

Newsletter

Summer/Fall 2018

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader:

The sun is finally out, and we're as excited to enjoy the nice weather as we are to share our most recent newsletter with you. In this issue, "Gaining and maintaining another language," Bilingualism Matters celebrates language learning at various stages of life. If you're in the mood for some outdoor reading while the weather is nice, Lindsey Chandler interviews David Pencek and colleagues at the Schlow Regional Library (that's sch like in school) to learn more about the resources related to language learning at the library. David also tells us about the outreach activities that community members can take advantage of, like World Stories Alive, a multilingual story time that is regularly offered to children in State College and the surrounding area.

If your child has the opportunity to be exposed to more than one language at home, you might be concerned about what will happen to the home language (also known as the heritage language) when they start school and start speaking English more often. Nora Vosburg (a recent mother of an emergent bilingual boy) and Mike Johns discuss language learning in situations like these, making important distinctions between heritage language learning and the kind of classroom-



BILINGUALISM MATTERS at PENN STATE

based foreign language learning that is common in high schools and colleges. They also present several resources for speakers of heritage languages in the State College area, so be sure to check them out over the coming months!

For those of you whose summer goal is to take steps toward mastering a new language, Manuel Pulido offers some tips for making the most of technology for language learning, including several smartphone apps that are great tools for you or your children to get some exposure to a new language. Whether you're starting a new language or reinforcing an existing one, it's important to understand that there's a lot of misconceptions out there about language learning. Amy Lebkuecher uses linguistic research to dispel some of the common myths about learning a second language as an adult. Spoiler alert: you can!

We hope you enjoy this issue of our newsletter, and we look forward to sharing more with you soon.

Warm regards in warmer months,

The Editors (Amy, Grant, Lena, Lindsey, Mike, Manuel, and Nora)



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Making the Most of Technology for Second Language Learning

By Manuel Pulido

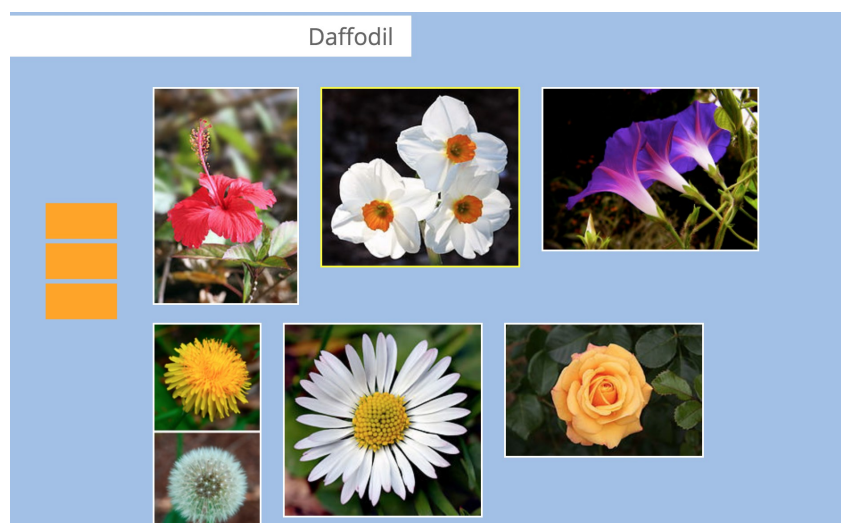
Whether you are currently learning a language, are the parent of a foreign language learner, or you are simply thinking of brushing up your L2/L3/Ln, you are surely aware that practice is a key component of language acquisition. You may also be aware that the more input you are exposed to the better. But is there an easy way to accomplish all of this? Here are some useful apps and resources that may help, just a few taps away on your smartphone screen.

Words, words, words. Research shows that people need to be exposed to new words multiple times in order to learn them (and spacing repetition is also important [1, 2]), so you will need to make sure you know where to find those new words. Websites like quizlet.com and flashcardstash.com let you not just create your own lists, but also use those created by others. They also let you practice using a variety of formats and games.

Read real texts more easily. A common frustration for any non-proficient reader is that of encountering a steady flow of indecipherable words as they read in another language. Lingro.com is a free tool that helps make reading an easier task. Simply insert a web address you would like to read, and you can click on any word in text to see its meaning in any of the 11 languages available.

Exposure to real-world language for learners: While texts in learner-oriented materials are helpful, the content is rarely up to date or may not be very appealing to one's particular interests. Some news agencies provide text and audio versions of their content adapted for learners, such as Voice of America for learners of English (learningenglish.voanews.com/), or the EFE agency for Spanish (practicaespanol.com).

Appealing apps for children. To make practice more appealing, some apps include stories and games popular among younger learners, and are available for several languages and operating systems. Some popular ones are Gus on the Go, Pacca Alpaca, Teach Kids Languages, and Studycat.



