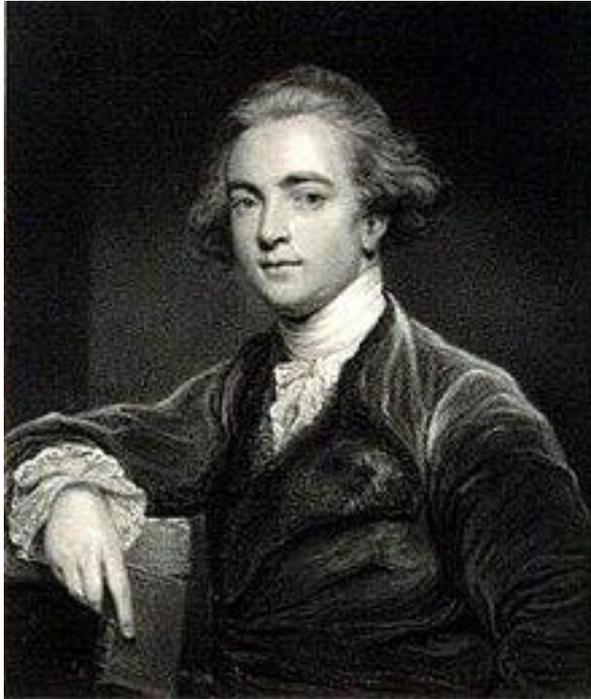


Hyper polyglots: what can they teach us?

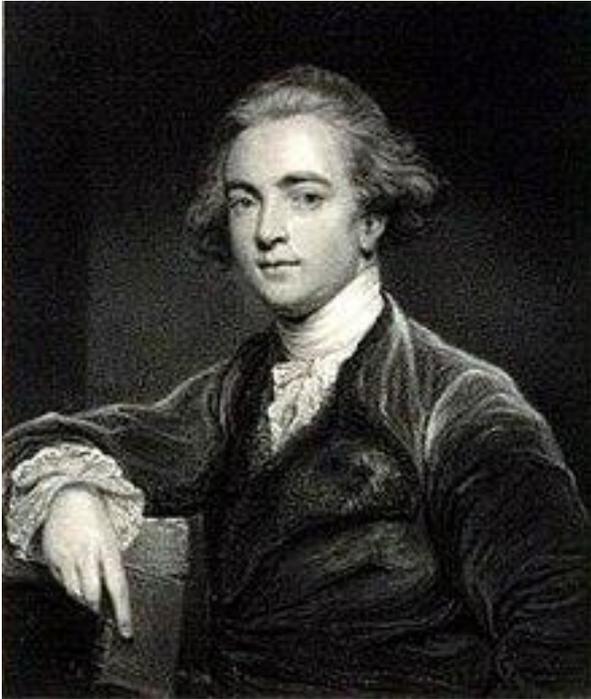
Scott Thornbury

IH Barcelona Conference

February 2018

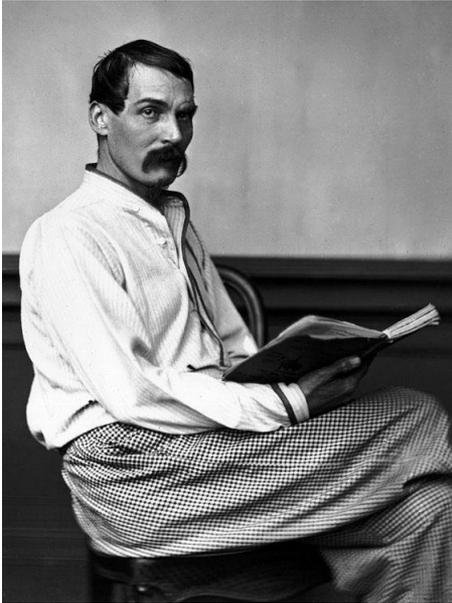


Sir William Jones: (1746 – 1794) “The young William Jones was a linguistic prodigy, who in addition to his native languages English and Welsh, learned Greek, Latin, Persian, Arabic, Hebrew and the basics of Chinese writing at an early age...”



