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Can't learn a foreign language? Not true, say scientists

The brain can learn a new word in less than 15 minutes, according to scientists, whose finding will rob many of the excuse that they can't learn a foreign language. Dr Yury Shtyrov and his team made the discovery after placing electrodes on the heads of 16 healthy volunteers to monitor their brain activity. First they recorded the pulses generated when they listened to a familiar word. Then the volunteers were made to listen to a made-up word, over and over again. Initially the brain had to work hard to recognise the new word. But after 160 repetitions over 14 minutes, the new memory traces were "virtually indistinguishable" from those of the already familiar word, said Dr Shtyrov.

Squad Designated Linguist

[VIDEO] When Spc. Kevin Chalkley of the 7-10 Calvary Scout Regiment, 4th Infantry Division began learning Dari at the Defense Language Institute's Fort Carson Language Training Detachment, he never realized how much his language skills would mean to his mission of security stabilization in the remote small village of Yaka-Tut.

Female Marines in Afghanistan

YouTube video clip by First Lieutenant Quincy Washa, platoon commander for the Female Engagement Team with Regimental Combat Team 1, speaks about the challenges, triumphs, and goals for her team in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The FET comprises female Marines from California-based units, and travels throughout the province to interact with Afghan men, women, and children. These Marines are responsible for gathering information related to security, development, and governance for their assigned area, while respecting Afghan cultural norms. The FET attaches to an infantry unit, and works as a go-between for male Marines and the local female population. Washa's team deployed in September, and is scheduled to stay through early next year.

South St. Paul considers English-Spanish immersion

School leaders in South St. Paul are in the early stages of considering a new language immersion program in which elementary students would learn both English and Spanish. Most metro-area immersion programs, in which students are taught core academic subjects in a foreign language, are one-way programs in which students learn a language other than English. South St. Paul envisions a less common model called dual language or two-way immersion, in which native speakers of English and Spanish learn each other's languages in the same classroom.

Kindergartners to get first taste of Chinese

Barrington School District 220 will begin a Mandarin Chinese immersion program for tots through teens next fall, now that the board of education has voted to accept a \$1.5 million federal matching grant for the program for five years. School board members had been mulling over whether to take on the financial and logistical obligations posed by the grant, which was awarded in the summer. They voted 6-1 to proceed at a meeting Tuesday night. The district will be on its way to becoming the only one in the state to offer Chinese immersion from kindergarten through high school, said Todd Bowen, chairman of the world language department, who secured the grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Air Force pilot encourages Iraqi women to aim high

I volunteered to deploy to Iraq. It had been seven years since I first entered basic training in 2003, the same year we entered Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom, now [Operation New Dawn](#). While I knew my primary mission was to fly, I couldn't forget all the lessons I learned about Middle Eastern culture and language. I'd been to the region three times before with the Air Force and still remembered the many

conversations I had in the region with women there. It made me deeply appreciate my freedoms as an American, including my ability to fly. I had a million ways I wanted to help the women of Iraq. Then I realized I should encourage them in the field I know best – aviation. Even the concept of women in aviation in the U.S. is still rather new. In my initial stage of training, for several months I was the only woman in a building of 200 people. It was only in 1993 that women were allowed to fly combat missions. Now we have women who have served as members of the [Thunderbirds](#).

Early Foreign Language Ed Could End

An interim legislative committee is considering a proposal to end state-mandated early foreign language instruction in Wyoming elementary schools. Some lawmakers want to repeal a 1999 statute that requires Wyoming schools to teach foreign language in kindergarten through second grade. The Legislature's Joint Education Committee will discuss the measure when it meets on Thursday in Casper. The Casper Star-Tribune reports that school administrators say many schools lack the financial and human resources necessary for quality instruction. In addition, knowledge is lost between second grade and middle school. Republican Rep. Matt Teeters, of Lingle, says the requirement should be dropped until a complete foreign language program can be established through elementary school.

PREVIOUS NEWS

U.S. falls behind in foreign languages

Americans are not, in general, proficient in foreign languages. That situation, according to experts, is not good for the nation, not good for humanity, and not good for the individual monolingualist. "For the United States to get to where it needs to be will require a national commitment to strengthening America's foreign language proficiency." "Sadly, many Americans don't see the point of studying foreign languages at all, since the world seems to have learned English," Grafton said. "I wish everyone could speak, as I have, with a veteran of the Iraq war who has done house-to-house searches at night without the benefit of a competent interpreter."

Early foreign-language education could end

State-mandated early foreign-language instruction could end next year because facilitating the instruction has become a burden on school districts throughout the state. Lawmakers want to repeal a 1999 statute that requires Wyoming schools to teach foreign language in kindergarten through second grade. The Legislature's Joint Education Committee will discuss the measure when it meets on Thursday in Casper. The current law went into effect in 2002. The Wyoming Department of Education launched several pilot programs in 50 classrooms around the state to determine the most effective method of instruction. A bill to extend the program through sixth grade and provide funding failed to pass in 2004, and the effort has since fizzled.

Arabic, Korean, Chinese courses see gains at U.S. colleges

Student enrollment in Arabic, Korean and Chinese classes is showing the fastest growth among foreign language courses at U.S. colleges, even though Spanish remains the most popular by a huge margin, a new study shows. The survey of more than 2,500 colleges and universities by the Modern Language Association, or MLA, found that enrollment in Arabic surged by 46 percent between 2006 and 2009. More U.S. college students are studying Arabic than Russian, a change that officials say reflects a shift of interest from Cold War concerns to current issues involving the Middle East and terrorism.

