

A SURVIVAL LANGUAGE LEARNING SYLLABUS FOR FOREIGN TRAVEL

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This article presents a language syllabus containing approximately 120 items which represents an easily achievable goal for people wishing to visit a foreign country for a month or more. The syllabus is the result of needs analyses involving interviews with learners, analysis of guide books, and personal experience. In addition, the items in the syllabus have been checked for frequency, coverage, and combinability. The syllabus is divided into eight categories, greetings and being polite, buying and bargaining, reading signs, getting to places, finding accommodation, ordering food, talking about yourself, and controlling and learning language. The article concludes with advice for learning the items in the syllabus.

This paper addresses a question that has been posed many times and for which many answers have been found. That question is "What is the language knowledge that learners first need when they learn a language?" Previous answers to the question have generally focused on specific grammatical structures or vocabulary that were considered useful. The major exception to this is the Council of Europe work which has defined a Threshold level (Van Ek and Alexander, 1975), and a lower Waystage level (Van Ek, Alexander and Fitzpatrick, 1977), in terms of communicative function - what people need to do with language.

The study starts with the simple fact that millions of people throughout the world, in temporary informal social contact with speakers of another language, learn enough of that language to conduct initial communication. The study attempts to tap this phenomenon of successful initial language learning. Specifically, it asks what things do people typically need or want to say in the initial stages of contact with an unknown language and what resources serve them best?

We were particularly interested in the very first contact and how much learning could relate to that contact. This would apply to the language learning of many people - tourists in a country for a short time, professionals visiting a country for a short assignment. Such people often shy away from contact with the language, and yet if they learned a little, they would almost certainly profit more from their visit and would possibly be encouraged to take the learning further. We are thus looking at what guidance can be given to people who want to cross the very first threshold - the threshold of using the language for the first time.

A typical resource with which to approach this threshold is a book of useful words and phrases. Such phrase books are generally intended as reference books: a resource that you look up when you are in communicative difficulty. The aim of this study is to provide a list based on a principled approach that will give learners an immediate and useful return for the effort of learning. A quick survey of introductory course books indicates that their syllabus content provides poor short

term return for someone with limited time to invest. There is usually too much material in the early lessons that is not relevant to immediate needs. The first chapters often deal with topics like the indefinite article, pronouns, or adjectives, before coming to something that can be immediately used. The following interview (Dickie, 1989) with a young foreign language learner highlights this.

Gareth is in his fifth month of learning Japanese in the first year of secondary school. He is speaking to the researcher.

"Tell me something in Japanese, Gareth."

"O.K. You ask me questions in English and I'll answer in Japanese."

"Were you born in New Zealand?"

"We haven't got up to 'yes' yet."

"All right. I'll try something else. How old are you?"

"Do you want me to say the whole sentence because I can only say the number?"

"That's fine. Just tell me the number."

"....."

"That sounds good. Here's another question. What do you do at school?"

"No, not that kind of thing."

"Sorry. What sort of thing should I be asking you?"

"Well all the regular things like 'This is a pen' and 'The book is red'. That kind of thing."

THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS OF THE SURVIVAL SYLLABUS

The content of the present survival syllabus has been selected considering the situation of someone who is going to stay in another country for somewhere between one and three months. This is long enough to make it worthwhile learning something of the local language and yet not long enough to justify a sustained intensive course. No consideration has been given to special needs that the visitor may have as a result of the particular reason for visiting that country, such as to do academic research, to arrange a trade deal, or to get married. Rather, attention has been focused on survival, travel and social needs which would be common to any visitor to another country. This includes getting the necessities at a good price and basic social courtesies (so you can get the necessities at a good price!). Pimsleur (1980:16) describes this as 'the "courtesy and necessity" speaking level,' and suggests that 'this type of mastery can be achieved in less than sixty hours, which comes to

only an hour a day for two to three months - an excellent return for a limited effort.' This contrasts with the 240 hours needed to reach the elementary proficiency level in an 'easy' language or 360 hours in a 'hard' language (Pimsleur, 1980:15).

