

BENNY LEWIS

FLUENT IN 3 MONTHS

Tips and techniques to help
you learn *any* language



'WOW! INSPIRATIONAL AND PRACTICAL – BENNY'S NAILED IT.'
LARRY LAMB, ACTOR AND LANGUAGE AMBASSADOR

Benny Lewis

Fluent in 3 Months

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Аннотация

Meet the man who makes the mission of learning any language possible!

The all-you-need guide to learning a language.

Language hacker Benny Lewis shows how anyone anywhere can learn any language without leaving their home, using a simple toolkit and by harnessing the power of the Internet.

Benny definitely wasn't born with the 'language gene'. After graduating in electronic engineering in his native Ireland he spent six months in Spain struggling to learn Spanish. This frustrating experience fuelled his determination to take a different approach to learning foreign languages.

Today he speaks over ten languages including Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, French, German, Portuguese, and Hungarian. He has also learnt Japanese in Spain. This typifies one of his '3-month challenges' where he targets a new language and proceeds to become fluent in it within just three months. He charts his progress on his blog, proving that his techniques allow anyone to learn a language from anywhere.

Benny's blog, also called *Fluent in 3 Months*, is the largest language learning blog in the world.

The key principles of Benny's method:

- Speak from day one: find mother-tongue speaking partners online. Don't be self-conscious – keep the flow going!
- Change your mindset: ditch the excuses, you can do it!
- Stay focused and determined: even if you don't have much time, never forget the goal you've set yourself and work at it.
- Learning a language doesn't need to be expensive: there is a wealth of free resources out there, if you know where to find them
- Reap the rewards! Learning a new language is not an end in itself, but a means to meeting new people and discovering new cultures. Curiosity will fuel your determination.

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INTRODUCTION

My Story, Your Passion

**Your story, like mine, begins and ends with passion
– the surest path to learning a new language.**

In late July 2003, just a couple of weeks after my twenty-first birthday, I moved to Valencia, Spain. To help me adjust to life in a foreign country, I enrolled in a Spanish class.

It was a small class, and it was taught entirely in Spanish, which was a bit of a problem for me because I only understood English. I had just graduated with a degree in electronic engineering, and I had barely passed the German and Irish* courses I took in high school and college. Languages were definitely not my thing.

After several classes, I was getting absolutely nowhere. Each lesson ended with the other students wearing great big satisfied smiles on their faces. I knew they had figured out something about the language that they didn't know before, while I still couldn't understand a single thing. My ego was destroyed. I was, without a doubt, the worst student in the class, and as I walked home with my head hung low, I couldn't help thinking, *It's not fair! Why were those guys blessed with the language-learning gene*

and I wasn't? I'm never going to learn Spanish.

After six months in Spain, I could barely muster up the courage to ask how much something cost or where the bathroom was. I really started to think I would never learn Spanish. I began to worry my experience immersed in a different country would be a total failure. I was convinced my destiny was to spend the rest of my life speaking only English.

Fast-forward seven years. One night in Budapest, I ended up at a 'couchsurfing' party at a local bar with an international crowd. I confidently strolled in and said hello to everyone *in Hungarian*, one of the most notoriously difficult languages in the world. I started chatting with a local, *in Hungarian*, about my progress with his native language. I had been learning it only for about five weeks, but I was still able to have this rudimentary chat with him.

Next, I noticed a slight Brazilian Portuguese accent from the guy speaking English to my left. I asked, 'Você é brasileiro?' (Are you Brazilian?), and when he told me, in Portuguese, that he was from Rio, I immediately switched to my Carioca accent, using slang from his own city, telling him how much I missed it. He was shocked to hear an Irish guy speak his own Portuguese dialect in a random bar in Budapest!

Then I recognized a Spanish friend of mine across the table and immediately switched to fluent Spanish, asking her how *her* Hungarian was coming along. Later, a couple from Quebec arrived, and I turned on my Quebec accent and expressions while speaking French. We exchanged contact information and made

plans to hang out the next day.

That night I also managed to use some Italian and Esperanto and wowed a Thai tourist with a few phrases of basic Thai, using all the right tones. I even flirted in German with a German girl I saw regularly at these meetings.

In one evening I spoke eight languages (including a little English) casually, socially, and naturally. I switched between them effortlessly, without mixing them up, and – more importantly – made some amazing new friends in the process.

