eurac research

Activity box 5

# The language learning experience

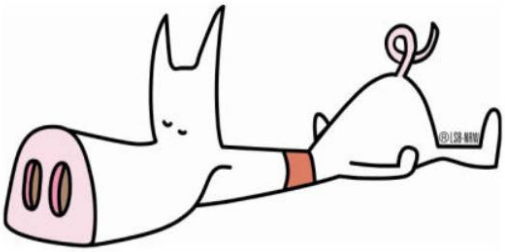


*Figure 1*

**Target:**
Elementary school and middle school

**Duration:**
90 minutes. If the activities are carried out as a carousel of stations, calculate 10/20 minutes per activity.

**Introduction:**

The activities in this series are designed to approach two goals:

1) raising linguistic awareness through collecting participants' experiences with language learning;
2) planning and organizing future language careers, whereby we always start out from already acquired language skills and proficiency. The methods for reaching the individual language goals of participants are mostly practical; this activity box tries to answer the following questions (among others): Why is it important to learn languages? What is the best way to learn a language? Are there borders in the human brain that limit our capability to learn new languages? The PowerPoint presentation presents the activities clearly and facilitates the completion of exercises. At the end, teachers obtain a comprehensive picture of the material.

**Competences:**[1]

- Competence in the construction and broadening of a plural linguistic and cultural repertoire (C 2);
- Competence in applying more systematic and controlled learning approaches in a context of otherness (C 2.2);
- Competence in critical analysis of the (communicative and/or learning) situation and activities one is involved in (C 6).

**Activities:**

- My language learning tree
- How can we learn 11 languages?
- How can I overcome my weaker self?
- Nine new nouns – Our vocab-learning strategies
- Multilingual? – Sure! But how?!

**Worksheet:** a task for the pupils to complete

**Solution:** for the teacher

**Material:** provides pupils with the basis to carry out activities, games, or go into more depth on the topic

**PowerPoint Presentation:** available upon request

*Table 1*

[1] Competences are based on the FREPA, *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (see Literature at the end of this document). Individual competences are divided into three groups using the letters "K", "A" and "S" (pp. 24 – 59).

Activity 1

# “My language tree”

**Topic:**
The language learning experience

**Description:**
This activity invites students to reflect, visualize and portray their language biographies. This facilitates an investigation of linguistic roots, as well as discussion about the importance of these roots for understanding new idioms we come across in our everyday lives. Students are asked to depict all of their languages, including those that they’ve only ever encountered briefly, using the language tree. It‘s not a coincidence that this exercise is the first the activity box – it paves the way perfectly for students to plan their very own language careers.

**Competences:**[2]
- Assigning value to linguistic knowledge / skills, irrespective of the context in which they have been acquired (within school / outside school) (A 17.2);
- Can communicate “between language” (S 6.4).

**Duration:**
approx. 30 minutes

**Copy templates:**
- Language Tree (can be used instead of blank paper to save time)

**Materials:**
- PowerPoint 1 – Language Learning without Borders (slide 5) (optional)
- Laptop, projector (optional)
- Blank paper, drawing and writing tools
- Tape (optional)

**Activity:**
0. Preparation: Set up the PowerPoint presentation (begin with slide 4)

[2] Competences are based on the FREPA, *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (see Literature at the end of this document). Individual competences are divided into three groups using the letters “K”, “A” and “S” (pp. 24 – 59).

1. Introduction: Students should depict their own language biographies. It might make more sense to let students begin the exercise before the introduction of slide 5. Slide 2 shows a Slovak saying "Those who know many languages live as many lives as the languages they know", which lends itself well as introduction to the language tree exercise. The teacher collects the students' answers and opinions regarding this quote (on the board or flipchart) so they can be discussed at the end of the activity box. In this way, students can see whether their own attitude has changed during the task, exercises and reflection.

2. Development: Students receive a blank sheet of paper and are asked to draw a tree (trunk and branches) on it. They should follow these instructions (slide 5):
   the **trunk** symbolizes
   ➔ The language/languages spoken in your family;
   the **branches** symbolize
   ➔ ... the languages you have acquired from your **environment**
   ➔ … the languages you hear/need in your **holidays**
   ➔ … the languages you learn/study in **school**
   ➔ … the languages you have **encountered/come across**
   ➔ … the languages you would like to **learn**

   ***Please note****: This classification should be strictly followed by students when they write their languages into the tree. Exercise takes about 10 minutes.*

3. Extension: After the task is completed, the language trees are spread out and hung up around the classroom just like at an art gallery. Students are invited to take a two-minute tour of the "gallery". When the teacher signals to stop, the students stop at the one biography that appealed to them most and are asked why they chose that biography, and what appealed to them.

4. Conclusion: Brief final discussion on the various languages present in the classroom.

**Note:**
Not all students need to present their language trees in step no. 3. In order to save time, the teacher could ask for volunteers to present their tree, or choose a few students.

