

Language Tai-chi, or You Cannot Be Taught a Foreign Language, by Nikolay Zamyatkin  
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Abridged and streamlined  
Gary Vandenbos and Nikolay Zamyatkin  
zamyatkin.nikolay@gmail.com  
zamyatkin.com

## No One Can Teach You? So Teach Yourself!

My dear reader, likely it was the title of this book that caught your attention. How could it not? Among the heaps of multi-coloured courses, textbooks, books and booklets promising to teach you all of the languages of the world in a couple of months (or even a couple of weeks) in a pleasant and stress-free environment, this title undoubtedly appeared to you as a less-than-pleasant surprise. That brings me pleasure. Many surprises of this nature await you in the pages of this book. Now don't rush into despair and begin trampling this treatise in rage right here and now as if it is some poisonous and dangerous insect. That's unnecessary for one simple reason. The claim that it's impossible for you to be taught a foreign language is an incontestable and indisputable truth, as true as the sun rising in the morning, yet you surely can learn a foreign language. That is, you can teach yourself!

A fundamental difference exists between these two notions. No one, under any conditions, is able to teach you a foreign language, but teaching yourself (and by no means should we exclude the use of competent resources for assistance)? That you can do!

A recognition of this ancient yet cornerstone truth is the key to the successful mastery of a foreign language or, if you like, a dozen foreign languages.

Let's return to our multi-coloured fallow ground of courses and aids for the study of foreign languages, with their loud—at times high-pitched—promises of 'heavenly pleasures' with minimal effort from you in using these very aids. 'Buy us! We are shiny and beautiful! Within our pages are beautiful glossy pictures! Within our pages are secret signals, thanks to which in you will become a superpolymegalinguist in no time at all!' What do these books and aids all have in common? A dose of howling shamelessness and lack of honesty! By their appearance and manner, they are reminiscent of a loose woman of low morals persistently offering you her 'faithful and incomparable love' for sale right here on this very street corner.

As deplorable as it may be, this is exactly the way things are. I have yet to see one foreign language course (including, by the way, some very good ones), that is absolutely honest, without allusions and verbal fog, that directly explains what the study of a foreign language really is. We are given either no explanation at all or we are given a confused, incomprehensible offer to execute some vague instructions, leading to many years of fruitless wandering in an impassable maze of a strange language. I'm not even talking about the laughable 'textbooks' attempting to teach you a language in three minutes a day. These are beyond the pale!

My fellow seekers of linguistic wisdom! My brethren! It's to you I appeal! To try studying a foreign language in only three minutes a day is as easy as trying to cross a stormy ocean in an empty sardine can. Trust me—someone who has graduated from a language institute, studied languages

independently, worked as a translator for many years, and taught languages to American Green Berets, military intelligence, National Guardsmen, and employees of the CIA and NSA, someone who has worked for some years at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey—one of the largest and most prestigious teaching institutions of its kind in the world.

Trust me—a specialist in the realm of studying foreign languages. Miracles here are extremely rare—though in principle possible—but don't expect them to happen to you! Don't place your hope in miracles here. Intense and long hours of effort await you, but you will be rewarded according to your labour. Instead of a being conscious of growing failure and the bitterness of defeat, you will be rewarded with the sweet taste of well-earned victory! The things that taste sweet in life are those earned by overcoming obstacles and difficulties, not those that effortlessly fall into our laps.

Let us go back to the manuals and textbooks that bookstores have been flooded with in the last few decades. By no means do I assert that all of these textbooks and courses are completely, one hundred percent useless and inadequate. Quite often, they contain some fair and sometimes even good components.

2 However, without a clear understanding of the process' strategy and precise, unambiguous instructions for the execution of these supplementary components—they can lose a significant share of their usefulness and even become harmful. It is similar to thinking that tea is good for you but, for whatever reason, being unaware of how it has to be consumed, assuming that chewing dry tea leaves with boiling water poured into your mouth as a chaser will benefit your health. Or if someone told you that, to make a stew you need meat, potatoes, and carrots, forgetting to say that you will also need water, salt, and other key ingredients and, most importantly, 'forgetting' to mention such a thing as cooking itself, that is, putting the pot on a burner. Would you be satisfied with such minimalistic stew put together by this short-version recipe?

I'll repeat myself: I have never come across any thorough and completely honest instructions on how to use any foreign language manual—the kind of instructions that would eliminate any two- or three-fold interpretations and be understood by someone without a degree in linguistics. Hypothetically, I allow the possibility of the existence of such instructions, as I do not exclude the possibility of extra-terrestrial life, or for example, a Bigfoot, but I have yet to encounter either.

And even if you were able to find the sought-for 'ideal' textbook, you should not forget for one second that your goal is not to study a textbook. Your goal is to study a language! Neither effort is tantamount to the other. You can study from cover to cover as many wonderful textbooks with pretty pictures and fine print as you wish without moving an inch toward speaking the desired foreign language. Try to keep that in mind, my—I hope still intrigued—friend.

All of this is precisely what inspired me to write this treatise. I realized that, unfortunately, no one else would take on this work. Years and decades passed, but my reverent and immeasurably wiser colleagues were not rushing to do it, being engaged with other, obviously more important and interesting endeavours.

Somehow or other I ceased waiting for a favour from above, diligently sharpened my trusty old pencil, pondered for a minute or two looking out of my window at a blooming apple tree, gathered my thoughts, took a deep breath, and decided to take on this pleasant and simple task.

In this work, I intend to convey the complete truth on studying a language. I will uncover all secrets, tear off all the covers, and once and for all make the study of a foreign language understandable, logical, and simple. Or, rather, relatively simple. Notice, my dear friend and reader, that I did not say 'easy' since I do not want to, nor will I deceive you; the study of a foreign language cannot be easy. Only a fool or a liar would claim the opposite, whatever shiny packaging and promising titles he may hide behind.

And with that...

### **Where To Begin, or Information Not For Idiots**

Where, then, does one begin in studying a foreign language? First and most important, you must have a strong desire to teach yourself a foreign language.

I will now explain what it means to have a strong desire to teach yourself a foreign language. It's by no means a mechanical execution of a predetermined number of exercises a day with one eye glued to the television while listening to the latest pop music on your iPod—even if the music is in the foreign language you're studying! It's not experiencing a tight knot in your stomach that appears when you realize you have to study today. It's not constantly glancing at the clock with self-pity over how slowly time seems to pass when you 'courageously' study your foreign language. It's not a sigh of relief breaking forth from your suffering soul when you gladly slam shut your loathed foreign language textbook.

3

If this is what's happening to you, then please cease wasting your limited, precious time on this Earth and take up a more peaceful and pleasant task—something like breeding rabbits for meat, jogging, dancing cha-cha, studying yoga, or some other fine activity. The study of a foreign language should stir in you positive emotions and a pleasant longing. Without these feelings, you will wander in despair down a dusty road to nowhere for months and years.

I repeat and will continue to repeat until it is fully grasped by all interested parties, including you, my friend: it is impossible to overemphasize that you need to recognise that only you can teach yourself a foreign language. And by the way, that goes for every subject you may tackle—no one, not even someone who has three doctorates in some science or other, can really teach you anything.

Until you grasp this, you will never master a foreign language. Give up on thinking that language study has to do with finding a 'unique' course that is tailored just for you or finding the most recent scientific insights on education. Give up on thinking that you will finally be able to breathe a sigh of relief, kick back in a comfortable armchair and say, 'Ah, now teach me! Come on, chaps, show me that I didn't waste my money!' As long as this draining and paralyzing mirage still resides somewhere deep within you, you will never master a foreign language. Never!

The second thing to realize will likely be a surprise to you (though a pleasant surprise): you must stop thinking that you're an idiot.

I bravely assert, in the most decisive way, that you are not an idiot! What? You didn't think you were an idiot, even without my assertions? I assure you that you did think that and you still do! You couldn't feel otherwise. Our ability to master a foreign language is directly tied to the reality of being products of our school system. For many years, while at your most impressionable age, it was

persistently instilled in you by the best methodology that, in the strength of your natural idiocy, you are not capable of learning a foreign language. And you, my poor, cruelly deceived reader, have become so accustomed to this idea that you have already forgotten that you think this way. The small child deep within you, frightened for years by teachers, could not think differently.

So now, you and the child within can confidently rejoice: at a minimum, you have an average ability to learn a foreign language. And with a certain amount of self-discipline and a capacity for hard work, you are capable of learning one, two or three (would you need more?) languages.

Then again, it's very likely that your intellectual capabilities are higher than average, and you of course already know that this can be quite useful to learning something, including a foreign language.

You are likely feeling an urge right now to scream out, right here in the bookstore, 'But Why!? Why when I was in school did they...?!' There are weighty reasons for this, but your capability to learn a foreign language is not tied up in those reasons. Let me assure you of this! The main cause of this has to do with the dishonesty of the system, when all of us, teachers and students alike, are placed into conditions in which a realistic mastering of a foreign language is simply not possible; no matter how well it's packaged by the players of this game. The very format of instruction in a foreign language in our schools doesn't allow for a positive end result.

4 It would be like you trying to learn to swim, and from time to time, you are brought to an old rusty bathtub, on the bottom of which is a couple of inches of cloudy water. You can listen for years and decades to various lectures about the properties of this water and even be told to go down and touch the water or put your foot in it, all to 'learn' how to swim. For your efforts and enthusiasm, you receive more or less comforting grades. The whole process depends upon the teacher's ability to entertain his students and keep them interested, but it is all in vain in terms of teaching you how to swim. Even if they took radical measures by occasionally cleaning the bathtub, adding a few of inches of water and launching a couple of rubber ducks or toy boats, it would still be in vain.

School students don't understand this, although the majority of them intuitively know that something is not quite right, that 'there is something rotten in the state of Denmark.' Regardless of their initial honest efforts to follow the algorithm given to them in school for studying a foreign language, they hit a brick wall. Though their life experience is somewhat limited, their intuition tells them that honest labour should bring forth at least some fruit or at least some noticeable results, some forward movement. But in the case of foreign languages, their labour seems to bring forth nothing but frustration and a feeling of exhaustion, like they have been tramping through sticky clay.

Students are unable to blame the system for their misfortunes, which for them has always been a system beyond criticism, created by those who, in the eyes of children, are demigods who are incapable of consciously deceiving them, so they naturally end up blaming themselves, secretly or openly encouraged in this by their teachers. This murky and formless sense of guilt develops through the early years—fruitless, painful school years—and then turns into a firm conviction that most will never escape: 'I am guilty! It's my stupidity! I am incapable!'

This is precisely what takes place: subdued by the merciless pressure of the system, defenceless children blame themselves for all of it. The years pass by, those glorified early years of school, and all the while, the bright, wide-open eyes of expectant, trusting children begin to fog over with a lacklustre film of mistrust toward the school system and their teachers. The first sprouts of cynicism sink their poisonous roots into their little and still passionate hearts.

Teachers take part in this ugly game for various reasons. Many do not understand what's going on due to their own fallibility (can you imagine that?!) and ineptness. Many have thrown up their hands in defeat and voluntarily become part of this corrupt system. They have given themselves up to the murky waves of this all-consuming conformity. For whatever reason, they never confess this to their pupils, even if they do understand that it's not the idiocy of the children that's to blame but the dishonest conduct of the adults.

In addition, the situation, which is already unpleasant for all players of the game, gets even worse with teachers' painful realisation of their own inferiority; many teachers show low language proficiency in both speaking and listening, and for some of them, the ability to communicate in a foreign language is practically non-existent. Haunted by the fear that their ineptness will be publicly and embarrassingly revealed, they subconsciously concentrate on fields that are less dangerous, such as grammar and reading. These are the margins within which teachers feel sufficiently comfortable and confident, ruthlessly nipping in the bud any attempt of a student to venture out.

Some teachers, however, break through with a protest and let out a sigh, filled mainly with self-pity and regret for years wasted on school. At these times, they say something vague—sometimes even to students in classrooms—that we must study a foreign language in a different way, that a rusty bathtub with a little puddle of dirty water on the bottom is not a place where one can learn how to swim. These honest impulses, however, are quickly bottled up by those who let them out of the bag: 'What can we do? Such is life! Everybody does it!' and so the daily lie goes on and on, soon turning into teachers' natural habitat, away from which they feel about as comfortable as a fish on a heated frying pan.

For the rest of your life, you—all of us, as a matter of fact, with the exception of a lucky few—are pursued by a firm belief that, in the field of studying foreign languages, you are a complete and utter idiot—this being the highest achievement of our school system.

Thus, the quicksand of explicit lies and half-truths sprinkled with 'good intentions' sucks both teachers and students in, making it hard to distinguish which are the real victims—children or adults. Personally, my heart goes out to the children, although I do understand the situation of the teachers. However, unlike adults, children don't have a choice: a teacher has the choice to quit and become anything from a janitor to a philosophical taxi driver to a poetic farmer or a Buddhist monk, but a poor school child has nowhere to go. A school student is a dependent creature, chained to his loathed desk by invisible but nonetheless solid, bonds. He perishes every day attempting to storm the unreachable heights of a foreign language while a ruthless teacher-general keeps sending him, armed with nothing but a puny pen, into head-on attacks against the heavy artillery of modal verbs, the barbed wire of past tenses, and the steel barriers of impersonal constructions. Let us bow our heads in memory of those fallen in this unequal fight...

Can the pointless, unimaginative head-on attack on a foreign language be the one and only strategy?

No, it cannot, and it is not. Is it possible that you, my friend, could take the heights of a foreign language and sit on the top of this stronghold, letting your feet dangle, glancing down victoriously?

Yes, it is. How can it be done? Read this book carefully. Smile and frown together with the author and at the author (well, who knows, why not?). Rebel against the insolence and paradoxes of his statements! Be sceptical. Don't just take his word for it. Think. Then think some more. Test on

yourself the statements and guidelines contained in this book. Become sure of their correctness and effectiveness. Make this book your Linguistic Bible and your Foreign Language Action Manual. You will be destined for success...

### **You Are Being ‘Taught’, or the Sky Is the Limit!**

To discuss the study of foreign languages, the topic of language classes cannot be overlooked. These courses are characterised by small groups under the direction of an instructor. In essence, the basic methodology (forgive me for using this word; I’ve never liked it, either) in these courses differs little from those used in the school system, with the exception that attendance is voluntary and paid for. In addition, the students are generally adults and there by choice, which gives the course its own particular flavour. It seems to me that the flavour is peculiar enough to demand a deeper look.

You have likely seen ads posted around city centres and universities or on the Internet and in newspapers. These ads likely made a significant impression on you, and the cost didn’t seem to be very burdensome. The number of times the class meets each week didn’t seem too burdensome, either—once or twice a week. You made the decision and started going to the classes.

You felt pretty good telling your relatives and friends about your decision. As expected, your decision was met with approving glances, exclamations, and other pleasant emanations. Your status in society was significantly strengthened.

6

In the proper column of the mental report card, the important section on social interaction—under the title of ‘Good Intentions and Effort’ under your name—appears the mandatory checkmark. Your self-esteem is fortified. Within your chest rose that coveted warm feeling of practically having already fulfilled your task. After all, the difficult decision to learn a foreign language is in itself worthy of the highest respect. This universal truth is unquestionably accepted by all players in the game; isn’t that true, my respectable friend, filled with the highest intentions?

Armed with these very intentions, you show up once or twice a week to a somewhat cosy classroom filled with rows of desks and chairs. Hanging on the walls are grammar charts, fire-escape instructions, and some other visual propaganda designed to pour incessantly all kinds of knowledge of noun cases and conjugations into your brain. You sit at one of the desks—I usually chose one toward the back of the class—and attentively gaze at the blackboard and the instructor.

Immediately, you are filled with respect for this instructor since he knows various words that are unknown to you and he’s dressed in a suit and tie (about the instructors decked out in mini-skirts and half-transparent blouses, we will prudently be silent). Occasionally, your instructor will have a beard or wear glasses, which adds another level of sophistication to your lessons.

The instructor struts in front of the board speaking out words of wisdom and writes them out on the board for your optimal learning. You listen with the utmost attention, watch and try to understand, and remember it all. The especially diligent students even make detailed notes. (I swear, in the beginning, I also sinned in this manner, but only in the beginning!)

From time to time, the all-knowing instructor turns to the group and asks if everything is clear and understood. The answer is usually just silence, but sometimes, out of the 20–30 fairly tense students sitting at their desks, someone (like me, sitting in the back row—always the back row!) ventures to

say that some portion of the lesson isn't that clear. The wise instructor firmly but tenderly (ever so tenderly!), gazes at the inquirer, who is now, oddly enough, experiencing a feeling of guilt, and condescendingly repeats the unclear part of the lesson. He asks again if everything is clear and understood. The answer at this point is usually dead silence. The instructor adjusts his glasses in a distinguished manner and continues his lesson, so rudely interrupted by our not-so-bright student.

When a similar situation arises and the slow student again starts in with his questions, showing his inability to master the material at the same pace of his classmates, the instructor fixes his eyes on the transgressor with a bit less tenderness. All the same, he repeats the material, displaying his deep knowledge of the subject and simultaneously revealing his unsurpassed angelic patience.

The slow student (and not he alone) is not feeling quite so cosy anymore and even begins to cringe under the wise gaze of the all-knowing instructor. In addition, he now feels the silent condemnation of the rest of the group who, of course, perfectly grasps the material and can't wait to get going again with the instructor at the pace of a supersonic steam locomotive. These irrelevant questions are just a hindrance to our instructor-engineer guiding his speeding, red-hot engine into that crimson language sunset beyond the clouds.

On another day, during a lesson on a new theme (practically every day is a new 'theme'), the question once again is put forth, 'Is everything clear?' This time, it is asked directly to the slow and obviously mentally challenged student. This time, everything is clear. Having gained this small but vitally important victory for the successful forward movement of the smoke-belching locomotive... pardon, lesson... the instructor continues on, picking up the pace, heading ever deeper into the labyrinth of declensions, suffixes, cases, and weak predicates. So little time, so many suffixes and prefixes!

You diligently keep attending the lessons and even complete the homework—all those exercises, answering questions, cramming irregular verbs and participles and gerunds that inevitably sprout from these verbs. The instructor checks your homework and occasionally praises you, which is quite pleasant. Your self-esteem rises. You compare your success with the success of your classmates. Your success is no worse than theirs and, in some areas, even better.

Weeks turn into months, and the course is progressing well. However, you're starting to notice though that your group is gradually thinning out. One student has a business trip that can't be postponed, another becomes ill, another buys a boat that takes up all his time, another experiences family issues, and another gets a promotion at work. It turns out that people have many important things going on in life, and learning a foreign language is not at the top of the list.

Strangely enough, our slow student sitting in the back row didn't join the ranks of the quitters (which you undoubtedly expected!) but continues to show up for class. Of course, he's not asking any more questions and is completely lost on his homework. The instructor has even given up on checking his homework, figuring it to be a hopeless endeavour. Whatever self-esteem our dunce once had is now completely gone. What is he thinking of!?

Then your turn comes—you get the flu. It's winter, and there is nothing you can do about it. It could happen to anyone. You are seriously ill, and you aren't able to go to class. Your relatives, friends and associates totally understand; one's health is much more important than any language course, especially as it's only a month or so until the end of your course, and in addition, you can always take the course again next year.



You come out of the game with no loss to your status in society or self-esteem. If not strengthened, then at least there was no significant damage to it since the conditions were clearly stronger than you, and it would have been completely unreasonable to get upset about it. You displayed strength of character and at the same time showed your flexibility, so necessary in these complex times. And what could be more important than such satisfaction?

But what about the foreign language? What foreign language? Oh, yeah! The language! As far as the foreign language goes, without a doubt, you learned many new and interesting things; you met and spent time with new and interesting friends. You became acquainted with a wise and outstanding instructor who knows so many complicated concepts about gerunds, predicate phrases, and indirect speech, so important for a correct understanding of the processes that take place every day in a foreign language.

Overall, your course turned out successful. Hmmm... maybe not.

### **The Smoke Is Gone, or Locomotive Post-flight Critique**

Now let's assess the situation and conduct the locomotive post-flight critique, so to speak. What actually happened in the aforementioned situation? There's no need to tell you, my insightful reader, that real mastering of a foreign language didn't take place.

8

What actually did take place was a well-done replacement of the stated goals and objectives with entirely different ones; with the goals and objectives equally real and tangible although not stated aloud. This isn't very surprising considering that it is quite common and happens often.

The officially advertised objective of these courses is to master a foreign language or at least make significant progress in becoming proficient at it. However, the actual goal of such courses is to take money from people who desire or think that they desire to master a foreign language, while at the same time meticulously camouflaging the primary goal. Incidentally, it doesn't exclude a superficial familiarization with a foreign language; but that does not constitute a priority, either.

The initiators of this game—whether they realize it or not—never lose sight of their main goal: to gain the most material benefit while spending the least amount of energy and maintaining an appearance of respectability of the 'learning' process. Appearances and superficial respectability become the necessary conditions for the successful and lasting functioning of this sort of establishment.

The skilful (or sometimes not quite so skilful) hand of the instructor immediately puts an end to any disruptions, whether through his demeanour, tone of voice, streams of brainy explanations filled with incomprehensible terminology, references to pseudo-authorities on the subject or other well-known methods of manipulation.

The instructor (very much skilled in manipulation) never lets the group of students out of his total control. He doesn't appreciate any insightful questions from language nerds, and he is always ready to give them a well-deserved brush-off. Of course, a proper evaluation of this situation can only be given by an expert psychologist; however, in the course of time, the reality becomes apparent to everyone, and gradually, the group thins out.



What slows the rapid deterioration of the group is a strong psychological reinforcement painfully reminiscent of circus animal training. Like puppies, the students get little 'treats' from the instructor's hand for successfully completing some minor and insignificant exercises. Overachievers are patted on the head and given psychological candy for the enthusiastic accomplishment of useless (or at least not very effective) but abundant tasks, generally leading to nowhere.

However, in reality, many begin to enjoy this treadmill. It gives them the illusion of doing something that is worthy of respect in society. It gives them an opportunity to spend time in the pleasant company of quite nice people and even an opportunity to get encouragement from the instructor—a highly respectable figure, dressed in a suit and tie.

The stated goal has already become illusory and unimportant. The students simply enjoy being part of a club for people with common interests, or should I say a pseudo-psychotherapy group wrapped in an esoteric air of studying a foreign language. Here in this group, they get charged up with emotions that they lack in their ordinary lives but unconsciously crave.

The instructor, being a psychotherapist by nature, from the very beginning relies on those students, who clearly depend on this form of therapy to lead his group steadily to the completion of the course. After this, there will be another day, another group and another slice of bread and butter for our instructor and his bosses.

9

Why does this happen? Is it because all foreign language instructors, without exception, are liars and scoundrels by their evil nature? Not at all. The job of an instructor is difficult and almost never appreciated. I have the utmost respect for many of them. And even if their students do not learn a foreign language, they get something quite as valuable instead—a certain substitute for love and attention that, as it turns out, many students (if not all) are badly in need of.

Is it really so awful that, instead of potentially mastering a foreign language (with no guarantee that it will actually happen), you get a solid opportunity to receive immediate attention and some sympathy from an instructor, right here and right now?

All that this seller of love (served in a 'foreign language sauce') requires of you is that you play by the rules, his rules. Isn't it true that even you, my dear and hardened-by-life friend, sometimes need something more than just an ambiguous dream, more than just a faint hope for proficiency in a foreign language in the misty distant future that doesn't yet exist? But what you also need is someone's tangible and instant attention, and even—it happens, too—someone's love! You do need it. Maybe not very often, not every day but, nevertheless... Admit it; I promise not to reveal this little weakness of yours to anyone!

And now, the future 'two birds in the bush' of being proficient in a foreign language is exchanged for the 'bird in the hand' substitute of attention and love right here and now or, put another way, the unpleasant stick (any experienced instructor knows how to wield this stick well) of the instructor's dissatisfaction with unsubmitive and inconvenient students is traded for the tasty though somewhat rancid carrot of approval fed from the instructor's hand to the submissive and humble. Submissive to the inescapable? Humbled by your own 'inability'? Only you can answer these questions and nobody else...

Instructors, instructors, instructors... One must love the sound of this proud word...

The instructors themselves are also very much victims of these circumstances, delusions, traditions and myths. Yes, yes, myths. The first myth in the realm of foreign language study is that only the really smart (bordering on the line of genius) can master a foreign language, not to mention two or three languages.

This is a very harmful and dangerous but deeply rooted myth (which, by the way, is the flip side of the myth of your idiocy that limits you in learning a language). Basically, though, there is a significant amount of truth in this myth. You really do need to possess a fair amount of energy, determination and, to some degree, natural intuition to keep yourself from becoming a casualty under the present conditions of the class you've taken and someday actually to achieve a solid mastery of the language.

Mostly, though, this exertion of energy will not lead to actual mastery of a foreign language or a working knowledge of it but instead toward a tortuous overcoming of the hindrances and obstacles already formed within the fossilized and flawed system. The system is not working for you but against you. It is vital that you clearly understand this so that you can be successful in this difficult world of foreign language study.

