

Transcript in English

Video: Why making mistakes is key for language learning?

Okay. So take a moment to think about this: How often do you get things right the first time? Ask any scientist or top chef, and they'll tell you that the mistakes they made often led to great discoveries and creative breakthroughs.

In short, and as strange as it may sound, we sometimes have to get things wrong to get things right. Think about when kids learn to speak. It takes ages, right? Babies spend a long time mimicking the sounds they hear other people making and first put together thousands of meaningless sentences like dog, fun, mummy, bum before they eventually start making sense.

In fact, making all those funny noises is an essential part of training our brains and vocal abilities to form real words. So you could say that a certain amount of trial and error is an advantage when learning anything, and especially when learning a new language. Any native English speaker, myself included, who tries to learn a language that has gendered nouns such as German or French will be familiar with getting things wrong now and then. Is it a *der*, *die*, or *das* baby? Is it *la* or *le chat*?

There are some rules of thumb for deciding which is which, but also a lot of exceptions to these rules. In the end, I just stopped worrying about it. There's no need to get tongue-tied as most people will automatically understand what you're saying from the context. Our brains are experts at filling in the blanks.

I find it useful to think of mistakes as signposts on the path to success, reminding me of when I took a wrong turn; then the next time, I know which is the right way to go. And sometimes, our own language leads us up the wrong path, take false friends, for example. These are words from different languages that look and sound alike, but mean different things. Here's a tip: false friends are actually great opportunities for getting words to stick in your memory. The English word "gift" for example means "poison" in German. And I'll never forget the look on my friend's face when instead of a birthday present I offered him "poison". Of course, I'll also never forget that a "gift" in German is "Geschenk", so you see: I learned something!

