

《学习外语的7个错误观念》

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There are over 6,000 languages in the world. Some are more important than others, not better or more advanced, just more important. Why? Because they are spoken by more people, in more countries. That does not mean that Finnish is not important to the Finns, and Maori is not important to the Maoris. It is just that these languages are not so important to the rest of us.

世界上的语言超过6000种，其中有些更重要些，有些则不是很重要。这不是说那些重要的就是更好的或者更高级的语言，而是因为使用者更多、分布也更广。芬兰语对芬兰人很重要，毛利语对毛利人也很重要，但对于其他人来说就不那么重要了。



[Photo/Pexels]

On the other hand, Mandarin Chinese is spoken by over one billion people. Chinese origin words account for 60% of Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese vocabulary. Knowing Chinese will help you learn these languages

too. It helped me. Chinese culture has influenced the world for thousands of years with its art, philosophy, technology, food, medicine and performing arts. Today China ' s economy is booming. Chinese seems well worth learning.

而汉语普通话的使用者有十多亿，而且日语、韩语、越南语中有60%的词汇都来源于汉语，掌握了汉语，学习这些语言会容易许多，这是我的亲身体验。中国文化——包括艺术、哲学、技术、饮食、医药以及表演艺术等——几千年来不断影响着世界，如今中国经济又日益强大，所以汉语是值得好好学习的。

Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese are essentially dialects of the same language. If you learn one, you can learn the others. I did. If you learn Spanish, you open the door to the culture, music, history and possible business dealings with 800 million people in 60 countries, including the US and Canada.

西班牙语、法语、意大利语和葡萄牙语其实就是一种语言的不同方言。学会了一种，就能学会其他几种。我就是这样。如果你学会了西班牙语，你就打开了一扇通向8亿人的大门，包括他们的文化、历史、音乐，以及同他们做生意的机会。这些人分布在60多个国家，包括美国和加拿大。

If you get ambitious you could try Russian, as I have been doing for the last two years. once you have Russian you can probably communicate with other Slav speakers.

如果抱负够大，你可以尝试一下俄语。过去的两年里，我自己就在学习这门语言。一旦学会了俄语，不仅可以和俄国人交流，甚至可以和其他斯拉夫语系的人沟通。

But hold it here! Before getting carried away, let ' s look at the present situation of language teaching. According to one Canadian survey, after 12 years of daily French classes, only one high school graduate out of 147 (0.68%) achieved " intermediate " proficiency. Another survey of immigrants learning English in the US showed that " classroom instructional hours " had little impact on progress.

不过你先别激动，让我们先看看语言教学的现状再说。根据一项加拿大的调查，在课堂上日复一日地学了12年法语后，每147名中学毕业生中只有一名能达到中等熟练水平，比例是0.68%。根据另一项针对美国入境移民的调查，课堂英语教学对他们的英语水平几乎没有什么提高。

If we cannot teach our own official languages in North America, what hope is there for other languages like Chinese or Spanish, let alone Russian, Arabic or Hindi?

如果我们在自己的国家教自己的官方语言都如此失败，那我们还怎能教别人学会汉语、西班牙语等其他语言呢？更别说俄语和印度语了！

As a speaker of 10 languages I know the benefits of speaking more than one language. We simply have to change the way we go about teaching languages. To start with we need to dispel seven common misconceptions about language learning.

我能说10种语言，我知道会说外语的好处。我们需要做的是改变传统的语言教学方式。首先，我们要破除关于语言学习的7个错误观念。

1. Language learning is difficult

外语很难学

It is only difficult to learn a language if you don't want to. Learning a language takes time, but is not difficult. You mostly need to listen and read. Believe me, it is that simple. I have done it many times. Soon you feel the satisfaction of understanding another language. Before you know it you start speaking. It is the way languages are usually taught that makes language learning hard to like.

如果你不想学，那外语的确很难学。学语言要花时间，但并不难。你要做的主要就是听和读。相信我，就这么简单，我就是这么学的。只要不断地听和读，很快就能理解你所学的外语了，而且不知不觉中你就会说了。之所以很多人不喜欢外语学习，是因为我们的教法不对。

2. You have to have a gift for learning languages

学语言必须要有天赋

No you don't. Anyone who wants to, can learn. In Sweden and Holland most people speak more than one language. They can't just all be gifted at languages. Foreign athletes in North America usually learn to speak English faster than people in more formal learning environments. In language learning it is attitude, not aptitude, that determines success.

