



Episode 259: How to Learn Languages by Ear With
the Mimic Method Idahosa Ness

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Katie: Hello and welcome to "The Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and this episode is going to be all about languages and learning. And I am here with Idahosa Ness who is a teacher, a musician, a foreign language expert, and the founder of something called "The Mimic Method." The Mimic Method is his system to learn languages faster, to understand more, and to speak with a better accent. And those are all things I've been trying to work on. So I was really excited to bring him on and dive deep. So, welcome. And thanks for being here.

Idahosa: Thanks for having me on, Katie.

Katie: Well, I'm really excited about this because when we spoke in person, we went kind of, we talked about language quite a bit and I told you that I had took several years of multiple different languages in school. And to this day, I can read and write in those languages and I can certainly conjugate verbs in those languages, but I struggle with actually using them in conversation. So even though I had, for instance, years of high school Spanish, I struggle when we travel when I go to a Spanish-speaking country to actually connect with the people there. And yet the goal of language should be that we can actually use the language. And so when you

and I talked about this, you have an entirely different theory. So let's start there. Can you kind of explain how you've flipped language learning on its head?

Idahosa: Yeah, sure. So, you know, you said in your own situation, you learned how to read and write, but you weren't able to have a flowing conversation with a native Spanish speaker. So the first thing I always try to bring people's attention to is there's a very clear and important distinction between written language and spoken language. And in most cases when someone says, "I wanna learn Spanish," or, "I wanna learn French," I always encourage them to actually be more precise. And what is it exactly? Well, maybe you're traveling to Costa Rica or Mexico or something. And what you're really saying is, "I wanna be able to have meaningful conversation with Spanish speakers when I'm traveling or maybe this person that I work with at my job or my next door neighbor." Whoever it is, ultimately the language is a tool for connecting with a real human being. And the way we're connecting, like we're doing right now, is through conversation.

So the written form, though it might seem, though it's based on the spoken language, is actually a different thing. So the traditional approach to learning a foreign language, what do you do in your first day of Spanish class? You learn how to spell, you learn how to conjugate verbs, you learn all these structures and all these theories. And if you do that, you get to a point where you can read okay, maybe you can write a letter, but you're like, "Wait a minute, this is not what I signed up for. I don't care about reading newspapers or, you know, writing essays. I wanna be able to, like, you know, talk to the taxi driver about, you know, what's going on in his hometown. I wanna be able to, you know, speak to this guy over here who I think is really handsome," or, "this girl over there who I think is really cute," right? Like whatever it may be, it's all about the conversational element.

So what we do in our program is we reverse the order and you wanna be able to speak and converse before you can read and write. Which sounds crazy to people, but it should be no surprise to people listening to this podcast usually because if you look at your child, you know, how children actually learn a language, there's not a child out there who learns how to read and write before they can have a basic conversation. You know? And, you know, I always ask people, "Wouldn't you love to be able to speak as well, like speak Spanish or French as well as a six-year-old native of that language?" And, you know, they don't really know how to read and write yet. And so that's what we do and the real focus on that is on pronunciation and hearing because at the foundation of language is that pure ability to be able to hear and distinguish the sounds and the ability to actually create them with your mouth.

So we call it The Mimic Method because the way language is learned is by mimicking. So bringing it back to children, for example, what they're doing when they're sitting there staring at you, you know, you're talking and speaking to them and speaking to each other, first they're taking in the sounds of their environment and they're starting to kind of suss them out and separate them, hear the little nuances and the differences in the sound. Then when a baby babbles, they're actually practicing the physical movement of speech before they know what any words mean or how to use them. So in our method, it's a similar thing. We don't have you babbling in our programs, but what we do is we break down all the basic sound, the different sound effects of Spanish, like there's 39 sounds in Spanish and 38 sounds in French, and we make sure you can configure your mouth and your lips and your tongue to actually create those sounds. And then we make sure we can train your ear to be able to hear them precisely and all the different nuances and the beauty and the musicality of the language.

And from that place, once you've been able to internalize those sounds, get into the flow of the language and be able to mimic native speakers, that's the foundation from which you can learn very rapidly, but more importantly, learning in such a way and speaking in a way that you're able to connect with people on a deeper level and have that true kind of flowing connection.

Katie: Yeah. It's so logical when you explain it. I'm curious, how did you get into this world of language learning? Because it's not, I mean, I feel like you found a very revolutionary and also a very common sense thing. How did you start doing this?