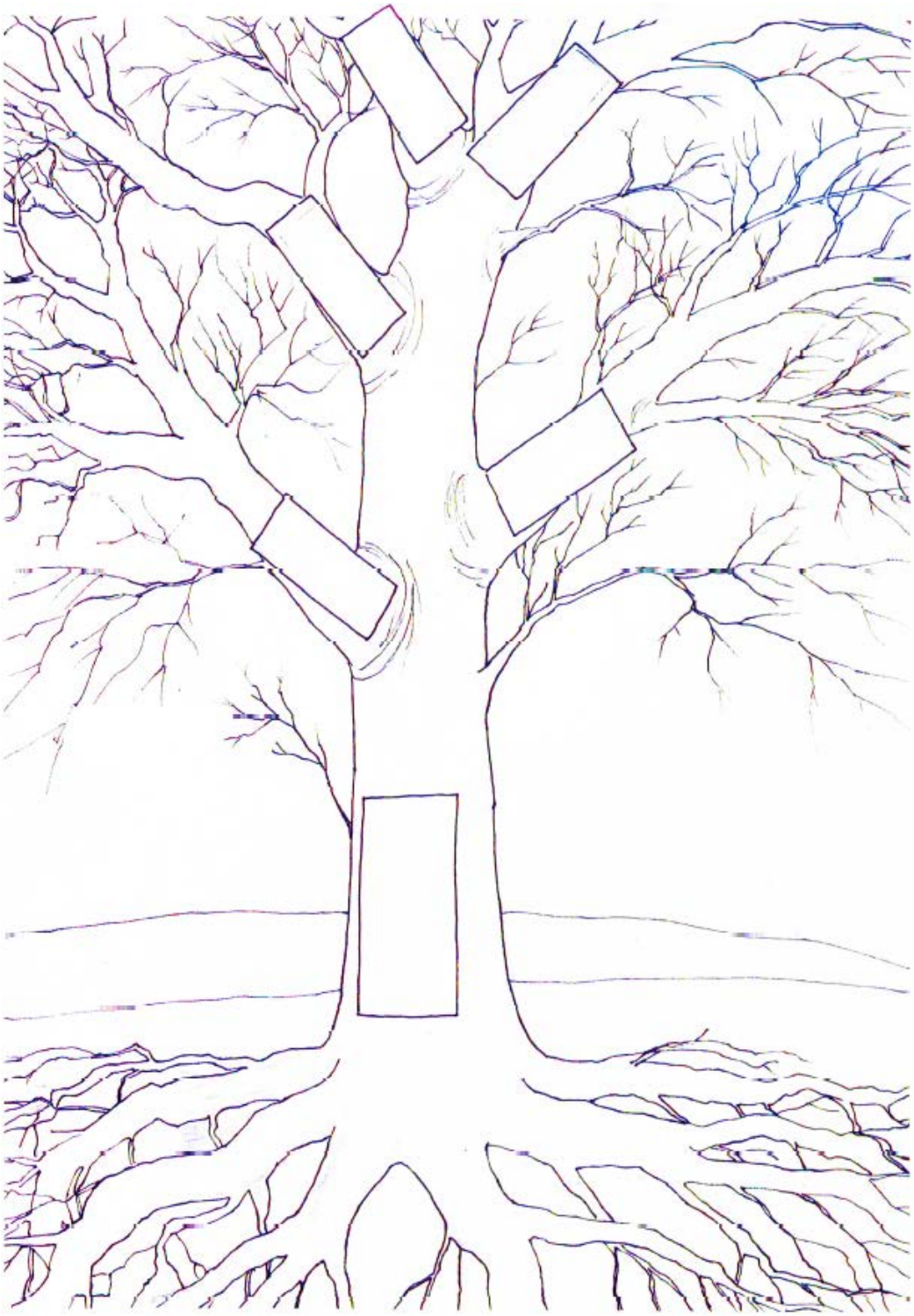


*Figure 2*

Activity 2

# “How can we learn 11 languages?”

**Topic:**
The language learning experience

**Description:**
Alex Rawlings is a language teacher. In 2012, at the age of 21, he was named the most multilingual student in the UK. At the time, he was able to speak 11 languages. He was born in London and has Greek roots. Alex learned French, Spanish and German before he started learning further languages self-reliantly[3]. The following activity focusses on Rawlings and his experiences with language learning.
This should then initiate a discussion of the students’ own experiences.

**Competences:**[4]
- Assigning value to linguistic knowledge / skills, irrespective of the context in which they have been acquired (within school / outside school) (A 17.2);
- Motivation to learn languages (/ of schooling / family / foreign / regional /…) (A 18);
- Can communicate “between language” (S 6.4).

**Duration:**
approx. 20 minutes (video 2:54 min.)

Video only available with English subtitles

*Figure 3*

**Copy templates:**
- Alex Rawlings “The most multilingual student in the UK”

**Materials:**
- PowerPoint 1 – Language Learning without Borders (slides 6 and 7) (optional)
- Laptop (with internet access)
- Projector, speakers
- Board or flipchart and writing utensils
- Video “How do you become fluent in 11 languages” at the following link (or on PowerPoint presentation slide 7) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfj011wG0f8

[3] http://rawlangs.com/
[4] Competences are based on the FREPA, *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (see Literature at the end of this document). Individual competences are divided into three groups using the letters “K”, “A” and “S” (pp. 24 – 59).

**Activity:**

0. Preparation: Print templates (CT 05.02), prepare video, slide 8.

1. Introduction: Teacher briefly introduces Alex Rawlings, possibly without anticipating the contents of the video: How many languages does he speak? Why did he learn so many languages? What tools does he use or find useful for learning languages? etc.

2. Development: Divide students into groups. Each group gets one worksheet and comes up with four questions they would like to ask Rawlings about his language proficiency and/or strategies for language learning. Students write the questions into the clouds on their worksheet. Finally, the questions are read out in the group and copied onto the board (tip: leave enough room for answers next to the questions). Once all questions have been collected, watch the video.
   ***Important**: While watching the video, students should try to find the answers to their questions (or those of their classmates).*

3. Extension: Discuss the video and the answers the students found, as well as the questions that were not answered through the video. Ideally, answers are written next to the respective questions on the board.

4. Conclusion: While this activity is centered on Alex Rawlings, the next exercises will take a closer look at the individual language biographies of the students. The video should be considered as a tool for picking up on the language proficiency, learning strategies and motivation of the students.

**Note:**

If the video failed to answer all the questions, the teacher can choose to let students do some research on Rawlings at home.

# Alex Rawlings

## “The most multilingual student in the UK“

*Figure 4*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ug7A9kPaNeU

Activity 3

# “How can I overcome my weaker self?”

**Topic:**
The language learning experience

**Description:**
In this activity, students are confronted with the obstacles of learning one or multiple languages, and discover strategies to overcome them. Despite many appeals and presentations on the importance of language learning today, a widespread tendency to see this privilege and opportunity as a fastidious obligation still persists. Often people would like to learn a new language, but because of negative learning experiences in school they do not dare to start the endeavor. Hence it really comes down to beating one’s weaker self. The following exercises should unravel what causes a slowing down or obstacles in the language learning process, and thus students can learn how to overcome their weaker selves and find new motivation.

**Competences:**[5]

- Motivation to learn languages (of schooling / family / foreign / regional…) (A 18);
- Knows how one acquires / learns a language (K 7);
- Knows that the perception one has of a language influences the learning of that language (K 7.4);
- Being self-confident in a situation of communication (expression / reception / interaction / mediation) (A 14.2);
- Participating consciously in the construction of one’s own plurilingual / pluricultural competence /
- Voluntary involvement in the development of the process of plurilingual / pluricultural socialization (A 8.2);
- Motivation to study / compare the functioning of different languages (structures, vocabulary, systems of writing …) / cultures) (A 7.5).

**Duration:**
approx. 30 minutes

**Copy templates:**

- “I would like to, but…” (works best in A3 format)

[5] Competences are based on the FREPA, *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (see Literature at the end of this document). Individual competences are divided into three groups using the letters “K”, “A” and “S” (pp. 24 – 59).

**Materials:**

- PowerPoint 1 – Language Learning without Borders (slide 9) (optional)
- Writing utensils, board/flipchart, speakers (if needed)

**Activity:**

0. Preparation: Print worksheets (CT 05.03), set up materials needed for this activity, and decide if students should work individually, in pairs, or in groups.

1. Introduction: The teacher introduces the topic with the German metaphor of overcoming one's weaker self ("*Die innerer Schweinehund")*. Students work in groups and receive worksheet CT 05.03.

