

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

ADVANCED READING'S AND CONVERSATIONS

Sandra Costinett

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INTRODUCTION

This text is intended for use by students of English as a second language who wish to reach a higher level of oral proficiency. It often happens that a student who can read almost anything and write easily still cannot speak fluently. His oral proficiency may be grammatically accurate but halting. His previous training may have prepared him to speak on topics limited to daily activities, general information and personal history.

This text may be used to stimulate and to structure conversation of a more abstract nature on topics which will evoke strong responses and interest on the part of the students. If controversy and disagreement arise in the course of classroom discussion, they are in this context desirable, as they are more likely to evoke verbal responses. While discussion material is based on two-part Readings in each Lesson, and while there are additional exercises for the purpose of reinforcement, the principal objective of each lesson in this book is simply *to get the students talking*.

This text is designed for use with another book, *Grammar for Use*, also published by the Institute of Modern Languages, and follows the Institute's six-level series, *Orientation in American English*. The text may, however, be used independently or in conjunction with other materials suitable for teaching English as a second language at the advanced level.

For information concerning SR® teaching methodology, please see *Orientation in American English: Teacher's Manual*, published by the Institute of Modern Languages.

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LESSON ONE

The Origins of Language and Song

Part One

Preparation: Read Part One before class. Note down any questions you have about words or structures, and ask your teacher about them when Part One is introduced in class.

[1] Language is such a pervasive cultural phenomenon that it can truly be called *second nature*. In the immeasurable length of time since this form of behavior was acquired by the human race, language has always been the best integrated and most often used medium of cultural expression. The idea of human society and of man himself as a reasoning being cannot be separated from the fact that men possess language.

[2] On the nature of language in general, volumes have been written and schools of philosophy founded. Over specific languages in particular, arguments are easily incited and political controversies are often based. Fantastic and wholly disproportionate emotional responses can be raised by the issue of language, and yet a satisfactory definition of it has never been reached. In the mind of the average person, it is

[1] **pervasive:** spread throughout. **second nature:** force of habit. **to acquire:** to get for oneself. **human race:** humanity, all people. **integrated:** unified, complete. **medium:** means, method. **to possess:** to have.

[2] **nature:** character, attributes. **school:** group of men with similar ideas. **to found:** to begin, establish. **to incite:** to urge to action. **disproportionate:** too large

undistinguished from other systems of communication and is surrounded by a mass of misinformation and emotional overtones. The situation is compounded in many language-teaching classrooms, where time-honored nonsense gets passed on from generation to generation. Although every person has the fantastic complexities of his language at his command, science has yet to perceive, record, tabulate or render them into a comprehensive scheme.

[3] Social order, be it human or animal, is impossible without some form of communication. Cooperation depends upon the existence of some kind of sign system, signals which can take a variety of forms. You can whistle for a dog. Your cat can scratch at the door to be let in. You can hail a taxi by holding up your hand. You can point to your mouth and rub your stomach to ask for food. But human language in the form of human speech must be considered the best of all existing or known sign systems.

[4] Sign systems in general are of two types: iconic or conventional. An iconic system uses images of a recognizable concept, such as the pantomime of hunger mentioned above. In a conventional system, the signal bears no relationship to the concept being expressed. Awareness of what the signal means arises only through learned association. Thus, a whistle might represent a variety of concepts, such as: *Come here! Stop! Go! Danger! All clear!*

(or too small). **undistinguished**: not able to be seen. **overtone**: implication, extra meaning. **to compound**: to make more difficult. **time-honored**: believed because men have believed it for many years. **nonsense**: foolishness, stupidity. **complexity**: difficulty. **to perceive**: to understand. **to tabulate**: to list in order. **to render**: to express either in speech or in writing. **comprehensive**: thorough, complete. **scheme**: plan.

[3] **sign system**: method of communication by using some kind of symbols or hand motions. **to hail**: to get the attention of.

[4] **conventional**: normal. **pantomime**: actions without words. **All clear!** O.K., No danger.

[5] **phonetic**: written like it really sounds. **meow**: the sound of a cat. **scrunch**: the sound of a man walking in the snow. **choo-choo**: the sound of a steam engine on a train. **quack**: the sound of a duck. **audial**: pertaining to hearing. **appealing**: attractive.

