

The Language Learning Revolution With Tony Buzan

Hi, this is Bill Jarrard; I am here with Tony Buzan once again.

BILL

"Tony, how are you today?"

TONY

I'm well, and I'm actually talking to you this time from Singapore

BILL

"Fantastic!"

BILL

Now, Tony, I just received an SMS message from Jennifer and she just said that she has found out that 2008 is the International Year of Languages by the United Nations. What do you think about that given the recent development of your own language program?

TONY

"Well, I could not have wished for a better message from the United Nations!"

As you know, it was in fact, President Vicente Fox of Mexico, who at the United Nations Conference for Creativity and Innovation in 2003, pronounced to the 10,000 delegates that this century was the century for the development of the brain and innovation. So the United Nations was very kind then to have been a supporter of the initiatives. Hearing now, this is the Year of Languages. On March 3 in London we launched the beginning of a "domino" launch around the world called "Collins Language Revolution". What Collins has done, that is Harper-Collins the publishers, is to set up an entirely new division called "The Language Revolution", that is "The Collins Language Revolution" and it is entirely based on my methods and my work, and can I tell you some good news?

BILL

"Yes, you can absolutely do that."

TONY

The first two weeks of the launch the French book, with its CD's and adjoining web, went immediately to #1 on Amazon Language Learning. The Italian went to #2 and the Spanish went to #3, so we have gold, silver and bronze right off the bat. And Waterstones, the big, giant bookshop chain in England were having five foot high, front

of store units and within a few days the Language Revolution books, of all the Waterstones books, were #1, #2 and #3. So it got off to an incredible launch, and as a result of that, Collins is now planning the next stage of learning in each of those languages, new languages to be learned, and special iPodable packages for people to learn in conjunction to Mind Mapping and the Harper-Collins learning revolution. So the fact that the United Nations calls it the Year of Languages is something with which we, and I am sure Collins, will agree.

BILL

"Fantastic and congratulations. I am fascinated in the work you have done in a broad range of areas. What made you get interested in going into this area of languages and of language programs? Where did that all start for you?"

TONY

Well, it actually came from around the world, including you will be pleased to know, I am sure, Australia. Once I had done the BBC "Use Your Head" television series and started to lecture, I was asked, literally in every course that I did, by delegates for applications of Mind Mapping, how to use my methods for this, how to use my methods for that.... And one of the main constant questions was, "how do you use mind maps to learn a language? I would say look you know it's obvious isn't it, you now know how to Mind Map, apply it to language!"

But the questions kept on and on, the drumbeats repeating, and eventually after having read some pretty provocative negative research which says that people over 40, 50, 60 could never learn language and what brain cells were devoted to language learning, couldn't hear sounds, couldn't pronounce sounds, I grew angry as well. I waited until I was 60 and started to learn fundamentally a language, and applying Mind Mapping and memory principles to it, and found that it was only 40 hours of teaching, I could actually using the techniques, I could hold a basic conversation in a restaurant, and I even gave a lecture in Spanish to 140 Spanish-speaking teachers. So that gave rise to the whole idea of a language learning product and Collins leapt at the opportunity. And for the last four years we've been developing it and it was in March that it actually came out, to my delight, so far total acclaim. There have been many, many, many reviews on it, and all the reviews have been really, really good, so I am chuffed.

Also I am pleased language learning has a new kid on the block, and instead of having to go through the standard, you know, really turgid grammatical sentencing type learning, people can learn language in the same way as the best language learner on the planet, the baby learns it. And that is fundamentally by mind mapping, by images, by association, by having fun, by using the memory techniques, by making mistakes and learning from them. The whole thing becomes a glorious game in which you learn languages four, five, ten times faster than before. We have already had a number of people writing in and emailing, saying that they had tried to learn French, English or

Spanish for years and had actually given up. And they have used the new mind map approach and found that it worked immediately and, finally, they are using the basic language.

BILL

Well, I can tell you that from our perspective here in Australia, it certainly has been one of those things that we have known has been the power of that. You might remember Ian, one of our young Buzan instructors... "Yes, I do".....His story was, of course, that he went and studied environmental engineering and chose, because his parents were living overseas at the time, he wanted to go to Paris to study. So he ended up doing his third year engineering degree in French in Paris, never having learned the language, but went over four weeks early, did the study course, but because he had been mind mapping since he was fourteen, he mastered the language and actually did his third year university in French in Paris using the mind mapping approach. When he came back here to Australia, of course, he has been active in the study skills area.

I can remember one young high school student that he had come in and was failing in French, and went from in about four or five weeks from essentially failing French to top of class using exactly the same approaches that you are talking about. So we've seen those examples here and now with the new stuff you've put out it's going to be a lot easier for us to push that sort of thing along.

TONY

That is wonderful.....I mean, please ask Ian to write up a brief summary of his report and we'll put it up in verbal form on the web as well.

BILL

Absolutely, we'll get that done.

Another thing I would like to learn is that while you were doing all this, it must have been a fascinating learning approach for you. What did you learn about language itself in doing this, and the nature of language and how people learn that stuff?

TONY

Bill, that's a two-day response. Let me summarize it for you. I learned many, many things. I learned the power of learning a language in its own context. For example, when I was mind mapping Spanish, when I was using Spanish words, for example, manzana for apple....instead of putting manzana/apple I just put manzana and drew a little apple. The connection in my head was Spanish, so I tried to draw a Spanish-looking apple.