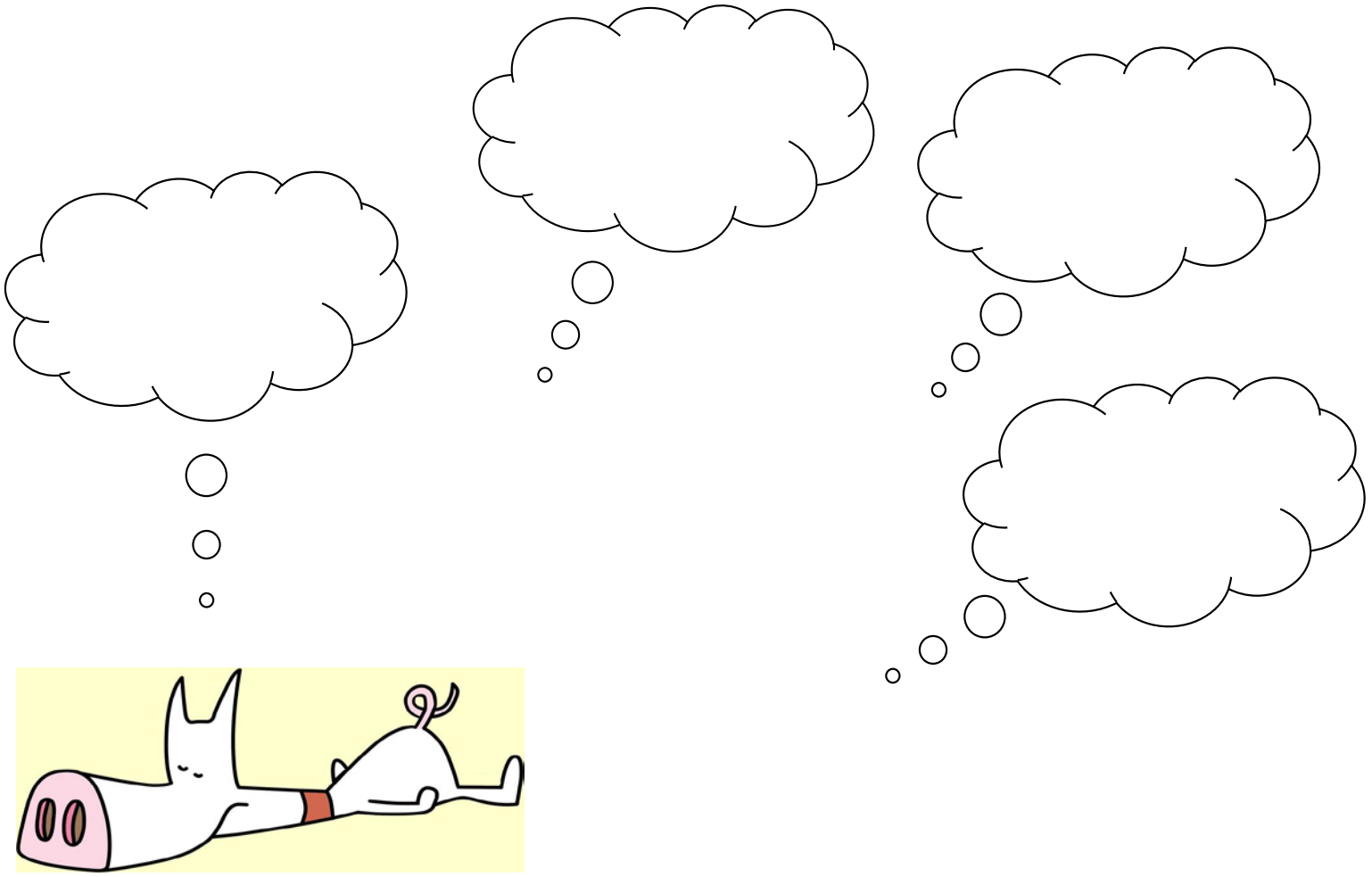
2. Development: Each groups gets 10 minutes to fill in the clouds on their worksheet with four motives they think could help improve their proficiency in languages they already know. Another option is to write down things that inhibit or even halt the process of acquiring a new language. Should students find more than four motives or arguments, further clouds can be added. After 10 minutes, each group reads out the arguments they have collected and the class discusses the factors which might influence motivation and the learning process. In doing so, personal experiences of the students should be focused on, such as for example: "I wanted to learn a few languages, but I didn't have enough time….", "I wanted to learn a particular language but I thought it would be too difficult…", etc.

3. Extension: The class can discuss possible ways to overcome obstacles and blocks: "You could look for other people who also want to learn Spanish, and you all could study and learn together", *"You could start by re-watching your favorite movies in the language you are trying to learn", etc.* Make sure to write answers on the board or flipchart and then ask students to write them down.

4. Conclusion: Revise the most important points/arguments of steps 2 and 3.

**Variants:**

This activity also suitable for individual work, whereby the teacher hands out the sheets (DINA4), and gives students less time for brainstorming



Activity 4

## "NNN: Nine new nouns"

**Topic:**
The language learning experience

**Description:**
Once you have decided to learn a new language, building vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar is fundamental. Language learning is not a universal process that is done and experienced in the same way by everyone. We all have an individual strategy for learning a language, studying and memorizing content. The following exercise deals with individual strategies for vocabulary learning, making students aware of the many different ways there are to do so. The often rather abstract concepts were transformed into concrete instructions, which should make vocab study a lot easier.

**Competences:**[6]
- Can manage their learning in a reflective manner (S 7.7);
- Knows that one can try to resort to linguistic similarities (genealogical links, loans, universals) to facilitate communication (K 3.4.1);
- Knows that one can build on the (structural / discursive / pragmatic) similarities between languages in order to learn languages (K 7.2);
- Knows that there are different strategies for learning languages and that their relevance varies according to the learner's objectives (K 7.5).

**Duration:**
approx. 30 minutes

**Copy templates:**
- NNN "Nine new nouns"
- Vocab test

**Materials:**
- PowerPoint 1 – Language Learning without Borders (slide 10)
- Projector
- Board or flipchart, writing utensils

[6] Competences are based on the FREPA, *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (see Literature at the end of this document). Individual competences are divided into three groups using the letters "K", "A" and "S" (pp. 24 – 59).

**Activity:**

0. Preparation: Print worksheets (CT 05.04.1/ CT 05.04.2/ CT 05.04.3), set up projector and start PowerPoint presentation at slide 10.

1. Introduction: Following a brief introduction to the topic at hand, we suggest to start a discussion using the following questions:
   - Have you ever reflected on learning techniques and strategies?
   - What technique do you use for learning vocabulary when you are learning a new language?
   - What helps you when learning new vocabulary? What is rather an obstacle?
   - Write answers on black board or flipchart so they are visible for everyone.

2. Development: After the discussion, the teacher hands out the worksheets with the vocabulary lists (CT 05.04.1/ CT 05.04.2/ CT 05.04.3). Each students gets only *one* worksheet with a specific learning strategy. The students sitting next to each other can't have the same strategy as they should exchange their experiences and ideas with one another afterwards. Students have five minutes to try and memorize as many words as they can. The words are printed in Finnish, Croatian, Albanian and Icelandic.
   When the five minutes are up, each student gets a vocabulary test sheet (CT 05.04.4) where they write all the words they can remember in columns. They have five minutes for this task. The teacher should make sure that students do not talk to each other during this whole phase of the activity!

3. Extension: The teacher asks students how the test went for them. Then, students may complete their vocab lists by using their worksheets.

4. Conclusion: The introductory discussion is taken up again. Through a mini-test the teacher checks whether or not the arguments discussed at the beginning of this unit are "true" or not, that is, whether or not students applied them or not. The test should serve as a self-assessment for students regarding their own learning strategies, help them discover which strategies would actually apply best to them, what other options there are.

