

3 LANGUAGE LEARNING SECRETS

(Only Polyglots Know)

SECRET ONE: AUDIOBOOKS WITH TRANSCRIPTS

Foreign language audiobooks are great learning tools. Combined with a matching transcript they become incredible resources. Today I'm going to show you how to use audiobooks to hugely boost your language level.

Who should use this method?

I highly recommend this method for upper-intermediate learners and above. You should see a noticeable improvement in your foreign language ability in a matter of weeks.

For those who are only just starting out, tackling a whole audiobook is too much for now. Indeed, your time will be better invested in developing your vocabulary base and understanding for the critical structures of the language. Come back to audiobooks once you are ready.

Sounds good. So what do I need to do?

My suggested procedure for the audiobook with transcript method is simple:

1. Find interesting material to listen to with a matching text (discussed later)
2. Listen to the first chapter. Just listen for now, without reading the text. Try to just get the gist of what is going on in the story and focus on what you can understand.

WHY AUDIOBOOKS ARE GREAT FOR LEARNING LANGUAGES

- Gain exposure to authentic native material.
- Learn tons of new vocabulary.
- Develop a native-like sense of individual words and phrases from their proper context.
- Improve your listening skills.
- Enjoy foreign literature in the original.
- Learn cultural nuances and context



3. Next, listen and read at the same time. You are likely to understand a lot more of the content during this second round. Take time to notice unknown words and make a mental note of them, perhaps guessing at what they might mean. There is no need to look them up with a dictionary at this stage.

4. Listen to the chapter one more time.

OK I did the first chapter. What next?

If you can roughly follow the plot and understand around 50% of the words, then move on to the next chapter and repeat the above process. The reason I recommend skipping the dictionary where possible is twofold:

1. New words will tend to make their meanings known to you if you give them enough time. The context of the story you are listening to will often give them away. Your brain is great at making its theories all on its own. After all, that is how you learned your native language.

2. This language stuff is supposed to be fun. I want you to enjoy the content and let it flow. Over time, this will positively reinforce your learning and you will begin to look forward to it.

If it is proving difficult to follow the general story and your comprehension is below 50% then a different strategy is required. In this case, we will break our rule. Look up some of the unknown words with a dictionary. Don't go too crazy though! Try to find out the meaning for the vocabulary items that seem to repeat themselves. These will usually be the most useful ones to know. You can write down the definitions or make flashcards for them in a program such as Anki. When you have looked up a decent number of words, try starting again through steps 2-4 of our procedure. Your comprehension should be much better this time. Now you can move onto the next chapter.

Which audiobooks do you recommend for language learning?

You might find that a familiar story or topic will make for a better audiobook to start out with. This way, you will already know the context and be able to decipher the meaning of new words with greater ease. Of course this will depend on your level in the language. If you are comfortable with your listening skills, then by all means move onto completely new content.

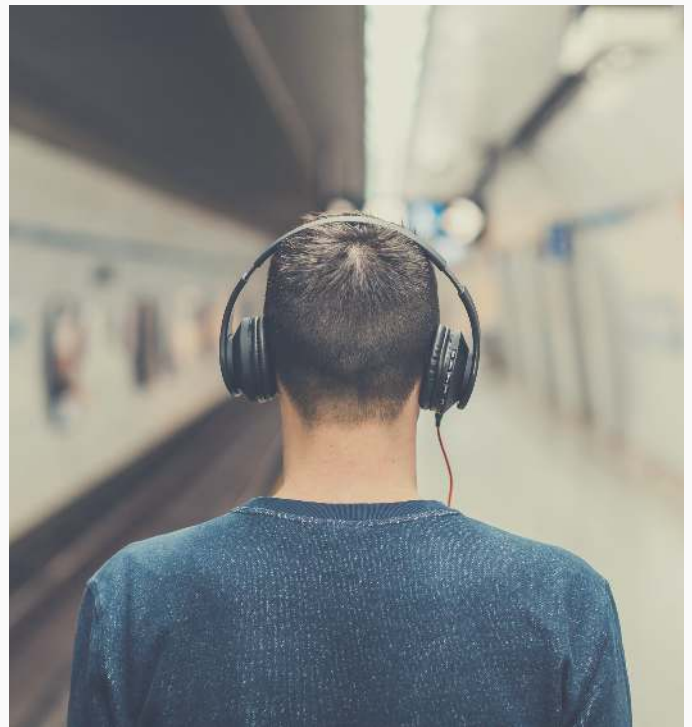
I have listened to and read the Little Prince in several languages. For me, it's just right -- a short and enjoyable story with fairly straightforward vocabulary. Others prefer using religious texts such as the Bible. No subject matter or genre is objectively inferior to another. What matters is what is interesting to you.

