

## Fluent in 3 months

By: Benny Lewis & Scott Young

**Scott:** I think will talk about the most important methods, basically the, if I can recap from what I understand, the most important test here, your method is the total immersing into the language and also interacting with the language in a realistic and practical way but another thing that you've actually mention in your blog, we'll talk about it a little bit, is you have some smaller tactics that I read on that you used to help remember words I think this is particularly interesting for me because I've written a lot about this method which I haven't used for language learning that much but I used a lot on other academic subjects, where you talk about what are the techniques you used for remembering words by linking and ideas using the vocabulary of the word, the way the words is structured to other ideas in your head. I read that actually from an article book that's in your blog. I need to talk to you briefly about that, that tactic you used before to remember the words.

**Benny:** Yes certainly, there is actually two tactics I used, I haven't talked about the second one that on the blog yet. But, the first one, for remembering vocabulary because I don't have a photographic memory and I can't just see a word and know what the translation is and remember it forever. So the one technique I used which of course I did come up with it, it's something lots of people do and I saw your book here, you've said you called it visualization I think you're linking an 8 inch with lots of animations and emotions and things like that, so for example you would've seen on the post that you reference that what I wanted to learn that the word for train station in French was Gar and I, what does that look like? There's nothing in English called gar, just g a r so the closest word I could think of is Garfield so instead of just imagining Garfield sitting in a train station, which has no impact on you that you would forget that I made a little story, I imagined that he has to catch a train to Italy to go to a lasagna eating competition and he's running on to the train station. I imagined a particular train station in Valencia that I used to live in to make it very visual, he runs into he looks up to the time table but he sees the train just about to leave and he's dashing to it, and it has big fat cat and he seems sweating and panting and I got this extremely graphic and amusing image of Garfield running to the train station so whenever I got the best part of this is it works in two ways. Because if you want to really learn vocabulary and the language, it's not just about recognizing but also reproducing that word so even if I always recognize the Gar, it's going to be train station, if I want to say the word for train station that's a lot harder because you have to produce it yourself, of course this image links both of them directly so when I see the word, Gar, I remember the word okay I got Garfield, and Garfield was running to a train station. When I see, when I'm taking up a train station and then I see the image of Garfield and I guess with French word, so that's one thing is to link it up and then sometimes you have to be very imaginative on how you come up with those word beyond the example I gave and the purpose was to check words for first, which is a PRVNI and then I just got to wrote that word and it doesn't sound like anything in English so just thought about it for few seconds now at first I could tell you if you haven't applied this to languages when you tried this method at first it will take a while you need a whole minute to think of the word and it seems completely impractical because there is hundreds and

thousands of words to learn a language but when you do this, the kind of process that your brain learn how to apply it quicker in future so even if the first couple of times it takes you a whole minute to make the story and a graphical image in your mind after couple of times you started to do it in a couple of seconds and it starts becomes a very practical means of learning a new vocabulary so definitely I just look it on and I saw PROVAN and I thought of this professional band competition in the Olympics that I just won all of this I actually wrote a huge description of it and people say it's ridiculous because it's a, the description took me about ten minutes to actually write on the post but in reality, it only took me about five seconds to come up with that image and this is not something I come up with its just one of the ways that I apply to learning vocabulary which anybody can do for learning a huge amount of words.

**Scott:** That's a great suggestion it actually really draw on the techniques that I've talked about on holistic learning. The book Learn More Study Less and some other things that I've written about and the most interesting thing I found after writing the book and compiling it together is that, even though very few people I found are writing about, there's some people write about specific tactics that are sort of holistic but assembling all together found very few people that assemble all altogether but when I actually talk about it there's actually a lot of people who are already doing it so I'm glad that I'm not the only one who's advocating this kind of ideas and I think you're exactly right that you spend a little bit more time, especially when you're not used in doing it, doing it initially to create the image but you really widening your brain, so you don't have to learn it again as much and I've been very lucky with my language learner because French is very similar to English, there's a lot of long words in both the languages, English has a Norman root so there are a lot of English words that are very similar to the French word or you can kind of see how they made up more from French word

So I've really been trying to use even more even basic technique of more thing the English vocabulary have to the French words which I've found very successful too. But I think it's the same kind of idea that instead of just staring at the word and hopefully it's going to stick you look for something to kind of link it in together with the rest of the things that you know and I think you really have an inventive and imaginative method for doing that

**Benny:** Yes and the thing is a lot of people would when they hear about this they think, they have a lot of imagination I remember when I have a French teacher in the past and I try to have some of my students remember some French words like this and he said "ok now you try" when they try they can never think of something as imaginative as the examples I've given and it is something that you can learn and it is actually a lot of fun because when were children we have amazing imagination for a thing and all of these stories we come up with and we lose this as were an adult as we get more practical about the word and everything and this is actually brought a little bit of joy back in my life and it makes my word more interesting because I'm always imagining all this crazy stories going all around me and they ways that I'm learning. And now I'm definitely not the only one, I don't remember the link right now I can give it to you later, there's a guy who catalogues the mnemonics for these kind of stories for learning a new vocabulary, he does it for a couple of word, just French, Spanish, Italian and you can search for a word you try to remember and he might give a couple of hundred examples for each language and you can say if you want to remember this word you got there's a story with this and that's great for inspiration for people some ideas to get them started on this path.

