

# My experience of second language acquisition

Polyglot, Multilingual, bilingual or whatever term you have to describe these group of few that are blessed with the ability to speak, read and write with more than one language. "Great ability comes with great responsibility," as the fictional character "Uncle Ben" from the Marvel comic original would say. Growing up in a very multicultural family background, I was taught 3 languages at the same time. It was a struggle to learn it all at the same time as I was taught in a very traditional way, a one-way method where the teacher speaks and I listen. My father made me understand that I was special in a way that I could speak 3 languages and that only few people have that ability.

Bombarded with words that I barely understand, I was left with no choice but to force my way into it. Fear was my motivation. I was constantly punished for making mistakes and with that being said, I wasn't able to grasp and embrace all the languages that they wanted me to learn. I was lucky enough to become fluent with the language that my Mother speaks which was a dialect in her hometown.

How I absorbed the second language at a certain age growing up was through my Mother's persistent use of her native language whenever she talked to me. I couldn't understand why she suddenly stopped talking to me in English. I felt comfortable with using English whenever I talked to her and I reached a point where in I felt disgusted to hear any language aside from English. It felt like I didn't belong, not understanding why I had to learn and speak another language. My father then explained that she just wanted me to know my roots and that I am from a multicultural family that I can be proud of. He taught me that to be different means to be special. After that sincere "Talk" with my father, it all finally made sense. She wasn't pushing me away but she was just introducing me to a part of her that I couldn't see.

How I acquired my second language was mainly through, "Total physical response method." My Mom would speak in her mother tongue and with me not having any idea what she was talking about I would try to read her body language, study her facial reaction, listen to the tone of her voice just to understand what she wanted to tell me or what she wanted me to do. She would point at my dirty room and yell "Limpyo Kwarto!" (Clean your room) in her own mother tongue. At first, I didn't know the meaning of the words she said but the fact that she was pointing at my messy room and with her handing me a broom, constantly yelling those same words made me understand that what she wanted me to do is to clean up my messy room. Through repetition, I was able to familiarize the sound and was able to determine the tone she uses when she wants me to do something and I was able to determine the emotion behind the tone. I would respond to her in English but then she would reply in her own mother language. I would shake or scratch my head again not knowing why my mother was talking to me in a language that was alien or foreign. Being a 6-year-old child, I felt the need to talk and communicate with my mom but it felt like there was a wall and I remember thinking, the only way I can communicate with her effectively was to copy the sound, gesture, facial reaction, tone, along with emotion. Without me knowing it, I was absorbing learning and studying her mother tongue. As years went by, I became fluent and would not eventually even think of it anymore. It became a part of me, a built-in switch that I can automatically turn off and on. I didn't have to translate the words in my brain when I speak. It somehow became an instinct, the very same way how you still know how to ride a bicycle even though it has been years since you rode a bicycle and it's all because of "Muscle memory."

Learning my second language somehow was like a muscle memory in my brain. Even though I don't get the chance to use the language all the time, I am still able to speak the language. Though my father no longer exists but a part him will always stay, I may not have successfully learned his language but he taught me a language that no words could contain.