

[Language immersion is more effective than classroom language learning](#)

How does a person learn to speak French like a Frenchman or Spanish like a Spaniard? While most people believe that the best way to learn a new language is to live in the country where one speaks the language (language immersion), test results from earlier studies show that classroom instruction is better.

A new research from Georgetown University Medical Center shows that learning languages by immersion is actually much more effective than learning languages at a classroom. Download the entire research article here on: morsmal.org

[Michael Ullman](#), Ph.D., a professor of neuroscience at Georgetown University Medical Center (GUMC) was not convinced by earlier studies showing that classroom language learning is more effective than language immersion.

Ullman who is bilingual himself in English and French, studied together with his colleagues how the brain handles language acquisition, comparing classroom teaching to an immersion exercise.

To understand the impact of immersion versus classroom grammar instruction, Ullman and his colleagues taught a small group of participants to speak and understand an artificial language of only 13 words. Its grammar was constructed to be like that of natural languages, but not like English.

The intention of the research was to investigate how foreign language learners can achieve native-like processing of grammar.

The scientists found that after a few days, participants reached high proficiency in the language, whether they had undergone classroom - or immersion-like training. However, measures of brain processing showed that different types of training led to different brain mechanisms.

The results from the study show that when learning a foreign language by immersion, adults attain and retain the brain patterns of native speakers.

- Only the immersion training led to full native-like brain processing of grammar. So if you learn a language you can come to use native language brain processes, but you may need immersion rather than classroom exposure, Ullman says.

The researchers attempted also to answer another interesting question: What happens after you've reached high proficiency in a foreign language, if you don't keep on being exposed to it? Do you lose the use of any native-language brain mechanisms that you've attained?

In order to find answer to the question, the researchers asked the participants to come back about five months later for another round of brain scanning.

- To our surprise, the participants actually became more native like in their brain processing of grammar. And this was true for both training groups, though it was still the case that only the immersion group showed full native-like processing of syntax, Ullman said.

Ullman and his team are attempting now to find out why immersion learning and periods with no exposure help one to reach native-like brain processing of syntax.

- We have lots and lots of next steps, in many different directions. We are extremely excited about this research, and how it may help people learn foreign languages and possibly recover from language disorders, said Ullman.

See also:

- [Dual language immersion programs growing in popularity](#)
- [Strengthen mother language with immersion](#)