We can make some generalizations though. Fiction light on dialogue and heavy on abstract descriptions (e.g. Kafka) will be much tougher than a trashy romance novel. It may be surprising to some that low-brow content tends to make better language learning material, especially when you are starting out.

SECRET TWO: MAKING USE OF IDLE TIME (ESPECIALLY TRANSIT TIME!)

I moved to Saitama a little while back, which gives me a commute time of roughly 40 minutes to work. This is longer than the 10 minutes or so from my previous apartment in Tokyo. Well, something interesting happened to my language studies as a result. I find that I am learning a lot more Japanese!

For the record, I am a full-time Japanese-English translator; contrary to popular belief, translators still need to constantly learn new vocabulary and industry terminology to stay competitive. This game never ends!



I'm going to share how you can better use your commute time for learning a foreign language. In today's post, I will talk about the benefits of studying on your way to work or school.

The Benefits Of Studying A Language During Your Commute

Regularity

Your commute is a regular time slot that repeats every day. Over time, small increments of time add up to big returns. Let's do a quick calculation of what this means. A 30 minute commute by train is 60 minutes per day. Assuming you studied Chinese every day during this time (instead of texting your friends or mindlessly browsing Facebook! Not that I would ever do that 😊) and did the same amount study during the weekends, this amounts to 21,900 minutes a year. Not bad going! In reality, it is much easier to stick to studying during a regular commute than is putting aside time for studying.

Stress relief

I can honestly say that I now look forward to studying Japanese during my commute. When I have a bit more time, I even take the slower train to fit in a bit more learning (I know I am a bit weird for this). I'll cover the specifics of how I study in another post, but I usually add new material in the mornings and focus on reviewing in the evening. I have found that doing something useful before I even get to work helps relieve some of the stress that comes with working in the hectic concrete jungle that is Tokyo. I feel less rushed and more at ease.

Rewiring the brain

Practically all of the apps you use on your mobile phone, especially social media and games, target the dopamine reward systems in your brain. Each new update, prize, or notification is linked to dopamine release (I once interviewed a gaming company in Singapore who openly told me they base their gaming experience on addicting their users). This might not be so bad in the scheme of things; I'd rather be addicted to Angry Birds than tobacco. But replacing these time killers with something useful (you do want to learn a language, right?) literally rewires your brain. Three months into my new schedule, I am now far more addicted to adding and mastering new words than social media.

Rewiring the brain is something that interests me. The internet is such a great tool, but I feel that many of us have been led astray into wasting time and money on it instead of using its full potential for our own long-term benefit and well-being. I recommend reading a book called *The Shallows*, which is a fascinating (and foreboding) take on the internet's role in neuroplasticity.

Fun

Following a regular study habit during my commute time has made me enjoy life more. I no longer view my train to work as an annoyance. It's a marvelous part of the day where I discover new and interesting things about the Japanese language. There is also a sense of achievement as the unknown transforms into the familiar before eventually becoming an old friend.

These are just a few of the advantages of studying your target language every day during your commute. Whether you take public transport or drive, it's safe to say that you can fit some learning time into your routine.

SECRET THREE: HOW TO BREAK LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCRASTINATION

Do you ever find yourself putting off your study? Or perhaps you go through times where you study manically followed by days of doing nothing? Don't worry. You are not alone!

Procrastination is a common problem. It affects us in many areas of life, including language learning.

I am going to break down the issue piece-by-piece and show you how to solve it. Fortunately, the cure is an easy one but it requires some self-reflection.

Bossing yourself around never works. It never did work and it never will.

"Damn. I haven't done any Chinese study for days. I have to get back to it."

Or maybe it's: "Yikes. I've missed doing my Anki for the last 3 days. I've got to catch up on it or it will be unbearable."

Does any of the above sound familiar? Take a look at all those command words in there.

Got to! Have to! Must! Need to!

