

Learning a language

Tom Rochette <tom.rochette@coreteks.org>

November 2, 2024 — [36c8eb68](#)

0.1 Context

0.2 Learned in this study

0.3 Things to explore

- Adapt vocabulary learning based on word frequency of learner
- Why is it that it appears easier to learn to speak first than it is to learn to read first?
- What makes it easy to add new knowledge to existing one? Is learning random words an appropriate approach, or is there some constructive method, such as learning pronouns, then learning sentence structure, then a few critical verbs, and so on?
- Is it possible to learn a language without linking utterances to things or existing internal concepts?
- What are the stages of language learning as an adult and is there some duration between stages as in children development?
- Why is it that when we're babies we can learn a language from nothing, but when we're adult we have difficulty learning a new language "only by experiencing it"?
 - Is it because our neural network is "empty" of any weights/biases, thus it makes it easier to learn something?
 - * What is it exactly that we learn? It can't be classification until we're old enough to associate reward/punishment with its corresponding value, thus making it possible to classify how a word is written/said

1 Overview

- This/That
- Greetings
- Objects in the home
- Pronouns
- Verbs
- By topics
- By word frequency

2 Topics

The following list is an attempt at ordering the topics from most important to least important. The importance may be altered if a specific topic domain is more important to you.

- Pronouns
- Verbs
- Question words
- Adjectives
- Conjunctions
- Numbers

- Time
- Days of week
- Months
- Math/measurements
- Home
- Clothing
- Body
- Color
- Nouns
- Location
- Materials
- People/Relationship
- Food
- Beverage
- Directions
- Transportation
- Animals
- Job
- Countries
- Electronics
- Nature
- Seasons
- Society
- Art

3 Parallels to learning a new programming language

- Recognize similar structures
- Learn about the standard library
 - Know what is expected to be part of a language standard library

4 How to learn any language in six months

4.1 5 principles of rapid language acquisition

- Focus on language content that is relevant to you
 - Attention, meaning, relevance and memory
 - We master tools by using tools, we learn tools faster when they are relevant
- Use your new language as a tool to communicate from day 1
- When you first understand the message you will unconsciously acquire the language (comprehensive input)
 - Language learning is not about knowledge
- Physiological training
 - When your face hurts, you are doing it right
- Psychophysiological state matters

4.2 7 actions for rapid language acquisition

- Listen a lot (brain soaking)
- Focus on getting the meaning first (before the words)
- Start mixing (create sentences from the words you know)
- Focus on the core
- Get a language parent

- Copy the face
- Direct connect to mental images

4.3 The language toolbox

4.3.1 Week 1

- What is this?
- How do you say ... ?
- I don't understand...
- Repeat that please
- What does that mean?

4.4 Week 2-3

- Pronouns, simple nouns, (simple) common verbs, (simple) adjectives
- Me/You/This/That

4.5 Week 4

- Glue words
 - But/And/Even though/Although/Therefore
- Get a language parent
 - Somebody interested in you as a person who will communicate with you essentially as an equal, but pay attention to help you understand the message
 - Four rules of a language parent
 - * Works to understand what you are saying
 - * Does not correct mistakes
 - * Confirms understanding by using correct language
 - * Uses words the learner knows

5 Fluent Forever

- Spelling and sound: learn how to hear, produce and spell the sounds of your target language (1-3 weeks)
- Learn 625 basic words: learn a set of extremely common, simple words using pictures, not translations (1-2 months)
- Learn the grammar and abstract words of your language (2-3 months)
- The language game (3 months +)
 - Learn the top 1000 words, then specialize in the words that are useful to you
Source: <https://tim.blog/2014/07/16/how-to-learn-any-language-in-record-time-and-never-forget-it/>

6 Speaking Japanese Fluently in 6 Months

- Master the essentials: learn 1000 words and the core grammar.
- Master conversation fillers: Er... because... they're very... um... useful.
- Real life Japanese people: practice with native speakers in conversation (1h/week for 6 months).
- Master every situation: Think and problem solve in Japanese at all times.
- Get excited about synonyms: Don't allow yourself to become stuck. Move on.
- Forget your native language: Either speak Japanese or say nothing at all.
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IOZbJ7PCPk

7 My suggested learning steps

- Pronouns
- Basic verbs (be, have, want, need, like, think, know, understand, go, get, say)
- Get a language parent/tutor

8 Personal observation

- Learn a lot of vocabulary
- Make sure to hear the words, as it's easier to learn/associate from speech than from reading (at least for me)
- At some point, you start to want to generate sentences in the target language, but you notice that you do not know some of the words you'd like to say, which prompts you to look them up
- Spaced repetition is the best way to track your progress as well as to make you recall words
- When generating sentences, stay within the limits of the vocabulary you know. When you discover words you don't know, write them down so that you can add them to your spaced repetition software (always favor tracked memorization over ad-hoc learning)
- It's possible to infer words simply from intention/context (for instance, someone shopping for a hat may ask for a mirror)

9 Things to do

- Speak to yourself in the target language
- Watch people talk
- Watch videos from the target country/language using <https://www.youtube.com/feed/trending>
- Use websites you use everyday in the target language

10 Conjectures

- Language learning begins with a “silent period”, where the language learner practice listening and understanding

11 Dealing with difficult to remember words

- Associate the word with other words
- Create crazy story using the word
- Use the word frequently (10 minutes after you've learned it, then 1h, 1d, 1w, etc.)

12 Track your progress

If you are the kind of person who might get discouraged because they don't seem to make any progress, it is strongly advised to keep track of your progress so that you can have an objective way to evaluate it instead of “feeling you're not making any progress”.

Every 10/25/50h of time spent learning, you should record yourself speaking a few sentences in your target language. This will allow you to assess your progress, as well as give you a trace you can look back on and laugh about.

12.1 To track

- Vocabulary progression (how many words can be recognized and/or generated on request)
- Listening/Spoken word recognition progression (be able to tell the English word)

- Speaking/Spoken word generation progression (be able to say the word given its English one)
- Reading/Character recognition progression (be able to tell the English word)
- Writing/Character writing progression (be able to write the word given its English equivalent or its target language one)
- Listening/Sentence comprehension (be able to understand sentences meaning at a normal pace)
- Speaking/Sentence generation (be able to construct sentences with appropriate grammar, vocabulary and syntax)
- Speaking/Pronunciation (use the proper tone for words)

13 Notes

- It takes from 1000-2200h to become fluent enough to have acceptable conversations (and understand others)

14 See also

15 References

- [https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Chinese_\(Mandarin\)](https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Chinese_(Mandarin))
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0yGdNEWdn0>
- <https://www.tefl.net/elt/articles/teacher-technique/7-tricks-to-help-remember-new-words/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_European_Framework_of_Reference_for_Languages#Common_reference_levels
- <https://www.fluentin3months.com/hours-to-learn-a-language/>
- <https://lifehacker.com/5903288/i-learned-to-speak-four-languages-in-a-few-years-heres-how>

15.1 Exchange websites

- <https://www.conversationexchange.com/>
- <https://www.hellolingo.com/>
- <https://www.italki.com/>

15.2 Exchange mobile applications

- <https://www.tandem.net/>