

TALKING MY LANGUAGE

VOCABULARY Talking about languages

- 1 Work in pairs. How many of the languages in the picture do you recognise?
- 2 Complete the sentences about using foreign languages with these words and phrases.

accent	express	fluently	picked it up
accurate	get by	mastering	struggled

- 1 I'm not very _____, but I can hold a conversation and make myself understood.
 - 2 I know the basics – enough to _____ when I'm travelling there.
 - 3 I really _____ with French when I was at school, so I just gave up.
 - 4 I get frustrated when I can't _____ myself.
 - 5 I never went to class. I just _____ from talking to people.
 - 6 I'm a bit embarrassed to speak sometimes because I know I have a strong _____.
 - 7 I grew up bilingual so I speak Spanish and Japanese _____.
 - 8 I'm not interested in _____ the language, I just want to be able to read it for my job.
- 3 Work in groups. Use some of the language from Exercise 2 to discuss these questions.
- What languages have you studied?
 - What languages do you know at least a few words in? What can you say?
 - How did you learn? Do you use these languages now? How well do you know each one?

READING

- 4 You are going to read an article about 'hyperglots' – people who speak many languages. Work in pairs. Look at the photos and the title opposite then discuss how these words and numbers might be connected to the topic.

72	a parrot	translator	10,000
two weeks	globalisation	genes	mistakes

- 5 Read the article and check your ideas from Exercise 4.
- 6 According to the article, are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?
 - 1 Mezzofanti spoke 72 languages fluently.
 - 2 Some people who heard Mezzofanti speak probably couldn't know if he was fluent.
 - 3 There is no proof that Mezzofanti really was multilingual.
 - 4 Globalisation will create more hyperglots.
 - 5 Hyperglots often possess genetic advantages.
 - 6 Hyperglots aim to speak all their languages fluently.



- 7 Work in pairs. Read the comments that follow the article and discuss these questions.
- Which comments do you agree with and which do you disagree with? Why?
 - What did you find most interesting about the article?
 - Did you read anything about the habits of hyperglots that could help you study better?

Understanding reading texts and improving your vocabulary involves more than just learning single words. You also need to notice the connected words and grammar.

- 8 Find these words in the article and notice the connected words and grammar.

far	evidence	growing
allow	terms	opportunities

- 9 Work in groups. Cover the article and complete the sentences. Then check your ideas.
- 1 But _____ far _____?
 - 2 There _____ evidence _____ he could use many languages.
 - 3 There will _____ growing _____ in the future.
 - 4 Top _____ may _____ genes _____ allow _____ get the _____ their training.
 - 5 They often _____ limited _____ terms _____ individual languages.
 - 6 They _____ opportunities _____ language closer to home.
- 10 Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.
- Think of two examples where there are growing numbers of something. Why are they growing?
 - How is your English in terms of vocabulary, speaking, listening etc.? What can you do to improve these different aspects?
 - What opportunities do you have to practise English?

THE GOOGLE TRANSLATORS IN HUMAN FORM

Michael Erard's new book investigates the master linguists or 'hyperglots'

Liam Scanlon



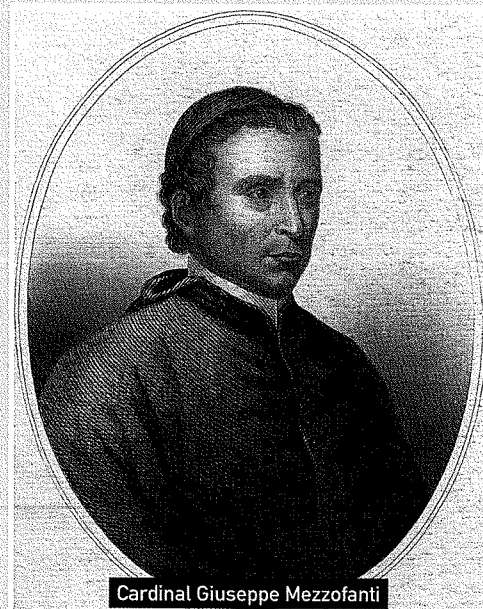
The 18th century Italian priest Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti is a legend among linguists. They say he studied 72 languages, 30 of which he mastered. He spoke another nine fluently, though not perfectly, and could hold a basic conversation in at least eleven more. And all that without leaving Italy! One story suggests he picked up Ukrainian in just two weeks, after meeting a visitor from there.

