

学习一门外语的秘密

题目: The secrets of learning a new language

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I love learning foreign languages. In fact, I love it so much that I like to learn a new language every two years, currently working on my eighth one. When people find that out about me, they always ask me, "How do you do that? What's your secret?" And to be honest, for many years, my answer would be, "I don't know. I simply love learning languages."

我喜欢学外语。实际上,这种痴迷让我每两年就想学一门新的外语,现在我正在学第八门外语。当人们得知此事后,总是问我,“你怎么做到的?你的秘诀是什么?”说实话,这么多年来,我的回答总是,“我不知道啊。我只是喜欢学语言。”

But people were never happy with that answer. They wanted to know why they are spending years trying to learn even one language, never achieving fluency, and here I come, learning one language after another. They wanted to know the secret of polyglots, people who speak a lot of languages. And that made me wonder, too, how do actually other polyglots do it? What do we have in common? And what is it that enables us to learn languages so much faster than other people? I decided to meet other people like me and find that out.

但是人们从来都不会对这个回答感到满意。他们想知道为何他们花了多年试着学习哪怕只有一门语言,却从未达到流利的程度,而我却能够学了一门再学一门。他们想知道多语言者,即说多种语言的人的秘密。我也对此感到好奇,其他的多语言者到底是怎么做的?我们有什么共同点吗?是什么让我们较之他人能够更快的学习语言?我决定见见其他像我一样的人,并试着找寻背后的答案。

foreign
languages
外语

fluency
n.流利

polyglots
n.多语言者

The best place to meet a lot of polyglots is an event where hundreds of language lovers meet in one place to practice their languages. There are several such polyglot events organized all around the world, and so I decided to go there and ask polyglots about the methods that they use.

能够遇到很多多语言者的最佳地点 是聚集了数百名多语言者的地方，他们在那里进行练习。世界各地有许多类似的多语言者活动，所以我决定去看看，打听一下他们各自使用的方法。

And so I met Benny from Ireland, who told me that his method is to start speaking from day one. He learns a few **phrases** from a travel **phrasebook** and goes to meet native speakers and starts having conversations with them right away. He doesn't mind making even 200 mistakes a day, because that's how he learns, based on the **feedback**. And the best thing is, he doesn't even need to travel a lot today, because you can easily have conversations with native speakers from the comfort of your living room, using websites.

我遇到了来自爱尔兰的本尼，他告诉我他用的方法是从第一天就开始说出口。他从一本旅游指南上学了一些词组，然后就去见母语者，立马和他们展开对话。他不介意一天犯 200 个错误，因为这就是他基于反馈的学习方式。最棒的一点是，如今他甚至不需要出游，因为你只需要呆在惬意的房间中，就能在网络上和母语者进行交谈。

I also met Lucas from Brazil who had a really interesting **method** to learn Russian. He simply added a hundred random Russian speakers on Skype as friends, and then he opened a chat window with one of them and wrote "Hi" in Russian. And the person replied, "Hi, how are you?"

我还遇到了来自巴西的卢卡斯，他学习俄语的方法很有意思。他就在 Skype 上随机添加了上百个说俄语的人，然后打开其中一个人的聊天框，用俄语写下“嗨”。然后对方回复，“嗨，你好吗？”

phrase

n. 短语，词组

phrasebook

n. 短语手册

feedback

n. 反馈

method

n. 方法

Lucas copied this and put it into a text window with another person, and the person replied, "I'm fine, thank you, and how are you?" Lucas copied this back to the first person, and in this way, he had two strangers have a conversation with each other without knowing about it.

卢卡斯复制这段话，再把它发给另一个人，然后另一个人回复，“我很好，谢谢，你怎么样？”卢卡斯又把这段话复制发给第一个人，这样，他就让两个陌生人在完全不知情的情况下展开了交谈。

And soon he would start typing himself, because he had so many of these conversations that he figured out how the Russian conversation usually starts. What an ingenious method, right?

ingenious
adj.精巧的，
有独创性的

过不了多久，他就可以自己打字了，因为他看了那么多的对话，已经知道俄语的交流大概是怎么开始的了。很聪明的办法，是吧？

And then I met polyglots who always start by imitating sounds of the language, and others who always learn the 500 most frequent words of the language, and yet others who always start by reading about the grammar. If I asked a hundred different polyglots, I heard a hundred different approaches to learning languages. Everybody seems to have a unique way they learn a language, and yet we all come to the same result of speaking several languages fluently.

