



ACQUISITION OF FRENCH LANGUAGE FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Jaspreet kaur

Assistant Professor, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun.

Abstract

The advantage of being a multi linguist has become the pressing need of the society in this global world. In order to know the world and to communicate effectively, one must be a multi linguist. Nonetheless, English is a global language and acts as a filter language to translate the works written in other languages, but one cannot ignore the advantage that a multi linguist has over others.

The present paper focuses on the importance of learning French language for a person who is well versed in English language which is regarded as a vehicle for upward mobility. There may be certain challenges that a person might face to learn new language, especially French, which is a very vast language as far as its accents, agreement, gender, articles, usage etc., is concerned and which are quite different from English language. The aim of this paper is two fold. Firstly, it states about the importance of learning a second language, i.e. French, and secondly it focuses on the challenges that one has to face to learn this new language. This paper also provides a few strategies on making the learning of this second language easy.

Keywords: Multi linguist, Communicate, French language, Importance, Challenges.

Introduction

We all know that knowledge is power. Knowledge was born with the birth of humanity. Since then it is moving at a speeding pace. As substantiated by William Badke in his book Research Strategies:

Throughout the entire history of humanity, knowledge has been passed down from one generation to another. Before this was done in written form (and in preliterate societies today), speech and demonstration were the source of humanity's information- historical tales told around campfires, children learning about agriculture by doing it with their parents and so on. (Page 2, 2011).

Language is an unbeatable tool to communicate. But one language is never enough. In a famous saying by Nelson Mandela, he states:

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart.

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/n/nelsonmand121685.html>)

Many people, who speak English, do not make an effort to learn any other language because this is their belief that English is a global language and they can interact with anybody in the world using this language. But it has been observed by the people who travel abroad for the first time that in spite of all the progress that has been made in the past decades in making English as a global language, many foreign people still speak in foreign languages. The lack of any foreign language knowledge puts the English speakers at a disadvantage.

Hence, it is a necessity of the present era to learn a foreign language. As substantiated in the following lines:

Learning a foreign language takes time and dedication. Some reasons are practical, some aspirational, some intellectual and others sentimental, but whatever your reasons, having a clear idea of why you're learning a language can help to motivate you.

(<http://www.omniglot.com/language/why.htm>)

When we talk about learning a foreign language, it will not merely be a tool in modern professional life or not only important in contact with the outside, but will be a contact with the foreign as an everyday occurrence for everybody.

Importance of Acquiring French for People Well Versed in English

If we take a look back at history, we will find that over the centuries, and apart from Latin and German, French has influenced the English language a lot. After the Norman Conquest in 1066, French stayed as the language of the English court for over 300 years.

If we speak of learning French by speakers of English, it can be a very daunting task, but acquiring French has far reaching advantages and consequences, which will add on to the personality of a person. Some of the major advantages of learning French are stated below:

1. It will improve one's English automatically. Learning any foreign language, especially French, draws one's focus to the mechanics of language, grammar, conjugations and sentence structure. This makes one more aware of a language, and the way it can be structured and manipulated. Thus, it helps in language enhancement.
2. Almost 40% to 50% of English vocabulary comes from French. Hence, studying French will enhance one's grammar skills.
3. It improves one's skills and helps one to function and compete effectively in this global economy.
4. It increases job opportunities and salary potential. As substantiated in the following lines:

Many businesses work closely with companies in other countries. They need many different kinds of workers who can communicate in different languages and understand other cultures. It gives a real advantage and can work successfully with many more people.
(<http://www.forlang.wsu.edu/top10.asp>)

French is indeed one such language.