The syllabus thus has two focuses

- (1) a focus on spoken language on the assumption that in the mainstream tourist areas of a country communication will be in a spoken form.
- (2) a focus on vocabulary. Research on vocabulary learning (Nation, 1982) has shown that it is possible to learn a large amount of vocabulary in a short time with good long term retention. There is much more involved in language learning than memorising words, but a carefully chosen vocabulary that takes account of the patterns words occur in can be an excellent basis for planning short term learning. The size of the syllabus (approximately 120 items, consisting of roughly 150 words) takes account of learning rates revealed by this vocabulary learning research and Pimsleur's time limits, and makes it about one-quarter of the size of Waystage syllabus prepared for the Council of Europe for initial language learning. (Van Ek et al, 1977)

Table 1, using part of Munby's (1976) framework for needs analysis, shows how limited the communicative context is for the foreign traveller.

Table 1. The communicative needs of a temporary visitor

Purposive domain

Tourist, temporary visitor

Setting

Foreign city, used occasionally, culturally different, recreational, urban, unhurried

Interaction

Consumer, customer, non-native, guest

Instrumentality

Spoken dialogue, face to face

Very low on size of utterance, complexity, range of forms, delicacy, speed.

Middling on flexibility.

High tolerance of error, stylistic failure, reference to a dictionary, repetition, hesitation.

Criteria for selecting the communicative content

The syllabus should contain useful items which also provide a good starting point for further learning and which are easy to learn. To make sense of this, criteria were set up to help decide whether an item should be included in the syllabus or not. Table 2 lists the criteria in order of importance. The second column shows what information was used to apply the criteria. The criteria and sources of information are discussed below.

Table 2. Criteria for choosing content for the syllabus

Criterion	Source
Need Frequency Coverage and combinability Learnability	Needs ana

Need. The first needs analysis was done by interviewing ten people who had recently returned from a visit to another country. Each interview took approximately three-quarters of an hour and required the interviewees to recall who they used the language with, in what situations, and what was said. After this open-ended interview each interviewee was asked to look through a list of words and phrases and to indicate whether they used any of the items in the list. This list was made by one of the researchers and was added to after each interview. This provided a good check on the information gained from the interview. All of the people interviewed were at a low level of proficiency in the language. Some had done a course before going to the foreign country, others picked up what they could from phrase books and dictionaries. The countries visited included China, Italy, Japan, Turkey.

The second needs analysis was done by surveying ten guide books which included lists of useful words and phrases. The guide books included some from the Lonely Planet series, Frommer's Europe on \$30 a Day, Baedekker's Japan, APA Productions' Thailand, Cadogan's Italy and a range of other guides. Several guide books in the same series used the same list. In such cases the list was surveyed only once. Guidebooks were used because it was assumed that each one represented the experience of at least one well travelled person. The information from the guide books was tabulated separately from the interview material, because guide book lists can also contain items to consult in an emergency rather than to learn for everyday use.

An item was included in the first draft of the syllabus if it was mentioned by at least two of the people interviewed, or by one of the people as well as occurring in more than three of the guidebooks.

The third needs analysis involved one of the authors using the syllabus on extended visits to three different countries - Finland, Greece, and Thailand. During the visits (each longer than a month) a careful record was kept of what was used from the syllabus and what needed to be added.

Frequency. Frequency was checked by using Eaton's (1940) Word Frequency List which collates the frequency of items in four European languages (English-French-

German-Spanish). Eaton found a very close correspondence in frequency level among the high frequency words of those languages. For example 662 of the items which occurred in the most frequent 1000 words of English corresponded to items in the most frequent 1000 words of French, German and Spanish, and most of the remainder of the first 1000 words of English occurred in the first and second 1000 words of two of the three other languages in the study. The great majority of the words in the Survival Syllabus were in the 1st 1,000 words of Eaton's (1940) list. The age of the sources of Eaton's list accounts for some of the lower frequencies, photo (4th 1,000), telephone (5th 1,000). Eaton's list is based on written text, which may account for the frequency of Goodbye (3rd 1,000). Toilet does not occur in Eaton's list!

