How to Improve Your Foreign Language IMMEDIATELY

Foreign Language Communication Tools

Boris Shekhtman

MSI Press Info
1760-F Airline Highway, PMB 203
Hollister, CA 95023

Library of Congress Control Number 2021930044

Fourth edition

ISBN 9781950328871

cover design by Carl Leaver
back cover photograph by Suzanne Keating
Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Some Words about Boris Shekhtman and This Book

I met the late Boris Shekhtman when I became the Russian Language Training Supervisor at the U. S. Department of State's Foreign Service Institute.(FSI) He had been enjoying remarkable success as a Russian language instructor of diplomats—they glued themselves to him as one would to a prophet. And perhaps he was sort of a language prophet. He earned teaching awards and established and taught an immensely successful advanced language course. He did not fit into the mainstream of language teachers, though. His methods were his own—no labels for them that fit with current thought. Today, one might point them out as transformative, and the advance course structure did give rise to what today is called Open Architecture Curriculum Design. His approaches and techniques in the 1980s are only now, 40 years later, entering the consciousness of the mainstream of L2 education—and still at the cutting edge of it. Still, back in the 1980s, they poked up through the mass of standard approaches, thanks to his success at getting students to very high levels or proficiency nearly without fail and the formation of a growing cadre of devoted students. He earned FSI's highest teaching award.

After leaving FSI, he ran a private school for year 5. Struggling diplomats showed up on his doorstep, hoping to be able to reach proficiency levels that seemed out of reach—and they did. Stellar journalists with household names from *The New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, who filled his classrooms, sang his praises—in writing in their publications.

Other government students also blossomed under his touch. He assisted faculty and administrators at the Defense

Language Institute Foreign Language Center, the US Institute for Peace, and other federal institutions.

He also co-founded the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers and developed materials for teaching learners to reach the near-native level. His publications with MSI Press LLC, Villa Magna, LLC, and Cambridge University Press have informed many teachers and many students.

The book in your hand has been held in some version or another by thousands of students who swear by it. I have used it myself in assisting ministries of education and schools in more than a dozen countries. They have become fans.

Now, it is your turn! May you have much success in language learning—and if you do, go out and share that information so others may also benefit.

Betty Lou Leaver, Ph.D.
Provost, retired, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center
Former Russian Language Training Supervisor, Forein Service Institute
Former Language Program Coordinator, NASA

To the Reader from the Author

The book which you, dear reader, have picked up was written approximately twenty years ago. However, the reasons that brought it to the light of day then remain as important today as ever. The first of these reasons is the survival of foreigners who are living entirely surrounded by native speakers of the foreign language. I came to the United States with a decent level of English, but, naturally, I did not feel myself to be on a par with Americans. I am certain that a great many people are suffering and have suffered from this feeling of "linguistic inferiority." Some people come to accept this feeling. Others try to improve their foreign language. Still others--and I belong to this group--try to find a set of strategies to help them to use the language that they have acquired more effectively. Back then I had already begun to realize the strategic significance of simplifying thoughts in order to be understood; after all, it is better to express a thought simply than not to express it at all or to express something that the native speaker either cannot understand at all or perceives as nonsense.

The next step forward in the development of a system of strategies for using a foreign language came at the time of my teaching at the Foreign Service Institute of the U. S. Department of State. Students enrolled at this institution take a test at the end of their course of study, the results of which have a strong impact on their career. This is when I noticed that students who intuitively possess good strategic competence do better on the test than those who do not even if their level of knowledge of the language is practically the same. So, it was then that I developed my system of commnunicative rules and began to teach them to my students. The results were aston-

ishing. Using military terms, the weapon of the student taking the test with no knowledge of communicative strategies was equivalent to a bow and arrow, whereas the weapon of the student who had at his or her command a set of strategic rules was a missile. The students simply went crazy over these rules, as they understood these rules to help them in the best sense to show what they knew of the language.

There was something else that had a strong impact on my desire to write this book. I came to the United States from the Soviet Union. At the time, the U.S.S.R. had a planned economy, which completely subverted the market processes. In the country where I lived for almost forty years, the prices of goods were fixed by the government. So goods there, for all practical purposes, were not sold but given out or distributed, but suddenly, here in America, exposed to the nature of a free market, I saw for the first time that the essence of a normal economy is that everything is for sale, that everything can be considered a good. I also understood what the essence of the sale of any good was. The essence is that the seller always shows the attractive aspects of his goods and does not highlight the negatives. Whether one is selling an insurance policy or a book, a car or a house, a legal ruling or a political program and whether a real estate agent or the president of the country is doing the selling, the sales approach is always the same: talk up the positive attributes as much as possible and downplay the negative ones as much as possible. Likewise, speech is your good, which you sell through the process of communication. Sell it right. Show its positive sides, not its negative ones. It is precisely this that the strategic rules of communication will help you to execute.

Nonetheless, the fact that this book was written many years ago makes it a little outdated. During this time, the system of strategic rules for the effective use of a foreign language that are described in this book became more developed and solidified. The strategic rules were codified in accordance with the type of communication; their significance was shown in relation to the aggregate of forms and content; their dependency on proficiency level was examined; and, most important, the possibility of using these rules as a teaching method was demonstrated.[1] Indeed, the rules described in this book can be of considerable assistance both to students studying a foreign language and to teachers teaching it.[2]

The Role of Communicative Rules in Teaching and Learning Languages

In learning and teaching second and foreign languages, teachers and students have a number of resources at their fingertips to work with both the "top-down" and "bottom-up" aspects of language acquisition. Textbooks and reference grammars provide us with grammar rules. These are very useful in understanding how the language works and in helping us to make our communication literate. Some textbooks, along with conversation guides and the like, provide us with scripts for generating various kinds of speech acts in various topical domains. We have the weather forecast script, the political meetings-andgreetings script, the professional reception script, the business meeting script, and so on and so forth. A very few textbooks (and then only at high levels of proficiency and only in some languages) provide us with the outlines for discourse structures for various kinds of genres: chit-chat, formal presentations on scientific topics, the narration of anecdotes, the preparation of a piece of literature (in one of many possible genres), news reports (written and oral), and so on. Each of these resources does one of two things: (1) it provides an overall structure (macro) level or (2) it provides the pieces that fit into the structure (micro level).

What current resources fail to provide, however, is set of guidelines that learners can use to control their language use. The word, *control,* here is very important because, in general, current resources control the speaker, not the other way around. Thus, a structure at the micro level gives students a format to use; it is, however, generally quite inflexible: students fits their output to the structure, not to the speaking situation or environment in which they finds themselves. Likewise, structures

at the micro level give students forms to use; they, too, are inflexible: in general, they are either right or wrong, and students piece them together syntactically either correctly and are understood or incorrectly and are not understood. Both formats and forms are language-specific.

Communication rules, however, are quite generic by nature. They transcend the linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of language. They are not languagespecific. They are mechanisms for putting students in control of information flow, of idea exchange, of negotiation, and of any other communicative function, regardless of the language being spoken. They subordinate linguistic performance to social performance and sociolinguistic knowledge to psycholinguistic legerdemain.

Legerdemain, indeed, is an appropriate word because to many these rules of communication seem like magic. And, if it is magic to control one's environment, then it would be hard to argue otherwise.

In essence, though, these rules of communication are just what they are labeled. Analysis of social performance through speech reveals the keys (rules) to being in control of a conversation.

There are many positive aspects to having such tools at one's ready and being able to use them well. First, they allow one to enter into a conversation with a native speaker and successfully stay in that conversation by regulating the conversation in such a way that it remains on a proficiency level that is both manageable by the student and comfortable for the native speaker. Second, it allows a student to accomplish his or her goal in entering into the communication, whether that be to impart information, negotiate a deal, or impress an audience with a brilliant presentation. Third, they allow speakers of a foreign language to use that language to their advantage, not disadvantage. These, of course, are only some of the positive aspects of learning to use communication tools. Other advantages are identified within the various chapters of this book.

It is very popular nowadays to talk about learning strategies. It is only slightly less common to teach learning strategies. Rules of communication are strategies, and they form an important part of a student's strategic competence. Individual learning strategies, however, are generally limited, and it is the choice of the right strategy or combination of strategies at a particular mo-

ment that predicates whether or not a student will be successful in learning or using a bit of language. Communication tools go beyond learning strategies; they are not strategies for learning but for organizing, fostering, controlling, and learning from whole communications. While they can be taught and practiced in the classroom, they go far beyond it and allow the student to live, work, and play successfully in the foreign-language environment.

The question, then, is for whom are such tools intended? The answer is very simple: for everyone. Teachers successfully taught these tools to students at every level of foreign-language proficiency from raw beginner to near-native speaker. They have seen students change from being tongue-tied and incoherent to impressive language users without an additional day of foreign language study. As Natalia Lord (see Chapter Notes at the end of this volume) points out, these rules make any communication more effective, even in one's native language, although, of course, they were intended for the foreign-language student trying not only to survive but also to accomplish a variety of goals in communications with native speakers.

The toolbox presented here and the instructions for the use of each tool have no parallel in the second language literature. Whether you are a teacher or a student, take time to learn how to use each of these tools. You will not regret it; it will be some of the best-spent time you will ever have in teaching and learning a foreign language.

What Are Communication Tools?

For any person who comes to a foreign country, the challenge of communicating with the inhabitants of that country is of the utmost importance. Without any doubt, the effectiveness of this communication depends first and foremost on the level of the arrivee's language. The better the command of the foreign language, the more fluid the speech will be; the greater the knowledge of grammar, the richer the vocabulary will be; the more fluid the speech and the richer the vocabulary, the easier the process of communication with the native speaker will be. In other words, the degree of the foreigner's knowledge of the language determines the nature and success of the communication process between the foreigner and the native speaker. The knowledge of the language of the host country is the primary foundation upon which the quality of language communication depends.

Essentials for Knowing a Foreign Language

What is necessary for an individual to know a foreign language? Naturally, either one must be taught this foreign language by someone else, or one must learn it independently. Most frequently, we see a combination of both of these processes. A student studies at school, or at an university, or in a special language course; the student studies a series of textbooks, memorizes many rules, completes a certain number of exercises, participates in different colloquial situations, writes, reads, translates, listens to foreign radio, studies independently, shows interest in the culture of the target language, and so on—in effect, *the student acquires the foreign language.*

Definition of Communication Rules

Yet everything discussed above—the acquisition of the language, the knowledge of the language—have nothing to do with communication tools.

> *Communication tools are the combination of skills which allow a speaker to use most effectively the level of foreign language in his or her command.*

To make this definition more clear, let us imagine two groups of students with the same level of knowledge of foreign language. Let us imagine also that these students have come to the host country and are capable of observing the quality of their communication with native speakers. We do not have to have any great imagination to know that the members of the two groups will be quite different one from another and in striking ways. Everyone has seen representatives of each of these groups. So, let's see what happens with these two groups when they are "in action."

Group #1

These students communicate with the inhabitants of the host country only with great difficulty. They cannot maintain a conversation. They answer questions very abruptly. They are afraid of making mistakes. They await the next question from their counterpart with fear. In the process of speaking, they think extensively in their native language. Even worse, when they speak, they translate from their native language to the foreign language. They cannot find the necessary words quickly. In brief, they create an anti-communicative atmosphere with their counterpart and, as a result, conversation stops.