Since then I've learned several other languages, and at the time of writing this, I can confidently use twelve languages in varying degrees of proficiency, from conversational Dutch, Mandarin, Chinese, and American Sign Language to certified mastery in Spanish and everything in between for the other nine. I understand the basics of another twelve languages on top of these. I also run Fluentin3months.com, the world's largest language-learning blog, which, to date, has helped millions of people around the world learn a new language.

All of this is true despite the fact that I spoke only English until the age of twenty-one and did poorly in my attempts to learn languages in school.

How did this happen? How did I go from dropping out of my Spanish language class to being able to converse in more than a dozen languages? Simply by changing how I approach new languages.

The Way to Learn a Language Is to Live It

One of the biggest issues with a traditional approach to language-learning is that the benefits of picking up a new language are constantly postponed. Study this and study that and *then*, if you're lucky, in a few years' time, you'll eventually understand the language. As well as being far from the truth, this approach removes the fun and the *life* from the process.

In many education systems, especially in English-speaking countries, languages are taught the same way as any other subject, like geography or history. Teachers provide the 'facts' (vocabulary) so the student will 'know' the language. Or, as in mathematics, students do the exercises to understand the 'rules' (grammar).

Except on rare occasions, this approach does not produce *speakers* of the target language, so something clearly needs to be fixed. A language is a means of communication and should be *lived* rather than taught.

A teacher's primary role should be as a language facilitator. A teacher should make sure students use the target language at whatever level they happen to be at, rather than keep them quiet while he or she does all the talking, trying to transfer the informational components of the language into the students' brains.

In high school, I had to learn Irish. It was mandatory and, in order to gain admission to university, I needed to pass my exams. As a result, I only cared about learning enough Irish to pass; I

didn't care about the language itself.

My attitude towards Irish changed completely when I actually took the time to live in the Gaeltacht region of Ireland, where people still speak the language, and I started to make friends using it.

The second language I took in high school was German. I took German because Germany is an important economy in Europe, and I figured it would look good to have this language on my CV. German language skills would help me stand out, especially since most people in my year were studying French. Once again, I didn't care about the German language; I just thought learning it might give me secondary benefits. And, of course, I barely retained anything. I thought German was nothing more than *der, die, das* tables of impossible-to-learn grammar. And I imagined Germans were robots that automatically spit out grammatically-correct sentences.

That is, until I met actual Germans and saw firsthand how interesting and fun they were. So fun, in fact, I wanted to get to know them better. This way of thinking allowed me to stop thinking of the German language as a barrier between Germans and me, but instead as a bridge I could cross to communicate with them. In both cases, my initial tangential motivations for learning a language were replaced by a direct motivation to live that language and use it as a means of communication and connection.

This is how language courses should work. The best tend to

veer away from the traditional approach of drilling grammar and word lists into us, or providing us with old, boring, and irrelevant texts. Instead, the best courses encourage us to play games and role-play in the language. They let students speak the language with one another, which – as I realized with both of the languages I had learned poorly in high school and then much better as an adult – is the truest means of communication. As a result of speaking the language right away, students start to *acquire* the language rather than *learn* it as they would other academic subjects.

What's Your Motivation?

Let me ask you something: When you first tried to take on a language you were interested in, did you think something like, *If I learn this language then I'll get this benefit* – some benefit that had nothing to do with intrinsically communicating in that language or getting to know a foreign country's culture or particular people?

'Benefits', like career advancement, impressing people, prestige, passing an exam, crossing something off your bucket list, or other similar reasons, are examples of tangential motivations that have nothing to do with using the language itself.

For so many language learners, that motivation to learn a language is more often than not extrinsic rather than intrinsic. They have no true passion for the language; their only motivation is almost entirely for the side benefits they'd theoretically get

from speaking a new language. Recognizing the bridges to *people* that language-learning opens up as opposed to benefits you may receive someday, is a key ingredient to making language-learning faster, more fun, and more efficient.

The Missing Ingredient: Passion

In this book, I focus on independent learners, rather than those sitting in classrooms. Even if you are taking a classroom course, whether it is taught efficiently or not, you need to be an efficient learner in your free time. When you love learning a language enough to have it fill your free time, then your passion can truly blossom. You can find many new motivations beyond extrinsic ones.

This is not to say that these factors automatically lead to failure; success in your career, for instance, can be a very effective motivating factor. The catch, however, is that these side benefits can't be the main motivators for you to learn a language if you want to learn the language better. You must intrinsically want to speak that language for the language or culture itself.