Coverage and combinability. Coverage is the capacity of a word to take the place of other words. A word which has good coverage can be used as a superordinate term in place of other words (go can be considered a superordinate of run, walk, drive etc), can be used to paraphrase or define other words (thing is an especially useful word in this respect), and can combine with other words to make new words (foot as in footpath, football, footstep). As Viberg (1989) shows, frequency is a close correlate of coverage. However coverage can also be checked by comparing items in a list to see if one can replace others. This did not result in any changes to the syllabus, but it is a point to consider when the syllabus is translated into another language. For example, How much? in English can be used for both cost and quantity. It is more economical to learn this one item than two or three different ones.

Learnability. Higa (1963) investigated the effects on learning of the types of meaning relationships between words. He found that grouping synonyms, opposites, or free associates together made learning more difficult. The related items interfered with each other. The Survival Syllabus was checked to remove such items where they were not considered strictly necessary.

What the syllabus does not include

An item that only one person found very useful was not included. This is of course a reflection of the variation in circumstances in different countries, the variety of reasons why people go to another country, the variety of things that happen to them, and the many things they can do while they are there. Here are a few examples of excluded items. Cheers!, Are you married?, I don't want meat. (for a vegetarian), What is my size? (for clothes), reporting a theft, dealing with illness, and talking to an official found searching your room. What is learned following this syllabus, therefore, will need to be supplemented by the use of phrase books and dictionaries to meet particular circumstances by almost all people who use it. But, all the items in the appropriate sections of the syllabus will be worth learning and as a whole will put travellers over the threshold of initial communication.

Most people interviewed expressed the desire to be able to chat with people in the foreign country. This is an ambitious aim and is far beyond the goals of this syllabus. One of the people interviewed had studied the language for a total of more than 250 hours of class-time. In spite of this, he still found it very difficult to maintain conversations with 3 or more turns.

THE SURVIVAL SYLLABUS

The syllabus has been divided into eight sections on the basis of information revealed during the interviews. The sections have been ranked and numbered according to the number of interviewees indicating that they used items in the sections divided by the number of items. So the section Greetings and being polite was the most useful one. Items which occur in more than one section are indicated by numbers in brackets. So, I want ... in Section 2 also occurs in Sections 5, 6, and 9. The slash (/) indicates alternatives.

1. Greetings and being polite

Hello/Good morning etc. + reply [there are many cultural variants of these, including Where are you going?, Have you eaten?]

How are you? + reply e.g. Fine, thank you.

안녕하세요? 건강하시죠? 어떻게 지내세요?
An nyong ha sey yo? Geon gang ha si jiyo? Eo ddeong ge ji nae se yo

잘 지내요. 덕분에 잘 지내요.
Jal ji nyae yo. Deon pun e jal ji nyae yo

Goodbye

안녕히 계세요 (when you leave your friend's house),
An nyong he kye se yo

안녕히 가세요. (when your friend leaves your home),
An nyong he ka se yo

안녕. (when you part with your friend),
An nyong

Thank you + reply e.g. It's nothing, You're welcome.

Please

고맙습니다
Go map sup ne da

뭘요, 아무것도 아닌걸요. 별말씀을 다하시네요
meul yo, a mu geos do a nin geol yo. Beul mal ssum ul da ha si ne yo

Excuse me [sorry] :

실례합니다 (죄송합니다, 미안합니다)
Sil ley hab ni da (jŭi song hap ni da, mi an hap ni da)

It doesn't matter:
상관없어요
Sang gwan eobs eo yo

Delicious (6):
맛있어요
Mas iss eo yo

Can I take your photo?
사진 찍어도 될까요?
Sa jin jjin eo do doil gga yo?