Not very much time has passed since I made a break from the system, thanks to a strongly developed sensitivity to insincerity and to natural stubbornness. I point-blank refused to place myself into the category of clinical idiots, in spite of all the feigned, sugary tolerance and cruel efforts of the functionaries of this system, some with beards and some without.

10

I firmly recommend that you do the same, my friend. Don't give up! Don't let them intimidate you or suppress your will to succeed! Reject within you the veiled hints at your 'inability'! Don't bend under the whip of instructor disapproval or give in to the 'carrot' of their sympathy. Smile politely—ever so politely!—and continue forth on your path in the direction of your chosen goal. Otherwise, all your efforts will be in vain. You will spend years wandering within this ingenious labyrinth until you tire and give up on any hope of success.

It's not geniuses who speak foreign languages. It's people like you, well, almost like you, who, for some reason, maybe because of their stubbornness, quiet self-confidence or an incomprehensible hunger that compels them forward in spite of everything—were able to cross the border of their own prescribed reservations.

Let's return now to the instructors. The majority of them are also victims of the malicious myth that it's necessary to possess outstanding talent to be proficient in a foreign language. This myth tickles their self-love and raises them above the drab and everyday masses. So why destroy this myth? Both consciously and unconsciously, they work to fortify it, subconsciously not allowing their students to approach any proficiency in mastering a language, which the instructors themselves possess. (About those instructors who are not proficient in a foreign language we will graciously be silent!) They receive satisfaction from watching helpless students flounder in endless and practically useless, unimaginative, run-of-the-mill exercises that are manufactured and manufactured by the hundreds and thousands.

By the way, the overwhelming majority of instructors, to the very end, do not understand the actual process of mastering a foreign language (they never learned the theory of language mastery in their college days because such a theory simply doesn't exist). Deep within, they are amazed at this because they got to know the language. On the one hand, they absolutely know that they are not

geniuses and don't even possess outstanding mental qualities. On the other hand, this myth is so desirable for them that they don't want to doubt it even for a minute. Therefore, to them, it's very confusing!

Nevertheless, occasionally, they are tormented by their secret doubts, and then they take out these unpleasant sensations on their defenceless students. They load them up with the next portion of 'irreplaceable' exercises (irreplaceable for filling up the amount of time allotted for the lesson and not at all for the mastering of the foreign language), or they pour out an unintelligible tirade, strewn with pseudoscientific terms. Or they'll squeeze from the dried-out tube of their imaginations another 'theme' of some sort and try to force it into the poor students' heads. After all this, the instructors feel much better, yet the students cringe under these verbal lashes, confessing once again their own personal insignificance, recognising the greatness of the instructor and continue on in their futile wandering in the dull labyrinth of a foreign language in the midst of a tightening spider web of declensions, conjugations and modal verbs.

'It's the way things are done now, and it's the way things have always been done!'—another brilliant argument that the players of the game are always ready to use. This classic in the realm of argument, to some degree rather touching in its simplicity, is also widely known as, 'Better that I—a good fellow—rape her, than some dirty bastard!'

A bit roughly spoken? Maybe. But right on the money...

## 11

### **Through the Dictionary! Hmmm...**

If you already have a burning desire to teach yourself a foreign language, how do you get started? What concrete steps do you undertake? Of course, you must find the thickest dictionary available for your foreign language, open it up to the first page, and begin memorising the foreign words in alphabetical order. For everyone knows that vocabulary is the most important thing!

No, my dear friend! No, no, and again, no! No! Forget what I said about the dictionary; that was just a lame attempt at a joke, although, as with any joke, there is a grain of truth.

Okay, I will explain for those suspiciously sitting in the back row.

Many people (and, sadly, even some instructors) imagine that studying a foreign language is all about memorising a mile-high heap of vocabulary, sometimes even directly from a dictionary. I know—for I did it myself! With a certain amount of shame, I must confess that once I tried to memorise a thick dictionary in alphabetical order. Fortunately, this unhealthy (putting it mildly) endeavour didn't last too long. Your humble servant experienced some dubious pleasures from this so-called method.

I'm telling you, my friends! I implore you! I plead with you by all that you consider holy—don't do this! The study of a foreign language is not the mindless memorisation of vocabulary! A language is not just words. It's a huge mistake to think of another language as merely a collection of unknown words that requires incessant memorisation and learning by rote! The quicker you free yourself from this idea, the better. A language is a complex, dynamic system that's always in motion. Words are just a part of the system. They are constantly playing, pulsating, changing their phonetic form, their meaning, their purpose.

In the beginning, this will seem to you a wild cacophony, chaos boiling up in front of you, overwhelming you and flooding you in its frenzy. Actually, every language is a splendid harmony, a fine-tuned organism. You just need to feel (through tireless labour) its complex and magical harmony, its warmth, its unique aroma...

Since we've been talking about dictionaries, it needs to be stated that, nevertheless, you will need to buy one. If you're going to study a language, you can't get around it. Students go through some interesting rituals when buying a dictionary. First they buy the smallest little dictionary they can find. In a short while, they realize that this dictionary is not sufficient, so they buy a second dictionary that's a little bigger. Then, they buy a third and so on, all the way up to finally buying the thickest dictionary possible. In this fashion, you end up with a useless assortment of various-sized dictionaries collecting dust—with the exception of the thick dictionary, which is absolutely necessary to begin your dictionary adventure with. So work backward and get yourself the biggest dictionary you can find and save a few trees.

While we're talking about the ineffectiveness and undesirability (gently speaking) of the simple memorisation of vocabulary, it's in order to say a few words about memorising numbers in your new language. Do not memorise these numbers in numerical order (one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and so on). In real life, it is highly unlikely (probably never) that you will ever hear them pronounced in that order. This kind of order would be very unnatural in a language. Language logic isn't formed from mathematical logic. In language, two times two doesn't have to equal four.

12

Let the numbers come to you 'disorganized', not in tight order or lined up from the shortest to the tallest on a separate page of a textbook. Let them arrive in random order: in books, in life situations, in the context of other words. Trust me; if the first number you meet and remember is nine or three, the end of the world won't happen. A specially formed tribunal won't start investigating the matter and convict you of grave crimes against the foreign language if the first number you learn is two or seven.

Now, if it's absolutely necessary (because of the peculiarity of your memory) for you to memorise the numbers all at once, then memorise them in groups of random pairs or triplets, such as: eight-one-five or two-six. Or memorise your cell phone number in your new language, or your favourite girlfriend's number or your mother's. Don't make the same mistake made by my former colleague, who complained to me that, when attempting to speak French, to remember a number, let's say 'five', he had to count to himself in French: one, two, three, four, five! From the beginning, that's the way the numbers were 'cemented' in his brain. That's how he also remembers the days of the week.

Most often, the study of a foreign language starts with learning the alphabet. This is an incorrect and less than effective approach that wastes time and energy during the initial stages of studying a foreign language. The usefulness of knowing the alphabet is limited and basically is reduced to tracking down words for translation in a dictionary, where the words are of course laid out in alphabetical order. Besides that, this knowledge may only come in handy if you're pulled over by an American policeman suspecting you (I'm sure a groundless suspicion) of driving under the influence. He will offer you the chance to recite the alphabet in his language so that you can prove to him that you are as sober as a judge. Yes, there exists such a game for highway policemen in the US. By the way, you can quietly parley an awkward situation like this by telling the policeman that you didn't attend any schools in America and therefore you didn't learn this particular game. Or you can just say you're a D student. Then, he will offer you some other entertaining game, such as touching the nose

with your finger—not his, mind you, but your own nose. Or he may ask you to walk along an imaginary straight line.

Regarding your lack of knowledge or weak knowledge of the foreign alphabet, that's about it for any other consequences. Regarding the consequences of the aforementioned amount of alcohol in your bloodstream (most unexplainable to you, of course), we won't mention it here...

That's the way it is. No need to open up to the first page of a thick dictionary and burn a hole in it with your persistent, unblinking gaze. You don't need to worry too much about words, about vocabulary. The vocabulary of the foreign language will come to you in the process of your study, just like calluses come to your hand on their own as you persistently, indefatigably till the soil in your garden. Keep tilling, my labour-loving friend. Hoe and weed by the sweat of your face and thou shalt see trees in blossom and breath in the fragrance of these flowers. The pain of your overworked hands will seem thus pleasant, and sweet shall be the fruit from these trees...

### **Language Matrix and Reverse Lingual Resonance**

There is an indestructible link between our cognition and the actual process of articulation. The connection between prayer-like utterances, consciousness and the subconscious has been known for thousands of years. I assert that this connection can be and must be used in the learning of a foreign language.

13

Repeated vocalisation of foreign language texts in a loud and articulate manner along with an attempt to imitate the pronunciation of a native speaker as closely as possible produces a certain process in our nervous system that can be called a 'reverse lingual resonance'. This resonance includes in itself a subconscious analysis of all linguistic structures and harmonies of the given language.

The reverse lingual resonance is certainly not based on the harmonies of the native language; it is based on the harmonies of a new and initially alien language that is being studied. The foreign harmonies eventually become somewhat customary for the person studying a foreign language through the use of a sort of matrix audio course and the repeated-aloud articulation of the 'text mantras'. What happens in this process of subconscious analysis is the realisation of a deep kinship between the native language and a foreign language at the level of elemental cognition and its expression through the means of language.

Such kinship, though varying in the degree to which it manifests itself, can be observed between all languages, including those that appear completely disparate. Thus, all languages in their essence ascend to one lingual core. The kinship between the languages can be discovered underneath layers of linguistic transformations accumulated over thousands and thousands of years, which is precisely what the matrix of reverse resonance is able to achieve when sufficiently continuous effort is applied to it.

Thus, the primary stage in studying a foreign language should be the building of this matrix of resonant mantras, consisting of various forms of speech, such as dialogues and other texts in the studied language, to read them aloud subsequently. From personal experience, I know that the optimally effective matrix should consist of 25–30 standard-sized dialogues or monologues (voiced by native speakers), each 300 to 500 characters or 20–50 seconds long.

Each unit should be listened to and then articulated to perfection before moving on to the next one, then the next one, etc. When a sufficient number of dialogues has been mastered, you need to continue reading them aloud from the first one to the last one and back again, within 2–3 months, then over and over and over again, until this reading aloud becomes as simple and habitual as stirring a teaspoon in a cup of coffee.

The dialogues and texts (in this book, the words ‘dialogues’ and ‘texts’, as used in the context of a matrix audio course, are synonymous and interchangeable) must be professionally voiced by native speakers at a normal rate of speech. The use of high-level vocabulary and corresponding grammatical models is preferred. Emotionally negative content should be avoided in the selection of the course content due to the strong possibility that frequent repetition of and listening to such negatively charged texts can have a negative psychological effect on the student. However, a certain emotionality in the dialogues is very much preferred because it reinforces the assimilation of language elements. Therefore, the desired ‘emotional coating’ must be positive.

Long pauses and gaps in the dialogues are also undesirable; they are destructive to the natural rhythm of the language and the integrity of our perception. Pauses and gaps are permissible and even indispensable in real-life communication due to our ability to fill in those voids with various non-verbal factors: gestures, facial expressions, etc. In the audio recordings, these pauses and gaps, however, become painful hindrances in studying a language and are subject to eradication.

14

In the matrix, there must be no non-language noises complicating our perception—only the language and nothing else. Very often, the authors include such noises in their courses in order to ‘create a natural linguistic environment’, so on the teaching records birds are chirping, cars are honking, rockets are roaring, nails are screeching on glass and such. If you listen once or twice, these noises are amusing, but then they become irritating. If you do serious, heavy listening, without which it is absolutely impossible to master a language, they turn into exquisite torture.

Our brain’s initial reaction to a foreign language almost always is blocking and rejection. Our brain doesn’t want its harmonic peace to be disturbed in any way. The resonance caused by the matrix successfully breaks its initial resistance and then helps bring it to relative comfort after it has already left the old and cosy comfort of the mother tongue. The matrix smoothens and soothes the painful transition from the old harmonies to the new ones.

Within the matrix, the brain is given the opportunity for intermediate training and for becoming accustomed to the foreign language in the early stages when full transition to the foreign language is still impossible. If you will, the matrix could be compared to arpeggios and scales when learning how to play a musical instrument or *Kata* exercises when learning martial arts. From films, everybody is familiar with the pictures of martial arts students standing in neat rows and performing certain kinds of offensive or defensive moves. Essentially, they are performing a martial arts matrix, in many respects similar to the language matrix that I am proposing.

Of course, lacking spontaneity, it is not yet the actual martial arts mastery but a certain and necessary stage on the way to the real use of moves and reactions perfected to full automaticity.

The full name I have chosen for this approach is a ***meditational reverse resonance lingual matrix with peripatetic elements***. Peripatetics will be explained later.

However, in preparing my first matrix for China, I decided not to use this name, which could be too confusing for Chinese students due to cultural differences and translation difficulties. Therefore, another name for this approach is *language tai-chi*. It is short and completely to the point.

### Three Parts of the Language

So what, basically, does a language consist of? What units, what 'continents' is a language world made of? What should we diligently and thoughtfully consider in studying and researching a language?

Usually, a language—a foreign language, of course—is divided up into three main parts. It is broken down into speaking, listening, and, of course, reading. Writing isn't usually given a separate category and isn't studied separately (unless it's hieroglyphic writing) since it is generally accepted as a product of the three basic components mentioned, primarily reading.

I fully agree with this breakdown of what a language is. Although it's not perfect, for the purposes of foreign language study (for a practical mastery of it!), it will have to satisfy us.

Therefore, to achieve full acquisition of a foreign language, we must have a mastery of speaking (spontaneous speech), be able to understand a native speaker, and be able to read original literature in the target language with adequate understanding of it.

15

It is possible that some are concealing a vague but oh so sweet hope that, to master all three language components, it's not actually necessary to invest intense work in each of them separately. You're kind of hoping that, if you learn to read, then speaking and listening will just come on its own. Or you hope that if, in some miraculous way, one day you will come to understand foreign speech that comprehension somehow will transform itself into speech, flowing from your lips like a majestic deep river.

Let me be quick to discourage you, as nothing of the sort will happen to you, unless of course you are the rare exception. If that is the case, then it raises the question of why you are even reading this exhortation, for another man's discoveries must be boring and superfluous for you.

Practical experience gives us all kinds of real-life examples showing that mastery of one component in no way means mastery of the other two. Even grasping two of the components does not automatically result in grasping the third. We have to battle each separate component separately! Each height has its own particular defence fortification, and we have to storm them separately. Remember that, my future general.

Of course, all three components are interconnected, and knowledge of one will ease the acquisition of the other two. But that's it, nothing more. This is well known among true professionals who teach in foreign language departments, where speaking, reading and listening are essentially independent disciplines.

A great example of how the knowledge of one component does not automatically turn into knowledge of the others is seen in how foreign languages are studied in non-language departments. Most students can read their foreign language decently enough, or at least the literature for their majors and specialties. But that's all. They don't understand oral speech, and even more, they are



unable to speak the language that they are studying. A similar situation, by the way, exists in primary and high schools.

There are all kinds of examples of professional translators who spend their whole lives translating literary works from some foreign language and yet do not speak the language at all. Neither do they understand their target foreign language when it's spoken. They possess the language only at the written level. This type of situation is rather ordinary and not really that astounding.

As a reverse example, we can consider the indisputable and well-known fact that millions and millions of people exist who are unable to read in their native language. We're not even talking about tribes that have no written form of their language, despite getting along fine just speaking. I think these types may even be among those you know personally.

You can make a weak effort trying to say that it's possible that the situation is a bit different if it's not your native language, if you study the language as a foreign language. I counter that with the fact that there are millions of illegal (and legal) Mexicans in cowboy boots and seekers of the 'good life' from other nationalities who have somehow just barely learned to speak the local 'jive'. They barely understand (mostly just guessing from context) what they are being told by the natives, but reading in English, or other local language, remains for them a mystery beyond their reach. Yes, you can find tons of examples of this in your own country, too.

16

An interesting but sad illustration of the aforementioned situation is how parents and children interact in the overwhelming majority of first-generation American families. Parents, being practically non-English speakers, talk to their children in their native language. The children, having 'unlearned' to speak the language of their parents (almost completely), can more or less understand what they're being told but answer (if they answer at all!) in their day-to-day language of school and friends, in the language that has taken the place of their native tongue—English. Quite amusing an example, is it not?

So, then, how do we approach the study of a language so that we don't end up in one of the unpleasant aforementioned situations?

Language study must begin with long, persistent listening. This idea, this foundational dogma, I will tirelessly express countless times because it is so important for the correct approach to studying a language. As often as it's repeated, it still won't be enough. By the way, listening at the matrix stage of learning still does not mean significant understanding of the spoken foreign language; actual understanding will come to you much later. Don't give in to panic if after a few days of listening to the matrix dialogue you don't understand much, if anything, of the elements of the dialogue. That's normal. You just need to take a deep breath and keep working. The initial matrix listening is a necessary step in the right direction, nothing else.

Then follows repetitive reading aloud, which brings us closer both to spontaneous speaking and reading in the target language, but at this stage, this kind of reading aloud is just a surrogate and preparatory prototype of real speaking and real reading.

In this way, the use of the resonant meditative matrix leads us simultaneously in the three language directions, and we remember that, without mastery of all three, full knowledge of the foreign language, alas, is impossible.

For now, though, we will take a well-deserved break from our studies. For a little while, you can forget about foreign languages and stretch out in the grass, surrounded by young yellow dandelions, under the rays of a warm, promising spring sun.

### **The Child Approach, or Dancing Until You Are Exhausted**

Often, a so-called ‘natural’ or ‘child’ approach to studying a foreign language is set forth and even practiced to some extent. Usually, this method is imposed upon adults in the form of singing children’s songs, reading clumsy poems written during a hangover by balding, pot-bellied men and other similar futile endeavours.

The logical basis of this method is the following: you must approach the learning of a foreign language as children do since neither you nor they know this language but are only making an attempt to become proficient. The followers of this approach assure us that children learn a language by singing songs, reciting poetry and dancing inexhaustibly day and night.

They suggest that you, my friend, should become similar to these little angels with their innocent little toys and that the ability to chatter in a foreign language will immediately come to you like singing does to birds.

There is definitely some logic in this argument. Children certainly are not born able to speak; they have to learn how to do it just like we have to learn a foreign language. Why, nevertheless, do I feel like asking (from the back row of the class) one very simple question: where, in what circus, have you seen children singing, dancing and reciting poetry at the age when they uttered their first words? Show me those little monsters—I want to see them, here and now!

Clearly, my question was purely rhetorical since such freakish children are not and never have been in existence.

For children, the learning of a native language does not start with performances of sappy poems and songs of dubious quality; children in general do very little singing, poetry reciting and least of all dancing, in the process of their natural development. Normally, these activities are enforced by adults. What it does start with is months and years of observing their parents and other members of their families and attentively listening to how and to what they say to the children and to each other.

That is how a language is really assimilated by children: first through hearing, then through listening, then through understanding with the use of deep internal analysis and, when ready—through imitating the native speakers around them. Do not let the fact that it takes children months and years before uttering their first words disturb you, my dear friend. You and I have one great advantage—we are no longer children! Unlike children, we are able to control this process, manipulate it, make it richer and less extensive, while preserving its main principles:

Hearing, listening, analysis, imitation.

So let’s really start learning a foreign language like children, but without wearing diapers, drooling and sucking on pacifiers. We, my smiling and grown-up friend, couldn’t do it anyway; unfortunately, this golden age is irretrievably gone for us.

## The Physical Process, or Your Black Belt

Studying a foreign language is a physical process as much as it is intellectual. In its primary stage, this process should be even more physical than intellectual. What happens at this stage is the development of the muscle memory for your speech apparatus and the muscles of your face in the course of repeated articulation of the new and unfamiliar combinations of sound—a completely novel algorithm of motion. This must be clearly understood.

This process is parallel to learning martial arts, playing musical instruments, dancing, typing and other kinds of somatic activity that require persistent and copious training in the memorisation of complex motor algorithms. What must come to mind is practicing scales (so dear to your neighbours), working on dance moves in front of a mirror and perfecting *Kata* in martial arts. Learning a foreign language is a physical process that demands physical efforts and, moreover, unaccustomed physical efforts from us and our muscles. Unlike math or computer programming, a foreign language cannot be mastered by the sole means of logic and cognition.

Remember it, learn it by heart, get it into your head; studying a foreign language is radically different from studying math, physics, or computer science.

You can spend years and decades trying to figure out how to drive a car, reading with dedication various manuals and instructions about what you need to do with your right hand and what with the left hand and what your feet and eyes are supposed to do. Now get behind the wheel and try to drive a car in reality! How far do you think you are going to get having 'learned' to drive this way? Exactly!

We can fully study the anatomy, physiology and biochemistry of the process that is taking place in our muscles; in the same way, we can learn all the names for all the movements and poses in karate but that would not get us a black belt. In fact, it wouldn't get us any belt in karate. The road to the coveted belt lies through actual physical work through real sweat, blood and pain; and though learning a foreign language doesn't usually go as far as making you bleed, you, my dearest friend, are guaranteed to experience strong emotional discomfort, extremely close to the physical sensation of pain. Remember this and be prepared!

However, I must say that it is impossible to be entirely ready for this kind of pain because the sensation will be completely new and unusual for you, and sensations cannot be explained—they can only be felt. You cannot explain what an avocado tastes like to a person who has never tried one. A child cannot comprehend when he is told, 'Do not touch a hot stove—you'll burn yourself.' He will only be able to understand what it means to 'burn yourself' when his rosy finger touches the forbidden red-hot object. That's when an empty word becomes full of real sensation, but no sooner than that.

And you will understand what I'm talking about only then, when you experience the 'burns' of a foreign language on yourself. As for now, you and your 'tender rosy fingers' will remain in a state of blissful ignorance.

## Articulation and the Speech Apparatus, or You Are Dancing the Fandango

It is well known that the sounds of human speech are formed through the modification of the airflow from our lungs by our speech apparatus. The speech apparatus includes the mouth and nasal cavities along with all its parts: the voice ligaments, tongue, teeth, palate, etc. The air flow is changed primarily by the work of the voice ligaments, larynx, tongue and cheeks.

The speech apparatus is considered identical for everyone, just like hands, feet or, let's say, hearts. In any case, that's how it is immediately after birth and the first years of life. But for any given language, the functioning of these speech organs is different from other languages. The differences lie in what groups of muscles of the speech apparatus are functioning and in what sequence—that is, in the algorithms of the working of the speech apparatus. Various languages have their own algorithms for how the speech apparatus works. The speech apparatus of a native speaker of a particular language forms sounds and combinations of sounds that are characteristic to that language but to greater or lesser degrees alien to other languages.

We can draw a parallel here with dancing and say something like this: in one language, the speech apparatus exclusively dances the waltz; in another, nothing but the tango; in a third, the foxtrot and nothing but the foxtrot; and in a fourth, the Cossack dance. Here's a more masculine example: in one language, the speech apparatus only boxes; in another it only knows kung-fu or some other discipline, such as sumo wrestling; it is satisfied and made proud by sumo and desires nothing besides sumo.

19

Practically the whole sound structure of a foreign language is often based on sounds that are completely absent in our native language. The matter is complicated even more by the fact that, in the beginning, it's impossible even to distinguish these completely alien (to us) sounds, let alone to try to pronounce them correctly. There is simply no program in our brain that is assigned to recognise the alien sounds of a foreign language. These sound elements are unusual to our native language, and the hearing apparatus needs training for the corresponding program to develop in our brain and begin working effectively in identifying these sounds.

But let us return to our speech apparatus. In the process of speech, some muscles bear most of the workload, and accordingly, they are trained and constantly in shape. Other muscles function to a significantly lesser degree or do not function at all and accordingly are in a condition of partial or complete atrophy.

In some measure, this can be compared to the way that the Chinese aristocracy would bind girls' feet from infancy. This was actually practiced to give their gait a certain elegance. As a result of this drawn-out process of many years the poor aristocrats were unable to walk in a normal way but 'graciously' hobbled, not unlike ducks suffering from gout. The atrophy of the corresponding foot muscles left them with nothing else. It could be said for all of us that our articulation apparatus has been 'bound', 'twisted' by our environment just like Chinese aristocratic feet. In different languages and cultures, this transpires in different ways and correspondingly generates various language 'gaits'.

When you attempt to form sounds in your new language, mastering, as it were, a new language gait, the poorly trained or atrophied muscles of the articulation apparatus suddenly have to begin working, though they are completely unaccustomed to it and protest against the process. By the way, this behaviour is not simply our muscles being capricious. They really do not know how to make the demanded algorithms of movement. Imagine their surprise and indignation when we try to force

them to do this impossible thing! How would you feel if all of a sudden you were ordered to dance, let's say the fandango? Right here and now! What would your fandango look like? Personally, I wouldn't like to picture this ugly debacle in my mind, with all due respect to you...

