**WSE Korea Podcast #25**Interview with Sam Hammington  
Learning Second Languages  
04.19.2013

For me, I started learning Korean when I went to university in 1997, and I studied Korean for about 3 years. Now one of the reasons for studying Korean was that I thought it was just sort of a different language that I'd never come across before. I thought it would be of a great help to me in terms of being able to expand my horizons, whether it's work or just across the board.

For example, if I had the ability to speak Korean written on my resume, on my CV, I envisioned that people who were employing me, or looking to employ me would see that and it would stand out. So it would get attention, essentially, and that's part of speaking a second language. It's getting that attention and using that, whether it's in a job, or for whatever reason it is that you're hoping to learn.

When I started learning the language, I started off with the basics: grammar and learning how to read and write. Then, my studies went in the direction of being quite reading and writing intensive and not as much conversation, in the classroom anyway. For me, that's a real problem in terms of the Korean education system. We're seeing students who are particularly good at grammar - they have exceptionally good grammar. They can also read and write really well. But, they can't have conversations.

For me, one of the main points of learning a second language is to be able to talk to people in that language. So, I had to do a lot of study on my own. For me that was surrounding myself with a lot of non-English-speaking Koreans when I lived here in Korea initially, and when I was home in Australia, having Korean friends around me, where I had the opportunity to use it as often as possible. And part of that was watching television, watching movies, listening to music with friends, and if I didn't understand things, I'd get them to explain it to me.

It's tough, but you really have to put yourself in that situation and get immersed in the language and surround yourself with it on a regular basis. That's, I guess, why so many people go and travel abroad or go and study abroad, because of the opportunity for immersion.

When you learn a second language, you really have to put your heart into it. You really have to want to learn it, and you have to think to yourself, "It's not going to be easy, and there may be times where I look like an idiot," but you have to have the ability to not be concerned with that. You shouldn't worry what you're going to look like because everyone is going to make a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes no matter what they're doing in life. If you're learning a second language, you're bound to make a lot more. So, you've got to have confidence.

You've got to go out there and be confident and just say what you want to say. And if you make a mistake, sure people might laugh, but they're going to laugh for a short period of time, and generally, they're going to correct you.

The other thing is that when you make a mistake, you have to realize that mistakes are not a negative thing. Mistakes allow you to make the opportunity to learn. You know, people say, "Learn from your mistakes." That's why we make a mistake, so that we don't have to do it again. So, you learn and remember. You won't make that same mistake.

For me, mistakes are a big opportunity. It's an opportunity to go back and say, "Oh, wow! I didn't realize. Oh, that's why I did that." If you get into it deep enough, you can certainly correct yourself in the future. And, sure, you'll make another mistake later on, but don't let that stop you. There are so many opportunities, and you need to try and grab that opportunity. If it works, if a positive result comes out, great! If you succeed, that's exceptional! If you fail, oh well, try again. Or, maybe that's not right for you. Try something else.

With a language, you certainly need to put in a lot of effort and you need to maintain it. Like for me, it's probably been said time and time again in interviews or on the television, when I was here in Korea, I spent a lot of time going out drinking. I'd put myself in those kinds of social situations, and that allowed me to learn a lot of Korean, but also a lot of Korean that I could use on a regular basis, which for me, was one of the more important things, one of the things I really wanted.

I wanted to learn Korean, and I wanted to be able to use it all the time. What I was learning in class wasn't going to help me, so I had to go out, and I had to learn on my own. And then through that, that's how I started to make friendships with people that I've become really good friends with. When people see you trying and making an effort, then people really appreciate that. So, going out there and putting the time and effort, people will go out of their way to help you. And then that, you know, can only make you better.

I guess there are people out there who are probably shy. Hey, we're all shy, but sooner or later you're going to have to bite the bullet because there's no point in learning a language [only] to read and write. I personally don't see the point in that.

For a lot of people these days, I guess learning English, particularly in Korea, learning English is really important because to get a job, people are looking at your TOEIC results. I'm not sure if that's the reason people should be learning English, but hey, you've gotta do what you've gotta do.

For me, learning a language is because you want to do it, and you should enjoy it. It should be fun. That's a really important thing. Learning anything should be fun in my opinion - in particular with learning a language.