When I eventually rebooted my attempts to learn Spanish, I put aside these superficial reasons – that someday Spanish might make me impressive or perhaps even more employable. Instead, I started to learn Spanish specifically to use Spanish with other human beings. This made all the difference. I genuinely wanted to communicate in Spanish and make friends through their native tongue. I also wanted to get to know Spain beyond the superficial

experience I had had until then.

I was no longer motivated by benefits I might get months or years in the future, or by the idea that speaking Spanish would ‘make me cool’; I was genuinely passionate about learning the language in order to communicate directly with and understand other people through reading, watching, and listening to Spanish.

So take a moment to ask yourself what your motivation for learning a new language is. Are you learning a language for the ‘wrong’ reasons? Even if you indeed need the benefits that result from learning a language, like advancing your career, can you mentally put aside the long-term benefits and embrace learning the language for the inherent beauty of it and the many doors it will open for you? If you change your thinking in this way, all the side benefits will come, but they will come much faster, because your new focus will make learning a language happen more quickly and efficiently.

The missing ingredient, and the single thing I have found that separates successful language learners from unsuccessful ones, is a passion for the language itself. For successful language learners, acquiring a new language is the reward.

Give Yourself Goose Bumps

So how do you develop this passion, if extrinsic benefits have been clouding your vision?

For a start, seek out films and art and history from the country where your target language is spoken, listen to music in that

language, read books and magazines, find as many sources of audio, video, and text online as you can, and absolutely spend time with native speakers – which you’ll notice I’ve dedicated an entire chapter to, without requiring that you travel to their countries.

Even when I know I am going to a country and have my flight booked, or even when I’m in the country itself, I can get lazy and make very slow progress *unless* I make that language a true part of my life. Doing so lets me grow passionate for the language.

Here’s a good time to tell you about my friend Khatzumoto. After speaking and reading Japanese exclusively for just eighteen months, he could read technical materials and conduct business correspondence and job interviews, all in Japanese. He ultimately landed a job in Japan as a software engineer at a gigantic corporation based in Tokyo.

The amazing thing is that Khatzumoto reached this stage by living his life in Japanese... while in Utah! He filled his world with Japanese *virtually*. He watched anime, read manga, consumed his favourite sci-fi series dubbed in Japanese, and surrounded himself with everything Japanese during every spare moment of his day, even though he was a full-time computer science student. By integrating his target language into his day-to-day living, he gave himself no escape route; he had no choice but to live most of his days in Japanese. As a result, his passion for the language grew. Today, his motto for learning Japanese, or for learning any language, remains ‘You don’t know a language,

you live it. You don't learn a language, you get used to it.'

Nothing creates passion for a language more than using it. Similarly, nothing I say about why you should learn a new language will be more convincing than the first time you understand your first sentence, or the first time you make yourself understood, in a different language. These moments will give you goose bumps, and the immense feeling of satisfaction that comes with them will stay with you forever, as well as thousands of other positive experiences that will follow.

The passion ingredient is what makes learning languages worthwhile; you simply have to live that language in whatever way you can to have your passion sparked. Spend time with natives of the language, listen to streamed radio, watch TV shows and films, or read books in the language, and you will spark your passion, which will motivate much more progress than any side benefit could ever hope to inspire.

How Far Are You Willing to Go?

Moses McCormick is a well-known polyglot who often posts online videos in languages that he's learning. He can communicate, in varying degrees – from knowing a few phrases to being able to converse very well – in about fifty languages. When he was trying to improve his Hmong, an Asian language rarely known to Westerners, he told me the one place where he could consistently practise with native speakers was in online chatrooms. That's all well and good, but one major obstacle,

he said, was that most chatrooms were often filled with men interested only in meeting girls. They weren't interested in continuing a conversation with another guy.

So what did Moses do? He created another screen name and logged in as a woman (a virtual sex change operation, if you will, only taking just an instant and totally reversible). Even when he said he was married, he still found that people were much more eager to chat.

Would you go to such lengths to get some practice time in your target language? If not, then maybe you aren't passionate enough to get the results!

I'm obviously not saying that logging into a chatroom as another gender is a prerequisite for speaking another language, but going to such lengths and being willing to do whatever it takes, no matter what the level of embarrassment, will greatly improve your chances of being successful.

The Right Mentality Will Launch You Forward

Success in language-learning doesn't come from having the perfect circumstances or require a perfect language-learning system. Success relies heavily on facing challenges with the right mentality, having motivation and passion, and sticking to the learning process until you charge through the 'brick wall' in your way.