*Please study the following words in bold.*

*You have 5 minutes.*

| *Albanian* | *Finnish* | *Icelandic* | *Croatian* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **dashuri** | **hiiri** | **klippur** | **brisalo** |
| **mace** | **lyijykynä** | **gleði** | **sreća** |
| **--** | **--** | **--** | **ptica** |

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*Please study the following words in bold.*

*You have 5 minutes.*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **dashuri** | love | *Albanian* |
| **brisalo** | eraser | *Croatian* |
| **klippur** | scissors | *Icelandic* |
| **gleði** | friends | *Icelandic* |
| **mace** | cat | *Albanian* |
| **hiiri** | mouse | *Finnish* |
| **sreća** | luck | *Croatian* |
| **lyijykynä** | pencil | *Finnish* |
| **ptica** | bird | *Croatian* |

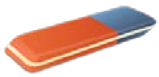

*Figure 5*

**brisalo**

*Figure 6*

**dashuri**

*Figure 7*

**hiiri**

*Figure 8*

**klippur**

*Figure 9*

**mace**

*Figure 10*

**lyijykynä**

*Figure 11*

**ptica**

*Figure 12*

**gleđi**

*Figure 13*

**sreća**

**Please study the following words in bold. You have 5 minutes.**

**Please write all the new words that you remember:**

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____

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**Please write all the new words that you remember:**

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

8 _____

9 _____

Activity 5

# “Multilingual? Sure, but how?!”

**Topic:**
The language learning experience.

**Description:**
Who? When? How? Where? Why? – Language learning is entertaining and often arouses curiosity and prompts many questions. The following activity aims at helping students to find answers to the many questions that can arise during the language learning process. Students can get to know the basics of language acquisition through the *5W-questions* (who?, what?, when?, where? and why?). Answering these W-questions is the foundation for gathering information as well as solutions to the issues at hand. The class discussion is the essential part of this exercise, where the students’ questions are considered and many issues concerning multilingualism are discussed.

**Competences:**[7]
- Assigning value to linguistic knowledge / skills, irrespective of the context in which they have been acquired (within school / outside school) (A 17.2);
- Motivation to learn languages (/ of schooling / family / foreign / regional /…) (A 18);
- Knows that because of his/her plurilingual and pluricultural competence, a person who speaks another language possesses a particular status in communication (K 3.6).

**Duration:**
approx. 40 minutes

**Copy templates:**
- Multilingual? Sure, but how?!

**Materials:**
- PowerPoint 1 – Language Learning without Borders (slides 11) (optional)
- Poster 6 of travelling exhibition “Multilingual? Sure, but how?!” (optional)
- Colored sheets of paper (min. 50x70 cm)
- Sticky notes (optional)
- Writing utensils

[7] Competences are based on the FREPA, *A Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (see Literature at the end of this document). Individual competences are divided into three groups using the letters “K”, “A” and “S” (pp. 24 – 59).

**Activity:**

0. Preparation: If available, set up the poster from the travelling exhibition "Multilingual? Sure, but how?!", or the PowerPoint presentation (slides 11). Print worksheets with questions (CT 05.05.1 to CT 05.05.7) and stick on colored sheets (one question per sheet - A3 or bigger). Prepare writing utensils and sticky notes in case students don't have enough room for their answers on the sheets.

1. Introduction: If the poster is available, start with a brief introduction.[8] If the poster is unavailable, introduce into the topic verbally. Ask students about their personal experiences regarding language learning: What languages have you learnt? Where? How well do you speak them? Students are put in groups, one group per question.

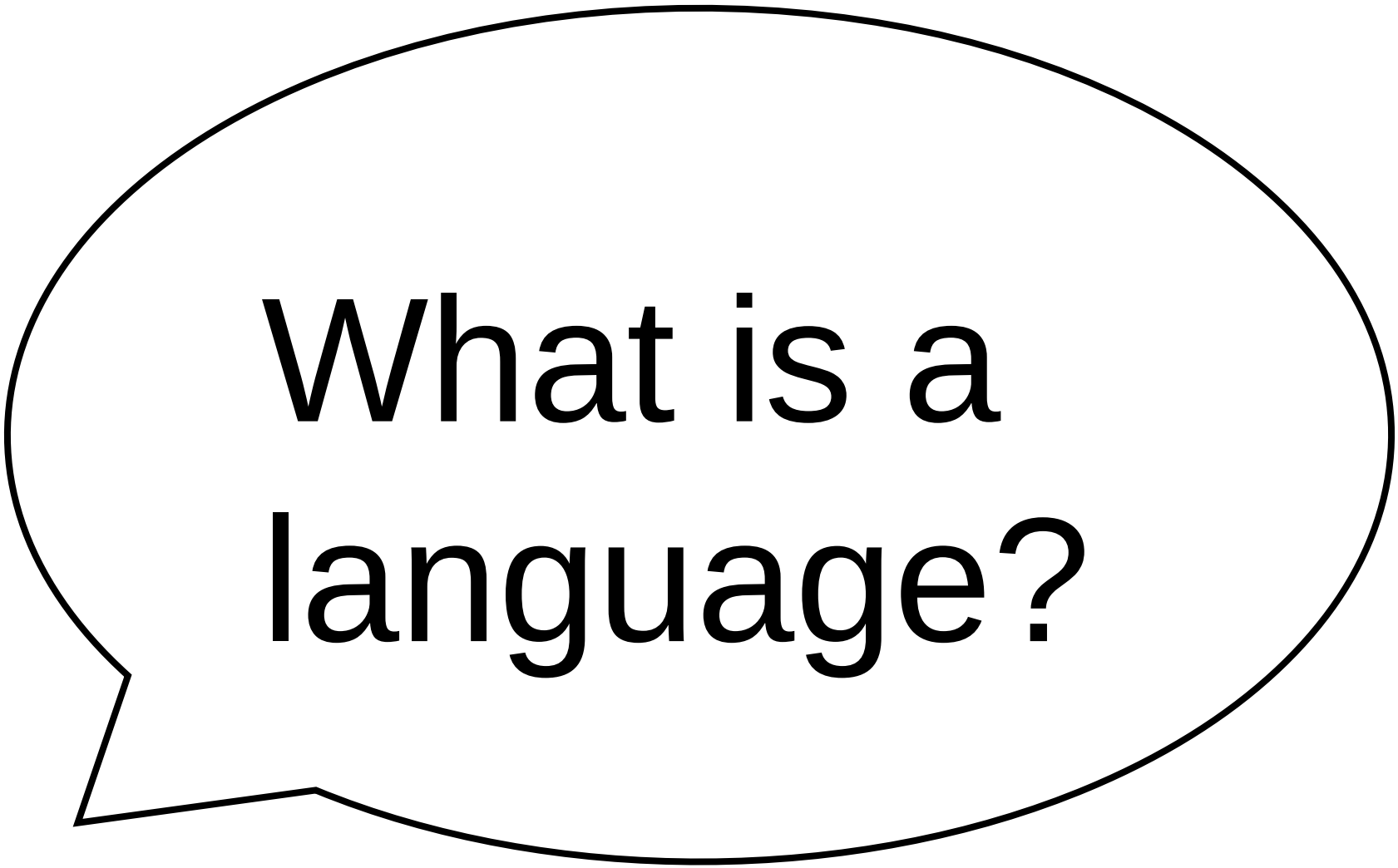
2. Development: Once the teacher has handed out a different question to each group, the students get 5-10 minutes to find appropriate answers. Then each group presents their answers and the class discusses.