Keep in mind that, during the articulation of the many, many sounds of a foreign language, the primary load falls directly on the unprepared muscles, the 'loafers'. A battle begins between your will... your... uh... iron will?... and your insubordinate and self-willed articulation apparatus, accustomed exclusively to, let's say, Polish folk dance and in no way desirous to cross over to a minuet. Or vice versa if you prefer.

Who will come out the victor in this battle? Each will answer this question for himself, but your success will depend highly on the correctness of your chosen tactic for this battle with this 'dangerous enemy'. Will you hobble in your new language like the aforementioned ill duck? Or will you walk with a firm and from time to time elegant stride? Unless you have no innate functional flaws in your articulation apparatus or any serious traumatic alterations, the tactic you choose (correctly or incorrectly) in developing the new articulation 'gait' will give you the answers to these questions.

Thus...

### **Rice or Lice?**

20

Typical national accents are formed in this very manner. The atrophied muscles within a native language do not cross over completely into a work mode, which is necessary for an ideal accent in the foreign language. And since various groups of muscles within different languages are prone to atrophy, accordingly, various accents form that are typical for these languages.

For example, in Japanese, there is no 'r' or 'l' sound (there is a certain sound that occupies an intermediate position between r, l, and d). So the words 'rice' and 'lice' sound exactly the same to a Japanese person. A Japanese person's articulation apparatus is simply unable to pronounce the letter 'r' without special training. The average Japanese person is simply unaware of the existence of the letter 'r'.

This is just like the average uninitiated Russian, who is not aware of the existence of interdental consonants in English that have no equivalents in Russian (and in many other languages, of course)! A very unpleasant surprise awaits Americans who are beginning to study Russian in the pair of so-called 'hard' and 'soft' consonants in Russian. I remember one of my students from the Green Berets yelling in the hallway during a break. Apparently on the verge of a nervous breakdown, my student was highly frustrated with a letter in Russian that simply 'softens' consonants.

Of course, I could parry these hysterical outbursts by quietly pointing out that, for Russians, Americans have a most unpleasant similarity in pronouncing two major city names, New York and Newark. A quite astonishing discovery for non-Americans takes place, often at the last second in an unfamiliar airport when purchasing airline tickets to one of the aforementioned places. However, glancing at the bloodshot eyes of my frustrated Green Beret as he convulsively clenched and unclenched his huge fists, I refrained from engaging in an overly intellectual debate on the topic...

Sometimes you may hear people say, 'Why do I need to have good pronunciation in the foreign language? There is no way I'll waste my precious time on such nonsense.' Right...

In the late eighties, I saw a television program in which the hosts were talking with Americans who occasionally listened to Soviet propaganda over the radio in English, particularly aimed at North Americans. One American said with a smile that it was impossible to take the speaker's words seriously, as he broadcasted Soviet politics and global issues with the accent of a southerner from Alabama, all the while openly and absurdly proud of his pronunciation...

Some brilliant hiring politics of Soviet propaganda radio...

One of my American acquaintances who knows Russian very well tells the story with laughter of how proud he was on his first trip to Moscow when his new Moscow friends told him that he had a strong Armenian accent. Much, much later, he discovered that, in Russia, this is by no means a compliment. Oh well...

For now, you can forget about Soviet broadcasters, proud of their Alabama accents. Forget about Americans speaking Russian with an Armenian accent. Think about all the crazy, strange accents you have heard in your own language. Imagine a Thai man being asked at US immigration control, 'How old are you, sir?' 'Dirty'. 'And how old is your wife?' 'She is dirty-two'.

Do you want to be like the people mentioned in this section when you speak in the foreign language you are studying? Do you want that? Wonder of wonders! Then pronunciation really won't play a significant role for you and you can boldly neglect it!

21

Believe me; you may not be pleased with the results.

### **About the Orchestra and Musicians and Other Things**

It seems that the facial muscles, along with the respiratory system—everything that makes the sounds of language—can to some extent be compared with an orchestra. This orchestra always plays the same symphony. The movements of the 'musicians' (meaning the facial, chest and other muscles) are developed to the highest degree of virtuosity. These musicians always know what to play, how to play and in what sequence. Their movements are coordinated and polished through years and decades of repeating the intonations, sounds, words, phrases and sentences of the symphony of the native language. As soon as the conductor (the brain) gives the signal, the musicians carry out the command without hesitation, operating by the familiar matrices of habitually carrying out these commands.

Or almost always without hesitation. Of course, we all know that our coordination in performing the commands of the brain can be significantly compromised—by alcohol, for example. Strong frost or getting a shot of local anaesthesia from the dentist will also impair coordination. In such cases, the language symphony falters. And this happens with a native speaker, familiar and comfortable with the performance of his own symphony!

Imagine what happens when the conductor gives the command to perform an entirely new symphony, or at least some elements of a new symphony. Phony notes! Protest! Sabotage! That's what results. These new notes are so strange and unfamiliar that the musicians simply refuse to comply and continue to play their favourite old melodies and themes rather than those that the conductor is commanding. By their behaviour, they are telling the conductor that they have no idea

what is required of them, that they haven't been trained in these new tricks, that they are tired of all this nonsense, and, in the end, they want to just be left alone!

What is the conductor to do in this situation? Should he capitulate completely, displaying a shameful lack of courage? Will he compromise and insist just partially on having his own way and try to force the rebel musicians to perform the new symphony, albeit with phony notes and out of tune—have you ever heard an orchestra playing badly? Or will our conductor firmly find the courage and energy to straighten out his negligent subordinates and make them play smoothly and nicely?

This question one can answer only for himself...

### **Listening and Reciting, or Alzkwite**

The initial several days of listening will serve as a breach of the first lines of defence of our brain—our 'habitual self'. Our brain is trying to defend itself from the invasion of an alien—another language. We must expose our ears and the brain centres that control the hearing to the constant pressure of speech in the target language. Not two or three times of listening (and certainly not once, as is often practiced!) to the dialogue, but many days of listening—daily for at least three hours. I'll explain the technical aspects of this kind of listening later.

The fact is, with one, two, three or even twenty times of listening, you are not even hearing what you're listening to. At this point, we're not even talking about understanding but just a basic recognition of the sound units of the foreign language. In our brains, there is no program that allows them to recognise the sounds of a foreign language that are significantly distinct from the phonetics of its native language.

Almost always in such cases we hear only a strange noise and not a chain of recognisable phonemes. Often, the brain slips us phantom sound images. We think that we are hearing familiar words or sounds, which is not true. For example, when I hear the Uzbek language, which is completely unfamiliar to me, sometimes I could swear that I can make out some English words or even whole phrases, although I absolutely know for sure that it can't be, and I know for certain that my hearing is picking up phantom sound images.

The goal is to hear, to learn to hear the alien elements of the new language. The challenge is to force our brains to overcome their resistance and to develop a program to accept and recognise the alien phonemes of the new language.

Initially, you will listen to the matrix dialogue 'blind' for two or three days, without any attempt to read along with the text or to imitate the speaker. The fact is that how sounds in any language are reflected on paper is rather conditional (in various languages to various degrees). The gap between what you hear and what you see will be quite confusing to you and will be a strong hindrance to really hearing the sounds of the foreign language.

Often and in normal everyday speech, we almost always say one thing and write something else entirely different. A few examples in English:

We say for 'give me'—'gimme', for 'What's up'—'whassup', for 'president'—'prezdnt', for 'governor'—'govner', 'talking'—'tawkn', 'What did you say?'—'Whajse?'... and countless other examples, which



even the thickest of books could not contain. This happens with varying degrees of severity with the all words in your mother tongue or any language, and not just with words but with various word combinations, as well.

When people take on the challenge of studying a foreign language, the rules of phonetics and spelling, which differ from those of their mother tongue, seem incredibly complex and illogical. In response to the protests of my American students, I would say (not without pleasure, I must add!) that all these difficulties were specifically invented by the KGB and the Politburo and personally approved by Comrade Stalin to cause torment. (Incidentally, the fact that virtually all Russian language textbooks for foreigners begin with the insanely difficult word 'zdravstvuyte' (hello) raises some questions. What effect did these reverent textbook authors want to have on the poor foreigners, zealous to master the Russian language, studying textbooks made in this way? It makes you think about whether I was that far from the truth with my KGB joke.

But let us now finish our excursion concerning the phonetics of the Russian language and return to our main topic.

Our first task is to listen for many hours over several days until we come to a complete or nearly complete hearing-recognition of all the sound elements of the dialogue in a normal speech pattern. Of course, for this kind of serious listening, there will be some very serious technical and physiological obstacles. We will talk about how to overcome these obstacles later.

23

You must not be frightened by the words 'several days'. This will only occur in the beginning of your learning the foreign language. The process will speed up after that in accordance with how quickly the sounds and harmonies of the new language become, if not native, then ordinary and familiar.

From blind listening, you will transition to listening to the very same dialogue while simultaneously following the text with your eyes. At first, the speaker will get ahead of you. This is normal because you'll be delayed, clinging to individual words, trying to match the printed image of words with the corresponding sound elements.

We must bear in mind that the discrepancy in different languages between words in print and their actual sound has varying degrees of severity. In German, for example, or Spanish, the gap between writing and sounds is quite small—though in those languages, of course it exists! In English, it reaches absolutely fantastic dimensions. The British themselves joke about this (oh, that incomparable English humour!)—in English they write 'Manchester' and say 'Liverpool'!

I have to say that this joke is not that far from the truth. In English, you will at first be appalled by the large number of letters that seem to have absolutely no relationship to the pronunciation of a particular word, as well as a seemingly endless succession of exceptions. But this is only in the beginning. With the right approach, you can learn to read even English very quickly.

If you persistently keep listening and then continue to listen while following along with the text, you will become accustomed to and eventually firmly associate the visible 'word clothes' on the page with the sounds hidden beneath these 'clothes'. Then you will begin to notice a desire to speak, to imitate the speech of the speaker. This is apparent by the involuntary movement of your lips. This means that you are ready to speak.

Start reading (without simultaneously listening, of course), but do not try to read everything at once,

all in one bite. Begin to read, starting with individual words and phrases. Don't hurry to swallow big hot spoonfuls of porridge, so to speak. Remove it from the dish carefully, in small portions, from the edge where it is not so hot. Do not be afraid occasionally to go back for more listening; sometimes, you will need to do this. Initially, after the first period of listening, you may think you are ripe for reading aloud, but your attempts show that you're not quite ready and some elements of the dialogue require additional prolonged listening. Come back if you need to; that's normal.

Never read in a whisper or an undertone! Developing your pronunciation in this way is self-deception and pure illusion. The muscle-memory for articulation is not produced by whispering! This is the same as learning to box, imagining as you throw irresistible punches at the face of Mike Tyson, from which he falls flat on the mat, spitting part of an ear out of his mouth, and begins to sob like a baby at your feet saying, 'Don't hit me again, mista!' As they say, dream on!

Or try to gently hum a melody, some *Rigoletto* aria. Aren't you starting to get the feeling that you're not doing too badly, almost like some opera singer! Ok, now perform the same melody, but in a full voice and preferably in the presence of a large number of friends and acquaintances. What do you think their reaction will be to your ... er ... song? Loud applause? Cries of 'Bravo!' from the audience? That's a bit hard for me to believe...

In his *Book of Five Rings* the famous Japanese sword master Miyamoto Musashi likes to quote an old saying: 'He who is able to do more is also able to do less.' I must say that this quote describes very well my recommendation to read the matrix dialogues very loudly, very well, indeed!

24

When reading, you must do so only very loudly! Moving from loud speaking to quiet is quite easy and simple, but the transition from quiet speaking to loud while maintaining proper pronunciation is very, very difficult and perhaps even impossible. In establishing correct pronunciation, this rule is not just extremely important but foundational! In this very manner, an actor develops his professional voice.

I repeat again:

You must read your matrix dialogue exclusively in a very loud voice!

From an inarticulate stutterer to a brilliant orator, Demosthenes did it in this very way, through loud articulation (close to the level of screaming). Don't forget that, even if becoming a new Demosthenes is not included in your plans!

Schliemann intuitively discovered this idea of loud language reading or reciting. This very same immovable Schliemann dug up Troy for us, guided by *The Iliad* of Homer. He learned to speak dozens of languages, using a loud voice to recite texts in these languages, so we have a very worthy role model to imitate!

And do not forget to breathe! Yes, yes, breathe... that's exactly what I wanted to say! When you begin to speak a foreign language, your breathing gets out of step. When articulating a non-native language, you must breathe in a different way. The diaphragm and lungs are using new algorithms that are significantly different from the old ones. You must realize this. If you become a bit short of breath while training on the matrix dialogues, it will only happen in the beginning. Gradually, your breathing should get in tune, and you will begin to breathe, well, in a foreign language...

As you begin to recite, break up the sentences into so-called 'phonetic words', which do not coincide

with the lexical units in the printed form. A phonetic word consists of a long word that carries a stressed syllable along with adjacent words attached to it, often supplementary. It's kind of like a phonetic core to which are attached words, pronounced with less stress or almost not pronounced at all. Some words appear only on paper; they are not uttered at all, having completely dropped out of speech, unless it is some special, artificially articulated professional kind of speech.

Here is an example. Imagine you are a foreigner. Let's take a phrase that you have already heard, 'All was quiet and he liked it.' Pronouncing this in full (don't forget, you are a 'foreigner'!) is extremely difficult. Because of this, we have to divide it up into the simple phonetic elements of which the phrase consists.

The reading should be done in a very energetic and loud voice. The phrase is divided into two phonetic words: 'alwazquíet' and 'enhelíkedit' separated (or connected, if you like) by a slight pause or 'alzkwíte' and 'enhelíkedit' at normal speed. Always start the reading part from the end. In our example, the end is the phonetic word 'enhelíkedit'. The stressed syllable is 'líked'. This is the phonetic centre of attraction around which is organized the entire phonetic word. Read it. Now let's add the unstressed 'it' and we get 'líkedit'. Let's read that. Now we add another unstressed syllable 'he', and we get 'helíkedit'. Read this combination. Add the last unstressed syllable 'and' and we get 'enhelíkedit', and accordingly, we read the phonetic word in its entirety. We read it until we can no longer make any improvement in the pronunciation. We have reached our peak.

After this, we go on to recite 'alzkwíte': 'kwíte' (the stressed core) and then add, 'alz' to get 'alzkwíte'. Then we connect 'alzkwíte' and 'enhelíkedit'. Let's read the whole phrase: 'alzkwíteenhelíkedit'. Trying to achieve our best accent (Russian, English, French, Chinese, etc.), we shouldn't forget the overall native intonation of the whole phrase, as well. The value of the intonation cannot be overstated. If the individual words are the bricks of a language, the intonation is the mortar that holds together the entire structure. Then we proceed to the next phrase of the dialogue, and so on. We continue to work through this string of 'sound beads' until we work through the whole dialogue from beginning to end.

Of course, you must remember the preliminary step: persistent listening to the whole dialogue and, naturally, our 'alzkwíte' phrases. Without this preliminary, extensive listening, you (a foreigner!) will not be able to discern or recognise any stressed syllables, or even more, the unstressed syllables, let alone the phonetic words. You won't be able to hear anything at all except for disjointed sounds or non-existent phantom sounds and words that the brain obligingly presents as sounds you are expecting. The brain is simply functioning with the only program it has to recognise the sounds of its native speech.

I repeat once again that, when I am talking about extensive listening, I do not mean two or three times or even two or three hours but days and even weeks of three hours a day of pure listening, especially the first few dialogues! Hold your horses! This phase is crucial in establishing your pronunciation. Trying to cut corners and save time in this beginning stage (the value of which cannot be overstated) will cost you dearly in the future. If you allow coarse errors in establishing your pronunciation at this stage, they will remain with you forever and can be overcome only with very great difficulty. Moreover, this correction will never be complete.

One must also keep in mind that pronunciation is not just pronunciation but an indicator, as well, a visible marker of how strong the foreign language is being repelled, rejected by the person trying to learn, to absorb the language.

This is how we must approach the developing of the matrix of the reverse resonance for any foreign language, be it Spanish, Russian, Chinese or English.

Since in any language spelling does not match pronunciation, it follows that you must simply remember one cardinal rule: you need to listen over and over to foreign speech and accurately imitate it, including breaking it down into phonetic words. There is no other way to develop good pronunciation. At this stage, it is highly desirable to have the participation of a teacher who knows what he is doing.

By 'the participation of a teacher', I mean a teacher who is not spoiled by typical cynicism or the 'traditional', incorrect approach to foreign language study, one who follows the aforementioned algorithm I have taught you. Finding such a teacher will be rather complicated, if it is possible at all. Participation by a traditional (read 'incompetent' here) teacher is harmful and should be avoided, or at least one must approach such involvement with great caution. However, independent work leads to very good and even excellent results. I tell you this based not only on my own experience and my students' experience but also on the experience of many other people who have followed this path intuitively even before this book was first published.

I was personally acquainted with one such intuitive Demosthenes type. It was a woman who spoke Russian with a beautiful, intelligent, 'professor' voice, although she was born in a small mountain village where she spent the first third of her life. When we became acquainted, I expressed my admiration for her ability to speak Russian so well and asked in which faculty she worked as a professor of Russian. She laughed and said that she studied Russian as a foreign language in an ordinary village school. Her native language, as it turned out, was one of the languages of the Caucasus. I said that there was no school in which one learns to speak as she spoke. She again laughed and said that, as a girl, she would go out to the fields and loudly recite—almost screaming—in Russian. I asked her whether she knew at the time of Demosthenes. She replied that no, of course, she did not know of him. Something inside of her just told her she needed to do that...

So, by all means, start with an immense amount of listening (until you are exhausted!) and then, loudly, very loudly, read what you have heard, breaking the phrases into their basic phonetic elements. Try to imitate the voice-actors of the dialogue (who absolutely must be native speakers) very closely, as close as possible.

Don't despair if it seems you are unable to perfectly pronounce some elements. The main thing in pronunciation is the total collection of elements, and even not so much that but a correct overall intonation of the foreign language! Some elements of pronunciation are not of decisive importance and even tend, to a certain extent, to 'ripen' in the later stages of language learning. However, this does not negate the need for an absolutely honest (not honest for someone else but for you!) application of all possible efforts to perfect each element taken separately.

As you work through the first five to ten dialogues, you can take quite a long time, about a week or two or even more for each dialogue, but then the process can be sped up to four to five days on a dialogue, including listening and reading aloud. Exact figures here cannot really be given. Learning a foreign language is strictly individual. In large measure, this is inspiration, creativity, intuition and not an exact science, so do not be alarmed if the first and second dialogue take you up to 15 or 18 days each. Believe me, for your successful mastery of a foreign language, this is time well spent! When you

have in this way worked through and read 25 to 30 (no need for more than 30) dialogues, you are ready to take the next step.

By the sweat of your brow, you have grown wheat, threshed the grain and milled flour. You have poured in water and added salt. Now begin to knead the dough from which you will bake your bread. This will happen soon, very soon! In the meantime, roll up your sleeves and start kneading dough without reprieve. It's not bread quite yet, but bread it will be very soon...

Knead your 'matrix' dough. Read the matrix in a full voice, starting with the first dialogue and ending with the last without stopping. Once you've read the last one, go back to the first one again and work your way nonstop to the last one. You should not do more than three or four hours in one sitting because you can lose your voice, and then the matrix reading will need to stop to allow your voice to be restored. You can use some cold lozenges to diminish the impact on the throat. These are quite effective.

Shortly after the beginning of this matrix-meditative reading (20, 30 or 40 minutes into it), a warm feeling in the cheeks and lips may appear, a sign that everything is going along as it should. Continue reciting the full matrix for a month or two or three, after which you should be ready to transition to intensive reading with minimal use of a dictionary.

How do you properly define 'working' days, weeks and months? Thank you for asking a very interesting question!

27

According to my criteria, if you listen or read for ten minutes a day, that's not a day. If you put headphones on your head for an hour or two (or even three), all the while watching television or simply sleeping, this is not a day. You have to open yourself to the foreign language or at least try to open yourself to it; you have to make an absolutely honest effort. You must be honest with yourself and with the language. A foreign language doesn't tolerate deception. This is a daily test in which you cannot have a cheat sheet up your sleeve or look at the answer from your neighbour!

Regarding the amount of time you study, I suggest the following very conditional formula: 1,000/3/3,000

During the year, you have to work on the language at least a thousand hours, including at least 3,000 pages of reading in that language. It follows that you should listen or read about three hours a day. If you work on reading for two hours, then listen for one hour. If you read an hour, then listen for two. If you have enough energy for five or six hours of language study a day, do it. No terrible catastrophe will take place if by the end of the first year you have not read 3,000 pages in the target language but 5,000 or 10,000 pages.

'Why a year and not three months or five years?' Again, your question is right in the bull's eye!

Well, it's determined by experience. After one year, a person possesses the language sufficiently well for normal everyday communication, reading original literature of medium complexity, and a decent understanding of television programs, radio and movies. After a year, the foreign language student goes, so to speak, to an operational level; he already possesses the language. At the same time, he is ready (and must!) improve this ownership. The crucial difference here between the initial and this advanced stage consists of the fact that the language is no longer completely foreign and is already becoming, to some extent, part of the new person.

Learning transitions to a new qualitative level. A self-sustaining reaction, so to speak, is beginning. You no longer need to apply the same high-level energy as you did in the beginning. You are surprised and pleased to notice that learning a foreign language has become natural. It's time to reap what you sowed with such difficulty a year ago...

On the other hand, the fact that I took a year as a basis for the calculations does not mean that you absolutely must follow this timetable. Nothing catastrophic will happen if you put together the matrix for six months or two to three years. A year is simply the amount of time that I believe should be a minimum in getting to a solid level of acquisition of the language while applying maximum effort to it.

In foreign language departments, students hit their peak at the third year of study and do not surpass this level at the fourth or even the fifth year of study. However, we can't forget that these students are studying two contemporary languages simultaneously (I studied three), with many study subjects having no direct relation to the practical mastery of the target languages. The long summer holidays are also a serious hindrance.

You, however, will be working on a practical, concentrated mastery of the language that compresses the time that it takes actually to use the foreign language in real-life situations. At the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, it takes about a year to attain practical mastery of a highly complex language (Russian, for example)—six hours of language study every day with an instructor in the classroom, plus a couple of hours of homework.

28

The most important thing for you is that, within a year, you completely prepare yourself for full personal communication with native speakers. Your ship can bravely come out of the comfortable harbour of the matrix of reverse resonance, out of the safe and habitual reading of hundreds and thousands of pages, from watching films and listening to the radio, into the rough waters of spontaneous personal communication with native speakers.

Rest assured that the ship you have built will be guided perfectly at the helm and withstand the pounding waves. And very soon, the yet inexperienced captain—you, my dear friend—will become a seasoned sea dog, calmly charting his course among the dangerous reefs, underwater currents and sudden squalls that every language is full of...

### **No Time To Spare, or the Expanding Universe**

I can hear you all the way over here, my friend! Oh yes, I hear your groans! I hear everything! I am not deaf! The slow-simmering rage of a protest rising up from your chest after hearing my words, '1,000 hours a year!' You reply, 'There's no way I can do it. I'm not in a position where I can find and devote three hours a day with only an occasional day off! It's just physically impossible! I don't have that kind of extra time!'

My dear (and quite busy) friend, apparently, perhaps only for a moment, you have forgotten who you're dealing with. I am an old hand at this, and I won't accept such an answer! Let's take a closer look at your extraordinarily busy life.

What is your brain so tied up with when you wake up in the morning (with the roosters, of course)? How about when you are grooming your beard? And when you are eating breakfast, putting on your coat of armour, sliding your sword into its sheath, checking the edges on your fingernails, plopping yourself gently into the saddle and, with a brisk trot, galloping off to work or school? Are you turning over and over in your mind the theory of the expanding universe? Oh, okay, then I must sincerely beg your pardon. Somehow I mistakenly imagined you were thinking about absolutely nothing.

What do you do while waiting in lines at bus stops or riding on the subway? What are you doing when you're walking along the street or in parks and squares? And in forests, across plains and fields? Through the valleys and across plateaus? Navigating through shady gorges and over hot, relentlessly sun-baked desert sands? Is the theory of the expansion of the universe still running through your brain? Yes, I thought so. And what about at home? Still working out the details of the universe? Perhaps some ideas are arising on how to stop the universe from expanding? Certainly, you wouldn't spend your precious free time on mindless television shows!

Well, perhaps you can forget about the destiny of the universe for a little while (after all, it's in safe hands) and set aside three short hours a day for a foreign language. Think about it, my reader: just get an MP3 player and put on those soft and comfy headphones, taking you away from the noise of the outside world, and just listen. Listen while you're in line, at bus stops, on public transportation, in the dark shadows of skyscrapers and on the massive sun-drenched lawns of springtime, with cheerful yellow dandelions rising up from the grass all around you... or how about a short hour or two at home, stretched out on your favourite couch or easy chair?