Someone with mountains of passion will always find a way to progress in his or her target language, even if that person uses

inefficient learning approaches or gets stuck on plateaus for long periods of time. There are successful language learners who learn very differently from me – sometimes slower, sometimes faster, sometimes with better language skills or more languages under their belts. Without fail, however, the one thing we always have in common is passion.

In fact, every language-learning challenge I have ever taken on has had its disappointing failures. I've had moments when I felt like giving up, when I saw others doing much better than I was, and when I had trouble finding people to practise with. I've struggled with conversations that went nowhere, had some rough starts, hit plateaus, forgotten words I should have known, and experienced countless other obstacles that made me feel like a failure, all of which led to many hours of frustration. But I kept going because I *wanted* to keep going. I had a passion for language, and that's how I've been able to learn to speak twelve languages and counting.

Once you learn one new language, you're off and running. Learning the first foreign language gives you the skills to learn a second, and then a third, faster and more efficiently.

In the following pages, I'll show you how to master a new language, with the lessons I've learned and the techniques I've applied while transitioning from a monoglot to a polyglot, plus give you solutions to – or ways around – difficult problems. Believe me, none of it involves re-engineering your DNA to add in the language gene. Instead, this collection of lessons can be

used by any language learner, at any stage or any age, and it includes the same lessons millions of people have already been using on my blog: Fluentin3months.com.

Follow-Up

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Qiān lǐ zhī xíng, shǐ yú zú xià.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

CHINESE PROVERB

The first step in language-learning is to make the commitment to do whatever it takes to make your project a success. If you have the passion to do what it takes, no matter what that may require, then this will ensure that you will, soon, be able to speak your target language.

For more on my story and other thoughts on the importance of passion in language-learning, check out fi3m.com/intro, where there are videos, links to sites of people mentioned in this chapter, and extra updates designed specifically for readers of this introduction.

CHAPTER 1

Destroying Twenty Common Language-learning Myths

Stop making excuses. There's simply no reason you 'can't' learn a new language, and I'll tell you why.

I can confidently say that any person on earth can learn a second language, no matter what their age, intelligence, working or living situation is, or what their past attempts to learn languages have been like. When our mentality, motivation, passion, and attitude are kept strong, we have the momentum required to charge on towards language fluency.

But there's a catch. Even with the best intentions and most enthusiastic starts, we are all bound to run into challenges along the way – sometimes before we even begin or at the very first step of the journey – that prevent us from really starting to learn the language.

The thing is, while these obstacles may feel like brick walls preventing us from continuing on our path towards speaking a language, many of them are actually myths that exist nowhere but in our minds.

The reasons we give for why we can't learn a language often have us second-guessing ourselves, wondering if all this language-learning business isn't for us at all. Many may feel too old, untalented, busy, or located too far from any native speakers. There are a host of reasons, excuses, and discouragements we tell ourselves, have been told by others, or just presume to be true. Well, there is no good excuse for not learning a language and advancing towards fluency.

I have personally talked to thousands of language learners, with millions more reading my blog over the years, and I have heard about pretty much every possible setback learners have had (and I've had quite a few myself!). In this chapter, I share with you the twenty most common retorts people have given me when I tell them they can, and should, learn a second language – some of these you have probably felt yourself – and I'll explain why each one of them is baseless, or at least has a good solution, as well as many examples of people who have overcome this challenge before.

1. Aren't Adult Language Learners at a Disadvantage?

One of the most common reasons many people give for not even trying to learn a language is that, once someone passes a certain age, learning a new language is pointless. This almost feels like common sense. 'Children are better language learners', people often tell me, 'and after a certain age you simply can't learn a language.'

I know I certainly felt too old already, even at the age of twenty-one. However, the idea has never held any water or been demonstrated as true by any serious scientific study. Instead there is only a general trend of adults not learning languages as well as children – but this may be true for reasons totally unrelated to age. Adults struggle with new languages most especially because of a misguided learning approach, their learning environment, or their lack of enthusiasm for the task, all of which can be changed.

Fluency in a second language is definitely possible for *all* ages. The ‘I’m too old’ excuse is one of many self-fulfilling prophecies we’ll be coming across in this chapter. By telling yourself you are too old, you decide not to put in the work and, thus, don’t learn the language. The vicious cycle continues.