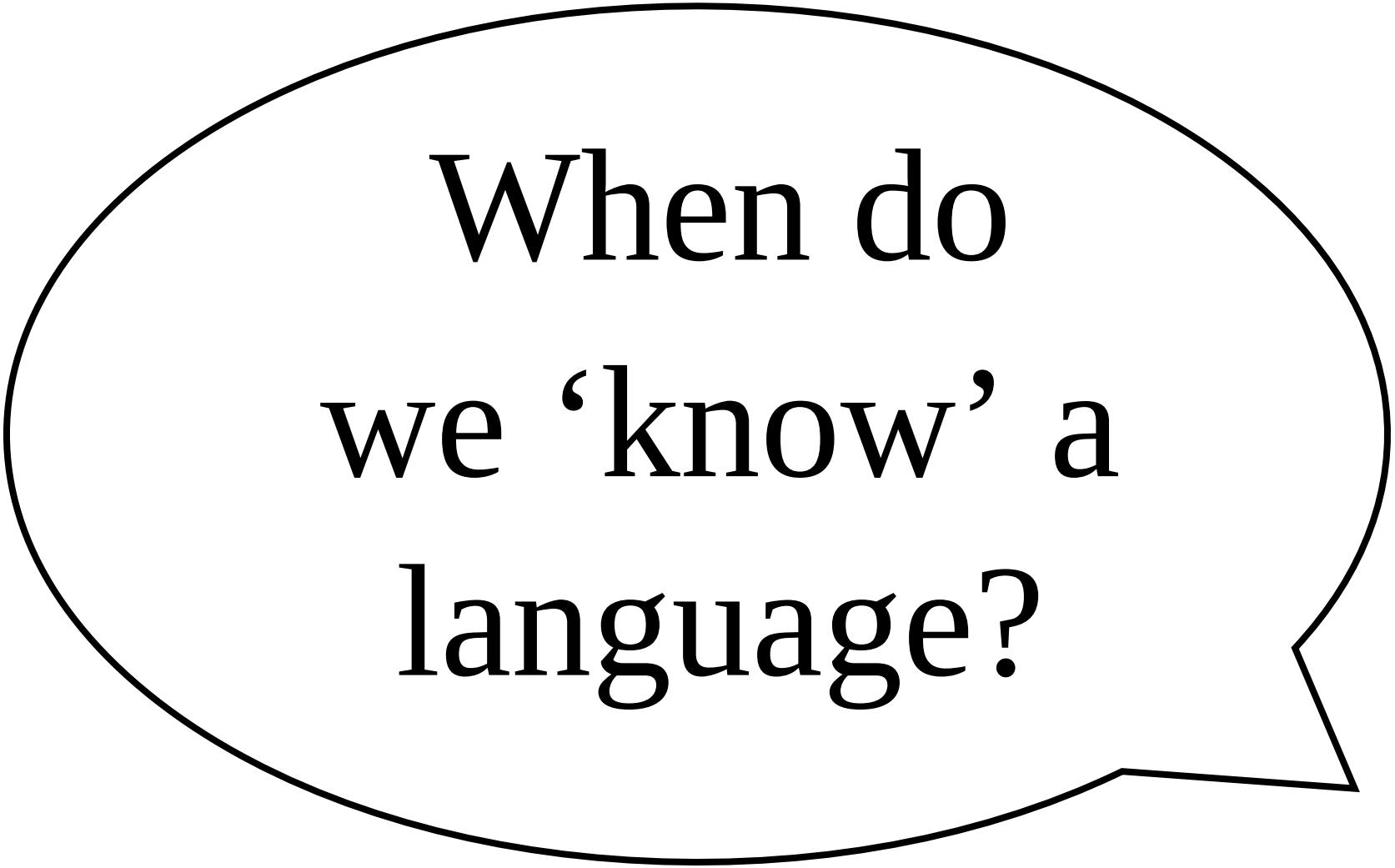
3. Conclusion: At the end, the questions discussed at the beginning are taken up again (or the poster, if available): Have their answers changed?

