

Learning a Second Language

Languages

What the research supports about how adults actually acquire a language.

Consistent findings across decades of applied linguistics.

What works

Large amounts of input you mostly understand

Speaking early, accepting mistakes

Spaced vocabulary review

Explicit grammar as a supplement

Consistency over intensity

What is oversold

Grammar drills alone

Translation as the main method

Waiting until you are 'ready' to speak

Apps as the only source of input

Rough hours

Spanish, French for an English speaker: ~600–750 h

German: ~900 h

Arabic, Chinese, Japanese: ~2,200 h

Adults learn grammar faster than children; children reach better accents. Neither group has an across-the-board advantage.