



The art of learning



“Knowledge of languages is the doorway to wisdom”

Roger Bacon



THE ART OF LEARNING

By: Pedro Eslava, FLI teacher

Welcome dear readers to the seventh edition of USTA SPEAKS: The Art of Learning.

The Foreign language institute is proud to present the seventh edition of our magazine.

This semester we would like to share with you our experience in learning foreign languages. In this opportunity, you will be able to read about the feelings, the ups and downs of your teachers and fellow students who succeeded in acquiring a second or even a third language.

We all know that studying languages could be hard, even exhausting with all the verbs, confusing vocabulary and grammar rules. But there are people who have done it. You don't have to be a genius, what is mandatory is a willingness to learn new stuff and to find the right way to study. But that, dear reader, depends entirely on you.

We have chosen the title: The Art of Learning, getting away from our discipline which demands methods and grades. We believe that there are many ways to learn, and those ways are as individual and unique as the students who embark on this journey and who are willing to work for understanding. We strongly believe that learning is just another expression of our personality; so if you get to a point of mastery in any subject or field, you'll understand these words: every single topic, discipline or piece of information for which you have spent time learning and suffering to master to the point of achievement are just expressions of your true self.

So, we invite you to go ahead and read this edition. Let's see what your teachers, classmates and other members of our beloved Santo Tomas university have to say about themselves. Let's see what their secrets were when they were students, their passions, their tricks, their love for language and what it means to them. Join us meeting the man

behind the curtain of language. Let's discover their art of learning.

"The limits of my language means the limits of my world".

Ludwig Wittgenstein



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Learning is my way of saying, “I love you”

By Aneta Toborikova FLI teacher

Learning is a way of saying, “I love you.” Not the romantic “I love you” that you might be thinking of. A bit more casual one. The one that we should be saying to our family, to our friends, to our neighbours and colleagues every day. The one that should be present in every moment of our lives.

I’ve always loved learning. When I search my memories, I always see myself with a book, with a pen and notebook, trying to understand something. I guess at first it was just fascination with anything new and really just an interest. But over the course of years, it has changed.

The more I study, the longer I live, the further I go ... the more it seems that nothing truly makes sense if it is not for love. Don’t think I’m pathetic just yet. But at the end of ends, it’s love that changes everything and that makes you learn. Either love for the subject of your learning or often for the people that are connected with it.

It is really obvious with languages. When you love, you want to learn the language of the other person or at least you want to learn a language that you would have in common. And not just in the case of romantic love. You would want to learn the language of your friend and of the people that you are surrounded by who make your life the way it is. That’s how I ended up learning Spanish. At the end it’s the love for the people around me that keeps me

learning and that motivates me to learn more every day. And every language (every single word that I learn) opens the door for me a little bit more.

But it’s not only languages. It is anything.



<https://co.pinterest.com/pin/130815564159260443/>

Learning economics, politics or chemistry is exactly the same thing. Learning anything that someone else is passionate about is a way of loving. Every single detail that you learn opens a totally new world and paves a new way to the people around you. There is nothing I enjoy more than listening to my dear colleagues explaining their subjects to me and talking about engineering, law or psychology.

So next time you find me listening to you, you will know: **Learning is**

my way of saying, “I love you.”



“Growth comes at the point of resistance. We learn by pushing ourselves and finding what really lies at the outer reaches of our abilities”. Josh Waitzkin

These things take time

-Alexander Avellaneda-

One of the most difficult things in life is waiting for something to happen. It can create a sense of helplessness and it can discourage us in such a profound way that we may lose interest in it for ever. This also happens because social pressure to get quicker results is heavier upon everyone and it is accepted as the norm. Think of food: many people prefer burgers and ready-to-go meals as they believe that this fulfills their need right away instead of cooking, which is considerably more time consuming. Think of the internet: no one likes the idea of a slow connection in which everything takes ages to load. Think of instant messages and how it has affected the way we communicate: we get a notification once a text has been sent and when it has been read - we need, perhaps now more instinctively, an instant reply otherwise we might feel ignored or left out. Our societies have turned to instant gratification in almost every aspect of life which is not necessarily a bad thing (getting things quicker has saved lives in situations of emergency) but it has implicitly affected our perception of things such as patience, anxiety, discipline, concentration, and long-term goals.