29

If you still think you don't have three hours a day for a foreign language, then it's just not for you, my busy but still dear friend. In this case, you can safely forget about a foreign language and instead devote yourself (to the fullest) to your favourite fast-growing universe. Good luck to you on this difficult mission because it's so important for all of mankind! I hope you are able to catch up to it and even pass it by!

The argument about a lack of time could have, at least to some extent, been taken seriously up until around the early eighties, when the first ultra-portable audio players began to appear, those that could play audio cassettes through headphones. Since then, studying foreign languages has become much simpler. It has become truly possible to do it on the go.

The ultimate device for studying a foreign language is, at present, an MP3 player. In terms of size, sound and quality, it is ideal for making use of learning material for extended periods between battery charges. In the beginning, some work will be required to convert the language course CDs into MP3 format, but this is purely a technical issue and fairly easy to deal with using a personal computer. You simply buy a standard foreign language course in CD format, transfer all the dialogues from your computer into MP3 format, and then modify them properly. I'll explain later how to properly modify them.

During the process of transferring the material to MP3 format, you must separate the vital material from the rest of the language course because not everything there is really necessary. To put it gently, far from everything is necessary. You have to separate the grain from the chaff, or vice versa. In standard language courses, you will find necessary material, unnecessary material and even harmful material, all dumped together into one big pile: the dialogues that you need, the ineffective exercises and the incomprehensible (and incorrect) instructions. Often the dialogues have been inexcusably mutilated by pauses, and the native and foreign languages are almost always mixed together (this



should never be the case!) All this is very easily removed when doing the conversion into MP3. The useless chaff is blown away, leaving only the pure grain.

My inquisitive friend, your mind is probably accelerating rapidly at this point, and you undoubtedly want to ask, 'Why, oh why aren't the dialogues in these language courses organized correctly for us already?' Thank you for your very interesting and timely question! I will answer this one with great pleasure.

This happens for various reasons. The most important of them are:

- A total lack of even a basic understanding of the process of learning a foreign language on the part of the creators of these courses.
- Pseudo-conservation: they are 'unable' to add it to a course of 30 to 45 cassettes or CDs! (And why not, in fact, if it's needed?)
- 'Sacred' traditions: but everyone does it that way!

For some reason, the last explanation has become very, very popular in the field of teaching foreign languages. Hmm...

A very serious negative aspect of almost all these courses is that the foreign language is interspersed (as I noted above) with the native language, and this absolutely prevents the successful mastery of a foreign language!

30

There should be no mixing of the studied language with your own native language, not through headphones or on textbook pages! Translations of dialogues, explanations, grammar and comments and other such things, should be in a special reservation, an infectious disease ward, so to speak, from which they can't scurry around in the textbook, breaking our already fragile concentration on the new and hostile foreign language...

Unfortunately, there are many 'experts' who do not really understand this or even give it much thought, if any, thinking it's just an insignificant little detail. Ah, but these trifles, these 'termites', begin to erode all our efforts in struggling with the foreign language, especially at the outset of our journeys. Here, my self-disciplined and ready-for-battle friend, there should be no trifles that can easily grow into those notorious snowballs rolling downhill...

### **To Mosquito or Not To Mosquito?**

The first thing you want to do when you start listening to dialogues in a foreign language is to go over the parts that weren't very clear. At first, it's practically the entire dialogue. I have already explained the reasons for it, so I won't cover it again.

To go back to the place that wasn't clear, you need to stop the audio and find the exact spot on the recording. This is not really feasible with common audio programs. Neither the audio recordings nor the equipment they are used on will allow for it. You constantly miss the right places you are searching for, stopping too early or too late. At first, it may seem like an insignificant problem: why not spend a few moments searching? That may be true if you were to do it once or twice. However, during intensive, repetitive listening, when you have to perform this task hundreds and thousands of times, the problem becomes paramount.

You just can't afford to waste your precious time and your intellectual energy on mechanical button-clicking and the never-ending search for the right place.

The point here is not so much the loss of time but the loss of concentration, which is vital. This concentration is very easy to break and hard to maintain. Staying focused on a foreign language is no simple task. The constant, annoying pressing of buttons and keys doesn't assist in your concentration, to put it mildly, but only destroys it. This will be familiar to anyone who has ever tried to find a needed spot on a cassette (on a CD, it's basically impossible). If you've never attempted this, then I highly recommend that you give it a try—a good time is guaranteed.

No one does this very often, however. No one is that patient. Once you've tried it a couple of times and become convinced that the whole process is extremely inconvenient and laborious, you'll throw up your hands and just try to move on. Language learning won't forgive that. It's pointless to imitate progress (especially in the very beginning) by just moving on, leaving out large portions of language material that you haven't mastered. You can't build your house on the sand. It's useless to press on the gas if your wheels are helplessly spinning on the ice.

You'll soon recognise this and cease your imitation of making progress. It's a dead end. But these very same language course designers are guiding you into the dead end. They leave out necessary information, and their misguided instructions cause you to think that you can listen to a phrase, sentence or dialogue a couple of times and learn them thoroughly. Nothing could be further from the truth, especially regarding the need to utter what you hear. How can you correctly pronounce a phrase when you haven't managed to really hear it?

But I have already spent enough time on courses and textbooks and even on the motives that drive the designers of these materials. It's not worth going deeper into this quite inexhaustible and rather unpleasant topic.

The problem of searching for the right places in a dialogue is solved in the simplest and most effective manner through multiple recordings of the same dialogue so that the dialogue you're working on ends and then begins again after a second. I used to record a single dialogue on one cassette—on both sides. With a player that switches over to the other side automatically, I had two-three hours of uninterrupted listening. Two batteries in my player and two in the charger, and I was set. These days, an ideal method for this kind of listening is through an MP3 player or even a mobile phone.

The dialogues for the MP3 player are prepared on a personal computer. You just need to obtain the appropriate program for processing audio, get a standard language study course that includes CDs, extract the audio from the CDs, record only the dialogues while tossing the extraneous chaff of directions, explanations, exercises and empty spaces before, after and within the dialogues. Finally, create MP3 files from the dialogues so that you can listen to them on your MP3 player.

The dialogue recordings must be clear and without any extraneous noise. Quite often, the designers of these courses end up recording noises in the background: street traffic, the clatter of dishes, creaking doors, honking cars, police sirens, helicopters hovering overhead and other sounds that only hinder you from hearing that which you really need to hear—foreign speech—especially in the early stage of study. After a couple of times of going through your listening, all these apparently benign everyday sounds will turn into genuine torture, comparable to some kind of Eastern torture of drops

of water dripping on your head, especially after many repetitions of listening, which you must do if you want to succeed. Therefore, you must only use clear, clean dialogues—without honking cars and barking dogs.

I repeat once again—the essence of this approach lies in repetitive listening to a single matrix dialogue over and over again. *All was quiet on the Western front. All was quiet on the Western front. All was quiet on the Western front. All was quiet on the Western front. All was quiet on the Western front.* (All was quiet on the Western front—this is our matrix dialogue in the foreign language, symbolically.) The recording should be void of any significant pauses (longer than two seconds) between the end of the dialogue and the beginning of the very same dialogue, and there should be no significant pauses within the dialogue. Standard language courses often have pauses within their recordings.

For example, almost in every standard language course, there is a recording that takes place in a restaurant and other dining establishment. The waitress takes an order, after which there is a considerable amount of time that is supposed to mean that during the pause the patron is eating his meal. After this very long and very dead pause, the waitress reappears and offers dessert or the check. What a ‘creative’ approach by the authors of the course, though! Yes, sir! Studying with these kinds of tortuous intentional pauses can only cause irritation and breaks in attention. Your humble servant and other fighters on the language front have often experienced this personally.

Right now, lying on my desk are eight matrix sets of dialogues ready to be listened to. It took me a reasonable amount of time to prepare them on my computer but quite a bit less time than I used to spend on this labour-intensive process before these language courses came out digitally.

One more word on the length of the recordings: I make MP3 files of 15 to 20 minutes in length per unit, but they can be made longer or shorter. Again, you will be able to determine the appropriate unit length once you get into your work mode. Make the first unit 20 minutes in length, work with it for a while, and the second one you can make 15 or 25 minutes or 13 and a half minutes. With the assistance of the continuous-play function on your player, you can play your dialogue continuously, isolating it from the mass of other recordings. You can also get rid of any unwarranted empty spots and other contorted and harmful ‘embellishments’.

The seams between the dialogues should be tight—all of your concentration must be on listening to the matrix dialogues and not on technical problems, whatever they may be. Remember that concentration on a foreign language is achieved with the greatest difficulty but is broken with the greatest ease. Our lazy brains are always looking for the slightest excuse, the slightest pretext, to wriggle out of any kind of work, especially from this difficult task of learning a foreign language. That’s the way it is...

You should listen to the dialogues with good headphones that do not simply fit into your ears but cover them completely—keeping out external sounds that hinder you from hearing the foreign speech. Listening on a stereo system in the car isn’t entirely useless, but it is ineffective. Peripheral sounds (including the strong background noise of your car moving along the road, which distorts many of the crucial voice frequencies in the dialogue), and the need to focus a large portion of your concentration—if not all your attention!—on the road only hinder your concentration. You should be listening to your recordings with the same intensity that you would give to your cell phone calls—no less. I strongly doubt that you’ll be able to master a foreign language from behind the wheel of a car, whatever the designers of these various *Learn While You Drive* language courses may say...

On paper, the dialogues in these standard courses are not in the ideal formats for optimal use. All of these flaws and rough edges can easily be remedied by retyping the dialogues into the appropriate formats. Here's what you need to do: take out the hyphens in the middle of phonetic words. Retype the texts so that the simple sentences are not separated in the middle of a word between lines. In the compound sentences, you can transfer the dependent clauses, but definitely as a whole, without breaking apart the phonetic words.

And of course, the entire dialogue should fit on to one page so that, in the process of reading, you are not required to turn feverishly from one page to another. You have more important things to do than that, like studying a language, for example. These absolutely mindless and unwarranted transfers of your vision only cause your concentration to stray. This can only be explained by sheer negligence and a general lack of understanding of how to teach a foreign language on the part of the creators of these courses! Shall we eliminate these flaws? Let's eliminate them...

All of the numbers in the dialogues should be written out with words. When you are trying to read numbers, there is often a hesitation, which is totally natural. How are you supposed to know how to pronounce numbers in a strange language? What is unnatural is this approach, this completely mindless negligence toward us that, year after year, decade after decade, migrates from textbook to textbook. An insignificant problem? But why even have insignificant problems at all when they can so easily be removed?

33

All of these 'insignificant' issues can be compared to a few small 'insignificant' rocks in your shoe when you jog or a few 'insignificant' mosquitoes that begin to hover over you just when you turn out the lights, close your eyes and try to see your favourite dreams. My dear friend, at that moment, I don't think the mosquito issue seems so insignificant to you; otherwise, why would you violently jump out of your warm, cosy bed, turn on the light, vindictively clench your teeth and make a vain attempt to find and mercilessly destroy these hateful creatures that are robbing you of your nocturnal solitude and sweet dreams...?

### **Peripatetics and Drowsiness**

There is another highly important reason that you must only read the matrix dialogues in a loud voice. When you read aloud in a full voice, you won't get sleepy or start nodding off. Yes, yes! Don't be too quick to chuckle, my dear friend! This is a really serious factor that has a huge influence in the study of a foreign language, but it's as if everyone has agreed not to pay attention to it. Preventing drowsiness is completely impossible when studying a foreign language traditionally. Anyone who has ever studied a foreign language knows this only too well.

During the process of learning a foreign language, drowsiness has nothing to do with laziness, lack of ability, discipline or other similar traits that are often considered embarrassing.

I'll share a little secret with you: when you are working through the process of learning a foreign language, drowsiness is just one of the many tricks that your brain plays on you, trying in any way it can (and it has quite an imagination for achieving its unrighteous goals!) to derail the learning of this alien language.

Your brain quietly but firmly sabotages the orders of your will, and very often (almost always), your

brain succeeds in this. What do you do, my unusually not-so-sleepy-at-the-moment friend, when you are reading some foreign text or grammar or listening to a language recording and suddenly you feel the warm waves of tiredness washing over you? You fiercely say to yourself, 'Don't sleep!' You stand up and stretch. Then you go over to the sink and splash some cold water on your face. You gulp down some coffee or tea or cola. You start to walk around. And, well, you even fall into bed and drift off to sleep.

In all of these cases, you are doing exactly what your despicable saboteur-brain wants you to do: you're stopping any activity that is unpleasant for your brain. You distract yourself with some other activities that don't require any real mental efforts from you. By doing all of these things, you give in and give up, defeated in the struggle against your lazy but extremely cunning and resourceful enemy.

'Well, what can we do about it?' you ask in perplexity, my friend. 'After all, it's impossible to fight against this kind of internal terrorism!' Allow me to disagree with you right now: this must be and truly can be successfully combated. How exactly do you do it? How? Read on, of course...

When you are listening for many hours to a matrix dialogue, there are two very effective ways to combat drowsiness:

#### 1. Listening on the go:

The ability to learn a foreign language has largely and stubbornly been associated with so-called 'assiduity.' What does this mean? By definition, this means our ability to assimilate information without movement, in other words, while we're sitting down. In no way, to put it gently, can everyone do this. For a great number of people (perhaps the majority?), the way their nervous systems and general physical constitutions are put together, they're not able to function effectively this way. There is a distinct physical type of individual for whom any prolonged immobility is next to impossible. For them, sitting is almost excruciating torture (all normal children, incidentally, can be counted in this category).

The general vitality of the body and the mental faculties of this category of the population are sharply reduced during periods of physical immobility. Because of this, the persons in this category are often labelled (almost always for life) as 'incapable' and even 'stupid'. But they are only 'stupid' in a 'straitjacket of immobility' sense, so to speak, due to the long-standing traditional conditions of the educational system. Our modern school system expects and depends upon the immobility of students ('Johnny, stop moving around!'). This deeply entrenched approach is very convenient for teachers yet intolerable for the 'non-assiduous', even during independent study time, where you automatically enter into this mode of 'immobility'.

Right from the beginning, studying relies upon our immobility, and even to think about any other approach is simply out of the question. While engaged in the learning process, we have absolutely no choice about this, and through this inevitable approach to learning, we must force our overwhelming love and thirst for body movement into the 'straitjacket of school' and therefore be immobile, and as a result, we end up becoming 'incapable'. These are the rules of the game in this, shall we say, 'insane ward'!

Of course there is a certain percentage of 'assiduous' students who suffer through the torture of immobility quite easily, the so-called 'assiduous individuals'. They aren't this way due to any outstanding merits and not because they ardently practice hatha yoga every day but rather by

chance, thanks to some natural features of their personalities. All the benefits of the rules of the traditional educational system are given to the assiduous simply because they are most comfortable in this type of unhealthy environment.

Others are mercilessly castigated as being 'incapable' of studying foreign languages and then are thrown into the wastebasket, seen as 'rubbish' and losers in the school assembly line. This process could be considered somewhat normal if not for the obvious fact that the vast majority of students end up in the wastebasket... almost everyone, in fact. And what's worse, the 'incapable' aren't left in peace even after they are tossed into the school wastebasket. The torture of studying a foreign language goes on (now it's completely pointless torture because these unfortunate ones have already been written off as hopeless!) until the last day of school. Is this not proof itself of the clear insanity of the system?

I will allow myself to shake gently the foundations of the aforementioned customary unhealthy approach and offer you some new rules for academics. With these new rules, you no longer need to force yourself to forever be immobile and, as a result, 'incapable' with languages. During the matrix phase of studying a foreign language, this 'incapability' because of a lack of 'assiduity' can easily be eliminated by mastering the language through receiving, processing and assimilating audio information, specifically while you are fully in motion.

Let us now take a moment to pay tribute to the philosophical school of Aristotle. In one of the legends (the one that *is* actually very interesting), philosophy was not studied by students all contorted behind wooden or even marble desks but rather on long walks. They called this kind of studying 'peripatetic' or 'strolling'. This idea is apparent in the title that I offer for my method: I propose that you become a linguistic peripatetic! (Additionally, I think that this approach is effective beyond studying philosophy and foreign languages.)

Throw on some headphones and go out for a walk while focusing on a matrix dialogue; that is, go and learn a foreign language in motion. Your chances of becoming drowsy while walking are next to none. The increased adrenaline in your bloodstream won't allow you to drift off. When's the last time you fell asleep while walking, may I ask? Over the course of many months and untold miles, your humble servant has tried this on himself, always with the same result: a boost of energy and extraordinary clarity of mind! It's best to walk along a familiar route but not waist-deep in a swamp, desperately fighting off a million-plane squadron of bloodthirsty mosquitoes. And it's probably not the best idea to go through the mountains at high altitudes, panting from a lack of oxygen. You should walk in a comfortable environment, not in a blizzard, not in the pouring rain without an umbrella and not under the scorching sun in 100+ degree heat. On the other hand, if daily walks up Mount Everest during 10.0 earthquakes are as familiar to you as your morning strolls to the bathroom, I am not going to stand in your way.

For those individuals who are not quite so advanced, it would be desirable to choose a route where you will not be distracted by anything, even such things as cars passing by or curious dogs chewing on your pants and ankles. Nothing should distract you from your matrix. By the way, it is best to use padded headphones that effectively cut off external noise pollution. The ideal path to take is a circular route or simply to walk back and forth in a room with the lights turned down low (there is even a little-known form of Tibetan meditation where monks leisurely run around in a circle). You will also need comfortable clothing and walking shoes; you should be fully focused on your language, not on any blisters.

As best you can, you should minimize any outside visual or auditory distractions. The perfect setting would be with mildly subdued, indirect lighting and furniture with pleasant, non-stimulating colours, such as the kinds used in modern cinema theatres.

This is entirely possible to do at home, especially if you have a treadmill. Keep in mind that this is also very suitable for reading while moving.

Moving on...

## 2. A dream that's not a dream:

It's also possible not to struggle and rather to just go ahead and give in to drowsiness, not removing the headphones but making sure to continue to listen. You immerse yourself in a certain state of being, which is not, strictly speaking, a sleep, and lasts about twenty minutes or so. Twenty minutes later, you emerge from this special frame of mind. You have no drowsiness; quite to the contrary, you feel a surge of new energy within. At least this has been the case with me and some of my friends on many occasions. I'm not positive that this will work for everyone, whereas walking will definitely be suitable for virtually all healthy people who have two legs to stand on.

'And how about studying grammar?' I hear once again coming from the back row. 'After all, drowsiness and grammar are two inseparable things!' My persistent friend, you must think you have caught me off guard with your tricky little question?! Well, I will answer this one with pleasure!

36

I enjoy answering such kinds of questions from the back row. My dear friend, isn't that because I feel a certain kinship with the folks camping back there?

Well, let us return once again to the study of grammar. There is no 'grammar study' in the usual sense of the word within my approach. Don't be quick, however, to get all worked up and angry. Don't be in a rush, once again, to tear this book apart page by page and burn it in the sacred flames of your righteous indignation. You certainly will know your grammar. When the matrix is all worked out, all that is necessary will be right there in the next stage: 'marathon reading'. At that point, the grammar will be indelibly engraved into your brain.

By the end of the year, after you've read your 3,000 pages, you'll know the grammar probably better than a graduate from a language school. You won't know some useless pseudo-scientific verbal rubbish that practical grammar becomes tangled up with, but you will actually be able to use the grammar you learn. Your knowledge will be purely functional, as this is necessary for practical mastery of a language.

Let me explain. You know your own language wonderfully. You know it in a practical way. You're not beating your head up against past passive participles in a sentence or worrying about not knowing what exceptional subjunctives are. You use all of these every day, day in, day out, not knowing any of their 'scientific' names. You don't need to know these terms to skilfully use your own language.

You will be using your new foreign language in the exact same way, not wracking your brain trying to understand the words such as 'gerund', 'pluperfect subjunctive' and 'modal verb'. Of course, there won't be any harm if you periodically review the grammatical tables and explanations for the matrix dialogues and even beyond, picking on your way all these 'smart' grammar words. In my method, grammar is not 'forbidden' at all. Browse it if you wish, and occasionally you can show off and



impress your mother with your astounding knowledge of these terms, but by no means can you make this a goal in and of itself at the expense of truly learning and acquiring the language!

If I were made to sit down right now and take a test on the traffic rules in the US, I am sure I would fail miserably, for I don't remember these rules at all. I successfully forgot all of them five minutes or so after answering the exam questions about 20 years ago. But that didn't stop me from driving (without one accident!) around the US, including in New York City, Washington, DC, Baltimore, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle, with a few side trips to Canada, Mexico and now all over Russia (traffic in Moscow is horrible, though!). So do I know the rules of traffic or not?

As I am typing this text on my computer, it doesn't matter to me whether or not the electrons in the computer processor (or in my brain) are moving clockwise, counter-clockwise, or even standing completely still. Such knowledge does nothing to help my fingers as they briskly click away on the appropriate keys. Even if I had absolutely no idea about the very existence of any processor at all (and electrons with positrons, for that matter!), I wouldn't be typing any slower... or any faster.

Knowing terms such as 'triple-nickel half axel' does not make you a figure skater. Knowledge of such words as 'in A-minor' or 'fortissimo' does not mean you're a pianist, but at the same time, you can pick up a guitar or a harp, if you wish, and in a month or two, you can learn to play without knowing any of these 'smart' words.

I remember how impressed our Latin professor was (an old-school, very strict woman) when she said that I was the only one in the course who had no difficulty in reading and translating Latin texts on the exam. From the very first lesson, I categorically refused to memorise countless charts of cases and conjugations. I declared that learning a language this way is impossible and that I would not subject myself to this senseless torture. I guaranteed that, by the time of the exam, I would know Latin in a practical way, not just within the limits of the institute's programs but much better. They allowed me to do this very thing.

I found a decent tutorial at the library, and during my time there, I read all the texts and browsed through all of the grammatical explanations. And then I went on to another tutorial. This was sufficient to pass the exam with excellent marks. (By the way, Latin was a really enjoyable language to study; why has it caused so many people such pain?) Up to this day, I still don't know whether the Latin professor or my fellow classmates have ever recovered from their shock. Plutarch, however, would be pleased, but more about him later.

*Grammar from language, not language from grammar!*

Do remember this ancient, most valuable and unbreakable formula! Understand it through and through! Love it! Make it your guiding principle, and then that 'awful' foreign language grammar will humbly come over and lie down at your feet, gently raising its head and licking your hand with its warm and rough little tongue...

### **A Different Reality, or All Shaken and Stirred**

To some degree, we are all firmly grounded in reality. That is true for you and me. It's also true for the next guy. Thousands of visible and invisible roots and threads keep us attached to it. Every minute and every second, we receive continuous impulses and affirmations that maintain and reinforce us in our reality. This includes sound, images, smells and taste sensations.

Language is inseparably linked to reality. While we are grounded in reality, we are also grounded in language. It's equally strong in both directions. To some degree, our reality and our language can be considered two parts of the whole.

As we begin to learn a new language, we begin to create a new reality for ourselves, though we are continually slowed down and thrown back into our old reality. Thousands of roots, threads and old impulses attach us to our old reality like hooks. Television, radio, newspapers, conversations coming in through the window, the whistle of a train, familiar music, the smell of wet grass after a warm summer rain—all these things take you back to the place you intend to leave. All of these things hinder your study of a foreign language in a very serious way.

Since it is impossible in most situations to stop completely the inflow of external irritants from our old reality (unless you leave for a country where the studied language is spoken, fully severing yourself from the former self, former language and former life), then we must at least reduce this inflow to an absolute minimum. In what forms of communication is this practically feasible? Television, radio, theatre, press, music, books, conversation. It is necessary either to exclude all of this from your 'diet' or reduce it to a very minimum. The first five can be excluded completely and for good, which will only benefit your spiritual and physical well-being. For the time being, reading books in your native language can be postponed—let them rest on their shelves for now.

We will make some exceptions for personal interaction since one cannot and should not live without it. Of course, what I just said does not mean that you should compensate for the loss of your beloved mass media trash by chatting with friends twenty hours a day! Moderation, my dear friend! Moderation in all things! Even in personal interaction, so essential to us all...

However, you can—and should!—engage in all of the aforementioned activities as much as you like, but only in the studied language. Having been starved for multimedia impressions, your brain will energetically throw itself at the new though not yet deciphered information and vigorously begin to process it. But that is exactly what we want to achieve, isn't it?

All that I have said about excluding extraneous influences when crossing over into the new reality is not something original that I just discovered yesterday but has been known to mankind for thousands of years. Ancient distractions were done away with in monasteries by the most decisive means: bare walls—with the exception of an icon—and concentration on prayer. No movies or Friday night dances, none of the latest tabloids or television news with your morning cup of monastery coffee. The ideal approach to studying a foreign language must be deliberately 'monastic' when it comes to limiting the influence of your native language and other extraneous irritants. A foreign language is comparable to praying in a monastery—the more the better. Speaking about the monastic approach—before beginning language study, I would recommend taking a minute or two to gaze at a burning candle. To some degree, this will help us detach ourselves from ordinary reality and enter into another reality.