Group #2

Students in the second group have the same level of knowledge as students in group #1. However, they conduct their conversations much better and more effectively. They are able to maintain conversations even if they do not know all the words or even fully understand the all the content. They answer questions smoothly and at some length—as in a conversation in their own language, creating comfort for their interlocutor. They make mistakes, but they keep on going; they are not

afraid of "being wrong." They look forward to the next question from their counterpart, often setting up the conversation so that the next question will be one that they can, for sure, handle. In the process of speaking, they seem to think in the foreign language; at least, language spills out of them seemingly effortlessly. They clearly are not translating from their native language because they use expressions and discourse that are particular to the foreign language. The words they need always seem to be at their command. As a result, they create a communicatively interesting and comfortable environment with their counterpart, and, as a result, conversation flows unabated.

What is the reason for this difference? The second group of students intentionally or intuitively use some communication tools—tools which this book describes.

What Communication Tools *Do*

In connection with my language school for journalists and business executives, I have worked with adults who have been highly motivated to succeed at learning a language for the practical purpose of communication, rather than for the acquisition of academic credit. I developed the communication tools discussed in this book in response to the desire to help my students succeed with whatever amount of language training their circumstances permitted. It is clear, of course, that I could not, with sometimes only a few weeks or months of work, improve the objective level of a student's language. But what I really achieved was to provide them with tools which would enable them to exhibit their level of knowledge most effectively and noticeably. By using these tools, students could make the most positive impression of themselves, or, as one might say, "sell themselves" for a greater profit.

We can also explain the success of these tools by the fact that, unlike an academic grade, which places much emphasis on theoretical knowledge, our objective has been to give the student the practical ability to communicate in the host country.

> *The communication tools presented in this book are precisely those strategies that enable the student to use the foreign language as an instrument of communication.*

Where Communication Tools Came From

Additional enhancements to these strategies (communication tools) came from the students themselves. A number of outstanding, journalists have completed our programs. These include journalists from the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, *Time Magazine*, National Public Radio, and ABC, as well as freelancers. These journalists helped me to refine and improve these communication tools by exposing *me* to *their* common devices. In their daily work— conducting interviews and writing columns and reports—journalists regularly use techniques that give them effective results and more interesting material. Therefore, I felt that, when compared to many of my other students, the journalists quite easily learned how to use communication tools and employed them with great success.

Communication Tools in Action

During the meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev in Washington in December 1987, Michael Putzel, who came back from Moscow for several days to cover the event, called me. He spoke to me in Russian very fluently and easily, and I told him that the level of his language had increased significantly during the three months he had spent in Moscow. I will never forget his reaction: "Listen, Boris, this is only because now I am using our communication tools." And we burst into laughter together.

At this moment, he and I recalled his first meeting with Ita Janovna. Ita Janovna is a dear and kind old woman, my dedicated friend, who immigrated from the Soviet Union ten years ago but still knows no English. Without realizing it, she has often helped me to teach my students to use communication tools. I would warn a student that the next day he or she would meet with a native Russian-speaker and that his or her assignment, although his or her level of the language was still very low, was to manage normal communication with this person at the meeting. Michael's meeting with Ita Janovna went terribly; it was a complete catastrophe. He forgot all of the communicative tools, uttered unintelligible phrases and sentences, and absolutely could not understand anything Ita Janovna said. She even questioned my judgment in arranging the meeting.

"This American cannot speak Russian at all," she said.

I was furious. "Why didn't you use your communication tools?" I asked Michael.

Michael responded with the most typical argument against communication tools, "Because I didn't want to trick her. Why should I make her think that I know the language better than I really do?"

"For two reasons," I answered. "The first one is that, if you had used them, you could have *talked* with her. You could have had a normal conversation with her, and it would have been nice for you and for her. The second one is that only by using our communicative tools would you have shown her your real language level."

The next day I asked Ita Janovna to come once again to the class to meet with Mike. She was very surprised, but she came. This time, Mike was simply magnificent. He used our tools with such art that Ita Janovna was amazed.

"How could he have improved his language to such an extent in one day?" she asked me. "He speaks very well. Did he pretend ignorance yesterday?"

Michael was very satisfied with himself, and I was once more convinced of the tremendous role that communication tools play in the organization of the process of communication.

Tool #1
Show Your Stuff

When a native speaker asks you a question, give the most verbose answer possible. The question asked by a native speaker is an invitation for communication. Take advantage of this invitation to display all of your foreign language knowledge to its best advantage: be a "show-off." That is what tool #1, showing your stuff, is all about.

Short, simple answers hinder conversation because they very quickly transform *communication* into *interrogation*, making both the foreigner and native speaker feel awkward. There are other difficulties for both the foreign student and the native speaker that come from this unnatural type of verbal exchange.

1. When the native speaker becomes an "interrogator," the foreigner experiences a sharply increased "language load," i.e. the amount of language which the native speaker addresses to a student increases exponentially. This is a vicious circle: The more a student manifests passivity (keeps silence), the more active the native speaker has to become in order to keep up the communication and the ever more difficult it becomes for the student to communicate for he understands the native speaker less and less and, therefore, becomes more and more passive.
2. When one question follows another, the native speaker ends up being in complete control of the conversation— and there is no longer a real conversation because a conversation requires equal partners.

3. Being fully responsible for control of the conversation makes the native speaker feel tense; he or she senses that the communicative process is ineffective, strained, and unnatural—and rarely knows what to do about it.

What is the result of these difficulties?

- The native speaker feels that the foreigner does not know enough language for normal communication; and
- the foreigner perceives that it is very difficult to satisfy his or her companion.

Both parties want to escape from this unpleasant predicament. Therefore, either the communication quickly comes to a stop or it reverts to the language of the foreigner. Quite frequently this occurs if the language of the foreigner is English (the most commonly studied "second language") because it offers the native speaker, who more often than not has studied English, an opportunity to practice it.

How to Show Your Stuff

So, how can we put this tool, showing your stuff, into practice? The answer is to "link" one piece of information to another, going from subject to subject, each time "hooking" onto a new, yet related issue. For example, the sentence "I live in Brooklyn" may be expanded by the student in three ways.

(1) First of all, the student must say a handful of sentences about himself. "My name is Ivan. I was born in Moscow. I am an engineer. Now I work in a large company."

(2) The student then can develop the next element of the sentence "live" and speak about living in different places, e.g. "I like to live in New York. I like the climate here. This is a very big city and I like to live in big cities. There is more to do in a city than in a small town. In Russia I lived in a small town and I did not like the life there."

(3) Next comes "Brooklyn" itself. "I live in New York, in Brooklyn. Brooklyn is a part of New York. I live near

the beach. There are many Jews from Russia who live in Brooklyn. There are many good Russian and Georgian restaurants in Brooklyn."

In other words, the student must look at all of the components of that first simple sentence as the start of expansions. The expansions need to utilize the vocabulary and structural models that the student has already mastered.As we see, the student so far does not leave the original sentence as far as his focus is concerned.

The student may also develop a "chain reaction" and expand away from the original topic of the sentence. This exercise is similar to the previous one except that in this case, the expansions lead the student away from the original topic sentence. The student may mention another city when speaking of Brooklyn and then mention a family member or friend who lives there. From that sentence the student begins to describe this friend and forgets all about Brooklyn. From the description of his friend, he may mention the place where the friend works. This introduces still another topic in this chain reaction.

Using Tool #1

Let me give an example of "showing your stuff" as a communicative tool. (All of the examples given in this book assume the following scenario: The foreigner is invited to the home of a native speaker for dinner. The native speaker introduces the foreigner to a friend, who beings to talk to him or her. The native speaker is identified in the dialogue as "N," the foreigner as "F.")

N: How do you do?

F: How do you do?

N: I hear that you are an American.

F: Yes, I am an American. I live in Philadelphia. It is a very large American city. It is located on the East Coast of the United States between New York and Washington. I came to Moscow only two days ago, but I have already seen the Kremlin and Red Square. Moscow is a beautiful city.

N: How do you know Boris Vladimirovich?

F: Oh, I have known him for many years. I first met him in Washington. He was studying at the University. He was 20, and I was 21. We have been friends ever since then. We correspond regularly. He is a very good engineer; I am an engineer, too.

This type of "wordy" answer accomplishes a lot:

(1) it creates a communicative atmosphere;

(2) it attracts the interest of the native speaker;

(3) it reduces the amount of difficult language directed to the foreigner;

(4) it limits the language initiative of the native speaker;

(5) it sets a natural tone for the conversation; and

(6) it makes the participants in the conversation equal.

Note that in the above example, I illustrated a foreigner whose language was not on a very high level; his language was simple and sometimes primitive. I did this intentionally to underscore the fact that this tool can be used to enhance *any* level of language.

Exercises to Develop Tool #1

I'd like to share with you examples of exercises which have been used in classes in order to improve a student's ability to sell himself or herself to a native speaker, i.e. to show his or her stuff. Such exercises take place in groups of two or three students, but it is quite possible to use them individually (i.e., without an instructor) or in larger groups of students.

Before describing some of these exercises, I would like to make one further remark. When I talk about a student's "mistake," I am referring not to just any lexical, grammatical or syntactic error, but to a communicative error. A communicative mistake is an error of word choice, grammar, or syntax that prevents the hearer from understanding what the speaker intends to convey. A grammatical, syntactical, or lexical mistake which does *not* interfere with what the speaker intends to convey is not a communicative mistake. Of course, in all of these exercises grammatical mistakes, rather than communicative mistakes, can serve as targets for error correction.

The One-Minute Exercise

The first exercise is called "The One-Minute Exercise." At the beginning of the exercises, the leader defines the opening topic of the conversation, from which the dialogue can digress naturally into a free association discussion. All the participants in the exercise are allowed to speak for only a limited time. The limit can be one, two, or five minutes, depending on the proficiency level of the participants. The turn, or transfer of control of the conversation from one participant to another, is made by the use of such questions as:

- "What is your opinion about this issue?"
- "Do you agree with me?"
- "What do you think?"

The leader carefully controls both the time allocation and the transitional rule. If one participant speaks past the designated time, the leader signals him or her. I, for example, hold up a small sign resembling a red stoplight. Upon receiving such a signal from me, the participant must not simply interrupt the conversation but rather effect a smooth transition to another speaker, *using the rule.*

The One-Minute Exercise is useful for a number of reasons:

- It provides the participant with the ability to survive for a fixed period without making communicative mistakes. (If the speaker *does* make such a mistake, the leader immediately transfers control of the conversation to another participant; this is the only time the leader will interrupt and assume direct control.)
- It provides a foreigner with the skills necessary to survive in a *group communication environment*; usually the foreign speakers have been trained only to handle dialogue between two speakers but become confused when confronted with group discussions among native speakers.
- Group discussion in any language requires transitional devices for getting and relinquishing control of the speaking role.

- The ability to *yield* control of a conversation at will provides the foreigner with a graceful and controlled method of taking a break when he or she has exhausted the available language.