Therefore, many students find it extremely difficult to learn a foreign language because it simply takes time out of their lives. Knowledge and skills are things that can always be perfected little by little, please be

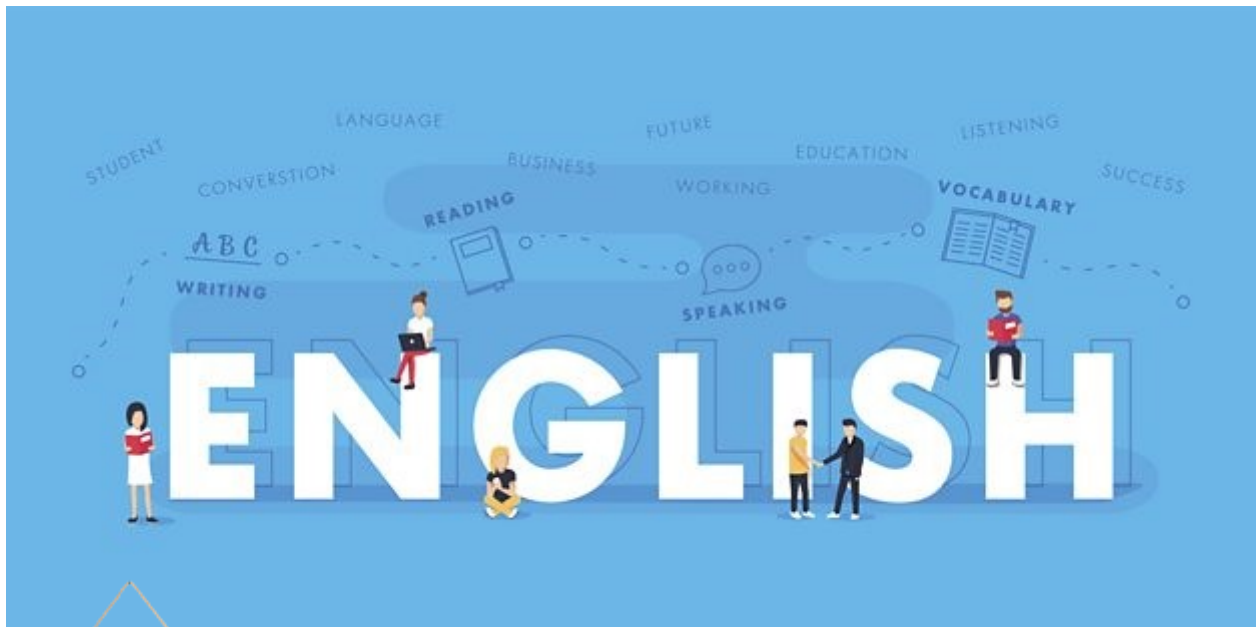
aware of that. Some concepts will take longer to grasp, some sounds of a new language will be more challenging, and becoming fluent will most definitely take a few years out of your life. However, once you have achieved a good command of the language, things get a lot easier and that is when the journey of new discoveries starts. After all, being able to independently 'connect the dots' is the greatest skill you can learn; it gives you the power to understand the simplest and the most intricate nuances of the language.



The way I see it, there are 2 vital qualities you need to learn a foreign language and here they are:

Patience: these things take time, just because you did not understand the past perfect continuous at first, it does not mean you will never understand it. Languages have survived and evolved through history. You cannot properly learn a 500-year old language in a few weeks.

Organisation: avoid mindless practice when it comes to vocabulary and grammar, focus on what is more difficult now so that you can move on and learn some more. If you are going to learn 10 words a week, make sure these words are memorable, connected to something useful. 10 random words are easy to forget. Attach your progress to short term goals that you can achieve in days, then in a year you will probably learn more than you would have expected.



*Nadine Rey
Daniela Rojas
Ing. Civil*

are going to tell you some tips that you can use for improving your skills and knowledge in this language. And at the same time we are going to tell you how we learn it.

Now, we will start with the first tip: Be in contact with the language. For this you can listen to music in English with lyrics and try to sing it, it doesn't matter if you do it badly because with time can understand it easily. If you don't like to listen to music, then you can watch movies with subtitles or if you are a video games fan then you can play it with the original voice actors in English so you can learn and have fun at the same time.

These days learning English is very necessary if you want to get a good job or have more opportunities. So we

Another form that you can use to learn English formally and get really good grammar is to follow a program with a native teacher via the internet. It isn't necessary to pay for these programs, you can find them on youtube for free or on other websites. Once you have the basics in the language you can practice reading texts like books, comics, newspapers, magazines, or articles among others.