Websites like flashcardstash.com allow learners to practice through games, such as the word-picture matching game in this photo

[1] Ausubel, D. P., & Youssef, M. (1965). The effect of spaced repetition on meaningful retention. *Journal of General Psychology*, 73, 147-50.

[2] Karpicke, J. D., & Roediger, H. L. (2007). "Expanding Retrieval Practice Promotes Short-Term Retention, but Equally Spaced Retrieval Enhances Long-Term Retention". *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 33(4), 704-719.

Things to Keep in Mind When Learning a Second Language

By Amy Lebkuecher

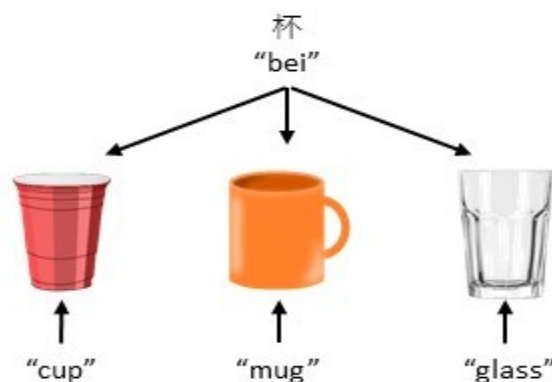
Learning a second language is just a matter of learning new labels for the same words that you already know in your native language, right? Not quite! There are some key differences between different languages in terms of grammar and the way that words are used. Research on language learning has debunked some common misconceptions about learning a second language as an adult. Knowing about findings from research in language science may help you become a more informed and efficient second language learner.

Myth: It is impossible to become fluent in a second language as an adult

Though it is likely that you won't sound exactly like a native speaker, with a lot of practice (including conversations with experienced speakers) it is possible to become fluent enough to converse easily, read books and watch movies in your second language. Although research does suggest that learning a language is easier if you begin as a child, it is certainly not impossible to learn a second language if you begin as an adult [1]. One study found that the main determining factor of a speaker's second language proficiency (other than the age when they started learning) was how frequently they used their second language [2]. The findings from this study suggest that the key to achieving native-like levels of proficiency in a second language is, unsurprisingly, using that second language.

Myth: Every word in your native language has an exact translation in other languages

While we are often taught that a word from a foreign language is an exact translation of a word in our native language (e.g., *Hund* is the German translation equivalent of *dog* in English), there can sometimes be subtle differences in the way that words are used in different languages. The Portuguese word *saudade* does not directly translate into English, but it means something akin to "the feeling of being away from the homeland" [3]. You may think that these differences only exist for obscure words referring to complex ideas like *saudade*, but there are also variations in the way that different languages use words to describe ordinary objects. For example, the word for *cup* in Mandarin Chinese, 杯 (pronounced *bei*), refers to a wider range of items than the English word *cup* [4]. Items that English speakers would separate into the categories *cup*, *mug* and *glass* would all be referred to using the same word, 杯, by Mandarin speakers.



Myth: Grammar in other languages is a lot like grammar in your native language

Similar to word meaning, grammars vary largely between different languages. In many foreign languages, words and phrases take on different forms depending on their role in a sentence. For example, in German the phrase "the dog" is translated to "*der Hund*" in the sentence "The dog chased the boy". On the other hand, "the dog" is translated to "*den Hund*" in the sentence "The boy chased the dog". This difference in translation occurs because the dog is playing a different grammatical role in each sentence: it's either being chased (the object), or chasing someone (the subject). Differences like this suggest that people who switch back and forth between languages are actually doing quite a bit of mental juggling!

Overall, when learning a second language, it is important to gain experience in whatever way you can (e.g. by talking to native speakers, taking foreign language classes, reading books, watching movies, etc.). Given all the ways that word meanings and grammar rules can vary across languages, just the practice of trying to learn a new language can provide great exercise for your mind!

[1] Marinova-Todd, S. H., Marshall, D. B., & Snow, C. E. (2000). Three misconceptions about age and L2 learning. *TESOL quarterly*, 34(1), 9-34.

[2] Major, C.A. (2014). The Effect of Age on Second Language Acquisition in Older Adults. *All Theses and Dissertations*. 3973. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/3973>

[3] Priberam Informática, S.A. "Significado / definição de saudade no Dicionário Priberam da Língua Portuguesa".

[4] Malt, B. C., & Lebkuecher, A. L. (2017). Representation and process in bilingual lexical interaction. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 20(5), 867 - 885.

Heritage Language Education

By Mike Johns and Nora Vosburg

The United States is rich with different languages and cultures. In 2011, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated a total of 9 million children out of 60 million U.S. Americans who speak a different language than English at home [1]. These speakers are called heritage speakers. In this article, we provide short answers to some common questions about heritage speakers.