The Do Not Stop Exercise

In contrast to the One Minute Exercise, the Do not Stop Exercise creates competition among its participants to retain control of a conversation and speak for a long time. The leader gives a question to one of the participants, who must provide an answer which is as long as possible. The longer the answer a participant provides, the longer he or she can talk. If a participant stops or makes a short pause, the leader immediately stops listening to the speaker and turns his or her attention to another participant, asking a question to trigger that person's as-long-as-possible response. The participant who manages to give the longest answer is the winner. A communicative mistake in the process of an answer counts as a pause and thus interrupts this participant's speech. The number of pauses and communicative mistakes which influence the transfer of speech can be adjusted to suit the level of the students. Analysis of communicative mistakes made can be done at the end of the exercise.

The purpose of the Do Not Stop Exercise is to develop strategies for taking and maintaining control of a conversation. Such strategies are useful to language learners for several reasons:

- They allow learners to prevent the situation in which they find themselves being "interrogated" by a native speaker.
- They allow learners to escape from "interrogations" if they find themselves in such situations.
- Controlling a conversation allows students to talk about what they *can* talk about and avoid discussions on topics for which they have neither grammar nor vocabulary to manage.

The Develop It Exercise

In the Develop It Exercise, the leader provides the speaker with only one sentence, such as, "Yesterday I was at a restaurant," which can be developed into a story that can continue for either a limited or unlimited amount of time (as set by the rules), depending on the number of mistakes that are allowed by the rules in force. This exercise uses the time and error limits found in the two previous exercises but adds the new dimension of challenging the student to develop the topic.

The purpose of the Develop It Exercises is to develop strategies for controlling the length and content of a conversation. Such strategies are useful for the following reasons:

- They allow students to hang onto the rudder of the language, i.e. the length of the monologue depends on the student's will.
- They provide students with the opportunity to review language they already know.
- They serve as an opportunity for self-drill.

The use of this tool alone—showing your stuff to its fullest—can sharply increase the impression made by a foreigner's language.

An Example of Show Your Stuff in Action

The story of a student referred by a much-respected colleague of mine provides a good example. My colleague's evaluation of Amy's Russian, acquired in college courses, was very low, a 1+ (intermediate level, or someone who can handle some every day language but does not have enough skill to do much of any work that requires the use of the language). When Amy came to me, I decided that before evaluating her level myself, I would provide her with the show-your-stuff strategy and ask her to use it. After being taught how to use this tool, the language she produced for me was significantly higher. Most important, the level at which she was able to communicate, using the show-your-stuff tool, *was probably her **real** level*. She just hadn't known how to show her stuff!

Tool #2
Build up Your Islands

Native speakers speak readily, without any seeming effort. Their speech is natural and spontaneous; it is real, not artificial. Speaking one's native language is like walking. One does not think about *how* to use gross motor muscles; one simply walks. Speaking in a foreign language is not like this. It is, in fact, more like swimming. Foreign-language speakers have been thrown from their natural environemnt, pushed off their "land," so to speak, into an unfamiliar language environment, as if it were a large body of water. They know very well that if they stop swimming, they will drown immediately. Unfortunately, drowning occurs all too often. After a long period of swimming, swimmers, overcome by fatigue, lose their strength and efficiency. Then, in panic, they waste their remaining energy. This is immediately seen in long-duration conversations with native speakers: the foreigner, under the stress of communicating in an unnatural environment, experiences an increase in errors and a decrease in speed and confidence in speaking.

Both the swimmer and the foreign-language speaker elicit sympathy. If only each could find a small island upon which to rest and recoup before assaying forth once again! They can, of course. In speech, such an island would be a small, but very well memorized, much practiced, or frequently used monologue. The more such monologues the speaker knows, the more places of rest are available when the need arises and the easier it is for the speaker to speak, or "swim."

Such islands are not unique hide-outs, or tools, for foreign-language students. Most people have a number of these kinds of memorized oral texts (or islands) at their fingertips in their own language. When they speak about the topics of

these texts, they sound particularly effective and articulate. In some cases, these are stories and anecdotes that, as a result of much re-telling, have become polished. Often, these "speeches" can be examined and from them can be identified formulas for expressing a specific position or explaining a concept about which the speaker has thought and spoken often. These can also be formal speeches, lectures, and "opening lines." The use of such islands helps native speakers express themselves more precisely and eloquently, without ever once thinking about the forms they are using or the discourse formats that they need.

Is it possible to gain the same advantage in a foreign language that islands give in one's native language? The answer to that question is that it is not only possible, it is imperative for foreign-language speakers to develop islands. For them, islands can be a salvation. By using islands, foreign-language speakers can improve the quality of their communication and the kind of contact they have with their interlocutors. By using islands, they can give themselves a rest break any time they want without breaking down the communication but rather improving it. By using islands, they gain the attention of the native speaker as someone with whom they can communication. In my experience, the confidence of the foreigner in speaking situations varies directly with the quantity of islands within his or her control. It is impossible to overemphasize the communicative value or siginificant role that islands play in interactive communication.

There are two reasons that islands have communicative value:

(1) They give the speaker the ability to shift quickly into fast and confident speech.

(2) They supply a variety of grammatical patterns for successful application to different contexts and situations.

Let's look at islands in practice. If, for example, an island contains the sentence, "*politics* play an important role in *society*," this sentence provides the foreigner with both an example of a basic grammatical rule and with a model that can be used in a different situation–such as "*sports* play an important role in *my family*." The most powerful use of a sentence pattern is not as a conduit for specific content, but as a "template" for use

in situations where communication is of a parallel type. For example, a speaker can recycle the model, "this is one of my favorite books," as "Paris is one of my favorite cities." This use of islands takes some refinement, typically required by classroom exercises and repetitive practice. While this takes much work, the investment usually pays off well.

Moreover, some islands can be used intact in comparable but different situations. Let us look at one such island:

> *American-Soviet diplomatic relations were established on October 16, 1933, during the period of Stalin and Roosevelt. Before establishing formal relations, there were unofficial trade, economic, scientific, cultural, and athletic relationships between the two countries. From the point of view of the Soviet Union, Franklin Roosevelt established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union for three reasons: The first reason was the economic crisis in the United States, which forced the United States to search for new markets; the second reason was the stability of the Soviet regime; and the third, the military threat from Japan.*

Note that, with minimal substitutions, this particular island can be used to describe American diplomatic relations with any number of countries.

Linking

At the same time, the literal use of an island's well-memorized text to convey its content (in contrast to using it as a model for grammatical form) is also very important, especially in a situation where communication has become strained and it is necessary to provide a stimulus to restore communication. Because the technique of using islands to re-energize a conversation is not as easy as it may seem, let me recommend several approaches to assist the speaker. The first is a device described previously (in **Show Your Stuff**), called **"linking,"** in which the speaker links one piece of information to another, moving from subject to subject, each time "hooking" onto a new, yet related issue. By combining several repetitions of this device, linking several topics in sequence, the speaker can build a se-

ries of "stepping stones" to serve as a bridge through the shallow water approaching the island. If, for example, the speaker has a very good island on American literature and at the moment the conversation is about helicopters, about which the speaker cannot speak comfortably in the foreign language (and perhaps not even in his or her native language!), the speaker can, with the help of the linking device, get to the island. The process can follow this pattern:

N: You know, I am fond of helicopters. First of all, I read a lot about them as a child. Then, when I served in the Air Force, I flew them. Have you ever flown in a helicopter?

F: Unfortunately, not. I've only flown in airplanes, and only as a passenger. But I can understand how it must feel to be involved with flying. I've read a lot of books about the aviation industry, for example, Arthur Hailey's Airport. Many American writers now provide background on some subject areas – hotels, flying, and so on. I find that I can learn much about American culture by reading American fiction. I think that now **literature plays an important role in society.** [Note that this is the beginning of the speaker's island, which he or she has reached by using a series of links.]

Baiting

We might call the next device **"bait"** for catching the native speaker. This device is especially important when the conversation has come to a complete standstill. Perhaps the foreigner is absolutely unable to understand what has been said or to answer the question asked, or perhaps the native speaker simply does not know what to say next or what to do with the foreigner. This is the moment for the "baiting" device. Baiting consists of several elements:

(1) The foreigner gives a question to the native speaker which corresponds to the topic of a prepared island;

(2) The native speaker, obviously, must answer the question;

(3) After finishing the answer, the native speaker provides the foreigner with an opportunity to use the island, which is ready for delivery.

Here is an example:

F: [*After an uncomfortably long period of silence*] Do you like music?

N: I like classical music, but have trouble understanding some of the newer popular music. What do you think about this loud stuff? [*The foreigner has "hooked" the native speaker with the bait. Regardless of the native speaker's response, the foreigner can use the island.*]

F: I do not like this music, either. My favorite kind of music is folk music. Folk music is international. Every ethic group has its own folk music. The form is both universal and unique to each culture. I try to learn the folk music of each region I visit. I especially like American country music … [*And the foreigner continues with the island.*]

Control of the Island

The foreigner's command of the island is extremely important. Lack of mastery of the island will result in an unwillingness to use it. There is a direct correlation between the degree of control a speaker has of an island, and his or her ability and inclination to use it. If the speaker does not have complete control of an island, the stress and pressure created by the situation requiring the use of the island will compound the speaker's lack of confidence in executing the island, resulting in communicative paralysis. There is no difference between having a poorly-prepared island and no island at all: in each case, the speaker will not have an island available when it is needed. Only an absolutely automated "computerized" island which has been drilled into the native speaker to the point of becoming like a reflex, can get the foreigner through the pressure of the communicative environment with a native speaker.

Here are some specific rules which can help the instructor and the student in memorizing islands:

- **Each island must be very small.** Short, specific, "modular" islands are easier for the student to

memorize and can be combined flexibly with one another as necessary.

- **The student has to perceive the practical need for each island.** It is difficult for a student to memorize something for which he or she can envision no practical application.
- **The student should participate in constructing an island.** The topics and language of islands must reflect the student's style and personality to assist the student in mastering the island.
- **Use a variety of techniques memorizing each island.** The student must train through different techniques (questions/ answers, grammar pattern drills, repetition, retelling, substitution, singing) so that a variety of stimuli might trigger the speaker's memory.
- **Repeat each island as many times as possible.** The process of memorization, particularly for the adult learner, requires repetition over a period of time and in a variety of contexts. The ability to recite an island must become a form of reflex for the speaker.

Categories of Islands

There are two distinct categories of islands. The first deals with an individual's personal background and information, while the second provides information on less personal topics.

Personal Islands

Suggested topics for "personal" islands include:

- About Myself
- My Family
- My Friend
- My Day
- My House
- At Work
- My Supervisor

- My Favorite Book
- My Favorite Author
- My Favorite Opera
- My Favorite Movie
- My Last Vacation
- My Hobby
- My Favorite Season

Non-Personal Islands

Topics in the second category usually relate to the country visited or the homeland of the native speaker. For instance, if the foreigner were visiting Russian, appropriate islands might include:

- American-Soviet Relations;
- Geographical Situation of the U.S. and Russia;
- Political Systems of the U.S. and Russia;
- Economy of the U.S. and Russia;
- Youth of the U.S. and Russia;
- Science in the U.S. and Russia;
- Literature of the U.S. and Russia;
- Religion in the U.S. and Russia;
- Perestroika and Glasnost'; and
- Gorbachev

The use of islands is essential to the success of all of the other tools available; this will become more and more clear as you progress further through this book. But even now, it should be obvious that the more islands a speaker possesses, the more effectively he or she can "show his or her stuff."

