

## FLUENT IN 2 MONTHS

By: Benny Lewis

**Scott:** I'm really excited today because I have Benny Lewis who's a self describe polyglots and speaker of 8 languages and this is going to be a short interview just describing how he's able to do, how he's able to do that in less than a decade and his approach to rapid learning. In particular his new website which is fluent in 3 months because his progress in becoming fluent in a language in only 3 months. Hey Prof Benny, how it's going?

**Benny:** It's going great and I can say that I do speak 8 languages but prepare to say this I can get by pretty well any languages because you can never really say you speak a language. It's an on ongoing process but I would from a Layman's perspective I would say that I would speak them fluently

**Scott:** Well I just come to, giving you a lot of advantages in your life you currently do freelance translation work as majority of your work, correct?

**Benny:** That's right jess.

**Scott:** So this language learning invention that you took on several years ago is really paid up both on your career and personal life would you say

**Benny:** Definitely. See, I originally started Electronic Engineering and I was under the impression that you cannot have such a wide range of talents for one person. You are either excellent in mathematics and physics and science or your an artistic person you could know languages and so on. And I was very good in Math, Math and Science in school and not so great in languages. So I can just presume that's the way it was for my whole life. I started engineering, I was going to be an engineer but through the progress of the last 3 years. I've learned languages and combined them with the technical subject I studied and it's been extremely beneficial because it's such a specific specialization because I translate engineering document. So it's so specific that it pays quite well and can be very flexible and the amount of work when I accept the work and so on. It sort start off just a little hobby for me you know, it was a nice touch. I can speak a few languages someday but now it really has enable me to this noble effect to this more languages I learned the more is enable me professionally and mentally to continue travelling and continue learning more languages.

**Scott:** And that's great, I think you bring up a really good point about the benefits that really focusing on learning and mastering not only the skill of the new languages but also the ability of learning language really paid off for you. One thing that I think that is really important to point out to people that are listening on this which was really important to me which really drew me in the years is that you're not one of those kid that grew up on a house hold, you are fluent on 3 languages by the time you are five, you learn another through exploring. Some people get fluency in that way and I know notice

respect of them but you started learning languages fairly late and light maybe we could be able to talk about that.

**Benny:** Yes certainly! So when I was 20 years old, I graduated university and I move to Spain and I that time I only spoke English and I had study German in high school because you have to have a pretty decent level in academic to get it to university in Ireland and then I also studied Irish but I don't need basically higher in academic level of these 2 languages where I can read them but definitely not speak them and more or less the same as anybody would have gone to the high school system of learning any language. But I moved to Spain and it was kind of graduate process. My story is not unique; it's something that happens to a lot of people, if you move to a country no matter how naturally talented you maybe with languages, if you are committed to learning a language but you stay in a country long enough and you will pick it up so the only thing that is slightly different for me is I repeated the process several times over. After I've learned Spanish and I moved to Italy and I learned Italian, then I moved to France. I just repeated the process. I've actually met literally ten thousand of people and I've done what I've done for a particular language. Like you know in France story were running to the Reshma student and I hang out with them all those time whenever I'm in Europe and definitely I have circle of friends with the Reshma group and they were going to the same struggle that I was. They are from foreign country and try to learn Spanish and going to very slowly but after a year they were all speaking it fluently. And it's not actually that impressive, it's something that's absolutely anybody can do

**Scott:** I think you already touch on because this is sort of the position I'm in. I am learning from the people who don't know. I am learning French, I'm living here in France for this year and I'm basically the description of process of you describe someone who moved from a country and is learning a set of languages. I think there's going to be a lot of people who are willing, who are interested in doing this. And I think you bring up a really good point that learning a foreign language, becoming fluent in a foreign language isn't limited to certain skill set. You agree with anyone can do it as particularly the techniques that you're suggesting are not from a certain set of people, also for people that are living 3 years of 4 hours a day study this is something that is approachable you have for the average person, correct?