[6] **to verify**: to prove. **speculative**: the result of guessing. **gesture**: movement, motion. **organ**: a part of the body which performs a certain action. **articulation**: speech. **secondary function**: less important purpose or use. **to assume**: to take for itself. **primacy**: first place, highest importance.

[5] Human speech is primarily a system of conventional signs with a small number of words in each language that are held to phonetically resemble and represent some real sound. In English, examples of these are *meow*, *scrunch*, *choo-choo* and *quack*. The earliest theories on the origin of language held that all languages began with the development of such words, as a conscious attempt to produce iconic, audial images. This theory is appealing in its simplicity, but it is unconvincing and has long been abandoned.

[6] The fact is that such theories cannot be verified. Any theory on the origin of language is speculative at best. The most generally accepted current speculation on the origin of human speech is that the most primitive form of communication consisted of different gestures of the body, hands and face. These gestures included movements of what are now called the organs of articulation. Although, in the beginning, articulation served only a secondary function, gradually these movements acquired conventional meaning, and eventually the articulatory organs assumed primacy. So, at least, goes the theory.

VOCABULARY LIST

appeal	hail	perceive
assume	incite	pervasive
compound	integrate	tabulate
gesture	overtone	verify

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

- Use the following questions as the basis for a class discussion.
1. Do human beings think in words? If a person does not know a language, can he think?
 2. How would you define language?

COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

The numbers in the exercises below correspond to the numbers of the paragraphs in the Reading. The teacher will read a paragraph aloud, explaining it and answering questions. Then you will select the statement that most closely corresponds to the material in the paragraph.

1. (a) Language is second nature to man.
(b) Language can be called second nature to man.
(c) Language is instinctive to man.
2. (a) Nobody knows what language is.
(b) Science has not yet made a study of language.
(c) There is really no perfect definition of language.
3. (a) Any kind of social order must have some form of communication.
(b) Animals have language too.
(c) Speech is not necessary for communication.
4. (a) A sign system is either iconic or conventional.
(b) There are two types of sign systems.
(c) Most sign systems are either iconic or conventional.
5. (a) Human speech is a combination of conventional and iconic signs.
(b) Human speech is a system of conventional signs.
(c) Human speech is primarily a system of conventional signs.
6. (a) The best theories on the origin of language are speculative.
(b) Theories on the origin of language are speculative at best.
(c) Any theory on language is speculative at best.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Use the following questions as the basis for a class discussion.

1. Do human beings think in words? If a person does not know a language, can he think?
2. How would you define language?

3. How does the language you speak influence your thoughts and attitudes?
4. Are most arguments based on semantics, that is, are they based on a misunderstanding of the terms the other person is using?
5. Why are people so emotional about language?
6. Can you think of any dubious statement about language which you have heard in the classroom or elsewhere?
7. Some examples of signals were given in the Reading. Give some additional examples.
8. What are the two types of sign systems mentioned in the Reading?
9. Give examples of conventional and iconic signs.
10. What are some theories on the origin of human language?

As a home study assignment, choose one of these Discussion Questions and write a complete paragraph in answer to it.

The Origins of Language and Song

Part Two

Preparation: Read Part Two before class. Note down any questions you have about words or structures, and ask your teacher about them when Part Two is introduced in class.

[7] If the origins of human language must remain a mystery, we might still imagine that we could trace the beginnings of the specialized uses of language. After all, we have evidence from the Late Paleolithic Age (ca. 30,000-15,000 B.C.) of the beginning of the arts of painting, modeling and sculpture. And the existence of flutes and pipes found in caves establishes the fact that Late Paleolithic Man had begun to express himself through some kind of music. We therefore suppose that he also enjoyed describing in song

[7] **Paleolithic Age:** the second half of the Stone Age, when men used tools made of chipped or cut stone. **flutes and pipes:** musical instruments. **depict:** show, draw. **means:** way, method.

the same scenes of hunting and the capture of beasts which he was depicting in painting, sculpture and pantomime. For this means of expression, he must have had words. Unfortunately, without the records made possible by the invention of writing, the content and nature of such songs cannot be directly discovered.