But how **far** is this true? Certainly, the figure of 72 is too high and some people perhaps exaggerated how fluent he was. He lived at a time when travel was difficult and learning other languages was still unusual. Therefore, many reports of his abilities come from visitors who were probably struggling to express themselves in Italian. There were also those who, while appreciating his good accent and accurate grammar, described him as merely a parrot who said nothing of interest. However, according to Michael Erard, author of the book *Mezzofanti's Gift*, there is sufficient **evidence** to believe he could use many languages.

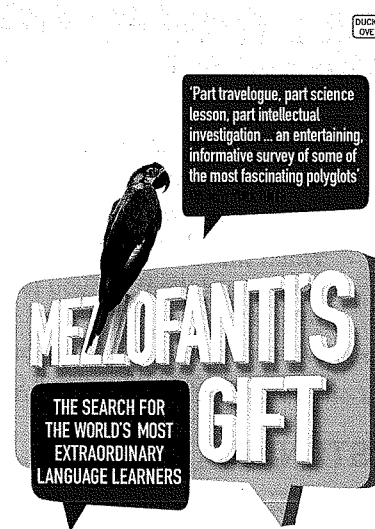
Erard also argues that there are many hyperglots in the world today and that, with globalisation, there will be a **growing** number in the future. For example, Alexander Arguelles is fluent in around twenty languages and has studied 60. He studies nine hours a day, down from fourteen before he got married! The Hungarian translator Kato Lomb worked with sixteen, and you can watch a YouTube video of Alex Rawling speaking eleven languages at the age of twenty.

A central question of the book is whether hyperglots are born or made. Are their achievements genetic or do hyperglots have secrets that normal language learners can learn from? Erard's conclusions agree with research on highly talented people in other areas such as sport and music. These people generally have advantages they are born with: top athletes may have genes that **allow** them to get the most from their training; hyperglots seem to possess excellent memories and have brains that are more efficient in processing speech sounds. However, becoming the best also requires a lot of hard work. Some argue that the difference between a top performer and someone who's just 'very good' is that the top performer has practised for 10,000 hours instead of 6,000.

The fact is that most ordinary language learners lack these natural advantages and simply don't have that much time. So is there any hope for us? Erard believes there is and that research on hyperglots can offer some useful lessons. For example, they often have limited ambitions in **terms** of individual languages: they're happy to get by, or to be only able to read, or not to have a perfect accent. They're practical: if they can't travel, they look for **opportunities** to use the language closer to home. Some simply imagine conversations in their heads. They also use other techniques like learning words in context. Finally, they're never afraid to make mistakes or appear stupid and so never give up.



Cardinal Giuseppe Mezzofanti



MICHAEL ERARD

COMMENTS

- languelerner:** I've actually read Kato's book about language learning and I think the best advice is to read what you're interested in and read a lot.
- bobjob:** I know it's wrong, but I kind of hate these people! I'm struggling to learn one extra language.
- unconvinced:** How does Alexander Aguelles earn a living? I think you need to be rich to be a hyperglot!
- hughd:** You have to start learning languages when you're young.
- andyw:** When people say they're bad at languages, they just mean they don't want to spend the time required to learn.
- artist:** I can say 'do you work or study' in fifteen languages. Does that make me a hyperglot?
- r_sewell:** The thing about vocabulary in context is good. I never learn single words. I always learn words in groups.



PUTTING YOUR WORDS TO WORK

SPEAKING

1 Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.

- Where and when do you use English outside the classroom?
- What do you do most: read, listen, speak or write?
- When was the first time you used English outside a classroom? What did you talk about? How successful was it?
- What's been your best moment using English outside the classroom? Why was it good?

LISTENING

2 5 Listen to three people telling stories connected to speaking a foreign language. Match two sentences to each speaker (1–3). There are two sentences you do not need.

- a They helped someone by using a foreign language.
- b Their parents fell in love in Rio de Janeiro.
- c They have an unusual family background.
- d They were involved in a misunderstanding.
- e Their parents speak together in a foreign language.
- f They filmed an animal attacking someone.
- g They changed their behaviour as a result of the experience.
- h They work with people from other countries.

3 5 Listen again and complete the sentences with three words in each space. Contractions count as one word.