grammar
n.语法

此外，我还遇到了总是从模仿声音开始学习语言的多语言者，从学习500个最常用词开始的多语言者，以及总是从学习语法开始的多语言者。如果我去询问一百个多语言者，我会听到关于学习语言方式的一百种不同的答案。每个人似乎都对学习语言有着独门秘笈，但是我们最终都能流利的说多种语言。

And as I was listening to these polyglots telling me about their methods, it suddenly dawned on me: the one thing we all have in common is that we simply found ways to enjoy the language-learning process. All of these polyglots were talking about language learning as if it was great fun. You should have seen their faces when they were showing me their colorful grammar charts and their carefully **handmade** flash cards, and their statistics about learning **vocabulary** using apps, or even how they love to cook based on recipes in a foreign language. All of them use different methods, but they always make sure it's something that they personally enjoy.

handmade
adj. 手制的

vocabulary
n. 全部词汇

当我倾听着这些多语言者讲述他们学习语言方法的时候，我突然意识到：我们有一个共同点，那就是我们找到了享受学习语言这一过程的方法。所有这些多语言者在谈论语言学习的时候，都表现得像那是一种趣事。你们应该看看当他们向我展示他们多彩的语法表，专心制作的语言卡片，他们语言学习软件上的统计量，甚至他们是如何爱上用外文菜谱烧菜时，脸上自豪的神情。每个人都用着不同的方法，但是他们做到了让这件事情变成一种享受。

I realized that this is actually how I learn languages myself. When I was learning Spanish, I was bored with the text in the **textbook**. I mean, who wants to read about Jose asking about the directions to the train station. Right? I wanted to read "Harry Potter" instead, because that was my favorite book as a child, and I have read it many times.

textbook
n. 教科书

我意识到，这实际上也是我学习语言的方式。当我学习西班牙语时，我对书本上的文章没什么兴趣。我想说，谁想学胡赛是怎么问去火车站的路的啊。对吧？相反，我想读《哈利·波特》，因为这是我童年时期最喜欢的书，而且我已经阅读了很多遍。

So I got the Spanish **translation** of "Harry Potter" and started reading, and sure enough, I didn't understand almost anything at the beginning, but I kept on reading because I loved the book, and by the end of the book, I was able to follow it almost without any problems. And the same thing happened when I was learning German. I decided to watch "Friends," my favorite sitcom, in German, and again, at the beginning it was all just **gibberish**. I didn't know where one word finished and another one started, but I kept on watching every day because it's "Friends." I can watch it in any language. I love it so much. And after the second or third season, seriously, the **dialogue** started to make sense.

所以我买了本西语版的《哈利·波特》开始阅读，毫无疑问，最开始我几乎什么都看不懂，但是我坚持读了下来，因为我喜欢这本书，直到读完此书，我基本可以不费力的跟上故事情节。同样的事情也发生在我学德语的时候。我决定看我最喜欢的电视剧《老友记》的德语版本，同样的，最开始我基本上听不懂。我不知道一个单词在何处结束，另一个单词在何处开始，但是我坚持每天观看，因为这是《老友记》。我可以看不同的语言版本。我太喜欢这部剧了。在看完两季或三季之后，说真的，我能渐渐听明白对话了。

I only realized this after meeting other polyglots. We are no geniuses and we have no **shortcut** to learning languages. We simply found ways how to enjoy the process, how to turn language learning from a boring school subject into a pleasant activity which you don't mind doing every day.

在我遇到了其他多语言者之后，我才明白这一点。我们不是天才，我们也没有学习语言的捷径。我们只是找到了享受这一过程的方式，以及如何将语言学习从一项枯燥的学校课程转变为一项你不介意每天都做的有趣活动。

translation

v. 翻译

gibberish

n. 乱语

dialogue

n. 对白，对话

shortcut

n. 捷径

If you don't like writing words down on paper, you can always type them in an app. If you don't like listening to boring textbook material, find interesting content on YouTube or in podcasts for any language. If you're a more introverted person and you can't imagine speaking to native speakers right away, you can apply the method of self-talk. You can talk to yourself in the comfort of your room, describing your plans for the weekend, how your day has been, or even take a random picture from your phone and describe the picture to your imaginary friend. This is how polyglots learn languages, and the best news is, it's available to anyone who is willing to take the learning into their own hands. 如果你不喜欢在纸上写单词，那你可以在软件里面打单词。如果你不喜欢听无聊的课程材料，你总是可以在 YouTube 上或播客里找到任何一种语言的有趣内容。如果你是个内向的人，不愿意马上就和母语者交谈，你总可以和自己练习对话。你可以在自己的房间里，对自己说话，描述你的周末计划，一天过得怎么样，甚至是从你的手机里随便选一张照片，然后把它描述给你想象中的朋友。这就是多语言者学习语言的方式，而好消息是，这种方法对每个想要自主学习语言的人来说，都是可行的。

