

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IS A

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SUPERPOWER

TRACKING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING JOURNEY

- CHAD DAVIDSON ON GAUGING YOUR LANGUAGE SUPERPOWERS
- HOW INTERESTS AND CURIOSITIES ACCELERATE LEARNING
- MEASURING PERCEIVED PROGRESS THROUGH TESTING
- *AND SO MUCH MORE!*

After attaining a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees, Dr. Chad Davidson taught English at the university level for ten years before finally attaining his doctoral degree. He realized that one of the largest gaps in language learning literature was tracking a learner's language learning journey rigorously and longitudinally.



Being raised in and currently living in Middle America has meant that Dr. Davidson only regularly speaks one language, English, but he would say that he's an ongoing learner of five languages: English (his first language), Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and French. In the past, he has also embarked on other language learning journeys (e.g., studying abroad in Russia and in Greece) but realized that if he wanted to get to a point in which he could think, talk, and learn about his interests and passions (such as philosophy or CrossFit) in languages other than English, he needed to commit and dedicate himself to a select few languages.

Dr. Davidson decided to study the topic of tying a person's valued interests and curiosities with their language learning. He also set out to analyze if and how a person could do so throughout all points of proficiency on their language learning journeys - beginner to advanced - and if and how it can be accomplished throughout situations of existential uncertainty and opportunity deprivation, such as those brought about by the COVID pandemic. He documented each moment of engagement with his four new languages, multiple times daily, over the course of a year and a half.

Among other findings, Dr. Davidson's study found that indeed tying one's valued interests and curiosities with one's languages created engagement in all of the languages. Moreover, this tying together of valued interests and curiosities was effective for learning the languages and advancing in proficiency at all levels, even during the beginner stages. The study showed

that if one chooses languages *through which* one can learn more about one's important interests, one could become more advanced in each language even throughout situations of opportunity deprivation and existential uncertainty.

However, while he could subjectively discern his improvement in the new languages over time, gauging it based on his personal assessment of what he could understand of certain podcasts, videos, interviews, papers, and books as he progressed, and how his ability to converse in the languages improved during the few times he was able to converse face-to-face with others in the non-native languages, he still needed at least one means of an external, quantitative measurement to tell him whether or not he had advanced. This is where the ACTFL assessments played a vital role. They provided further evidence of Dr. Davidson's language proficiency improvement over the 18 months of study. He received an Advanced Mid for Spanish Listening, Advanced Mid for Portuguese Reading, Advanced Mid for Italian Reading, and Intermediate Mid for French Reading.



"On an ethical level, taking and using ACTFL tests may be the fairest ways to judge one's competence in a language because the test does not care about who you know or what your cultural, gender, or religious orientations are. The test only cares how well you can perform in the language skills," stated Dr. Davidson. "The world would be a better place if it relied on results from ACTFL tests to hire someone without knowing the person's name or relying on face-to-face [language] interviews where subconscious biases slip in. Hence, if you have the time and resources to be able to perceive your (or any future colleague's or student's) present language abilities via taking ACTFL tests, it is quite worth the investment," he added.