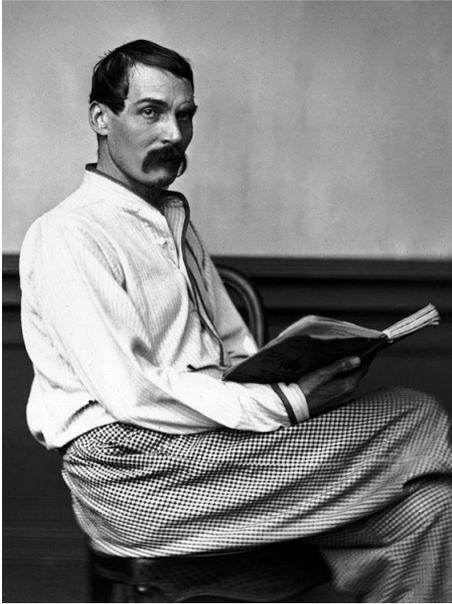
“By the end of his life he knew eight languages with critical thoroughness, was fluent in a further eight, with a dictionary at hand, and had a fair competence in another twelve.”

(Wikipedia)



Sir Richard Burton (1821 – 1890): famous for “his extraordinary knowledge of languages and cultures. According to one count, he spoke 29 European, Asian and African languages.”

(Wikipedia)



“Whenever I conversed with anybody in a language I was learning, I took the trouble to repeat their words inaudibly after them, and so to learn the trick of pronunciation and emphasis.”



Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890): “he could converse in English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Polish, Italian, Greek, Latin, Russian, Arabic, and Turkish as well as German.”

(Wikipedia)



“Of the Greek grammar I learned only the declensions and the verbs, and never lost my precious time in studying its rules.”



Ármin Vámbéry (1832 – 1913) “By the age of sixteen, he had a good knowledge of Hungarian, Latin, French, and German. He was also rapidly acquiring English, the Scandinavian languages, Russian, Serbian, and naturally other Slavic languages.”



“By the age of twenty, Vámbéry had learned enough Ottoman Turkish to enable him to go ... to Istanbul and establish himself as a private tutor of European languages.”

(Wikipedia)



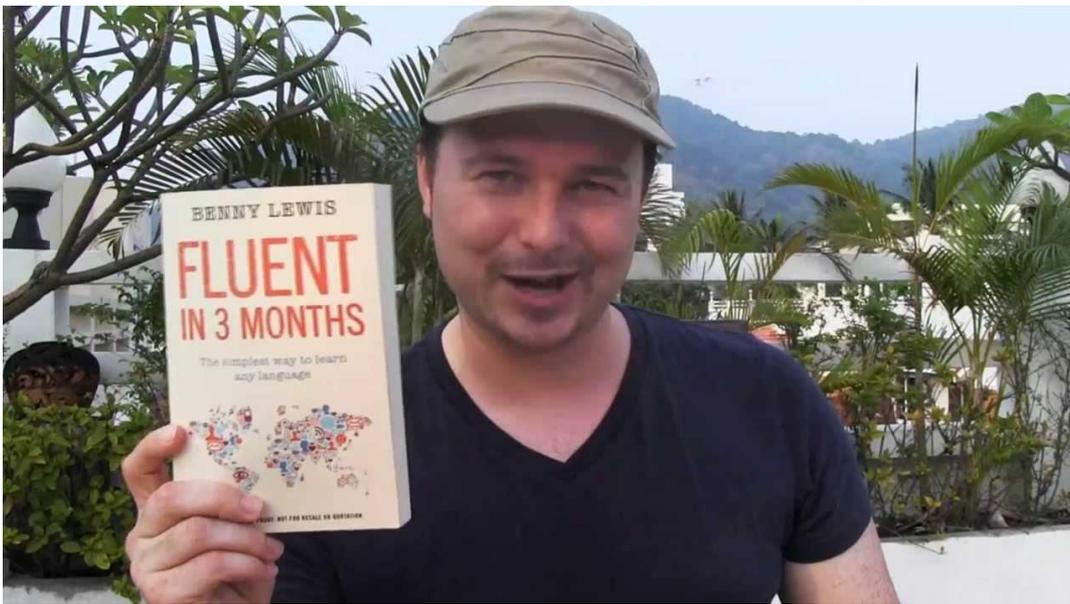
“I always took special delight in memorizing. [...] When I was able to increase the number of words which I could master in one day from ten to sixty and even to a hundred, my exultation knew no bounds. [...] I never omitted to read out loud and to hold conversations with myself in the languages I was learning.”