The idea that babies have an advantage over us because their brains are hardwired to learn languages while ours aren’t is also not the case. No matter what language you are taking on, you have a vast head start on any baby learning that language, simply because you cannot start from scratch as an adult learner. Starting from scratch is what is truly impossible. There is a huge difference between learning your first language and learning your second. Without the thousands of words that your second language may have in common with your first, a baby has to do much more work, work that we adult learners so merrily take for granted.

It took you years to be able to confidently distinguish between all the sounds in your native language. When you start to learn a

new language as an adult, there are so many learning processes you get to skip that babies have to spend years working on. How about not needing to learn how to distinguish between sounds like an *m* and an *n*? Or all the other sounds that the majority of languages have in common? You also don't have to concern yourself with developing the muscles in your voice box and tongue in order to even *attempt* to make noises with them. Or with training your ear to be able to distinguish between male and female voices, or between the particular voices of family members and friends, not just other noises in your environment.

Adult language learners also have the advantage of already having been exposed to years of context in universal human interaction, which indicates when someone is angry, shouting, or asking a question, or the many other aspects of international body language, intonation, and speech volume. One study at the University of California, Los Angeles, actually found that an incredible 93 percent of communication of emotions is nonverbal. And a majority of nonverbal communication is universal. A laugh is a laugh, across the world.

While it's possible that some of these communication cues are built into our DNA to be recognized automatically, babies still need to develop them. They have all this extra work ahead of them, learning how to communicate in general terms before they can even begin to incorporate specific language blocks like vocabulary and grammar.

But a language is not just vocabulary and grammar; it's an

entire spectrum of communication, from the clothes we wear to our posture, hand gestures, personal space, pauses, volume, intonation, and a host of other verbal and nonverbal cues, most of which are universal among modern cultures. (There are definitely exceptions, but if you compare them to the number of similarities, the latter will greatly outnumber the former.)

An infant picks all of this up over many years before he or she can adequately communicate with adults and other children. This means we adults have much more time and energy to focus on the much smaller aspects of communication, of how words go together. Babies have it hard, and young children still need serious tweaking, even at the age of six or so. This is why it takes years before children can be considered good speakers. But this shouldn't be the case for us. When it comes to language-learning, an adult can overtake a baby any day because an adult has much less work to do.

Even if you're with me so far, you may still say that adults are definitely worse off than preteens and early teenagers, who already speak one language well. You might think that their brains are 'fresher' or process new information more quickly than ours. Why bother competing with that?

This sounds logical enough, but research has shown that it's not true. A study by the University of Haifa in Israel examined how well different age groups – eight-year-olds, twelve-year-olds, and adults – picked up unexplained grammar rules. The study revealed that the 'adults were consistently better

in everything we measured’.*

Adults are not *worse* language learners, but *different* language learners. The real problem with adult language learners is the environment in which we try to learn languages. As mentioned in the introduction, a traditional academic environment is already not efficient for children, but this is even more true for adults. If an adult makes a mistake, other adults are less likely to correct that person because they don't want to insult him or her, but the teacher – student dynamic with children makes this less of a problem.

A child learning a new language after a certain age can also find it quite hard if the material is presented too academically. In their spare time, children are more likely to want to play video games or enjoy activities not related to language-learning. We can send them to an immersion school, where they can at least play games with other students in the right language, but they may not want to be there and are often just going because their parents have sent them. Their own rebellious nature may get the better of them and, even in an immersion environment, if they don't want to learn, they won't.

Adults, on the other hand, can actively decide to learn a language and justify doing so with many more reasons than a child may come up with, including a greater degree of passion. They can go out of their way to arrange to meet up with people to practise the language. Adults have many more options for language-learning strategies, and can control their free time more

easily than children can. Being the master of your own destiny has its perks! Resourceful and clever adults can even pick up a helpful book on the topic or read blog posts written by a charming Irish polyglot, for instance.

Adults are also more analytical than children. This creates different sets of advantages for both. Children will indeed be more likely to ‘pick up’ a language with less conscious effort, but this does not mean they are better at it. Adults who put in a conscious effort can keep up at the same rate of progress, even if making that effort is a little more exhausting.

While I prefer to leave grammar aside (more on that later) until I can converse pretty well in a language, when I do get to it, I process the rules and understand the logic behind them much better than a child ever would. Children are better at absorbing a language naturally, but adults do that *and* combine it with a greater capacity to reason why one sentence works one way over another way.

Because of all this – plus implementing a human-centred learning approach – I feel I am a much better language learner now, in my thirties, than I ever was as an eight-, twelve-, sixteen-, or even twenty-year-old. I am getting better at learning languages with age, not worse!

