

Learning English podcasts ... from the  
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Level: Lower Intermediate  
Lesson: 7

Title: "Children's Acquisition of Language"

**Summary:**

*Lisa Keble, a language specialist explains to Alexander and Lisa how children acquire language.*

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*Alexander is in the middle of a live show in a radio studio. He is interviewing Lisa Keble, a language specialist. Listen to their conversation and answer the question that follows about the main idea.*

**Alexander:** Welcome back to *Languages around the Globe Show*. I'm Alexander Smith and Lisa Keble is here with us again today to discuss **children's acquisition of language**. Just how many languages can a child **pick up** until the age of three without getting confused?



**Lisa:** Children can become **fluent** in as many as 7 languages provided that significant people in their lives speak the target languages to them. You see, it's really important for children to **associate** each language with a different person.



**Alexander:** Well, family members qualify as significant people in children's lives, don't they?

**Lisa:** I sure hope so!



**Alexander:** What other factors **play a role** in successfully acquiring a language?



**Lisa:** I've seen that exposure to various languages through songs, movies, and games, **makes a world of difference**.



**Alexander:** Oh, I wish I'd grown up in a multi-cultural environment. I wouldn't have to struggle so much now with foreign languages.



**Lisa:** Well, it's always easier for kids! They are more **at ease** and not really afraid of making mistakes. We, on the other hand, feel so self-conscious and are so terrified of losing face.



**Alexander:** I know exactly what you mean! I'll never set foot in that restaurant again after thanking the owner in my **broken** Italian for a dreadful evening, instead of the delightful meal I had.



*Now answer the following question . . .*

*What are Alexander and Lisa talking about?*

They are talking about second language acquisition in children.

*Now listen again to the dialogue in parts. After each part there will be 3 to 4 questions on the details...*

### Part 1

**Alexander:** Welcome back to *Languages around the Globe Show*. I'm Alexander Smith and Lisa Keble is here with us again today to discuss **children's acquisition of language**. Just how many languages can a child **pick up** until the age of three without getting confused?

**Lisa:** Children can become **fluent** in as many as seven languages provided that significant people in their lives speak the target languages to them. You see, it's really important for children to **associate** each language with a different person.

**Alexander:** Well, family members qualify as significant people in children's lives, don't they?

**Lisa:** I sure hope so!

*Now answer some questions...*

1. Alexander says: "I'm Alexander Smith and Lisa Keble is here with us again today to discuss **children's acquisition of language**." What does "children's acquisition of language" mean?

Children's acquisition of language happens when children are beginning to speak.

2. Alexander says: "Just how many languages can a child **pick up** by the age of three without getting confused?" What does "pick up" mean?

To pick up a language means to learn a language.

3. Lisa says: "Children can become **fluent** in as many as seven languages." What does "fluent" mean?

When someone is fluent in any language it means that he can speak a language well and without many pauses.

4. Lisa says: "it's really important for children to **associate** each language with a different person." What does "associate" mean?

Associate means connect. So Lisa is trying to say that it is really important for the children to connect each person with one language.

*Now listen to the second part of the dialogue.*

## Part 2

**Alexander:** What other factors **play a role** in successfully acquiring a language?

**Lisa:** I've seen that exposure to various languages through songs, movies, and games, **makes a world of difference**.

**Alexander:** Oh, I wish I'd grown up in a multi-cultural environment. I wouldn't have to struggle so much now with foreign languages.

**Lisa:** Well, it's always easier for kids! They are more **at ease** and not really afraid of making mistakes. We, on the other hand, feel so self-conscious and are so terrified of losing face.

**Alexander:** I know exactly what you mean! I'll never set foot in that restaurant again after thanking the owner in my **broken** Italian for a dreadful evening instead of the delightful meal I had.

*Now answer some questions...*

1. Alexander says: "What other factors **play a role** in successfully acquiring a language?" What does "play a role" mean?

To play a role means to help or to be part of the cause. So here Alexander wants to know what else makes children learn a language.

