

Re: Is there an optimal sequence for language acquisition?

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Source: <http://sci.tech--archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2005-12/msg00881.html>

- *From:* Lee Sau Dan <danlee@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 08 Dec 2005 11:19:13 +0800
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>>>> "leuwarden" == leuwarden <leuwarden@xxxxxxxx> writes:

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

And how come this "dialect" has not creolized?

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

Is that a pidgin or a creole?

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.

But I remember stories from Chinese students who were shocked that
when they passed the Swiss immigration counter in Basel Bad. train
station, the officer talked to them in Mandarin upon seeing their
Chinese passport.

leuwarden> I grew up in a town where both Swiss German and French
leuwarden> were spoken.

>> Somewhere near Biel/Bienne?

leuwarden> Yes, just above it, in Magglingen = Macolin, but I went
leuwarden> to school in Biel=Bienne. Your memory is very
leuwarden> good. How would you remember such a minor place?

I once travelled by train from Freiburg (DE) to Lyon (FR), and a part
of the journey was in Switzerland, from Basel to Genève. It's
interesting that the train passes between German- to French- speaking

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areas a few times on this track. And Biel/Bienne was remarkable because it's a relatively bigger interchange station, where the train stopped longer. It's also remarkable because it's bilingual. (The other stations only have signs of the station name in the local language. Also, a few minute before entering a station, the train broadcast will announce what the next stations is — but only in the local language. Genève is the only exception: the broadcast the message in 3 languages: French, English, German. [The broadcast has the additional message tht the train further goes to the airport, and advises passengers heading to the airport to stay on board.] Yet, I couldn't even see "Genf" signs shown in the Genève station.)

leuwarden> I saw your web page and so now I know that you are not
leuwarden> one of those grrrrrrrrrr language teachers.

I've never taught a language.

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.

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

But those in China can really speak both Putonghua (not necessarily very fluently) and the local language (natively).

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

That's why I'd find a technology/science article in Japanese and French much easier to decipher.

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

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Just like what people did with Latin.

Well... aren't most medical jargons in English actually Latin? So, it doesn't help to know English. Maybe, an Italian doctor would find it easier to write a medical prescription in "English" than an English speaker!

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Lee Sau Dan

E-mail: danlee@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
Home page: <http://www.informatik.uni-freiburg.de/~danlee>

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