Once you've learned a language though, it offers you so many more opportunities than you could ever imagine. I mean, I think for me, I'm a perfect example, especially if you look at foreigners living in Korea there are a lot of people that don't speak Korean. And they're kind of stuck working in certain industries whether it's teaching... Well, yeah, teaching probably is pretty much the only thing. If you learn Korean here, it enables you to do so many other jobs, work in different industries and people start paying attention, which is where a lot of it comes from.

Interestingly enough, this works exactly the same way. I meet students who say to me, "I'm going on a working holiday to Australia. What kind of job will I be able to do?" And the first thing I ask them is, "How much English do you speak? Show me how good your English is." And a lot of them say, "Well, my English isn't very good. I'm going to study there, and then try and get a job after that."

I mean, that's great, but if your English isn't that good, it's unfortunate but the jobs you're going to get will be dishwashing or cleaning - jobs that don't require you to speak English. If you speak English quite well, all of a sudden there are a lot more jobs that you can do. And if you speak English very well, well, it's almost unlimited in terms of what you can do. This is one of the great things about learning a language.

If you do take the opportunity to travel, or if you have the chance to travel, people are going to... you meet so many kinds of people... it opens doors, it allows you to do so much more. That's where a lot of opportunity comes from, when you meet people and you tell them your story and it's like, "Oh, wow. I actually know someone who's looking for someone to do a job at the moment. Would you be interested?" That's what happened to me.

Being able to speak Korean has allowed me to meet so many different people and make so many different connections, whether it's in television, whether it's in film, music, whether it's in the Australian Embassy, these things wouldn't have happened if I didn't speak Korean. And it's certainly the same learning English. Plus, the things that you can do once you have that second language just gives you so much more opportunity in life.

I guess for me, having a second language is - when I say a second language, I mean being able to speak English conversationally and being confident. There are people out there that could speak English exceptionally well, but if you don't have confidence, it doesn't matter. You need to be able to be confident. Even if you don't speak English well, being confident differentiates you from people who speak English well and don't have confidence.

That, for me is one of the big things. In Australia for example, one of the things we look at is people who try their hardest. Sometimes they won't succeed, sometimes they never succeed, but if we see people trying hard, we're going to help them out. And that's what we really appreciate.

So, the person who has confidence tries harder, and they try to fit in and do this that and everything else... The person who may speak really well, but has low levels of confidence, they don't stand out. They mix in with the rest of the crowd, and you don't get attention, people don't notice you. You may speak English perfectly, but if you're not confident and you can't talk to people, people will never know that.

So, for me, one of the most important things is confidence - to be able to learn it, to be able to make mistakes. But also once you've attained that language and learned that language successfully, you need to have that confidence to be able to speak in that language because - for example, if you're learning English here in Korea, and you don't know anyone who speaks English here, you're going to have to go out of your way to talk to people you've never met before for you to use that language.

So, confidence is something that you really need to think about. And it's not easy. It's not easy. But you have to work at what makes you comfortable. What works for some people may not work for other people. You have to work out what works for you. What is it that you feel confident in? Attain that confidence. What is it that you want? Get out and get your language down - speaking. Reading and writing? You can work on that later but you're not going to use it when you meet people.

And then, use that language, and "wow" people and say, "Hey look, I can speak English" or whatever language it is you've learned. Show them and once you've shown them that, people will start paying attention, and who knows where that'll lead.

For listeners out there who, I don't know, maybe have dreams of going to America and maybe being an actor or an actress over there, you know, you need to be able to speak English. Let's be honest, that's why a lot of Korean actors and actresses haven't broken out in Hollywood. But if you've got that ability and you show people, who knows what's going to happen? Anything's possible.

You just have to have confidence and you have to grab that opportunity when it's there. Don't let it slip through your fingers. If it works and you succeed, good job. If it doesn't, try again. It's all about - in my opinion, life is like "luck or no luck" so go out there and give it a go.

I'd like to wish everyone the best in their language studies, for people out there learning a second language. If you haven't already, I recommend you give it a go. At least try learning a second language because it'll help you so much later on in life.

Guys, thank you for taking the opportunity to download this and listening to me talk. I know it's so not what you'd normally expect me to talk about, and if you were hoping I was going to be incredibly funny, I'd like to apologize for not being funny at all. But maybe next time, if I get the opportunity, I can be a little funnier for you all.

Alright, have a great day everyone. Bye.