Finally, if you can make friends from countries with English as its native language then you can practice your listening, speaking and grammar.

These are some ideas that we use often and that really help us with our learning. We hope our advice can be

**Languages open
many doors**

Step out of your comfort zone

By: Anderson Rincón Grosso

Once you admit to making mistakes, you also agree to be in potentially embarrassing situations. It can be intimidating initially, but it is the only way to really progress.

No matter how many hours you spend studying, you cannot express yourself in a language without practicing it: you could address strangers in your target language, ask for directions or try telling a joke to your interlocutors.

Every time you interact and test your skills, your comfort zone expands and gains confidence in your learn-



Listening



Speaking



Reading



Writing

ing process:

At first, we always have difficulties, whether this is in relation to pronunciation, grammar or syntax, but of course these all limit understanding of the language.



It is important to develop an intuitive relationship with language. Native speakers develop this with their mother tongue, and that is precisely what makes them native speakers: they have appropriated their language and speak it in an intuitive way.

So go on, dear learner, this is the best advice I can give you since "it is better practicing and learning than being silent and ignored".



Everything Works!

Andrea Granados D, Fli teacher

It is true we are in the age of communication. Information travels all over the world in seconds, different from before when our elders had to wait days or even more to receive distanced news. However, it is also surprising the way that this information is forgotten and replaced for another at an even faster rate. It seems that everything is about tendency and fast track.

Unfortunately, it looks like this timing synchronizes all of our activities, education included. It is very common to hear on advertisements how easy and fast you can learn a language - "Learn English in three months", "Learn English by speaking", and the funny one "Learn English while sleeping".

All of these types of messages have given new generations the wrong perception about what learning a language really is. As a consequence, English teachers have to find ways to deal with frustrated students claiming that this is not for them; that it never has and never will be. For this reason, I will share with you what I think could be a path to achieve language proficiency, always

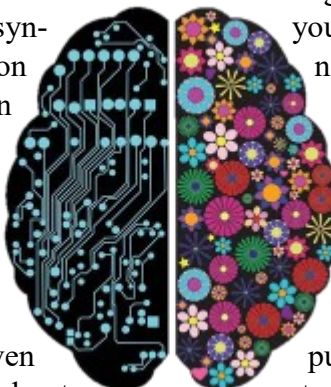
bearing in mind that there is never just one answer to this question.

Everything works! It's that simple. Listening to music, watching movies or series', doing grammar exercises or talking with native speakers. Everything works as soon as the objective of those exercises is clear and we are aware of it. It is not about

listening for the sake of the music, but instead

you may check pronunciation and acquire new vocabulary. Repeatedly doing grammar exercises without reflecting on its use or structure is likewise pointless if you are not completing them with an ultimate smaller goal.

I invite the reader to keep in mind that everything we do in life should have a purpose, otherwise we would become automatic machines, and machines don't learn (at the moment). It is vital that we escape from the "fast and easy" moto in which we are immersed, and that we think about the purpose of our actions so that we can make them worthwhile.



"Live as if you were to die tomorrow, learn as if you were to live forever"

Mathama Gandhi

Learning a second language

By: Juan Sebastian Casallas Reinel



Learning English, to me, is an exercise, is something I have been doing for over ten years now. English appeared in my life through the common middle-class channels (by channels I mean both the class-marked practices of attending a bilingual school and the cable television service brought to Colombia in the 90's).

My main motive to learn English was also one of my weaknesses, being a skeptic. I couldn't trust the translations and interpretations of the information I was constantly consuming through the previously mentioned channels. In my doubt, I felt both my classmates and teachers could deceive me anytime they wanted. I remember one time I mispronounce the word "everyone" (I pronounced something like "everjhon") and many people in the classroom laughed. The combination of

those two motives, skepticism and shame, made me study with enough effort to improve a bit.

Ironically, when I started studying at the university I understood both that English is not as difficult as I had considered before and that I had a funny accent. Through the many readings I needed to do for my subjects and the English classes where I had to self-correct my pronunciation, I began to polish my speaking.

Some people have asked me if English is a mandatory language and I always answer that it is not at all. What I think is that everyone should have the opportunity and the stimulus to learn a second language or a third or as many as possible. When I started to comprehend the books and ideas originally written in English I could understand there is something unique in the language we decide to write in, there is a certain precision in each language, something that becomes hidden when a translation is made.