[8] There exist in the contemporary world, however, small isolated groups of people who maintain the essential habits of the Stone Age, not so much because they use stone weapons and tools, but because their economy and way of life remain fundamentally the same. Although we can discover nothing about historical Paleolithic song, the possibility exists that something about it may be deduced by examining the poetry and songs of these contemporary primitive peoples. By studying what is known of their songs and by trying to understand their attempts to put words into a rhythmic order, perhaps something may be derived which will help us to understand similar attempts by early man.

[9] In general, the songs of these people demonstrate an effort to put incoherent thoughts and feelings into a coherent framework of words. Although there is richness and variety in the songs, their scope is limited by the fact that the life led by the singers is also limited. They are the songs of the Stone Age before the introduction of agriculture and the domestication of animals, and they represent a type of experience and outlook which is different from anything in the more advanced societies.

[8] **isolated:** separate, alone, apart. **maintain:** keep, still practice. **to deduce:** to reach a conclusion by logical thinking. **rhythmic:** an orderly repetition of sounds. **to derive:** to infer, deduce.

[9] **coherent:** orderly, understandable. **scope:** extent of, or amount of, ideas. **domestication:** taming, domination by man. **outlook:** point of view, way of seeing things.

[10] **rites:** ceremony, actions which are always done in a particular way. **episodes:** events, happenings. **to manipulate:** to handle, to control. **courtship:** activities which lead to marriage.

[11] **selective:** choosy, choosing from a limited number of choices. **theme:** idea, thought. **impact:** force, power, effect. **to convey:** to send, communicate, carry. **impulse:** motive, urge. **abstraction:** concept, idea. **to draw:** to take, abstract.

[12] **enchantment:** attraction, excitement. **spell:** trance, attraction. **metaphors:** words having one meaning which are used to express another meaning, especially in literature, e.g. words of fire, a copper sky, etc.

[10] In the songs of the primitives, everything seems concerned with particular rites and episodes. The rites are mainly directed at manipulating the forces of nature, and the episodes reflect the common experience, the associations and the available symbols of the tribal group. The subjects, such as courtship, childbirth and familiar anxieties, are chosen with care, as are the individual words of the song.

[11] This highly selective technique, whether of themes or of words, is closely related to the part played by the emotions in the songs of the primitives. The main strength of these songs lies in their emotional impact rather than in the information they convey. The emotional impulse behind a song is largely responsible for the character of primitive imagery. Imagery takes the place of abstractions. Since the images are drawn from the natural environment, the audience is more immediately affected.

[12] Primitive song must have been the basic form of poetry. Song, in its beginnings, is closely related to music. The sound, rhythm and imagery of words exert so strong a hold over us that we speak of the "enchantment", or "magic", or "spell" of words. These are not empty metaphors, but a memory of the early origins of poetry, which was closely connected to the origins and early use of language itself.

VOCABULARY LIST

coherent	derive	means
convey	episode	mystery
courtship	impact	rite
deduce	impulse	theme
depict	manipulate	

COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

The numbers in the exercises below correspond to the numbers of the paragraphs in the Reading. The teacher will read a paragraph aloud, explaining it and answering questions. Then you will select the statement that most closely corresponds to the material in the paragraph.

7. (a) We have evidence that primitive man had songs.
(b) We can assume that primitive man had songs.
(c) We don't know whether or not primitive man had songs.
8. (a) There still exist small groups of Stone Age men.
(b) There exist small groups of people who live like men of the Stone Age.
(c) There exist small groups of people whose economy and way of life are similar to those of Stone Age men.
9. (a) The scope of the songs of primitive peoples is limited by their lives.
(b) The scopes of the songs of primitive peoples is in no way limited by their lives.
(c) The scope of the songs of primitive peoples is limited to agriculture.
10. (a) These songs center around certain rites and episodes.
(b) These songs center around a small number of rites and episodes.
(c) These songs center around the tribe and nature.
11. (a) The impact of the songs comes from the information they convey.
(b) The impact of the songs comes from the emotions they convey.
(c) The impact of the songs comes from the information and emotions they convey.
12. (a) Primitive song was probably one form of poetry.
(b) Poetry and song must have come from the same source.
(c) Primitive song was probably the basic form of poetry.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Use the following questions as the basis for a class discussion.