Kató Lomb

1909- 2003

A Hungarian interpreter, translator and one of the first simultaneous interpreters in the world. ... Native in Hungarian, she was able to interpret fluently in nine or ten languages (in four of them even without preparation), and she translated technical literature and read belles-lettres in six languages. She was able to understand journalism in further eleven languages.

[Wikipedia]



Benny Lewis:

Languages: English (native), Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Mandarin, Dutch, American Sign Language.

<https://fi3mplus.com/>



Luca Lampariello

Languages: Italian (native), English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese and Romanian.

<http://www.thepolyglotdream.com/>



Lindsay

Languages: English (native), Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch and Mandarin.

<http://www.lindsaydoeslanguages.com/>

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Richard Simcott

Languages: English (native), French, Spanish, Welsh, German, Macedonian, Swedish, Italian, Serbian/Bosnian/Croatian, Portuguese, Czech, Catalan, Russian, Dutch, Romanian and Albanian.

<http://speakingfluently.com/>



Steve Kaufmann

Languages: English (native), French, Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish, Swedish, German, Italian , Cantonese, Russian, Portuguese and Czech.

<https://blog.thelinguist.com/>



Donovan Nagel

Languages: English (native), Egyptian Arabic, MSA, Korean, Russian, Irish, Ancient Hebrew and Greek.

<https://www.mezzoguild.com/>



Gabriel Wyner

Languages: German, Italian, French,
Russian, Hungarian and Japanese.

<https://fluent-forever.com/>



Professor Alexander Arguelles

Alexander Arguelles

Languages:

English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Old Norse, Middle High German, Old French, Latin , Middle English , Middle Dutch, Old Occitan, Old Swedish , Portuguese , Catalan, Norwegian (NN), Norwegian (BM), Danish, Modern Provençal, Esperanto, Afrikaans, Icelandic, Russian, Arabic MSA, Korean , Persian, Modern Greek, Frisian, Old English, Old High German , Romanian, Gothic, Ancient Greek, Irish Gaelic, Hindi, Sanskrit.....

<http://www.foreignlanguageexpertise.com/>

What characteristics do their 'methods' share? They are

- nativist
- eclectic
- experiential
- fluency-oriented
- socially-constructed
- goal-oriented
- intensive
- disciplined
- resourceful and strategic

Nativist

‘As a result of speaking the language right away, students start to *acquire* the language rather than *learn* it.’ (Benny Lewis)

‘How did you learn your first language? You heard it all the time, in many situations. You have to do the same with a new language.’ (Steve Kaufmann)

‘Don’t translate ... Not only can a beginning student skip translating, but it [is] an essential step in learning how to think in a foreign language.’
(Gabriel Wyner)

‘When you speak from the start, you will make many, many mistakes, but also come to realize that these mistakes provide valuable opportunities for growth, correction, and experimentation in language use.’ (Luke Lampariello)

Eclectic

There are so many courses and so many ideas. Who is right?