In the same path and to conclude, I feel now slightly influenced by my current readings that learning a new language not only opens a new world of culture but also operates a transformation in the one who is learning. I like to think that when you start learning you never stop. That world that appears through the language has virtually no limits for someone curious enough to keep exploring. As a correlate effect or as the other face of the coin, when I started learning I became a "stranger in my first language" and could recognize how little I knew about Spanish. This is why I consider that a second language is an awesome experience both because you can explore new worlds and you can gain awareness about your "native" language (or world).

Spanish enchanted me



Ever since I was a child, I had always wanted to learn how to speak many languages. Spanish in particular enchanted me, and I fell in love

with it when I started to study it in high school. I started to combine my love of Spanish with my love of writing, and I began to write poems, journal entries, and short essays. One of my poems was even published in my class newsletter. Writing in Spanish has allowed me to express my creativity through new eyes and images that my native language was unable to give me.

To practice speaking Spanish, I did a university exchange program in Rosario, Argentina. After the program

ended, I traveled alone throughout Argentina and Chile, and had to use Spanish to buy bus tickets, order food at restaurants, and

make friends. Speaking in another language also helped me conquer my shyness, and opened new worlds for me that I hadn't known existed back in my Midwestern hometown.

Learning another language has changed my life. Spanish has given me more ways to express myself, and has helped me overcome my fears in the process. It's one of the best things that's ever happened

to me.

Desde que era niña, quería saber hablar muchas lenguas extranjeras, especialmente el español, el cual siempre me fascinaba. Me enamoré del idioma al empezar mis estudios en el bachillerato, y empecé a combinar mi amor del idioma con mi amor de la escritura. Empecé a escribir poemas, anotaciones en mi diario, y ensayos cortos, e incluso uno de mis poemas fue publicado en un boletín como éste. Escribir en español me ha permitido poder expresar mi creatividad por ojos e imágenes nuevos, ojos que mi lengua materna no alcanzó darme.

Para practicar hablar en español, hice un intercambio universitario en Rosario, Argentina. Después de que el programa terminó, viajé sola por la Argentina y Chile. Ahí tuve que usar el español para comprar

pasajes de bus, pedir comida en restaurantes, y conocer amigos nuevos. Hablar en otro idioma también me ayudó superar la timidez, y a la vez abrir nuevos mundos para mí que, desde mi tierra natal, no

hubiera sabido que existieran.

Aprender otro idioma ha cambiado mi vida. El español me ha dado más formas para expresarme, y me ha ayudado sobrepasar mis miedos en el proceso. Sin duda esta experiencia de aprendizaje ha sido una de las mejores en mi vida.



By Ruben Mauricio Muñoz

Everything started when I was 8 years old at school,

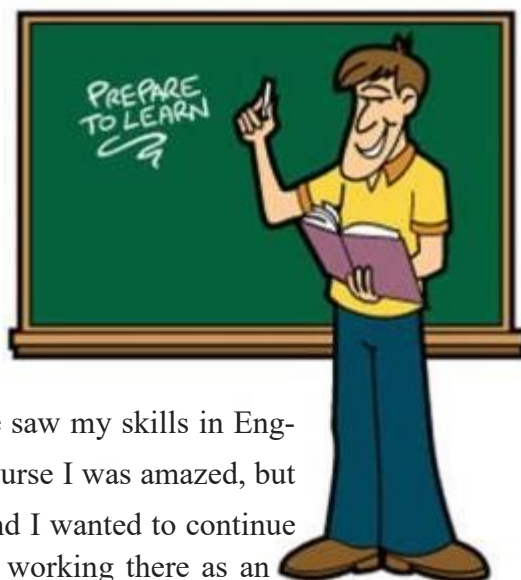
e I remember that I had the chance to take classes with the best teacher ever! Her name was Loren Beltrán (She was my 5th grade teacher). Even though she was not an English teacher, she did

her best to allow each one of her students to learn and improve English as a second language. After that, I started high school and of course my new English teacher (who was a lawyer) called Yolanda Amado, taught me that English is a universal language and with it you have the chance to be a better person. She reacted positively to my development in her subject; I remember that she asked my parents several times to pay for some

English lessons for me because she felt that my English level was excellent and, of course, my parents replied “no” because they did not have enough money to do so. I think that the ability to learn languages was a gift given by God, because he provided me with high discipline and responsibility (two crucially-required traits for acquiring a second language) because I really was interested in the language. I started reading the English dictionary, recording videos of my favorite songs, singing in English and studying what my oldest sister was learning in school by reading her English notebooks.

