



Students in an African classroom (2008)

HOW NOT TO LEARN A LANGUAGE

October 23, 2017

José Cruz: You got your English ba- basically, Do- I don't- I don't know, (I got it) I don't want to sound like a stereotypical Idiot...

Vasco Ferraro: **From the street.** (Really?) Yeah basically because when I moved to England- So like thi- this was very upsetting at first, because all the education I **got** in Italy, like I was studying English for uh, like since primary school basically...

José: OK that's- you went to a normal program for a normal Italian (Yes) kid

Vasco: Yes, like you start at six (Six) and..

José: Six. (Yeah) Six years old?

Vasco: Yeah yeah yeah. That's when you start your primary school in Italy. And you finish your high school either 18 or 19 years old.

José: So 12 years, normal route of education. Sure.

Vasco: Yes yes yes. Something like that, but at the end of it, when I moved to England, and I was just, not straight after my diploma, but after a while because I I- worked uh for a while in Italy I- I wasn't able to speak English. (Really?) I felt like uh I've been cheated somehow.

José: And would you say that's the case for most Italian kids who go through those 12 years of education? Most study as much as you, about as hard as you, (Mm) but the average Italian kid will not come out speaking English?

Vasco: I- I think that is the case pretty much for everyone that has studied in Italian school. (Really) Because you you they - you study a

lot of useless stuff. You basically study a lot of grammar which is still good. I mean, I'm not saying you don't need to know grammar to speak a language, but you don't do, you don't do actual speaking. You just study like, I studied English Literature for some reason, in school, like instead of teaching me the actual language, they teach you the the literature. Which is quite interesting. I'm not saying it's not. I actually like it very much now, but back in the day I felt like I needed actual English speaking classes. That's what you need in school.

José: Is it recognized though in Italy that this is a problem. You know, we're spending all this money making these kids waste all this much time, and most of them don't end up coming out speaking the language. Is it recognized (I think) in Italy? This is a problem?

Vasco: I think it is not recognized and that is like ha ha ha a huge problem. (It's not recognized?) It's not. I- I never heard of this as a- like a **issue**. Never, I had to realize it myself. (Really) Like chatting with my friends from my- a- a guy that lives in my town. He he comes from Africa, from like some part of Africa that I consider third world sometimes like where is war and stuff. He comes from Somalia if i'm not wrong.

José: Somalia, (Somalia) is that Italian influenced, or is that... (I think) Ethiopia and Somalia **those are Italian**, (Either) right?

Vasco: Either Italian or French, (Right) something like that. (Uh huh) But like, speaking with him, like he was he was tell-saying that they of course like have their own language, like (Sure sure) Somalia language, then they have Arabic and then (Sure sure)

and then they have English. So they start studying in school in their own language, Somalia language, (Sure) I don't know the name. Then they like switch to Arabic, and they they just study all the subjects in Arabic, so they make the language theirs and after that they switch to English and study all the subjects in English. So that is a system that works for me. And we're talking about parts of the world that I consider third world and instead in Engl- in Italy you study like literature and grammar and that is it. That's that's the- we should write a book called, "How You Don't Learn a Language."

José: Four or five years (Mm hmm) and then basically you'd say that his English was as good as yours?

Vasco: His English was I'd say as good as me. Uh I- It was conversational. So like, I might be like, now I- I've been living in England for a while so I might be a bit more fluent than he is, but he's able to **conversate**. Like when the first time I landed in- **on England, in English soil**. I was like, oh I can't speak a single word. I don't know if Shakespeare helps me now.

José: Yeah. "How Not to Learn a Language" So (Yeah) just to just to make sure I understand you, so your your So- Somali friend said that they switched languages **three times**, (Mm) from the native language to Arabic to English. So how much time did they spend in English?

Word count	Time	Words/Min.
817	4:01	203.40

Vasco: I think that is like high school program, so like four or five years?

Pointers:

from the street: an idiom meaning to learn a language by usage and experience, not by formal education, (0:05)

got: occasionally Vasco's accent has indications of his having acquired the language in England. Here he drops the "T" in **got** which is more common in English accents (0:13)

a: Vasco should have said "**an issue**" (2:01)

those are Italian: José is referring to the former European colonial influence in African history. (2:24)

three times: José is wrong. It was two times (3:24)

conversate: Vasco should have said "**converse**" (3:52)

on England, in English soil: Vasco should have said "**IN England, ON English soil**" (3:52)

Discussion:

Do you think your school taught you English in good ways?

Do you agree with Vasco that learning grammar is good?

How would you change your school's language education system?

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