2. Buying and bargaining

I want ... (4, 6)
나는를 원합니다
Na nun...lul eoun hap ni da

Do you have ...?/Is there ...?
.... 있나요?
.....Iss na yo?

Yes (8)
네
nae

No (8) :
아니요
a ni yo

This (one), That (one) [to use when pointing at goods]
이것, 저것
E geos, jeo geos

There isn't any ...
...가 없어요
...ga eops eo yo

How much (cost)? (5, 6)
얼마예요?
Eol mae yo?

A cheaper one (5)
더싼것
deo ssan geos

NUMBERS (5, 7) (These need to be learned to a high degree of fluency)

1	인	il
2	이	i
3	삼	sam
4	사	sa
5	오	o
6	육	yuk
7	칠	chil
8	팔	phal
9	구	ku
10	십	shib

Above ten, the form is 2 10 1 [i shib il] = 21, etc.

50	오십	o shib
100		(il)paek
1,000	천	ch'on
10,000	만	man

UNITS OF MONEY (5, 6) : 십원, 백원, 천원, 오천원,
ship won, paek won, ch'on won, och'on won,

UNITS OF WEIGHT AND SIZE:

킬로그램 (kg)
kiloglaem

대(large)
dae

중(medium)
jung

소(small)
so

How much? (quantity):

얼마나 많이?
Oelmana manhi?

half:
절반
jeolman

all of it:
전부
jeon pu
(one) more:

하나 더
hanadeo

(one) less:
하나 덜
hanadeol

Excuse me [to get attention] (4):
여기요, 잠깐만요
yögiyo, jamganmanyo

Too expensive:
너무 비싸요
neomu bissayo

Can you lower the price? + reply (Some countries do not use bargaining. In others it is essential.)

깎아주세요
shagajuseyo (juseyo = give me)

- 이거 싸게 파는 거예요.
- Igeo shage p'anun keoyeyo.
- 그럼...원만 주세요.
- küleom...ueonman juseyo
- 더 이상은 안돼요.
- Deo isangün andoeyo

NAMES OF IMPORTANT THINGS TO BUY
(These may include stamps, a newspaper, a map.):
우표, 신문, 지도
upyo, sinmun, jido

3. Reading signs

Gents : 신사
Sinsa

Ladies : 숙녀
Suknye

Entrance/In : 입구
Ibgu

Exit/out : 출구

chulgu

Closed : 문닫음
Mundadŭm

4. Getting to places

Excuse me (to get attention) (2)
저기요. 실례합니다
jeogiyo. Silyŏhabnida

Can you help me? :
좀 도와주시겠습니까?
jom doajusikeshasŭbnigga?

Where is ...? (5) : ...
는 어디 있나요?
nŭn eodi ishdayo?

Where is ... street? : ...
거리는 어디 있나요?
keolinŭn eodi ishnayo?

What is the name of this place/street/station/town?
이 곳/거리/역/마을 이름이 무엇인가요?
i kos/keoli/yŏk/maül ilŭmi mueosinkayo?

Toilet : 화장실
Hojangsil

Bank : 은행
Ŭnhyaeng

Department store : 백화점
Byaekhwajeom

Restaurant : 식당
Sikdang

Airport : 공항
Konghang

Train station : 기차역
Kijayŏk

Underground : 지하
Jiha

Bus station : 버스정거장
Beosŭjeongkeo jang

Hospital : 병원
Byŏngueon

Doctor : 의사
Ŭi sa

Police : 경찰
Kyŏngchal

Post-office : 우체국
Uchekuk

Telephone : 전화
Jeonhwa

Market : 시장
Si jang

I want ... (2, 5, 6) : 나는 ...를 원해요
Nanŭn...lŭl eounhyaeyo

How far?/Is it near? 얼마나 멀어요? / 가까운가요?
Eolmana meoleoyo? / kagaunkayo?