**Benny:** That's right. Definitely! As I said, I was 20 years old and I was self confessed idiot with languages and if you told me that I'm on the current situation in speaking several languages, I would not believe you. I was the worst student in class. In German the only language I studied and I don't actually speak German, this is the one language I will soon be coming back to but because I only study academically I went to traditional process. I don't actually reach the stage of speaking it. But if you live in a country and you see from a different perspective. You can look us a something that you have to study I don't really think of a languages as a study project for me it's completely social project. It's all about speaking on people, the means to speaking to people. So I don't see it as list of words of grammar that I have to learn, analogies recovery, I see it means to talk to people, to make new friends, to open my cultural horizon. And this is definitely something that anybody can do.

**Scott:** Ok so going from your 20's, early 20 when you are self confessed language idiot, just like I personally quote you and saying that.

**Benny:** Yap yap!

**Scott:** So fast forward today, were you speak 8 languages, whether or not your 5 minutes fluent or just being pretty good. I'd still saying 8 are fairly impressive. Speaking 8 languages, doing professional translation and also working on becoming fluent in 3 months, I have to say when I first heard the name of the website it sound a little bit, a little bit fictitious to me. Because for my experience, 3 months to learn a language, not just to learn it but to become fluent in it is incredibly rapid and I know I've learning a lot from you from just recently following your blog and talking to you a few times. That I'd be in France for 3 months that I would say I'm fairly I'm in the media fluent still going to be a little bit more from you so maybe you can discuss sort of how you been able to take a language learning process and just compress it into a period where you use realistically from learning in 3 months

**Benny:** Ok and so the whole purpose of my blog is to show my experiment in proving to myself that I can learn a language in 3 months. I haven't done it yet, all of the languages I've learned in somewhere between like for example it's been 6 months total from my Portuguese and after year and half total from my Spanish because that was the first language and I'm absolutely sure that I can reach fluency in three months and I'm planning to do it next year and another language will be taking on and so for example some of the things that I do which I think will distinguish me from other learners and there means of learning languages is a lot deeper commitment so as what you have seen on the website one of the things I've said there may have the huge difference from me and I can explain now is that I can spend 6 months in Spain. I was studying very hard, and I try to take some classes and I take the opportunity to speak Spanish I was teaching English part time but try to talk to the parents of the students I was teaching. I try to talk to some people in the supermarket. I try to spark of conversation but after 6 months my "habla Spanish" was not even intermediate was still quite basic and I was at the stage of giving up. That's when I made the greatest discovery in all of my language learning and process was really holding me back was that I'm kept switching during half of the things in Spanish and a comeback to English and you know it would be a per day trying to speak Spanish and in the evening I go to my friends who are either premium speakers or Spaniards who could speak very well in English and I would tell them, I complain about how hard it is to learn Spanish. So I made the decision to not speak a word of English for an entire month. It was a crazy experiment that warn everybody in advance that I'm going to try this and that month is literally change my life because it showed me, I wasn't speaking it fluently after that one month but something change on my head a little disconcept that you can speak in another language. I mean it's seems a lot obvious but it's something that's hold us all back. It's that to ourselves was taking of the language or learning as a different language that belongs to other people, that's kind of barely able to grasp but control of or were kind of taking English and translating to that language. So after this month of homely doing everything absolutely everything in Spanish and I've gone over this barrier that I call my own language barrier. I reached the stage where I was able to do anything communicated. Anything I wanted entirely to Spanish. So that was the main things that change everything for me. And now in terms of my 3 months, can anybody, anyone can learn a language in 3 months but it requires a very big change in the attitude and a lot of sacrifices. So that not speaking English is a huge sacrifice because you're missing and be able to communicate your emotions and be able to relate to people if you can be very lonely feeling if you are in a foreign country and you're trying

to speak the language and you can't fully communicate yourself. That's a very big sacrifice this why a lot of people are just are not willing to make that sacrifice. They mutual country they gladly speak most of the times but they still have their English speaking friends. This is just one example of method I used that makes a huge difference. I never ever speak English that I've got very, very few exceptions like skype calls like this one with my parents. Everywhere I go I kind of avoid the English speaking expats, I still hang out with other foreigners but I still maintain other languages like here in Rio I got some French friends for example, I speak French. In general I avoid English, that's the one of the most important decision that I made in terms of learning another language