Taking care of our words

At birth the brain can absorb all sorts of sounds. As we grow our brains become wired to certain tones and less open to new accents or languages. Children as young as 12 months can learn multiple languages. At that age they are absorbed in the same way as a native tongue. "Your ability to reproduce sounds and accents starts to decline from three years of age," notes linguist and founder of Babylangues Caroline Benoit Levy. Giving classes to toddlers and providing a foreign language nanny service, Ms Benoit Levy says that before our tenth birthday our brains have become hardwired to certain sounds, and

find it hard to retain or reproduce new ones. Adults may struggle to perfect a foreign language but more frustrating still is when you start to speak your native tongue with a foreign accent. 'Foreign language syndrome' is a rare condition with currently 60 known sufferers in the world.

Study: Every foreign language has its niche

A new and definitive [survey](#) of foreign language instruction in U.S. colleges finds that every major language has found its audience, and each is showing some measure of growth, however modest. That hasn't always been so. French, German, Italian, Latin, Russian and Japanese all have had ups and downs in enrollment in past surveys by the Modern Language Association of America. But enrollments are rising in each of those languages at a fairly steady clip since at least 2000, according to the new survey, which was taken in 2009 and was last conducted in 2006.

Study of Sign Language on the Rise in U.S. Colleges

A recent article in [USA Today](#) reports that American Sign Language (ASL) is now the fourth most studied foreign language in the United States. Enrollment in college ASL classes is up 16 percent over the last three years, according to a survey by the [Modern Language Association](#). Spanish and French are in the lead, with German beating ASL by just 0.3 percent. Although some in the deaf and hard of hearing communities may take issue with the term "foreign" when referring to ASL (as the language does not come from any foreign country), it is certainly a language in its own right. ASL is not simply a translation of English into a gestural language. ASL has a specific syntax, with regional variations and slang. And, like other languages, ASL evolves with time especially to incorporate signs for new technologies.

Technology In Schools: iPod Touch Becomes Learning Tool

Not long ago, school supplies included mostly notebooks and pencils. At Owens Cross Roads Elementary, classroom materials now include the [iPod Touch](#). Check in on a weekday and you're likely to find the students in at least one classroom busily working away on the iPod Touch. Each student uses a different application to challenge their math or language skills.

International Language Institute

The spring semester of 2011 will bring about some exciting changes for Texas A&M International University's International Language Institute. Lisa Flores, visiting assistant professor will be the new director for the ILI. New opportunities will be provided to the TAMU student body, as well as members of the community who wish to broaden their language skills and knowledge of other cultures. As time has progressed, an emphasis was placed on the need for adding other language courses, such as Madrid, Japanese, French, Spanish, Arabic, and Portuguese. Flores emphasized, "The distinction that will be different now is that ILI will be under the department of Language and Literature." This will allow for language courses to be offered for both credit and noncredit purposes.

CIA Chief Leon Panetta, Federal Officials Urge Scholars To Help Improve Foreign Language Learning in U.S.

In order to make the United States more globally competitive and secure from foreign attacks, the nation must radically transform the way it teaches foreign language. That was the heart of the message that CIA Director Leon Panetta, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and other government leaders delivered Wednesday to more than 300 foreign language educators who gathered at the CIA Foreign Language Summit at the University of Maryland University College conference center.

CIA Director Urges Stronger Focus on Foreign Languages

At a national summit yesterday, Central Intelligence Agency Director Leon Panetta called for a strong national commitment to ensuring that Americans master foreign languages, saying the issue is vital to U.S. security and competitiveness. "A significant cultural change needs to occur," he said, according to a CIA [press release](#). "And that requires a transformation in attitude from everyone involved: individuals, government, schools and universities, and the private sector." U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan also spoke at the event, which was jointly hosted by the CIA and the University of Maryland's [Center for Advanced Study of Language](#). In his remarks, Duncan defended a plan to consolidate an existing federal foreign-language program into a broader, competitive fund.

Pakistan facing language 'crisis' in schools

Study of education system claims dominance of Urdu and English is a barrier to effective schooling for all but a linguistic elite and threatens to undermine social cohesion. Pakistan's commitment to using Urdu as the medium of instruction in its state schools and its ambition to widen access to English language teaching are creating barriers to effective education, limiting economic mobility and undermining social cohesion. These are the stark warnings made in a report on the current state of Pakistan's schools published last month by the [British Council](#) and debated by academics and policy makers in a series of public meetings across the country. The report, [Teaching and learning in Pakistan: the role of language in education](#), sets out proposals that, if implemented, would seek to raise the status of the country's main regional languages, lower barriers to higher-paid government jobs and help to strengthen ties between language groups at a time when political instability is straining national unity.

District Creates AP Language Alternative; FLES Program A Success

FLES consists of a two-year introduction to a foreign language focusing on listening, speaking, reading, writing skills as well as learning the country's culture that uses that language. Giacalone, who refers to the program as "my baby," said that it provides a "seamless transition" for students to move into higher level language programs. Giacalone showed a video of elementary school students answering questions in Spanish spoken to them in Spanish by their teacher, and pictures of the classes corresponding Halloween to [Dia de los Muertos](#), a similar holiday celebrated in Mexico. Giacalone said the district's FLES program is so strong that he is helping other, local districts to model their own FLES programs.

Government Agencies: A Glimpse at Positions at the CIA and NSA

"We're always looking for engineers, computer scientists and other technically qualified applicants who can advance our vital mission of keeping America safe," CIA spokeswoman Paula Weiss said. "Anyone with a scientific or technical background who would like to apply his or her skills to our intelligence mission should check out our Web site to see the wide range of opportunities we offer. It's helpful to have an interest in world affairs, overseas experience or language skills, but it's not necessary."