So the language remained in the context of itself, through the associations and networks in my head were all in the language. Another thing I learned to my surprise and total

delight was that there are only 1,000 basic words that make up 95% of standard spoken language, in any language. And so I got those thousand words, and then noticed to my even greater surprise, that 400 of them in Spanish, French and Italian were basically the same as the English words. So of 95% of the basic language I already knew 400. And so did any other English-speaking person. "Amazing!" So I wasn't having to learn a totally new language. I already had 400 of them and all I had to do was tweak them to the accent. So instead of saying "excellent" in French, I would say "Exel-aunt"...but the spelling was identical. In Spanish it would be "exellant-aye". So the similarity was extraordinary and, therefore, the big, looming horror of having to learn all that stuff just melted away. And the other thing I learned which stunned me, was trying to learn in Spanish certain words and one of the words that the lady who was being my mind mapping tutor and who was trained in all the things she needed to be trained in to teach me the language in the right way...and she said to me, "the word for gold is dorado.

And I said, "ahh, I suddenly now remember from when I was a little boy, El Dorado, the Paradise, so I already know dorado. And she said, 'No you got that wrong.' And I said, "Well you said dorado and I said dorado and you're telling me it's wrong." And I said, show me what I am doing wrong. And she put her mouth near my eyes and very slowly she said, "I said dorrrado, and her tongue bounced off the back of her front teeth. And she said, "You said dorado with your tongue bouncing off the top of your middle palate.

And suddenly I could hear the difference that I couldn't hear before. And as I say to you now what she said was, "what I said was dorrrado, and I said dorado, so the Spanish was slightly softer. I then....she had me close my eyes and she randomly said the word each way and I totally clearly distinguish. Where as when I hadn't seen it, I couldn't distinguish. And I suddenly realized that the learning of a language is incredibly visual, and that all these courses that only have sound are actually losing the strength of a major sense, which is vision.

And then when I asked children to teach me in Mexico, every single one of them, when I had any difficulty with a word, moved their mouths closer to my eyes so that I could see the sound being made. And then when I watched babies with parents, they weren't turning their ears to the parents mouths, they were looking intently at what the shape of their mouth and the movement of the tongue was. So I discovered what I think is a revolutionary discovery. That is that language learning is majorly visual. It was very exciting.

BILL

"Yes, and I think so much about language is particularly...when we go to other countries, how very often what you are doing is translating one word to the next, rather than simply relearning the word to the image, which is what you are talking about. In other

words, you are actually learning the language, not learning to translate, which is what so often happens.

TONY

Yes, exactly. You're not having to be perfect. In fact, the more mistakes you make, the better it is. One of the other revelations was I thought I learned the words for day, and week and month and year. And so I was asked to say them and someone was videoing me doing it in the very early stages. And so I said, "Day is dia, week is semana, month is mesa, and with great enthusiasm having thought I had done so well, which I hadn't done particularly well, I said, "year is ano", and there was a smiling silence from my Spanish listeners. They all started just roaring with laughter and said, "No, Tony, that is not the word for year." That is the word for part of the human body. And what you have said is ano, and it should have been anyo.

BILL

And, of course, as soon as you were saying that, I could just hear what was going to come for that.

TONY

The delight was, of course, that I immediately learned two new words, and they had a real laugh, and so did I. And I was learning language even faster.

BILL

And, as you say, there is another word that's very close to an English word as well.

TONY

Indeed, it is. Indeed.

BILL

So, on the whole language thing, if you had to give just one, or even two quick tips to people who now want to go out and learn to speak Italian, French, Spanish, etc., English speakers predominantly, but anyone who wants to learn another language, what would be the key tips for doing that?

TONY

I would actually suggest that they go and get these little books and CD's because they are incredibly inexpensive and they are beautifully done. I think Harper Collins spent a fortune into building them. Some of the tips that those books contain are some of the things I have said to you. Mind Map the language, to learn to Mind Map, and mind map the language. Another is to go into the learning of the language with a complete confidence and a complete intent to have fun and make mistakes. Go into learning of the language looking for the key words. Don't try to learn the grammar. When I "learned" or actually didn't learn French in school, the first thing I had to learn was

"jeun tredom la salle de class, je regard ou tout de mou". What in heavens name was that going to do to help me when I was a young man in Paris?

BILL

Exactly. I remember when I was living in the U.K. as a 21-year-old, Tony, coming from Canada, of course, I had learned some French when I was in school but quickly lost it all...and I remember a friend had joined me from Canada and he had gone right through the university with his French studies and he was looking forward to going with me over to Paris. Of course, while there he could read many of the signs and that kind of stuff, but to try to order a beer and a dinner was left to me because I had been there a number of times and you just pick up the language because you are there and you are participating in it. So me with only my couple of years of basic French years and years earlier I could get along better because you were in amongst the people verses the academic environment.

TONY

If you have learned any language in the traditional way and went through the agony of it, forget trying to get perfect, forget trying to get the grammar, but try to remember a few of the key words. All you need are the key words and your body. Fifty percent of learning language is body language anyway. Each different language has its own kind of physical expression, and you can mimic the way those people use their bodies when they're talking. For example in Italian Moma Mia, the hand goes from a closed rose to a open happy hand.

You learn the gestures and you learn the language as well. You have the rhythm, you have the accent, you have fun, you make mistakes as well, and the grammar is the last thing to come along. And the other point is, of course, that when you use this approach you can learn at any age and you can hear the differences in the tone and the sound and you can make those with your mouth. As long as you play at it. You've got to have fun and enjoy it.

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For more information on Tony Buzan and the Buzan Centre:AustralAsia go to:

www.buzan.com.au or call 1800 060 982 (in Australia)

Also visit our community website www.fuuz2buzz.com