

Tips for Successful Language Learning

by Mark Koester

The Mountain of Language



WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

A Skill
or
Information?



Information or a skill?

- ▣ It is not easy to define exactly what language is.
- ▣ There are several definitions of what language is, but simply put, language is a method or means of human communication, either in speech or writing, that is expressed in words that are a structured and conventional way.
- ▣ We might also say language is structured according to a “grammar,” but I prefer to simply define the ordering of language as a contemporarily structured, though constantly evolving, convention.

Parts of Language

- ▣ In one perspective, from its most general to specific, language consists of several parts: sounds, words, phrases, sentences, grouped sentences or discourses, etc.
- ▣ From a learner's perspective, language consists of:
 1. Pronunciation
 2. Vocabulary ~ words, phrases, expressions, etc.
 3. Grammar
 4. Listening
 5. Speaking
 6. Reading
 7. Writing
 8. "Living the Language"

Language Is Just Info, Right?

- ▣ When we divide language into parts and simply study the parts of a language, it appears as if language is simple bits and pieces of information. If we learn all the information (vocabulary, sound production or pronunciation, grammatical rules, sentence structure, paragraph structure, etc.), we can effectively say we know the language.
- ▣ But is language just information?

Language is a Physical Activity

- ▣ Simply put, it is more a doing than a knowing.
- ▣ While there is a body of knowledge or information attached to every language, using a language in speech, writing, reading or listening is a skill like riding a bike or swimming.
- ▣ Learning a foreign language cannot simply be building a passive understanding of words.
- ▣ Learning a language must be about turning your body and mind into an instrument or tool for using and expressing language.

Lesson #1

- ▣ #1: The first lesson for every language learner is:
- ▣ *You need to do more than just memorize, remember and understand.*
- ▣ *You need to practice! You need to put language into action!*
- ▣ *You need to live a language in your body!*



Learning is Doing

- ▣ Specifically, when you read something or hear a new word in a foreign language, speak it out loud.
- ▣ When you want to practice your oral language skills: speak, speak, speak.
- ▣ When you want to improve your reading: read, read, read. When you want to improve your listening: listen, listen, listen.
- ▣ When you want to improve your writing, write, write, write.

Lesson #2



- ▣ #2: The second lesson for every language learner:
- ▣ *Study Everyday.*
- ▣ *Study Everywhere.*
- ▣ *Study When You Can.*

Regular, Daily Doses of Study

- ▣ We all have busy lives, and it is often difficult to find enough time to do everything. Often times, we wait until last to do our language studies, which often means we don't study our foreign language everyday.
- ▣ It is not always possible to study for hours and hours everyday. But it is scientifically proven that regular, daily study even if for short period is better than irregular but intensive study.

While You Wait, Study Words

- ▣ Instead of just waiting, while you wait, study.
- ▣ You can make flash cards (pieces of paper with vocabulary on them) and study while waiting for the bus or before class or a meeting. You could also use your cell phone or computer to create flashcards to learn and review.
- ▣ You can carry a small MP3 player and listen to your lessons while you are on the bus or washing the dishes or walking somewhere.

Lesson #2

- ▣ #3: The third lesson for every language learning is:
- ▣ *Remember to Review What You've 'Learned.'*



- ▣ Tip: Space Repetition Method

Build On What You've Learned

- ▣ Real learning of a foreign language is a cumulative, meaning what you learn must be increased or added to what you already know.
- ▣ One of the best ways to improve in a language is regularly reuse or recycle the words you've learned weeks or months ago with a new subject or grammatical form you just recently learned.

Learning is Reviewing

- ▣ Learning is, in fact, reviewing and reviewing over time.
- ▣ One of the most successful and scientifically technique for learning and review is Spaced Repetition.



Spaced Repetition

- ▣ Spaced repetition is a learning technique that incorporates increasing intervals of time between subsequent review of previously learned material.
- ▣ By spacing out or changing the time you review each word over a period of time, you improve your ability to remember words more quickly and effectively.

Anki

- ▣ One of the best systems currently available for is the Space Repetition Flashcard System *Anki* (<http://ichi2.net/anki/>), which allows you add words and phrases you are learning, and then as you review, the words are spaced out and repeated so that you learn at your best.

You Only Can Learn It!

- ▣ Also since language is a skill more than a body of information, it is important to realize that only you and you alone can learn it.
- ▣ Teachers, books, websites, dictionaries, CDs, videos and all the learning materials cannot change the simple fact that: You are the person that has to learn a foreign language!

You Know How You Learn Best

- ▣ Always take advantage of every tool, book, teacher or resource that cannot you, but in the end, it is you that must choose and work hard to learn.
- ▣ You know yourself best. You know how you learn best. You know in what ways you can study most effectively. And you know when is the best time to study.

Lesson #4

- ▣ #4: The fourth lesson for every language learner is:
- ▣ *Teach Yourself!*
- ▣ *Be Your Own Teacher!*



Fear!

- ▣ Finally, one of biggest obstacles to learning a foreign language is fear. We are all afraid of making mistakes.
- ▣ Or, for Chinese students, it's the fear of losing face.
- ▣ Being self-conscious or worried about what other people think about you makes it difficult to try.
- ▣ One of the reasons why children seem to learn languages so fast is that they just play and try. Children aren't afraid of making mistakes; they just want to play.



