

次の英文は Polly Barton による *Fifty Sounds* (2021) に基づいている。これを読んで以下の設問に答えなさい。

- (I) 下線部(1)が意味するところを、30字以内の日本語で説明しなさい。
- (II) に入るもっとも適切な語を下から選び、記号で答えなさい。  
(A) comfortable with      (B) confused by  
(C) familiar with      (D) sceptical of
- (III) 下線部(3)を、this word の内容を明らかにしつつ、日本語に訳しなさい。
- (IV) 下線部(4)が意味するところを、50字以内の日本語で説明しなさい。
- (V) に入るもっとも適切な語を下から選び、記号で答えなさい。  
(ア) avoidable    (イ) daunting    (ウ) meaningful    (エ) thorough
- (VI) 下線部(6)を日本語に訳しなさい。
- (VII) 下線部(7)を日本語に訳しなさい。
- (VIII) 著者が下線部(8)のように感じるのはなぜか。言語習得についての著者の思いや議論を踏まえながら、その理由を100字以上120字以内の日本語で説明しなさい。
- (IX) 次の日本語を、なるべく自然な英語に訳しなさい。  
私たちは、これまでの経験とは著しく異なる言語環境にドーンとぶつかることで、ときに打ちのめされそうになるだろう。

It's my lunch break and I'm being serenaded by a lime-green owl. 'Did you know!' the owl calls as it swaggers jauntily across my line of sight, 'There are more people learning languages on Duolingo in the US than there are people learning foreign languages in the entire US public school system!'

The year is 2019, and I will soon be travelling to Italy for the summer, which is why I have found myself being taught Italian vocabulary and grammar, along with a variety of trivia, by this digital apparition, the mascot of the language-learning app Duolingo. I learned of Duolingo's existence only recently, but it transpires to be phenomenally popular, offering courses in 23 languages to 300 million users worldwide. Initially, there seems to me something faintly Japanese about the wing-gestures made by the mascot, Duo, but I check and discover that the company originated in the States, as I suppose I should have guessed from the trivia-nugget above; it's the brainchild of Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker, born out of the idea that 'free education will really change the world'.

Duo's screech is unvoiced but it sticks in my head nonetheless, whooping and half-demented, Disney-villainous: *Did you know! Did you know! Did you know!* And no, as it happens, I didn't know. At least the first time big-eyed big-eyelashed Duo addressed me, I didn't know. By the tenth time it pops up on my screen I've begun to feel very familiar with this particular bit of trivia, and I also know something else: <sup>(1)</sup> each run-in with it leaves me feeling a little unclean, in a way I can't really account for.

As the fact I am spending my lunchtimes with Duo reveals, I am not entirely (2) its methods, and I don't find the comparison drawn between public-school language education and the Duolingo model outrageous, at least prima facie. Unlike a lot of language-focused applications, Duolingo is not devoid of audio content; it has clips of real people talking, and invites its users to speak phrases into the microphone, so they are at least interacting with how the language actually sounds, and feels in the mouth. While its level-unlocking structure drawn from the world of gaming means that users might be focusing on strategies to pass rather than to truly master, the same accusation could be levelled at language education in schools: there is, in short, a lot of hoop-jumping. You learn the language the way that the exam boards or the green owl want you to, but it is, at least, a start. If it makes language education accessible and enjoyable to those who might not otherwise

have access to it, then that is surely a good thing.

So why, then, does Duo's factoid bring me such a sense of unease, and why do I begrudge his hooting pride? It dawns on me that the source of my discomfort resides, utterly unreasonably, with his use of the word 'learning'.

<sup>(3)</sup> I say unreasonably, because I recognize that this word is used legitimately to cover a whole range of activities undertaken with varying degrees of intensity. The generous, rational part of me can see there is no cause to bar people from calling their five or twenty minutes a day on Duolingo 'learning a language'. But even as I have this thought, another part of me stamps its foot resentfully, the kind of foot-stamp that ends up hurting the stamper, and declares that the world has turned its eyes from what is real and true. This part wants to say its piece. It wants wider recognition that there is another, far less stable form of learning—a radium to Duolingo's lurid neon.

The language learning I want to talk about is a sensory bombardment. It is a possession, a bedevilment, a physical takeover; it is streams of sounds pouring in and striking off scattershot associations in a manner so chaotic and out of control that you are taken by the desire to block your ears—except that even when you do block your ears, your head remains an echo chamber. The language learning that fascinates me is not livening your commute and scoring a dopamine hit with another '5 in a row! Way to go!' Rather, it is never getting it right, hating yourself for never getting it right, staking your self-worth on getting it right next time. It is getting it right and feeling as if your entire existence has been validated. It is the kind of learning that makes you think: this is what I must have experienced in infancy except I have forgotten it, and at times it occurs to you that you have forgotten it not just because you were too young when it happened but because there is something so utterly destabilizing about the experience that we as dignified, shame-fearing humans are destined to repress it. It is a learning that doesn't know goals or boundaries, and which is commonly known as 'immersive'. The image that springs to mind is a lone figure wading gallantly into the sea, naked, without a single swimming lesson behind them.

As you'll have inferred from my self-righteous tone, I speak from experience. 'Immersion' is exactly what I did when I went to Japan, although probably it's more correct to say that immersion is what happened to me.

<sup>(4)</sup> If I'd known what I was getting myself into before I went out there I may well not have had the nerve to go, and knowing this, I don't go around

patting myself on the back for having done it. At least, I don't believe that I do, until I'm confronted with the pride of a green owl, and then I realize that there is some part of me that wants for this experience of mine to be recognized. Not only is this part not rational—it's furious with all the goal-driven rationality of the commute-friendly app.