**Scott:** Ok great. Well I guess maybe we can summarize your rapid learning tactics as being extreme emerging whereas most people including myself, I don't protest to being an expert. I'm still learning a lot from this call. And I'm sure many of the listeners are. But even myself I know there's quite people that's speak English with. I speak English with my Canadian roommate here in France where I can definitely relate with your feeling of the difficulty but also the benefits of that total emerging. But I guess my question in you, because this is something that I'm thinking and I'm sure some of our listeners who are, maybe anticipating starting this process or in the middle of it. How we cross that gap. I know you may commitment into only speak Spanish for 30 days but for a lot of people especially if you are new in the language. How you meet people who are just speaking that language because obviously your social skills, your ability to introduce yourself and have a conversation to people are little bit slower when you are less comfortable of the language. How do you cross that kind of barrier?

**Benny:** Yeah that was very difficult. This is another thing that I've learned in the last few year is the social aspect and another one of the most important is I've learned in terms of learning language is letting go of your ego and is kind of ironic for you people. You can imagine if you speak several languages, people will tell you that you are really smart all the time but I just let that flow over me that I don't have kind of vanish. I feel very humble. Because I actually sound like English all the time I've got an accent whenever I speak, I'll be making a mistake, no matter what language it is. I feel much better for Portuguese at the moment for example. But in general when I speak another language, I definitely not doing it perfectly so you have to have this concept in your head that your variable just like everybody else and this is very, very hard because you have to let go of your ego to do this. Because when you try to learn another language you try to expand yourself, you try to be a smarter person but you have to embrace the fact that you are going to feel like an idiot. So this is one of the most important things for me is that I know I would walk up to somebody and I say something very basic when I started this 30 day mission in Spanish. I still have no command what so ever over the past tense because the past tense in Spanish is quite complicated, it's more complicated that in French so I just can't say anything in the past tense, so I've kind of wave me and say yesterday I go to the cinema and yesterday I eat breakfast, that kind of thing. And I just have to let go of the fact that I know I was wrong and just look it more casually. I think most of the things I've learned in last year had been more conceptual rather than in terms of method but I do several methods. Practical method, I do need to me. There's a lot of people use them memory techniques and so on but it's mostly this kind of thing but I think letting go of your ego is very important part of that.

**Scott:** Well I agree with you. I think that I will agree in fact that with the opposite with that your extremely merging strategy is a learning method simply because a lot of people don't use them. I think this is something interesting to bring up because I'm a little bit, little bit of phonetically getting the things in every reading a few languages and learning blogs and we talk about this before but your extremely immersion approach is I would say probably not most educated approach for learning languages and in fact is I can join you some criticism from some other people who behave disagree with you so maybe you could just explain a little bit about what makes you unique regarding the different style of learning languages then maybe advocate of elsewhere

