



**March 2021**

# **Gift of Gab Part 1: Foreign Language Facts**



This is part one of Gift of Gab, providing some educational resources about the benefits of learning a new language.

- We'll start off with facts about languages in the United States.
- There are many health benefits to learning a new language.
- Different types of sign language are used across the world in addition to spoken languages.

After you're done reading, [don't forget to listen to our webinars every Tuesday! You can find registration links and recordings here.](#)

We are also holding Healthy Lifestyles Project: LIVE events, every Wednesday at 11 AM and Friday at 1 PM. [Register here.](#)

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# Language Facts

## USA Does Not Have An Official Language

- Although 80% of Americans speak English, the United States does not have an official language.
- The Continental Congress did not declare an official language when creating the laws of the United States. This was due to the vast amount of languages that were spoken in the US at the time including Dutch, Spanish, French and German, as well as thousands of Native American languages.
- Since then, the linguistic landscape of America has remained widely diverse, and there is still no official language.

## More Spanish Speakers Than Spain

- Our country is the home to the second largest Spanish speaking population in a country, with 52.6 million people Spanish speakers living in the U.S. according to a report from Instituto Cervantes.
- The Spanish-speaking population of the United States has grown 210% since 1980.
- According to the report and U.S. Census data the United States will surpass Mexico with the most Spanish speakers at 132.8 million people by 2050.

## California is a Hotspot for Languages

- According to the 2011 U.S. Census, California is home to about 15 million people who do not speak English at home. This adds up to about 5% of the United States' population alone!
- Spanish is the most popular non-English language in California with around 10 million speakers, and there are also a lot of Asian languages that are well represented in the state.
- According to the U.S. Census, about 3,375,028 people who primarily speak Asian languages live in California.
- The most popular Asian language used in California is Tagalog, a native language of the Philippines. Filipinos account for over 1.5 million of the state's population.

## French is Still Growing

- Some people may assume that because French is not as popular in schools anymore that it is not used as much as it once was. Contrary to this belief, over 1.3 million people speak French in the United States, which is a 28% increase since 1980.
- Most Francophone communities are located in areas near French Canada, such as Northeast Maine. Louisiana is an exception to this because many people in rural Louisiana speak Cajun, a dialect of French, which has been passed down from generation to generation since the French controlled Louisiana back before the United States bought the territory in 1803.

## Arabic is a Growing Language

- Nearly a million people speak Arabic in the United States now, and the population has grown nearly four times since 1980.
- A large number of American Arabic speakers live in the Detroit Metropolitan area, specifically Dearborn, which accounts for 30% of its population of Arab descent.
- The growth of Arabic speakers in Michigan originated with Henry Ford's famous invention. People immigrated from the Middle East during the early 20th century to work in Ford's auto factories, thus bringing the Arabic language and culture to Michigan and the United States!

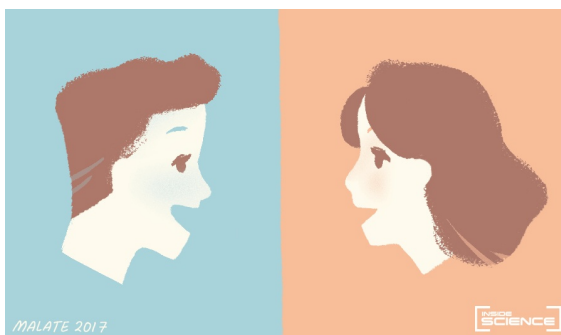
## Babies and Children Learn Fast

- The researchers measured the activity of different parts of the brain that responded to Spanish and English.
- Monolingual infants showed different patterns of brain activities in response to Spanish and English; many parts of the brain showed weaker activity in response to Spanish than to English.
- In contrast, bilingual infants' brains exhibited a similar pattern of activity in response to Spanish and English words. Hence, before they reach their first birthday or can even speak fluently, babies exposed to two languages hear speech sounds differently than their monolingual peers.
- Researchers found that the ability to learn a new language drops significantly at around 17 years of age. While the biological reason for the critical period is yet to be understood, many scientists suggest that age-related changes in brain plasticity, or the brain's ability to change and adapt as a result of experience, may be the underlying factor.