- 1 a Two Chinese guys _____ me and stopped me.
b They started talking really fast, you know, and I _____ at all!
c I asked them to slow down, and then, _____ of my bad Chinese and gesture, I explained ...
- 2 a He worked in the engine room and she was _____.
b My mum said Dad was a really good dancer, _____ very difficult to believe.
c They also said it _____ about whose country to live in.
- 3 a We go all over the place _____ unusual wild animals.
b We often need _____ local people to act as guides or cooks for the film crew.
c Anyway, last year we were filming in Sumatra in _____ a forest ...

4 Work in groups. Discuss the questions.

- Which of the stories did you like the best? Why?
- Do you know any families where they speak more than one language? Why?
- Have you ever been on a cruise? When? Where?
- Have you ever helped anyone in the street? Where? What did you do?
- Do you know any 'false friends' – words that look or sound the same, but have a different meaning in different languages?

GRAMMAR Narrative tenses

5 Look at these sentences from the stories. Then complete the rules below.

- They first **looked** really surprised and then they **started** talking really fast, you know.
- It was actually the first time I'd **spoken** to anyone Chinese outside of my class.
- They first **met** when they **were** both **working** on a cruise ship.
- Neither **spoke** each other's language, but my mum **had worked** in Germany before.
- Last year we **were filming** in the middle of a forest ... and one time at dinner I **was talking** to the guide and I **tried** to ask about 'the people of the inner forest' ...

We use three main tenses when telling stories: the past simple, the past continuous and the past perfect simple.

- Past simple: add _____ to the infinitive (without *to*) of the verb. Some past forms are irregular, e.g. _____.
- Past continuous: use _____ / _____ + *-ing* form of the verb.
- Past perfect simple: use _____ + past participle. Some participles are irregular, e.g. _____.

6 Look at the sentences in Exercise 5 again and answer the questions.

- Which tense is the most common in telling stories?
- Which tense is often used at the beginning of the story to give background information?
- Which tense shows the events followed each other in order?
- Which tense shows the 'past in the past' – an action that happened before something else we talked about?
- Which tense shows an action was unfinished or stopped by another action?

G Check your ideas on page 166 and do Exercise 1.

7 Read this story about how another person's parents met. Decide if the past simple forms are correct or not. Correct the ones which are wrong.

I love the story of how my parents met. My dad was twenty. One day my dad ¹*taked* an overnight train to Prague in Czech Republic and during the night he ²*fell* asleep. When he ³*waked* up, he realised they ⁴*was* in Prague so he rushed to get off the train. He ⁵*see* a policeman looking at someone's papers and he suddenly realised he ⁶*hadn't* his passport or money or phone. He ⁷*ran* back to the train. He sat down, but then this guy ⁸*came* up to him and asked him something in Czech. He then said in English, 'What's the matter?' and so my dad ⁹*explained*. So basically, this guy, who was called Anton, ¹⁰*helped* him. He took my dad home, ¹¹*given* him something to eat, ¹²*let* him phone his parents to get some money – everything. And later that evening my dad met Anton's parents ... and he met his sister. And that's how he met my mother!

PRONUNCIATION

- ▶ 6 Some of the details of the story in Exercise 7 are missing. Listen and write down the eight phrases and sentences you hear. You will hear each twice: first fast and then slower.
- ▶ 7 Listen again to the faster version. Notice the weak forms of the auxiliaries: *was* /wəz/, *were* /wə/, *had* /əd/. Practise saying the phrases and sentences as quickly as you can.
- 10 Work in pairs. Decide where each of the eight phrases and sentences from Exercise 8 should go in the story in Exercise 7.
- 11 Complete the sentences with your own ideas.
 - When I got home, I suddenly realised ...
 - I didn't recognise her at first because ...
 - I wasn't looking where I was going and ...
 - This guy came up to me and ...
 - I had meant to say ... , but I'd actually said ...
 - I found out later that ...
- 12 Work in pairs. Compare your ideas from Exercise 11 and decide which is the most interesting. Then write a story around the sentence.

G For further practice, see Exercise 2 on page 167.

SPEAKING

- 13 Choose two of these ideas for stories. Spend a few minutes thinking about what happened and how you will tell the stories.
 - the first time your parents met
 - the first time you met your best friend / wife / husband / boyfriend / girlfriend
 - a time when you forgot or lost something important
 - a time you had a good or funny experience using a foreign language
 - a time a stranger helped you or you helped a stranger
- 14 Work in groups. Share your stories.