Idahosa: Yeah, so I grew up in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in kind of normal American suburbs, and I was always really bored with, like, where I was, so I was looking forward to get out and explore. And my parents had taken us to different foreign countries, like once a year, we do a little family vacation and I really came to love traveling. So when I was 17, I figured out a way to graduate from high school early and go to Mexico for my final semester in high school. And that's where I learned Spanish. And when I first got there, I was really excited at first, I'm living in a foreign country on my own for the first time, I had a home family, a homestay family. But I got really lonely within the first couple of weeks because I wasn't quite able to communicate with anyone yet. I couldn't understand people when they spoke. Mexicans are speaking super fast and I couldn't catch the words. Whenever I tried to speak, I'd get tongue tied and, you know, self-conscious and nervous and I was pretty, pretty desperate because I'm sitting here and I'm just kind of surrounded by people, but I'm isolated and alone because I can't really communicate.

And one day I just kind of decided like, "You know what, I'm gonna change my approach a bit. If I'm not going to learn this language I keep studying and not see any results, let me at least try to sound good when I do it." So what I mean is, before, I'd show up and I'd be like, "Puedo tener mas guacamole con mis tacos por favor ." And I'd say things, I'd speak Spanish as if it were American English, right? I'd say it the way I would say things in English. But I said to myself, "You know what, how would Antonio Banderas say this?" Right? Like, "What would, like, a really Mexican way of saying this be?" And I come and say, "Puedo tener mas guacamole con mis tacos por favor." And I'd be very dramatic about it and exaggerate it and just kind of having fun with it. And then through that, I'm starting to pay more attention. I'm like, "Oh, no, that's not exactly how they're saying it. And their voice goes up here. Like, how's her mouth shaped here?" I started to kind of really nerd out on it without caring too much about my ability to really understand or express myself.

After like a week or two of doing that, the language started to open up for me. And for the first time ever, I'd be in conversation, I'd find myself understanding what was being said intuitively. I'm like, "Oh, wow, I actually know what this guy is saying." And then when it's my turn to speak, I would start to kind of, these things would just flow off my tongue as if it wasn't even me speaking, like someone else was speaking. And that's when I knew that, "Okay, this is the way to learn." And I repeated that process afterwards in China for Chinese, then I went to Brazil later on, I learned Portuguese. And I repeated that more times but it was during my time in Brazil that I started to have a much more precise understanding of what this process is, what was going on in my mind, and then how to kind of systematize this and create that experience for other people.

Katie: It's so fascinating. And how many languages would you say you can get around in now after learning this process?

Idahosa: Get around in. So I speak seven. Could probably get around to nine. And yeah, so English, I grew up only speaking English until I was 17, learned in Spanish in Mexico. Then while I was in university, I studied abroad in China. That's where I learned Mandarin Chinese. Then after I graduated, I went to Brazil and learned Brazilian Portuguese, and then later on went to Montreal learned French, and Germany, learned German, Italy, Italian. Recently, I was in Tel Aviv. I learned a bit of Hebrew there. So really, though, just the whole process for me is, it's the same thing. I always tell people it's the same process because human beings, we're all the same, you know, species, we all use the same mouth to create our sound effects to communicate with each other. So once you know the kind of underlying process and you've gone through it a few times, you can pick up new ones very quickly.

And for me, just that process of going to a place and just not understanding the people culturally, they're really weird and strange, you know, foreign to me. But then through this challenge of, you know, connecting through the sounds, through the culture, having these people now be part of my extended family, so to speak, and having them accept me as one of their own as well, that experience is really what kind of drives me forward. So underneath everything we do at Mimic Method, we find the language learning community gets pretty sterile and they're like, "Oh, grammar, vocab, conjugations." And I'm like, "No, no, screw all that stuff." It's all about people and being able to connect with them on a more empathic and deeper level. So that's the kind of message we really wanna put out there to people.

Katie: Yeah. And that's so much more practical as well. I'm curious, though, I wanna highlight this a little bit because I'm guessing there are people listening and even me a little bit going, "Well, that's great. You probably just have a gift for languages or you're just probably highly intelligent," but that's important that you said that you grew up only speaking English. So are you confident this is something that anyone can really, like, learn and adapt to or do you think that you also have a special gift for this?

Idahosa: I think both are true and I can kind of go into the details of it in the sense that, fundamentally, everything is based on sound and movement. So, people vary to the degree to which they can just, without any training, pick up on the nuances of sound. Some people just pay attention to that naturally. Much of the technique and the process that we created is based on my experience growing up, playing violin, learning different musical instruments. So I'm also a very musical person. And that, for sure, influences it as well. But that being said, I mean, we've had tens of thousands of people use our program, we see the results. Really what happens is maybe, say, you're learning Spanish and there's a sound you're mispronouncing and maybe someone else can just intuitively and naturally hear, with very high precision, what that sound is supposed to be and then be able to recreate it with their own mouth, but maybe you struggle with that, it's still just a movement, just like a dance step.