**Benny:** Yeah, I was quite surprise that I would get quite a criticism. I don't know, I got 10 or 20% of traffic coming from my blog is links from other language learners who speak more languages than me. I'd say academically speaking they actually are better than me in this languages they have wide range of vocabulary and so on. And they will link to me saying check this guy; he's making all these mistakes blah, blah. But the problem is they're looking at the language as an academic subject and they can explain all the grammar to you and you can ask them anywhere than the spend that to you, for me they don't actually speak the language but these guys need to prove themselves by putting up you tube videos of themselves talking to the camera like whatever it is 20 languages but actually reading a script that they prepare beforehand. Then even though their accent is very good it's not natural but I prefer mine to be more natural so what's kind of unique was my method is almost completely against the academic process of learning language, I think you can't do it all because when you learn a language naturally as you growing up and you know as you learning English you don't think about the past participle of verb and true perfect and things like this maybe you can learn them and if you wanted a better understanding how the English language work. You don't need to know any of that to speak fluent English and it's the same with other languages. I actually one important part on my process is I abandoned, almost entirely abandoned grammar in the most, early stage of learning language because I find grammar to be a very frustrating and almost useless list of word when the early stages because if you the grammar of any language inside and out you still cannot speak that language whereas if you could repeat a few phrases even if you are as good as a parrot. You could just repeat the phrases and a particular situation. You still able to communicate, you're able to get some kind of a point across so that's how I start language, I actually start with usually a phrase book, one of the like the lonely planet or the rough guy. And I try to learn the phrase book off to give me the typical sentences that I will be using in basic day to day conversation. And they try to expand from there and I don't want to reach some kind of low intermediate stage whereas saying lots of things and they were very, very wrong. At that stage they started studying grammar; it's more interesting because it's not just the list of words it's the list of reason why the things I already know are the way they are, it's very, very interesting when I do that. My way is kind of little bit reversed from the other way is that just like I leave grammar for the end, I leave academic professionalism for the end and I try to start off with the colloquialism, slang, I also learn these things first because my whole purpose is I wanted to speak with people. I'm not interested in passing test. I have done a professional test and I got diploma in French and Spanish but I did the more academic studying part of it after I already spoke the language and that was really different from me compared to other learners and again I got criticism from that because a lot of them are kind of I do have a very frustrating relationship with this other learners because all of my experience is from

pure practice, pure in field experience and experimentation whereas all of theirs are from theory and we have an argument. They always reference some study done in some university, there's statistically this way is slightly better. That's fair enough but they don't actually speak a language and they're telling me that I should learn a language, so it sad.

**Scott:** So yeah, I guess we can say that you are the perfect example of your own philosophy because it require so fairly. But I think one point I want to try to touch on a little bit because the whole point of this program which the people listen who has signed up for is to implement this kind of method. Now you've be given some steps, meaning the extreme emerging is that I could give some people who are really going to die or do it but I think my question is this something that I'm feeling to and I tend to be susceptible both to myself is that going 30 days of complete emerging is very, very intense and I'm not suggesting to people don't do it. Specially if language learning is important to them but maybe you could suggest are there any alternate ways you think would be a certain immediate step or something that I want to apply some of these emerging topics do you think of some way that you can apply it in maybe a step like that for the first month you try to do this, second month you try to do this or you think it is an all or nothing down that.

**Benny:** Well, if you want to become fluent in a very short time like 3 months, it has to be all or nothing but if you want to do it in 6 months, or a year or something if you're comfortable with spreading it over a longer time period, of course you can do it in less than 10 months. I know some people they travel as a couple for example and they told me that they absolutely at night time when they're going out of town, they want to speak English. And as committed as they are to learning a language they fail. They have to relax because otherwise they're not going to enjoy themselves so much. So what I suggested to them was to have a very particular time table each day in terms of just speaking languages and doing certain things always in languages and believe in themselves the freedom to do things in English. So for example, they will only speak in their target language in 8pm and they will not let themselves do anything in English and as soon as the advantage to that compare to my method is they actually have something to look forward to during the day. They speak the language and try hard and you can get very tired but at least you know that in very short time, just another hour and then you can relax and you can speak English again versus a long stressful if you're doing for the whole month because 3 days is a very, very distant time when you're doing something so intense. So I definitely recommend that, you can apply lots of things like you don't have to necessarily travel. My whole thing in pure immersion is obviously that you have to be in the country but I have other ways of learning in improving languages without ever going to the country in question. As I said for example here in Rio constantly practicing my French and definitely my Spanish because there's a lot of Argentine here in Rio but in general if you're any country in the world, you can meet up with people about natives and other learners who can show you that there also enthusiastic about learning the language. Remember I wrote a post for example saying that you don't have to travel there's a lot in this site link for example there's cat surfing where you can meet up with foreigners travelling to your city. You can host them or you can meet them for a coffee of a weekly meeting several dozen people and there was also meetoff.com which is especially popular in Canada and in States. I suggest that my website and one person who have common thing before who was generally skeptical and critical of my method because it's only possible if you can travel.