podcast

n.播客

imaginary

adj.想象的，
虚构的

So meeting other polyglots helped me realize that it is really crucial to find enjoyment in the process of learning languages, but also that joy in itself is not enough. If you want to achieve fluency in a foreign language, you'll also need to apply three more principles. First of all, you'll need effective methods. If you try to memorize a list of words for a test tomorrow, the words will be stored in your short-term memory and you'll forget them after a few days.

所以，遇到其他的多语言者让我意识到在学习语言的过程中，找到乐趣是十分重要的，但是仅凭兴趣是不够的。如果你想要流利的说一门外语，还需要遵守三大准则。首先，你需要找到有效的方法。如果你正为明天的考试复习，要去试着记住一系列单词，这些单词只会被储存在你的短期记忆里，而你过几天就会忘得一干二净。

If you, however, want to keep words long term, you need to revise them in the course of a few days repeatedly using the so-called space repetition. You can use apps which are based on this system such as Anki or Memrise, or you can write lists of word in a **notebook** using the Goldlist method, which is also very popular with many **polyglots**. If you're not sure which methods are effective and what is available out there, just check out polyglots' YouTube **channels** and websites and get **inspiration** from them. If it works for them, it will most probably work for you too.

相反，如果你想长期记住单词，就需要隔几天就复习一下，用所谓的间隔重复法。你可以试试基于这种方法设计的软件，譬如 Anki 或 Memrise，或是在笔记本上用“黄金列表”法写下一系列单词，这也在许多多语言者之间十分流行。如果你不确定什么方法是有效的，以及现在有些什么方法，那么就去看看多语言者的 YouTube 和主页，你可以从那里获得灵感。如果这些方法对他们适用，那么可能也对你适用。

The third **principle** to follow is to create a system in your learning. We're all very busy and no one really has time to learn a language today. But we can create that time if we just plan a bit ahead. Can you wake up 15 minutes earlier than you normally do? That would be the perfect time to revise some vocabulary. Can you listen to a podcast on your way to work while driving?

你需要遵守的第三个原则就是制定一套自己的学习体系。如今我们都很忙，没有人真正有时间去学习一门语言。但是如果我们事前计划一下，就能挤出那个时间。你可以比平时早起15分钟吗？这段时间可以用来复习一些单词。你可以在开车去上班时听一段博客吗？

notebook
n. 笔记本

polyglots
n. 通晓多种语言的人

channel
n. 通道

inspiration
n. 灵感

principle
n. 原则

Well, that would be great to get some listening experience. There are so many things we can do without even planning that extra time, such as listening to podcasts on our way to work or doing our household chores. The important thing is to create a plan in the learning. "I will practice speaking every Tuesday and Thursday with a friend for 20 minutes. I will listen to a YouTube video while having breakfast." If you create a system in your learning, you don't need to find that extra time, because it will become a part of your everyday life.

household
chores
家务琐事

这可以算是很不错的听力练习。甚至不需要提前规划时间，我们也可以做很多事情，比如在上路的路上或是做家务时，我们可以听听播客。重要的是，制定一个学习计划。“我要在每周二和每周四和朋友练习20分钟口语。吃早饭时，我要听一段 YouTube 视频。”如果你建立了自己的学习体系，就不需要挤出额外的时间，因为这已经成为你每日生活的一部分了。

And finally, if you want to learn a language fluently, you need also a bit of patience. It's not possible to learn a language within two months, but it's definitely possible to make a visible improvement in two months, if you learn in small chunks every day in a way that you enjoy. And there is nothing that motivates us more than our own success.

definitely
adv. 肯定地

最后，如果你想要流利掌握一门语言，还需要一点耐心。一个人不可能在两个月之内就掌握一门语言，但是如果你以自己喜欢的方式每天学习一点点的话，在两个月之内肯定可以取得显著的进步。没有比我们自己的成功更能激励我们的了。

I vividly remember the moment when I understood the first joke in German when watching "Friends."