不对。不管是谁，只要想学，就能学会。在荷兰和瑞典，很多人都会一种以上的语言。他们不可能都有语言天赋。北美的外国运动员学会说英语的速度往往快于那些在正规的教学环境中学习英语的人。学习外语，重要的是态度，而不是能力。

3. You have to live where the language is spoken

必须住在英语国家才能学会英语

Some immigrants to North America never learn to speak more than halting English. Yet we meet people in other countries who speak flawless English. In 1968, I learned to speak Mandarin fluently while living in Hong Kong, where few people spoke it. With the Internet, language content is available to anyone with a computer, and you can download it to your iPod and listen. Where you live is not an obstacle.

实际上，一些来到北美的移民直到最后也只会说磕磕巴巴的英语。但在其他国家生活的一些人却能把英语说得很流利。1968年我住在香港时学会了流利的普通话，虽然那里几乎没人说普通话。现在有了互联网，只要有台电脑，任何人都可以接触到语言材料，还可以下载到你的ipod里听。所以，住在哪里已经不是障碍了。

4. only children can learn to speak another language well

只有孩子才能学好外语

Recent brain research has demonstrated that our brains remain plastic well into old age. Adults who lose their eyesight **have** to learn a new language, braille, for example. Adults have a wide vocabulary **in their own** language and are better language learners than children. I have learned 4 languages since the age of 55. Adults only need the child's willingness to experiment and **desire** to communicate, without the fear of ridicule.

最近的研究表明，人类大脑的可塑性能一直保持到老年。很多成年人在失明后能学会盲文就是一个例子。成年人掌握了大量的本族语词汇，学外语比儿童更有优势。拿我自己来说，从55岁开始，我已经学会了4种语言。成年人需要做的只是像孩子那样乐于尝试，渴望交流，并且不怕被嘲笑。

5. To learn a language you need formal classroom instruction

只有通过正规的课堂教学才能学会外语

This is the crux of the problem. Classrooms may be economical to run and a great place to meet others. They have the weight of history and tradition behind them. Unfortunately, a classroom is an inefficient place to learn a language. The more students in the class, the more inefficient it is. Languages cannot be taught, they can only be learned. Theoretical grammatical explanations are hard to understand, hard to remember, and even harder to use. Drills and exercises are annoying to most people. A majority of school kids graduate unable to communicate in languages that they study for 10 or more years.

这是问题的关键。课堂教学比较经济，通过课堂学习还可以结交很多人，而且这种教学方式历史悠久，已经成为传统。但对语言学习来说，这却是一种低效的方式，而且班里的人数越多，就越低效。语言不是教会的，而是学会的。语法讲解让人难以理解，难以记住，更难以运用，而句型练习和课后练习则枯燥无味、令人生厌。结果是，很多学生在学习了10年甚至更长时间的外语后，还是不能用它进行交际。

6. You need to speak in order to learn (and I have nobody to speak to)

必须通过说才能学会外语，（没人跟我说，所以我学不会）

Speaking the language is usually the goal of language learning, but speaking can wait. once you have acquired the language, you will find the opportunity to speak. When you are learning the language it is more important to listen. Trying to just pick up a few “handy” phrases to say is likely to just get you into trouble. If you meet a native speaker, you will inevitably spend most of your time listening unless you already know the language. You do not need to speak in order to learn, you need to learn in order to speak.

能说外语一般是外语学习的目标，但“说外语”可以先等一等。一旦你学会了一门外语，自然会有说的机会。但在这之前，更重要的是听，而不是说。记住几个常用的句子然后就去说往往会让你陷入麻烦。如果你遇到一个外国人，你将主要是听对方说，这是难免的事，除非你已经学会了对方的语言。总之，不必为了学而去刻意说外语，而应该为了会说去学外语。

7. I would love to learn but I don't have the time

我很想学外语，但没时间

How about the time you spend waiting in line, commuting, doing things around the house, going for a walk? Why not use that time to listen to a language on your iPod? once you get started, even 10 or 15 minutes a day will soon grow to 30 minutes a day, or one hour. If you believe you will achieve significant results, and if you enjoy doing it, as I do, you will find the time.

那么在排队、坐车、做家务或者散步的时候你有时间吗？为什么不在这些时候用你的i pod听听外语呢？开始的时候，即便你每天只能听10或15分钟也没关系，不久后你自然就能延长到30分钟甚至一个小时。只要有信心，你就能获得巨大的进步，只要你喜欢这样做——像我这样，你自然就能够找到学习的时间。