2. Lisa says: "I've seen that exposure to various languages through songs, movies, and games, **makes a world of difference**." What does "make a world of difference" mean?

To make a world of difference means to improve something very much. So here Lisa is saying that when children listen to songs or watch movies in any other language they learn that language more easily.

3. Lisa says: "They are more **at ease** and not really afraid of making mistakes." What does "at ease" mean?

At ease means more relaxed. So here Lisa is saying that children are more relaxed and therefore they find it easier to learn a foreign language.

4. Alexander says: "I'll never set foot in that restaurant again after thanking the owner in my **broken** Italian for a dreadful evening instead of the delightful meal I had." What does "broken Italian" mean?

When you use the word broken to describe how you speak a language you want to show that you can't speak that language easily and that you have to stop a lot to think.

*Please visit our site at [www.hau.gr](http://www.hau.gr) to find the transcripts, explanations and activities.*

## GLOSSARY

**Acquire** (verb): to gain or obtain something.  
*e.g. He acquired the firm in 1978.*

**Acquisition** (noun): the act of getting knowledge, skill etc.  
*e.g. The museum has been heavily criticized over its acquisition of the four-million-dollar sculpture.*

**Delightful** (adjective): very pleasant  
*e.g. a delightful meal / restaurant / book*

**Dreadful** (adjective): bad / unpleasant;  
*e.g. This is dreadful weather to go for a picnic.*

**Exposure to** (noun): the state of being affected by something,  
*e.g. Exposure to the sun harms the skin.*

**Face** (noun): the respect and honour of others:  
*e.g. He thinks he would lose face if he admitted the mistake.*

**Self-conscious** (adjective): nervous about what other people think of you  
*e.g. She is so self-conscious about her appearance that she can't enjoy the party.*

**Set foot in** (idiom): to enter or visit a place,  
*e.g. I'll never set foot in that restaurant; the service was terrible.*

**Struggle** (verb): to try very hard to do something when there are problems / difficulties  
*e.g. Although both are working hard, they struggle to pay their bills every month.*

**Target** (noun): a level or situation which you intend to achieve  
*e.g. The government's target of 3.5% annual growth seems easily attainable.*

**Terrified of somebody / something** (adjective): very frightened  
*e.g. I am terrified of spiders.*

## Activity 1

Practice using the words in the glossary. Choose the most appropriate word to fill in the blanks.

1. The Bhopal disaster was a _____ tragedy that cost the lives of hundreds of people	A. acquired
2. The young girl _____ to get away from the thief	B. delightful
3. Celebrities try their best not to lose _____ in front of the cameras.	C. dreadful
4. We've just _____ a dog.	D. face
5. Our two-day trip to the lake was a _____ short holiday.	E. self-conscious
6. Being _____ of heights I have never been to the top floor of our building.	F. struggled
7. He's always been _____ about having big ears	G. terrified

## Activity 2

Express regret using 'I wish . . .' for the following situations.

1. You've invited your ex – boyfriend to your party and now you regret it; you say . . .  
\_\_\_\_\_ ; it will make us feel uncomfortable.
2. You didn't have any breakfast that's why you're hungry now; you say . . .  
\_\_\_\_\_ ; I'm so hungry I can barely work.
3. Your best friend was in hospital; you were so busy at work that you couldn't visit her; you say . . .  
I'm so sorry I didn't come to see you; \_\_\_\_\_
4. You missed your favourite team playing last night because you were out; you say \_\_\_\_\_ ; my night out was a disaster.
5. You spent two weeks in London and didn't go to a musical; you say . . .  
\_\_\_\_\_ ; the performances there are supposed to be excellent.

## Key

**Activity 1.** 1. c. 2. f. 3. d. 4. a. 5. b. 6. g. 7. e.

**Activity 2.** 1. I wish I hadn't invited my ex-girlfriend to my party 2. I wish I had had some breakfast 3. I wish I hadn't been so busy at work 4. I wish I had stayed in to watch the game 5. I wish I had gone to see a musical while I was in London

