

**T**he British have always had a poor reputation for learning languages – and it's getting worse. The number of UK students studying a language at university continues to fall, and most schoolchildren take advantage of the fact that they can drop foreign languages at 14. Is this not understandable, though? Why would any Brit want to spend countless hours struggling to learn a language when most of the world is keen to speak English to them?

Here, two high-profile British language learners explain how learning a language has enriched their lives, and what sparked their passion for learning languages.

France, and after that I'll be doing it in Spanish, then Russian, then Arabic. They say if you have French and English you should be speaking Spanish pretty well after a month of deep immersion. If I get stuck with a word or a phrase during a show I ask the audience, 'How do you say such and such', and they help out.

I don't find languages easy, but I have a hunger to learn. When you can speak another language you go from being a person in an adult's body pointing at things like a child to being able to communicate with people like an adult again.

There's a political basis for me to learn other languages because if we don't come together in the world, then the world's not going to make it. There's a business case, too – I'm beginning to turn a profit on my foreign shows. Plus, no stand-up has done this before, so there's also the fun, bloody adventure of it.

and putting sentences together in a French way, and it felt really good.

What's brilliant is that I can meet up with my neighbours now and have a laugh with them. They'll gossip with me, whereas before it would have been quite formal and polite. So you feel much more a part of things. People have been extraordinarily welcoming and are appreciative of the fact that I've made the effort to converse with them.



#### Glossary

*gossip* (v) talk about other people's private lives  
*grasp* (v) understand  
*offended* (adj) upset  
*rock up* (phr v) arrive  
*stint* (n) period of time

5 Read the text again and answer the questions with **Eddie**, **Chris**, or **both**.

- Who finds learning languages difficult?
- Who has tried different ways of learning a language?
- Who is expecting it to be easier to learn another language? Why?
- Who is using languages to do something very original?
- Who has used what he does for a living to help him learn a language?
- Who says he feels immature when he can't speak a language?
- Who wishes he could spend more time speaking the language? Why?
- Who has learned the language by doing something other than speaking?
- Who asks native speakers of the language to help him improve? How?
- Who says that people treat him differently now he can speak their language? How?

6 Write the correct prepositions in the verb phrases. Find examples in the texts and check.

~~for~~ in with on (x2) for at (x2) of

- have a reputation for sth
- have a passion \_\_\_\_\_ sth
- make/turn a profit \_\_\_\_\_ sth
- study sth \_\_\_\_\_ university
- be fluent \_\_\_\_\_ a language
- get \_\_\_\_\_ top of sth
- take advantage \_\_\_\_\_ sth/smb
- point \_\_\_\_\_ sth/sb
- have a laugh \_\_\_\_\_ sb

Make some examples with your partner.

**I have a reputation for being late!**

### What do you think?

- Are people in your country enthusiastic about learning a foreign language? Why/Why not?
- Are there benefits to learning a foreign language beyond the purely practical ones?
- Has learning a language improved your life?
- Do you want people to correct all your mistakes when you speak English? Why/Why not?

**▶ Watch** a video about how subtitles are made for film and TV.

