



Learning New Languages

Language learning can perhaps be described as part of the human condition. Beyond the languages we learn as a child, we also maintain the capacity to add new languages throughout our lifespan. Learning and using new languages for different purposes is the norm across the globe¹: for trade, for education, for cultural exchange, and even for love... Speaking more than one language in life is definitely the normal way to live in our world. There are some 6,000 languages spoken in 200 countries across the globe, and most people with more than one language in their repertoire switch languages throughout the day as they do different things and speak to different people. Perhaps one language is used in school, another used in the local town for transactions or work, and another spoken at home or with other family members or for religious purposes.

Advantages

There are many advantages to language learning. These include:

- expanding your personal relationships by allowing you access to the world of your friends, neighbours or co-workers who speak different languages
- allowing you to see the world differently, to see the world through the eyes of others, to understand that different languages shape different visions of the world
- increasing your employment opportunities and giving you access to a much wider education or job market
- allowing you to travel independently in countries where your languages are spoken; even simple words or phrases will break the ice with locals
- being able to read a novel or watch a film in its original version
- stimulating your brain (for example supporting the development of abstract thinking or problem-solving ability) and your creativity
- delaying illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia

Challenges

Some people portray language learning as tedious, time-consuming and rather dull. In Europe, we have probably all inherited this notion from school, where languages were seen as 'subjects' rather than communicative tools and means of meeting people, travelling and accessing a new world. Many successful adult language learners are those who simply learn enough of the language in question to meet their own needs, and not people who become language experts. Our needs or motivations to learn a language will vary – perhaps it is simply a case of being able to explain directions to a taxi driver or ask for food in a restaurant; for others, it may involve presenting very technical aspects of their job; for many of us, it is just being able to take part in conversations with old or new friends and family members. For immigrants, one motivation of learning the majority language is the desire to integrate and take active part in the country. For people seeking citizenship, a proof of adequate knowledge of language is a requisite in most countries.

One common misconception is that learning a new language means sounding like a native speaker, or speaking or writing with complete accuracy. In fact, linguists describe this as one of the biggest fallacies of language learning, the 'native speaker fallacy'. When you learn to speak a new language, especially if it is a widely spoken language, you may be more likely to meet and speak with other non-native speakers rather than native speakers. This is especially the case for English;

¹ <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/how-many-languages-are-there-world>

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there are now more non-native speakers of English in the world than native speakers! In fact, there are so many non-native speakers of English that a new type of English seems to be emerging, where English is a lingua franca.

Sometimes, learning languages can be a balancing act, especially for school pupils who need to learn the language used in school (for some this may already be their second language), as well as foreign languages, well as regional or home languages. However, research has shown that children can cope with these difficulties as they have the cognitive ability to acquire more than one language, even when the language of instruction is different from their home language².

Of course, language learning in the different stages and ages of life is not always as easy as in childhood, but most people would argue that it is certainly worth it. In

fact, some older learners tend to be even better learners than younger people, because they are very motivated and they can use their world knowledge and previous language learning experiences very effectively. Before you start learning a new language, a very helpful book called “Language Myths” by Laurie Bauer and Peter Trudgill (Penguin, 1998) sets out to challenge some of the conventional wisdom about language and the way it works. It addresses many common misconceptions about the learning of languages, some of which we mentioned above.

Below, we answer some questions about language learning, provide some suggestions and share some good examples of initiatives that support people who want to learn more languages.

Broken links, corrections and updates can be reported and viewed at www.urbanlanguages.eu/toolkits/errata

² If you want to know more about these ideas please contact LUCIDE – enquiries@urbanlanguages.eu

Ideas for university students



You don't want to be a language expert but you want to keep up your language learning or learn a new language...



Even though you are not studying a language as part of your main degree courses, most universities have a range of language-learning opportunities with varying levels of commitments. For example, these might include some regular '**conversation meetings**' in a local café or pub with your university's foreign students, student societies which organise informal and fun language exchanges, or short **language courses run by your university's language centre**. You could even consider taking a **study abroad** component (Erasmus or similar) and spend part of your degree abroad. This is often a great way to add a new language to your repertoire, as well as focusing on your studies!