How long (to get to ...)? : 얼마나 걸려요?
Eolmada keolyŏyo?

Left : 왼쪽
Oindzok (winjoke)

Right : 오른쪽
Olŭndzok (orinjoke)

Straight ahead : 곧장 가세요
Jodjang kaseyo

Slow down (Directions for a taxi.) : 천천히 가세요
Cheon cheon he kaseyo

Stop here : 여기서 세워 주세요
Yŏgiseo seueo juseyo

Wait : 기다리세요
kidaliseyo

Ticket : 티켓, 표
Tik'es, pyo

When : 언제, ...할 때
Eonje..hal daae

5. Finding accommodation

Where is ... (4) : ...는 어디 있나요
Nŭn eodi ishdayo

Hotel : 호텔
hotel

How much (cost)? (2, 6) : 얼마예요?
Eolmaeyo?

A cheaper one (2) : 더싼 것
Deo shan keos

I want ... (2,4,6)

Leave at what time? : 몇 시에 떠나요?
Myöch sie daeodayo?

NUMBERS (2, 7) : 숫자
susja

Today : 오늘
Onŭl

Tomorrow : 내일
Naeil

6. Ordering food

How much (cost)? (2, 5) : 얼마예요?
Eolmaeyo?

The bill, please : 계산서 주세요
Kyesanseo juseyo

I want ... (2, 5, 9) : ...주세요, 저는 ...로 할래요,
Juseyo, jeonŭn...lo halaeyo

NAMES OF A FEW DISHES AND DRINKS :

김치, 된장국, 찌게, 김밥
kimchi ,doeonjangkuk, dzigae, kimbap

A FEW COOKING TERMS : 끓이다(boil), 굽다 (bake, grill), 자르다(cut)
Galhida kubda jalŭda

Delicious (1) : 맛있어요
masisheoyo

7. Talking about yourself and talking to children

I am (name) : 저는 찰스입니다
Jeonŭn Chalsŭ ibnida. (Charles)

Where do you come from? :
어디서 오셨어요?, 어디 출신이세요?
Eodiseo osyŏsheoyo? Eodi chulsiniseyo?

I am (a New Zealander)/I come from (New Zealand):
저는 뉴질랜드 사람 입니다 / 저는 뉴질랜드에서 왔어요
jeonŭn New Zealand salam ibnida/jeonŭn New Zealandejeo oasheoyo.

What do you do? : 직업이 뭐예요?
Jikeobi meouyeyo?

I am a (teacher)/tourist :
전 교사입니다 (여행객)
jeon kyosaibnida (yŏhaengkaek)

You speak (Chinese)! :
중국어를 하시네요.
Jungkukeolŭl hasineyo.

A little/very little:
조금이에요/ 아주 조금이에요
jogŭmiyo / aju jogŭmiyo

What is your name? (Especially for talking to children.) :
이름이 뭐니?
Ilŭmi meouni?

How old are you? + reply :
몇 살이야? - ...살 이에요.

Myöch saliya? ...sal ieyo
NUMBERS (2, 5)

I have been here ... days/weeks/months :
저는 여기 ... 일/ 주/ 개월 있었어요.
Jeonŭn yöki ...il / ju / kaeoul isheosheoyo.

I am sick : 아파요
apayo

8. Controlling and learning language

Do you understand? : 아시겠어요?
Asikesheoyo?

I (don't) understand : 알겠어요 (모르겠어요)
Alkesheoyo (molŭkesheoyo)

Do you speak English? (7) : 영어를 할 줄 아세요?
Yöngelül hal jul aseyo?

Yes (2) :네
nae

No (2) : 아니요
aniyo

Repeat : 따라하세요
Dalahaseyo

Please speak slowly : 천천히 말씀해 주세요
Cheon cheon he malshŭmhae juseyo

I speak only a little (Thai) :
저는 (태국) 말을 아주 조금 밖에 못해요
jeonŭn (taekuk) malül aju jogŭm bagae moshaeyo

What do you call this in (Japanese)? :
이것은 (일본)말로 뭐라 하죠?
Ijeosŭn (ilpon) malo meoula hajyo?

