

Sent to the New Yorker, Sept 4, 2018

To the editor:

Judith Thurman's article on hyperpolyglots, "Maltese for Beginners," (Sept 3), provides a number of valuable insights on language acquisition. I would like to share two more from the hyperpolyglots I have studied, insights that agree with the results of research in second language acquisition.

First, they agree that the key to successful language acquisition is not hard study of rules of grammar, but exposure to comprehensible and interesting messages. Hyperpolyglot Steve Kaufman (15 languages) tells us that he tried grammar study: I would usually remember grammar rules or explanations (if I understood them) only for a short period of time and then forget them. In the end it was only through enough exposure to the language that my grammar improved" (*The Linguist*, p.100).

Lomb Kato (17 languages): "Perusing books frequently and listening to the radio diligently allow us to encounter the right forms again and again. If our interest gets our heart and mind to accept these patterns, we can recall them quickly when we need them." (*With Languages in Mind*, p. 93).

Second, they also agree that there are no age limits to successful second language acquisition: Kaufman has acquired eight of his 15 language since age 61. When I met Lomb Kato in 1995 in Budapest, she was 86 and making good progress with language number 18, Hebrew.

Stephen Krashen