Tool #3
Shift Gears

It is quite likely that during the normal course of conversation with a native speaker, the discussion will progress to a topic which is either unfamiliar to the foreigner or for which he or she lacks adequate vocabulary or grammar. This occurrence threatens the continuity of the communication. This danger becomes particularly serious if a foreigner, despite inadequate knowledge or language, nevertheless tries to express what he or she is not capable of expressing. The scenario can become quite humorous: the foreigner does not know how to express the desired thought while the native speaker does not know what the foreigner wants to say and thus does not know how to help out. The foreigner resembles a beached fish that suddenly finds itself cast up onto dry land, out of its natural habitat. The foreigner's mouth opens and closes, without making any sound, or produces sounds that do not resemble language. Sometimes, the foreigner makes rapid and wild gestures, which serve not to clarify the communication but to add significantly to the humor of the moment. The native speaker politely observes the foreigner and patiently waits for his or her agony to run its course. The most interesting element of the entire spectacle is that the foreigner could have escaped from the situation at any point, but instead, the more he or she struggled, the more he or she entrapped himself or herself in this uncomfortable situation.

Escaping From an Uncomfortable Situation

"Shift gears" is a tool that is especially devised to allow a foreign speaker to escape from those uncomfortable situations which can result from an inability to conduct a conversation

on a particular topic. There are two distinct variations of this tool. The first consists of expressions and statements which help the foreigner to escape from the situation in a frank and direct fashion. For example, the foreigner can say: "Excuse me, this is a difficult topic for me. Let's talk about something else" or "You know, my language is quite weak. I do not think I have enough vocabulary to talk about this. Let's discuss something simpler." At least, when the foreigner uses this part of the tool he or she avoids the trap described above. The communication will likely continue on a different topic, usually the one suggested by the foreigner, thus easing the process for him or her and allowing him or her to maintain control.

There are, however, two distinct negative aspects to this approach. First, it places the foreigner in a subordinate, secondary, inferior role in the conversation; it changes the relationship of the conversant from two people trying to share ideas to two people trying to find a way to communicate. Second, from a psychological standpoint, particularly for certain personality types, it is difficult to admit an inability to express onself.

The second element of this tool avoids these pitfalls. It allows the foreigner to escape from the situation skillfully and inconspicuously.

Let us illustrate this second element with several examples:

Example 1

N: [*After listening attentively for several minutes to the foreigner's articulate description of his or her house in America and its large surrounding yard*] What kind of trees do you have in your yard?

F: [*Who does not know the name of even one tree in the target language*] Uh…what kind? Different kinds. Do you live in a house or an apartment?

The technique used here is that the foreigner:

1. Provides the smallest possible response to the question.
2. Poses a diversionary question.

By providing a very short response and a diversionary question, the foreigner evades the difficult topic without any

obvious abruptness, making the evasion more comfortable for the native speaker and less noticeable than do the direct statements described above as the first element of this tool. However, while the communication was not interrupted and the foreigner did not expose his or her ignorance, it was, nonetheless, not skillful: the native speaker is aware of the foreigner's abrupt change in topic and avoidance of the question.

Note a variation in the next example.

Example 2

N: [*As above, having listened to the description of the foreigner's home and yard*] What kind of trees do you have in your yard?

F: What kind? Oh, all different kinds. I really do not remember. To be perfectly honest with you, I'm not very interested in them. I prefer to spend my time indoors reading books. I have a lot of books in my house. I'm quite proud of my library. It's not a big room, but the walls are completely lined with books. I have many classical authors. Do you collect books?

In the above exchange, the foreigner has managed to shift the topic with the help of five procedures:

1. First, he or she "sidesteps" the topic both by staying with it: "What kind? Oh, all different kinds" and by expressing indifference: "I really do not remember. To be perfectly honest with you, I'm not very interested in them."
2. Next, he or she shifts from one topic to another by use of the transitional sentence: "I prefer to spend my time *indoors* reading books."
3. He then introduces the new topic: "I have a lot of books in my house."
4. He proceeds to develop it: "I'm quite proud of my library. It's not a big room, but the walls are completely lined with books. I have many classical authors."
5. Finally, he or she shifts the dialogue to the native speaker: "Do you collect books?"

Example 3

Let's examine yet another example.

N: What kind of trees do you have in your yard?

F: Different kinds. And what kind of trees do *you* like?

N: I like fruit trees.

F: What kind of fruit trees?

N: Oh, for example, I like apple, pear, plum trees…

F: What are your favorites among non-fruit trees?

N: Magnolia, oak, maple.

F: I have two maples in my yard, and one very large oak, and two apple trees.

In this example, the foreigner has used two separate mechanisms to conceal his or her lack of vocabulary and thus avoid interrupting the communication:

1. By posing a question which relates to the topic, the foreigner gains the terminology he or she needs: "What kind of fruit trees?", "What are your favorites among nonfruit trees?"
2. After getting this information, he or she carefully incorporates it in his or her answer. "I have two maples in my yard, and one very large oak, and two apple trees."

Of course, this technique can be risky because it assumes that the foreigner will comprehend and recognize the vocabulary when the native speaker uses it. It can be used successfully only when a foreign speaker has a moderate level of language and has been exposed to the terminology previously so that the use of the same words will prompt his or her recall. But even when used by a foreigner who cannot manage the information received from the native speaker, this technique has some value: it allows the foreigner to stay with the topic longer and to remain in control of the conversation. In such a case, the conversation might have proceeded in this fashion:

N: What kind of trees do you have in your yard?

F: Different kinds. And what kind of trees do you like?

N: I like fruit trees.

F: What kind of fruit trees?

N: Oh, for example, I like apple, pear, plum trees…

F: What are your favorites among non-fruit trees?

N: Magnolia, oak, maple.

F: To be perfectly honest with you, I'm not very interested in trees. I prefer to spend my time indoors reading books. I have a lot of books in my house. I'm quite proud of my library. It's not a big room, but the walls are completely lined with books. I have many classical authors. Do you collect books?

The foreigner can use **Shift Gears** to avoid difficult topics and prolong the discussion of familiar topics, but this is not its only benefit. It can also serve to lay a smooth foundation for the use of two other tools, **Show Your Stuff** and **Islands**. This latter benefit recommends **Shift Gears** as the most effective tool that a foreigner can use in achieving an active position in a conversation.

Tool #4
Simplify, Simplify

The foreigner can use **Shift Gears** to avoid difficult topics and prolong the discussion of familiar topics, but this is not its only benefit. It can also serve to lay a smooth foundation for the use of two other tools, **Show Your Stuff** and **Islands**. This latter benefit recommends **Shift Gears** as the most effective tool for a foreigner for achieving an active position in a conversation.

The tools introduced to this point can greatly facilitate communication, but are most useful in situations where the conversation might be termed "casual," one without serious implications—so-called "social" exchanges, the type often encountered at receptions, parties, and so on. In such situations, the foreigner's primary concern is maintaining the flow of the conversation and his or her counterpart's interest, rather than the content of the dialogue. In other words, these three tools, **Show Your Stuff, Islands,** and **Shift Gears**, are particularly effective in what we might describe as a "pretend" conversation, when the communication does not require serious purpose and substance, but rather fulfills a somewhat "ceremonial" function.

If we are talking about "real" communication, about the need to discuss or resolve an important element in a companion's questions, then these instruments are not enough, and we have to find additional tools. For example, what if the foreigner needs to express something difficult, but important? What should he or she do in this case? What if the foreigner must transmit to the listener a valuable thought that *must* be understood? Should he or she begin to show his or her stuff? to use his or her islands? to shift gears? Not only will none of these

help, but the use of any of them will impede his or her intention. The first goal of communication is to transmit information from one person to another. If we cannot do it successfully, why do we need conversation at all? Why do we need islands if we cannot swim? We need some tools to help us swim, to enable us to say what we really want to say.

What sort of tools can help a person to convey an essential thought in a foreign language, without the special vocabulary and/or grammar needed to do so? We can state the first of these in this way:

> *If it is difficult to express a certain thought or idea, do not delay the communication; immediately express it as simply as possible.*

Unfortunately, most foreign speakers, when they want to express a certain idea, first think in their native language and then try to translate into the target language. This process delays communication. But the delay in communication results not only from the foreigner's duplicate process of formulating the message – first in the native, then in the foreign language, but also because of a desire to present the idea in the target language as elegantly as he or she could in the native language. Unfortunately, this two-step process does not always take place quickly and successfully. And when it does not, when the foreigner feels that he or she cannot translate his or her thought from one language into another quickly enough, this is when he or she has to **simplify**. The goal of this tool is to substitute for the complex, intricate concept or thought a simple one, which conveys the same message.

Mechanisms for Simplifying

The mechanisms for simplifying actually consists of three levels of substitution:

1. Substitution of the sophisticated or technical word for the most simple, easy to use, and general word. For example, instead of "endow" or "dispense," use "give." For "tome" or "volume," use "book". For "inconspicuous", "not noticeable."
2. The substitution of simple sentence structure for compound sentence structure. "I am going to the

theater tonight, following dinner with old friends whom I have known for many years." Becomes "tonight I am going out to dinner. I am going with friends. I have known them a long time. After dinner, we will go to the theatre."

3. The substitution of complex grammatical structures with elementary grammatical structures. "The car was driven in a very careless manner by its angry driver" can become "The angry driver drove the car carelessly."

Let us examine several examples which illustrate the application of this tool. Try to identify how each of the three mechanisms is used.

Example 1.
What kind of apartment do you have?

Native Language Response:

My apartment is in a nine-story building with unique, classic architecture in the downtown area, close to the theater and nightclub district. The architectural details include enormous exterior columns and even gargoyles. Inside, the high ceilings, elaborate moldings, and arched windows result in an elegance which recalls a bygone era.

Simplified Response:

My apartment is in a building. It is in the center of the city. It is a nine-story building. The building was built many years ago. It is a very handsome building.

Example 2.
Is swimming popular in your country?

Native Language Response:

In our country swimming is enjoyed by a great many people, and in contrast to many sports requiring extensive skill and training is not limited to young or affluent people, or to those who have access to private clubs or lessons.

Simplified Response:

Many people in our country like swimming. Everyone has a chance to swim: old people and young people, rich and poor ones.

Example 3.
What do you think about racism in the United States?

Native Language Response:

To answer a question such as this in a sophisticated manner, one should be cautioned to take into account the historical origins of the problem, providing insight into a number of events that are now occurring. At the same time, the examination of the more recent, contemporary evolution of the problem in the context of current social values should not be overlooked.

Simplified Response:

To answer such a question correctly, we have to look at the history of the problem. I think that this can help us to understand the present situation. At the same time, today's changes influence this also.

Example 4:
Do you think that in the future it will be possible for all the races and nationalities to become one?

Native Language response:

Oh, if only I were able to see the future. If that were possible, just think of all that we could learn about impending events. Having encountered such predictions, we might be able to influence our own history.