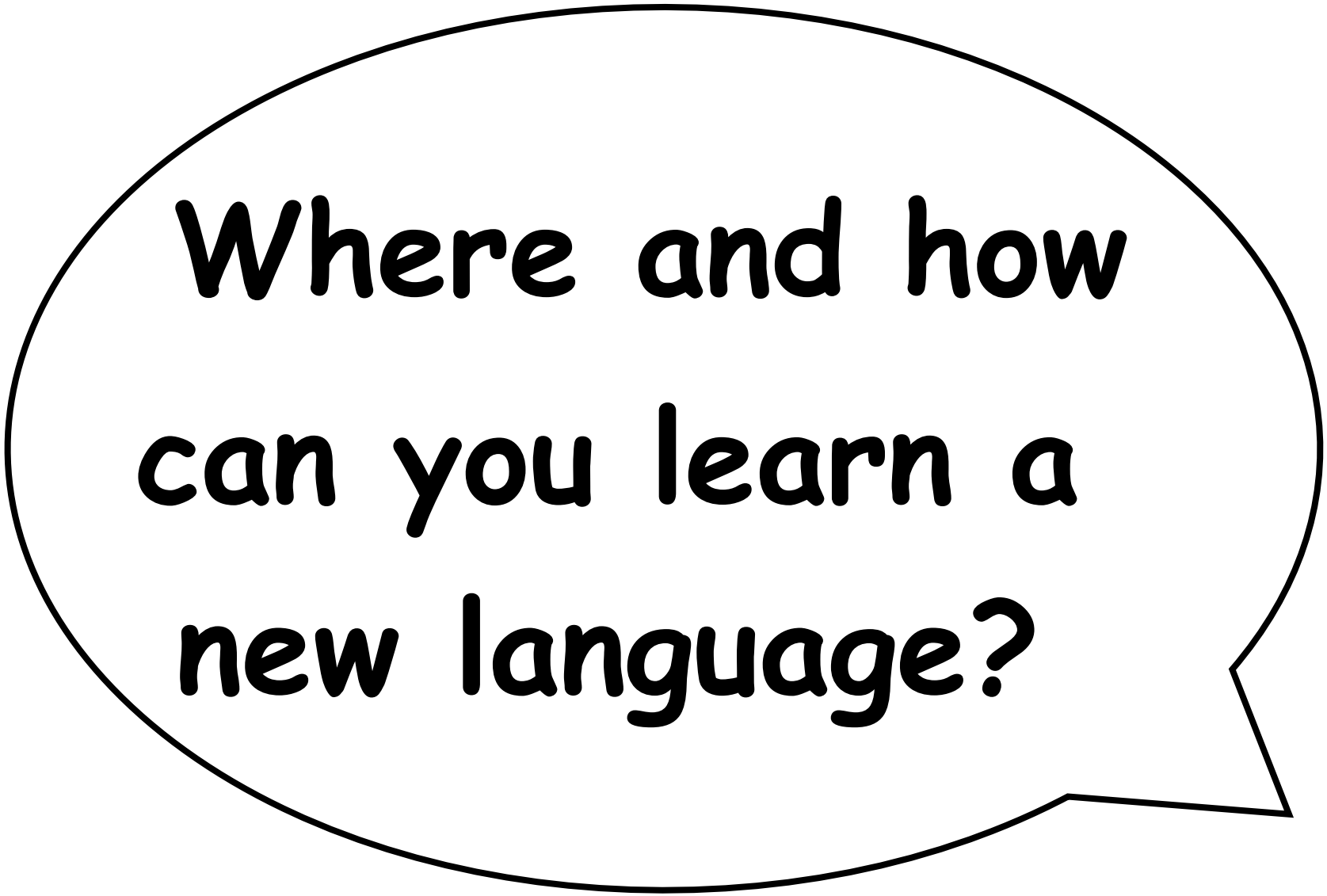
**Variants:**

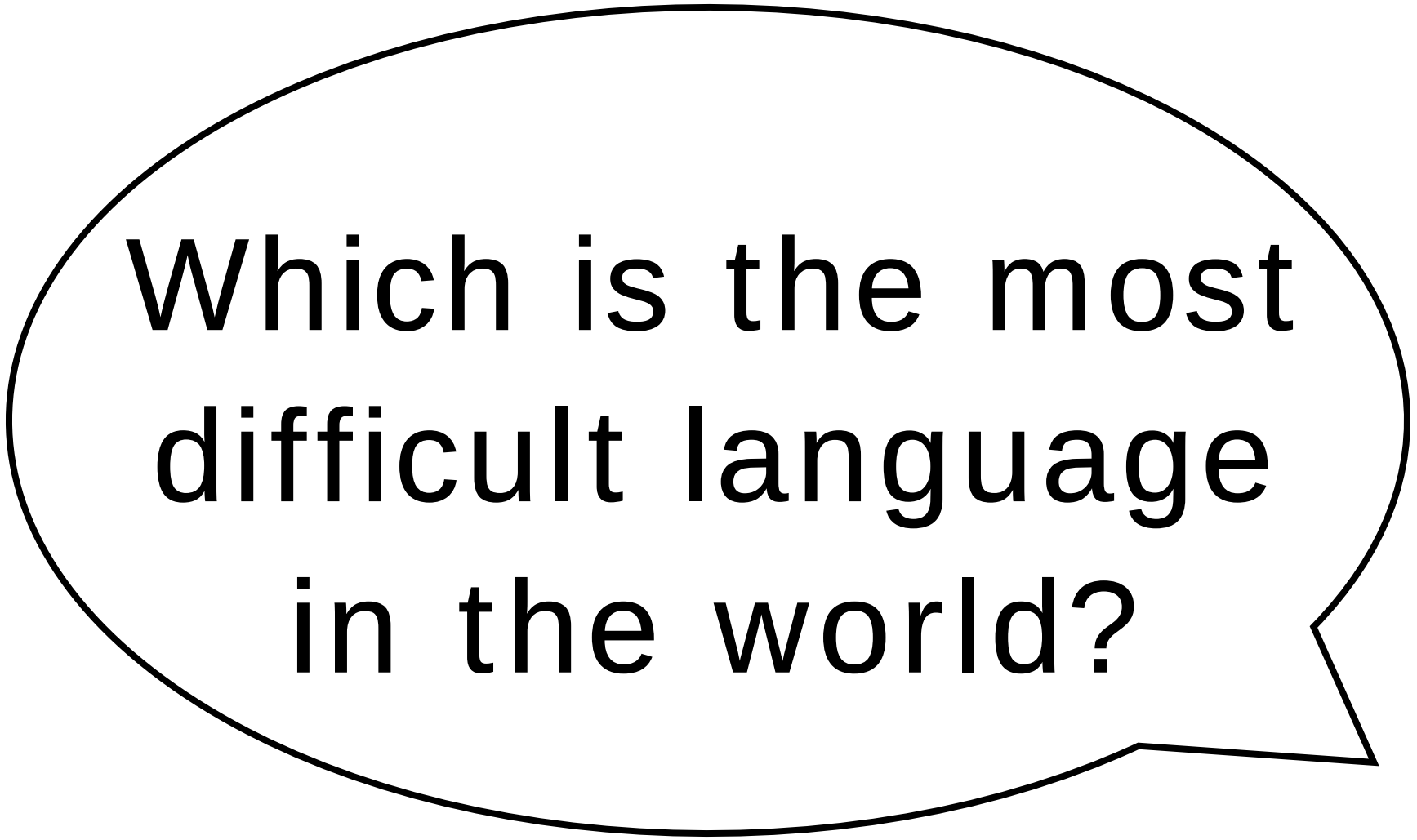
This exercise can also be done individually. Each student has 10 minutes to answer all the questions. Then the class reflects and discusses together.

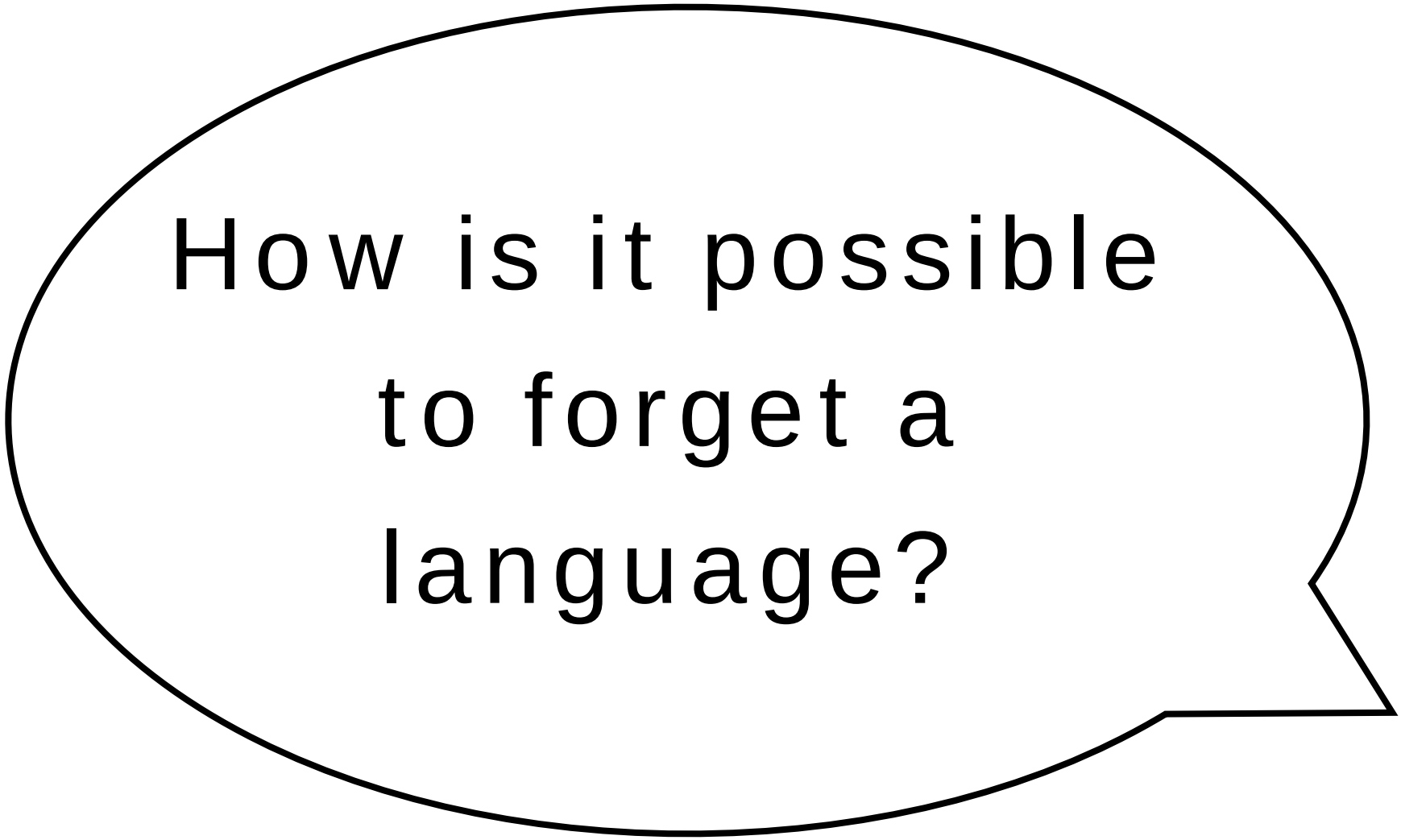
[8] Link: http://sms-project.eurac.edu/IT/Mostra/Pages/Begleitmaterial.aspx, poster 6 „Multilingual? Sure, but how?!"