See this meetup website to see the different language meetup groups near you:
<http://www.meetup.com/>



In Utrecht, there is an example of a meet up group organised on a weekly basis by university students, called [Language Café Utrecht](#)³:

A similar language café exists in [Strasbourg](#).⁴ Students (but not only) meet once a week in a relaxed atmosphere and practise each others' languages.



In Hamburg, a website provided by the University of Hamburg connects native speakers who want to learn each others' languages. Go to <http://www.uni-hamburg.de/piasta/sprachtandem.html> fill in the language you are looking for and you will be connected with a native speaker who wants to learn your mother tongue.



There are also Facebook pages where you can find partners who are interested in language learning in pairs online. See: <https://www.facebook.com/TandemPartnerDE> for a German example. In Rome, a Facebook page for this kind of language learning is <https://www.facebook.com/tandemroma>

A similar page will probably also exist in your city.



Most universities have a dedicated language centre as well as language departments who teach foreign languages. This enables you to learn languages at university even if they are not part of your studies. The offer ranges from general language courses to more specialised courses that focus on the specific vocabulary of a study field.



The language centre at the University of Strasbourg makes it possible for students and staff members to learn up to 28 languages. The [SPIRAL website](#)⁵ explains in detail the different services and ways in which students can maximise the resources available.

3 <http://languagecafeutrecht.blogspot.ie/>

4 <http://blog.chatbella.com/language-cafe-strasbourg/>

5 <http://spiral.unistra.fr/index.php>



You can investigate Erasmus programmes through your university's international office, and read more about Erasmus exchanges on this website:
<http://www.erasmusprogramme.com/>



You wonder if language degrees are useful...



There are lots of models of language degrees that you can investigate, for example you can study more than one language at once, or take a language at the same time as another degree subject. The range of languages on offer in European universities is very wide, and you can investigate some of the programmes available in the cities in our network.



The [QS World Rankings](#)⁶ explores which languages to learn at university.



You don't have to plan to be a teacher, interpreter or translator – the skills learned during a language degree include intercultural skills, critical thinking, flexibility and creativity, as well as being able to see things from 'outside the box'. These skills are very important for employers in many sectors including technology, industry and professional services.



The European portal [EURES](#)⁷ combines job offers of the public job agencies of the EU member states. Here you can search for a job in other countries that requires your foreign language skills.



Your city may have a language fair for graduates, where employers are keen to recruit people with language skills. In Dublin, an example of this is the 'GradChances' language fair⁸, the first 'careers with languages' fair to be held in Ireland.

Ideas for parents



You want your children to learn another language...



There are lots of ways that you can expose your children to another language and support their language learning. Your children's school is obviously a good place to start, but sometimes parents want to start language learning earlier than the educational system may allow. You can search for any playgroups or activity groups which encourage use of different languages – very often Embassies and Consulates are good places to find this type of information (e.g. French-language playgroup, Italian-language storytelling group).

6 <http://www.topuniversities.com/courses/modern-languages/best-languages-learn-university>

7 <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/page/homepage?lang=de>

8 <http://gradireland.com/events/234044>



There is a website run by [the Multilingual Children Association](http://www.multilingualchildren.org)⁹ (an American association), which offers some advice for parents who are not native-speakers of the languages they would like their children to learn.



The website www.meetup.com is a good way to see if there are any multilingual playgroups in your area, eg, <http://bilingual-or-multilingual-playgroup.meetup.com/>



In Dublin, [Divertitaliano](http://www.divertitaliano.com/)¹⁰ is a not-for-profit association that offers a wide range of activities for children and teenagers who are interested in learning, improving or maintaining the Italian language. It started off with an Italian playgroup and grew to include Italian classes for children and adolescents, as well as drama classes and other fun events in Italian.



In Strasbourg, there is a not-for-profit association called [FaMiLangues](https://fr-fr.facebook.com/familangues)¹¹, which organises activities for parents and children in various languages (Arabic, English, Spanish...).