The transition to the different reality of the foreign language takes place simultaneously with the development of a certain new 'self' within. Evidently, we, our selves, are so connected with the words and language we use that it simply cannot but take place. A while back, I read a statement in a book that said that we live as many lives as languages we speak. I cannot agree completely with this since we unfortunately are only given one life. However, with the transition to a new language reality,

from somewhere deep within emerges a new self, significantly different from the old one, not better or worse, mind you, just different.

This phenomenon is well known to various secret services that often and successfully recruit agents from among language students. Those abandoning their old selves, blindly seeking and trying to create the new self, are ready for and accept this new self quite easily. Consequently, they may take on the new self as the role of an intelligence agent of the country of the studied language. My American students approached me a few times with quite... er... interesting offers. Apparently, they thought I was KGB (otherwise why would they call me Comrade Major and stand at attention every time I entered the classroom? Hmm...). But that is a story for another time and another book.

The new foreign self almost always manifests itself in such a way that you are able to speak—and think—things in your new language that you never would have begun to say in your native language. The old limiters, ‘can/can’t’, ‘good/bad’, ‘moral/immoral’, begin to weaken, malfunction or cease to work entirely.

When I visited the English Club in a town in Siberia, practically all of the members of the club allowed themselves an unparalleled freedom of speech (before Gorbachev!). Freedom of speech in English, of course, since to talk in Russian in this club was against the rules (not so much official rules of the club as rules for setting a good tone, which everyone in the club strongly upheld). We seemed to be under the influence of some kind of intoxicating drug. The windows of the library where our club met once a week opened up to a big grey building, next to which I used to pass, involuntarily speeding up my pace. Even when we knew for sure that the workers of this grey establishment were among us and listening to our every word, we did not cease to express openly our free-thinking ways, to which our new selves were inevitably drawn. Moths cannot but fly to the flame!

Even more radical examples are well known. My classmate told me about one of his buddies who studied English with him during the early days of Perestroika. His friend went directly into the American embassy in Moscow and offered his services (it is easy to guess in what role). The receptionist of the embassy listened attentively to him, having pasted on her face the standard American smile. Then she asked him to wait a few minutes, came back and told him that they don't recruit in this fashion and wished the unlucky James Bond wannabe a good day and a wonderful life.

### **Counting Crows In Life**

The brain is constantly seeking newer and newer irritants. That's the way we are wired. But that's just half the trouble. What's worse is that we can't focus our attention on anything for very long. Or at least it's awfully difficult to do so. Like a lewd man chasing any new skirt, our brain is uncontrollably drawn to new or just fresh impressions.

While sitting in class, the teacher's loud voice will hold our attention for a time, but then any random distraction begins to predominate. A fly shows up in class—our attention is drawn toward it. Someone sneezes—our attention goes toward that. There's some movement outside the window—our glance, like a magnet, is drawn to that place where crows, the inescapable companions of every student, are doing their thing. We think for a while about them... but even the crows don't hold our attention for long. We abandon the crows and their fussing and return to the buzzing fly, then to the buzzing teacher, then to the sneezing, the sniffing or creaks and again back to the cawing crows outside the window. Often, our eyes meaninglessly cast themselves upon the posters and charts and

various scientific propaganda covering the walls, causing to well up in us a perplexing light nausea. Our attention grabs on to one thing and then another and then a third, not focusing on any one thing very long. It continues on its customary circle, otherwise known as boredom.

Yes, sir and my dear friend! This is your primary enemy! The main problem that needs to be dealt with when studying a foreign language is the quandary of your attention being scattered; of overcoming the difficulty of prolonged concentration on any task, especially on those endeavours that require significant intellectual effort. Focusing your attention is by far the greatest difficulty you face, much greater than difficulties with memorising words or grammar rules. Compared to this central strategic problem, all other problems and difficulties—in essence, tactical difficulties—take a back seat. If we can manage to deal with this problem, all the remaining tasks will fall into place.

In what way will we deal with this problem of our wandering attention? Thank you for another interesting question, my thoughtful friend! I will attempt to answer it succinctly and to the point—as always.

In the first stage, we will solve this problem through a merciless assault on our brains with endless repetitions of the matrix dialogues pumped through the headphones. Attempts by our brain to sabotage our listening by lulling us to sleep will be neutralised through walking or some similar type of physical activity. Subsequent reading in a clear, loud voice is undoubtedly a form of physical activity, and as a result, the problem with our attention will not emerge.

40

The problem with our attention most often takes place while reading or watching films. To some degree, this can be resolved by choosing interesting materials to read and view. You must only read books and watch films that ignite in you a genuine interest. If you enjoy detective books and films, read detective books and watch detective films. If you like reading romance novels with muscular hunks on the cover, read them! Yes, ma'am!

No one has the right to tell you what you should read in your studied language! If you have a weakness for stuffy, high-minded literature, then read stuffy, high-minded literature! If you have a tendency toward gutter press of the lowest level, then read it! Just don't tell anyone! Just read it! We'll just let it be our own little secret! There's just one rule here: read a lot and enjoy it!

The key word here is 'mileage'. You must read miles and miles of pages in your studied language! All that I have mentioned above goes for films, too, thanks to the fact that a large number of films can be obtained (regular films and documentaries) according to your interests: war, history, religion, fantasy, geography, nature, science, etc., all in your target language, of course...

### **Warm-up Exercises and Pressure Points**

There are a variety of things to work on now: reciting the matrix dialogues, speaking and listening or reading in the foreign language. Before doing any of these, I recommend doing some special warm-up exercises. These types of exercises are widely used in foreign language institutes as well as for actors in the process of establishing their professional voices or immediately before going on stage.

These exercises constitute a kind of massage or energetic rubbing of the lips, cheeks, eyebrows and also the ears—especially the earlobes. A massage of the ears—often including some really sharp slaps—is quite common, not for actors but for boxers a few seconds before they step into the ring

(their trainers do this since the boxers' hands are already covered with gloves). The goal is to increase the inflow of blood to the brain and to activate the pressure points that are located in the earlobes, as well.

You should also do some stretches for the lips—something like a scowl that turns into a supersized, 'plastic' American smile. You should also do some energetic circular movements with the tongue inside the mouth cavity to stretch out your lips and cheeks from within.

All these exercises should produce a general sense of warmth in the area of the face and take no more than a minute or two.

Now, even though I'm talking about these exercises as warm-up activities, that doesn't mean they're only necessary during the winter when it's 40 degrees below zero—do them even if the thermometer outside your window reads 80 or 90 degrees. Whenever you study your language, begin with these exercises, and do them occasionally even during your lessons. Try not to do this for show or it may seem to those around you that your mental health has severely cracked and they end up putting you into a straightjacket and sending you away to recover.

A massage of the biological pressure points of the face occasionally needs to be done during the lessons—every 30 to 40 minutes, with special emphasis on the earlobes and around the eyebrows. This will help alleviate fatigue and heighten the ability to concentrate, which cannot be overestimated in the study of a foreign language.

41

By the way, it is well known that the scratching of the back of our head, forehead, nose, chin and so on that we do during difficult moments of contemplation, is nothing other than the unconscious reflexive activation of our body's pressure points. Studying a foreign language is one nonstop taxing moment on the brain, which is accustomed to laziness and passivity.

Let these exercises, deliberately carried out by you, my dear friend, be your secret weapon against this obstinate—in the beginning!—foreign language.

### **Interference, or Rearing to Go**

For the overachievers—which I was many, many years ago—and those who are burning with a desire to study two to three languages simultaneously, I must say just a few words about the so-called 'interference' among languages. There's no need to sigh and look at the clock, my dear friend—this will take two, three minutes, maximum.

The word 'interference' has to do with the influence of a different language on the language you happen to be studying at the time. If you are studying two or more languages at the same time, mutual interference is happening between the two languages. To be precise, it's not that the languages are influencing each other; rather, they are influencing you and the process of how you master the studied languages.

Most often, this is evident when you want to say a word or phrase, say in German, but it comes out involuntarily in French, and vice versa. This not only carries over to vocabulary but also to grammatical constructions. Interference is a peculiar obstacle that languages place on the path of studying of other languages. This phenomenon has been known for ages, and we won't discuss it

long. I only want to say that, if anyone desires to study more than one language at a time, then this phenomenon definitely needs to be taken into consideration so that you choose the studied languages in a way that minimises this undesirable occurrence.

Interference is especially strong among related languages but can be disregarded when studying languages that are sufficiently diverse. You can bravely take on German and, say, French or something like Japanese, with no fear of any serious interference. But if it's French and Spanish (or Italian), then there's no way to avoid this obstacle. Norwegian and German—problems. Italian and Portuguese—problems. French and Chinese—no problems!

That's about all I wanted to mention about interference. And now, applying the aforementioned principles, quickly go and choose two or three languages for yourself, and we'll meet back here in a year or two—I'll be waiting...

### **Intensity, or Matches Burnt To No Avail**

Sustained intensity of effort plays a decisive role in the study of a foreign language. This intensity must be maintained for a sufficient length of time and must not fall below a certain critical level. This may be compared to making fire from friction.

You position a stick into an opening in a piece of wood, press it between your palms and begin to rotate it. For simplicity's sake, let's assume that your initial attempts are conducted correctly: the wood is the right type and suitably dry, the stick is the correct width and length and, so to say, all systems are 'go'. Apparently, all that is necessary for success is present. You rotate the fire-stick with discipline and consistency. You do about ten rotations and then take a well-deserved two- or three-minute break. Then another ten rotations and another break. In this way, the day is spent, and you go off to sleep. You're tired but satisfied and full of determination to continue your labours. In the morning, you begin the exact same procedure—exactly like the first day. The second day passes, then a week, and then a month...

I don't think I need to explain that you could keep yourself busy with this type of fire-starting for years and even decades without the slightest chance of success. But, of course, you already know all this, my shrewd reader. What's missing in this whole process is the critical element of intensity. There must be an intensity or focus that does not fall below a certain critical level within a given period. While you are relaxing, the wood is cooling down and you have to start from the beginning every time. Doesn't this remind you of your efforts at studying a foreign language? Years and years of persistent but 'cold', fruitless work. All your discipline, all your labours—all in vain. And this is all because of the absence of this necessary component—a sufficient amount of intensity in your efforts that will bring success.

A few more examples: water will not start boiling unless the temperature reaches the necessary level. If you desire tea with your favourite blueberry danish and want to boil the kettle, you do not bring the water temperature up to 80 degrees Celsius and then proceed to turn off the gas and postpone completing the process until tomorrow. In the morning, the water will be cold again in the kettle.

Holding a lit match up to a steel bar will not make it melt. Of course, you can try for years and years, displaying admirable perseverance and hard work, but I'd venture to suggest that the results will be

very disappointing. It's the same with the conventional long-term 'study' of a foreign language. The physiological reactions of language 'ignition' in your head don't start and cannot start because the temperature in the core doesn't reach the proper level. And even if it does, it is only for short intervals of time, insufficient to start a chain reaction. From the outset, an imperfect, low-level intensity will determine your inevitable failure...

How about we go and have a cup of tea, my dear sir? The shadows of the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas have lengthened and cover the cosy courtyard of our monastery with their reaching hands, covering us as well. Our fascinating conversation has made us forget our traditional tea with lotus petals, collected from a glittering dew-drenched spring morning in the secret valleys of a mysterious and distant country. Alas, this is an unpardonable blunder on our part. We will continue our conversations later. They're not going anywhere...

### **Reading Plutarch, or Sherlock Holmes Behind the Coconut Tree**

And now the moment has finally come for which we have waited so long. The time has come to talk about your favourite thing... reading!

What? You haven't been waiting for this moment? Reading is not your favourite pastime? That's odd. For some reason, I was convinced that I had found a kindred spirit in you. I was positive that you love to read, that you couldn't even live one day without reading—that you are hardly ever far from a book.

In my mind, I pictured you reading on public transport, at bus stops, on a bench under a blooming lilac bush in the park, along the riverbank where the evening nightingales are ever singing just for you. I pictured you all curled up on a frosty winter evening in your warm room on a cosy sofa with the soft light of the lamp pouring onto the pages of the next thrilling novel in your hands, enjoying the exploits of your favourite hero fearlessly saving the civilized world from villains with waxed mustachios. Next to you sits a steaming cup of cocoa, the clock on the wall quietly ticking...

Alas, all this was not about you. My dreams are dashed, so allow me to approach the issue from a different angle, dryly and unemotionally. I can do it this way, too... believe me, I am able to.

And now... reading. Undoubtedly, reading is one of the most important components, if not the most important, in learning any foreign language. The matrix of the reverse resonance is extremely important, but for all its importance, it is only the first step on the road to reading. By itself, the matrix cannot provide all the grammatical and lexical components required for full mastery of a foreign language. The vocabulary and grammar of the matrix are at the basic level, which is its primary value. It only provides the cornerstone, nothing extra.

To some extent, building the matrix can be compared with building islands that support you in the sea of language. Reading then serves to expand and strengthen these islands, to create bridges and passages between them, which allows for more freedom of movement from island to island. Reading fills the huge gaps that remain after working through any matrix, even the most ideal one.

Of course, these gaps are filled by watching films and television programs, as well as by listening to the radio in the studied language, but reading is still the most convenient and attainable means of filling the gaps.



You can put a book in a pocket and easily open it up at any convenient time. You can re-read unfamiliar words or sentences many times. You can return to pages you have already read and make an instant comparison with what you are reading now and right there do a quick analysis of the vocabulary and grammar.

In all respects, books are convenient and relatively inexpensive. Presently, a fairly large selection of books is available for reading in any foreign language. The difficulty lies more in the choice of what to read.

So what do you read and how do you read it? First, let's talk about what to read. There are a few fundamental rules that you absolutely must follow.

Rule number one:

*Only read what interests you.*

I have already talked about this somewhere in this book, but I'm not afraid to repeat myself because repetition—as is well known—makes perfect, being the mother of learning. So read the genres that you already like reading in your own language. Don't torture yourself trying to study something like *Song of Roland* in the original. At best, it will cause you to fall into a mortal slumber, at worst, a gag reflex. It is useless to convince yourself that you will be taken up into some life-giving source of semi-divine genius. That won't help in keeping you awake, and in no way will it help your progress in learning a foreign language. It will only serve as the quickest way to kill any desire you have to study the language.

On the other hand, if for some strange reason you truly are fascinated by the adventures of Roland and Tristan, then I have no other choice than to bow my head before rule number one and wish you further convulsions of pleasure from reading the unfading classics... but now in a foreign language.

I will repeat again: you should only read that which stirs in you a genuine interest. Only read that which touches your heart, even if it's some type of Grisham with his funny little books generating disgusted sneers from 'sophisticated' audiences. Find the equivalent of this Grisham in your studied language and read it. Read as much as you can. Fill in the gaps in your vocabulary and grammar. As long as I understand and forgive you, you have nothing to worry about. I, for my part, promise you that under no circumstances will I ever tell of your weakness; let it remain our little secret...

Rule number two:

*Only read works of considerable length.*

By considerable length I mean a complete narrative of 100 to 200 or more pages printed in a standard font without illustrations on every page. Avoid reading short stories, even if these stories are interesting. Why, you ask?

Because I'm telling you, and as you have been able to already figure out, I never say anything for no reason—at least regarding the study of foreign languages. Either way, I won't slack off here; I will explain my thoughts more extensively.

Reading works of considerable length is preferable to reading short stories and texts for the following compelling reasons:

*To create a sufficient contextual setting to work with.*

When you start to grasp a fairly good-sized piece of writing, you become acquainted with the 'canvas' of the story, its characters, as well as the geographical, political, social and other various realities in which the events transpire. To a certain extent, you can guess the words and actions of the characters, their motivations and the things they enjoy.

If the action is taking place in the nineteenth century, it is highly unlikely that the hero is going to have a computer on the table. And if she meets with the count, she likely won't be in running shoes and a miniskirt. If the main character of the story is a private detective with the broken nose of an ex-boxer, with protruding eyebrows and a square jaw, it is unlikely that at the height of an investigation he will leave and go to a Buddhist monastery, where he gives himself over to prayer and fasting, forever forgetting about the need to solve this excruciating mystery of who stole the diamond collar from the dog of the butcher's beloved wife. In the same way, if we know that the action is developing in nineteenth-century London and our beloved Sherlock Holmes is hot on the trail of the villain, watching him from behind a tree, then it's quite certain it won't be a coconut tree, and the villain will not escape at the last moment, soaring into the sky warp nine in the latest-model spaceship.

45

And that, my dear reader, is the contextual setting. You only need to read a few pages to get a feel for the story before the setting begins to work for you in a significant way. Short texts do not have enough room to develop this. You barely start getting into the contextual setting before the story ends. You start reading the next story, and the same thing happens—you are deprived of the opportunity really to get into and lose yourself in the story.

*To create a contextual setting for the vocabulary.*

We all have our favourite personal vocabulary. Even your humble servant—I am not ashamed to confess. Fiction writers are no different.

The vocabulary of any given author in a particular work is quite limited. This becomes apparent even after just reading a few dozen pages. Some words begin to be repeated quite often. You see them dozens of times but in different contexts. At first it's a bit vague, and then a given specific word becomes clearer and clearer as to what it could mean. If every time Sherlock Holmes takes something from his pocket and points it at bad guys and the bad guys always either raise their hands or run away (cowardly rascals!), it's doubtful that it's a vial of holy water or a handkerchief. More than likely, the given object is some type of gun.

It's not out of the question, of course, that the object that the main character pulls out of his pocket is precisely a vial of holy water. This could be a tricky move of the author, but that's exactly what we need to establish by recognising and decoding the author's contextual setting from the very first pages.

One thing we will know for sure from the contextual setting is that Sherlock Holmes' weapon could not possibly be a laser blaster, a grenade launcher or Harry Potter's magic wand. To be certain, we

will take a quick glance in the dictionary—and the sought-after word will forever be chiselled into our memory.

Or, in pursuit of the foul villain, our hero goes through the woods, brushing against the bushes sprinkled with morning dew, along the meadow where chamomiles reach out to our hero. He then goes along the field, breathing in deeply the disturbing smell of wormwood, into some suspicious gully and then again in the woods. The path narrows and almost disappears, and then it miraculously brings him to some old castle, where in one of the towers the unshaven villain is hiding. The villain has no idea that the time for payback has come.

The name of the path that the main character follows is marked on his map. What can it be? It can't be a highway of asphalt or concrete, where you might see cars zooming along. No trains chugging down the track. To confirm our guess, we'll elegantly look it up in the dictionary. 'Trail'! Another word is forever imprinted in our memory. And with the word comes a little mental gold star for a good guess!

In addition, the author does not fail to inform us (25 times over the course of ten pages), that our hero has 'intelligent' eyes, but the villain has 'shifty' eyes. He tells us that the parting of the hero's hair is 'impeccable' and that he is 'incorruptible'—30 times in fifteen pages. The villain carries out 'sinister' plans in every second sentence, and so on...

The words are repeated, repeated and repeated again in different lexical and grammatical contexts, and as we already know, repetition is the mother of learning (hello, Mother!), especially in learning a foreign language, where almost everything is based on repetition.

Being inclined to rigorous analytical thinking, you will surely notice (and quite reasonably, it must be stated) that the setting is not very clearly demarcated from its contextual lexical setting and that the example of the gun above could well be used here.

I will argue that this is quite insignificant. Things are vague and fuzzy in a language; everything crosses over, interpenetrates and interacts. Absolutely clear boundaries are impossible in a language. This is true for your native language and for a foreign language. Get used to this, my dear sir, and you will encounter fewer unpleasant surprises on this challenging path of studying a foreign language!

With regard to the vocabulary and contextual settings, they are of course intertwined and interpenetrated. In the end, they can be considered one large contextual field. Your task is not to remember titles and conventional divisions, but to plunge yourself decisively into the context without much thinking. You need to feel it and be able to use it for successful language learning.

This is how I understand context. This is how knowledgeable people understand context. I now ask you to read very carefully what our favourite writer Plutarch said about the role of context in learning a foreign language in his *Comparative Biographies*, starting with the life and deeds of our beloved Demosthenes:

'... affairs of the state and students, who came to me to study philosophy, did not allow me the leisure to practice the language of the Romans, and therefore when it was too late, already in my declining years I began to read the Roman books. Amazing, but true—what happened to me is this: it was not so much from the words that I discovered the context, but

on the contrary, I would capture the meaning of the words from the context of which I already had knowledge.'

So that's how it is. As you can see, the role of context in language study, especially expanding vocabulary through contextual guessing, is not my recent discovery. As you have certainly noticed, Plutarch was somewhat surprised by his own observations, but this is understandable—*Comparative Biographies* was written nearly 2,000 years ago, and apparently Plutarch was the first who wrote down these ideas, without anyone to refer to. He had every right to be surprised. However, what seemed new and worthy of astonishment 20 centuries ago in the field of language study should not particularly surprise us today. In fact, since that time, we have more or less learned something, haven't we?

But leaving our Plutarch behind (so astonished by his linguistic discovery), we will continue to talk about why you need to read only works of considerable length.

*To penetrate the grammatical setting of the author.*

What I have said about the repetitiveness and predictability of the author's vocabulary can also be fully said of his grammar in a particular work. From the beginning of the work to the end, the author's favourite grammatical patterns are repeated many times. Thus, the literary work can be considered a giant illustration of grammar in the studied language—at least a significant part of the grammar. In another work by the same author, his use of grammar—and, of course, vocabulary—may be somewhat different. A person changes over time. The way he thinks changes, and accordingly, his use of language changes, too. Therefore, works written by the same author in different periods of his life may be written quite differently.

Why do I mention this? Because most of the time, all of an author's stories are grouped together in one book, though the stories were written in different periods of his life. There's really no way around this; it's just the way things are.

When you begin to read such a collection of short stories, a holistic contextual setting does not take shape for you. The stories differ in vocabulary, grammar, rhythm and mood, not to mention the different realities in the various stories. You are just beginning to enter one realm of reality and experience it, taste it, and then it ends and another begins, then a third and so on until the end of the book.

This kind of broken rhythm wrecks your language 'breathing' (runners know what I mean) and significantly complicates your progress. Of course, this kind of reading is also beneficial, but why place more obstacles on your path when there are plenty of them in your study of a foreign language already?

So, if at all possible, avoid reading short stories. It's ironic, but short stories are much more difficult than novels that consist of hundreds of pages. Besides, there are other factors that make reading novels more preferable than reading short stories.

*Writers lay it on thick in the beginning.*

Virtually all writers complicate—'thicken'—their vocabulary and grammar in the first pages of their works. With a big ladle, they scoop from the very bottom of the soup pot, so to speak, generously

dumping the thickest stuff on the first few pages. Are they doing this deliberately, trying to show us their immensely broad vocabularies, brilliant, complex grammar and unparalleled encyclopaedic knowledge? Or is it possible that there are some other subconscious motivations and ambitions? Who knows? The point is that the most difficult pages to read and understand are those first initial pages.

When we finally are able to fight through these first pages, we are surprised and pleased to notice that our seasoned, mighty author has run out of steam, the 'forest' has become less dense and we are able to move through it much easier. Unfortunately, this cannot be said about short stories because there, all of the pages are first pages. Short stories are almost entirely composed by writers laying it on thick. There is not enough room for the inevitable dilution of the language to take place after those dense first pages.

Of course, we cannot blame the authors for the way short stories are constructed because this is simply the format of how they are written. These are the rules of the literary game. The story is supposed to be short—it's a short story. It is doubtful that the writers thought (except, perhaps, Agatha Christie), that their works would be used by us in language study. Most likely, they did not at all suspect that they would be writing for those reading their works as a foreign language. Therefore, we generously forgive them.

#### *The effect of a psychological gold star.*

48

By comparison with a novel, a short story isn't very significant and is psychologically light. After you and I read a short story, we don't quite experience the sweet taste of victory. A short story is too light for that. The same thing happens when we read two or three stories or even an entire book of short stories. Psychologically, when you add small values, you still get a small value.

Of course, this has nothing to do with mathematics. We are talking precisely about adding up psychological values. The psychological effect of reading a whole work of 200 pages is not the same as the psychological effect of reading 70 short stories at three pages long each.

After you have read a large work—a book!—you can pat yourself on the back (well deserved, I must say!), you start respecting yourself, and you can give yourself a shiny gold star. However, if you read a couple of hundred short stories that are equal to or even larger than the size of a 'gold-star potential' book, you'll never feel like you earned a gold star. Your subconscious will repeat over and over to you that you have read nothing more than a bag of air. Surely, the significance of any positive psychological reinforcement during the difficult task of taming a foreign language cannot be overemphasised! A short story won't get you a psychological gold star, no sir! Believe me, your renowned granter of gold stars!

Rule number three for successful reading:

#### *Extremely minimise your use of a dictionary.*

You must consider the use of a dictionary a necessary evil. Don't reach for a dictionary on every occasion and without a real reason to—it distracts you from the main thing, reading. Using a dictionary always breaks your concentration on the text, forcing you to carry out a purely mechanical action: you take out a dictionary, open it to the correct page, search for the right word and choose

from the list of meanings that might work in this context. You may well spend a few precious minutes on one word. These minutes could be used on something much more beneficial—like continuing to read, for example.