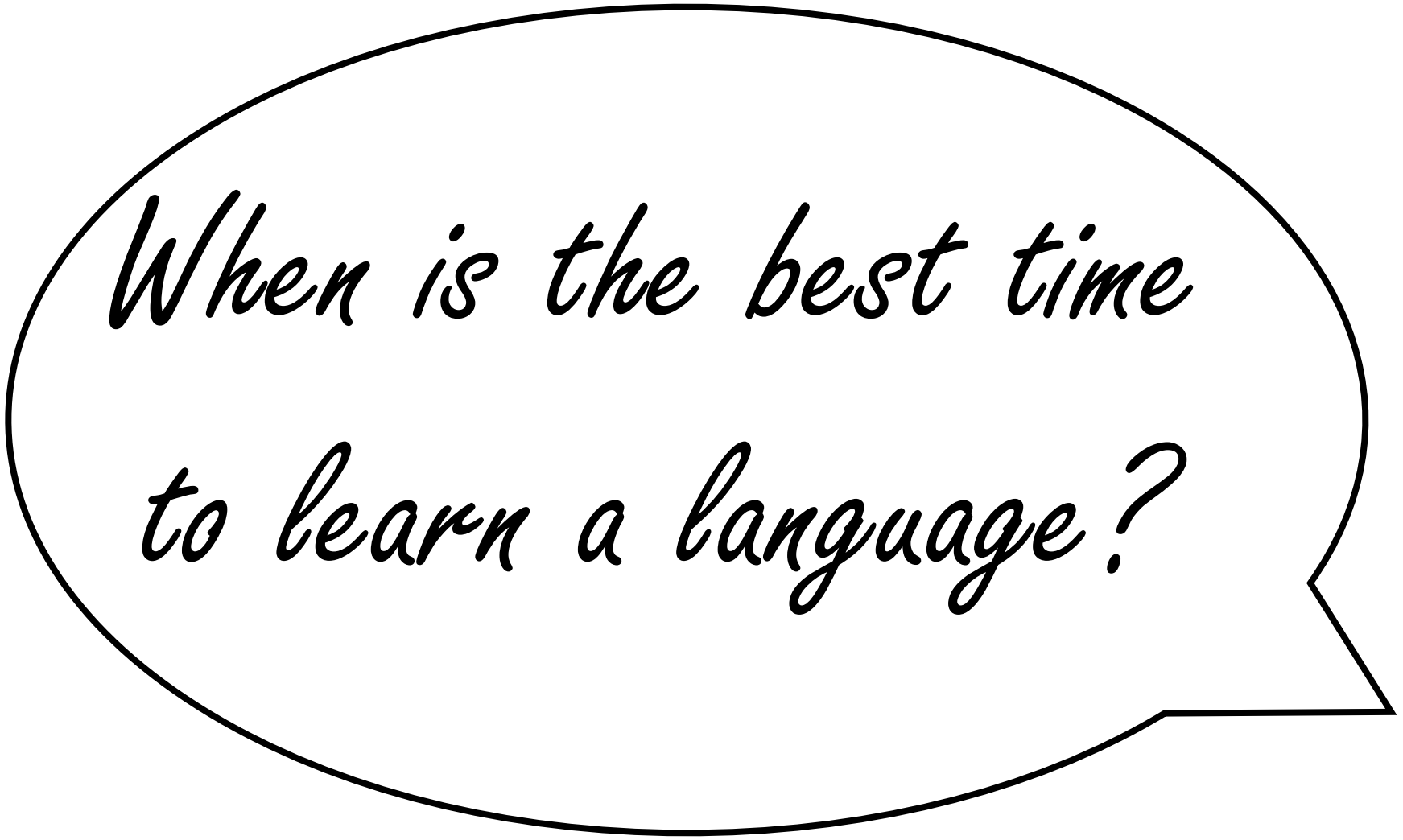

What is a language?