When I finished high school, I got the best results in the ICFES test in the whole department, and was therefore placed in first position. This helped me to recognize that my future was in teaching English, so I asked my parents to enroll me into an English institute called ELC. There, I started studying level one at the age of 16, and one month later, the director of the institute saw my skills in English and told me that I was being promoted to the 4th level. Of course I was amazed, but I said “no” because I wanted to learn and improve my English and I wanted to continue my studies properly. Eight days later he proposed that I started working there as an English teacher for children, and I said “yes” immediately. I got a scholarship and I finished the whole course in 6 months instead of the usual 12!

Thanks to that experience, I started working in some public and private schools; my parents were very proud of me and gave me support and advice at all times. In one of those experiences teaching English, I met my mentor: the teacher that I love the most and the one I am going to be very grateful towards for my whole life. Her name is Concepción Baez - she believed in me and in my skills, she gave me all of her



teaching tips, didactic resources, and advice for improving my lessons and techniques while I was teaching children. She was the one who encouraged me in all aspects (even economically) to start

my professional career as an English teacher.

She paid for the first semester of my major and during that semester I asked for a loan from ICETEX. In that way I started to become the teacher that I am now. During my career I was keen on technology, internet, website creation and so on and I started teaching myself how to do that. Of course all of the information was in ENGLISH! So, I improved my vocabulary, grammar, listening and reading comprehension techniques while I was learning how to master ICT (one of my strengths up to this day).

With this short story I want to invite you to be disciplined and responsible with your English learning process here at USTA. I am pretty sure that you have one of the best teaching staff in the whole region and I want you to take advantage of that, because bilingualism in the university is growing by leaps and bounds.

By: Louisa Hall

LEARNING in PROGRESS

Learning a language is one of the biggest challenges I have ever faced.

There are just *so many words*, right? It is particularly difficult to learn languages such as Spanish and English because although they are spoken in many countries, they vary a lot between their respective nationalities. For example, an Australian wearing a *thong* describes a completely different image to the thought of a Brit wearing a *thong*, much like a Colombian would get a strange look if they were to say “voy a coger el autobus” to a Mexican.

Aprender un idioma nuevo fue uno de los retos más difíciles que he enfrentado en mi vida. Es que existen *demasiadas* palabras, ¿verdad? Es particularmente difícil aprender idiomas como inglés y español porque, aunque se hablan en muchos países, ellos varían muchísimo entre cada nacionalidad. Es decir, un australiano que lleva un *thong* describe una imagen muy diferente de la idea de un británico que lleva un *thong*, y la misma confusión existiría si un colombiano dijera a un mexicano “voy a coger el autobús”.

This year I am living here in Colombia, and my Spanish language has reached a point where I can more or less survive a normal day without too much confu-

sion. I am far from being fluent, and still often get a few strange looks when I say certain things (for example when I mixed up the verbs *follarse* and *fallarse*), but after a long 8-year journey since uttering “hola me llamo Louisa” for the first time, I have acquired a few language-learning tips to share with you.

Este año estoy viviendo aquí en Colombia, y mi nivel de español ha acercado al punto donde puedo sobrevivir, más o menos, un día normal sin muchos problemas. Por cierto, todavía estoy lejos de tener una fluidez en la lengua, y sigo causando extrañas miradas cuando digo ciertas cosas (por ejemplo, cuando mezclé las palabras *fallarse* y *follarse*), pero 8 años largos después de decir “hola me llamo Louisa” por primera vez, he aprendido unos consejos para aprender una lengua que quisiera compartir con ustedes.

Don't be embarrassed/No te avergüences

Confidence is one of the most important traits that a language learner can have. Don't be embarrassed to make mistakes – most people will enjoy helping you and teaching you their language; the fact that





you are making the effort to communicate in their mother tongue will encourage them to be patient with you. There is also no shame in explaining that you are not speaking in your first language and asking people to speak slower – it is better than having somebody talk to you for 5 minutes for you to no response because they were talking too quickly!