Simplified Response:

I would like to know the future. Then we could know about coming events. In this case, we could even change the history.

Applying the Simplify, Simplify Tool

The most difficult aspect of applying this device is the immediate identification of the specific vocabulary or grammar structure to be dropped, and then the selection of a simpler form. The problem is that our command of vocabulary and grammar consist of three layers:

The first layer is automatic, polished command; this is language which we have practiced many times, with which we feel secure, which is readily available to us for simplifying purposes.

The third level is extremely weak command of vocabulary and grammar; this is the language which we have heard occasionally, which is in our passive recall, which has not been drilled or repeated or used effectively; this is the language which we have either forgotten or haven't reinforced adequately.

And the second level falls between. Usually, we want to use this second level which is already quite easy to use although it is not yet automatic. We want to try it, to reinforce it, to improve it, because we realize that this is the most effective way to bring this language to the automatic command level.

On the one hand, we need to use the vocabulary and grammar of the middle level, in order to practice it, to make it more effective. On the other hand, when we use it, we have to concentrate on how to do it, and that is why we make mistakes and delay communication. What should we do? It depends on the nature of the communicative process. The more communication requires a real exchange of opinions, where we cannot afford the "luxury" of making errors, the more appropriate it is to simplify by using the automatic level, level one. When the situation allows us to exploit the communication as an exercise to test and reinforce our developing language, we can use level two.

But this is only general advice. The ultimate decision depends on the skill of the communicator and on his or her evaluation of each situation.

Tool #5
Break Away

There is a second tool which can enable us to say what we really want to say. To understand the functioning of this tool, we have to understand the dynamics of knowing two languages. There is a very interesting relationship between these two languages, determined by the extent of the foreigner's knowledge of the second language. In fact, if the foreigner knows the second language as well as he or she knows the first, it is possible there will not be any dependency at all between the two languages. These languages can exist independently of one another. Our foreigner can turn on the first language, or the second one, at will.

But the relationship between these two languages can become complicated very quickly if our foreigner does not know the second language as well as the first. In this case, the foreigner, as he or she encounters deficiencies in speaking the second language, relies on the first language for help. The first language begins to dominate in this relationship because the foreigner constantly speaks the foreign language *under the influence* of the first. In his or her desire to speak the second language as well as he or she does the first, the foreign speaker tries to transfer the grammar structures of the first language into the second one, which quite likely has absolutely different grammar and syntax. As a result, the foreigner's speech sounds obviously non-Russian, non-Italian, non-English, or non-Finnish.

Break Away Rules

The intent of the tool we call **Break Away** is to help the foreigner ignore his or her native language while speaking the

foreign language. To develop this ability, the foreigner must follow three rules:

1. He or she must speak the foreign language using only the grammar structures of that language.
2. He or she must know these structures automatically
3. He or she must know as many grammar structures as possible.

The automatic knowledge of a grammar pattern enables a foreigner to use it immediately upon encountering a thought that requires the pattern, without reverting to the native language for help. Automatizing knowledge is a must because if a foreigner has not perfected the requisite pattern for a specific speech event (i.e. for the use of language in specific circumstances), his or her native language will "help him or her" out and when this happens, his or her foreign language will sound strange to a native speaker (i.e. either marked as foreigner talk or marginally comprehensible).

The More Automatic the Pattern, the Better the Break Away Tool

To demonstrate this, let us consider some typical mistakes in vocabulary or grammar which a native Russian speaker might make in English:

> **She is a good man.** [Instead of "She is a good *person*."] In the Russian language, the word "man" has two meanings, a "man" and a "person." So the Russian here intends to say "She is a good person."
>
> **How much cars did you buy?** [Instead of "How *many* cars did you buy?"] In Russian, the word "much" is used for both countable ("many," in English) and uncountable things.
>
> **I read the book; she is interesting.** [Instead of, "I read the book; *it* is interesting."] In Russian, inanimate nouns, and pronouns referencing them, can have masculine or feminine gender.

She is in hospital. [Instead of "She is in *the* hospital."] The Russian language has no articles, definite or indefinite.

To the grocery store I have this afternoon to go. [Instead of "I have to go to the grocery store this afternoon."] Russian word order is different from that of English.

You speak English? [Instead of "Do you speak English?"] Russian has no auxiliary verbs in interrogative sentences.

If I will see him tomorrow, I will tell him about it. [Instead of "If I see him tomorrow, I will tell him about it."] Russian conditional clauses use the future.

He said that he or she will do it. [Instead of "He said that he *would* do it."] Russian does not have the same sequence of tenses as English.

If I was there, I do it. [Instead of "If I were there, I would do it."] This type of sentence is very difficult for Russians because of the differences between Russian and English forms of the subjunctive mood.

These types of mistakes are the results of imperfectively acquired grammar that results from grammatical patterns not having been completely mastered. They can be the fault of a student who did not work hard enough, an instructor who did not drill the student to perfection, or even to a whole school of linguistic theory that underestimates the importance of grammatical drilling.

It is also important to note that there is an inverse relationship between the number of structures a foreign speaker knows and the influence of his or her native language on his or her use of the second language. The fewer the foreign language structures available, the more frequently the foreign speaker will use grammar structures of the native language, increasing

the image of incorrect and incomprehensible language to the native speaker.

The need for developing natural language requires the instructor to take a student through different exercises to help him or her bypass the influence of the native language and make use of only the structures of the foreign language which he or she has learned. In a way, this ability is similar to the **Simplify, Simplify** tool: it allows the foreign speaker to substitute *simplified* language for intricate language. While the method is the same, the content is different; in **Break Away** we are not looking for *simplified* structure, but rather we are looking for appropriate natural grammar patterns in the foreign language, to help us convey our idea or thought.

Break Away Exercises

There are two groups of exercises that can help students to learn to use the break away tool. Both groups are described below.

Group 1 Exercises

The first group consists of a variety of student speeches, such as monologues, dialogues, conversations, reports, written compositions, and so on, presented while the instructor observes. The instructor reviews the presentations and points out unnatural elements, asking the student to substitute grammar structures more appropriate to the foreign language. The goal of this approach is to enrich students' models.

The first group also includes translations from the native language to the second language, in which the instructor plays the same role. In translating someone else's thoughts, the student is even more likely to be under the influence of the native language, producing more unnatural structures, providing more material for analysis.

We are in many ways discussing the difference between *translation* and *transmitting*. When a student lacks sufficient grammar structures to translate or convey something from the native to the foreign language, he or she hopes to impart adequately the main idea with the available structures of the foreign language. For this reason, I label all of these exercises **Transmitting Exercises**.

Let us give an example of an exercise that illustrates the first category.

Transmitting Exercise, Category I

[*The instructor asks the student to describe his or her childhood.*]

F: I begin to remember myself, from the age of five.

I: I do not like "begin to remember myself."

F: I remember my life from the age of five.

I: Good. Go on.

F: Then we lived in a small village.

I: I do not like the word order in this sentence.

F: We lived in a small village then.

I: Okay. Go ahead.

F: You couldn't imagine what a funny village was it.

I: "Was it"?

F: You couldn't imagine what a funny village it was.

I: I do not like "you couldn't

imagine."

F: Hmmmm.

I: You cannot imagine what a funny village it was.

F: Oh, yes. You cannot imagine what a funny village it was.

Transmission Exercises, Category II

As stated above, the exercises of the second type usually consist of translations from the native language to the foreign language, in which the student tries to transmit the meaning of what he or she hears, rather than translating literally. Illustrating this exercise in our book presents a challenge, since we cannot assume a common second language among our readers. Therefore, our illustration (previously printed in Shekhtman, 1990, and Shekhtman et al., 2002) contains only the second element of this exercise, the *transmitting* of the message

from the native language into English. The first paragraph below represents a student's initial attempt to transmit from a native language into English, with unnatural grammar structures apparent; the second paragraph shows the version with correct structures .

> You are asking me what are my impressions on United States after I came to this country. I will say you my impressions are very striking. The first three months I was in the United States I felt myself as if I was in the fairy tale. First of all, what astonished me that I saw a lot of people of different colors and races. On one street I saw Oriental, Black, white and they were walking, talking to each other the same language. The second what struck me was the houses—neat, beautiful, small, surrounded with trees and flowers and without fences, open for public to be observed.

> You ask what my impressions of the United States were when I first arrived. I can tell you that my impressions were very striking. For the first three months I was in the United States, I felt as if I were in a fairy tale. First of all, I was astonished to see many people of different races and with different skin color. On a single street, I saw people of Chinese, AfricanAmerican, and Caucasian heritage; they were walking together and speaking the same language one to another. The second thing that struck me was the houses— neat, beautiful, small, surrounded by trees and flowers and without fences, in full public view.

Of course, the best way to show the technique of transmitting, of **Break Away** from the patterns of the native language, is to take a native language statement and to demonstrate several equivalent grammar patterns of the target foreign. The instructor must tailor the application of this tool to each particular student and language.

Group II Exercises

In the second group of exercises, the instructor helps the student to find the model she/he knows to express her/his ideas. We can call these exercises "You want to say that...". For example, the student begins speaking on a theme and pauses to search for a word or slows down his speech, indicating that she or she is struggling to find appropriate structures and vocabulary. The instructor interrupts with the words, "you want to say that...," and then uses an appropriate model the student already knows. It is imperative that the instructor knows which models the student has mastered. Throughout this exercise, the instructor demonstrates what the student can do or rather what the student should do the next time. The student then repeats his story using familiar models and avoiding the painful search for something that is not yet under his control.

Tool #6
Embellish It

So far we have explored two categories of communicative tools. One category consists of tools useful in so-called "social conversations," good for presenting one's language in a favorable light; they are tools which help to "market" one's language ability more impressively. The second category are tools which are workable in "real talks", in conversations which are comparable to communication between two native speakers. Such tools are not intended to "show off" one's command of a foreign language, but to help the foreign speaker articulate his or her thoughts. As is the case with any system of classification, the distinction between these two categories of tools is artificial. In practical application all of these tools can be "mixed and matched"; those in the first category are for use in conversations of substance, and those in the second might have appropriate place in social conversations.

Embellish It is the first tool which we may classify among the "general purpose tools." One can use such tools in any communicative situation; however, while their use is desirable; it is not mandatory. Let us use an example to illustrate the nature of embellishment:

Monologue 1.

> *I get up at 7:00, but yesterday I got up later. I forgot to set my alarm clock. Usually I get up on time. I am not like my wife. She just does not hear the alarm. After getting up, I dress. I do not do morning exercises. I don't think it's healthy.*

Monologue 2.

