

# Effortless English

## Learning Languages Like Children

By Dr. J. Marvin Brown

In 1984, the American University Language Center in Bangkok started using a **new approach** to teach the Thai language. The method is called '**The Listening Approach**'. In more recent years it's become known as 'Automatic Language Growth'.

The method says that any **attempt to speak** (or even think about language), before automatic speaking comes, **will cause damage** and limit final results! In other words, the method uses a **very long "silent period"**.

During the "silent period", students **focus only on listening**. After 6 - 12 months of intensive listening, students begin to speak spontaneously and naturally-- without effort and without thinking!

### ONE - THE CHILD'S SECRET

Everyone knows that when people move to a new country the **children** will eventually **speak the language natively** and the **adults won't**. The normal explanation is that children have a special 'talent' that they lose as they grow up.

Teachers said that **for adults**, languages should be **taught and studied** instead of learned naturally.

But are we any better with present language teaching? Why, for example, do adults in Central Africa do better when they move to a new language community than our modern students do? Could it be that early **teachers were mistaken**? Maybe **adults can** do what children do. Maybe it's just adult behavior (not lack of talent) that prevents them from succeeding.

**THE MISTAKE** – Children can do something that adults cannot.

**THE UNASKED QUESTION** – What would happen if an adult were to just listen for a year without speaking?

**OUR ANSWER** – **Both** adults and children **can do it right**, but only adults can do it wrong.

Imagine a 4 year-old child and an adult reacting to somebody talking to them in a foreign language. **The child most often just listens**, while the adult usually tries to talk back.

Now imagine that '**not trying to speak**' was the **child's secret**. It makes sense that listening to things that are always right would build the language right, while saying things that are always wrong would build it wrong.

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What would happen if adults were to **do the same thing children do**, (that is, **just listen for a year** without trying to say anything).

In 1984, the **AUA language center** in Bangkok started doing exactly this in its Thai classes. The students **just listened** for as much as a year without speaking at all. We found that adults get almost the **same results that children do**. If adults understand natural talk, in real situations, without trying to say anything, for a whole year, then **fluent speaking with clear pronunciation** will come **automatically**.

It seems that the difference between adults and children is not that adults have lost the ability to do it right-- but that children haven't yet gained the ability to do it wrong (that is, to destroy it with forced speaking).

**Forced speaking damages adults.** Consciously thinking of one's sentences – with translations, rules, substitutions, or any other kind of thinking prevents you from speaking like a native.

Natural speaking (speaking that comes automatically) won't cause damage (not even when it's wrong). The **damage** doesn't come from being wrong; it **comes from thinking about the language**.

What we're suggesting is this. The reason that children always end up **as native speakers** is because they **learn to speak by listening**. And the reason that adults don't is because they learn to speak by speaking.

**Adults talk too much.**

The formula is this: '**Listen**', '**Don't speak**', and '**Be patient**'. And now it appears that this is not only the child's secret. It's **everybody's secret**. And while children do it more faithfully, adults can do it **faster**.

## **TWO - HOW ALG WORKS**

Most language **teachers** are constantly telling their students to **try to speak** as much as they can, and to **think carefully** before they say anything, so they'll get it right. And now I'm saying that **this kind of speaking** and thinking is the exact thing that **prevents adults** from learning languages well.

## **THREE – PUTTING ALG IN THE CLASSROOM**

We look at children who have moved to a new country, and we see them 'listen, laugh, and stare'. The child's secret; **ears open, mouths shut, no tests**. They become **near-native** within two years.

Then we look into **language classrooms** around the world, and we see just the opposite; **ears practically closed (the students use their eyes instead), mouths open, and a lot of tests**. Very few of these students become near-native.

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Two things are **needed** for modern students.

First, they need **experiences in the language that are so interesting** (fun, exciting, suspenseful, etc.), that the students forget that a new language is being used.

And second, the students **understanding must be high** enough to learn - and this means 80-100% from the very first day!

It takes a lot of work to train teachers to be **both interesting and understandable**. But it is the secret to **success!** Interesting and understandable listening, and a long "silent period", is **the key to speaking like a native**.

## RESOURCES

**Free Email Course: 7 Rules for Excellent English**

<http://www.EffortlessEnglishClub.com/free.html>

**Effortless English Lessons**

<http://www.EffortlessEnglishClub.com>

**Automatic Language Growth (Dr. J. Marvin Brown)**

<http://www.algworld.com>

**Dr. Stephen Krashen: Language Learning Research**

<http://www.sdkrashen.com>

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