## Languages in Schools

- Many studies on the cognitive benefits of bilingualism from infancy suggests that bilingualism in children should be encouraged, yet only 20% of K-12 students in the U.S. take foreign language classes.
- Although most colleges in the U.S. now have a foreign language requirement of some sort, learning a language in adulthood is harder because students are likely already past the critical learning period.
- Giving young children an exposure to foreign languages, either in school or at home, could lead to cognitive benefits that will last their entire life.

SOURCE: <https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2019/bilingualism-start-early-and-earn-all-your-benefits/>  
<https://www.access2interpreters.com/5-fascinating-facts-about-language-in-the-united-states/>



## Health Benefits

### Delay Alzheimers

- One of the most recent and striking discoveries is that bilingualism may delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's disease involves memory loss and other cognitive disabilities that develop slowly and get worse over time.
- Numerous studies have found that the onset of Alzheimer's disease is delayed by 4-5 years in bilingual Alzheimer's disease patients when compared to monolingual Alzheimer's disease patients regardless of sex, lifestyle, education, and occupation.

- They found that bilingual Alzheimer's disease patients had thicker and denser brain regions related to language and, more importantly, cognitive control.

## Stroop Test

- Growing evidence suggests that bilingualism provides cognitive benefits.
- For example, life-long bilinguals are better at inhibitory control, the ability to ignore irrelevant information during a task.
- In a Stroop test, a test designed to assess inhibitory control, people are asked to name the color of a word printed with colorful ink. The color can be the same as or different from the meaning of the word.
- A 2015 study found that bilinguals performed better than monolinguals when the color and word did not match, showing that bilinguals were less distracted by irrelevant information (i.e., the meaning of the word).
- Also, bilinguals were shown to be better at managing a complex task and switching attention to goal-relevant information.
- Try the Stroop test below by naming the COLOR of the word, not what it says.

**PURPLE YELLOW RED**  
**BLACK RED GREEN**  
**RED YELLOW ORANGE**  
**BLUE PURPLE BLACK**  
**RED GREEN ORANGE**

## Increases Networking Skills

- Opening up to a culture allows you to be more flexible and appreciative of other people's opinions and actions.
- As a result, if you are multilingual, you have the advantage of seeing the world from different viewpoints, enhancing your ability to communicate in today's globally connected world.

## Provides Better Career Choices

- According to Eton Institute's Language Development in the Workforce survey (September 2014), 89% of clients stated that multilingual employees add value to the workforce and 88% stated that recruiting team members with language skills is important to their organization.
- A multilingual ability is definitely a competitive edge in today's world.

## The First Language Is Improved

- Learning a new language makes you more conscious of the nuts and bolts of your own language.
- Terms such as vocabulary, grammar, conjugation, comprehension, idioms and sentence structure become everyday phrases, whereas your own language is probably absorbed more intuitively.
- Learning a new language also makes you a better listener as you are used to having to interpret meaning and judge nuances.

# Improves Performance In Other Academic Areas

- As a result of higher cognitive skills, studies show that the benefits of learning a new language include higher scores on standardized exams in math, reading comprehension and vocabulary by multilingual students compared to the scores of monolingual students.
- Language skills boost your ability to do well in problem-solving tasks across the board, a fact recognized through compulsory foreign language learning curriculum in schools.