IS YOUR SELF-TALK SABOTAGING YOUR LANGUAGE LEARNING?

- "I have to..."
- "I really need to..."
- "I should have..."

Read on to find out why these language patterns lead us to procrastination



Is this what you are telling yourself? If so, you are most likely stuck in a “school mindset”. It is at the root of your procrastination problem. Confused? I thought you might be.

The school mindset

Think back to your school days. It could be any subject, any teacher. Were you ever asked what you wanted to study? Were you ever consulted about the quality of the lessons? Did you ever get to choose what homework to do?

Of course not. That’s because as a pupil at school you didn’t have the power to choose your curriculum. You didn’t have the right to an opinion about your own learning. You were there to obey the teacher and meet external expectations.

Now think back to your homework. That homework that you had zero input about. Did you love doing it? Of course not. Well mostly not anyway. So why did you do it? Because you had to! You were scared of getting into trouble. Hmm, sounds like a healthy paradigm for learning doesn’t it?

At school, you were coerced into doing what the teacher wanted. And then along came the endless tests and exams. More “musts” and “got to”s all the way up through into college and beyond.

Got to. Have to. Must. Should. Need to.

Let’s do away with this destructive language. We can treat ourselves better than this.

The truth of the matter is that procrastination occurs for a reason. When you don’t want to do something, you procrastinate.

Conversely, the opposite is also true...

You can’t procrastinate over something you want to do.

Do you procrastinate over eating when you are hungry? No.

Do you procrastinate over sleeping when you are tired? No.

Do you procrastinate over socializing with your best friends? No.

Do you procrastinate over opening that bottle of champagne? No.

Do you procrastinate over having sex? I hope not!

You want to do these things so you do them! It’s as simple as that. Procrastination never even enters the picture. If anything, you have to exert some discipline not to do these things all the time. That’s how enjoyable they are as activities.

Why do we procrastinate with language learning?

Sadly most of us didn’t develop this natural form of decision-making towards language learning.

It’s an unfortunate truth that languages are disliked by generations of school kids, who later grow up into adults with an allergy to foreign languages. It’s quite tragic. What should be a fun activity has been hijacked and turned into something that people dread.

Bossing yourself is counterproductive because it stops natural intrigue and enjoyment from developing. It fuels the procrastination inside you.

You don't have to study a language!

Wake up and open your eyes. You don't have to do anything at all!

You don't have to study Chinese. So you'll fail your HSK exam. So what? There's always next year.

You don't have to study Japanese. What will the consequences be if you don't? None whatsoever. All those kanji characters are pesky and irregular anyway.

You don't have to learn Korean. What is going to happen to you if you stop? Well, nothing to be precise. Kim Jong Un won't come for you in the middle of the night. Nothing will happen that you can't deal with.

The key to breaking down procrastination is to ask yourself your own opinion

Stay with me on this. I'm not telling you to stop studying! Far from it.

I'm reminding you that you are free to do whatever you like. Most of us live our lives on auto-pilot forgetting that we control our each and every action.

Imagine you are back at your home. Those Chinese books on your desk make you feel guilty because you have been slacking off lately. Then comes the thought:

"All that money I spent on those books. I really have to do some Chinese again!"

Stop right there! We are done with the school mentality. Instead of bossing yourself around, try asking yourself your own opinion:

"Do I want to study Chinese now?" If the answer is yes, then pick up your books and get started. If the answer is no then leave those books right where they are. You can ask yourself the same question another time.

With this new freedom mindset, there is no more "have to" or "got to". There is only "I want to" or "I don't want to". So simple yet so liberating.

Take the pressure off yourself and watch your procrastination melt away

If you want to study, then study! If not, then ask yourself what you want to do. Maybe you want to laze around watching movies. No problem. Go and do whatever it is you want to. This is your life and nobody else's.

It's a funny old process. Once you remove all that pressure and self-bullying your procrastination will melt away. By only studying when you feel like it, you will actually begin to intrinsically enjoy the language more. This is a huge deal. Next time you see your Chinese books you will want to study even more. So you will. And then you will get better and enjoy it even more. It's a virtuous circle of awesomeness.

This is part of why we study by ourselves. Self-study is not just about saving money or being more efficient. It's actually more enjoyable than going to school and contributes to your personal growth. You call the shots now. It's a nice feeling, isn't it?