Think about sending your child to a bilingual day care centre or to a day care centre where the use of other languages is encouraged and practised. For example, some centres employ bilingual staff who talk to children in other languages and visually display other languages.



In Strasbourg, there are several bilingual “crèches” in [French and German](http://www.creche-lasourisverte.eu/)¹² and in [French and English](http://givingtree.fr)¹³. There is also a bilingual and binational crèche with French and German children near the border between France and Germany. These crèches are financed in part by the city of Strasbourg, but they were started by groups of parents.



Talk to your child about the different countries that other children come from and the different languages they speak. This way, you can raise awareness that speaking other languages is a very normal thing and raise your child’s motivation to learn other languages.

Explain to your children the advantages of learning other languages.



Buy your child bilingual and multilingual books for children. There are many on the market now, as well as song books with CDs from many different cultures in the world.



You may also want to consider television programmes for smaller kids, or interactive websites for older kids, or games and songs. There are also many language-learning apps for tablets and smartphones.

9 http://www.multilingualchildren.org/tips/not_native.html

10 <http://www.divertitaliano.com/>

11 <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/familangues>

12 <http://www.creche-lasourisverte.eu/>

13 <http://givingtree.fr>



The [Studycat website](http://studycat.net/)¹⁴ is a good idea for early English learning or try [Busuu](http://www.busuu.com)¹⁵ for a fun way to learn languages and earn points.



To help your child learn vocabulary, you could display words and phrases in a different language throughout the house on sticky notes or by using flash cards.



In each city in our network, there are examples of ‘Saturday’ or ‘Sunday’ language schools – complementary language schools that are organised by parents or groups of volunteers who want to ensure that all children are able to keep up their language proficiency in languages that are not always taught in the school system.



In Strasbourg, it is the local education authority in collaboration with foreign consulates, that organises “home language” classes which are open to all children, not just those with family from the countries where the languages are spoken: <https://sites.google.com/site/elco067/home>



You want your child to maintain and develop their home language



Language is often an essential aspect of cultural identity and the links between culture and language are deeply imbedded. This can mean that if a child does not maintain the home language, he or she will remain without a large part of your culture and lose a valuable part of their cultural inheritance. Ask yourself whether you want your child to speak to his grandparents or other relatives who do not speak the language of the country where you live now.



Try and speak to your child in your home language as much as possible from the beginning. Do not worry if you mix languages as this is completely normal for bilinguals, and your child needs a lot of input in order to acquire your language. Read books to him/her in that language, sing songs, find other families who share the same language, get your family to record stories for your child to listen to – a grandmother’s or grandfather’s voice telling a story is wonderful for your children who will treasure such experiences and develop an affective dimension to the language.

Studies have also shown that in families in which daily and school-related communication is carried out in the home languages, the relationship between parents and children is much better and fewer problems are experienced at school.



Take care that your child is also exposed to the majority language from an early age, for example by attending a playgroup or kindergarten, or on the playground, or from friends.

¹⁴ <http://studycat.net/>

¹⁵ www.busuu.com



Next to input at home it is also important to develop the home language in an institutionalised context, either in school or another institution. Through a home language course, the grammar will be developed, specific vocabulary acquired, writing skills developed and facts about history and culture learned. Even if you think “my child knows their home language already”, it is about cultivating and caring for a language and developing the vocabulary for special subjects of which there are so many. Think about it, the majority language is also developed during the whole (school) life of a student!



Home language education is provided by community organisations, consulates or even the school. Try to find ways in which home language courses are no extra burden for your child. Some schools offer home language education, for example as second foreign language education.



Engage in the offer of home language education at your child’s school. Speak up for the establishment of home language classes. See if you can engage in those lessons by telling stories, reading poems or presenting topics in your home language.

Some schools organise events, such as language cafés or after school get-togethers, where you can offer to read or present something in your home language.

Ideas for older learners



You think it is too late to learn another language...



