

## Language Notes: 4

### **The Enemy Within: Part I**

You are in bed lying on your back at 3:00 AM, staring up at the ceiling wondering what in the world you have gotten yourself into. Thinking, “I brought my family half-way across the world and there is no way to learn this language. What have I done?” There are real enemies out there to be sure, and one of the enemies we have is ourselves. We bring it with us wherever we go!

Ask a veteran M what happens to a person’s personality in situations where he or she has continual, ongoing failure. They will tell you it can break a person. Let me add, it can break almost anybody, even an otherwise healthy people. How we respond to the ongoing failure of learning a difficult language will determine the course of a person’s work in his new home country.

Each person responds to the task of language learning differently. Some people are gifted, others come to the field knowledgeable and prepared with language learning tools, and a few are just naturally optimistic. Personally, I struck out on all three. So, I am writing to the person out there like myself.

Faced with a difficult task, it is important that you have the right mindset. I am not sure if this is the most important point, but it is certainly basic, “Never give up.” Find a good reason not to give up (there are many!). In my frustration, I became focused on the fact that what I was doing to learn Hungarian was not working and there must be a better way. I was not going to give up until I found it. Here is an illustration—hundreds of troubled couples have come to me for counseling help over the years. Many of them said, “I will keep working at my marriage, at least until I find out there is no more hope.” They are surprised when I explain to them that they should quit now because they have already created a hopeless situation. The point is, you cannot succeed in a marriage or in language study if you say, “I will only go this far, and no further.” You will be defeated before you begin. You have to have both feet in, the door closed, locked and no key to get out.

Another point to consider is this, “When you cannot grasp a difficult concept, put it aside and come back to it later.” Some of you musicians understand this point. A pianist faced with a difficult section to master will try one hand at a time, half time, double time, both hands, and finally give up and move on. Coming back to it the next day, it is easier. Personally, I was surprised to find that at the end of my second year of language study how many things finally began to make sense! I had studied some concepts 100 times, “gave up” and moved on, and then later discovered that I understood it. Do not give yourself a week, or even a month to “get it.” Give yourself several months. Just keep moving forward, focus on your strengths, change your learning style, go live with a native family for a week, and then go back to your hard to understand concepts.

So, if I can encourage you, never give up, and put difficult concepts to the side for a while when you are stuck. One final thought, as Philip Jackson has reminded us before, language learning is a worthy sacrifice, and a type of suffering. Suffering is what we are called to do for a greater reward and closer walk with the One we love.

### **Context**

The last Language Notes 2003.08 touched on the theme of learning in context. In this edition, I will give one example of learning new words in context. It really does help. This example, just so you know, comes from a Hungarian magazine. The title of the article is, “The Ideal European Citizen.” Hungarians are a bit sarcastic.

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### *The ideal European citizen is,*

- as flexible as a Swede
- as talkative as a Finn ☺ (that's me!)
- as easy to find as a Belgian office worker
- as generous as a Dutchman
- as discrete as a Dane
- as good a cook as an Englishman
- as gifted with humor as a German
- as sober as an Irishman
- as technically skilled as the Portuguese
- as humble as a Spaniard
- as good a driver as a Frenchman
- as famous as someone from Luxemburg
- as disciplined as an Italian
- as organized as a Greek
- as patient as an Austrian
- as OPTIMISTIC as a Hungarian.

Use this list to learn antonyms. Write out and memorize a list of sentences using each word and its opposite. In the spirit of team unity, do not use your teammates as your examples.

### **Email and Computers**

Time is precious and your computer is your enemy. Quiz question. What did people like us do back in the old days when there were no computers? They spent a whole lot more time with real live people!! We all enjoy getting a personal note from a friend back home via email. Others just enjoy working on the computer. But there is a point where you can cross the line and being at the computer becomes your way of coping. Spending hours with your PC or giving everyone you know open access to chat with you on-line or via email is not good to do. In fact, if you feel compelled to be at the PC contacting people every day, you really need to consider the possibility that you have crossed that line, and you are not connected with the people in the real world where you live.

I received this piece advice from a CCC staff person in Germany. She sends out email updates like most people and closes her updates with, "DUE TO THE FACT I AM IN LANGUAGE STUDY FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS, I WILL NOT BE RESPONDING TO ANY REPLY TO THIS EMAIL UPDATE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING." Interesting advice. The point is, learn to set limits.

**From the headlines:** "Firm bans e-mail at work." A London based telecommunications company banned use of email at work, citing that it saved the company 1 million dollars per month in saved time. Face-to-face contacts and phone calls replaced the use of email. (Sept 19, 2003.) Something to think about!