All of them and none of them. What works for Peter doesn't work for Jane. We are all unique and we remember things differently. You need to figure first of all what helps you remember best. (Richard Simcott)

Experiential

‘The way to learn a language is to live it.’ (Benny Lewis)

‘Native like fluency is achieved by LIVING THROUGH A LANGUAGE as much as possible. For example, I’ve never lived IN an English speaking country however I’ve lived a big chunk of my life THROUGH English with friends.’ (Luke Lampariello)

‘You didn’t become a fluent speaker of your own language by studying its grammar.’ (Donovan Nagel)

Fluency-oriented

‘To hell with speaking perfectly – mistakes help communication flow!’ (Benny Lewis)

‘Create an environment in which you can speak your target language as much as possible.’ (Gabriel Wyner)

‘People who learn lots of languages get good at “faking it”. No, that doesn’t mean that they are fakes. It simply means that they can get by on far less more easily than someone going at their first language over a longer period of time.’ ... ‘We learn to be fluent with what we’ve got.’ (Richard Simcott)

Socially-oriented

‘It’s a common truth by now that we need human interaction to communicate well in a language’
(Lindsay)

Always remember that if you practice regularly with real people, and get and incorporate the feedback they give you, you will inevitably improve. (Luke Lampariello)

‘We keep trying to find language solutions through courses, software, apps, flights abroad, books, schools, and a host of other methods, some of which can be useful, but these are nothing but accessories to the true core of language-learning: the people we speak with and hear.’ (Benny Lewis)

‘Get out there and talk to people. Even if you only know two words – hello and goodbye – it’s enough to get you started.’ (Donovan Nagel)

Goal-oriented

‘Set goals and measure your results!’ (Steve Kaufmann)

‘Give yourself realistic goals to keep yourself motivated!’ (Richard Simcott)

‘When I start learning a new language my goal is to first develop a solid language core, which is a combination of essential vocabulary and phrases and the ability to assemble the different pieces of the language together.’ (Luke Lampariello)

Intensive

‘To be fluent and to stand up to an exam scenario (written and oral), as I did in German after three months, takes a LOT of work. In fact, I was studying for 8 hours a day in the first month.’ (Richard Simcott)

‘Drive, discipline, countless hours of systematic hard work, sustained interest and motivation, access to good materials and intelligent methods and procedures for using them--if you have all these, there is no reason why you cannot achieve what I have achieved or even more.’ (Alexander Arguelles)

Disciplined

‘If you are able to set aside certain times of each day for language study, you should try to do so.’
(Steve Kaufmann)

‘Make sure you carry a notebook with you, and write down the most useful new words and phrases that you encounter when you’re out and about. Review your notes in your downtime, and try to use what you’ve written down whenever you interact with natives.’ (Luke Lampariello)

Resourceful

- digital flashcards (Anki, Quizlet)
- teach yourself manuals, grammars, dictionaries
- movies, songs
- Skype
- comic books, parallel texts,
- apps: Duolingo, Italki, Hellotalk
- etc etc



<http://www.lindsaydoeslanguages.com/reading-resources-for-language-learning/>

Strategies

- memorizing texts/dialogues
- memorizing chunks
- 'shadowing'
- translating – and reverse translation
- distributed practice/ spaced review
- mnemonics

But.... what about
aptitude?

“All linguistically gifted individuals seem to share common cognitive characteristics” (Biedrón & Pawlak, 2016, p. 167). These include

- excellent memory: working memory, long-term memory, and phonological short-term memory
- pattern detection and analysis
- ‘having a good ear’
- expertise (from accumulated language learning experience)

Affective factors

- ‘ego permeability’: ‘The good language learner has the ability to accept the role of a child’ (Erard 2012, p. 238)
- self-confidence
- motivation
- perseverance
- autonomy

Summary

‘You need three things...

- Some neural hardware that’s exceptionally suited to the activity of learning languages and to the ability to use many of them;
- A sense of mission about learning languages;
- And an identity as a language learner.

(Erard, M. 2012. *Babel no more...* New York: Free Press, p. 260.)

Takeaways?

For learners

- have achievable goals and monitor achievement
- experiment with different strategies
- be resourceful
- find a conversational partner
- put time aside regularly
- visualize your 'L2 self'

Takeaways?

For teachers

- set achievable goals and monitor achievement
- introduce learners to different strategies
- incorporate a variety of resources
- provide opportunities for conversation
- set extra-curricular tasks
- help learners visualize and nurture their 'L2 self'

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Biedrón, A. & Pawlak, M. (2016) 'New conceptualizations of linguistic giftedness.' *Language Teaching*, 49/2.

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