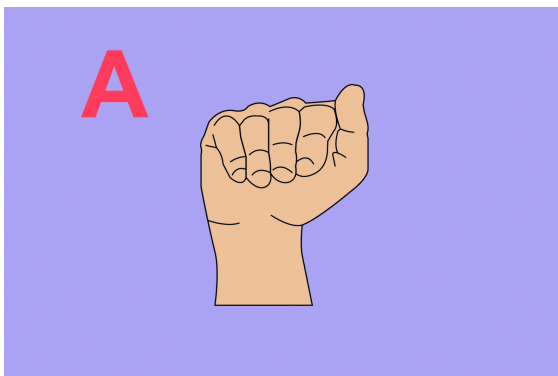
## Improves Memory

- Use it or lose it. How many times have you heard that phrase? It is a simple fact: the more the brain is used, the better its functions work.
- A new language requires not only familiarity with vocabulary and rules, but also being able to recall and apply this knowledge.
- Learning a language gives your memory a good work out in the brain gym. This means that multilingual people have brains that are more exercised and quick to recall names, directions, facts, and figures.

## Enhances The Ability To Multi-Task

- Multi-tasking is very stressful for those who are not used to it or don't do it well.
- According to a study from the Pennsylvania State University, people who are multilingual and proficient at slipping from one language system to another are practiced at this very demanding work for the brain.
- People who have developed the ability to think in different languages and move from one to the other become much better multi-taskers, reducing stress levels.

SOURCE: <https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2019/bilingualism-start-early-and-earn-all-your-benefits/>  
<https://etoninstitute.com/blog/top-10-benefits-of-learning-a-foreign-language>



## Sign Language

### Not a Universal Language

- There is no single sign language used around the world. Like spoken language, sign languages developed naturally through different groups of people interacting with each other, so there are many varieties.
- There are somewhere between 138 and 300 different types of sign language used around the globe today.
- Interestingly, most countries that share the same spoken language do not necessarily have the same sign language as each other. English for example, has three varieties: American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL) and Australian Sign Language (Auslan).

## Basics of Alphabets and Fingerspelling

- Most people start their sign language journey by learning the A-Z or alphabet equivalent in sign form.
- The use of the hands to represent individual letters of a written alphabet is called 'fingerspelling'. It's an important tool that helps signers manually spell out names of people, places and things that don't have an established sign.
- For example, most sign languages have a specific sign for the word tree, but may not have a specific sign for oak, so o-a-k would be finger spelled to convey that specific meaning.
- Of course, not every language uses the Latin alphabet like English, so their sign language alphabet differs as well. Some manual alphabets are one-handed, such as in ASL and French Sign Language, and others use two-hands, like BSL or Auslan. Though there are similarities between some of the different manual alphabets, each sign language has its own style and modifications, and remains unique.

## Let's Learn!

- Check out the video and image below to learn how to sign each letter in the American Sign Language alphabet.





SOURCE: <https://www.ai-media.tv/sign-language-alphabets-from-around-the-world/>

**Let's Stay Healthy and  
Celebrate Other  
Cultures!**



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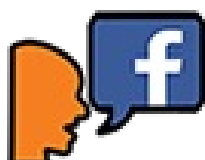
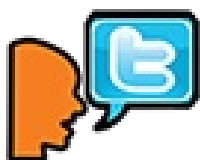


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The [Healthy Lifestyles Project \(HLP\)](#) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey and receives funding through a grant awarded by [The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey](#).

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**March 2021**

**Gift of Gab  
Part 2:  
Learning, Food, & Fun**



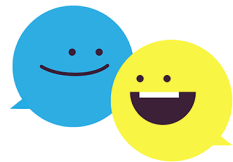
This is Part 2 of *Gift of Gab*, providing educational resources that help you learn a new language and form a better understanding of different cultures.

- Learning a new language takes a lot of effort but there are some helpful tips you can keep in mind to make things easier.
- American cuisine, though often unique in its own way, owes a lot to the cultures it borrows from.
- Test your knowledge on languages of the world and see how much you know (or don't know!)