I know how you are so tempted to rebel, my dear friend! No need to deny it—I’ve studied you well. Under your breath, you want to ask me, ‘What do you do with a word you’ve never met before?’ Is it really so necessary for you to know the meaning of that very word? Will some kind of catastrophe take place if you miss that word and calmly continue reading?

‘What!? Let it go? After all, the whole purpose of reading is to figure out the meaning of absolutely every word in the text, without exception, isn’t it!?’

No need to shout, my dear sir! I have excellent hearing—at least when I want to. I wonder where you’re getting those... er... interesting thoughts from. Don’t answer. My question is, of course, purely rhetorical. I know very well what it’s in your mind and where it came from. Many, many years ago, my young head, still covered with golden curls, was full of the same comical ideas, and I had to beat them out of my head quite a few times, sometimes with a two-by-four (just kidding, don’t you worry!).

So let’s go back to my question: do you really need to know the precise meaning of a particular word? Let’s take a close look at it.

49

‘Sherlock Holmes hid behind a \_\_\_\_\_ bush.’ Perhaps it’s a big bush... though it’s possible that it’s a small bush (incidentally, there is a similar example in a book by Hungarian polyglot Kato Lomb, which was very beneficial to me many years ago when I first started to study foreign languages). Does it really have any significance for the development of the plot? The plot will not suffer in any way if the missed word means ‘wet’, ‘thorny’, ‘rose’, ‘scratchy’, ‘clipped by the Japanese gardener’ or anything else, for that matter. So you killed a few minutes rummaging in the dictionary to find the meaning of a word that is completely unnecessary for the development of the plot. The issue here is not about losing a few minutes’ time but about the fact that during this time your focus goes astray from staying in the language, which is very difficult to establish initially and then once again restore after such setbacks.

Let’s take another passage: ‘Sherlock Holmes tightened like a steel spring and \_\_\_\_\_ onto the vile villainous village villain. They became tangled up in a tight ball and rolled down a hill overgrown with thorns.’

Does it matter whether Sherlock Holmes ‘jumped’, ‘threw himself’, or ‘shot like a bullet’? It makes absolutely no difference. From the context, it is clear as day that the missed word is a verb and cannot mean anything besides a quick movement or just movement in general. So why waste time digging around in a dictionary? After all, Sherlock really needs your help at this very moment! So roll down the slope along with him and help him out with a few good punches to the ugly and repulsive villain rather than poking around in the dictionary trying to find a word that is so completely useless at this fateful moment!

Here’s another example we’re already familiar with: ‘Sherlock Holmes snatched from his pocket a \_\_\_\_\_ with the hammer cocked.’ From the greater context, we already know that this is not some new sci-fi weapon that runs on compressed gravitons or a light sword borrowed by the hero from Obi-Wan Kenobi or Darth Vader but obviously some kind of firearm corresponding to the period that

easily fits into Sherlock's pocket. So is it really that important for us to know whether it's a revolver or a semi-automatic pistol? I am confident that the vast majority of female readers—and a certain number of male readers—have no idea what the difference is between the two objects. That did not prevent them, however, from perfectly understanding Sherlock Holmes' adventures and enjoying them.

Let us now digress from our exciting adventures of Sherlock Holmes to the no-less-captivating adventures of Harry Potter, whom we all are so fond of.

'Harry Potter, in pursuit of the evil Lord Vladimir, walked down the path, almost completely overgrown with Alyssibian Stiphelfugh. Under his breath, he softly hummed fashionable spells and carelessly waved his magic wand, turning Alyssibian Stiphelfugh into Non-Alyssibian. Night was falling. In the air, a flock of furred Guppogloff circled. Evidently their nest was somewhere nearby'.

Are you absolutely sure that you need to know exactly what Alyssibian Stiphelfugh are and how they differ from Non-Alyssibian? Why? Are you planning to grow Alyssibian Stiphelfugh in your garden?

But maybe it is vital for you to know what the furred Guppogloff are? Well, of course, you are very intrigued by the phenomenon of furred Guppogloff nesting in the early season of devilry and witchcraft at Malfoy Manor. In this case, my enchanted sir, you just need to dig in dictionaries to find the most accurate definition for Alyssibian Stiphelgloff, pardon me, Alyssibian Stiphelfugh!

50

Or will you still continue the pursuit of the elusive Vladimir not distracted by insignificant details that by and large are irrelevant to successfully catching the fast-moving Lord? Only you can decide and no one else...

By the way, how well do you understand—really understand!—the words of your native language, with which you were born, grew up and now live with? Language is by far the most essential and integral part of who you are, yet do you really understand every word? Really? I'm fairly certain that you do not understand a large number of words used in the incessant television programs and radio talk shows that aren't necessarily geared toward intellectuals. The same goes for all the newspapers that you incessantly read, and I'm not even talking about the thousands of words of special terminology used in many areas of science and technology, the meanings of which you cannot even attempt to guess.

I am positive that quite often, you habitually only hear an empty sound, a sound shell of a word, or see its external, visible image without understanding its real meaning. However, you also routinely disregard this lack of understanding and casually cast the misunderstood word to the side.

By no means is this a malicious or unprovoked attack on you, my unnecessarily offended friend. It is but a simple assertion of the indisputable fact that no one can know every word, even from his own language, not to mention the foreign language. We only are familiar with the language waters in which we are constantly swimming, and not those in which we are immersed only from time to time.

The fact is, when we hear and see words and don't know the meaning of some of them, the brain evaluates the situation and decides whether to exert more energy to figure out the exact meaning of these words. In many cases, the brain decides (almost without our conscious participation) that it's not worth the effort, that the tough word occurs so rarely that the exertion of energy to find the



exact meaning and remembering it won't pay off. The word is given the status of a non-priority and thrown in the kitchen drawer of your head with other undigested words.

Does this vocabulary filter exist from birth? No, it doesn't; this skill is not innate but acquired. We learn to evaluate words in terms of their importance in the same way that we learn to walk and talk, over the course of many years or even a lifetime. We must learn a similar type of filtering in the process of learning a foreign language, but the process will be more compressed in time because now we will be doing it consciously and with discipline—as befits an adult.

My words do not mean, however, that you will never discover the meaning of absolutely all the words that you missed during those times of reading with minimal use of a dictionary, which I so strongly recommend (and not only I but also all those who understand something about studying foreign languages).

These secondary and tertiary words will only be incomprehensible to you during the initial period of reading. With constant, diligent reading, the meaning of most of these words will come to you gradually, but steadily, every day, every hour and even every minute, they will be opening up to you. You'll read a book, then three, then ten, twenty, a hundred.... At first, you'll only grasp the lexical and grammatical skeleton of the book, only what is most important for understanding the simple plot. But then this skeleton will inevitably grow vocabulary flesh, components, nuances, colours, undertones and hints—all that makes up a real, living, pulsating language. One after another, faster and faster, the words will fall into your precious piggybank and continue to fill it up. This is loads of fun, I tell you!

Your piggybank will soon be filled to the brim, and then you, my dear sir, will perhaps remember your humble servant and say to yourself that, after all was said and done, he was right! Oh, how correct he was in all his paradoxical assertions! I shouldn't have taken offense to him!

And I will quietly smile to you in reply, stirring hot chocolate with a silver spoon in my favourite cup and listen to the snowflakes slowly twisting and turning and falling, falling, falling outside the window of my snow-covered hut...

I will summarise what has been said so far about reading:

- Only read what really interests you;
- Only read good-sized books; and
- Try to use the dictionary as little as possible.

Of course, you should not read on a computer monitor but on good old paper—it's much, much easier to read books of paper rather than on 'advanced' electronic screens, and your vision will be preserved, too.

And here's one more tip for reading and understanding a foreign language in general: by all means, try to grasp the logical and complete flow of information. Usually the author is trying to tell you something. Literary works are very rarely incoherent gibberish. You won't be reading that type of literature—I hope. At least not at the very beginning of your journey.

You are reading—in your studied language, of course—something like: ‘The man behaved and looked as if he were *doing time*. Maybe even more than once. All the extensive experience that Sherlock Holmes possessed told him about this’.

Your first reaction might be confusion and anger—this is not the right genre, and we’re not talking about Harry Potter and his buddy Vladimimort, who both could easily alter time, acting within the defined borders of the type of genre given to us by the author. But in this type of literature (Sherlock Holmes), no one should be flying on a broom and waving magic wands. You don’t understand the passage, although you very well know the meaning of the individual words ‘do’ and ‘time’. However, by this time, you should also already know that a word in any language very often has quite different meanings. Sometimes dozens of meaning. So don’t despair. Just remember that this passage must have some meaning, but you haven’t yet grasped it, so just keep reading.

‘Sherlock opened his address book. Yes, of course! The incomparable insight of Sherlock Holmes didn’t let him down yet another time. An old jailbird and complete scoundrel. Of course he did time! Three years in London, two in Stockholm and one year in terrible Pebble Beach. But this time he won’t get off so easy! For this horrible crime, he’ll get ten years—no less!’

I think that the first passage should now be clear and understandable for you. It makes total sense now. ‘Doing time’? Undoubtedly, this expression here means ‘to spend time in prison’.

The second passage, which is the key to the first, doesn’t necessarily have to follow it immediately. It could also appear within a couple of sentences or even one, two, five or more pages later. Keep reading in search of clues, and you will find them.

For some reason, during the height of the Gorbachev’s unforgettable Perestroika, I managed to read a rather lengthy book—hundreds of pages—about the Soviet Army. I don’t remember the title exactly—something like *Engineer Battalion* or *100 Days before the Order Was Given*. This wasn’t Plutarch, of course, but it described the final weeks of the main character’s service in some kind of engineering unit—his job was to clean military outhouses, if I’m not mistaken.

Throughout the entire book, for the life of me, I could not figure out the meaning of one word that was constantly used by the soldiers. And I also served in the military and was quite familiar with the contextual setting and the terminology of military service. I only came to understand the meaning of that word when I reached the last few lines of the book and got the key to the code! I needed the entire context of the book, its entire contextual field, to put together the necessary key and finally decode the meaning of this maddening, stubborn word, and I read the book in my own mother tongue!

Always seek the meaning and logic... and, my dear sir, ye shall find...

What I’ve said about reading to this point can basically be applied to developing your understanding of the foreign language from hearing. Watch and listen to things that are interesting to you. Soak up stuff that interests you in big quantities. Create a working contextual setting. What helps is to watch television series with leading characters that continue from one show to the next (in documentaries, the same narrator). Naturally, every character will be consistent in his vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The characters of the series maintain certain relationships with each other, and we become quite good at being able to guess their reactions to various situations, including their verbal

responses. It will be rather easy for you to guess what's going on. Therefore, don't go running for a dictionary every time you hear an unfamiliar word.

And don't watch those television series with subtitles—subtitles only mess up your concentration and hinder your perception! It is mandatory to avoid subtitles! I'm talking about any kind of subtitles—in the foreign language or in your native language.

Anticipating your natural reaction, I will explain. I'm not at all advising you to watch Latin-American soap operas. You can find rather decent and even good-quality series to match any taste: war, comedy, fantasy, detective, etc.

But if you're only crazy about soap operas, then by no means should you force yourself to watch documentaries about the mysteries of the Qumran manuscripts, throwing Diego along with Louisa to the capriciousness of fate!

Watch around a dozen series episodes with minimal breaks in between them, and you'll be amazed at how much you understand! And after that, you can finally reward yourself by leafing through a thick dictionary or grammar book!

There are many good documentaries in foreign languages about nature, and I don't know anyone who doesn't love these kinds of films. They are equally liked by us and fans of soap operas. There's something that draws us to the lives of sharks, ants and the coral reefs of Polynesia (Is it the beauty of sunsets? The purpose and clear logic of the 'characters' lives? The complete absence of young girls standing at the bus stop at 7:0 in the morning with an opened beer can in their hands and peacefully cussing up a storm among themselves?) Who knows...?

One way or another, these films are great study aids for learning a foreign language. Because of their entertainment value and their high density of language usage—the commentator talks continually, but that is exceptionally useful for us, much more useful than some action movie where the main character can crush everything in sight without saying a word for what seems the entire length of the movie. So butterflies and lizards can give us a whole lot more vocabulary and grammar than the muscled bunch of Clint Eastwood, Bruce Willis and of course, the one and only Arnold. So...

### **Nicky, Where Art Thou?**

It happened in those long-forgotten and even fairy-tale times, when your moms and dads were still young, beautiful and slim and not ... um... what they are now. They walked fairy-tale streets and sometimes read courageous and beautiful (in a fairy-tale way) messages inscribed on walls and rooftops: 'Communism is our ultimate goal! The Communist Party is the soul, the glory, and the conscience of our epoch! Fly Aeroflot Airlines! Turn the lights off when leaving! Wash your hands before you eat—'round the bush don't you beat!'

A little boy of twenty-something also walked these same streets... like every morally stable Soviet citizen of the appropriate age, he too was a member of the Pioneers... or the Communist Youth Organization. Which one it really was can no longer be authenticated due to the haze of time that has since passed. The difference between these two was never very significant even back in those times, all the more so in our enlightened century. However, to make it clearer for the younger generation of mobile phones, pierced noses and other vital body parts, this difference can be

compared to the difference between Coca-Cola bottled in Uganda and in China. It can only be detected by a true connoisseur of the highly nutritious and also delicious product.

So let's call this young, carefree, yet contemplative Communist strolling the streets 'Nicky'. And so he leisurely strolled the streets, rode busses and trolleys, looked at the messages on the walls, thought all kinds of thoughts... and all of sudden, out of nowhere and against the mentioned moral stability of a Soviet citizen, he felt a desire to immediately learn a foreign language. Nicky straightened his red Pioneer tie, got off the trolley and enrolled in the appropriate foreign language class.

As strange as it sounds, this class, attended with great persistence, could not kill the young Pioneer Nicky's unexplained yearning to learn a foreign language. What's even stranger is that the glorified Soviet school, though trying its best, also failed to do so. However, what it did is lead him to certain ideas, of which the main one was that learning a foreign language can be made more effective without taking any classes, especially those that our Nicky was taking.

However, this required a decent tutorial, without which no progress was possible. Bookstores had a pretty wide selection of works by a certain Lenin—a quick-witted author quite popular back then but fairly forgotten now—and absolutely no tutorials for foreign languages. The little Pioneer craving knowledge was in despair and even opted to buy Lenin's book *How to Establish Workers' and Peasants' Paradise* for subsequent painstakingly contemplative note-taking at home. All of a sudden, he saw exactly what he needed in a far-away section of the store: a language audio course with a set of vinyl discs in colourful, bright covers. Delighted, the boy dropped Lenin's book and rushed to the checkout. 'Comrade Cashier, I want to buy this right now!' Sadly, it turned out that the attractive audio-course was not for sale and could only be exchanged for books of a certain kind, to which popular works of Comrade Lenin didn't belong. This was a peculiar and now hard-to-explain custom of those legendary times...

What followed next was a feverish quest for the sought-after copy in the home libraries of relatives, friends and some accidental victims. Finally, the desired course was obtained in exchange for a few books.

After that, I, of course, came home and with a feeling of deep satisfaction played the first lesson on the vinyl disc. There is no need to say that what I heard was a bunch of gibberish. I played the lesson from the beginning—achieving the same result over and over again. It was awkward but fairly tolerable, despite irritating pauses and loss of concentration on the language to perform purely mechanical actions. Then came the second lesson: the needle stubbornly resisted my clumsy fingers and wouldn't return to the very beginning of the lesson! My irritation was growing—the work was clearly ineffective. Instead of carefully listening to foreign speech, I was doomed to constant fussing with the needle that was breaking my quite frail concentration. The problem was evident, and it had to be resolved somehow.

After thinking a while, I purchased a cassette player and transferred all the dialogues from the vinyl records to audio cassettes, but that didn't solve the problem, either. Instead of dealing with the needle, I had to incessantly press the buttons and wait for the cassette to rewind. Additionally, I couldn't stop thinking about how great it would be to be able to listen to these dialogues outside of the house: waiting for a bus, on public transportation or just walking in a park, considering that I had to spend at least two (clearly fruitless) hours a day in commute. If I could only have had a Walkman on that trolley!

Guess what? My wish was miraculously granted! In an electronics shop also dealing in goods brought back by the rare Soviet visitors to the West, I found one of the first—if not THE first in our town—portable cassette players with earphones. Naturally, I immediately bought it and started using it virtually everywhere: on transportation, at the bus stops, standing in lines, which in those days were becoming ever longer and more crowded, in parks... And of course, I did one more thing—I started recording the same dialogue over and over again on both sides of a tape. This was done partly out of purely practical considerations—I did not want to break a very expensive and possibly delicate player with constant button-pressing.

One way or another, I discovered that this method of reoccurring recordings of a single dialogue was exceptionally effective and could eliminate all of my previous technical issues. To play this dialogue multiple times, all I had to do was pop the cassette into the player, press a button only once and listen to it until the batteries ran down. My concentration on the language would no longer be ruined—not for technical reasons, anyway.

This was a ridiculously simple and obvious solution that hasn't been introduced by anyone ever before. Putting it into practice would, of course, require certain efforts, but these efforts would soon pay off. It would certainly be better to buy this kind of product ready-to-use, manufactured on an assembly line, but to this day, no one produces one. Well, this book might be just the start of it: without a doubt, interested parties will sooner or later read this treatise, reflect upon it and finally decide to have a serious talk with its author. I, in turn, will be patiently waiting for this crucial moment—what else can I do?

55

So what about the little young Pioneer? You might ask—whatever happened to him? We want to hear the rest of the Pioneer Nicky's story! The boy, of course, grew up and became a big Pioneer, learned all the foreign languages, and as I heard it, went to the far-away, magic California, a place where the sun always shines and the ocean waves time after time splash upon the sandy beaches of the mysterious city of Carmel, located three and a half hours away (if walking by forest paths, hidden from prying eyes) from the likewise mysterious city of Monterey, a place where people are kind, good-looking and humane; they only eat avocados for breakfast, which is why their faces shine day and night with broad and friendly smiles for strange Pioneer boys...

### **Regarding the Construction of Homes and Dog Kennels**

We need to have a few words about setting a time frame for studying a foreign language. The initial motivation that a person has for studying a language is by no means limitless. It can only last for so long. Often this means three or four months. During this period, you must achieve some measurable results for yourself. This success will serve as a psychological reinforcement and a boost for continuing your language adventure. A person who hasn't studied a language for long does not possess the internal confidence (though there are rare exceptions) to know that he's on the right track and that success is unconditionally guaranteed. Subconsciously, he gives himself some time to be convinced of whether his path is the right one or not.

Having great experience in studying foreign languages and being entirely confident that my approach is completely correct, I can permit myself the luxury of taking my time, and because of this, I might spend eight months, even up to a year, on working out the initial matrix. A beginner simply won't be patient for this long. From the very beginning, he is subconsciously (yet quite severely) restricting his time frame for success to merely three or four months. Of course, he will boldly proclaim that he is

ready to study and work hard for years on end and that his zeal will never fade away. But the cold reality is such that his subconscious mind will always be victorious over what he thinks he believes.

Imagine the following situation. You intend to build a house for yourself and I intend to build a house for myself. Being the professional that I am and knowing the ins and outs of construction, I have no need to be in a rush. I purchase all of the necessary building materials (including roofing supplies and weathervanes), draw up a floor plan, order plumbing materials, furniture, even a special painting for the wall and a doormat that I plan to wipe my feet on at the front door. And let's not forget some geraniums for the windowsill! I'm also in no rush to have all the materials delivered to my building site, knowing that delivery takes just a few days. I anticipate all of the possible complications in advance and plan for how to deal with them. In no particular rush, I march ahead toward my goal...

Now, over to you—you're really in a panic. According to the rules of our interesting little scenario, you know nothing about construction. In spite of this, you are fully determined! The rocky ground has to be dug up! You need to lay bricks and drive in nails and screws. That's what construction is all about! You're banging your thumb with the hammer, driving in stakes with brute force and using ropes to tie things together. You paste it all up with mortar and try to hide any imperfections using some coloured pencils.

You're having a hard time with all this. Holes appear out of nowhere, and you plug them up with newspapers and cardboard. Your hands and even your ears are streaked with scratches and dirt, which you're now standing knee-deep in. The weeks pass by, and a vague suspicion is beginning to torment you: whatever you're building doesn't exactly look like a house. This structure doesn't even resemble a dog kennel. And another thing—it wobbles from side to side. Sometimes pieces fall off it. Your original flame is dying. You've been showing up less and less at the construction site, and then finally you stop showing up at it altogether. That's it. Alas, as they say, kaput! Game over.

Let's develop this situation a bit more. You and I live in the same neighbourhood, and you can't help but notice my beautiful new home, which has a weathervane on the roof and a doormat at the front door. You peek through the window and see magnificent furniture, paintings and rugs. And geraniums, of course! The evidence is right there before your eyes; it is possible to build a house of good quality and beauty.

You ask me to show you how to build such a house. In a most gracious manner, I agree and start off by giving you a lecture on construction. I then suggest that you go learn how to drive nails, mix cement and use a saw, skills you absolutely must have to do construction. So you go out and learn these things.

I offer to show you how to use a level, a plumb line and some other gadgets. Some doubts are gnawing away at you, but you end up doing what I tell you, though without much confidence. I give you a list of materials that you need to buy. There are a few hundred items on the list, many of which are completely foreign to you. You get one item, then two, three more from the list, and then you start feeling tired.

You're not seeing the foundation, the walls or the roof. You only see bags of cement, mountains of gravel, some tools and an endless supply of odd-looking nails and screws, as well as pieces of some strangely shaped metal objects. It's not at all nice to look at, it takes up a lot of space and it has an unpleasant smell.

In your mind, all of this stuff doesn't quite fit with your idea of a cosy, beautiful home. I suggest that you need to learn how to use carpentry tools. On one hand, you understand that, if I say this, you should do it. On the other hand, your desire to deal with all this stuff is melting away like snow tossed into a frying pan.

You're not seeing any visible progress. You have no idea what you're doing! Where are the walls? Where is the foundation? Where is the cosy house with the geraniums in the window? You have no interest in trudging away with only step-by-step progress. All these screws and nails are irritating you. Those suspicious odours are driving you crazy. You're tired of it all. You're having some serious doubts about my competence as a builder. After all, my beautiful new house seems to have appeared out of nowhere, without any effort or work!

So you stop working. But the foundation and even the walls were so very close to being put up. Everything was almost ready for that. You didn't have enough patience to just hang in there for only a couple more weeks! You were less than half a step away from seeing real results.

And that pile of building materials that you've prepared—so critically necessary for the various stages of construction—ended up never being used at all. In the same way, your ability to use a level and plumb line were never put to good use either. But it's all over now.

The first approach is characteristic of complete ignorance of the profession as well as helplessness on the builder's part, although there are some basic elements of will and industriousness to be found. This approach doesn't require any special commentary, although it's quite common.

Obviously, the mistake of the second approach lies in the fact that you approached it in an extremely orderly and thorough fashion, which I suggested to you, although the general idea of the method was absolutely correct. But even more wise (for the teacher) would have been to take into account the reality of natural human weaknesses. The teacher should have anticipated those very things that would eventually drag down a student and made the initial work more condensed and energetic. The timing should have been calculated properly so that the foundation would have been built and the inexperienced builder would know how to properly lay the bricks before his initial impulse faded away.

Once the student had laid even a few rows of bricks, he would have been able to look upon his work with pride, and his strength would have doubled or even tripled at that moment. He would have tasted the incomparable sweetness of victory, albeit in a small way. He would have had renewed faith in himself as well as his abilities, and with all this newfound energy, he would have launched himself into the task. But, sadly enough, this never happened.

My disillusioned student, we have exhausted your psychological time limit as a beginner, with no results. The teacher simply did not bring the necessary wisdom to the table; where is a builder going to get it from otherwise? The teacher failed in his duties and responsibility toward his unprepared and unsure student and the student didn't have unconditional trust in his teacher.

And so, my young builder, if you do not have sufficient experience in this, you will need to achieve significant intermediate results at the beginning of your journey. This will bring you strength that you need for those first few months, or else your new home—your foreign language—stands a chance of remaining unfinished forever.



Another option is to have a teacher whom you can unconditionally trust.

However, there is another way. You can learn to love the grunt work, so to speak, finding real satisfaction in it, and then you will receive a sense of fulfilment during all those intermediate steps. This approach has an extremely positive side to it, but at the same time, it has its dangers as well. Having learned to enjoy the intermediate steps, you run the risk of becoming too deeply absorbed in them, even becoming lost in them forever, losing sight of your ultimate goal—true mastery of your chosen language in real-life situations. But more on this later, if we have the time for it, the time and energy...

### **Guilty as Charged, or Did You Wash Your Hands Before Dinner?**

Many people have successfully overcome the standard, flawed and dead-end system of foreign language learning, and as a result, they know their foreign language very well (or even a few foreign languages). Nevertheless, they do experience some residual guilt over their successes.

