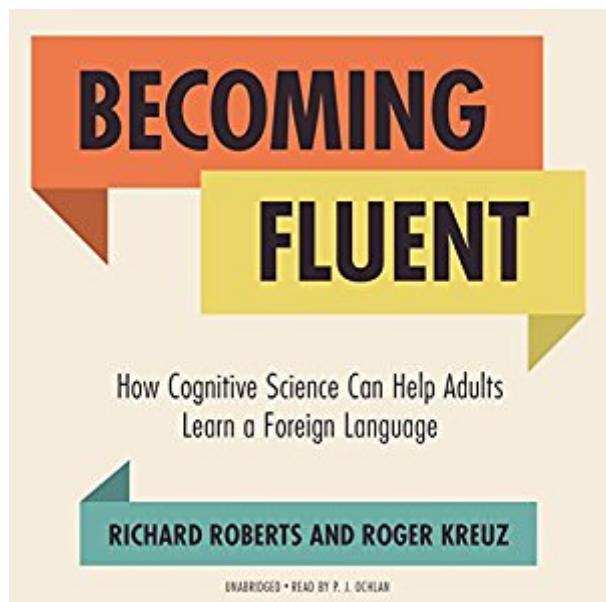


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# Becoming Fluent: How Cognitive Science Can Help Adults Learn A Foreign Language



## **Synopsis**

Adults who want to learn a foreign language are often discouraged because they believe they cannot acquire a language as easily as children. Once they begin to learn a language, students may be further discouraged when they find the methods used to teach children don't seem to work for them. What is an adult language learner to do? In *Becoming Fluent*, Richard Roberts and Roger Kreuz draw on insights from psychology and cognitive science to show that adults can master a foreign language if they bring to bear the skills and knowledge they have honed over a lifetime. Adults shouldn't try to learn as children do, they should learn like adults. Roberts and Kreuz report evidence that adults can learn new languages even more easily than children. Children appear to have only two advantages over adults in learning a language: they acquire a native accent more easily, and they do not suffer from self-defeating anxiety about learning a language. Adults, on the other hand, have the greater advantages - gained from experience - of an understanding of their own mental processes and knowing how to use language to do things. Adults have an especially advantageous grasp of pragmatics, the social use of language, and Roberts and Kreuz show how to leverage this metalinguistic ability in learning a new language. Learning a language takes effort. But if adult learners apply the tools acquired over a lifetime, it can be enjoyable and rewarding.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Finally, someone has written a book on the subject of adult language learning that is entertaining and engaging! *Becoming Fluent* offers encouragement and practical suggestions on how to improve

your ability to learn a language for those looking to take on the task later in life. I wish I had this information years ago.

In the past twenty years, I've studied a number of different languages (nine) in an effort to narrow the list down to one that I hope to invest my time and energy into mastering. I've also spent that time teaching ESL, with a MA in TESL alongside. So I do not come to this book as a novice. But while I'm not quite sure what I was expecting from this book, what I got was a fluffy pop-sci approach that did not in any way illuminate the subject in a coherent way. I did not find anything inside its covers that would be of any use as a teacher or a learner; it is more of an apologist / cheerleader / self-help approach than it is either practical or theoretical. I guess I saw the publishing house and assumed it would be meaty. I was wrong. The very last section serves as a very good encapsulation of the book. The authors explain the historical arising of mnemonics, exhaust the reader with a number of different ways to remember a shopping list, then admit that the technique probably isn't so helpful for learning a foreign language. I will happily save you the \$14: It's very, very difficult to learn a foreign language. Older people can learn things. You will forget things, but forgotten things can be remembered more easily. Study often and in different ways. I'd give it one star, but for someone who has never studied a foreign language, taken a psychology 101 course, or found a way to remember something, it might be of some slight use. For all others: Save your time and money.

While as a German teacher I primarily teach high school age students, my experiences with small group adult classes and corporate tutoring made me interested in this book. I found this book to be very informative and much needed, as I tire of comments from people I meet who say "I learned Spanish/French/German in high school, and I can't speak any of it!" My hope is that more adults revisit and restart their language learning for career advancement or even the pure enjoyment of it. There's a glut of books out there about child learners, and this new book helps balance it all.

Very nice review of why "older folks" can be adept at learning a new foreign language. It reviews some biologic phenomena, forming the main thrust of the book: 1.: Prepubertals "naturally" pick up language 2. Adults need to learn a foreign language differently, but are better equipped for that, due to life experience. I have some background in linguistics and neurobiology, so I didn't find anything new (to me) in the book. Enjoyable read, nevertheless.

An outstanding, fun, and informative read! Not only do the authors explain how adults can optimize

foreign language learning, but they also explain many key concepts and experimental findings in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology along the way. But the miracle of this book is the superb writing. Not only is it extremely clear and concise, but it's so easy and pleasant to read that it's harder to put down than it is to keep reading. By the time you get to the end, you won't believe how much you've learned, both practical and theoretical. This is a must read for any adult who wants to learn a foreign language with minimal effort, anyone who wants an overview of important topics in the psychology of language, and anyone who is just curious.

Here is the manifesto for a long overdue revolution in adult language learning. This is the first really new idea in language learning since the "communicative approach" in the 1980s. Roberts and Kreuz convincingly dispel the pernicious myths about adult language learning and then show us how recent research in cognitive science can be applied to the language learning classroom. I have long suspected that what currently passes for teaching in language classrooms is superstitious bunk. *Becoming Fluent* confirms those suspicions. If you have even a wisp of interest in learning a new language, start with this.

This book is about more than language learning, even though that is its main theme and why I bought it. I learned much about how the mind works, how we remember, how adults learn in different ways than children do. It is an upbeat book, with helpful advice and examples from the two author's own language learning experiences.

I have positive feelings about this book. I respect what others see as a 'scattered' character to the work—*the authors are essentially introducing you to a large, multidisciplinary bag of tricks and resources to help you understand the process of becoming fluent, the value of becoming fluent, the difficult terrain on the way to fluency, etc.* I think this is a really valuable resource to someone who is committed to learning a new language (e.g. a firm new years resolution with a clear action plan) but will be sand through the fingers of someone who is just flirting with the idea of learning a new language. If you're genuinely interested in gripping the problem, then this book can help you find your fluency. -Ryan Mease

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