> *I usually I get up at 7:00 in the morning. Except, that is, for yesterday when I got up a bit later because I forgot to set my alarm clock loudly enough, and overslept. But, quite honestly, that happens very rarely to me. We can't say the same thing about my dear wife, who, believe me, just does not react to the sound of the alarm clock. What did you ask me? Oh, yes, about when I normally get up…Yes, as I said, usually I get up about 7:00, and then, of course, I wash my face, comb my hair, and dress. Oh – you undoubtedly are surprised that I haven't said anything about my morning exercises. Just imagine – I do not like to do morning exercises. I do not do morning exercises. I do not think it's healthy at all. I'll tell you directly that I consider them to be harmful to one's health. Really, is it good, right after your sweet dreams, to begin doing such abrupt moves – running, jumping, sitting, standing, turning, and so on and so forth? No – think about it it's plain dangerous. It's better to take a warm shower: it refreshes you, strengthens you, makes you feel healthy.*

The contrast between these two monologues is obvious. In the first, we have dry, primitive, unexpressive, elementary speech. In the second, the speech is alive, normal, attractive, and expressive. The second monologue is an example of the implementation of our tool **Embellish It**. To embellish speech is to make it more natural, by using special devices.

Special Devices

What devices are we talking about? There are many:

> **Exclamations and repetitions:** "Oh!", "Right on!", "You bet!", "Uhhuh," "Yes, yes," "No, no," "Sure, sure."

> **Parenthetical expressions:** "You know," In my opinion," "Of course," "Without a doubt," "On the one hand/on the other hand," "I'd say."

Parenthetical sentences: "When I went to Paris—I was still in college then—I hardly knew any French."

Rhetorical questions: "But, who really cares about that?"

Guidance questions: "I forgot—What did you ask me?"

Adverbial modifiers of time, place, or manner: "Yesterday," "Later on," "Nearby," "Far, far away," "Perfectly," "Loudly."

Synonymous expressions of nouns, adjectives, or verbs: "The boss, my supervisor, who is very strict, rigid and stern, confronted me, or more precisely approached me head-on and said—no, no—hissed like a snake to me…"

Idiomatic expressions and cultural slang: "Stop joshin'me," "What's going down?", "Get off my back," "Get with it."

By employing these devices, the foreigner can implement even more effectively such tools as **Show Your Stuff, Islands**, and **Shift Gears** and at the same time decorate his or her conversation, making it more lively and natural. Moreover, this tool attracts the native speaker to the foreigner, intensifying the native speaker's feeling that the foreigner knows the language very well, and in turn, increasing the foreigner's desire for communication.

We once had a student who knew almost no Russian vocabulary or grammar, but she did know a few colloquial, idiomatic expressions, which she used very skillfully. He would approach a native Russian speaker, placing a hand on the shoulder, and say, the Russian equivalent of, "What's cookin'?" The usual result was that the Russian speaker, assuming that someone who used such colloquial expression had a thorough knowledge of the language, would begin to talk openly and naturally as if speaking to a native speaker, to which the student could only admit with a laugh, "I do not know Russian." Of course, in this case, the idiomatic expression, as an element of our tools, cre-

ated only a humorous situation. But in most communicative processes, when a person knows the foreign language to some degree, it can intensify communication and arouse the native speaker's respect for the foreign speaker who has mastered colloquialisms.

Using Embellish It

Embellish It is an unusual tool because it is very easy to teach a student all of its elements in just a short time, but it is very difficult to encourage the student to *use* it. This is the result of the point made earlier, that rather than walking, the foreigner swims in a strange environment. Since speech in a foreign language is difficult, and the most important goal for the foreign speaker is to take care of the main ideas of the discourse, attention to minor elements, such as embellishments, is secondary. In other words, the foreigner first must concentrate on the main components of each sentence, rather than on the minor ingredients; this results in dry and elementary language.

It is very important to train students to use this tool automatically. To make the student's use of embellishment a *habit*, we can use a number of exercises, three of which we illustrate below.

Exercise 1

In the first of these exercises, one of the students has the assignment to speak, ignoring the embellishment technique, and the other student rephrases the sentences, embellishing them.

A: I like pizza.

B: Oh, yeah. No doubt about it, no doubt about it… you can sure count *me* in. Like most other people in America, I *like* – love, enjoy, relish, adore – *pizza*. I like piping hot, spicy, gooey pizza with lots of toppings - pepperoni, extra cheese, onions, green peppers, mushrooms, anchovies – the works. You might say that I'm *really* into pizza. But, on the other hand, do you know any people who do not like it?

Exercise 2

The second exercise assigns the second student to restate what the first student says, using synonymous expressions.

A: Yesterday, having thought things over for a while, I decided to visit my friend with whom I had an argument a week ago.

B: Just a day ago, after considering it briefly, I made up my mind to call on my acquaintance, with whom I quarreled last week.

Exercise 3

The third exercise is a dialogue between two students. The loser in the game is the student who produces the "bare," unembellished, sentence.

A: For heavens' sake – why in the world did you become a diplomat?

B: I always wanted, even dreamed of seeing other countries – of seeing the world.

A: What countries did you see? [STOP! STUDENT A LOSES!!]

The tool **Embellish It** initially appears to contradict **Simplify, Simplify**, but only at first glance. Each tool has a distinct and different intent. **Simplify, Simplify** streamlines the main components of the sentence and is totally unrelated to the minor ingredients. In contrast, **Embellish It** does not involve the main components of the sentence; its concern is only with the minor ingredients. It is like adding spices to the basic ingredients in cooking—a variety of more interesting dishes can result from the same basic ingredient. And, as in cooking, **Embellish It** can facilitate simplification because it masks the simplicity of the major ingredients.

Let me emphasize that **Embellish It** is effective not only with the tools of the first category **(Show Your Stuff, Islands, Shift Gears)**, but also with the tools of the second category **(Simplify, Simplify** and **Break Away)**. If a foreigner has a very good command of all of these embellishing techniques, he or she can use them to create some "breathing space," time for

thinking about how to simplify and locate the proper grammar pattern of the target language.

In practice, when I introduce this technique to my students, I often run into a very interesting pattern of resistance. Native speakers of English are taught in school to express their thoughts in clear, succinct language; they avoid wordiness as poor style and undesirable. To help the student overcome the discomfort associated with this technique, we must emphasize that embellishing differs from redundancy, which often confuses communication and obscures the main message. Embellishing is a specific tool to apply with only one goal: to make the language colloquial, realistic, natural. In addition, the foreign speaker has a choice of whether or not to embellish—but it is helpful to know that the tool is available for use when needed.

Tool #7
Say What?

Understanding your counterpart is the most important component of successful communication. All the tools described to this point can not be effective if we do not understand the person with whom we are talking. That is why the technique which helps us to understand the other party is the most important of our tools.

To present this technique more vividly, imagine that you are a robot whose controls have two settings. Setting A is capable of achieving only one goal: getting the general idea (or gist) of what the robot hears. On Setting A, the robot is capable only of *screening* information. On Setting B, the robot is, in contrast, capable of understanding details, particulars, and intricacies of the incoming information.

We can use each of these settings for a specific situation. We run Setting A to understand the *general topic* of the conversation with a native speaker. We also use it when we feel that the details of a conversation are not very important to us. Finally, we use it when the foreign speaker talks at a very high speed and it is difficult for us to comprehend the details, and we need only one thing to survive: to get the main idea of the communication. The process is the auditory equivalent to skimming written material.

We use Setting B when the information coming at us is vitally important, such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, directions. We also use it when every element of the conversation is essential. And we use it when we feel we are losing the main idea and we need clarification. In contrast to "skimming," this process is the auditory equivalent to reading meticulously an entry from a reference book. i.e. intensive reading.

Setting A

The rules which make Setting A work successfully are:

(1) Listen for words you can recognize, such as cognates, proper names (of people, cities, places).

(2) Listen for words which you already know very well.

(3) Ignore unfamiliar words.

Setting B

There is only one rule for Setting B: Go for it! Ask for it! Do not listen further until you are sure that you completely understand what is happening. Do not hesitate to interrupt your counterpart for clarification. In order to do this, you must have automatic control of such phrases as

"Repeat that, please…"

"What did you say?"

"I didn't understand your last sentence. Can you repeat it again?"

"Excuse me. As you know, I am a foreigner. Can you speak more slowly?"

"Can you restate that differently?"

"Can you give me a synonym for [a specific word]?"

"You are talking about [restate your understanding of the topic], aren't you?"

"You said that [restate a fact], didn't you?"

"Let me check what you said: [restate]."

"Let me repeat what you said, to be sure of it."

Using Both Settings: an Example

Let us give an example of a foreigner who uses both settings during a conversation with a native speaker. The *highlighted* text is what the foreigner *does* understand.

F: I hear that you like to travel.

N: You bet! I'm fresh *from* a jaunt to *Portugal*. The populace is enticing. I've roamed *those* environs *while under* the thumb *of a dictator as well as with the* prevailing *democracy*. *Democracy has* spawned a rampant reawakening. I singularly cherished the terrain. The billows! The pastures! *The mountains! I'm* unequivocally spellbound!

The foreigner used Setting A very successfully up to the phrase "I singularly cherished the terrain." Beginning at that point, while he or she believes that the information which he or she is getting from the native speaker is not of great importance, he or she feels he or she is in danger of losing the main idea of the speech and becoming confused later. Therefore, he or she activates Setting B. Because he or she understood one word – "mountain" – and got the correct general impression of the native speaker's feelings from body language and intonation, he or she says:

F: So, are you saying that nature in Portugal is beautiful?

N: Oh, yes! It's a staggering deviation from anything you can fathom.

The foreigner, feeling that the continuation of this topic will create more and more problems for his or her comprehension, uses our tool of "shifting gears" and says:

F: And have you been to Mexico? I want to get there sometime soon.

N: Where'dja hatch this scheme?

The foreigner does not understand any part of this question, and because he or she senses that this information is vital for further communication, that it is especially dangerous not to understand the question, and that the question seems to require an immediate answer, the foreigner again switches on Setting B:

F: I'm sorry, but I think you've forgotten that I am a foreigner. Can you repeat this question slowly, please?

N: Where did you hatch this scheme?

F: Can you say this differently for me?

N: What made you want to go to Mexico?

F: My wife loves Mexican food.

N: Do you want to go there for a respite or for sightseeing?

F: Can you give me a synonym for the word respite?

N: Oh, sure, a respite is a break or a rest.

F: I am planning to go there for a rest.

N: In this case, I advise you to go to Acapulco, and to stay at the Hotel Grande.

F: Can you repeat the name of the city and the hotel for me?

The Importance Of Questions

As you can see, the ability to ask a question is an important element in this tool. In fact, this ability is important to *all* of our tools. Questions are an important element of our first tool, **Show Your Stuff**. There, one can use questions to interrupt the expanded answer of the foreigner, forcing the native speaker to respond, and leading to a more natural interactive conversational pattern.

Questions are also important to our second tool, **Build Up Your Islands**. As you remember, it is with the help of questions that we influence our counterpart, the native speaker, to ask us questions which we can answer with "islands" – topics we are prepared to talk about.

We cannot execute our third tool, **Shift Gears**, without questions. Questions help us to shift away from topics with which we are not comfortable, and move to more familiar subjects.

In contrast, our fourth tool, **Simplify, Simplify** should influence our questions. The skill of creating a clear and simple question is very important for effective communication with

native speakers. Apply the skill of simplification to any questions which you use.

And, of course, the connection between the question and our fifth tool, **Breaking Away**, is evident. The quality and clarity of a question requires precise use of the grammar structure of the target language. Questions in a foreign language are particularly likely to suffer from the influence of one's native language patterns.

Even our tool number six, **Embellish It**, enriches itself by the use of rhetorical questions.