Misconceptions about the proper approach to the study of foreign languages is so deeply ingrained in us that we feel that such unusual success is somehow wrong, that we've cheated, that the path we intuitively chose and followed only brought us success by accident. In some strange way, we feel that we have broken some sacred laws.

58

Most likely, this takes place because we simply do not have the mental fortitude to face the truth and understand it clearly. The standard system of learning foreign languages has been built on unspoken half-truths, lies and outright deception (I'm not talking about foreign language schools, which, for all their flaws, do quite a good job).

Those of us who speak foreign languages usually choose to blame ourselves unfairly (despite our obvious successes) and refrain in cowardly fashion from accusing the entire gargantuan system with its legions of representatives. That would be too difficult for us. We prefer not to pit ourselves against the system. After all, you and I were taught for so long that we must behave, wash our hands before eating, sit quietly and not make any noise and not disturb the order that was established eons ago. We were taught that the majority is always right, that our minuscule individual interests must be pushed aside in the interests of the countless others. We blame ourselves, and therefore we are so willing to believe in the arbitrariness of our success in learning a foreign language that we even want to convince ourselves of this. We want to convince ourselves that we have mastered the language not in spite of the system and not by challenging it. We want to convince ourselves that we really did do as we were told: we sat quietly, diligently doing our homework, continuing to behave, always fast in raising our hands to answer our wise teachers' questions, so we have nothing whatsoever to be scolded for.

We, who beat the system, quite sincerely think that others—as if we could redeem our imaginary guilt through them!—must humbly take these useless, traditional courses, foolishly gazing at their grammar books (the ones that make us yawn—how could they not?), mindlessly completing mountains of endless, idiotic grammar exercises, memorising things pulled out of thin air, listening to recordings with 'secret signals' produced by charlatans, that is, to do exactly what is necessary for achieving complete failure in learning a language.

From the very beginning, we're inclined to doubt the strength, will and common sense of beginners who have just embarked on studying a foreign language. We are almost certain that they will suffer a crushing defeat in their collision with the mighty system. We even want that—as if their defeat will somehow remove any guilt from our 'incorrect' successes!

By the way, why am I saying 'we'? I do not consider that you, my friend, are weak or incapable of a good fight. I believe in you! Otherwise, why would I be spending our precious time in conversation over two cups of lotus blossom tea? I believe you will find the strength within you to tear off those sticky, tight shackles of the rotten system, brush away all the blinders from your eyes, those deceptive ideas that try to force you to kneel before those false idols that have been moulded from the rattled phrases and rotten threads of pseudo-logic and multi-coloured candy wrappers from the ranks of 'authorities' sprinkled throughout the system. I'm sure you will be able to identify the omissions, to distinguish truths from half-truths and outright malicious lies. You, my friend, will have enough youthful energy, persistence, self-discipline and intuition for the task at hand!

I am confident that you will certainly, without any feelings of guilt, emerge from the worthless, mouldy system, into this still new and unexplored world—a place of originality and freshness, the world of a foreign language...

### **Resistance From Those Closest To You, or 'Aren't You So Smart!'**

59

Here's something else, my friend—you must be internally prepared to overcome resistance, not only from the language itself but also from the unexpected and rather unpleasant resistance from your loved ones. Yes, it's true! That's exactly what I wanted to say—your loved ones! Do not be surprised by this. Even though it probably won't be so blatant, truly noticeable resistance does await you, straight from those closest to you.

Unfortunately, human nature is wired in such a way that the successes of our loved ones do not bring forth any particular enthusiasm in us. Maybe it's because we ourselves don't look so good in comparison with the brightness of their successes? But oh, how pleased we are to see those closest to us fall face-down in the mud—just as long as they don't splash us!

Why do you think that recovering alcoholics are so often encouraged to 'have just one little drink. A little eency weensy. C'mon, it won't hurt you!'? You will also be urged to relax, not to push yourself too hard, to take a break from all your studies—entirely for your own good, of course! With their warm words they will support you in all your efforts, but when it comes to their tone, well, that's another story! The insinuations and subtle hints! Their very actions!

In every way possible, you will most certainly be made to understand that your language study is nothing more than a fad, nothing more than a whim on your part, and very likely, almost certainly, you will fail, having merely wasted time that could have been spent on something useful (useful for them, of course!). At best, you can expect to see politely bored indifference, but don't count on unconditional support, not from anyone. A harsh and lonely battle awaits you! You have only one ally in this fight whom you can fully and always rely upon, and that is yourself.

That's why it is absolutely necessary to constantly reward yourself internally for your successes when learning your foreign language. Do not expect anyone else to do that for you.

In no way should you scold yourself for any minor failures or temporary difficulties, whether perceived or real. In the most resolute way, you must suppress any negativity within yourself and tirelessly feed on all the positive emotions associated with your small successes in learning a foreign language. This is nothing to be embarrassed about; on the contrary, it is vital to your success!

And don't postpone rewarding yourself until later on, when you're beginning to communicate with foreigners. Many people half-consciously expect that native speakers will surely play the role of a concerned evaluator and are bound to praise you for your successes and all the sacrifices you've made to achieve proficiency in their language. People think that native speakers will be happily surprised by their rich vocabulary, their impeccable grammar and their intelligent accent!

My dear friend, I'm sorry to say it, but bitter disappointment awaits you in this. Native speakers usually don't care whether you know their language or not or whether you speak with a dreadful village accent or as elegantly as the Queen of England herself. They automatically place you—according to your language ability—at the proper social level, nothing more. They will not correct your mistakes (just as you probably never find yourself correcting the speaking errors of some stranger you've just met, but this doesn't stop you from cringing inwardly as you listen to him speak). They probably won't praise you, either. You mean to them as much as the millions of faces on the streets of any metropolis mean to you. Therefore, reward yourself for your genuine achievements right here and now because you might not have another opportunity!

Give yourself some psychological candy! Tell yourself how clever you are! Give yourself a pat on the back, even for little tactical successes—they eventually add up, and they'll lead you to a serious breakthrough and a major victory! Congratulate yourself, but not aloud, of course, my humble friend, not aloud but rather within. Do this just for yourself, with a wise little smile on your face, one that remains forever mysterious to those who aren't in the know...

By all means, you must do this, for here lies the key to your success in the transformation of your chosen foreign language from a dangerous enemy to your ally and friend!

### **Not a Single Thought In your Head? You're On the Right Track!**

Like caliphs in *Arabian Nights* wandering in disguise at night through their cities, listening to what people are really saying about them behind closed doors, your humble servant also has the habit from time to time of strolling through the open spaces and streets of the Internet and becoming acquainted there with a variety of views about himself, disguised in a charming digital turban and Arabian robe (handmade, by the way!).

Besides the rather dull and monotonous abuse in their words—and no less boring praise—I occasionally hear some rather interesting and instructive discussions and opinions. Here is a discussion about the matrix approach that I recently happened to overhear in a virtual 'teahouse'. For various reasons, I will leave the site address anonymous.

Since one of the participants of the discussion was simply exuding the standard school-fare incantations that do not interest us, I allowed myself to delete these statements—undoubtedly it would be less harmful to impressionable former school students!

The second participant's input—which I will present in a somewhat reduced and processed form—I consider quite decent detailed descriptions of certain aspects and nuances of my (mine and yours, my dear friend, mine and yours!) approach to language learning.

So I ask you to tighten the belt on your Arabian robe and follow me in search of adventures and pure matrix knowledge, down the streets of our virtual Baghdad...

A. I am an engineer by education and experience. I became acquainted with studying a foreign language because of professional necessity (funny that my father worked all his life as an English teacher; the son of a shoemaker ended up without shoes, so to speak), and as a representative of precise sciences, I was deeply struck by the chaos and circus atmosphere of everyone trying to sell their wares in the field of foreign languages study and teaching.

This situation has intrigued me in a significant way, and now for the past year or two, I've been collecting whatever I can that is related to this area of study.

I'm a disinterested party in this matter, and my observations—from the bleachers—are rather impartial and may contain unexpected ideas and conclusions that would never enter the minds of those who, willing or not, put themselves into this flawed teaching/training 'pot' saturated with unhealthy content. Because of that, they cannot be impartial concerning these stale stereotypes and these dubious ideas, which are usually just taken for the truth.

B...

A. You can certainly look for breadcrumbs in the garbage can. You can crawl on piles of refuse with a microscope in your hands, looking for useful molecules and atoms—or at least not out-and-out harmful ones!—in dozens and hundreds of methods, persistently offered to us from everywhere. You can dedicate your life to such explorations, but what's the point?

In his book, Mr Zamyatkin offers the correct approach to language mastery. So-called specialists often describe his ideas but do not penetrate the essence of them and sometimes completely distort them. Let me briefly describe these ideas.

Mr Zamyatkin suggests working with materials in the studied foreign language in which there are recordings voiced by native speakers—only native speakers! From these recordings comes the so-called matrix—a set of 25 to 30 dialogues recorded multiple times each. Each of them is from 15 to 50 seconds long with no long pauses, translations, sound effects, music or other non-linguistic debris.

It is suggested that every single matrix dialogue initially be listened to for a few hours, even up to a few days! Then each dialogue should be listened to while following along with eyes on the text—also for a few days. Finally the dialogue is repeated aloud—definitely very much aloud!—over the course of hours and days until the best possible pronunciation is achieved.

The method, of course, is a bit harsh, but extremely effective (I know from my own experience). It's similar to the long hours of repetition of scales and notes that musicians must practice—those who aspire to become professionals.

B...

A. The difference between knowing *how* to speak and the actual skill of talking—the physical skill!—is exactly the same as that between knowing *how* to play a piece of music and the ability actually to *perform* it. And this gap subsides only through training.

The main problem with language teaching methods—we're only talking here about honest attempts at creating real methods, not about 'subliminal learning' and other shameless attempts to put their sticky fingers into our pockets—is that they teach speculative knowledge on how to speak and forget about the need to develop and train the skill of practically using this knowledge. To develop such skills, it is necessary to talk and talk and talk—loudly and properly. At best, we are only taught to understand how to do this in our mind.

When did anyone learn to play the violin (or even a banjo!) only understanding mentally where to put the fingers, where to place the bow and by just looking at the violin from a distance?

Every child—every one of us!—from the age of one to three years goes through a stage of independent training of loudly pronouncing sounds (prefacing this sound-producing stage with a stage of long preparatory listening, of course), linking them to phonemes, syllables, then in longer sound constructions—words—and finally to complex sound chains—sentences.

It all starts with prolonged and repeated listening to what the grown-ups are saying, then crosses over to 'baby-talk' and ends with the ability to create multi-level compound sound chains, otherwise known as sentences, with a complex phonetic—and logical—structure at 12 to 14 years of age.

I stress it once more: after birth, we acquire a practical ability to speak—physically to produce successions of sounds one after another—in our native language without any theoretical knowledge of how to do it.

B...

A. From the book *Paradoxes of the Brain* by Boris Sergeev:

'Young children learn not only to speak, that is, to produce speech sounds, but also to perceive them. These two processes are so closely intertwined that they cannot be fully performed one without the other. A child must repeat each new word, simultaneously analyzing and comparing the sounds of speech and the motor responses of the tongue, larynx and vocal cords, which occur during the utterance of this word.'

Individual phonemes and complete words are stored in our brains in the form of “motor” and “sound” copies, but the motor images of phonemes are more important for us than the sound images. Without participation of the motor center of speech it is impossible to use the “motor” copies of phonemes and words, and therefore the control over the perception of speech becomes one-sided and incomplete.’

In other words, to learn to perceive, to distinguish the sounds of language (both native and foreign), we must learn to pronounce these sounds loudly and correctly. However, to be properly pronounced, they need to be heard and listened to first. These two processes—the articulation of sounds or sound chains (which we ordinarily call ‘words’) and the ability to distinguish between these sounds in the ears—are inseparable.

Thus, the road to distinguishing the sound chains of a foreign language (discrimination/identification is the very first and absolutely necessary step to subsequent understanding), in a most unexpected and paradoxical way, passes through our speech apparatus—through the ability of our speech apparatus to *loudly* produce these sound chains.

B...

63

A. You repeat the word ‘know’ over and over again without even trying to realize what this word really means and whether it is appropriate in this case.

I ‘know’, for example, how to run a marathon. I know it in my mind, of course: I need to tirelessly keep moving my legs one after the other (not both at once but one after the other and certainly in a forward direction and in no case backwards or sideways!), breathe noisily, sweat—and after 42,000 persistent steps, I will make it to the finish line in anticipation of loud applause and a beautiful ‘Gold medal for successfully enduring a long marathon in the heat of the summer, without preliminary wearisome training but only through pure theoretical knowledge of marathons lodged in my brain’! Knowledge is great power!

True, up until now, I’ve never tried to run a marathon in practice (and generally don’t get up off my sofa without extreme necessity), but I do not think this will become a problem for me because I ‘know’ after all!

B...

A. We don’t need to know anything to learn how to ride a bicycle! We are learning the *skills* of cycling. Before first sitting on a bicycle at the age of three, who among us read a theoretical bicycle-riding guide for beginners?

B...

A. The articulatory micro-movements that take place during the pronunciation of sounds and sound combinations in a foreign language is fundamentally different from the articulatory micro-movements of the native language. However, there are practically no foreign language study methods that allow for any significant amount of time for the formation of these micro-movements, with the exception of Mr Zamyatkin's method. Yet without this formation, the entire structure of the foreign language is without a foundation.

This important issue—at the beginning of learning a language, this is the most important thing!—will either end up being overlooked, as if in the hope that somehow the student will figure it out on his own (it would be like releasing some toddlers alone on an ocean beach in stormy weather hoping that by the end of the day they will have learned to swim!), or it will become lost in a theorised jungle of phonetic arguments, full of 'ideas' that even the authors themselves can't understand.

Mr Zamyatkin, though, offers a holistic, self-contained method in which training for these micro-motions is conducted by the loud repetition of typical textbook dialogues but in volumes much, much larger than needed simply to understand and remember them.

B...

64

A. In the course of extended and repeated listening to a single given phrase (in this case a matrix dialogue) the 'noise' of the foreign language becomes a recognisable sound. There is a deep wisdom in this. In every phrase of any language, there is a huge amount of information: about the tone, frequency, pitch, stress, means of pronunciation and other characteristics of each sound, word, word combination and phrase. But only young children who are still studying the language actually process this information, while adults filter it at the subconscious level, leaving only the bare 'meaning' of the phrase.

The same thing also happens with a foreign phrase, but the subconscious has no adequate deciphering matrix/program, so an unfamiliar phrase is heard either as meaningless noise, undifferentiated to sounds and words or they are interpreted by the old language matrix to be something quite different from what it actually is.

We must create—physically implant in ourselves!—a deciphering matrix of the foreign language. The matrix serves many functions, of course (including articulation, grammar, vocabulary and other functions), but its very first task is to decipher the sounds of the foreign language.

During the process of listening to the matrix, our first priority is not to study the words, to understand their meaning or to memorise them (although this is not forbidden). By listening to the matrix dialogues, we are learning to hear foreign sounds, and they gradually become our own.

Gradually, day after day, distinct words start emerging from the torrent of nearly white noise, and it is very interesting to observe. Every sound in the word begins to take form, harmony is heard, along



with the dynamics of the phrase, as well as the subtleties and nuances, which no textbook or teacher can explain. These can only be felt!

It is in this very unusual but very exciting process that Mr Zamyatkin suggests we fully immerse ourselves at the very beginning of the matrix method of studying a foreign language.

B...

A. In the film *The Thirteenth Warrior*, Antonio Banderas' character is exiled to the North because of his affair with the wife of a ruler. He is sitting by the fire with some grimy Vikings who insult him in every way, talking among themselves in their own language, when he suddenly insults them in response—in their own language. The Vikings are surprised and even horrified because they had met this foreigner just a few days ago and he didn't speak or understand a word of their language. They ask him how he learned to speak Viking, and he replied, 'I listened!'

'I listened!'—this is the key to learning a foreign language.

B...

65

A. Language skills are not limited to articulation, but they begin with it. It is useless to memorise words with incorrect pronunciation or to study the bare grammar. If you want to learn how to dance well, imitate the movements of a good dancer. Don't read volumes on the dancer's body's chemical composition and the mechanics of the movements of his muscles.

If you want to learn how to speak, imitate someone who does it correctly, including pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, and do it not just in your mind but do physically, actively imitating the actual movements of the tongue, lips, jaw, throat and diaphragm—loudly and in the exact same way!

B...

A. Mr Zamyatkin's method puts into practice one of the main postulates from B. Kurinsky's *Autodidactics*, which states:

*'...always try to replace mental labor with physical labor.'* Almost no one is able to persistently apply mental efforts for many hours, but almost everyone is able to diligently carry out physical work, and it is normal. All that is needed is to discard the false stereotype of 'learning' and 'understanding'.

B...

A. In the beginning, it is necessary to listen again and again—for days!—to a matrix dialogue voiced by a native speaker until it is branded in your memory—in your subconscious. Then you have to repeat it aloud also for days, *loudly*—in no way whatsoever should it be in a whisper, but spoken *loudly*!—imitating the voice actors until you get as close as possible to their pronunciation—with

effortless ease and speed. In two or three standard matrix dialogues, you will encounter almost every possible sound; in ten dialogues, you will encounter every sound combination.

The text can only be viewed in the second stage. The main idea here is attentive listening and subsequent attentive reading/reciting of the matrix dialogue—only *loudly! Loudly! Loudly! Loudly!* Because whispering only gives you an illusion of correct pronunciation! The criterion for ending this reciting is when you do not detect any further progress in speed and accuracy in pronouncing phrases.

B...

A. The matrix does not teach spontaneous speech—it's not intended for this purpose—but the matrix will create a bank of micro-movements trained to full automaticity so that the speech apparatus is able to pronounce typical sound combinations and imitate typical intonations of the studied language, which actually are not so many. This then will serve well as a foundation for—primarily through reading—other words, expressions and word combinations.

From the standpoint of a conscious study of a language, with the help of a logical acquisition of semantic structures, the method, of course, appears meaningless. In fact, pushing aside and neutralising what is usually meant by 'logic', it affects the deepest unconscious structures of the brain, linking the micro-movements of the speech apparatus with typical phonemes and sound combinations. It also links the visual/printed images of the studied language, creating and making tiny 'atoms of language' familiar that cannot be comprehended through logic or science. Without this linking, language remains a set of 'cold', boring rules and perpetually forgotten words.

In no way is it necessary to associate this with understanding or formal 'learning'. Understanding is a discrete process: one either understands something or one does not, but *skill acquisition* is a long and continuous process. From a complete lack of skill, you progress through the exercises—motor skill exercises!—to an initial uncertain and instable skill, and then only through persistent continuous work can you achieve a masterful proficiency of the skill.

Working with the matrix at the stage of initial language skills is like a voiced prayer or meditation in Eastern religions or like practicing scales and arpeggios in learning to play a musical instrument, like the endless repetition of simple movements in martial arts, like the drilling of the simplest components by a ballet dancer at the bar or the elements of figure skating. Without such exercises, it is impossible to master the art. That means that, in the initial stage of language learning, you must perform millions of articulated micro-movements, pronouncing the words, phrases and sentences *correctly* and *loudly*. There is no other way, and there can be no other way. There is only one effective method for drilling-in the initial articulation/speaking motor skills—the matrix method.

B...

A. In no way whatsoever should you give in to the temptation to whisper the dialogues. Such whispering is nothing more than self-deception, an illusion of acquiring speaking skills in the foreign language that you study. You must work through the matrix dialogues only in a loud, full voice.

Trying to develop articulation skills by whispering or muttering is like preparing yourself for a marathon by wiggling your toes!

B...

A. Now we come to the point in question. In the course of repeated (circular) listening or repeating the text (loudly, of course), there comes a time when not a single thought remains in your head and thereby your goal is achieved.

According to neuro-linguistic programming, you 'anchor' this most precious condition down, and in the future, there won't be any problems with learning. Using this anchor, you deliberately enter into a state of 'unawareness'—not thinking in the native language—and then you become open to the foreign language to soak it in, to acquire its new and unusual harmonies, which you could not previously take in through the defensive armour of the native language.

67

As a child, I had to spend not days but months of my life learning a single piece of music, in this way developing stable muscle skills—as a result, my little fingers ran and flew. When I became an adult, I decided to learn to play a different musical instrument, and my muscle skills developed much faster than before—understandably so.

In Mr Zamyatkin's method, you work on each matrix dialogue as you would on a piece of music—you work until you learn to perform it in a relaxed and effortless manner. The instrument here is your voice, your body—your speech apparatus.

And, of course, only you can force yourself to work! You do as much as you like, and these 'unrealistic' recommended hours and days are given to stress a point—we are not looking for the 'meaning' of a sentence (meaning that offers little and is actually very superficial) but aim to understand the multi-level subtleties of a real living language, the resonance and vibration of each separate word and sound, the smallest nuances and shades—all of which the surface 'meaning' only hinders. By the way, it is quite enjoyable, takes a reasonable amount of time—if approached intelligently!—and is extremely useful, not only for learning a foreign language but also for understanding the dynamics of sound in your own language.

B...

A. Using the matrix bulldozer, we will uproot and destroy the waterlogged jungle of these impassable thickets of external, linear 'logic'. Along this solid path, made possible by the matrix, we will now be able to travel in our pursuit of true language acquisition.

B...

A. Ask any monk, even a novice, a teacher of religious meditation or even a simple, unwashed shaman in taiga with a tambourine in his hands, and they will explain to you that, when our logical thinking and internal dialogue are switched off with the help of the extended repetition of simple phrases (mantras, prayers, etc.), it means that an initial and mandatory step toward a productive meditation has been taken.

Ask psychologists or adherents of neuro-linguistic programming how, through the use of specific verbal influences, people enter into altered states of consciousness with higher—several levels higher—productivity.

More than half a century ago, the prominent linguist Scherba, in a dispute with supporters of direct and transferable methods of studying foreign languages, complained that ‘we can drive the native speech out of the classroom, but we cannot drive it out of the heads of our students.’

It turns out that we actually can, and the experience of thousands of years of Eastern religions and the latest advances in science testify to that. Only the narrow-mindedness, tunnel vision and conservatism covered with the crust of smug tradition do not let it happen.

68

B...

A. Ramakrishna told his disciples, who sometimes demanded of him ‘exact knowledge’:

‘You came into this mango garden to enjoy the mango fruits. So, eat these fruits! Here they are right in front of you! Why are you trying to count the leaves on the mango trees?’

It’s the same with the matrix method: you are being asked not to ‘count’ suffixes, cases and conjugations in the studied language but to use the language practically and enjoy it (although one must bear in mind that the study of grammar in its pure form is not prohibited but just moved to the back burner, so to speak).

B...

A. The human psyche is characterised by shifting of attention—it’s not possible to retain focus on one object for more than 20 to 30 seconds. Therefore, initial concentration on the meaning of a phrase is completely eliminated after a few times of listening. The focus of attention will then switch to the meaning of the words, which there are more of. And only very long periods of repetitious listening will ‘rub away’ and take the focus of attention off the meaning, allowing you to concentrate on the smallest units of information—sounds and phonemes, the number of which in the passage is such that it allows for attention to be held for almost an unlimited amount of time.

Throughout our life experience, we are trained to process and filter all the ‘unnecessary’ information at a subconscious level, fixing our attention only on the exterior informational level—the level of ‘meaning’. It is impossible to shut off this habit with the conscious effort of your will, just as it is impossible to will yourself to no longer be able to swim or to ride a bicycle. However, we can eliminate the concentration on the exterior, habitual level of ‘meaning’ by exposing it to very large amounts of repetitious ‘meaning’, thus breaking the mould of habit, and then the *deeper secrets* will be revealed to us.

B...

A. The matrix is a small motor, a starter for a big, clumsy language engine. The starter serves to start a large engine by providing the initial motion. You won’t get very far on the starter alone, of course, but that’s not what it’s designed for. Without the starter, a big engine remains cold and motionless.

B...

A. This type of learning a language has yet to be researched and studied in depth, although a great demand for such methods exists and is felt on the market, at least judging by the huge amount of all these ‘miracle’ methods, ‘secret KGB/CIA research’, ‘subliminal’ learning, ‘Learn a Language in 10 Minutes-a-Day’, ‘Words-on-the-Run’ and other pseudoscientific nonsense.

Mr Zamyatkin’s approach, however, in its elegant simplicity, promises to put up the best battle with all these noisy ‘super-methods’ that the professional fraudsters have invented purely for the shameless plundering of the naive population!

B...

A. This is what attracts a huge number of followers: Mr Zamyatkin’s paradoxical ideas and recommendations coupled with the elegance of his proposed approach. The fact is, there are clear indications here of something quite revolutionary.

Initially, the followers are specifically attracted by the paradoxes of the proposed logic and by the novelty of the matrix method. Then the daily hard work with the language matrix (as in my case) furnishes an understanding that the method actually works and that this is the right path one needs to take to study a foreign language.

