

Lesson 24: Language Learning

Pat is getting married, and he's determined to learn his future wife's native language. He talks with John about his difficulties. Listen and answer these ten questions:

Comprehension Questions

- 1. Pat is learning how to speak...**
 - a. German
 - b. Italian
 - c. Russian
- 2. How long until his wedding?**
 - a. six days
 - b. six weeks
 - c. six months
- 3. John advises him to...**
 - a. focus on the basics
 - b. get a private tutor
 - c. try a software program
- 4. Pat wants to learn...**
 - a. because he promised he would
 - b. so he can live in another country
 - c. to surprise Veronica
- 5. What language did John learn?**
 - a. French
 - b. Irish
 - c. Spanish

6. John's biggest challenge was...

- a. grammar
- b. pronunciation
- c. vocabulary

7. How is Veronica's English?

- a. basic
- b. decent
- c. fluent

8. Pat is especially worried about...

- a. having Veronica laugh at him
- b. saying his wedding vows
- c. making small talk with Veronica's relatives

9. He's also doubting...

- a. the idea of getting married
- b. whether he should have a bilingual wedding
- c. whether or not Veronica loves him

10. At the end of the conversation, he decides to...

- a. admit to Veronica that he can't do it
- b. ask his mother-in-law for help
- c. keep studying and try his best

Conversation Text

Pat: How can I learn to speak Russian when I can't even understand how to read it? And the wedding is just six months away. There's no way, John... there's just no way I can learn to speak Russian before then.

John: You're the one who's marrying a Russian bride. But hey, **chill out**, Pat. The important thing is that you learn the basics. No one can really learn a language fluently in six months... not that I know of, at least.

Pat: I know, but Veronica and I promised each other that we would learn each other's language before our wedding. English **isn't exactly rocket science**... but Russian sure seems like it.

John: Hey, **don't knock** the English language. How do you know Veronica isn't having the same worries you are? I remember when I took classes to learn French... I wanted to learn the "romantic" language to **sweep Tori off her feet**.

Pat: Yeah, I remember. You're pretty fluent now, aren't you?

John: Yeah, but not at first. Pat, we're from Georgia. When I first started to learn French I sounded like a **drunken French hillbilly**.

Vocabulary

chill out = relax

isn't rocket science = isn't extremely difficult

don't knock = don't make fun of, don't insult

sweep Tori off her feet = make her fall in love with me very quickly

drunken = when you have consumed too much alcohol. We can also say a person is **drunk**.

hillbilly = someone from the countryside, from a less developed part of the country

Not only did I have to learn **the ins and outs** of the language, I had to **get the hang of** the accent. Tori couldn't stop laughing the first time I spoke French to her.

Pat: You seem to be doing okay now, though.

John: And all it took was five years of forcing my mouth to **get rid of my southern drawl** and try to sound like a French **aristocrat**.

Pat: I don't have five years... and now that you mention it, I didn't even think about my accent. Oh man, I'm gonna sound like a Russian hillbilly.

John: No you won't. You were raised in the capital. My point is that learning a new language takes time. **I bet you ten bucks** Veronica will not be speaking fluent English by the time of your wedding. And she's got **a thick Russian accent**.

Pat: Maybe so, John, but at least she already speaks decent English. I can't even say hello in Russian yet. I can just see us saying our **vows**... I'm supposed to say mine in Russian and Veronica is supposed to say hers in English. What if I **mess up** and **swear** my eternal love to her left shoe or something?

John: You will not, now stop it. Listen to me. You're a pretty smart **fella**. The only mistake you're making is allowing a new language to **intimidate**

Vocabulary

the ins and outs = all the tiny details

get the hang of = learn by practicing

get rid of = remove

southern drawl = the accent from the southern part of the U.S. is often called a "drawl" – a slow way of speaking that prolongs the words

aristocrat = a member of the ruling class or nobility

I bet you (ten bucks) = a way of saying "I'm completely sure that"

a thick accent = a strong accent

vows = the very strong promises made between the two people getting married

mess up = make a mistake

swear = promise

fella = fellow (guy, man)

you. I admit the Russian language **isn't a piece of cake**, but surely you can **make a dent in it**.

Pat: I know...I know...maybe I'm just worried about the wedding, you know... being a married man and all. I love Veronica, but the thought of a life-long commitment...

John: You'll be just fine. And if you do love Veronica—which you just admitted—then you'll learn the Russian language **for her sake**. Or at least – so you can argue with your **mother-in-law**!

Pat: Argh, **don't remind me!** It's true, though – there's nothing in the world that I wouldn't do for Veronica.

John: So **man up** and start studying!

Pat: All right – here, help quiz me on these flashcards so I don't **make a fool of myself**!

Vocabulary

intimidate you = make you feel scared and threatened

isn't a piece of cake = isn't easy

make a dent in it = make at least a small amount of progress in a big task

for her sake = for her benefit

mother-in-law = the mother of one's husband/wife

don't remind me! = I don't want to think about that!

man up = be courageous, take initiative (this phrasal verb is typically only used among men)

make a fool of myself = do something that makes me appear silly or stupid

Vocabulary Quiz

Complete each sentence with a word from the box. Three words are not used.

chill out	get rid of	made a dent in	mess up
don't knock	get the hang of	made a fool of	piece of cake
don't remind me	ins and outs	man up	swore
for the sake of	intimidating		

1. Applying to colleges is a complicated process, and teenagers can find it rather _____.
2. Do you think it's better for unhappy couples to divorce, or to stay together _____ the kids?
3. He looks like he's about to explode; when I told him to _____ he nearly bit my head off.
4. I wanted to show off my new dance moves, but instead I tripped and fell and _____ myself.
5. If you _____ during the performance, just keep going and nobody will notice.
6. Jack had a rough childhood, and he _____ he would be a better parent than his own had been.
7. No matter how much I practice, I just can't seem to _____ driving a manual-shift car.
8. She specializes in medical malpractice law, so she knows all the _____ of the field.
9. There are still 200 more letters to write, but at least we've finished 40 - so we've _____ it.
10. You should _____ those shoes - they're old and worn out.
11. _____ acupuncture if you haven't tried it. A lot of people get amazing results from it.

Speaking Task

Talk about something that you have learned (but not the English language!) – it could be a skill, a sport or musical instrument, something for your job, etc. What were some of the biggest challenges? What were some of your successes?

Record your answer at www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish or send the MP3 to homework@espressoenglish.net for feedback!

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. c
2. c
3. a
4. a
5. a
6. b
7. b
8. b
9. a
10. c

Vocabulary Quiz

1. intimidating
2. for the sake of
3. chill out
4. made a fool of
5. mess up
6. swore
7. get the hang of
8. ins and outs
9. made a dent in
10. get rid of
11. don't knock