Confianza es una de las características más importantes que debe tener un estudiante de lengua. No te avergüences de cometer errores – la mayoría de la gente disfruta ayudar y enseñar su idioma y el hecho de que estés dando tu esfuerzo para comunicarte en su lengua materna los animará a tener paciencia contigo. También, no debe haber pena alguna en explicar que no es tu lengua materna y debido a eso pedir que se hable más despacio – ¡eso es mejor que escuchar una persona por 5 minutos y luego no tener una respuesta porque estaba hablando demasiado rápido!

Take every opportunity to speak to natives/Usa cada oportunidad para hablar con nativos

If you hear somebody speaking your target language, talk to them! Tell them that you are learning their language, ask them how they are or even just say “hello”! Within the university you have so many opportunities to speak to native speakers, take advantage of them! I used to work in a shop in England, and every time we had a Spanish-speaking client, I would make an effort to chat to them (even if there was a queue of people behind them!), and this gave me many opportunities to practice in a non-intense environment.

Si escuchas que alguien esté hablando en la lengua que tienes como objetivo, ¡charla con él! ¡Cuéntale que estás aprendiendo su idioma, pregúntale cómo está o, a lo menos, dile “hola”! Dentro de la universidad tienes muchas oportunidades de practicar con nativos, ¡úsalas! Yo trabajaba en una tienda en Inglaterra, y cada vez que entraba un cliente hispa-

nohablante, hacía el esfuerzo para charlar con él (así hubiera una cola de personas atrás de él), y eso me dio muchas oportunidades de practicar en un ambiente que no fuera intenso.

Surround yourself in the language/ Rodeate de la lengua en tu vida normal

Even if you do not have access to native speakers, you can still surround yourself in the language. Whenever you are watching the television, put English subtitles on so that you can see how the dialogue is translated. Listen to English music and try to sing along to improve your vocabulary and pronunciation. Change the settings of your phone so that the language is in English. There are so many things that you can do!

Aún si no conocieras hablantes nativos, todavía puedes estar rodeado en el idioma. Cada vez que veas la televisión, pon subtítulos en inglés para que



puedas comprender cómo se traduce el dialogo. Escucha música inglesa e intenta de cantar para mejorar tu vocabulario y pronunciación. Ajusta la configuración de tu teléfono móvil para que esté en tu lengua objetivo. ¡Hay muchas cosas que puedes hacer!

Practice little and often/ Practica seguido y de a pocos

Language learning is more effective in short and frequent bursts; sit down with a short task for yourself or try to learn 10 new words every day. Intense sessions of study are not as useful because learning to speak a different language is a slow and gradual process. Be patient with yourself and stick at it!

El aprendizaje de una lengua es más efectivo en plazos cortos y frecuentes. Siéntate con una tarea breve; o intenta aprender 10 palabras nuevas cada día. Sesiones intensas de estudiar no son tan útiles porque la adquisición de otro idioma es un proceso lento y gradual. Ten paciencia contigo mismo y sé per-

sistente.

Don't neglect any aspects/ No dejes de lado ningún aspecto

Even if you love to learn new vocabulary and hate to practice your grammar, both are very important! Make sure you balance the type of learning that you are doing, as well as the activities (reading, listening, speaking and writing are all equally necessary) so that your effort truly pays off.

Aún si disfrutas aprender nuevo vocabulario y odias practicar gramática, ambos son muy impor-

tantes. Hay que hacer un equilibrio entre el tipo de aprendizaje que estás practicando, tanto como las actividades (leer, escuchar, hablar y escribir) para que tu esfuerzo resulte en éxito.

I hope that my 5 top pieces of advice will help you with your language learning! Enjoy the process and remember that it will be worth it!

Espero que mis 5 más importantes consejos te ayuden con tu idioma objetivo. ¡Disfruta el proceso y recuerda que valdrá la pena!



A Gringa's Experience Learning Spanish

By: Marie Lilly

People often ask me, “Where did you learn Spanish?” or “How long have you been learning Spanish?” and I find myself at a loss for how to respond. Do I tell them that I began at eight years old with a language-learning computer game? Or do I say that I started with two years of Spanish in high school? After those two years I couldn't speak Spanish at all, but I did know a lot about caballería from reading Don Quixote and I additionally had all of the rules memorized for using the past subjunctive.

