Myths and Realities of Learning a Second Language

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June 20, 2012
Welcome!
Reflection Questions

• What second languages do you speak?

• What second languages do you want to speak?

• What are your purposes for learning another language?
# Languages With the Most Native Speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Approx. # of Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chinese</td>
<td>1,213,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spanish</td>
<td>329,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English</td>
<td>328,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Arabic</td>
<td>221,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Hindi</td>
<td>182,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Bengali</td>
<td>181,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Portuguese</td>
<td>178,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Russian</td>
<td>144,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Japanese</td>
<td>122,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. German</td>
<td>90,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[http://www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com)
Historical Overview of Language Learning

- Grammar-Translation Method (1840s – 1940s)
- Direct Method (1880s – 1920s)
- Audiolingual Method (1940s – 1960s)
- Silent Way
- Suggestopedia (1970s – 1980s)
- Total Physical Response
- Communicative Language Teaching (1980s – Today)
- Post-Methods Era (2000s – Today)
Myth or Reality?
Myth #1: Children are better language learners than adults.

Reality: The human brain can learn and grow at any age. Children may achieve better pronunciation but adults are usually more efficient learners.
Myth #2: Only people with an “ear” for languages can learn a second language.

Reality: Success in language learning is influenced by many factors including aptitude, motivation, learning opportunities, willingness to communicate, strategy use, etc.
Myth #3: Language learners should master basic tasks before moving on to complex ones.

Reality: Second language learning is not a linear addition of one rule after another. New information gets shuffled around with the old information until it all gets sorted out.
Myth # 4: Studying from books, CDs, and computer programs are effective ways to learn a language.

Reality: Most programs suggest that it is possible to learn a language by reading and listening, sometimes writing. To really learn a language, input, output and interaction are all needed.
Myth #5: The best way to learn a second language is to move to a foreign country to be fully immersed.

Reality: Living in another country does not automatically mean that the local language will be learned. It is quite possible to live somewhere for years and learn only survival language skills.
Myth #6: Speaking with other language learners is not helpful because mistakes will be duplicated. It’s best to practice with native speakers.

Reality: Talking with other language learners provides more speaking opportunities and helps learners practice negotiation of meaning and noticing.
Myth #7: Most mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their native language.

Reality: These errors are a natural part of the learning process. Most will disappear over time. There are also errors that learners from different language backgrounds commonly make. This suggests that learners are trying to discover the rules of the target language.
Myth #8: It’s possible to easily chat with native speakers after learning the basic structure of a language and about 1,000 words.

Reality: Yes, but an understanding of pragmatics (i.e. how to show respect, apologize, make requests, etc.) is required. Cultural differences can lead to major communication breakdowns and misunderstandings.
The importance of pragmatics...

What a wonderful mop of curls!

I know she means well, but I just wish she would stop. One should not touch peoples heads.

http://sielearning.tafensw.edu.au
References