1. Why do we suppose Late Paleolithic Man created songs?
2. We have no records of Stone Age songs. How do we deduce what they may have been like?
3. Where are there still some primitive peoples in the world today?
4. Do you think certain types of communities (agricultural, industrial, hunting, etc.) tend to have more material or less material in their daily lives to draw upon for the creation of songs?
5. What are the favorite topics of popular songs today?
6. How do the topics of popular songs vary from one period of time to another? How, for example, have songs in each decade of this century varied?
7. In what way are the topics of song different from those of literature?
8. What are some favorite topics for song in all ages?
9. What is the role played by song in religion?
10. What are some uses song has been put to? In politics? In time of war? In relation to sports?

As a home study assignment, choose one of these Discussion Questions and write a complete paragraph in answer to it.

WORD STUDY

Discuss the differences between the two words of each pair listed below. Then on the blackboard, write sentences which use these words.

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. deduce/reduce | 7. rite/right |
| 2. derive/survive | 8. appeal/repeal |
| 3. incite/insight | 9. pervasive/evasive |
| 4. perceive/receive | 10. tabulate/calculate |
| 5. episode/epic | 11. coherent/inherent |
| 6. means/mean | 12. assume/assure |

DEFINITION PRACTICE

Match the words in Column A with the definitions in Column B. Put the letter for the correct definition in the parentheses before the numbered word.

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| () 1. convey | a. keep up |
| () 2. conventional | b. foolishness |
| () 3. abstraction | c. attract |
| () 4. found | d. habitual |
| () 5. enchant | e. force |
| () 6. maintain | f. concept |
| () 7. flute | g. establish |
| () 8. impact | h. musical instrument |
| () 9. mystery | i. carry |
| () 10. nonsense | j. secret |

SENTENCE VARIATION PRACTICE

In the following exercise, combine odd-numbered sentence groups into a single sentence, using whatever additional words or structural changes are necessary. Divide even-numbered sentences into two or more sentences.

1. Language is a very pervasive cultural phenomenon. It can truly be called second nature.
2. On the nature of language in general, volumes have been written and schools of philosophy founded, and over specific languages in particular, arguments are easily incited and political controversies are often based.
3. In the mind of the average person, language is undistinguished from other systems of communications. It is surrounded by a mass of misinformation. There are also emotional overtones further confusing the issue.
4. Although every person has the fantastic complexities of his language at his command, science has not yet perceived, recorded, tabulated or rendered these complexities into a comprehensive scheme.
5. There are various types of sign systems. In general there

are two types. One is the iconic type. The other is the conventional sign system.

6. Human speech is primarily a system of conventional signs with a small number of words in each language that are held to phonetically resemble and represent some real sound, examples of which in English are *meow* and *scrunch*.
7. The iconic theory of the origin of language is appealing in its simplicity. It is unconvincing, however. It has long been abandoned.
8. Because we have evidence from the Late Paleolithic Age of the beginning of the arts of painting, modeling and sculpture and have found flutes and pipes in caves as well, we are sure that he enjoyed singing about as well as painting and sculpting the beasts he captured.
9. There are small, isolated groups of people in the contemporary world. These groups maintain the essential habits of the Stone Age. This is not because they use stone weapons and tools. Rather, it is because their economy and way of life remain fundamentally the same.
10. The sound, rhythm and imagery of words exert so strong a hold over us that we speak of the "enchantment", or "magic", or "spell" of words, which are not empty metaphors, but a memory of the early origins of poetry which was closely connected to the origins and early use of language itself.

PARAGRAPH COMPOSITION

Using one of the sentences below as the topic sentence for a paragraph, write a complete paragraph consisting of at least five or six sentences.

1. The idea of human society and of man himself as a reasoning being cannot be separated from the fact that men possess language.
2. A satisfactory definition of language has never been reached.

3. Primitive song is closely connected to the origins and early use of language itself.

EXERCISE FOR WRITING PRACTICE

Write a brief composition on one of the following, or select as your subject one of the Questions and Topics for Discussion.

1. *Perhaps of all the creations of man language is the most astonishing.*

G.L. Strachey

2. Many animals have a system of communication. Give some examples. Then discuss the ways in which human language differs from them.

EXERCISE FOR OUTSIDE RESEARCH

Before the next class meeting, listen to popular music on the radio for an hour or more. Write down the general topic of each song. Then group the topics to determine which are currently the most popular. Bring your notes to class and be prepared to discuss them.