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## Language Learning Tips



## Know Your Motivation

- If you don't have a good reason to learn a language, you are less likely to stay motivated in the long-run.
- Wanting to impress English-speakers with your French isn't the best reason — wanting to get to know a French person in their own language is a more noble one.
- But no matter your motivation, once you've decided on a language, it's crucial to commit. This means sitting down and thinking, "OK, I want to learn this and I'm therefore going to do as much as I can in this language, with this language and for this language."

## Find A Partner

- Finding some kind of partner will push both of you to try just a little bit harder.
- You have someone with whom you can speak, and that's the idea behind learning a new language.

## Talk To Yourself

- If the previous suggestion on our list of language-learning tips isn't doable because you have no one else to speak to, there's nothing wrong with talking to yourself in a foreign language.
- It might sound really weird, but actually speaking to yourself in a language is a great way to practice if you're not able to use it all the time.
- If you don't know how to go about learning a new language, this can keep new words and phrases fresh in your mind. It also helps build up your confidence for the next time you speak with someone else.

## Keep It Relevant

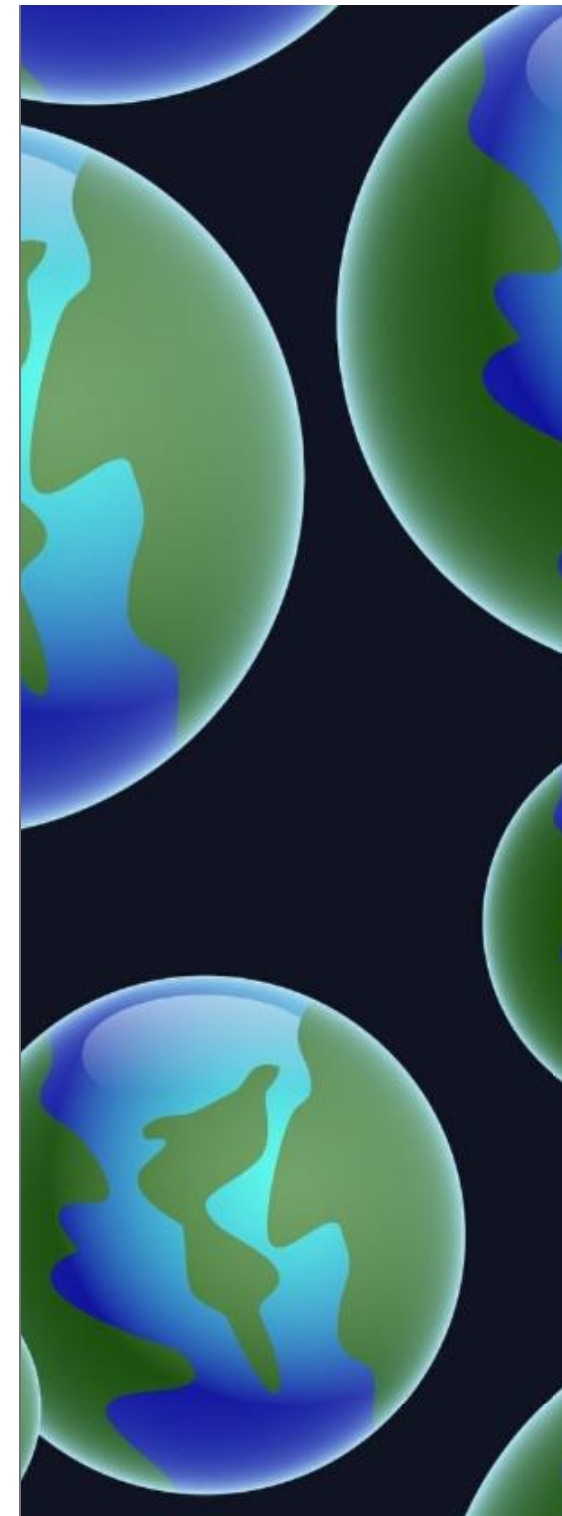
- If you make conversation a goal from the beginning, you're less likely to get lost in textbooks. Talking to people is one of the best ways to learn a language because it keeps the learning process relevant to you.
- You're learning a language to be able to *use* it. You're not going to speak it only to yourself.
- The creative side is really being able to put the language that you're learning into a more useful, general, everyday setting — be that through writing songs, generally wanting to speak to people or using it when you go abroad.