Good news – it is never too late to learn a language! Realistically, it does get a little harder as we get older, but older learners have some advantages over younger learners, for example better learning strategies, a clearer idea of why you want to learn, and sometimes better, more consistent motivation (i.e. you actually attend the class that you sign up for!). But, there are some things to bear in mind if you are an older language learner, for instance you might find that some students in a language class learn at a more rapid pace, or that learning lots of new words initially is a challenge.



You might want to consider keeping some sort of learning diary or vocabulary notebook, which would include as much information as you find useful about new words, their definitions, opposites, and even where you learned the word. These strategies can ensure better vocabulary learning. Explore some ways of recording the new vocabulary, for instance through a method called mindmapping, through keeping a vocabulary journal (mentioning where you heard or saw the word, its meaning, any similar words, opposites, etc.), or through online storage, e.g. apps on your phone such as flashcards or games that test vocabulary knowledge.



Another good way to learn a new language is to find out about one-on-one language exchanges. These are a great way to learn at your own pace and in a more informal setting. In cities with lots of residents who speak different languages, it is a good way to have regular conversational exchange in return for spending half of the conversation speaking your own language, and the other half speaking the language you want to learn. Hopefully you will find a way that suits your own language learning plans, and remember – research suggests that language learning is a great way to strengthen your brain!



Contact your local library or community association to see whether there are any language exchanges in your area. In Dublin, there are many conversations exchanges held in the public libraries: <http://dublincity.ie/main-menu-services-recreation-culture-dublin-city-public-libraries-and-archive-events/conversation>



The University of Hamburg connects native speakers who want to learn each other's languages. Their [website](#)¹⁶ connects you with a native speaker of German who wants to learn your mother tongue.



In Utrecht, there is an example of a meet-up group organised on a weekly basis by university students, called “[Language Café Utrecht](#)”¹⁷ and open to anyone who wants to practise a foreign language.



Libraries are an excellent place for learning languages. They provide language learning materials as well as books, magazines and other media in foreign languages. Moreover, they often host informal conversation groups.



In Oslo, there is [a multilingual library with collections in 35 languages](#)¹⁸.



The internet offers a wide range of language learning websites or apps, many of which are free of charge.



Sofia's [SHOPLANG 2.0](#)¹⁹ project promotes language learning through using the informal environment of a supermarket for language skills in Polish, Portuguese, Romanian and Slovenian. A web application resembling an online language supermarket allows people to learn words and test their knowledge related to the theme of shopping.



Adult education institutions are a good place to find out about language courses. As non-profit institutions, fees for such courses are generally much cheaper than those offered by private language schools. Generally, a wide range of languages are offered and they are often taught by native speakers.

16 <http://www.uni-hamburg.de/piasta/sprachtandem.html>

17 <http://languagecafeutrecht.blogspot.ie/>

18 <http://dfb.deichman.no/>

19 <http://shoplang2.com/Default.aspx>



In Germany, the best known adult education institution is the *Volkshochschule* (“peoples’s school”), which offers all kinds of adult education courses, including a wide range of language courses at reasonable prices.



The Université Populaire Européenne (UPE) is a well-known institution for adult education in Strasbourg. UPE offers a wide range of classes, including 13 language courses with levels that conform to the Common European Framework of References for Languages.



The city of Utrecht has published [an inventory of the local possibilities](#)²⁰ to learn (29!) new languages. There are, for example, ten institutes that offer Chinese, and Dutch Sign Language can be learned at four locations.

Ideas for teachers

Please also refer to [our toolkit on bilingual learners](#), which contains further ideas and suggestions for teachers.



You want to enhance the language learning opportunities in your school...



Point out the advantages of learning a foreign language to your pupils. Discuss the advantages with them in a separate lesson. Try to raise their motivation for learning languages by making clear to them the new opportunities that arise when speaking another language.



Use media (films, magazines, commercials, brochures) from other languages as teaching material to demonstrate the practical purpose of learning languages. Employ games and songs in other languages with all ages of pupils.



