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THE REASON FOR LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Language is used for a wide range of purposes and one way of speeding up learning is to focus on a particular purpose and the language needed for that purpose. So, it is helpful to be clear about your purpose in learning a particular language. For example, are you learning the language so that you can travel where that language is spoken? So, what should be the cause of language learning?

I am just interested in the language. Spoken language should be your major focus at the beginning.

I am living in a country where this language is spoken and I want to be able to communicate with others. You should make a list of your speaking needs and keep adding to it. It is worth starting with some of the Survival vocabulary .

My partner or another family member is a native speaker of that language. If the family member is willing and able to help you, you should start with useful repeated routines such as greetings and talking around daily repeated activities such as getting a meal ready or talking about what happened during the day.

I want to travel in countries where that language is spoken. You do not need to learn a lot of the language. Suffice to use vocabulary. Aim for a high degree of spoken fluency with the items in that very limited vocabulary. Put all of the survival vocabulary on to word cards.

I need to know this language to read books related to my work or subject area. You should begin working with the texts you want to read. This is because the technical words in the subject area make up a very large proportion of the running words in such texts (somewhere between 20% and 30% - that is one in every three to five words will be a technical word). If you read outside your subject

area you will need to learn many words that are not useful in your subject area.

I need to study for a degree using this language. Start working with the texts you will use in your study. Put unknown words onto word cards and do the same with repeated phrases. Study these cards every day.

I want to use this language to do business with people who speak this language. Start working with conversational spoken language and then move to business-focused conversation.

And the last reason. It is a university or school requirement and I want to pass the final exam. Get examples of the final exam and prepare for the kinds of questions the exam ask.

Start working with the texts you will use in your study. Put unknown words onto word cards and do the same with repeated phrases. Study these cards every day.

So, you need to organize your own deliberate learning. You need to take control of this very effective activity and keep using it to learn new vocabulary and even more importantly to keep revising previously met vocabulary. You may find that some teachers advise against using this strategy largely because of the belief that all vocabulary learning needs to occur in context. They are wrong. It is important that there is vocabulary learning in context through meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and fluency development, but it is also important that there is deliberate decontextualized learning through the use of word cards, because such learning is very efficient and effective. Some people also believe that because word card learning involves first language translation, it encourages thinking in the first language rather than the foreign language. Research however has shown that in the beginning and intermediate stages of language learning the first and foreign languages are unavoidably stored together. Using bilingual word cards is a very effective deliberate learning strategy that you should use.