

VOCABULARY · EPISODE 12

Why Traditional Language Learning Is Broken

Key words & expressions · English + Español

10 words

Your English Toolbox

1

to drill

repetir mecánicamente · practicar a base de repetición

DEF

to practise something repeatedly until it becomes automatic

In language learning, drilling is the old-fashioned technique of repeating grammar rules or vocabulary until you memorise them — effective for short-term tests, not long-term use.

ES

Practicar algo repetidamente hasta que se vuelva automático.

En el aprendizaje de idiomas, el drilling es la vieja técnica de repetir reglas gramaticales hasta memorizarlas.

We drilled verb conjugations for an hour, but none of us could actually use them in a sentence.

We drilled verb conjugations for an hour. -> Repetimos las conjugaciones verbales mecánicamente durante una hora.

Drilling vocabulary lists is exhausting and quickly forgotten — real use is far more effective.

Drilling vocabulary lists is exhausting. -> Practicar listas de vocabulario a base de repetición es agotador.

2

to pick something up

aprender de forma natural · captar sin esfuerzo

DEF

to learn a skill, language, or habit naturally over time, without formal study

Pick up is the opposite of formal drilling — it describes the effortless absorption that happens through exposure, conversation, and experience.

ES

Aprender una habilidad, idioma o hábito de forma natural con el tiempo, sin estudio formal.

Es lo contrario del drilling formal — describe la absorción que ocurre a través de la exposición y la experiencia.

She picked up French just by living in Paris for six months.

She picked up French just by living in Paris for six months. -> Aprendió francés de forma natural simplemente viviendo en París seis meses.

Children pick up their first language without any grammar lessons at all.

Children pick up their first language without any grammar lessons. -> Los niños captan su primer idioma sin ninguna clase de gramática.

3

to sink in

calar hondo · asimilarse de verdad

DEF

(of information or an idea) to be gradually understood and truly absorbed by the mind

Sinking in takes time — you can hear something once and not understand it, then hear it again in context and suddenly it clicks. Real learning happens when things sink in.

ES

(De información o idea) ser gradualmente comprendida y verdaderamente absorbida por la mente.

Asimilarse lleva tiempo — puedes escuchar algo una vez y no entenderlo, pero luego escucharlo en contexto y de repente hacer clic.

The grammar rule made no sense at first, but after a few weeks it finally sank in.

The grammar rule made no sense at first, but after a few weeks it finally sank in. -> La regla gramatical no tenía sentido al principio, pero después de unas semanas finalmente caló hondo.

Don't rush — give new vocabulary time to sink in before moving on.

Give new vocabulary time to sink in before moving on. -> Da tiempo al vocabulario nuevo para que se asimile antes de seguir.

4

meaningful

con sentido · significativo de verdad

DEF

having real significance, purpose, or value — not artificial or empty

Meaningful practice is the opposite of drilling — instead of repeating sentences out of context, you use the language to express something you actually care about.

ES

Que tiene significado real, propósito o valor — no artificial ni vacío.

La práctica con sentido es lo contrario del drilling — usas el idioma para expresar algo que realmente te importa.

Meaningful communication is the fastest route to fluency — say real things to real people.

Meaningful communication is the fastest route to fluency. -> La comunicación con sentido es la ruta más rápida hacia la fluidez.

The most meaningful vocabulary is the vocabulary you use to talk about your own life.

The most meaningful vocabulary is the vocabulary you use to talk about your own life. -> El vocabulario más significativo es el que usas para hablar de tu propia vida.

5

rote learning

memorización mecánica · aprendizaje por repetición ciega

DEF

memorising information through repetition alone, without understanding the meaning or context

Rote learning was the foundation of traditional language teaching — students memorised verb tables and word lists. It works for exams but fades quickly in real speech.

ES

Memorizar información solo a través de la repetición, sin entender el significado o el contexto.

La memorización mecánica fue la base de la enseñanza tradicional de idiomas.

Rote learning of grammar rules fills your notebook but empties your confidence when you try to speak.

Rote learning of grammar rules fills your notebook but empties your confidence. -> La memorización mecánica de reglas gramaticales llena tu cuaderno pero vacía tu confianza.

We all did rote learning at school — and most of us forgot it within a year.