In Dublin, the *Alliance Française* is an example of good practice in [making French cinema available to teachers for educational purposes](#)²¹. They allow French teachers at all levels to access more than 300 royalty-free films (fiction films, feature and short films, recently-released films, cultural heritage films and films for young audiences) along with over 50 educational kits. The main purpose of IF Cinema is to allow students to discover French cinema, and they suggest that teachers organise a “ciné-club, organise screenings during events devoted to the French language or simply watch the films in class as part of an instructional sequence”.

²⁰ <http://www.utrecht.nl/images/Secretarie/Internationaal/pdf/Taalcursusaanbieders%20Utrecht%20versie%209%20december%202011.pdf>

²¹ http://www.fta.ie/full_post.php?pid=125



Explore opportunities for e-twinning, school exchanges and school partnerships.

You can also use these programmes to connect with other teachers or groups who are interested in promoting language learning. Make contact with national and European teaching associations or organisations. They usually offer opportunities for ‘continuing professional development’ and for meeting other likeminded teachers who are interested in various different approaches to language teaching.



Funding for school exchanges can be obtained through the EU’s [ERASMUS PLUS programme](#)²².



Value all languages on an equal level, including the home languages that are present in your classroom. Emphasise that the languages represented in your classroom and school are valuable resources, part of your school’s ‘human capital’.

Together with your students, find out which languages are present in your classroom. Make them visible in your class/school. For example, you can display very simple phrases in other languages in your classroom or have signs and school rules in several language displayed around your school.

Often, teachers can set a good example for pupils by themselves learning and using the languages that are represented in their own classrooms, as well as by sharing their own language learning experiences.



A good instrument to start raising awareness of the languages pupils speak and how they feel about them is the European Language Portfolio. The [website of the Council of Europe](#)²³ contains valuable information on its development, as well as on how to use it.



This [website](#)²⁴ contains fact sheets (in German) on the major languages present in European classrooms. The fact sheets contain information on the background, grammatical structure, where the languages are spoken, dialects, sound samples, and their differences to German.



The [European Centre for Modern Languages](#)²⁵ organises projects and issues publications on a range of topics that are relevant for teachers, see for example the ‘Learning Through Languages’ initiative, which includes projects on whole school curriculum, mobility, teacher training, online resources and involving parents.



A good way of making the languages of the classroom a topic is in the form of language projects. Native speakers (students) can teach simple words to others and parents could also be included. You could organise languages days where everyone has to learn a few words in a new language.



Many schools organise a “languages of the month project”.
[See this school for an example](#)²⁶.

22 http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/index_en.htm

23 <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/>

24 <http://www.schule-mehrsprachig.at/index.php?id=3>

25 <http://www.ecml.at/Programme/Programme20122015/tabid/685/language/en-GB/Default.aspx>

26 <http://www.newburypark.redbridge.sch.uk/langofmonth/>



The *Didenheim Project*²⁷ in Strasbourg is a good example of how teachers can make the home languages of the students present in their classroom and the regional language Alsatian a topic in lessons



Encourage regular use of all languages present in school, but agree on rules with students that languages should never be used to exclude others. For instance, a 'language contract' can be drawn up by the class with some agreed rules.



You may wish to consider whether your school curriculum is still valid for a population that is highly multilingual. It might have been drafted for a monolingual group of students.



The *Curriculum Mehrsprachigkeit*²⁸ (Curriculum on Multilingualism) provides aims and exercises with which to emphasise multilingualism and make use of the language resources present in the classroom. The Curriculum (or parts of it) can be integrated into the regular curriculum. The curriculum is written in German.

Ideas for adults who have moved to another country



You want to learn the language of your new home?



Even though you may not have much time or money to spend on language learning, the good news is that you don't necessarily have to be in a language classroom to learn the language of your new home. Research suggests that one of the best ways to learn a language as an adult is to try to spend a short time every day where you try to develop your skills in the language. Even ten minutes per day pays off in the long run. This could involve trying to watch the news every evening after work in the language of your new home, trying to read the news headlines in the city's newspaper with a dictionary beside you (or an online dictionary/ translation app), or trying to ask for one thing in this new language when you are outside your home (like directions, or the price of an item in a shop). As well as these habits of spending a short time everyday concentrating on the language, there are some ways to join language classes or conversation groups which don't cost a lot of money or commitment.