Image: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/departmentofed/9599310777/in/photostream/>

1. What is a heritage language?

A heritage language (HL) is one which is spoken at home, usually in family or other close-knit contexts, and which differs from the dominant language of the broader (often national) community. Heritage speakers represent a large portion of the U.S. population, from a Spanish-speaking child in Miami, raised speaking Spanish at home and English at school, to an elderly German speaker in rural Kansas who rarely speaks his first language, and many more. This broad definition of heritage speakers reflects the diversity of people who live with more than one language.

2. Do heritage speakers need to abandon their language to learn English well?

The simple answer is no. Learning a HL in the home is accompanied with the development of other skills, such as classifying objects (e.g. that apples and bananas are fruits, and that one apple may be green and big, and another red and small), and learning to organize events (e.g. that you have to put water into the tub before taking a bath). Many parents fear that using the HL in the home will lead to delays and deficits in learning, but research has consistently shown that there is no such disadvantage in typical children's development [2]. The skills acquired when learning the first language can be transferred when learning the second, and using two languages regularly may even be advantageous both academically and cognitively [3].

3. How is foreign language education different from HL education?

When students learn a foreign language, they often start from scratch: They have no prior knowledge of the language, nor any familial or cultural connection to it. They must learn to speak, read, write, and understand it. However, heritage speakers often come into the classroom already speaking the language, and may or may not be able to read and write in it. Likewise, they may know a dialect of the HL that differs from the one typically taught in foreign language classrooms. HL students often come to class with variable knowledge in their HL, and they can be encouraged to draw on personal and cultural experiences to build vocabulary, literacy, and writing skills [4].

4. What HL learning resources are available outside the classroom?

Perhaps one of the most important goals of HL programs is to foster lifelong bilingualism. Kagan (2005) emphasizes the importance of the triad of family, community, and formal education to maintain a HL [4]. Community groups are therefore especially important for heritage language maintenance. Examples of such groups are the Happy Valley Chinese School here in State College (happyvalleychineseschool.org), and the Latino Hispanic American Community Center in Harrisburg, PA, which serves a prominent resource for heritage speakers of Spanish in central PA (visit lhacc.org).

For more information and resources on HL learning, visit:
 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services educational program Headstart: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/importance-home-language-series>
 Center for Applied Linguistics: <http://www.cal.org/heritage/research/faqs.html>
 National Heritage Language Resource Center: <http://international.ucla.edu/NHLRC/home>

[1] U.S. Census from 2011: <https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-22.pdf>

[2] Baker, C. (2006). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, p. 238-242.

[3] Blom, E., Küntay, A. C., Messer, M., Verhagen, J., & Leseman, P. (2014). The benefits of being bilingual: Working memory in bilingual Turkish-Dutch children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 128, 105-119.

[4] Kagan, O. (2005). In Support of a Proficiency-based Definition of Heritage Language Learners: The Case of Russian, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 8:2-3, 213-221, DOI: 10.1080/13670050508668608

1. What types of bi-/multilingual resources are available to children/adults/families who visit Schlow Library?

Schlow collects books, movies, and educational material to aid in the mastery of multiple languages, including media to support learning English as a second language. We offer excellent online resources as well: Muzzy Online for children or beginners is available in nine languages, including English, and we also have workbooks and flashcards. In addition, Transparent Language includes more than 80 languages with fantastic ESL instruction.

2. How does Schlow Library engage in bi-/multilingual community events or outreach?

Schlow is known for our World Stories Alive program where children can experience songs, stories, and art in different languages. Our director, Cathi Alloway, also is on the board of the Mid-State Literacy council, a nonprofit that supports literacy development in our community. We also partner with Global Connections to bring programming and welcome their tutors on the 2nd floor.

3. What do you enjoy most about outreach in the bi-/multilingual community?

The Centre Region is wonderful in its diversity and inclusivity. The library loves that we are able to offer resources and support for incoming families and students.

The Schlow Centre Region Library hosts World Series Alive, an event co-sponsored by the Center for Global Studies, Global Connections, and Bilingualism Matters at Penn State, featuring stories, songs, and fun projects for kids, conducted in multiple languages.

Bilingualism Matters

Featured Partner:

Schlow Library

Schlow Centre Region Library has served our local area for 61 years. It is home to more than 150,000 items, including books and magazines, eBooks, DVDs, video games, music, and audiobooks. As many as 199 library items can be checked out on an account at one time! They also host author events, have tech classes, clubs, and a variety of children's programs, and more.

We would like to thank Paula Bannon, Maria Burchill, and David Pencek for answering our questions!

Upcoming Events

Our outreach events are a wonderful time to connect with the surrounding community, families, and students at Penn State. We participate in many events throughout the year, always with games and demonstrations in tow. At family events, we have kid-friendly activities like crafting and language games. We hope to see you at our next event!



Bilingualism Matters at LitFest 2018 at the Mount Nittany Elementary School (left), and at ESL Summer Fun Night for State College Area School District ESL teachers and families (right).



Join us in the fall semester for **World Stories Alive**, a series focused on stories and songs from many different languages! Visit our website (pg. 6) for more information!

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