5. The European Union which is the second largest global trading bloc, recognizes French as an official language. France is, furthermore, a world leader in the development of modern telecommunication which is a market with an explosive growth potential. Knowledge of French can be very beneficial.
6. It increases one's appreciation of other people and their culture as well. More than 40 countries have French either as their first or second language. Knowing French has become equivalent as knowing English as it can give a chance of communicating better in a non English speaking country. Therefore, it helps in cultural understanding.
7. It develops one's critical and creative thinking skills. It will not only improve one's problem solving skills, but also enhance one's memory, self discipline and self esteem.
8. It will enhance one's traveling abroad as one feels more confident, if one is acquainted with a language like French.
9. French is a language of many great literary masterpieces. It's a language of cultures, opening one's door to art, music, dance, fashion, cuisine and cinema. How can one forget that the renaissance movement started from France?
10. Not only does French enhance one's literary mindset, it also opens up a world full of sporting events to enthusiasts. It is an official language used in the Olympic Games as well.
11. It helps one to attain important life skills as it improves one's chances of being accepted to various universities and graduate schools worldwide.
12. It assists in expanding one's personal horizons and become responsible citizens. When one understands other cultures, one can contribute to one's community and country.
13. It helps one to become smarter, as knowing a language like French, improves the functionality of the brain and also one develops multi tasking skills.
14. It can help one understand how the other people think and one can express in the native language where French is spoken.

Nonetheless, the acquisition of French language opens up wide horizons for a person and can make one stand out in the crowd.

Challenges Faced to Learn French

Learning French can be very challenging. When one starts learning French, there is a lot to remember, as in, the new vocabulary, all kind of verb conjugations, strange spelling, pronunciation etc. Some of the difficulties that the English speakers face while learning French are:

1. **Accents:** In French, we have accents in many words and they indicate the correct pronunciation of a word whereas in English one faces accents only in foreign words. So, one need to make an effort to learn what is meant by every word and its accent.
2. **Gender:** In French, all nouns and pronouns have a gender, either masculine or feminine. This is a very daunting concept for English speakers.
3. **Articles:** In French, articles are more common as compared to the English language.
4. **Contractions:** In French, contractions are required whereas in English, they are optional and informal.
5. **Pronunciation:** There are a lot of differences in French and English pronunciation, punctuation, the silent letters, singular and plural, spelling equivalents and word order. For e.g. The 'H' comes in two varieties, one act like a consonant and one act as a vowel and both are silent. So, it is considered to be the hardest part of learning French.
6. **Capitalization:** It is less common in French than in English. A learner of French who is well acquainted with English might get confused because in French, the first person, singular subject pronoun, days of the week, months of the year and languages are not capitalized.
7. **Rhythm:** In French, there is stress at the end of each rhythmic group whereas in English, there are stressed syllables in each word.

Though, a speaker of English might find these as some of the difficulties to learn French but a learner of language can easily overcome them.

Relation between English Language and French Language:

Over the years, English language has borrowed a great deal from the French language- be it the French words or expressions or be it the vocabulary that has been completely absorbed by English. The speakers of English might not realize its origins. As substantiated in the following lines:

French and English are related languages because French is a Latin language with German and English influence, whereas English is a Germanic language with Latin and French influence.

(<http://www.french.about.com/od/lessons/a/differences.htm>)

Given below are some very common French words which are frequently used in English:

Adieu- until God, used like farewell
 À la carte- on the menu
 À la mode-in fashion, style
 Art deco -decorative art
 Art-nouveau-new art
 Avant-garde innovative
 Blonde-fair haired
 Bon appétit-good appetite
 Bon voyage-good trip
 Brunette-small, dark haired female
 Chic-stylish
 Crème de la crème- best of the best
 Critique-critical
 Cuisine-food style
 Debutante-beginner
 Décolleté-low neckline
 Déjà vu- Already seen
 Divorcé's-divorced man or woman
 En-route- on route
 En-suite-in sequence
 Femme fatale-deadly woman
 Fiancé-engaged person
 Genre-type
 Haute couture-high sewing
 Matinee-morning
 Nouveau riche-new rich
 Par excellence-by excellence
 Petit-small
 Rendezvous-appointment
 Rouge-red
 Souvenir-memory, keep sake

These are just a few examples. Almost 10, 000 French words were adopted into English during the Norman occupation out of which three fourths are still used today.