## Excerpt From the Matrix Manual For Users in China

### *Teacher, Emperor and a Cat*

This is a story about how a cat helped an emperor become a great warrior.

It happened a thousand or two thousand years ago. The old emperor died, and his underage heir became emperor. The boy emperor heard that in his empire there was a great teacher of kung-fu, and he desired to learn all the secrets of this art.

He summoned the kung-fu teacher and said to him, 'I desire to know kung-fu! I desire to be a great warrior! Tell me everything you know!' The teacher said in response, 'Great Ruler, you shall have to lift heavy stones, carry water, chop wood...' 'Be silent if you want to live!' the emperor exclaimed. 'I am not a lowly peasant that carries stones and chops wood! Tell me all your secrets—I shall memorise them and become a great warrior!' He said this and sternly stomped his little foot on the floor.

'Very well, oh my Lord,' the teacher said. 'Sit down and listen.' And so the teacher began to talk while the emperor sat and listened very closely because he so much wanted to become a great warrior.

70

So passed days, weeks and then months. The little emperor was very joyous—his dream was coming true, and he was becoming a great master of kung-fu.

One day as he sat so in the palace garden and listened to the old teacher, a cat jumped onto the bench. The emperor wanted to take it and stroke it, but the cat hissed and avoided him—the emperor missed and awkwardly fell from the bench into the thorny roses.

Servants got him to his feet, and he asked with tears in his eyes, 'Why!? Why did I fall!? I, great warrior, because I have been studying kung-fu for many months and I know everything!'

The old kung-fu teacher said, 'My Lord, you have been a very diligent pupil, and you have memorised everything I have been telling you. You know about kung-fu everything there is to know, but you do not possess the skill of kung-fu. It is not possible to master kung-fu sitting still on a bench and memorising words even if one is an emperor. Kung-fu needs to be memorised with a different kind of memory. In our heads, we have one memory and a completely different one in our bodies.

There exists a mind of the head, and there exists a mind of the body.

It is not the mind of the head that kung-fu needs to be memorised with; instead, kung-fu needs to be memorised with the mind of the body. All this time, the mind of your body has been learning nothing and knows nothing; it has even become weaker from the constant sitting, that is why even this cat is stronger and more agile than you. The mind of the cat's head knows nothing about kung-fu, but the mind of its body knows very, very much, as opposed to you, to the mind of your body, my Lord.

However, kung-fu—or the strong mind of the body—is given to the cat from the cat’s birth; of this kind of body’s mind upon our birth we are given almost none...’

‘But how then does one become a kung-fu warrior?’ exclaimed the little emperor, wiping away his child’s tears. ‘What do I have to do?’

The old, wise teacher said, ‘My Lord, in the beginning, like all my pupils and like I myself, you shall have to lift heavy stones, carry water and chop wood; in this way, not your head’s mind will be memorising but your body’s mind! You can master kung-fu in only this way—there is no other path...’

### ***Foreign language tai-chi***

Thousands of people all over the world have already taken the path of the foreign language tai-chi and successfully learned a foreign language. You are extremely lucky to have embarked on the same path.

*Important!* Approach the foreign language with a great desire of success and a complete certainty of success, and then you will have success.

71

*Important!* Firstly, be ready to work very hard. Secondly, be ready to work very, very hard. Thirdly and most importantly, be ready to work very, very, very hard.

*Important!* The language tai-chi course is just a start, a door. Certainly, opening the door matters a lot, but when you succeeded in opening the door, you don’t remain standing in front of the door, but you enter it. When the door is opened, enter it and move on.

Now let’s talk about how you open the door.

*Important!* Do what your language tai-chi teacher tells you to do—diligently do the language tai-chi, and success awaits you.

Foreign language mastery has to go initially through the body’s mind—through a very intensive training of the sound-forming parts of the body. Remember the boy emperor—teach the mind of your body.

In a foreign language, the sound-forming body parts have a completely different way of moving. The energy flow moves through sound-forming body parts in a completely different way. This is why it is necessary to teach these body parts to move differently. The old, habitual energy flow needs to be replaced with a new one. This is the foundation for foreign language mastery.

To teach your sound-forming body parts new and unusual movements, a new approach has been developed. This approach can be compared to tai-chi. It is a special ‘language tai-chi’.



For you, it will be a beginning and a foundation for foreign language mastery. At the forefront, we put the teaching of your body's mind, not your head's mind—remember the boy emperor.

You can listen to many, very many kung-fu stories or tai-chi stories and read hundreds and even all the books on subject, but in the end, you won't master neither kung-fu or tai-chi. The energy flow through the body will remain unchanged. One can for a very long time listen and read about rules in a foreign language while still being unable to utter a word of this language. The energy flow through the sound-forming and sound intake body parts will remain old and unchanged.

The language tai-chi makes you speak the target language as well as understand it. Your tongue, your lips, cheeks, lungs, all of them, begin to work; your body's mind begins to work. The energy flow in the body changes and becomes different. This is a basis for further successful advancement in any foreign language.

The energy flow comes out of a person's mouth, is partially dispersed and partially enters another person's hearing apparatus. The hearing apparatus is linked to the speech-producing apparatus, so to a greater or lesser extent, the energy flow from the hearing apparatus penetrates the speech-producing apparatus as well. This reduced energy flow passes through the speech-producing apparatus, permeates it, influences it, makes it comply with its rules.

72

In childhood, any kind of energy flow from any language moves from the ears to the speech apparatus freely and without obstacles, but with aging, the energy movement passages take a certain configuration, becoming tuned up specifically and uniquely to the energy flow from the mother tongue.

From a certain age, energy flows from other languages—foreign speech—begin to move in the body with more and more difficulty. The ears 'close up'; the mouth 'freezes up'. More and more efforts need to be applied so that an energy flow with patterns uncharacteristic to the mother tongue's energy flow reach the speech-producing apparatus and make it comply with its rules.

Now, for a new and unusual energy flow to force its way through and become accepted, it needs to be made especially strong, dense and quite extended.

Experience indicates that this strong energy flow must intensely erode the obstacles with a wave after a wave pattern until the passages open up and the energy flow becomes free and unhindered.

That's the reason the course dialogues are recorded in a special, cyclical, wave-like way. Such wave-like recording is very important for successful language learning. It is the most effective organisation of the energy flow from the foreign language for teaching purposes.

A strong energy wave lashes incessantly after a strong energy wave—until the defensive walls come crumbling down!

### ***More specific instructions for the Language tai-chi course***

To properly work through the full course, an adult will need 6 to 10 months. It is impossible to be more precise—attentively listen to the energy flow inside yourself.

*Important!* The initial 12 weeks are of crucial importance.

The first five to ten units are the most important. Work with each of them has to be especially thorough and extended.

Do not rush; remember that what is born quickly dies quickly!

Each—each!—of the first five units has to be worked for 14 to 16 days, or even more, if necessary. After that, the time allocated to every unit can be reduced little by little—listen to the energy flow inside yourself.

*Important!* Only work gives all the answers.

### ***Work instructions for each separate course unit***

73

You need to listen to the unit during every free minute of life. Use your cell phone or a small MP3 player. Use tight, good-quality earphones—the energy flow should not be dissipated unproductively in space but enter your ears with minimal loss.

Listen to each separate unit for no less than three hours a day: when on a treadmill, in public transit, jogging, shopping, waiting in lines and so forth—walks are especially good for this. Put to use time that usually goes to waste. Make sure the energy flow is constantly fed to your ears.

During the first three to six hours of listening to the unit, do not look at the text. The first one or two days are just for listening.

After that, make a unit printout and always keep it on your person. It has to be only the text in the target language, without any translations or grammar explanations. Whenever possible, listen while at the same time looking at the printout. If for some reason you cannot listen and at the same time look at the printout, just listen—you will look at the printout of the text when you get a chance to.

For example, it would not be possible for you to ride a bicycle while looking at the text. So ride the bicycle for 15, 20, 30 or 60 minutes just listening to the unit and then stop, get out the text and listen for some time while looking at the text.

If you want to, you can write down some notes on the printout sheet in your own hand. If these notes are many and you begin to have a hard time seeing the text, make a fresh printout, but do not throw away the old one—it could be useful in the future.

From time to time, when you get a chance and you feel like it, read the vocabulary, translation and grammar notes for the unit that you are working on. It is more convenient to do it at home, but you can do it pretty much anywhere.

You should not force yourself to memorise the grammar, translation and vocabulary—just read them whenever you have the time and desire to do so. Your head will memorise on its own what needs to be memorised.

*Important!* In no case should you study grammar to the detriment of the listening and speaking aloud. Grammar has to be secondary to the rest of your activities.

Remember that, at this stage, the most important thing is to make work the mind of your body, to open your ears and to change the energy flow passing from your ears into your speech-producing body parts.

During the foreign language study period, try to increase to its fullest the foreign language flow through your ears, your eyes and your mouth, at the same time minimising as much as possible the mother tongue's flow—through your ears, your eyes and your mouth.

74

For many days, energy wave after energy wave will be saturating your tongue, lips, throat and lungs, preparing them to pronounce the sounds of an alien language. Let this preparation, this saturation, last for about 14 days, three or more hours a day, for each of the initial five units. However, if you feel that you need more time, spend more time. Do not rush; remember that what is born quickly dies quickly!

Often, this energy soaking will result in involuntary movement of the lips—your body begins to obey the alien language's energy flow, the unusual energy flow logic, in a visible way.

After 14 to 16 or even more days of such listening, such energy soaking of the speech apparatus, the next stage arrives—out-loud reading of the unit you have been listening to.

*Important!* In the out-loud stage, reading of the teaching unit has to be very, very loud. Very loud!

Very often, almost always, a person has an illusion that he is reading loudly, but in fact, he is reading in a quiet voice. Loud reading of the teaching units is absolutely necessary, and you cannot overestimate it. You will never learn to speak a foreign language correctly if your reading is not loud enough. Moreover, quiet reading could lead to serious problems in the future understanding the foreign language when it is spoken.

*Important!* In the out-loud stage, read the teaching unit only very loudly.

Immediately before the out-loud reading, energetically massage your cheeks and lips—this kind of warming-up will help the out-loud reading.

Look at the text and start with the word that appears to be especially easy and simple to pronounce. If you have listened long enough, your body's mind will suggest you these words, these weak spots in the fortress of the foreign language. Then add to these words other words. When you do it, do not simultaneously listen—at this stage, simultaneous listening would be a harmful distraction.

Read loudly and without simultaneous listening.

Try to imitate the voice actors' pronunciation and especially their intonation very closely—it is extremely important.

Often it is easier to begin reading aloud from the last word in the sentence, the one after which there usually is a pause. Listen to the energy flow inside you—it is rarely mistaken.

If you feel you need to listen more, listen more. At this stage, it is categorically forbidden to hurry—the foundation being laid must be as solid as possible for your new house to stand on it very firmly.

75

Read loudly one word from the text, then add to it one more word standing next to it and read loudly these two words together, then three words together, then five words together, then 10 words together—and finally the whole text together. Read loudly the whole text again and again—the out-loud text reading has to become completely free and very close to the actors' reading.

*Important!* In the out-loud reading stage, read the teaching unit very loudly and only with correct intonations—just like the actors'.

Read the unit loudly for three to five days a few hours every day, going back to listening if need be.

At the beginning of the out-loud reading, your cheeks and lips may hurt. Take joy in that because it is a good pain, an indicator that you are on the right path—your body is working hard, getting physically tired and hurting from the unusual kind of work.

Pain from the out-loud reading is a good pain, a correct pain!

If your throat starts hurting, use tea or cough lozenges.

If after a few days of the out-loud reading there comes a moment when you are reading aloud but your thoughts are flying somewhere far away from your reading, with your lips and tongue moving completely independently from your thoughts, it is a very good sign—you are on the right path.

When you feel that there will be no further improvement in the out-loud reading of the unit, begin to listen to the next unit. Work with it in precisely the same way you worked with the previous one.

To a beginning pupil, a foreign language is like a food that is too hard. The pupil is unable to chew and swallow this food raw, so as a preliminary step, the foreign language needs to be ‘cooked’—listened to.

You take a small piece that is specially prepared for you—a teaching unit—and ‘cook’ it patiently, that is, listen to it for a very long time. Only when it is well ‘cooked’ and ready for consumption do you begin to ‘chew’ it—to utter it very loudly.

*Important!* Begin to listen to the next unit only after having read aloud (‘chewed’!) the previous one for several days and in no case before that. Do not move on to the next unit before it has properly passed through your tongue, lips, cheeks and lungs.

Before beginning to read aloud a new unit, read aloud the previous ones to warm up your speaking apparatus. Do not forget about the energetic massage of your cheeks and lips.

In this way, most diligently, the pupil has to work through each and every unit of the foreign language tai-chi course:

- 1) Listen for several hours to each separate unit without looking at the text printout;
- 2) Listen for several days to this unit, looking at the text printout whenever it is possible to do so; and
- 3) For several days read the unit very loudly while simultaneously looking at the text printout, going back to the unit listening whenever you feel it is necessary.

*Important!* Only work gives all the answers.

It is impossible to give an exact timing for each course stage because the energy flow is different for everybody, and it changes with age. When a pupil works on a tai-chi or kung-fu move, it is impossible to tell whether perfecting the move will take a day, three days or two weeks. One pupil will need a day to perfect the move, but another will need 10 or 16 days for the same move. It is necessary to work as much as necessary.

After five initial units, the time spent on every next unit can be somewhat reduced—listen to the energy flow inside yourself.

*Important!* The initial five units are crucial and ‘time-economising’ on them is totally inadmissible.

Do not rush; remember that what is born quickly dies quickly!

From time to time when working with a unit at stages 2 and 3, read the unit’s grammar notes and its vocabulary whenever you have the time and desire to do so. If you feel like it, you can use other grammar reference books.

*Important!* Certainly, you should familiarise yourself with grammar, but you must not study grammar to the detriment of the unit listening and reading aloud.

In the manner described above, you will work one by one with 25 or all the units of the course. When you will have reached the 20<sup>th</sup> unit, you will have a sense as to how far you need to move in the language tai-chi course—for some, the 25<sup>th</sup> unit will be the last, while others will complete all of the course up to the very end.

It would be pointless to increase the number of units to work with because, toward the end of the course, the described work becomes less and less profitable linguistically, and it is apparent that it is necessary to move on to other kinds of language learning activities.

However, before this transition, you have to go through the completion phase of the language tai-chi course.

### ***Completion phase of the language tai-chi course***

After you have worked with every and each unit in the most thorough way, next you will need to read aloud all the units together—from the first one to the last—over and over again.

Read all the course units together two to four hours a day every day for 9 to 12 weeks.

It may very well happen that some units became a little ‘rusty’ because you have left them behind and your reading aloud is not perfect. In that case, listen some more.

Make one file of all the course audio files you worked with. To do that, take from each audio-file only its base element, without the circular repetition the course audio files come with, and put all the base elements together.

Listen to this joint file containing the base elements of all the files you have worked with.

### ***An illustration***

In the course, the base element is cyclical:

‘Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard. Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard. Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard. Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard. Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard. Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard’. And so on.

‘Pupil, do what I tell you. Obey me and work hard. Only work gives all the answers. Pupil, do what I tell you. Obey me and work hard. Only work gives all the answers. Pupil, do what I tell you. Obey me and work hard. Only work gives all the answers. Pupil, do what I tell you. Obey me and work hard. Only work gives all the answers’. And so on.

All the sound files in the language tai-chi course are organised in this manner. To create the joint file, take the base element from the first file, ‘Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard.’ Take the base element of the second file, ‘Pupil, do what I tell you. Obey me and work hard. Only work gives all the answers.’ Then you put them together: ‘Hello, Teacher! I want to know kung-fu. I am ready to work hard. Pupil, do what I tell you. Obey me and work hard. Only work gives all the answers’.

Then you take the base elements from all the course’s sound files and put them together sequentially. In the last phase of the course, you listen to this joint file instead of the cyclic course files you listened to previously.

Listen to this joint file to refresh the course units that may be a little ‘rusty’. You can listen to it when it is not possible for you to read the units aloud.

78

*Important!* It is absolutely and unequivocally forbidden to put the joint file together and listen to it until after you have duly worked with every course unit separately. The joint file is put together only in the last phase of the course.

If for some reason you cannot put together such a joint file, to refresh ‘rusty’ units, you may listen to the cyclical files you listened to previously.

Read aloud all the units one after another in the circular fashion two to four hours a day for 9 to 12 weeks or more. The shorter and weaker energy streams from the separate units will become a single, great energy torrent of the foreign language, similar to how little brooks merge and become a great, strong river.

*Important!* Only work gives all the answers.

In 9 to 12 weeks of the circular reading aloud of all the units, you will discover that the foreign language is becoming not quite foreign, alien to you—its ‘feel’ has become very close and comfortable for you.

This means that the door into the foreign language has been opened and you can enter it, moving on further.



### ***What to do after completing the language tai-chi course***

After the language tai-chi course, you need to read and listen a lot in the foreign language.

For successful book reading, there are a few very simple rules:

1. Read only what you like reading;
2. Use a dictionary as little as possible—put it in a far-away corner and open it no more often than twice a day;
3. Do not read books with the immediate translation right on the next page;
4. Read only novels no shorter than 100 pages;
5. Read the initial 50 books only on paper;
6. Try to read 100 pages a day—at first, it will appear impossible to you, but then you will discover that it is quite possible to read even more pages a day;
7. Try to read for at least seven days without missing a day;
8. Do not switch authors often—if a particular author's writing style is comfortable to you, read all the books by this author;
9. Do not try to read aloud—do not confuse different learning phases; if you particularly liked a phrase or two in the book, read aloud just this one phrase;
10. From time to time, go back to reading aloud the units from the tai-chi course; and
11. If you become interested in this or that particular grammar feature, look it up—in any grammar reference book of your choice.

If you are tired after a few days of reading, switch activities and go to watching a mini-series or listening to the radio or podcasts. To take a break from reading, you may also browse grammar books.

*Important!* Only work gives all the answers.

Rules for mini-series viewing:

1. Watch only what you like to watch;
2. Do not use subtitles—they hinder listening comprehension severely; you may use subtitles very infrequently as an exception;
3. If there are books based on the mini-series, it would be advisable to read those books—it will create linguistic synergy; and
4. At first, try to watch the mini-series in the dialect the course units are in; for example, if they are in British English, your first mini-series should also be in British English.

After watching the mini-series for a few days or weeks, you can go back to reading books—read them for a few weeks, then go back to mini-series, after that return to books again, then back to mini-series and so forth.

Listen to the radio or podcasts—look for what you like. Often, you can find transcripts to the radio programs or podcasts—use them to compare the printed words to the sound.

Watch and listen to the daily news in the target language.

From time to time, revisit the reading aloud of the language tai-chi units.

During your foreign language studies, try to maximise the target language flow through your ears, eyes and mouth while simultaneously minimising your mother tongue's flow—through your ears, eyes and mouth.

Energy from reading books helps in listening; energy from listening helps in reading books. Both reading and listening are fed by the strong energy current from the language tai-chi course. Three different currents merge into one current—a very strong torrent. This very strong torrent carries you unstoppably onward and upward to new successes!

### ***Transition to spontaneous speaking***

After the energy flow from the foreign language has filled you up for 9 to 12 months, your 'vessel' will be filled and overflowing; there will be a language overpressure inside you, so the time will have come to begin to speak—not just to read aloud the teaching units from the language tai-chi course like you have been doing up to this point but to express your own thoughts in the foreign language.

True, the foreign language energy inside you is seeking for a way out, but this does not mean that you will speak the foreign language just as freely as your own mother tongue right away. Transition to free speech in the foreign language will take some time and require considerable efforts on your part, but this transition will inevitably happen because you are now completely ready for this transition.

*Important!* Only work gives all the answers.

Look for any opportunity to speak the target language. If there is a chance to speak with native speakers, do it. Do it, even if in the beginning it is only one or two phrases. Remember—a child does not start discoursing all of a sudden.

*Important!* Remember—he who seeks will find.

Look for opportunities to speak with native speakers on the Internet. There are many special sites where you can find native speakers willing to chat with you in your target language. Do not be afraid—you are ready to speak, and now it is just practice you need. Believe me; the native speakers will be amazed by how well you speak their language.

If you can find absolutely no opportunity to practice speaking with natives face to face or on the Internet, find anyone who would be willing to your speaking in the target language. Recount for this

person the books you have read in the target language or mini-series you have watched. It could be a schoolteacher or anyone who knows the target language at least to some extent. You can even pay them to listen to you. Remember—he who seeks will find.

*Important!* At this phase, speak, speak and speak! Practice, practice and more practice!

*Important!* If from the very beginning you have been doing what the language tai-chi teacher has told you to do, that is, diligently done the language tai-chi, great success awaits you!

### **Testimonials?**

There will be none. Of course, I was planning to put in some testimonials as to the matrix results that my students get (and my students do get results!). Well, I am not going to. Wherever you look these days, you see 'testimonials', professionally written to make you drink this, eat that or buy those, so upon some reflection, I decided it just was not my way. If my book has convinced you, it convinced you. If it has failed to convince you, so be it, my friend, so be it...

### **Addendum please**

#### **Drop your trousers here for best results**

*Nowadays practically all of us poor foreigners are learning English. Or trying to. Yes, some of us get results. Some of us get better results. And some of us even get brilliant results. Here you can have a look at a few of the brilliant ones with pleasure. Or without. Hmm...*

*From 'Anguished English' by Richard Lederer*

In a Yugoslavian hotel: The flattening of underwear with pleasure is the job of the chambermaid.

In a Tokyo Hotel: It is forbidden to steal hotel towels please. If you are not person to do such thing is please not to read notice.

In another Japanese hotel room: Please to bathe inside the tub.

In a Bucharest hotel lobby: The lift is being fixed for the next day. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable.

In a Leipzig elevator: Do not enter the lift backwards, and only when lit up.

In a Belgrade hotel elevator: To move the cabin, push button for wishing floor. If the cabin should enter more persons, each one should press a number of wishing floor. Driving is then going alphabetically by national order.

In a Paris hotel elevator: Please leave your values at the front desk.

In a hotel in Athens: Visitors are expected to complain at the office between the hours of 9 and 11 A.M. daily.

In the lobby of a Moscow hotel across from a cemetery: You are welcome to visit the cemetery where famous Russian and Soviet composers, artists, and writers are buried daily except Thursday.

In a Hong Kong supermarket: For your convenience, we recommend courteous, efficient self-service.

Outside a Paris dress shop: Dresses for street walking.

In an Austrian hotel catering to skiers: Not to perambulate the corridors in the hours of repose in the boots of ascension.

On the menu of a Swiss restaurant: Our wines leave you nothing to hope for.

On the menu of a Polish hotel: Salad a firm's own make; limpid red beet soup with cheesy dumplings in the form of a finger; roasted duck let loose; beef rashers beaten up in the country people's fashion.

Outside a Hong Kong tailor shop: Ladies may have a fit upstairs.

In a Bangkok dry cleaner's: Drop your trousers here for best results.

In a Rhodes tailor shop: Order your summers suit. Because is big rush we will execute customers in strict rotation.

82

Similarly, from the Soviet Weekly: There will be a Moscow Exhibition of Arts by 15000 Soviet Republic painters and sculptors. These were executed over the past two years.

In a Vienna hotel: In case of fire, do your utmost to alarm the hotel porter.

In a Norwegian cocktail lounge: Ladies are requested not to have children in the bar.

In an advertisement by a Hong Kong dentist: Teeth extracted by the latest Methodists.

A translated sentence from a Russian chess book: A lot of water has been passed under the bridge since this variation has been played.

In a Czechoslovakian tourist agency: Take one of our horse-driven city tours — we guarantee no miscarriages.

Advertisement for donkey rides in Thailand: Would you like to ride on your own ass?

In the window of a Swedish furrier: Fur coats made for ladies from their own skin.

On the box of a clockwork toy made in Hong Kong: Guaranteed to work throughout its useful life.

Detour sign in Kyushyu, Japan: Stop: Drive Sideways.

In a Swiss mountain inn: Special today — no ice cream.

In a Bangkok temple: It is forbidden to enter a woman even a foreigner if dressed as a man.

In a Tokyo bar: Special cocktails for the ladies with nuts.

In a Copenhagen airline ticket office: We take your bags and send them in all directions.

On the door of a Moscow hotel room: If this is your first visit to the USSR, you are welcome to it.

At a Budapest zoo: Please do not feed the animals. If you have any suitable food, give it to the guard on duty.

In the office of a Roman doctor: Specialist in women and other diseases.

In a Tokyo shop: Our nylons cost more than common, but you'll find they are best in the long run.

In an Acapulco hotel: The manager has personally passed all the water served here.

***Language Tai-chi, or You Cannot Be Taught a Foreign Language, by Nikolay Zamyatkin***  
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***Translation from Russian by Gary Vandenbos and Nikolay Zamyatkin***  
***zamyatkin-nikolay@yandex.ru, zamyatkin.nikolay@gmail.com***  
***zamyatkin.com***