Local libraries are one of the best ways to learn the local language. You can usually read newspapers and magazines for free, and you can use the dictionaries and other resources there to keep track of new words. Public libraries often also host conversation groups.

27 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFBjXgkbgLU>

28 http://oesz.at/OESZNEU/main_03.php?page=0324



In Hamburg, public libraries host the project *Dialog in Deutsch*²⁹ – which are informal conversation groups for adults who are new to the city. Once a week they meet in public libraries and talk, under the guidance of a group leader about everyday topics in the host language. The library is a public and secure space that is open to everyone and in which everyone can feel welcome. Participants practise the host language by discussing everyday experiences. Groups are led by native speakers on a voluntary basis. The project has established a handbook with materials and training courses for group leaders. It provides childcare during the conversation groups and special groups for women.



In Rome, many libraries offer free courses in Italian for immigrants, and take part in the *Italiano in Biblioteca*³⁰ project (which includes language courses, a guide to the city services and intercultural meetings)



The Toronto Public Library offers free English classes that target specific audiences (for example, Chinese-speaking seniors) and different levels of knowledge of English. The courses address issues of interest to newcomers (for example, starting a small business, winter driving and citizenship exams).



Most cities have associations that can tell you about opportunities to learn the language of your new home.

In some cities, classes are provided and paid for by the local authorities.



In Rome and in the Lazio region, the free teaching of Italian language and culture to migrants is organised through the public education system, local centres as well as through voluntary schools and migrant or refugee associations, such as the *ScuoleMigranti Network*³¹.



In Germany, the state provides so-called “integration courses” (*Integrationskurse*). Foreigners (by law) or those with insufficient command of German (by application) can participate in a German-language course. A course comprises 600 hours of teaching. Cultural, juridical, political and historical content is taught. Every participant pays 1 Euro per lesson; for people on a low income it is free.



In France, new arrivals lacking linguistic competence are guided and assigned to training organisations to undergo 400 hours of French classes, which are paid for by the state and are compulsory. The final evaluation of language competence is tested by an oral and written examination through which a diploma is issued, known as *diplôme d'initiation à la langue française* (DILF).



In Vancouver, next to the main adult programme for English as a second language, there is a second main programme called “English for the Workplace”. This language programme focuses on employment and topics such as the culture of the Canadian workplace, making presentations, working on a team, looking for work, interview skills and business writing. Part of the training can be done from home through the internet. Free childcare service is provided for learners.

29 http://www.buecherhallen.de/dialog_in_deutsch/

30 <http://www.romamultietnica.it/italiano-per-stranieri-in-biblioteca.html>

31 <http://www.scuolemigranti.org/>



In Ottawa, the non-profit organization ELTOC (English Language Tutoring for the Ottawa Community) provides home tutoring for adult immigrants who cannot attend regular English programmes. Once a week, students receive free, one-on-one instruction in their homes from volunteer tutors. Emphasis is given to practical English skills that allow newcomers to integrate into Canadian life.



The internet is a good place to find help in learning a new language. But, it can be hard to find the right kind of help. You could start to collect a list of good websites, such as your city's local newspaper or your city's own website (municipality or local government website). Often, you can find important information about local festivals and services.



The [Knowble website](http://knowble.eu/)³² is a good resource for learners of English who want to improve their reading skills:

Conclusion

We hope that this toolkit on language learning has provided you with some useful information that will have a positive impact on your personal or professional activities. Language learning is not just a skill like learning how to play the piano or how to drive a car – it really is part of our human nature, what we are wired to do. Once you start, you will discover that it is also a tool for social connections as well as being a subject to study. You may be daunted by the idea of the extra commitment that you think learning a language might involve, but, the golden rule is that it is better to try to learn a little on a regular basis, rather than to try to learn too much too fast. We wish you every success as you add more languages to your repertoire, and please do get in touch with us to share your language learning stories and tips!

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32 <http://knowble.eu/>

