

Swedish language lessons

An Introduction

by Lillemor and Richard Horngren

The fall and winter seasons are fast approaching and we may be looking for things to do. How about starting classes in Swedish or any other Scandinavian language? To help you get started perhaps the following will help you in your endeavor. It is from a speech Lillemor gave at the most recent Grand Lodge Convention.

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

According to the dictionary, a few of the definitions are as follows: *Any method of communicating ideas as by a system of signs, symbols, gestures or the like. A characteristic style of speech or writing. Any particular manner of utterance. Language as a subject of study. To have the same background, experience or understanding as another person.*

In other words, we use language to communicate with each other. How do we learn to speak a language? In the beginning we are all equal. We have to learn from scratch. Is our first accomplishment a vowel or a consonant? Do we say “DA DA DA” or “MA MA MA” as our first real words? Of course any proud parent will surely interpret these to be directed to them personally.

We have to learn to crawl before we can walk or even run. How many years did it take for us to really know our respective languages? Are we still learning? Of course we are. Hopefully we will never quit being curious about our language. Just knowing the background will surely lead to discovering and learning another language.

For instance, did you know that the Indo-European Family of Languages, of which English and Swedish are members, is descended from a pre-historic language, Proto-Indo-European, spoken in a region that has not yet been identified, possibly in the fifth millennium B.C. In the European

group we find the Germanic languages divided into three parts, North Germanic, West Germanic and East Germanic. Here we learn that Gothic, now a dead language belonged to the East Germanic group. English, Frisian, Dutch, Flemish, Afrikaans and

Gemran are part of the West Germanic group. The North Germanic group includes Icelandic, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish. Our friends, the Finns, have a language that is part of the Finno-Ugric group, a sub-family of the (uralic group which includes Estonian and Hungarian. Swedish has been taught in Finland for many years.

The Icelandic language has been mostly unchanged since the 16th century, and is therefore considered the purest Scandinavian language in existence today. On the Faeroe Islands, a language very similar to Danish is spoken with a definite Faroese dialect. The other three countries, Sweden, Norway and

Denmark, are quite similar. There, too, we notice different dialects, depending on where you are in the country. For example, a person from Norrland in Sweden's northern part, may not understand somebody living in Skåne, a province in southern Sweden, although they both speak Swedish and learn from the same schoolbooks. I was born in Stockholm and when visiting friends in the Bråviken area east of Norrköping in Östergötland some years ago, I spoke with a farmer. Unfortunately I could not understand his dialect. This is something that can happen to all of us when visiting any country. Knowing this, we will appreciate the difference and learn from it.

It is much easier to understand another language when it is written. Why? Could it be because we can take our time deciphering the words? Checking the dictionary for every word and writing it down in English will certainly help make sense of what is being read. What a time-consuming chore but it may be the only way to find out what great-grandpa wrote about in his letters to Sweden.

How then, do we learn to speak and understand another language? Some of us live close to a city with a university or a technical college and they may offer language classes. If we live where such opportunities are not available, do not despair.

What you need to do first, is to check around in your lodge if there is an interest in having classes. Or check with your friends and neighbors. The ideal way is to have a teacher who was born in the country whose language you want to learn. We know this is not always possible. Don't give up, ask around. If you are lucky you will find a person who is willing but may not feel qualified. Consider yourself lucky.

What if you do not find someone who is a "native"? Or anyone who will take on the job to lead the class? You have a group of interested students. A place is available for a weekly class. What can be done?

A bookstore is your next step. Visit your local small bookstore or one of the giant superstore chains. They will help you with language material. If they do not have beginner's books and dictionaries in stock, they can search what is available with the help of their computer network.

There is plenty of very good material out there. Especially when a cassette tape is included. This will enable you to learn who you listen to the tape at the same time as you are reading the text.

As a group you can listen and learn together. Start by learning very few words. Repeat them over and over again. Don't be tempted to continue because you think you know the words. Stop the lessons and have a cup of coffee and then go back to it and you may find that you did not remember all the words. This is okay. Do you remember teaching a baby to say that first word? How many times was it repeated? Many, many times. We have to consider ourselves babies when tackling this foreign language. The second lesson should be started with what had been learned during the first lesson. Always go over the previous lessons. The secret is repeat, repeat, repeat.

A Short Lesson

You may want to learn simple topic words connected to things you see and **do every-day.**

ONE EYE. TWO EYES = ETT OGA, TVA Ogon

ONE NOSE AND ONE MOUTH= EN NASA OCH EN MUN

ONE TOOTH AND MANY TEETH = EN TAND OCH MANGA TANDER

I WILL WASH MY FACE = JAG SKA TVATTA ANSIKTET

I WILL BRUSH MY TEETH = JAG SKA BORSTA TANDERNA

Perhaps you could use Post- It notes as reminders. Place them on the bathroom mirror, by the kitchen sink, your desk or any other place where you may want to be reminded of certain words connected to that particular area.

The opportunity to learn is all around us. We just have to seize the moment.

Greet people with: **HEJ OR HEJSAN.**

Ask them how they are by asking them: **HUR MAR DU?**

If you do not know them, introduce yourself with either: **JAG HETER ...or MITT NAMN AR.**

You may want to ask them if they speak English by saying: **TALAR DU ENGELSKA?** If they say yes, your (day is saved (but no chance to practice your language skills), If they say no. you will have fun working with the famous Swedish language using your arms and hands. It does work but after a day or more of that, you will have to admit that it is tiring.

