

THE RESOURCEFUL TEACHER Series

Tim Murphey

# Language Hungry!

An Introduction to Language Learning Fun and Self-Esteem



## THE RESOURCEFUL TEACHER Series

One of the secrets of teaching a foreign language successfully lies in balancing routine classroom work with innovative and creative activities and techniques. This new series offers teachers, teacher trainers and teacher trainees a discussion of new developments in various areas, such as linguistics, pedagogy and cognitive psychology, and shows them practical ways of using key findings in these areas to enrich their own teaching.



Tim Murphey

teaches at Dokkyo University in Japan and is a free-lance writer and teacher trainer. His present research revolves around language learning communities, identities, and motivation issues.

**Language Hungry!** is a fun and exciting read for teachers and learners! It's bursting with useful ideas and stories to help readers experiment and try on new skills, effective beliefs, and positive attitudes—all in support of serious language acquisition.

"Tim Murphey is one of the most creative language teachers/methodologists that I know and this book demonstrates it. Tim presents a wide variety of ideas that enhance language-learning efforts, all following his main principle: 'Successful learning can be fun!' Language learning is a deeply personal matter and it is crucial for learners to get into a positive state of mind. This book shows us how." Zoltán Dörnyei, Professor, University of Nottingham, UK

"Research has shown that when learners take charge of their own learning with awareness of their styles, strengths, and weaknesses, the better able they are to take action in the form of strategies for achievement of their language goals. Here, in Tim Murphey's delightful blend of humor and practicality, research is put directly into practice as learners are creatively led to self-awareness and to finding their own pathways to success." H. Douglas Brown, Ph.D. Professor of English, San Francisco State University

"Language Hungry! is a book that is both hard to define and easy to use. I learned many things from it, not only for my classes but also for myself. It is very reader friendly – a pleasure to return to time and time again."

Jane Arnold, Professor, University of Seville, Spain, editor of *Affect in Language Learning*



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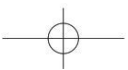
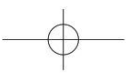
Language Hungry!





## CHAPTER 2

Need an ideal conversation partner?  
Try a Non-native!



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### *Need an Ideal Conversation Partner? Try a Non-native!*

*“The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.”*

Ralf Waldo Emerson

#### Think about it first!

1. How much do you think you can learn from your classmates when you speak to them in the target language?
2. How can you find classmates who want to speak with you outside of class in the target language?

Some researchers are now saying that native speakers are not necessarily the best partners for language learners to talk with. Really! **The best partners for you may be other learners who are at your approximate level, non-native speakers (NNSs) like yourself. Your classmates, for example.**

Of course, this still means that native speakers (NSs) are good partners too. (When you can find them!) They are good models, and interesting. But interaction with NSs is far from ideal.

#### Why Native Speakers are not always the best partners

1. NSs tend to dominate speaking time, leaving little time for NNSs to take part, even if they want to.
2. There is little *negotiation* of what is said. That means that when NNSs don't understand, they don't ask what things mean. Research shows that much is learned when you ask questions and reformulate to make language understandable. But often, when NNSs don't understand a native speaker, they just accept their confusion silently, with little questioning. Daring to say that you

don't understand takes courage. But with other NNSs you dare much more to ask questions and to negotiate meaning.

3. Interaction is usually an exchange of information. The different abilities make most NSs unwilling to talk with NNSs for very long, unless there is some more information to be exchanged.

4. It may not be easy to adjust to a learner's level, even if a NS wants to. It takes an extremely perceptive NS to do quality-adjusting for long periods, and to give the amount of repetition that allows beginners to absorb new language.

5. Often, there simply aren't enough NSs to go around. If you think you can practise only with NSs, then you will be simply out of luck. However, if you consider practising with NNSs, you may find that in many ways they are better than NSs. And they are everywhere!



#### The Advantages of NNS-NNS Interaction

When you speak with someone who is at about your level, you exchange more



information and language. You still have different vocabulary and different ways to use the language, and you can learn a lot from each other. Within any class, any two students probably have about 70% of their words in common. That leaves 30% that you can learn from each other when you interact. Because you share a lot of the same vocabulary, you understand each other more easily. You are also more relaxed, and less afraid of making mistakes. You are ready to take risks and negotiate, and even to correct each other. All of this means you can recycle new vocabulary and practise a lot.