I usually respond by saying that after graduating from High School, I moved to Granada, Spain where I enrolled in a semester-long intensive spanish program. At this point, I knew a lot of the grammar rules for Spanish but it was here is where I was first forced to speak the language. After I returned to the United States, I lost a lot the progress I had gained because I didn't practice enough. Upon enrolling at my University I continued to take classes in Spanish in order to keep it fresh in my mind, but 3 hours per week still wasn't quite enough. I had many wonderful professors, but perhaps more important than the content these professors taught me was them inspiring me to learn beyond the classroom. Throughout my experience learning spanish at my University, I was encouraged to watch TV shows and listen to podcasts in Spanish, to eat lunch in “el rincón de español,” and find ways to practice as much as I could, leading me to apply to study abroad for a semester in Ecuador. After this immersion experience, my confidence and ability to manipulate Spanish reached a new height.

My time here in Colombia has taught me a lot of regional differences in Spanish and I know that I will never speak with native fluency, but I can use Spanish to navigate any situation and now I even naturally think “Jesús Cristo” instead of “Jesus Christ” when a motorcycle almost kills me or a cup falls off of my dish rack. I cannot pinpoint one place where or one way in which I have learned Spanish because this experience has been and continues to be a journey full of ups and downs, good days and bad days. Nevertheless, the most important lessons that I have taken away from this journey have been to seek out learning opportunities, to *think* in Spanish instead of trying to translate, and to not fear making mistakes.



From Russia with learning expectations

By: Anna Zhuravleva

Hello. My name is Anna and I came from Russia to Santo Tomas University for a semester to study 'International Business'. I want to tell you about my way of studying English.

As for everyone, English seemed difficult for me at the beginning: even simple grammar structures are completely different from grammar structures in my own language. Above all, I struggled with understanding the difference between different language forms and knowing when to use which.

But this only happens at the start of learning a language. Everything changed the moment I started to properly understand and speak the language. Of course, it is normal to be shy when practicing and speaking a new language, but you have to remember that it wouldn't be a disaster if you made a mistake. You are learning a completely new language and everybody understands that. Shyness is the biggest enemy at this point. At university here, a lot of people have said that my English is perfect; I speak quickly and to beginners it looks like I'm a good speaker, however I still make a lot of mistakes, so of course, I don't speak perfectly. Also, a lot of people here always apologize for their language, and I truly do not understand why. It is okay if you do not know this or that, or if you have not met a certain word's collocation before.

What helped me? I found a really good opportunity to practice speaking English: I started to work in tourist business with foreign tourists, thousands of whom

come to my city every summer from all over the world. The reaction from people who appreciated my help given in English and praised my language was the biggest incentive for me to speak more. They would always sincerely encourage me, and they never said anything to me about my mistakes or about my accent, so I gained confidence in my speaking skills.

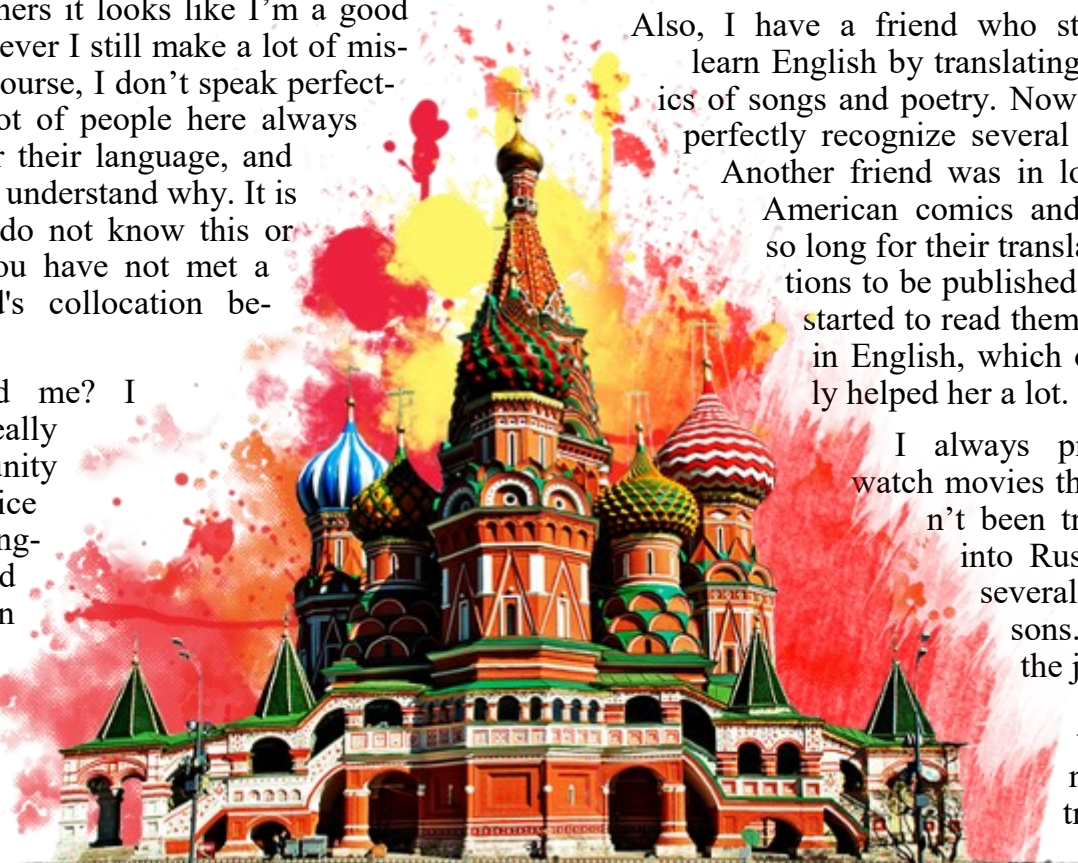
Of course, I understand that not everybody has the same opportunity to communicate with native speakers. But there are a lot of others opportunities. You just should *want* to practice your English.