我清晰的记得，当我第一次看懂德语版《老友记》里面的笑话时的情形。

I was so happy and motivated that I just kept on watching that day two more episodes, and as I kept watching, I had more and more of those moments of understanding, these little victories, and step by step, I got to a level where I could use the language freely and fluently to express anything. This is a wonderful feeling. I can't get enough of that feeling, and that's why I learn a language every two years.

我十分开心，备受鼓舞，又忍不住多看了两集。随着我不断观看，我能看懂的片段越来越多，这些小小的成就积少成多，使我可以自由熟练的使用这个语言去表达任何事物。这种感觉太棒了。这种感觉总是让我意犹未尽，就成了我每两年就学习一门语言的原因。

So this is the whole polyglot secret. Find effective methods which you can use systematically over the period of some time in a way which you enjoy, and this is how polyglots learn languages within months, not years.

这也是所有多语言者的秘密。找到你可以在一段时间内系统使用的有效方法，而且你还很享受这个过程，这就是多语言者在数月而非数年内就能学会语言的秘诀。

Now, some of you may be thinking, "That's all very nice to enjoy language learning, but isn't the real secret that you polyglots are just super talented and most of us aren't?"

你们中的有些人可能会想，“享受语言学习固然美好，但是真正的秘密难道不是你们多语言者天生就比我们更擅长学习语言吗？”

episodes

n. 发作，插曲

systematically

adv. 系统地

Well, there's one thing I haven't told you about Benny and Lucas. Benny had 11 years of Irish Gaelic and five years of German at school. He couldn't speak them at all when graduating. Up to the age of 21, he thought he didn't have the language gene and he could not speak another language. Then he started to look for his way of learning languages, which was speaking to native speakers and getting **feedback** from them, and today Benny can easily have a conversation in 10 languages.

feedback
n. 反馈

先别急，关于本尼和卢卡斯，有件事我还没说。本尼在学校时学习了 11 年的爱尔兰盖德尔语和 5 年的德语。而当他毕业时，却还完全不会用。直到 21 岁，他都认为自己没有语言天分，也学不会其他的语言。然后他开始找寻适合自己的语言学习方式，那就是和母语者交谈，并从他们那里得到反馈，而今天本尼可以毫不费力的用 10 种语言进行交流。

Lucas tried to learn English at school for 10 years. He was one of the worst students in class. His friends even made fun of him and gave him a Russian textbook as a joke because they thought he would never learn that language, or any language. And then Lucas started to experiment with methods, looking for his own way to learn, for example, by having Skype chat **conversations** with strangers. And after just 10 years, Lucas is able to speak 11 languages fluently.

conversation
n. 谈话

卢卡斯在学校学了 10 年的英语。他是课堂上最差的学生之一。他的朋友们甚至取笑他，给了他一本俄语教材，想看 he 笑话，因为他们认为他永远也不可能学会俄语，或是任何一门外语。然后卢卡斯开始试验其他方法，寻找适合自己的学习方式，比如，用 Skype 和陌生人聊天。仅仅 10 年后，卢卡斯已经可以流利的说 11 种语言。

Does that sound like a **miracle**? Well, I see such miracles every single day. As a language mentor, I help people learn languages by themselves, and I see this every day. People struggle with language learning for five, 10, even 20 years, and then they suddenly take their learning into their own hands, start using materials which they enjoy, more effective methods, or they start tracking their learning so that they can appreciate their own progress, and that's when suddenly they magically find the language talent that they were missing all their lives.

这听起来是不是很神奇？如果是这样，那么我每天都会看到类似的奇迹。作为一名语言教师，我帮助人们自学语言，我每天都能看到奇迹发生。有些人 5 年、10 年甚至 20 年都在语言学习中挣扎，然后他们突然就能够将学习掌握在自己的手中，开始使用他们感兴趣的材料，更加有效的方法，或是开始记录自己的学习进度，这样他们才能肯定自己的进步。就在这段时间，他们突然神奇般的找到了自以为一直欠缺的语言才能。

So if you've also tried to learn a language and you gave up, thinking it's too difficult or you don't have the language talent, give it another try. Maybe you're also just one **enjoyable** method away from learning that language fluently. Maybe you're just one method away from becoming a polyglot.

如果你也曾试着学习一门语言，然后你因为它太难了，或是觉得自己没有语言天赋而放弃了，再试试吧。或许你离熟练的说一门语言只差一种合适的，让你乐在其中的方法。也许你离成为一名多语言者，只差那一种方法。

miracle
n. 奇迹

enjoyable
adj. 令人愉快的