Also, when you are talking to others who speak your language, you can use it when you really don't understand. And when you share the same culture, it's easier to guess the meaning. Usually with a NS you share neither the language nor the culture, and that can make understanding more difficult.

#### Does NNS–NNS Interaction work?

It works for some people wonderfully, but not for all. Why? I gave the above information to over 80 students at Nanzan University in 1991, and I asked them to experiment with speaking only English with their classmates, in and out of class. The experiment failed wonderfully! Student feedback revealed why it didn't work, and pointed to things that you can do to make it succeed. (You can learn a lot when things don't work and you keep your eyes open at the same time.)

Some students reported that talking in the target language to other non-natives was unnatural and embarrassing, and that there wasn't much time to do it. The experiment was also difficult to carry out because some friends simply refused to talk in the target language. Many commented that speaking their native language is faster and easier. Quite a few felt embarrassed when people looked at them. Some students also expressed the

problem of not seeing anyone from the class often enough to practise.

#### Making it work

Looking more closely at the students for whom it does work shows that they see NNS–NNS interaction as a game, have supportive friends, have special times and places in which to speak, and actually enjoy it when others see them speaking English.

In order to make NNS–NNS talk successful, most of these learners do the following:

**1. Think it's a game, have fun with it!** It's a **fun game** that you can play with certain friends. Think of it as your group's special way to communicate.

**2. Find a supportive friend or two.** Some people will warm to the idea and enjoy the game (which soon becomes reality). Choose partners who are at your approximate level and who have similar interests.

To find partners, send out "feelers" with greetings in the target language ('Good morning!' 'Ohayo!' 'Bonjour!'). Potential partners reveal themselves by responding in the target language, and continuing to talk in it.



**3. A time and place for all things.** Trying to speak the target language ALWAYS may be difficult. Pick certain places and times when you agree to speak (probably not when you are in a large group in which your own language will be spoken). Play the game as long as it is comfortable.

Then take a break when you need to relax. Make the game periods regular, and short. Then increase them when you feel you want more fun. Lunches, coffee breaks, or meetings for activities like bowling seem to work best.

**4. You are a target-language speaker.** Rather than thinking of yourself as a strange person speaking strangely in public and being stared at, think of yourself as a fascinating person who can speak more than one language. Think that you enjoy being looked at and making people wonder where you come from.

**5. Mixed language *daijobu*.** Throwing in a few words of the target language can really spice up your conversation and sometimes get you to switch for a few sentences. 'Honto, it's tanoshii.' 'C'est lustig!' 'Andiamo!' 'Vamos!'

Language clubs work well because they encourage the above ideas.

An analogy with the above tips would be playing tennis. It's a game I love, and I'm fascinated by it. I pick my partners carefully because I know that if they are at about my level I will be challenged, not frustrated (as with professionals) nor bored (as with beginners). If they like tennis as much as I do, we can play often. And of course, there is a time and place for playing tennis, and I take breaks when I get tired. But I also find myself playing the game in my head at strange times and talking tennis with other friends. Instead of being embarrassed when I walk to the tennis courts with my racquets, I think that when people see me maybe they will think about getting some exercise and becoming healthier.

We need sports to stay healthy. We also need to speak other languages to have other points of view and to appreciate the wonderful variety around us. There are many ways to improve our ability to speak. An efficient learner learns not only to take advantage of opportunities but also to

**make the opportunities.** There are a lot of people with whom we can improve our speaking ability and have fun at the same time. It just takes changing a few old myths and taking good risks. Then the game becomes reality ... and fun.

### Smart Fun!

#### Try a Non-native

1. Greet (Good morning! Guten Tag! Bonjour! Ohayo! Buon giorno!) at least three of your classmates outside class in your target language every day. Notice which ones respond to you and try to carry on the conversation. Those are the ones you want to pick for your partners.
2. Find a friend in your class, and agree to speak only your target language most of the time for at least four days, in and out of class. How did it go? (It's okay to mix in a little of your native language when the going gets tough, if that's useful.)
3. Find another friend and agree to telephone each other every night for a week and ask each other 1) 'What did you do today?' and 2) 'What will you do tomorrow?' During the day you can prepare the things you're going to say that evening. Ask your partner for the times of day it would be good to call.
4. Talk to a friend about the advantages and disadvantages of speaking with a NS and a NNS.