## Have Fun With It

- Using your new language in any way is a creative act.
- Think of some fun ways to practice your new language: make a radio play with a friend, draw a comic strip, write a poem or simply talk to whomever you can.

## Leave Your Comfort Zone

- Willingness to make mistakes means being ready to put yourself in potentially embarrassing situations. This can be scary, but it's the only way to develop and improve.



- No matter how much you learn, you won't ever speak a language without putting yourself out there: talk to strangers in the language, ask for directions, order food, try to tell a joke.
- The more often you do this, the bigger your comfort zone becomes and the more at ease you'll be in new situations.

## Language Apps

- Try the language apps in the article below to start or supplement your language learning!



### These 10 language apps to make you fluent while social...

Want to learn a second language? There's an app (actually, several) for that -- especially if you're spending more time at home due to coronavirus-related quarantines, and social distancing, and want to spend that time doing something enriching.

[Read more](#)

[www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com)

SOURCE: <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/10-tips-from-an-expert>

# Food Origins and Adaptations



## Gumbo Chile con queso California roll Spaghetti and meatballs

- The names are as familiar as household brands. Yet how much do you know about these dishes?
- Based on the names alone, with their roots in other languages and other cultures, each dish sounds like an import. In some ways, they are.
- But each dish also morphed and adapted to its new environment, transforming into something uniquely American.
- [Read the article below to learn more!](#)



Made in America: Four dishes, inspired by other lands,...

Voraciously and Warning: This graphic requires JavaScript. Please enable JavaScript for the best experience. Gumbo. Chile con queso. California roll. Spaghetti and meatballs. The names are as familiar as household brands. Yet how much do you know ...

[Read more](#)

[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

SOURCE: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/voraciously/what-are-american-foods/>



# Foreign Language Quiz

## Trivia

- Find out how much you know about languages around the world by challenging your friends and family to a trivia game!
- [Click here to download the Questions and Answers!](#)

The image features a repeating pattern of stylized Earth globes. Each globe is depicted with green landmasses and blue oceans, set against a dark blue background. The globes are of varying sizes and are positioned at different angles, creating a sense of depth and movement. The pattern is consistent across the left and right margins of the page.

**Round 1:**

- 1. How many languages are spoken worldwide? Closest wins!**
- 2. Which language has the second most native speakers?**
- 3. Most English vocabulary used when talking about the law or cuisine has roots in which language?**
- 4. Which book has been translated into the most languages?**
- 5. The first printed book was written in which language?**
- 6. Which language has the most native speakers in Europe?**
- 7. What is the official language of the United States?**
- 8. The Hawaiians have a lot of words for rain.  
Can you guess how many? Closest wins!**
- 9. What was the first language spoken in outer space?**
- 10. How many countries have Spanish as their official language? Closest wins!**

The image features a repeating pattern of stylized Earth globes. Each globe is depicted with green landmasses and blue oceans, set against a dark blue background. The globes are shown from various angles, creating a sense of depth and repetition.