Of course it would come up with lots of reason were they can't travel and so on. But she wrote a comment on that post and she said, she was very, very please because she went to meetoff.com and it turns out that there was a weekly meeting of people in her city in America who are enthusiast about Italian. And she is now every week going to that meeting that would attended by 10 to 15 people. They're not native of Italians but they speak all just an Italian in a meeting. There's something to be said about speaking a language with non natives because it takes out a lot of the pressure off. And when I start learning Spanish, I can actually, I admit that most of the time I was speaking Spanish in Spain was not actually Spaniards, it was the Reshma students and then learn much more Spanish than French and German and Italian students who are also learning Spanish. And because their level is a lot closer to mine, I don't feel embarrassed when I speaking mistakes and slowing things down because they were also making mistakes and a lot less pressure too when you can relate to other learners so you can have a less intense version of what I'm doing if you were to devoted a particular times of the week just speaking the language but my whole this is about speaking not learning. I'm not saying you should devote 4 hours a week or an hour a day just sitting down at your desk which allow in opening your grammar book and going through with highlighter pen. I have point distance that no matter what stage you are in the language you should try some form of immersion and even if that's for an hour a day or 4 hours a week or whatever it is, you should try to meet people and say the language alive. And even if it that's just watching tv which is more input based which is kind of money processed but it still something, it's still saying the language alive and this is important because if you just studying a list of words you might as well studying mathematics which I love mathematics myself but a lot of people don't and they just see it the boring list of words and they shouldn't see the language like that because the language exists for communication purposes so no matter what you do, no matter how much time you devote to it. It should by that; it should be by the practical aspect to it and not the theoretical in the study aspects

**Scott:** I think just to comment quickly because I think a lot of the readers right now who are lot of the listeners who were going to this program are going to be thinking in terms of 30 day trial method which is something I really advocate. You also pick up on this as well in doing it in 30 day experiments saying but I think there is a lot of ideas you threw out there that can be incorporate into 30 day plan to keep start your language learning habits such as partitioning certain activities of your day to only done in your targeting language or as you said that a couple targeting a certain time of day to only be at the target language. I think all those are probably survive people, a little bit more bite size introductions and maybe are a little bit too afraid or a concern about going with the complete immersion but as we said obviously for the fluent in 3 months full you really have to have that high level of intensity .

**Benny:** There is a lot of ways you can do, I mean for example I explained that there you can have your computer interfere entirely in the foreign language. What I like to do when I started a language is I like to learn little things that I would say to myself and voice over like order an amount of milk or where do I leave my keys and whenever I'm saying this things to myself, I tried to say them in the language. I tried to force myself to think in the foreign language and this has the interesting consequences that if you do this all day long you will actually end up training in the language. People ask me this questions a lot. You know, you dream in a foreign language and if you spend your whole day thinking in a foreign language

and you can even do this in a city where theoretically there's nobody who speak the language that you want to learn. There are no more opportunities to practice it. You can still in your head do everything in that foreign language. If you have a journal that you keep every day, you can write a journal for what you're doing that day in the foreign language. You can write your shopping list in the foreign language. So even if you can't do with another person, you can still make the language something alive to yourself. This is definitely something can be done in bite size form.

**Scott:** Thanks for listening to this interview with Benny Lewis. I have another section of interview coming up next month for Benny's going to be talking about how he learned languages holistically and some holistic learning techniques that he applies to learning language. What Benny feels is the number one obstacle for language learning, how can he become more socialize have in learning languages and how he feels social skills build wall in the process of learning languages and finally Benny will talk about an interesting project that he's working on, right now he's staying in Brazil to take his emerging beyond fluency to the next level. So hope you will stick around for the next month, will post second half of the interview to both half an hour which will give you even more advice how to learn languages rapidly and become a polyglots like Benny.