We all did rote learning at school. -> Todos hicimos memorización mecánica en la escuela.

6

comprehensible input

el insumo comprensible · el input que entiendes

DEF

language you hear or read that you can mostly understand — the theory that you acquire language through messages you can follow, not rules you memorise

Stephen Krashen's most influential idea: you acquire language when the message is just slightly above your current level — understandable but with something new.

ES

El idioma que escuchas o lees y que puedes entender en su mayor parte.

La idea más influyente de Stephen Krashen: adquieres el idioma cuando el mensaje está justo un poco por encima de tu nivel actual.

This podcast is designed to be comprehensible input — slow, clear English just above your comfort zone.

This podcast is designed to be comprehensible input. -> Este podcast está diseñado para ser input comprensible.

The best comprehensible input is content you actually enjoy — the learning happens without you noticing.

The best comprehensible input is content you actually enjoy. -> El mejor input comprensible es contenido que realmente disfrutas.

7 trial and error

prueba y error · ensayo y error

DEF

the process of trying different approaches until you find one that works, learning from each failure

Trial and error is the most natural form of learning — babies do it constantly. In language, it means making mistakes and adjusting, rather than waiting until you are perfect.

ES

El proceso de probar diferentes enfoques hasta encontrar uno que funcione, aprendiendo de cada fracaso.

Es la forma más natural de aprendizaje — los bebés lo hacen constantemente.

Language learning is mostly trial and error — try, fail, adjust, try again.

Language learning is mostly trial and error. -> El aprendizaje de idiomas es principalmente prueba y error.

Through trial and error, she discovered that speaking daily worked better than studying for hours weekly.

Through trial and error, she discovered that speaking daily worked better. -> A través del ensayo y error, descubrió que hablar a diario funcionaba mejor.

8 to get the hang of

cogerle el truco a algo · hacerse con algo

DEF

to gradually understand how to do something and begin doing it with ease

Get the hang of implies it took time and practice — you struggled at first, but now it feels natural. Perfect for describing the 'click' moment of language learning.

ES

Entender gradualmente cómo hacer algo y empezar a hacerlo con facilidad.

Implica que llevó tiempo y práctica — al principio te costó, pero ahora se siente natural.

Once you get the hang of English word order, speaking starts to feel much more natural.

Once you get the hang of English word order, speaking starts to feel much more natural. -> Una vez que le coges el truco al orden de las palabras en inglés, hablar empieza a sentirse más natural.

It took me three months to get the hang of the past perfect, but now I use it automatically.

It took me three months to get the hang of the past perfect. -> Tardé tres meses en cogerle el truco al pasado perfecto.

9 a shortcut el atajo · la vía rápida

DEF

a quicker way to achieve a result, bypassing the usual steps

In language learning, people constantly seek shortcuts. The paradox: some genuine shortcuts exist (like immersion), but others (like translation apps) can create dependency and slow growth.

ES

Una forma más rápida de lograr un resultado, evitando los pasos habituales.

En el aprendizaje de idiomas, la gente busca constantemente atajos.

There is no shortcut to fluency — but there are smarter paths.

There is no shortcut to fluency — but there are smarter paths. -> No hay atajo hacia la fluidez — pero sí hay caminos más inteligentes.

Using cognates between Spanish and English is a genuine shortcut when learning either language.

Using cognates is a genuine shortcut when learning. -> Usar cognados es un verdadero atajo cuando se aprende.

10 to be fluent in dominar un idioma · hablar con fluidez

DEF

to be able to speak or write a language smoothly, naturally, and without significant effort

Fluent does not mean perfect — it means communicating without stopping to search for words or translate. Many people are fluent but still make occasional grammar mistakes.

ES

Ser capaz de hablar o escribir un idioma de forma fluida, natural y sin esfuerzo significativo.

Fluido no significa perfecto — significa comunicarse sin detenerse a buscar palabras.

She became fluent in Spanish after two years of daily practice and immersion.

She became fluent in Spanish after two years. -> Logró dominar el español después de dos años de práctica diaria.

You don't need to be fluent to have a real conversation — start now and fluency will follow.

You don't need to be fluent to have a real conversation. -> No necesitas hablar con fluidez para tener una conversación real.