The speakers of English, who have never studied French, already know about 1500 French words. Not only the words and expressions, the English pronunciation owes a lot to French language. There are certain keywords and little expressions that are used all the time in day to day conversation and assist in language flow. As stated in the following lines by H. Rosenthal:

However there are other keywords and expressions in French that are used all the time. They are French equivalents of English expressions like- in spite of, just in case, as soon as, on the other hand, by the way, all the same, who knows!, no way!, so what?, and many more. (French Key Words and Expressions: The Combined Book: Introduction)

Thus, if we keep in mind the similarities that the two languages-French and English have between them, it can make the acquisition of French an easy task for an English speaker.

Strategies to Learn French

According to Martin Williams:

Academic achievement isn't always a good indicator of one's ability to learn a language.

(<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/05/multilingual-speakers-language-learning>)

This statement is very true when it comes to learning any language. It is not about how academic a person is, it is about how interested a person is in accepting the challenges involved in learning a new language, especially French.

If one keeps in mind a few things, it might be of great help to one in grasping French with an ease.

1. One should listen to the language as one listens to music and pay attention to patterns, the fluctuations of speech and the emphasis in the words. If one listens to French as though they are songs, one can remember words and melody of speech.
2. One should always remember that learning French is not just about memorizing vocabulary and grammar, one should supplement one's learning with lots of songs, movies, T.V. and radio, listen to news and commercials and even folk music. Learning only the difficult grammar rules can be very complicated and monotonous, at the same time.
3. One should try to have links with people who speak French. One should try to mimic what one listens, and try to communicate in French as much as possible.
4. One should buy more French books and keep going through them in one's free time. One should try to grasp words and phrases which is only possible with repetition of reading the text.
5. Try to know the culture of the French people in order to learn the language French. As we all know that language carries the culture of the country. If one gets lucky enough to visit a French speaking country at any point of time, one must grab the opportunity as it will assist one to a great extent to enhance one's language skills.

6. One should practice pronunciation and spelling from websites and you tube videos, and also try out formal studies from grammar books and other course material.
7. One should try to tune one's ears to the new sounds and intonations in French, by hearing lots of French music and seeing lots of French movies with English subtitles.
8. One should not waste any time. One should utilize all the time while doing any mundane task like traveling in a bus or doing any household chore that doesn't require much brain. This is the time when one can fit in subconscious language learning.

In totality, we can say that learning a language like French, for English speakers can give an entirely different perspective of the world.

Conclusion

To better understand one's thought process and the real nature of human soul, the knowledge of several languages is necessary. One can discover the real self and at the same time enjoy different cultures. To quote Martin William,

There's a downside through: when I'm in a monolingual environment for too long. I yearn to switch to a different language. I have to think 'Will this person understand me if I say something in language X?' That can censor my speech or slow me down. It's fun to be with other polyglots because we just hop from one language to another naturally. We don't do it to show off - it's just how we think.

([http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sept/05/multilingual-speaker-language-learning.](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sept/05/multilingual-speaker-language-learning))

We see that being a multi linguist will always protect and nourish the growth of different cultures and different pathways of human knowledge can be discovered. One can openly express his thoughts and views.

Keeping in mind that the world is full of languages, we can conclude that if an English speaker can learn French, it will hardly be anything for him to go away from his front door to know that this is true that how many places he could really get to know and how many books he could read or how many websites he could visit?

References

- Badke William. 2011. Research Strategies: Finding Your Way through the Information Fog. Iuniverse.Bloomington-IN 47403. (Web)
- Rosenthal H Saul.2009. French Key words and Expressions: The Combined Book.Wheatmark. Tuscan, Arizona 85705.U.S.A. (web)
- William Martin. 2013. Natural born linguists: what drives multi language speakers?
[http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sept/05/multilingual-speakers-language-learning.](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sept/05/multilingual-speakers-language-learning) (Web)
<http://www.omniglot.com/language/why.htm>
<http://www.french.about.com/od/lessons/a/differences.htm>
<http://www.forlang.wsu.edu/top10.asp>
<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/n/nelsonmand121685.html>