

Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-12/msg00738.html>

- *From:* leuwarden@xxxxxxxxxx
 - *Date:* 7 Dec 2005 00:17:20 -0800
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Lee Sau Dan wrote:

> >>>>> "leuwarden" == leuwarden <leuwarden@xxxxxxxxxx> writes:
>
> leuwarden> I do not know why abroad it is thought that the Swiss
> leuwarden> are multilingual.
>
> That's the general impression. Swiss people working abroad can speak
> English (usually) and one or more of the official languages of
> Switzerland.

I know. I hope you know that it is impossible. People who live in bilingual places end up speaking a bilingual dialect, but not two languages, unless they start learning from books or newspapers.

I think that linguists call a multilingual dialect a "contact language"

> but I do not under Inside Switzerland, most people working in the tourist
> industry (and related industries) can speak at least 2 languages. So,
> people outside Switzerland think that Swiss can usually speak a few
> languages.

You would also know that German and English are linguistically related so that Germans can learn English somewhat more easily than the Latins.

>
>
> leuwarden> The country is, and to get a government job you have to
> leuwarden> pass a little test in two or three languages. The
> leuwarden> German Swiss learn English rather easily, but how many
> leuwarden> really do that? Maybe 20%? Probably fewer.
>
> You've reminded me of a Swiss German whom I met a month ago. He's
> accompanying his girlfriend, a German whom I knew because of my
> connections in Germany, on a trip in Asia, having a stop over in Hong
> Kong. To my surprise, he could not speak English! Well... I've
> already heard that Swiss from the Romance-speaking regions do not
> master English as well as those from the German-speaking regions.

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Yes. The French-speaking. Some people think that the problem is cultural.

- > So,
- > he might be from those areas? No. He was asked — in German — what
- > languages he knows, he said only German! He was from Luzern. It is
- > still mysterious to me why he cannot speak English — as you said,
- > it's should be relatively easy for a German speaker to learn English.

There you are wrong. In the farm towns of Lucerne nobody speaks English, except if they work in the tourist industry.

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- >
- > leuwarden> I grew up in a town where both Swiss German and French
- > leuwarden> were spoken.
- >
- > Somewhere near Biel/Bienne?

Yes, just above it, in Magglingen = Macolin, but I went to school in Biel=Bienne.

Your memory is very good. How would you remember such a minor place? I saw your web page and so now I know that you are not one of those grrrrrrrrrr language teachers.

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- >
- > leuwarden> I do not think it is possible to have a majority of
- > leuwarden> people learn more than one language well.
- >
- > In southern China, a large amount of people receive education in
- > Putonghua in schools, but speak the local "dialects" exclusively
- > outside school. These local dialects are mutually unintelligible with
- > Putonghua.

Of course, everybody has to do two or three languages at school, and there is an endless press debate going on about whether kids should start out learning English rather than German.

However, as you must know, one thing is to learn a language, another is to maintain or even develop it. That is where most fail.

I see I said exactly the same thing yesterday.....

- >
- > In Hong Kong, Cantonese in the lingua franca. But since all children
- > start learning English early, and you need English to get good jobs,
- > most people can handle English. At least passively. Further, more
- > and more people are managing to speaking Putonghua, to make it easier
- > to conduct business with people in China.
- >

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> leuwarden> One thing is to learn a language, another is to
> leuwarden> maintain it. I have four to maintain. Though I can no
> leuwarden> longer speak it fluently, I won't let my French go.
>
> I speak 4 languages already: Cantonese, English, Mandarin, German.
> And I still want to learn more.

Good luck!

>
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>
> leuwarden> Now, since the courses are for people who dislike
> leuwarden> literature, the texts are all of them irrelevant or
> leuwarden> downright idiotic in their pseudo-realism where the
> leuwarden> convention is that you need English to buy airplane
> leuwarden> tickets, ask the time, buy clothes and talk about
> leuwarden> Susy's boyfriend.
>
> I also find these texts boring. So, I've turned to reading books.
> This includes literature adapted for learners (using simpler language
> and a smaller vocabulary), fictions, documentary, etc.

In English that is easy. Even great texts can be read. Look for translations; texts translated from other languages are often easier to read than originals, because translators often simplify the language. And of course technology and science, where your knowledge helps you guess.

I have met doctors here who can't speak a word in English and yet read all their medical information in that language.

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- *Follow-Ups:*
 - ◆ **Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**
 - ◇ From: Lee Sau Dan

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- ◆ **Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**
◇ From: Peter T. Daniels

• **References:**

- ◆ **Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**
◇ From: ck
- ◆ **Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**
◇ From: leuwarden
- ◆ **Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**
◇ From: Joachim Pense
- ◆ **Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?**
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