ORGANISING, LEARNING, PRACTISING

Clearly the syllabus simply identifies the knowledge or language resources required. The task of acquiring this knowledge in a way that would make it accessible in communicative situations is addressed briefly in this section. The following principles and suggestions are based in part on studies of the good language learner (Rubin, 1975; Rubin and Thompson, 1982; Naiman et al, 1978) and research on vocabulary learning (Nation, 1990).

Principle: Organise your learning

Decide how many words or phrases can comfortably be learned each day. One effective way to learn the words and phrases in the list is to write them on small cards with a first language translation on the other side. These are then carried in bundles of fifty or so and are looked through whenever there is a spare moment. First, the learner looks at each foreign word and phrase and tries to recall the translation, looking on the back of the card to see if the recall is correct. When this is easily done for a bundle, then the first language items are looked at while trying to recall the foreign word or phrase.

Some care needs to be taken in grouping the items to be learned. Opposites like exit/entrance, men/women, far/near, left/right should not be learned together. This means that one of the items, say exit, should be learned first. When this has been learned satisfactorily the other item in the pair, entrance, can be studied. Similarly, words that are free associates or synonyms should not be learned together. Possible free associates in the Survival Syllabus include bus/train, names of foods, numbers, today/tomorrow, street/town. This means it is more efficient to learn the numbers, for example, one by one and to group them in a series after they have been learned.

Principle: Learn forms for meanings rather than meanings for forms

A basic principle behind all learning is that the quantity of learning depends on the quality of mental activity in the brain at the moment that learning occurs. This means that the more thoughtful and deep the learning activity, the faster and more secure the learning will be. The technique of using cards is one way of making learning deep because it encourages the learner to make an effort to recall the translation equivalent of each item. Another way to do this is to use the keyword technique or some variation of it. The research supporting these suggestions is reviewed in Nation (1982 and 1990). In learning words and phrases it is particularly important to focus on meaning and visualise it in some way. Say the form as you do this. For example you may be learning how to say "too expensive". Imagine yourself in a market holding a piece of local cloth, looking at the trader and wanting to pay less than the price suggested. With that image in your mind, say the words "too expensive".

Principle: Get as much practice as you can

Learning the items in the Survival Syllabus does not guarantee that they will be available for use. To develop fluency, practice is needed. The essential element of fluency practice is that the learner should focus on the meaning of the message as suggested above and that there should be several repetitions of the activity.

It is particularly important that numbers can be dealt with fluently. Number dictation, where a speaker says a number and the learner writes it in figures rather than words, is an effective activity. This should be done many times and with increasing speed.

When a traveller arrives in the country there will of course be further and more meaningful opportunities for practice. The more practice there is beforehand however,

the faster the learning can be put to use.

SOME FINAL COMMENTS

This syllabus is reductionist in nature. Communication, even initial communication is a complex phenomenon and the syllabus, like all content-based syllabuses, reduces that to a set of discrete items. Based on experience, however, we believe that by learning these discrete items, a traveller will be able to enter the complexity of initial communicative contact and have a sound starting point for further language learning if desired.

The syllabus is clearly oriented towards production. A traveller needs to maintain the initiative in communication and has little chance of playing a responding role in any extensive communication.

The main criteria of need should make the meanings in the syllabus applicable to all travellers, no matter what language is involved, although the specific items chosen would need fine-tuning for each language according to the other criteria. The phrases and words chosen are resources used in English to get a meaning across. Other languages may use different means. For example "Excuse me" to get attention may in some languages simply require an honorific such as the equivalents of "Sir" or "Madam". For this reason, any translation of the syllabus into other languages should work from the functional meanings of the expressions and not the literal meanings.

Finally the authors would be interested to hear from anyone who tries out this list of resources in a new language experience.

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