

## What Does It Take to Learn a New Language?

by Jeff Gregory, Coordinator

At El Centro College one of our jobs is to teach languages to adults. When you began to learn your first language as a little child, you had nothing to do all day except play and eat and listen to people around you talking. As you listened and observed you began to associate words with objects, actions, and relationships. So gradually you began to speak your “mother tongue” with relative ease. Professional linguists tell us that by the time a child reaches age five he/she knows the entire grammatical structure of his/her language.

But learning a new language as an adult is a totally different experience. You already have at least one language fully ingrained in your mind. Also your speech organs have adapted totally to the correct pronunciation of your “mother tongue.” In addition, you already have a full and busy life. You have to work, go to school, and may have a family to take care of. You do not have the leisure time to devote to language learning that you had as child.

So, with all these competing factors it is not easy to learn another language. But the good news is that it can be done! According to the observations of the famous American linguist, Noam Chomsky, every human being is born with a “*Universal Grammar*,” i.e., an innate ability to learn perfectly whatever language he/she is exposed to. Of course, this happens easiest and

fastest as a child. But an adult still retains the “*Universal Grammar*” - so a new language can be learned at any age. It just becomes more difficult because of some of the factors mentioned above.

To overcome these competing factors a person must exercise the three “virtues” of language learning:

- 1) commitment**
- 2) practice**
- 3) perseverance**

At El Centro College we have the professors, the curricula, as well as the World Languages Lab, to assist you in exercising these virtues. The process is not quick or easy, but the rewards are well worth the effort. We hope that you will experience firsthand the truth of our motto:

**The one who knows two languages is worth double.**

**Él que sabe dos idiomas vale por dos.**

**L'homme qui parle deux langues vaut deux hommes.**

**会两种语言的人具有双重价值**