

Becoming Fluent: How Cognitive Science Can Help Adults Learn a Foreign Language

Richard Roberts

Roger Kreuz

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Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife's ability to speak Greek, especially if thou art older than twenty-five years. Okay, you're right, that one didn't make the Commandment cut, but a merciful God surely wouldn't want us chasing the impossible—such is the apparent difficulty in learning a new language as an adult.

In *Becoming Fluent: How Cognitive Science Can Help Adults Learn a Foreign Language*, Richard Roberts and Roger Kreuz turn conventional wisdom on its head and identify dozens of advantages adults have over kids in language skills, beginning with the simple fact that adults have advanced knowledge, skills, and nonverbal communication mastery. The authors acknowledge that children do have a couple language-learning advantages—an ability to acquire local accents, and they also don't bring adult-sized anxiety to their study sessions—but Roberts and Kreuz point to antiquated teaching methods as the main culprit holding adults back. Namely, rote memorization methods, which have long been the go-to technique, are counterproductive for adults because this memory ability declines with age. So new language learning approaches are needed, and that's exactly what Roberts and Kreuz offer in this inspiring book.

Cognitive science is key, say the authors, because “it represents a deliberate shift away from extreme specialization” in favor of inclusivity and new points of view that allow adults to bring their formidable acquired talents to bear in the effort to learn a foreign language. The authors cite dozens of pertinent studies and research. Their conclusions and recommended techniques are wholly science driven and encouraging.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2016)

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