My cousin in Russia has started to play international video games online with other foreigners, sharing the common language of English. Of course, this isn't a fully effective practice but it is a good beginning. Through this means, he can find friends and start to communicate with them. As the world is becoming more interconnected, it is easier and more common nowadays to find friends in other countries.

Also, I have a friend who started to learn English by translating the lyrics of songs and poetry. Now she can perfectly recognize several accents.

Another friend was in love with American comics and it took so long for their translated editions to be published that she started to read them directly in English, which obviously helped her a lot.

I always prefer to watch movies that haven't been translated into Russian for several reasons. Firstly, the jokes are sometimes not translated



ed correctly and the humor is lost. Secondly, you can listen to the real voices of actors. Thirdly, it is a good practice, especially in the learning of common and everyday colloquial phrases. And it is actually easier to learn new words because you can see the picture and subtitle associated with it.

In my mind, you should really want to do something in order to achieve results – whether it be learning English, another foreign language, or doing something completely different.



Put into Practice!

By Katlein Spildooren



When I was twelve I found an old notebook in my grandmother's basement. It turned out it was my mother's and mainly contained notes on Spanish grammar. I've always been interested in languages, but especially Spanish has fascinated me since a young age. I started to memorize all the information in the notebook and only listened to Spanish music, which isn't that easy to find in my country. I also decided to study Latin and Modern Languages in secondary school, because that was the only way I could take Spanish classes at school. I continued my Spanish studies in university, where I studied applied linguistics and later even got a Master's degree in Spanish translation. I studied Spanish for six years and I managed to get to a B2 level. One thing was clear: learning a foreign language isn't something that happens overnight.

I had been studying Spanish for five years before I set foot in a Spanish speaking country for the first time. I learned the language mainly by memorizing hundreds of pages of vocabulary, making countless numbers of grammar exercises, writing lots of texts, reading lots of books and preparing presentations. We hardly ever played games in class, although some teachers did use songs from time to time. I don't believe it's possible to learn a language well just by playing games and singing songs. You also need discipline, patience and a lot of hard work, although extracurricular activities are definitely a must to put what you've learned into practice and to see the results of your hard work. At secondary school those activities were very limited for Spanish, but at university we could participate in a buddy-project with the Spanish exchange students or participate in 'La junta Amberes', a group of Spanish-students that organized events like 'La Noche Latina', concerts and a 'churro bake sale'.

It's definitely possible to learn a language at school without necessarily having to travel to another country or stay with host families, but it takes a lot of time and you're never really sure if you would actually survive outside the classroom, in a real-life environment. Exactly for that reason I decided to go on exchange to Latin America and I recommend it to everyone. I can assure you that it's the fastest way to learn a language. I've met people who arrived here without knowing a single word of Spanish and left one year later speaking the language fluently.

There are many ways to learn a foreign language, some just take a little bit longer than others. In the end it all depends on your personal needs. If you just want to learn how to speak another language, going on exchange is definitely the best option. If you really want to become a professional, you will have to put the necessary effort and hours in it. Although, spending some time abroad can definitely help you improve your speaking and listening skills. And then again, who doesn't like an extra excuse to book their next trip.



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