**Round 2:**

**1. How many languages can you say thank you in? The most wins!**

**2. "Panino" means sandwich in which language?**

**3. The word alphabet has roots in which language?**

**4. How many languages can you say hello in? The most wins!**

**5. The word "latte" means milk in which language?**

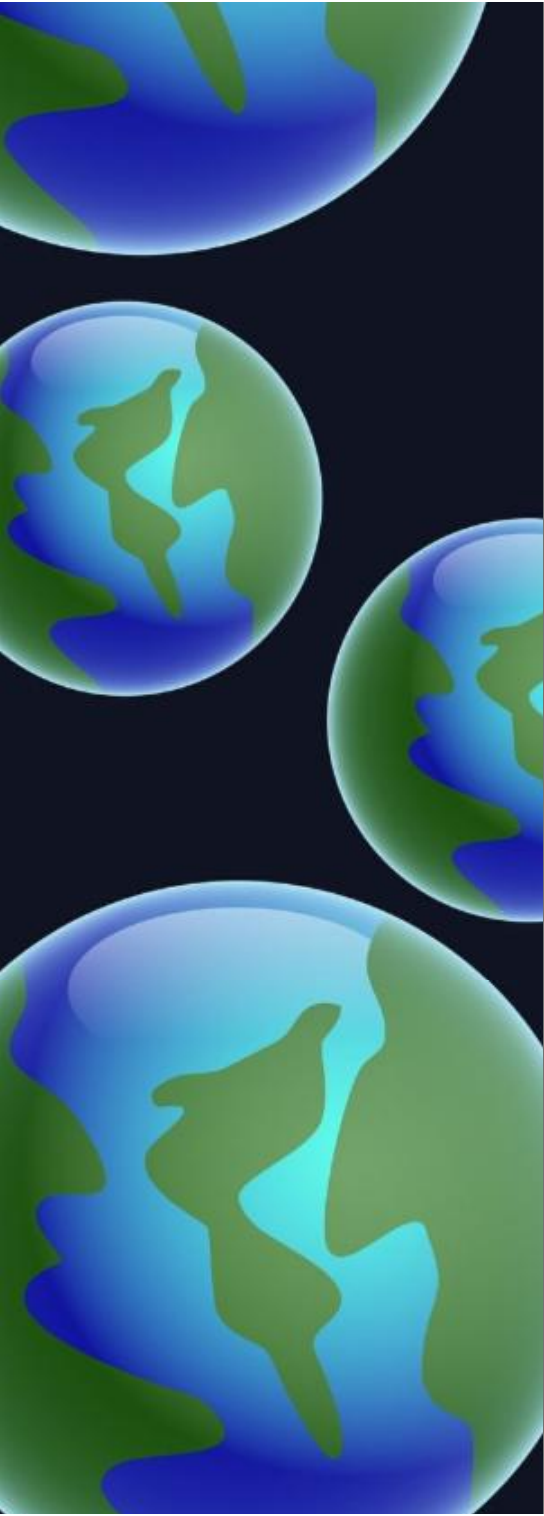
**6. "Ich liebe dich" means I love you in which language?**

**7. "Lycklig" or "glad" means happy in which language?**

**8. How many languages can you say goodbye in? The most wins!**

**9. What does "vinho" mean in Portuguese?**

**10. "Proszę bardzo" means you're welcome in which language?**

The image features a repeating pattern of stylized Earth globes. Each globe is depicted with green landmasses and blue oceans, set against a dark blue background. The globes are arranged in a staggered, overlapping fashion, creating a sense of depth and global connectivity.

### **Round 3:**

- 1. Zimbabwe has more official national languages than any country. How many do they have? The closest wins!**
- 2. What does "pain" mean in French?**
- 3. What are the three genders words can have in German?**
- 4. What does "blauw" mean in Dutch?**
- 5. What is the main foreign language taught in the UK?**
- 6. What does "amarillo" mean in Spanish?**
- 7. The Cambodian language (Khmer) has the longest alphabet. How many letters do they have? The closest wins!**
- 8. The verb "logga in" means "to login" in which language?**
- 9. In round 1 you learned how many languages are spoken worldwide. How many of those languages account for more than half the world's population?**
- 10. "Você Fala inglês?" means "Do you speak English?" in what language?**

SOURCE: <https://blog.rosettastone.com/free-foreign-language-trivia-questions-for-your-virtual-happy-hours/>

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