**Scott:** Exactly, alright, one thing that you talked about you post and maybe is even some of the tactics but now I want to talk about some of the practical obstacles that you go face. What in your opinion from doing this process multiple times going through yourself need the best real life example of your strategy and practice? What do you feel is the biggest obstacle people face when learning languages that keeps them from really hating your strategies coming fluent in it??

**Benny:** Yeah I think one of the most and biggest obstacles for me and definitely for your readers and listeners is that we're English speakers and it's a huge problem, you will need a lot of polyglots I met a lot of Europeans who speak several languages who speak four or five languages and this is not actually that big deal. I met a lot of Indians who speak almost a dozen languages and they are different language from each other but the thing is as English speakers it's not that we're less talented than them it's the fact that because English is currently the most popular language that is studied in the world and people are always when you're abroad people are very happy to take the opportunity to practice and that's great if you're tourist and going to the country briefly but I found this, the kind of negative aspect of this is when I was in Spain, I decided to take on the thirty day mission. I actually lost several friends, several Spanish friends, and I can see they were actually kind of just using me, they were just using me to practice their English because getting English lessons abroad can be very expensive so the huge obstacle I found is that some people, just only want to only speak English with me, not just native speakers all of these other travelers who are just going to the country very briefly. They're not interested in learning the language they are just, they want to take pictures and whatever. So that's a big obstacle when you meet other foreigners but also the locals can be not so enthusiastic depending on where you go and you know Brazilians are fine, Brazilians are very happy to speak Portuguese with you. But when I was living in Paris they have very, very little patience with my level of French on that stage and when I started speaking in French, they will answer me back in English and it's not just the dominance of them speaking in English it's also in Puerto Rico because you know you started it off on the language and it's like you insulting them, "no, no, no your level is pathetic, I'm not interested in speaking my language with you, let's just speak in English". That's definitely the biggest challenge I've had in the last few years. I find ways around, I find ways on convincing locals to speak to me in their language and kind of dislike for the English language in this kind of a my way of getting rid of problem is whenever somebody speak to me in English I kind of tell them I'm no listener and English is my least favorite language I don't want to speak in English its boring I want to speak this language so I've kind of got this and is negative few of English in my mind has just positively helped me in learning the languages and I find ways to convince locals to speak to me in their language like for example my own story I try to tell them "here in Brazil, we are trying to become Brazilian maybe you could help me". I compliment them how much I love their language and so on, so that's a biggest obstacle and I just think other ones would be just trying to sticking to your commitments because in the early stages there is a temptation to just speak in English and I've met people living in their countries for I actually met a guy in France, who is married and have children has been living in France for ten years and after just two weeks they are speaking better than him Czech thank him and this not make me feel smart, it made me feel sorry for him because he was just so uncommitted because his whole social circle is purely English. So there's a lot of challenges and it's definitely not easy, like what I said anyone can do the fluent in three months experiment I don't mean

anyone in terms of it's not easy I mean anyone can do it if they are committed enough and you have to make a lot of sacrifices if you want to learn foreign language but the benefits are so much worth it.

**Scott:** Exactly, well I think another thing that you talked about we had a discussion about it before, is what's your feeling on some people and you talked about it before that you really feel active method getting out there, meeting people speaking your language or at least if you're getting some input it's in a practical way so that the language is alive for you. But I think a lot of my readers are thinking right now, well you know "that's great for Benny, Benny is an extrovert, he's a crazy guy he has crazy pictures in some, he is clearly an outgoing sociable guy, what's your response to those people who say "you know what I'm just not extrovert enough. I'm too shy to really take advantage of your method."

