

Book Reviews

Richard Roberts and Roger J. Kruez, *Becoming Fluent: How Cognitive Science Can Help Adults Learn a Foreign Language*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015, ISBN: 978-0-262-02923

The book contains eight chapters, namely: Terms and Conditions; Set Yourself Up for Success; Aspects of Language; Pragmatics and Culture; Language and Perception; Cognition from Top to Bottom; Making Memories; And Making Memories Work for You. These eight chapters are followed by Epilogue, Notes, Suggested Readings, References and Index.

The authors begin their discussion on Adult Foreign Language Learning by talking about three myths–

- i. Adults cannot acquire a foreign language as easily as children.
- ii. Adults should learn foreign languages the way children learn languages.
- iii. When learning a foreign language, try not to use your first language.

And these are in fact, the fundamental propositions which the authors have attempted to navigate within these chapters.

Chapter 1 is relatively a short one which, apart from discussion on cognitive science, is centred around preliminary discussion on the earlier mentioned three myths.

Having built the initial dialogue in the first chapter, the authors get to business in Chapter 2. As the book talks about adult language learning, the authors term foreign language learning a complex decision. They say, 'Although some people make decisions by adding up perceived pros and cons in a loosely mathematical way, that approach doesn't work with complex decisions such as whether to start (or restart) studying a foreign language.' Moving on, the authors do talk about *availability* and *simulation heuristics* exploring the positives and limitations thereof in foreign language learning. Next they talk about habit formation and

its impact on language learning, with the headings such as- 'Does it take twenty-one days to develop a new habit?; Do setbacks mean that you have failed?; If a little study is good, is a lot of study better? The discussion is followed by 'Suggestions for developing effective language study habits' under the headings- Determine what is realistic; Go public with your goal; Find a study buddy; Study at the same time each day.

Chapter 3 presents the aspects of different languages and how learning the language x may require a different strategy from the strategy applied to learn language y. The chapter also deals with four levels of proficiency.

Chapter 4 is woven around the argument that an adult language learner has advantage over the non-adult ones and the metalinguistic ability comes really handy when learning the pragmatics of a foreign language, because an adult learner can reflect upon his language learning process.

Chapter 5 attempts to burst the phenomena like speed versus accuracy wherein he says that cognitively it is established that the adults have a relatively slower motor response and also that there is a decline in the processing of the information by the adult but that know how establishes that the older adults don't make as good and quick language learners as younger adults. The chapter further deals with the notions of accent and non-nativeness.

As the title suggests the sixth chapter of the book under- review talks about a to z of cognition with specific reference to adult foreign language learning. The very first argument that hearing is also seeing details as the readers; how we, the users of a particular language (both native and foreign) use our visual abilities to understand and comprehend our interlocutors better. This has been explained with varied examples and the authors make a clear point that sometimes we accept things as they are, even without questioning as in the case of hearing our impression goes that its only the ears who do the job, no other body part does. Thus the argument is if a learner knows how the hearing and seeing go together it can assist in overall language learning.

Chapter 7 begins with a task of memorizing the random digits and ends with the discussion on cognitive overload and ways to deal with two types of cognitive overload—overload from factors internal to language and for factors external to language.

Chapter 8 talks about the emotional aspects of memory, such as- think positive, Be specific, Be expansive. The chapter also offers some useful

suggestions like- getting hold of every small bit of information in the foreign language because it works really well for language learning.

Very interestingly, the authors take every small bit available in hearsays, discuss them with reference to language learning, but don't present 'the answers' to those questions; rather put their propositions on it and leave the rest for the reader(s) to decide what works and what doesn't for them.

Summarily, the authors draw on insights from psychology and cognitive science to show that adults can master a foreign language if they bring the skills and knowledge they have mastered during their lifetime. Adults should not try to learn as children do, rather they should learn like adults.

The authors present data which suggest that adults can learn new languages even more easily than young adults. Children appear to have only two advantages over adults in learning a language: they acquire a native accent more easily. Adults, on the other hand, have the greater advantages that they understand their own mental processes and know how to use language to do things. Adults better understand the pragmatics of new language, and the authors demonstrate how the adults can use this advantage for themselves.

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Anuradha Ghosh, Saroj Kumar Mahananda and Trisha Lalchandani (eds.), *Premchand on National Language (Rashtrabhasha)* (Translated from Hindi into English). Delhi: Aakar Books, 2019 (Hardback), ISBN 978-93-5002-606-9, Rs. 495.00

Premchand on National Language (Rashtrabhasha) is a collection of translations of Premchand's writings in Hindi between 1931-36 on the question of making Hindi the national language (Rashtrabhasha) of India (Bharatvarsha, then). This collection is a rich mine of Premchand's views (vichar) not only on the question of Hindi as the national language and all its ramifications but also on many other issues of national importance.