In particular, what I'm burning to tell Duo is the following: Did you know! When you immerse yourself in a very different language as a total beginner, not only do you not have goals! You also have no system within which to conceptualize what those objectives could be—discounting, that is, overarching goals like 'learning to read', or 'becoming fluent', which themselves start to seem less and less 

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 the more you poke around beneath their smooth surfaces!

Immersion in a foreign language is a bombardment of sounds, until you decide that you are going to actually do this thing and learn, and then it becomes a bombardment of imperatives: learn this, learn this, learn this. *Just start from the basics*, sings a voice in your head as you are tossed around in the waves of incomprehensibility. Yet as you continue to live in a language you don't know, it becomes increasingly obvious to you how much this category of 'basics' could theoretically encompass. Greetings and everyday interactions are of course basic, and there is always something embarrassing about not knowing basic forms of verbs. Everyone knows numbers are incredibly basic, as are colours, clothes, the subjects you study at school, animals, anything to do with weather, and adjectives for describing people. In fact, we could go ahead and say that every object is also basic, and there is something particularly alarming when you don't know how to say the first words you would have learned in your language(s) as a child: teddy, buggy, shoelace. And then there is the most fundamental-seeming vocabulary of all: abstract nouns, like justice, friendship, pleasure, evil, and vanity.

If the language in question has a writing system different from that you know, then even mastering 'the basics' of the spoken language isn't enough, because a whole new category of basics awaits you in the form of the written one. In particular, Japanese is the gift that keeps on giving in this regard, having as it does three different scripts: two phonetic ones, katakana and hiragana (collectively known as kana), with forty-six characters apiece; and then the kanji, or characters of Chinese origin, 2,136 of which have been

officially deemed 'in common usage'. <sup>(6)</sup> Which means, there is never any shortage of basics to trip you up and convince you of how little you know.

Last week (this is true), I had to look up a kanji that turned out to mean 'owl'. It wasn't entirely new to me; I'd learned it somewhere down the line and then forgotten it, but the experience still brought me to my knees with shame. Yes, it's not a commonly used character, but then I'm supposed to be a translator. I should know something as basic as 'owl'.

As I sat staring down in despair at the owl kanji, wishing my self from two minutes ago had only managed to remember it, wondering how I could have failed to recognize a legless bird on a tree, I recalled without warning an incident from long ago, back when I'd been learning Japanese for little over two years and had just found a job at a small Japanese publishing company in London. One day I glanced up to see O, a senior employee, approaching my desk. In his hand were two of the slips that employees had to submit when requesting or reporting time off, and as he moved closer, I saw they were the ones I had recently filled in.

<sup>(7)</sup> 'Polly-chan,' he said, pulling up a chair beside me, looking at me in a way that managed to be both conspiratorial and didactic, 'Let's talk. Your kanji usage is all over the place.'

'Oh,' was all I had the wherewithal to reply. I felt simultaneously apprehensive about what was to come, and flattered that he was taking the time to school me individually.

'Sometimes you write them perfectly, and sometimes they're totally off.'

As he spoke, O's eyes drifted to my computer monitor, around whose edge I'd stuck up a number of kanji written out on small post-it notes. I remember that one of them was 'crow': the same as 'bird', but with the stroke symbolizing the eye missing. This had cropped up during one of the translations I'd been asked to do the previous week, and I hadn't known it.

'You don't need that,' O said, pointing at the crow. He began to hover his finger around the other post-its, informing me which I did and didn't need. Then, with hawk-like focus, his attention moved back to the offending slip.

'Look,' he said, his finger thumping the desk. 'Look what you've written here. This is missing a radical. You can't just miss parts of kanji like that, because then they mean something else entirely. You're trying to write "problem" and this says "mon".'

Maybe sensing that I was struggling a bit to keep up, he looked me right in the eye, and enunciated in English of a crispness that bordered on hostility, “Mon” means “gate”. You’ve written “gate”.

I looked down to see that he was, of course, right. My slip read something that might be rendered in English: ‘Unforeseen absence due to health gate.’

Even ten years on, this episode feels as real and close as it ever did, and I can’t resist the idea that, in some way, it still encapsulates my status in relation to Japan. <sup>(8)</sup> To wit, I am always writing the gate. It’s a huge, lofty gate of the kind found in temples; I stand by its posts, passing in and out momentarily, variously welcomed, frowned at, and ousted by its keepers. Even when I’m inside, I’m perpetually aware how quickly I could again be pushed out, that I could find some basic item inexplicably missing from my knowledge. Sometimes I ask myself if things would be different if I’d done my undergraduate degree in Japanese, or a proper language course, or a PhD—if I’d entrusted the responsibility for accumulating the basics to a system larger than myself in some way. The answer, I think, is slightly. I imagine I would feel at least slightly less liable to have the rug pulled from underneath me, to realize suddenly that I’m on the wrong side of the gate.

For when learning takes a primarily autodidactic form, mastering something is dependent on noticing it, or having it pointed out to you. To the extent that you’re not consulting other sources, obtaining an accurate view of the inventory of items to be learned is all down to exposure, and your ability to perceive that exposure, which is particularly relevant when we’re speaking about aspects of language and culture radically different from anything we’ve experienced before. We can notice them, be outraged or intrigued by them, exoticize them, and therefore Hoover them up, bump them to the top of our rota—or, else, we can fail to see them really, fail to appreciate them in their fullness. We are too busy thrashing around in the waves, gulping, spitting, and trying to stay afloat.