**Benny:** It's alright, this is another thing that people can just learn and I definitely don't think that being an extrovert or an introvert is genetic; it's not built in to you. It's something that you can learn, and I can tell you that when I was 20, when I went to Spain I was extremely shy. I studied in an all-boys school in a university and I did one of the most difficult courses in the university so I was studying the entire time. And I think I only went out, at least 3 or 4 times a year, it was barely a university life so when I graduated, I was very, very introvert and shy. And there's no way I would approach a stranger and start a conversation with them. In general, in the last few years, I've learned there's a few other people that I've met and then you know you self brought from dirty sleeps, I find that it's a method of social skydiving where he says you know, you just have to, it's something you can learn. You have another 30-day project as you're talking about where you just force yourself to speak to as many people as possible, as many strangers as you can. You learn that it's not that big deal that somebody, people are going to bite your head off. You know you walk to them and say, "Hey, how are you doing?" You spark up a conversation and worst case scenario, they don't respond, and they look at you weird. Then you just go on to the next guy, as simple as that, it's a process that it does take a while. You can start from somebody extremely shy and then become fluent in 3 months in their language because you have, this is one of my things, I kind of presume people are a little bit extrovert and if they're going to be trying this. So I suppose it involves some prerequisites if you're taking on this intense immersion because you do have to be very open. You have to be willing talk to lots of people, you have to look at yourself less seriously and don't worry about making mistakes so I wouldn't be an expert in terms of explaining how to reach this stage but in general it's just something that you can practice. You just have to get out of the house and talk to many as people as possible and there's another reason why I have a strong contrast with the pure indulged language learning people who, as you say, commented negatively against me, is that they're kind of embracing their shyness. They are just staying in their past listening to their audio courses on their iPod and reading lots of their foreign language to the websites and whatever, but then this is kind of accepting the fact that they are too shy to get out and talk to people and you have to do that it's a necessary step if you want to be able to speak a language. You have to actually speak it, you have to get out there and talk to people. So, I can't really give such good advice explaining on how to reach that stage but there's a lot of good materials, that you know, a couple of really good self help books that people can get through it, lot of phrases and resources online through blog post, explaining helping people to change from an introvert to an extrovert so, it's definitely

something that you can learn, it's something that I've learned. I was very, very shy when I was 20 and now I was much more extrovert. It's a process that anyone can go through.

**Scott:** I just wanted to mention because you brought it up, my friend Brad Ballen Barker, writes at [thirtysleeps.com](http://thirtysleeps.com) and you can go there. He's busy in a new start venture so he doesn't post as frequently now but his archives are cool there is tons of great articles and including social success. What I really like about his attitude is it kind of reflects yours and my attitude which is less he's kind of, maybe, in some cases less more manipulative or go out and try to like trick people like you do. He is very genuine, very upfront, you called it social skydiving, I think a lot of people get some value at it if they haven't heard of him from before. So, moving on to another big point, which is I think a manifestation of your combination of the social and also the language learning which you go to learn Brazilian Portuguese, it wasn't just to learn Brazilian Portuguese take on to learn the academic own descriptive Youtube video fashion, but you wanted people to think that you are actually a Brazilian so that when they meet you in a conversation they don't think that this is some guy from Ireland speaking Portuguese this is a Brazilian so maybe you could talk a little bit about that, what kind of trigger that goal on your mind, maybe some of the steps that you take beyond your initial language learning process totally make that happen.

**Benny:** Okay. So one the most important parts of this mission for me is that it is a very, very high goal to reach, it's a very difficult thing. So, the way I looked at it is if I work really hard and I still don't make it to that stage where Brazilians think that I'm Brazilian in working so hard I'm going to hugely improve my Portuguese and it was the same when I'm trying to learn Czech fluency in three months it turned out my last month, I couldn't continue the experiment because I have financial problems and I have to work double time, but it still because I was aiming for such a high goal after the two months I was actually I've reached conversational Czech, which is an amazing achievement so if you aim for something really, really high even if you don't reach it, you're going to be landing on an impressive goal anyway. Now, in terms of what I'm trying here, what I want to do is exactly what you said I want to basically have just a hint, it don't have to be for hours or I don't want to convince anyone in academia that I'm a Brazilian I just wanted to meet some stranger and to talk to them for a minute or two, and I want that after that one minute or two he still thinks that I'm Brazilian until I mess up on some mistake or until I happen to mention that I'm from Ireland. And now, I can gladly say that there's yesterday for the first time, somebody did think that I was a Brazilian and I was only talking to him for about 30 seconds but I was kind of talking to a lot of people and when I went away and then when I came back the guy said that he was talking to my friends and he's very surprised to hear that I was Irish because up to that point he thought that I was Brazilian so I'm very pleased, you know even if I don't hear that from other people, at least I've convinced that one person. I still got two more weeks here so I'm going to try to see what I can do, so it's a very different process, I've learned so much in the last two and a half months. This is why I'm running my blogs and everything is because I'm still learning. You know, as you said in your last blog post, we're not experts so it's more on learning about things so this is I've learned so much. I'm not saying that, I know exactly how to learn any language very quickly and for example the kind of thing I've learned includes each language has its own music and this is extremely important if you want to reduce your accent, as English speakers have a preference for consonants rather than vowels so when we speak a foreign language we tend to eat non stressed vowels and this is a very difficult thing of an English