Questions are particularly important to our current device, **Say What?** Because comprehension normally takes place when we are interviewing someone, or receiving information from them. The nature of the information received is completely dependent upon the questions we ask. Questions also help us to specify the information we get from our counterpart. In addition, questions can be used to clarify the elements of the incoming information. And, as demonstrated already, questions can help us take complete initiative in the process of comprehension.

Thus, it is critical that a student have complete command of asking questions. There are three categories of exercises which can help in the mastery of this skill:

Category 1

In Category 1 are exercises that teach a student to have a variety of types of questions in his or her possession, including (but not limited to):

General questions:

Example: "Do you speak English?"

Specific questions:

Example: "What language do you speak?"

Alternative questions:

Example: "Do you prefer summer or winter?"

Tag questions:

Example: "This is a book, isn't it?"

Category 2

In Category 2 are exercises to condition the student to express automatically, at a very high speed, questions related to any sentence he or she hears.

Category 3

In Category 3 are exercises that teach the student to transmit any question from the native language to the foreign language.

Conclusion

The skilful automatic command of the questions is very important for both elements, because it gives a foreigner a possibility to clarify what he doesn't comprehend without native speaker understanding it. For example, if a foreigner doesn't understand the word, *corpse*, in the sentence, "When I came into my room I saw a corpse lying on the sofa," he may ask:

"What corpse?"

"Why was it on the sofa?"

"Who brought it there?"

Through the answers to these questions, the foreign speaker will usually be able to understand what the word, *corpse*, means. In this case, communication is not interrupted by questions that reveal the disability of a foreigner to understand the question; rather, a "normal" set of questions directly related to the context of the discourse lets the foreign learn what he or she needs to know without either revealing linguistic deficiencies or stalemating the conversation.

When dealing with a foreign language, there are many times when knowing more questions than answers is a valuable asset!

Epilogue
Sandy

One day, while working in my office, I got a call from a woman named Sandy. She said that she needed some classes in Russian.

As I do with all my students, I asked why she wanted to study the language. She indicated that she wanted to go to the Soviet Union to work at an American exhibition as a guide, one of the few ways that one could get to the U.S.S.R. in the days of the Cold War. To qualify, she had to pass an examination in Russian; she had failed it the day before. She told me that she was very upset, because she had studied Russian for four years in college. She believed that some of the people who passed the examination when she took it knew less Russian than her.

Sandy had managed to convince the examiners to give her a second chance at the examination. She asked me if it was possible for me – in four days – to improve her language to the point that she could pass the examination. I answered that it was impossible to improve her language knowledge in four days, but that it was absolutely possible to *organize the knowledge of the language* she already had in such a manner that she would present this language more effectively to the examiners.

So we began to work. I met with Sandy for two hours per day, for four consecutive days. Of course, you can guess how I worked with Sandy. First, I devised several exercises to teach her our first tool, **Show Your Stuff**. This tool so amazed Sandy that she wanted to do only such kinds of exercises, and she even decided that she was already prepared to go pass the examination again. Sandy's answers became very extensive. She so liked to consider my questions an invitation to talk, that I

felt she became an expert on how to sell all your language, in response to only one question from a native speaker.

What I haven't yet told you about Sandy is that she had also been a professional actress. Perhaps that is why she had such immediate success with this tool: as an actress she had mastered the technique of projecting an image that was different from reality, yet based on her real experience, knowledge, and personality. If you think about it, this tool allows you to project an image of language mastery which might extend your real knowledge.

As I listened attentively to Sandy's talk, I pointed out that some of the information she was giving to me about her family, friends, education, career, and travels were actually islands which were ready for use; I introduced her to the concept of **Islands**. We also created several new islands which we thought would be important for the examination, such as information about the Soviet Union, stories about her acting experiences, her understanding of art, and so on. Sandy was eager to pursue the islands: memorizing monologues was a very familiar task for an actress, and she did it with great enthusiasm. The result was that within five days she had nearly 15 islands, which became strategic tools in her "bag of tricks."

But the main assignment came when I showed her how to **Shift Gears**. Sandy became so skillful in escaping any difficult topic that I tried to force upon her that even I, who had seen so many students, was absolutely stunned. Her skill was such that I was sure no one would suspect it was intentional.

Then the time came for hard work. I began to put Sandy into very difficult situations, asking her a lot of questions for which she was not linguistically prepared. As you can guess, we were approaching our **Simplify, Simplify** tool. At the beginning it was not easy to work on this with Sandy. Sometimes she tried to express something which she couldn't, which made us laugh or sometimes even upset her. Or she tried to escape by **Shifting Gears**. But I didn't allow her to get away with this, constantly admonishing, "Sandy, do just one thing – *simplify*. Do not try to say what you want to under the influence of your native language. Look for a simple expression for what you want to say." And if she couldn't find such an expression, I immediately found one for her. Finally Sandy mastered the

very important ability to bring to a simple foreign structure a very rich thought or idea.

Then we began to work with grammar. I showed Sandy how many grammar structures she knew automatically, how many she knew semi-automatically, and how many she knew only theoretically. I told her that we didn't have any time to work with the structures which she didn't know, or with those she knew only theoretically. For an oral examination, all we had to do was to teach her to use in her spoken language only those structures, which she knew automatically.

We also took the most important structures from the semi-automatic category, and drilled them to an automatic response.

After that hard work, tool number 6, **Embellish It**, was a vacation or rest for Sandy.

The fourth day that I worked with Sandy, we concentrated on tool number 7, **Say What?** And Sandy quickly got command of this technique.

On day five Sandy went to take the examination. The best part was that before the examination, she was confident that she would pass…and she did.

Teacher Note

Teaching communication rules visibly improves students' language performance when interacting with foreigners, i.e. native speakers of the language being studied. At the same time, communication rules also significantly increase the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages. But how does one define the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages?

I decided to go to Internet and find the answer to this question. I found there numerous materials on the effectiveness of teaching but no definition, no answer to my question. True, I found some attempts to define the effectiveness of teaching, but all of these attempts substituted the notion of effectiveness for component factors of effectiveness, not effectiveness itself.

For example, some explain effectiveness as teachers' performance: their knowledge of a foreign language, the quality of their lesson plans, or even their attention to students' learning styles. Nowhere will you find the definition of the word, *effectiveness*, in respect to a teaching process. Very often the words, *good, excellent*, and the like are used instead of the word, *effectiveness*, but again all these words do not give us any idea of what effectiveness really means.

Meanwhile, in order to achieve effectiveness in teaching foreign languages, we (I hope you will agree with me) must deeply understand what effectiveness is. The words, *good* and *excellent*, do not express any degree or gradation of "good" and "excellent." They remain merely words unless and until they can be shown to contain measurable parameters. We never will develop effectiveness in teaching if we equate effectiveness to excellence in teaching.

The concept of effectiveness can be understood only through measurable categories, specifically *result* and *amount of hours* spent to get the result. In this manner, the definition of effectiveness in teaching foreign languages becomes "the capability of a language instructor to achieve high levels of proficiency (results) using fewer teaching hours."

Now everything becomes clear. Now we understand *why* we cannot find a definition of effectiveness in teaching: The proposed definition is very difficult to implement. Indeed, in order to compare the performances of language instructors, in order to find out who is more effective and what method is more effective, we first need to create the same conditions under which they teach. We need to have the same number of students in each group; we need to have students who are equal to each other in aptitude, memory, motivation, and learning styles. They need to have the same schedule, live in the same place, and share the same psychological environment. Obviously, it is not possible to achieve a perfect level of parity, and were it to be possible, then other factors would come into play: individual reactions to competition, personal ambitions, interests of program administrators. Any one of these factors, as well as others not mentioned, could influence the results and make them less objective. In a word, though we can formulate the definition of effectiveness in teaching foreign languages, this definition is extremely difficult to implement in practice.

Having said that, I personally have been able to check the effectiveness of any teaching technique. For 23 years, I owned a small, private, language school named Specialized Language Training Center. The main clientele of the school consisted of journalists and writers, teachers and linguists, politicians and diplomats, military people, businessman and attorneys, tourists and traditional students. I did not collect precise data on the number of students who studied at the school, but, for sure, it was not less than 3000. Some of these students studied foreign language in groups of 4, 6, 9 and even 12, but mainly all of them studied on a one-to-one basis. These students present an excellent opportunity for comparing various methodologies.

One of my experiments was to check the effectiveness of the communication rules approach. For this purpose, I taught eight students, using a traditional teaching approach without invoking any of the communication rules. Of these students,

two were beginners, two at ILR Level 2 (ACTFL "advanced"), two at ILR Level 3 (ACTFL "superior"), and two at ILR Level 4 (ACTFL "distinguished"). I worked with them the same number of hours I worked with eight other students, approximately equal to them in aptitude and learning styles. After 60 hours of work, I tested both groups. The results were as follows:

1. Two "no communication" beginners did not achieve ILR Level 1. Communication beginners did.
2. The ILR Level 2 "no communication" students did not reach level 2+; communication students did.
3. The ILR Level 3 and 4 "no communication" students showed no measurable progress on their tests; communication students did although, clearly 60 hours of instruction was insufficient to expect a half-point increase in proficiency.

Now, I understand that all these results are not official though there is one survey made by Dr. Betty Lou Leaver, who was the Russian Language Training Supervisor at the Foreign Service Institute when I worked there. This what she wrote:

I learned very quickly what Boris did with students, with any student. Given a group of students anywhere along the parabola from no proficiency (Interagency Language Roundtable [ILR] Level 0 to professional level proficiency (IRL Level 3), Boris in as little as 2-6 weeks would improve their proficiency by as much as a half proficiency point – a remarkable feet, considering that students of Russian typically take more than 1400 hours of in-class study accompanied by 400-500 hours of homework activity, to reach ILR Level 3. Moreover, Boris did not require talented students to work his magic. Students with learning difficulties and those who did not keep up with their faster classmates also benefited from his wand.

Where did magic come from? It very quickly became clear to me that Boris did not approach language teaching in any kind of traditional way. Yes, he understood and knew the prevalent theories of second language acquisition, was familiar with research, and had been taught principals of contemporary foreign-language teaching methods. All those things were in his toolbox. However, he had a number of tools of his own, and these came from looking at language learning and teaching in a

way very different from the way in which most practitioners and theorists viewed it.

Unlike most language teachers, Boris does not approach a classroom from the point of view of the nature of foreign language or second language. He approaches it from the point of view of native language, i.e. the language of the native speaker of the target language. Instead of helping students to acquire and improve what most programs teach – student language, he taught students to close the delta between their lack of language (and growing proficiency) and the native speech of their instructors and other interlocutors. This led to the development of seven tools that Boris used successfully for years and which he described in his book How to Improve Your Foreign Language Immediately.

