

## 1 SPEAKING

**a** Work with a partner and answer the questions.

- 1 What do you find easiest about learning a language?
- 2 What are the most important elements for learning a language successfully?

## 2 VOCABULARY

**a** Match the words in bold to definitions 1–5.

‘Probably the biggest challenge is a new, informal word. Sometimes I have to **translate** meetings, and there can be vocabulary that is **tricky**. Some people have very strong **accents**, and **pronounce** things differently. I **update** a wordlist on my smartphone every week, adding any new phrases I come across.’

**Karen, translator**

- 1 difficult to deal with
- 2 to change words from one language to another
- 3 to make the sound of a letter or word
- 4 to add new information
- 5 the ways in which people in a place or group say a word

**b** Do you agree with the speaker in 2a about some of the challenges of speaking another language? Why / Why not?

## 3 READING



### BETTER READING: USING TITLES TO PREDICT CONTENT

Before you read a text for the first time, you can use its features to help predict content. Reading the title and subtitle often helps you to identify and understand the main idea.

**1** Work in pairs. Look at the title of the article on page 35 and tick (✓) the things you think the article will talk about.

- 1 ☐ People who speak many languages (polyglots)
- 2 ☐ How polyglots speak so many languages
- 3 ☐ How people learn languages generally
- 4 ☐ How people learn generally
- 5 ☐ The importance of motivation
- 6 ☐ The importance of talent

**2** Read the article on page 35 quickly. Were your predictions correct?

**a** Read the article again. Are the sentences true or false?

- 1 At the EU, people don't understand other people because there are so many linguists.
- 2 The rise of polyglots is a very recent occurrence.
- 3 Polyglots are more common in some countries than others.
- 4 There are more polyglots today because of technology.
- 5 You have to be intelligent to learn a language.
- 6 According to Ikonomou, you have to speak the language 15 minutes a day, seven days a week.

**b** Match the person (1–6) with the information, (a–f).

- 1 Ioannis Ikonomou
  - 2 Ziad Fazah
  - 3 Michael Erard
  - 4 Brian Fox
  - 5 Professor Vivian Cook
  - 6 Brian Fox
- a says that he speaks more languages than anyone else
  - b wrote a book about how people learn more than one language
  - c uses a number of different languages at work
  - d believe that having language skills helps you to learn more languages
  - e believes language learning skills can be developed over time
  - f suggests that intelligence isn't a factor in polyglotism

## 4 SPEAKING

**a** Work with a partner and answer the questions.

- 1 What do you find most difficult about learning a language?
- 2 What do you think are the most important things for learning a language successfully?

**b** Have you learned to do these things? Was it easy or difficult? Why?

- ride a bike
- drive a car
- play a musical instrument
- play a sport

**c** In your opinion, is there much of a difference in learning the things in 4b and learning a language? Why / Why not?

# Language Learning Miracles

**Most people only speak one language at work. But at the EU headquarters in Brussels, business is conducted in 24 official languages, so there's every chance that colleagues might have misunderstandings. That's why there are 2,000 full-time linguists on hand to help. Incredibly, some speak eight or more languages. Then there are language learning miracles like Ioannis Ikonomou – he speaks 32 living languages.**

An avid language learner since he was a teenager, Ikonomou likes to keep busy and is happiest when learning something new. He acknowledges that language learning is hard work, but it also gives him a great amount of pleasure. He is currently learning three new languages to ensure that with the addition of Maltese, Estonian and Irish, he will speak all 24 of the languages used at his place of work. To do this he reads a lot of textbooks and novels, and has a vast collection of dictionaries. However, it's not all text-based study. Ikonomou says that television is a great learning tool. He watches everything, from Turkish movies to Russian talk shows. He also talks to as many native speakers as he can online.

Ikonomou isn't alone in his achievements. There have been examples of polyglots throughout history. People believe Cleopatra spoke nine languages, and the 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet, John Milton, understood ten. The Lebanese linguist, Ziad Fazah, is perhaps the most famous polyglot in the world, claiming to speak 59 different languages. But how can these people learn so many languages?

Lots of people think they have the answer. In his recent book, *Babel No More*, the American journalist Michael Erard interviewed a large number of polyglots. After extensive research he found out that they believe you need two key things: talent and ambition. Professor Vivian Cook, an academic linguist who has also studied polyglotism, agrees. His studies have shown

that motivation is essential for learning more than one language, and intelligence plays a lesser role. According to Cook, there are more polyglots in the world than we think. In some countries in Africa or India, for example, people use three or four different languages every day.

For Brian Fox, the director of interpretation at the European Commission, the secret of success is mastering that first foreign language. He believes language learning is like any other form of exercise. The first time is hard, but after that it gets easier.

Technically speaking, it's easier to be a polyglot today than ever before. Given our access to the internet, we are able to watch an ever-increasing range of online content. A quick search provides everything from Japanese quiz shows to Indonesian cookery programmes. We can read and listen to hundreds of languages. There are also many great language learning websites and apps around. On top of this, we have cheaper air travel too, meaning it's easier to visit foreign countries to learn a language.

So what is Ioannis Ikonomou's approach? Well, he says you can learn a language if you study for 15 minutes a day, seven days a week. You don't need a teacher. First, you have to learn the basic vocabulary and grammar. You can do this online, using video tutorials, as well as traditional text books. The next stage is using the language – reading newspapers or watching the news online. As you do this, you need to be prepared for slow progress – Ikonomou says that as he begins learning he often understands less than 10%. His final stage is cultural immersion – Ikonomou claims you need to do everything in the language and culture of the country you want to learn – eat the food, read the history, and watch its films. But it's not all hard work. He also suggests you need to visit the country, travel around, and make friends with local people. Enjoyment seems to be the goal at this stage. And perhaps that's the simple answer – if you enjoy learning a language, you'll succeed.