What about when you get much older? I have come across people in their fifties, sixties, seventies, and even older starting with their *first* foreign language and succeeding. I regularly receive e-mails and comments on my blog from learners of these

ages who are making fantastic progress in their target languages.

Ultimately, I don't want to argue that adults are *better* language learners than children, because this has the danger of discouraging those who want their children to do better. My point is that we all have our advantages, and it is much more practical to look at what those advantages are than to dwell on and exaggerate any challenges either group has.

It's never too late for an adult of any age to learn a new language.

The true advantage children have over adults is that they are naturally less afraid to make mistakes. Rather than feel this is a stamp for life, we should learn from children. Try to enjoy the language-learning process and don't be afraid of a little embarrassment. Laugh at your mistakes and have fun with it, instead of being way too grown up about it or taking every minor slipup so seriously. In this sense, we can definitely learn from children!

Children tend to absorb their first few thousand words entirely by human interaction, whereas adults, learning another language, may learn these from textbooks. Learning exactly like a baby is not wise, but we can aim to emulate many of the aspects of a child's learning environment that encourage real communication.

Also, keep in mind that babies and young children effectively have full-time teachers – their parents – who laugh at their mistakes (thinking they are *cute*), have almost infinite patience, and are overjoyed at every success. Imagine if an adult could

find a native speaker so motivated to help! These are things you can seek to emulate in your own environment, such as spending more time with native speakers motivated to help you. These are not inherent advantages built into children, but aspects of their environments from which you can draw inspiration.

2. I Don't Have the Language Gene

Lack of talent! Oh, if only I had a penny for every time I heard *this!* Here's a self-fulfilling prophecy if ever there was one.

When I was in school, I repeated to myself, *I don't have the language gene*. Since I didn't have it, I didn't put in the work to really learn German; and since I didn't put in the work, I barely passed my exams and ultimately didn't speak German after five years of lessons in the language. Therefore, I didn't have the language gene.

Do you see a problem with my circular logic here?

There is absolutely no reason to believe in a 'language gene', as if the ability to learn a foreign language is encoded in your genome at conception. The truth is that if a multilingual gene really exists, we must all be born with it. Most of the planet actually speaks *more* than one language. Many places in the West have a huge number of inhabitants who speak two languages, like Quebec, Catalonia, and Switzerland, to name just three. In China, people switch between distinct varieties of Chinese such as Mandarin and Cantonese with ease, and it's quite common in India to come across someone who can converse in five different

languages.

In Luxembourg, the language of instruction changes every few years. As a result, children come out of school fluent in French, German, and Luxembourgish. If any of us had been brought up in that environment, we would have learned the same languages just as well, regardless of our genetics.

If you happen to be British, don't forget that we are genetically about the same as any multilingual European and it's more a question of culture than ability that has tended to be a barrier in our attitude to language-learning up to now. *Somewhere* in your family tree someone very likely communicated in more than one language. Pulling the genetics card when this is the case in your own family tree is quite silly.

The fact that a monolingual culture breeds monolinguals doesn't say anything about an individual's inherent potential. When it comes to language-learning, there is no room for doubt: you decide your own success. Do the necessary work to learn a language, and you'll catch up with – and even overtake – the 'naturally talented'.

3. I Don't Have the Time

It's all well and good for those with no full-time job or responsibilities to go gallivanting around the world and spend all day studying languages, but some of us have to *work*.

Definitely a fair retort, if it were true that successful language learners were only those who practise language-learning full-

time. But this is very far from what actually happens. If anything, those doing it full-time are a rarity, and pretty much all successful language learners I have met have done it while also working a full-time job, completing their undergraduate studies, helping to raise a family, taking care of loved ones, or juggling a host of other responsibilities.

For instance, the second foreign language I seriously took the time to learn was Italian. And though I did move to Italy while I was learning the language (though you really don't have to, as I'll discuss later), the job I took in Rome required me to work more than sixty hours a week, so I know better than most what it's like to have a *really* demanding schedule and still find a way to make language-learning work.

It's not a question of having enough time. I've seen more cases than I care to list of people who had all day, every day, for many months to learn a language but squandered that time. It's all about *making* time. Even though I only had every other evening free in Rome, I used that tiny amount of time to focus on improving my skills in Italian. And while working as a receptionist at an international youth hostel, I often studied during the odd quiet moment when nobody was around.

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