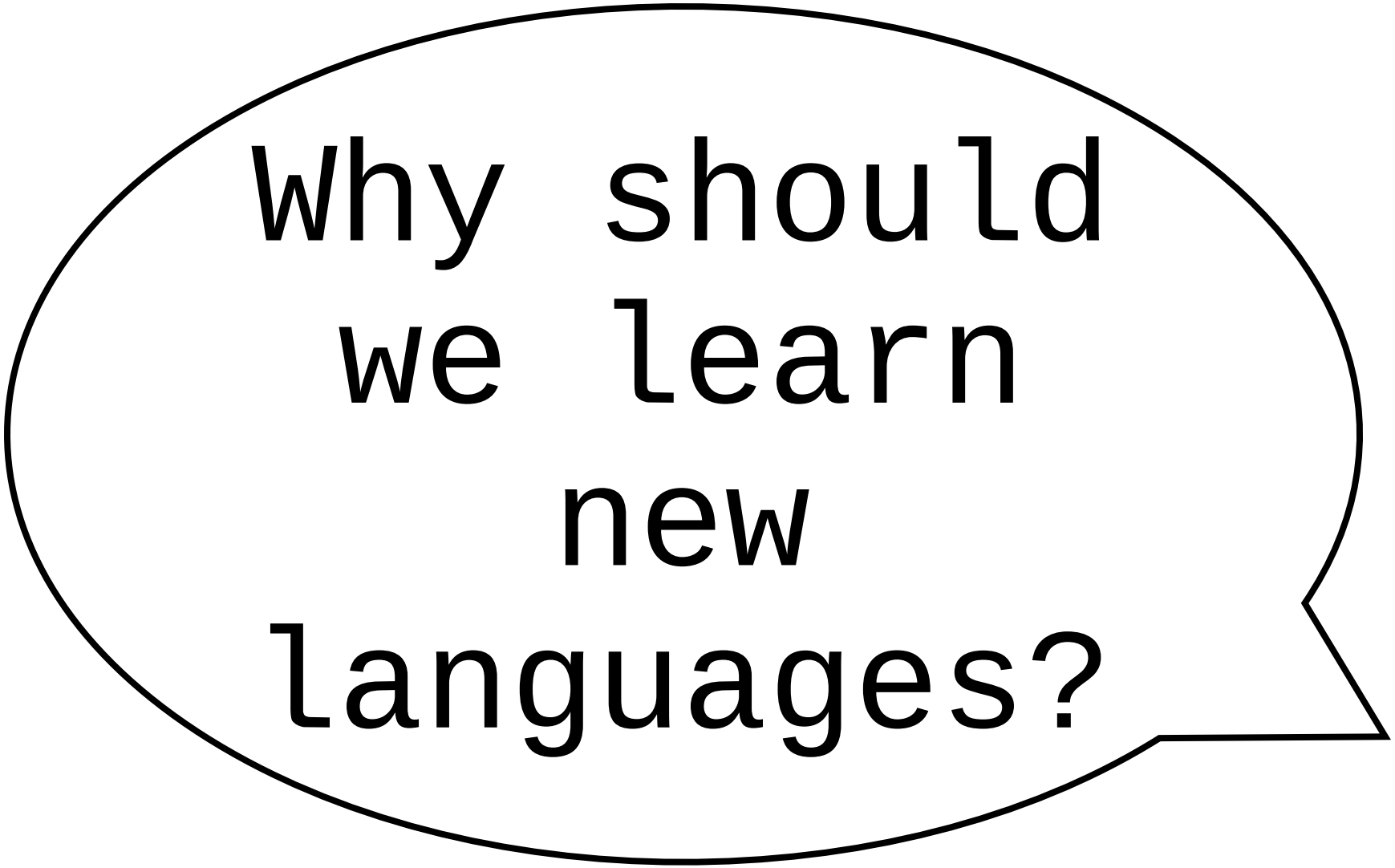

When do
we ‘know’ a
language?


Where and how can you learn a new language?


Which is the most difficult language in the world?


How is it possible
to forget a
language?


When is the best time
to learn a language?

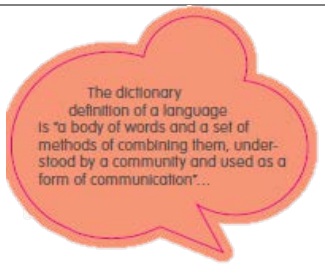
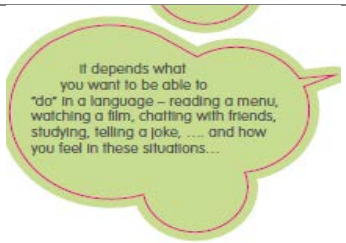
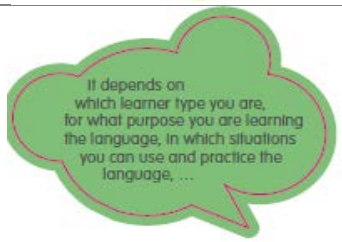
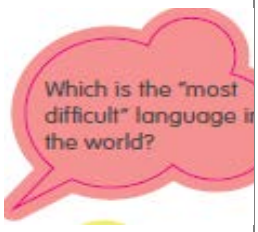
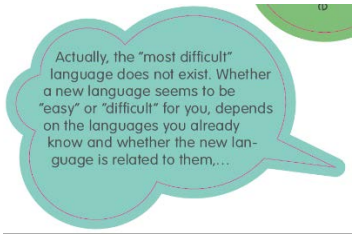

Why should
we learn
new
languages?

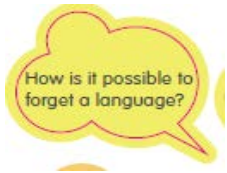
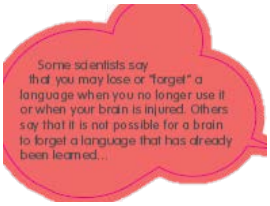
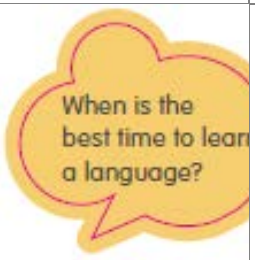
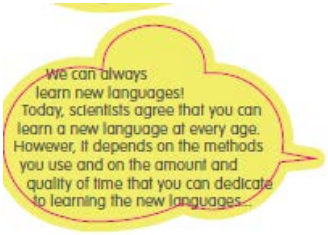
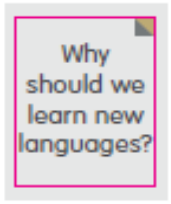
Explanations

*Figure 14*

# “Multilingual?! Sure, but how?”

## Explanations

| Questions | Corresponding answers | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| |  | It is difficult to provide a short definition of “language” that can capture the complexity of the systems of characters and rules. This question should therefore be openly discussed to find examples for individual communication systems. |
| |  | Ever since the communicative approach gained grounds in linguistics, the ideal of native competence as a benchmark for language learning has given way to aiming at functional multilingualism. All levels and all competences should be valued! |
| |  | Every individual has their own preferences as well as learning strategies that work best for them: visual types will acquire new information best through reading, while haptic types should include practical activities in their learning process. Motivation and environment of course also have a great impact on the learning process. |
|  |  | A certain answer to this question does not exist because the most difficult language does not exist. To give an answer, one has to take into account several factors, such as the languages one already knows and their major or minor relationship with the language(s) one wishes to learn, the writing system, phonetics or grammar as well as the greater or lesser ability of each individual to learn languages. However, the American Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has drawn up a "the most difficult to learn language"-ranking for native English speakers on the basis of the time needed to learn them. Among the most complicated are Japanese, Chinese and Arabic followed by Thai, Vietnamese and Mongolian. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  |  | As soon as we no longer commit to a language daily, it will be displaced from our ordinary memory that is the daily accessible knowledge, the actively available vocabulary. Only bits and pieces of it will be left. Exceptional cases, for example a brain or head injury suffered from an accident, may lead to memory loss that could also affect aspects/areas of language use. |
|  |  | There are studies that speak for an ideal time window during which a language is acquired mostly naturally in a respective environment. This time window is generally open until the beginning of puberty. As adults, we learn languages in a different manner and it usually takes us longer. However, there are generally no age limits for learning new languages. |
|  | | There are countless reasons that speak for learning a new language: we unlock new knowledge, we communicate more easily and efficiently when traveling, it becomes easier to meet new people, horizons are broadened, and the world becomes easier to navigate. Music, movies, literature and so much more become true pleasures and treasures. |

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