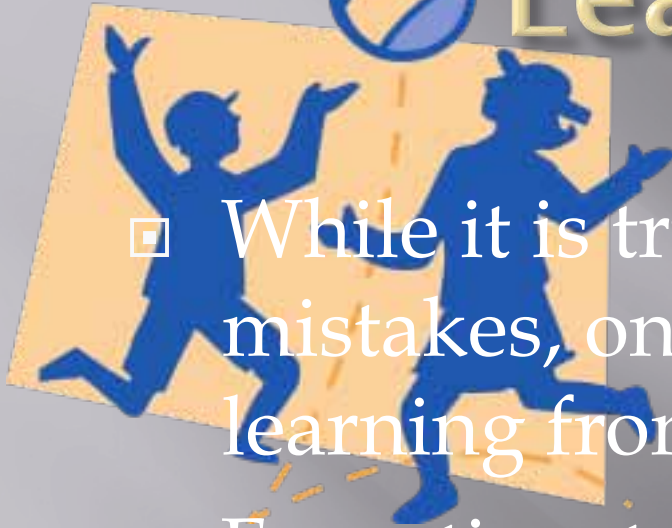
Lesson #5

- ▣ So, the fifth and final lesson for every language learner is:
- ▣ *Don't Be Afraid!*





Learn Through Play!



- ❑ While it is true that you will sometimes make mistakes, one of the best ways to learn is by learning from our mistakes.
- ❑ From time to time (or perhaps all the time!), you should try to act like a child or a clown or a goof when you learn a new language.
- ❑ Speak up. Make jokes. Tell lies. Don't hold yourself back from practice, practice, practice.





Tips for Learning a Language

- ◆ 1. Don't be afraid!
- ◆ 2. Be your own teacher
- ◆ 3. Set goals, make habits
- ◆ 4. Learn vocabulary effectively through review (*Flashcards!*)

Tips for Learning a Language

- ◆ 5. Make your world in English
- ◆ 6. Read or watch foreign news online
- ◆ 7. Watch foreign films in the original language
- ◆ 8. Listen to foreign language music

Tips for Learning a Language

- ◆ 9. Connect yourself abroad (Travel, Study or the internet can connect with the world)
- ◆ 10. *Don't get bored!* When you get tired of something, do something else IN ENGLISH
- ◆ 11. *Don't give up!* Never settle for Okay. Always try to improve...

Final Thought:

Good, Better, Best

Never let it rest

Until your good becomes
better

and your better is the best!"

My story learning French

How I learned French



On Arrival...



- La même chose, s'il vous plaît.
The same thing, please.

Cultural Exchanges

➤ *A typical day in our hometowns...*



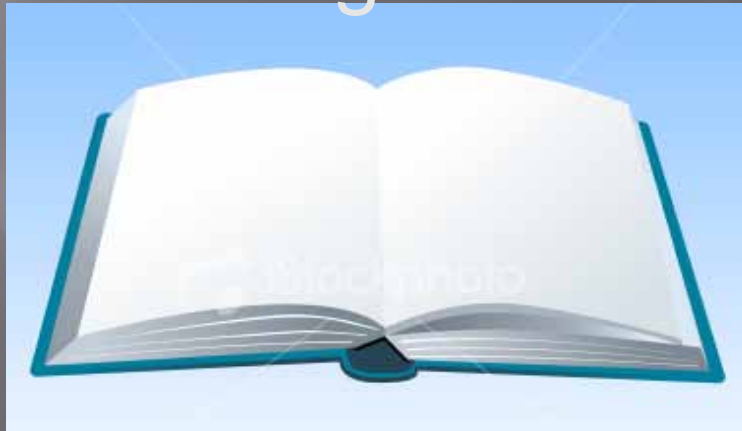
➤ Chicago

➤ Mongolia



Increasing Vocabulary

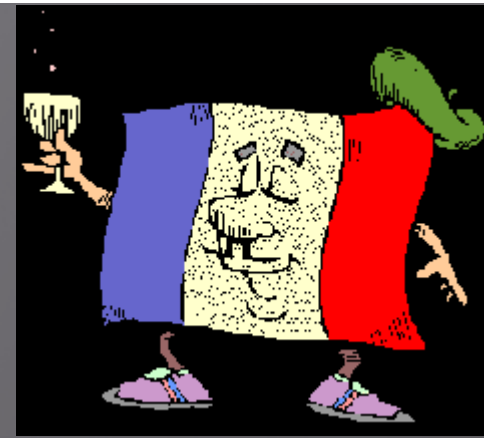
- One of the biggest challenges in language learning once you get beyond basic conversations is increasing vocabulary.
- Many people watch movies and listen to music, which has its advantages for oral listening.
- But I think the best way to learn new words is through reading, reading, reading...by using a dictionary and recording new words.



Reality of Language Levels

- Survival Skills and phrases
- Basic, Everyday, Situational Language
- Intermediate...reading, writing, & speaking...focused on your interests & goals
- Advanced...and beyond...
- Natural limits in “native” fluency

French University



- Studying at a French University taught me not just new words and ideas. It also taught me to think differently by thinking through a new language and culture.

“Secret” of Language of Learning



- Study Everyday!
- Be your own teacher!
- You don't need an expensive teacher or lots of time. You need to take time every single day to review and build up vocabulary.

Personal Changes...



- A new country
- A new language
- A new culture
- How to negotiate and deal with people and their cultural and linguistic differences

...and a Changed World