academic work (pronunciation and grammar) should lead to your becoming a better talker!

The great danger of language schools is that students are sooooo glad when it is over that they have little desire to keep on learning. Remember, even if you decide to go to a language school, you still have a long way to go after you graduate! Don’t stop actively learning the language. Finish in a positive frame of mind with a desire to keep on going.

Think of your language school as a launch pad. It gets you off the ground, but you have to create your own personal language projects even while in school. During your last weeks at school you might ask your teacher to help you determine what your specific pronunciation and grammar problems are.

Having said all of that, can you think of some guidelines to follow when you need to decide on a language school? What kind of things should you look for?

**Student #1:** Well, my favorite teacher was the foreigner. He was a warm, lively person who had a zest for the job and was fluent in his language.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Yes, a good teacher who can use the language in a wide variety of contexts is very important. Ideally you want a teacher who has professional training in language teaching methodology, in other words, someone who is familiar with a wide variety of methods and techniques and is willing to adapt them to suit the goals of the students.

What else should you look for?

**Student #1:** That really good teacher also tried to introduce us to his culture along with the language.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** How did he try to do that?

**Student #1:** He used materials like simple magazine articles, video and film clips, and music to introduce us to different topics and people from his culture.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Excellent! Can you think of anything else?

**Student #2:** Find out how much the school costs, and how often classes meet. From what I’ve seen of Missionary Li Wei’s method, I really like it. I wonder if it might be



possible to go to school part time so that there is time left over to implement some of Missionary Li Wei's methods with a language helper.

**Teacher Zhang Dong:** Yes, that is highly recommended. If possible, try to integrate school and self-directed study. This works particularly well if your school offers part-time classes.

There are other things to look out for as well. The course should be balanced among speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Another thing to look out for is class size. The smaller the class, the better! More than 15 students in a class is too large! Find out what schools other missionaries there recommend.

Lastly, you might investigate what kinds of resources are available at the school: do they have a language lab, media resources? Do they organize activities or outings?

Well, lots of things to look for for those of you going to some of the big cities of the world, where there are various options to choose from with respect to language schools.

As we said earlier, try, if possible, to integrate going to school with working with a language helper. This is possible if you go to school part time. For some of you more structures personalities, however, going to school full time may be the best way to get started, while for some of you energetic types school may not work at all. In short, it is important to know a little bit about yourself and your learning style in you are going to be an effective language learner. We'll talk more about that later...

## **Fade and Cut**

### **Scene 6.7. Things learned in this lesson**

*Scroll by on screen. Voiceover: Teacher Zhang Dong*

- Make sure that you language helper speaks the language clearly, in a nationally understood manner.
- It is probably better NOT to have a language teacher for a language helper. It is better to get a person who will let you take the lead.
- Asking a "friend" to find a language helper for you can lead to difficulties if things don't work out. For the same reason don't get someone from church.
- You pay language helpers for their services. Both overpaying and underpaying will cause you to lose respect.

- Make sure you get a language helper of the same sex as yourself.
- Don't commit yourself to a long contract with a language helper until you see how it well you can work together.
- Ask you language helper "what", "how", and "when", but not "why". "Why" puts people on the defensive.
- Don't say, "I don't think you understand". Say, "I don't think I made myself clear" if you have trouble communicating something.
- Be careful about asking, "Am I saying that right?" It is better to assume that you are NOT speaking like a native.
- At a typical language school you memorize vocabulary, do grammar work, work at translation, do drills.
- A language school provides a structure to your week. That can be very important to keep you from floundering when you first arrive.
- Schools are comfortable places in which to learn about the language, but not good places in which to communicate in the language
- The smaller the class, the better! More than 15 students in a class is too many.
- Interpersonal relationships at language schools can be very strained.
- People have different learning styles.
- See if it is possible to go to school part-time, and work with a language helper part time.
- Language is a human, social activity, and should be treated as the LEAST of academic experiences.