speaking accent and you got a particular letter. The R is the most important letter that anyone should work on and its rolling their r, r, r, making it more guttural if it's in French for example and so I've kind of work, I already worked, I have a pretty good pronunciation such as working more with music and then on making my language ironically even less academic. My Portuguese was already, you know, not so formal because I've never stick in a class of Portuguese, I've learned it all in parties and whatever here, I've gone a step further, because I have studied a little bit by myself on spokesman. And now, I'm getting rid of all of that, I'm trying to make it even more informal so, you know, equivalence in English would be like say things like "ain't" and you know, things like that they are not proper English but there's a particular group of people will speak like that and learning lots of slang and cursing, these kind of things are very important for making yourself sound natural because language learners tend to sound very formal. We used the words that the books tell us are translations rather than the actual words that people say like you know in French for example, the word for job or work is 'travail' but people on the street would actually tend to say 'boulot' and its less formal. It's a different social level, you put into a job interview or something. So these are the kind of equivalent things in Portuguese that I'm working on and then after that, that's just the linguistic aspect, when you're speaking a foreign language. It's not just the language it's your body language, it's your clothes, it's your your posture, your facial expressions, and it's not just how you say things but exactly what you're saying that has a cultural aspect to it and the way you're talking about a particular thing or the passion you have for them. And these are these are the kind of things I've been trying to observe and compare between Brazilians and foreigners and try to emulate as a Brazilian and I still got a long way to go and you know, if I can convince just a couple of more people, if I can confirm it, that it's definitely true, they're not just saying it to make me feel good, some other people do genuinely believe that I'm a Brazilian, I'd be very pleased for what I achieved during the last few months but even if that doesn't happen anymore people have told me that in the last two and a half months my Portuguese has exploded and in perfectionism. I've got such a good accent on it now, I'm saying things so much more naturally and they're more comfortable to speak with me. This is for me to solve the important to that speaking a foreign language is you're not just asking questions getting an answer, you know, it's the communication goes beyond that you need to have relationships with people, when you speak with a strong accent and just making it too formally this creates a little bit of a distance between people and where you can put yourself in the same level as them, using the same kind of straight vocabulary they would, they could open up themselves up to you so much and I've learn so much about Brazilian culture. And trying to actually imitate them and be one of them and be inside of their groups and they say things to me that they wouldn't say to foreigners normally. Like I discovered, for example, Brazilians love taking the best out of their friends, you know, lie hardly mocking them, saying that they're an idiot and doing it in such a way that if your level of the language is a little bit lower you would get offended, you know, so people are doing this I'm actually pleased that I'm getting insulted a lot from my friends and I can see from the way they are doing it with each other they you know. For example as a macho culture they call each other gay as an insult and all of these really funny things. There am I kind of feels pleased about because it makes me feel a lot closer to them and they appreciate it so much. As I said before, there's a noble effect, the passion I've shown them in trying to learn Portuguese has encouraged them to help me and correct me, tell me what I'm doing wrong and it's been an absolutely amazing experience and I definitely cannot do it in the other languages that I would speak fluently, like French and Spanish, I do want to reach the stage where a

local would think that I'm one of them even for just for a minute, you know, because it's a few people that would encounter that telling me "no, no, no, you need a whole lifetime to speak with an accent, and to be exactly like a native." But I'm not aiming for that, I'm being realistic I'm not going to reach that stage in the next few years where I could spend all day long with somebody talking to them and they still think that I'm not from the same city and you know, I'm being realistic, But I'm still aiming for the stars. And if I land on the moon then that's great still, you know.

**Scott:** That's great! That's great, and I think you brought up an important point, earlier when we talk just about how you and I, especially not me. We are not experts; I don't even know what the word expert means. I think that the real benefit of this conversation at least for me is that you're actually living this, this is your story and you have something that a lot of people can aspire to, I know that maybe there is some other language learning blog for someone who speaks something a little bit better and criticize you but you're actually out there doing it learning eight languages and living across a different cultures, immersing yourself so I think that you're probably the closest thing that many people can find maybe too an expert. But to the very least story that you can attached to it and I definitely have learned a lot in this phone interview, I hope that the readers were listening to this right now and getting some value out of this. I know I'm probably I had to listen to this again and take notes because I'm going to have to use this in my own language learning. So I want to thank you very much for coming on, and helping me out on this audio recording, you're definitely an interesting guy. I wanted to direct everybody to your website it's, [fluentin3months.com](http://fluentin3months.com), and it is a fantastic website where you basically tell your story of how you learn all these languages, so if you're thinking about maybe becoming bilingual or even just mastering the language that you are already learning you definitely a lot to share.

**Benny:** Thank you very much for the interview, it's been very interesting and I've learned a lot from you as well from our previous conversation and from your blog post so I definitely be interested in collaborating more in the future with you.

**Scott:** Thank you, alright.