Specifically communication rules approach makes language teaching successful for one main reason: a language lesson does not present grammar and vocabulary, the typical staple of traditional traditional teaching. Instead, a communicative rules lesson presents elements of the native speaker's speech: fluency, speech readiness, and communication control. Each of these elements is based on native speakers' abilities. Let us say that fluency is a result of expansion of speech, simplification of speech, adherence of speech to known patterns and lexica and embellishment of speech. It means that we do not teach students grammar or vocabulary; rather, we teach them how to expand their speech, using their grammar and vocabulary

This approach dramatically changes everything. Now, we do not only teach language, but we teach communication as well. We teach communication, using language; we teach how to communicate with native speakers, implementing their own principals and manifestations of speech. In the communicative rules approach, language is not separated from communication; rather, it accompanies communication. This is why the effectiveness of teaching language grows, and this is why students who are taught in communicative way demonstrate higher levels of proficiency under test conditions, as well as communicate more successfully with native speakers. Usually, these students can easily "hold" speech in memory, expand any topic until they are stopped, simplify language used to express more complex thoughts, use only what they know, make their

language live and natural, be ready to talk on as many topics as possible, have automatic control over the interrogative system of the language, and demonstrate comprehension techniques. (For more information, see Shekhtman and Kupchanka, *Communicative Focus: Teaching Foreign Language on the Basis of the Native Speaker's Communicative Focus*.)

At the same time, the communication rules approach does not relegate language acquisition activities to second place because implementation of it cannot be successful without immediate and solid internalization of grammar and vocabulary material.

Finally, teaching foreign languages using the communication rules approach is effective because it helps us to achieve higher levels of proficiency (i.e. better results), using fewer hours.

Chapter Notes

1. This method has been described in three works:

Shekhtman, Boris. *Working with Advanced Foreign Language Students,* 2nd Ed. Virginia Institute Press, 2013.

Shekhtman, Boris, Betty Lou Leaver, Ekaterina Kuznetsova, Natalia Lord, and Elena Ovtcharenko. 2002. The Shekhtman Method of Communicative Language Teaching. In Betty Lou Leaver and Boris Shekhtman (eds.), *Developing Professional-Level Language Proficiency* (pp. 119-140). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Shekhtman, Boris and Kupchanka,Dina. *Communicative Focus. Teaching Foreign Language on the Basis of the Native Speaker's Communicative Focus.* Virginia Institute Press, 2013.

2. The following comment on the use of these communication tools for teaching, student counseling, and student acquisition of foreign language was made by Natalia Lord, who has used them as teacher, program coordinator, and student counselor for twenty years:

I had the privilege of teaching with Boris Shekhtman at the Foreign Service Institute in the 1980s at the time that he began not only improving his students language by teaching structures, vocabulary and the like, but also by focusing their attention on how best to use whatever level of language they had already acquired. He would always remind students of the technique of using their foreign language to communicate with a native speaker. As a speaker of English as a second language, Boris was always very conscious of just how to use

his English. I was completely blown away one day when I overheard his telephone conversation with a real estate agent. Boris had complete control of that conversation. He seemed to know ahead of time just what he needed to say and how he was going to say it. He gained and kept the upper hand throughout that conversation. I knew very well that, although I consider myself a native speaker of American English, I could not have possibly handled that realtor as cleverly as Boris had done. Language level was not an issue here, but communicative techniques certainly were.

It was after Boris' conversation with the realtor that I began to pay closer attention to just what he was advising our students to do. By focusing student attention on the "rules of communication," Boris was equipping our students to make the best possible use of the language they had already learned. This was, in effect, creative packaging for the existing product.

"If you can give a lengthy if simple answer to a question, don't be satisfied with giving a one-word answer. After a few such one-word answers, the native speaker who is trying to speak with you will try to get away from you as fast as s/ he can, because s/he simply won't know what to say. Your one-word answers are putting too much pressure on this native speaker." Boris was speaking from personal experience. When we did workshops for ESL instructors on these communicative rules, I had to play the role of the native speaker. I can attest to the fact that one-word answers on the part of one's interlocutor places an inordinate communicative burden on the "native speaker." When our students absorbed this first lesson, they too became much more effective in their ability to use the language they already knew, thus keeping the communicative channel open.

Subsequent communication rules taught our students to handle a wide range of communicative challenges faced by non-native speakers of a language interacting with native speakers. Students who had difficulty expressing themselves because they always insisted on saying things in the most complicated and complex way possible suddenly seemed to speak more effectively just by following the Simplify, Simplify rule because they were making fewer mistakes. They were focusing on what they could say, rather than on what they wanted to say, and thus could express themselves in a way that was more comprehensible to their interlocutor.

The lessons that I learned from Boris about communication rules were ones I have continued to share with students since then. They are as applicable today as they were when he first began speaking of them twenty years ago. I found them invaluable as a language instructor, and I trust that they can continue to help language learners everywhere.

What Students Who Have Used Shekhtman's Communication Rules Say about Them

Tara Sonenshine

Contributing Editor for *Newsweek Magazine*
Former Assistant National Security Adviser in the White House

"The list of the people who have trained at Shekhtman's Center reads like a "Who's Who" of American journalism and politics... Boris Shekhtman is a language czar."

"To understand the "Shekhtman Methodology," you have to set aside traditional ideas about learning a foreign language. Most conventional foreign language teaching is built around rules of grammar, which are drilled into the student's head in a tedious and time-consuming way. In the equivalent of a Russian revolution in language approach, Shekhtman discarded the old system of old grammar rules, replacing it with his own new system based on "rules of communication".

"Shekhtman's "rules of communication" are designed to build a relationship between a foreigner, who is learning a new language, and the native speaker who is already in command of that language. Recognizing the inequality in such a relationship, Shekhtman works to close the gap, to level the playing field so that communication can flow more naturally."

Mark D'Anastasio

Harvard Institute for International Development,
Adviser

"The strength and science of your methodology are uniquely effective, and I plan to tell the world."

Elizabeth D. Sherwood

US Department of Defense
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia and Eurasia

"I have studied numerous languages (French, Spanish, and German) and this was by far the most effective language training that I have ever undertaken."

Francis X. Clines

The New York Times
Correspondent

"The current Moscow bureau, all taught by Boris, agree he is a genius at plunging a student up to his soft palate in the viscera of the language... [Boris and his staff are gifted, relentless tutors]."

"When graduates of Boris's tutorials meet - and there's currently a dozen or so alumni in Moscow's diplomacy, journalism and business circles - they invariably glory in the words and music not so much of the Russian language as of Boris and his methodology."

Michael R. Gordon

The New York Times
Correspondent

"The attention to grammatical models and rules of communication was rigorous. The program, however, was unique in developing communicative skills and preparing me for the actual give and take of verbal interactions. In many teaching programs, the teacher does most of the talking. At SLTC, the student does the talking."

Alessandra Stanley

The New York Times
Correspondent

"This method has helped countless foreign correspondents, including many of our predecessors at the New York Times. It proved invaluable to us."

Ester Dyson

EDventure Holding, Inc.
President

"Boris Shekhtman is the world's best Russian teacher."

Russel Murray

Holy Name College
The Franciscan Order Of Friars Minor

"Through the use of this methodology, SLTC students are able to gain proficiency at a faster rate than those who participate in other, more traditional programs, as well as to learn the skills which will serve their on-going education for years to come."

Felicity Barringer

The New York Times
Correspondent

"He analyzed my brain, made a template of the portion of my brain that learns language, and figured out what I could learn. And it was all custom-made to my needs."

Michael Wines

The New York Times
Correspondent

"Pedagogical theories are wonderful things. But the bottom line is: after nine months, I speak Russian far better than I spoke Spanish after thirteen years of instruction in elementary, high school and university classes. And I wasn't a bad Spanish student."

"The genius of your method is that it teaches the art of communication before it moves on to grammar - the exact opposite of many language courses."

Peter Baker, Susan Glasser

The Washington Post
Correspondents

"Neither of us has ever had a better language teacher… After just two months of studying with you, we found that our Russian was already better than that of graduate students at John Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies who had studied the language for years."

Anthony Lauder

Software Developer

"There is a fantastic book called *How to Improve Your Foreign Language Immediately*, by Boris Shekhtman that provides loads of helpful strategies for the kind of things you are talking about, and I found it to be a tremendous help in improving conversational ability."

Other Books by Boris Shekhtman

Achieving Success in Second Language Acquisition (Leaver, Ehrman, & Shekhtman, Cambridge University Press, 2005)
Aimed at beginning to intermediate undergraduates and above, this book teaches students to understand their own preferences in learning, to develop individual learning plans and approaches, and to select appropriate learning strategies. Equally suitable for both individual and classroom use, this book will be invaluable for all language learners.

Communicative Focus: Teaching Foreign Language on the Basis of the Native Speaker's Communicative Focus (Shekhtman & Kupchanka, Villa Magna Press, 2013; third edition currently in press by MSI Press LLC)
The author details the theory behind the principles and practices used in his approach to language teaching: the development of lexical and grammatical accuracy, the need for memorization, and the development of memory. He also discusses the unique nature of the connection between language and meaning experienced by native speakers that non-native speakers must learn. Teachers who want to see leaps in their students' progress in developing language proficiency can benefit from this book.

Developing Professional-Level Language Proficiency (Leaver & Shekhtman, eds., Cambridge University Press, 2002)
This book examines approaches to teaching students who aim to make the leap from "advanced" or "superior" proficiency in a foreign language to "near-native" ability. Compiled by leading practitioners experienced at teaching upper levels of foreign language proficiency.

NEH-funded workbooks for teaching advanced levels of Russian, edited by Shekhtman:
Workbook 1. Sociolinguistic Variables
Workbook 2. Sociocultural Variables
(available gratis upon request to info@msipress.com)

Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Language Proficiency, Volume I (Leaver & Shekhtman, MSI Press LLC, 2003)
Proceedings of the 2003 Spring & Fall conferences of the Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers.

What Works: Helping Students Reach Native-Like Second-Language Competence (Coalition of Distinguished Language Centers authorial collective including Shekhtman, Villa Magna Press, 2013)
The purpose of this book is two-fold: to make a statement that bringing students to high levels of foreign language proficiency can be done and to show how to do it.

Working with Advanced Foreign Language Students (Shekhtman, Villa Magna Press, 2013; third edition in press by MSI Press LLC)
Written by a teacher with 20 years of experience at this level of instruction, this book is chock-full of practical advice and sample classroom activities for highly proficient students.

Foreign Language and Culture Books from MSI Press

In print:

Achieving Native-Like Second Language Proficiency: A Catalogue of Critical Factors

Damascus amid the War

Diagnostic Assessment at the Superior/Distinguished Threshold

Individualized Study Plans for Very Advanced Students of Foreign Language

Journal for Distinguished Language Studies (7 issues)

Road to Damascus

Syrian Folktales

Teaching and Learning to Near-Native Levels of Language Proficiency (4 volumes)

The Invisible Foreign Language Classroom

The Rise and Fall of Muslim Civil Society

The Subversive Utopia

Think Yourself into Becoming a Language Learning Super Star

Thoughts without a Title

Travels with Elly (Canada)

What Works: Helping Students Reach Native-Like Second Language Competence

When You're Shoved from the Right, Look to Your Left: Metaphors of Islamic Humanism

Forthcoming*:*

Arabic in a Hurry

English in a Hurry

Fields of the Mind

Learning Languages at Home

Managing Cognitive Distortions and Mitigating Affective Dissonance

Practices That Work

Russian in a Hurry

The E&L Cognitive Style Construct