So in our program, we get very down into the details. This is my expertise in terms of phonetics, and we can show you and say, "Hey, you're placing your tongue here. Do step A, step B, step C, and then your tongue will now be in the right position. And now you will sound like a Colombian. Now you will sound like a French person." And then people go through that process no matter who they are. And they're like, "Oh, okay." So it's

just muscle memory and training. I mean, you can't train everyone to be the world-class concert pianist. But with a little bit of patience, anyone can learn how to play Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. And when it comes to having a conversation in the foreign language, as long as you're doing the right things, everyone has the ability to do it.

And one reason why we know this is because everyone, regardless of their intelligence, is able to learn their first language, barring some sort of, you know, some sort of condition. So people often say, "Oh, I don't have the language learning gene." And I'm like, "The very fact that you're saying that to me in a language disproves your hypothesis. Because you learned your first language, you learned English or whatever it is." So, you know, if people are struggling, it's 95% due to just doing the wrong things or the traditional program teaching you the wrong things.

Katie: That makes sense. And that's, I think, a perfect analogy for that. And you mentioned music, which also to me, as a mom, it seems to tie in with how we all learn our first language. Just it's a number of, like, nursery rhymes and songs and just the way that people even talk to babies in a singsongy voice. And I know that, you kind of explained that to me before, just how in a sense, like language is music. Can you elaborate on that?

Idahosa: Yeah, there's a lot of pieces to that. So in our...actually, our new program's coming out, we break it down into the rhythm of the language, the melody and the articulation. So when I'm speaking to you right now, the way it's working is I'm moving my mouth in specific ways and I'm varying the sound effects on different dimensions. So those ways of acoustic variation, most of them are also in the case of music. So, for example, what makes a song a song? Well, there's a rhythm and as a melody, like doh, reh, mi, fah, soh, lah, ti, doh. So you're perceiving my pitch increasing as I speak. Now if I'm speaking to you in English and I say, "This is your podcast," versus, "This is your podcast?" there's two different meanings going on there and the reason why you're able to hear a different meaning, it's because I changed the intonation, the melody there.

So the same part of your brain being used to appreciate a musical song or a nursery rhyme like you said, it's the same part of your brain you're using to understand what someone's saying to you in a language. So these, in the brain and, you know, the phenomenon of the actual language and music itself, they overlap. So we use musical techniques to teach people stuff because we're actually activating the same part of your brain you need to learn the language anyways. So nursery rhymes and all these things, the reason why they work so well and it's just such a huge part of all cultures for children and child-rearing is because it really does activate and stimulate not just the child, but the human being on a much deeper level. So you're able to remember things better if you put it to a musical melody, for example. So there's a lot of ways you can kind of dig into that topic. But yeah, that's the basics of it, that in the brain, we have shared learning mechanisms for learning music and for learning language. And when you're training it, it just makes it more fun and engaging.

Katie: That makes sense. Is it faster to learn, overall, to learn a language this way? I mean, I would guess you're obviously much more conversational much more quickly, but does that eventually also then translate into being able to read and write the language at least on some level?

Idahosa: Yeah. And so I explain to people, so from, for example, in my approach and what I recommend to people is you wait until you're basic conversational before you're learning to read and write. And the reason for that is because, you know, just think about, for example, the amount of times in your life you would have seen the letter T, right? Like I wouldn't know, like billions, who knows? And each time you see the letter T, you're reinforcing an association in your mind between that visual symbol and the sound effect of "t" and the feeling in your mouth and the movement of "t", right? But now let's say you go to Brazil and in most situations, that symbol is actually gonna be making a "ch" sound, which you would think of as a C-H as an English speaker, right? So what happens is people learn a very tight, reinforced mapping system, is what I call it, of relating sound effects to visual symbols in their home country and their native language. Then they go to a foreign language and all these wires get crossed.

So my main expertise is in pronunciation and accent. I can tell you that when I hear people speaking four languages and they're making pronunciation errors, most of their errors come from seeing the word in their head and pronouncing it with the conventions of their first language as they have been doing for their entire life. So it actually just introduces lots of noise into the system and makes things more complicated. So if you do a more pure way, once again, you just imitate your child and, you know, they just kind of learn by ear and learn by interacting with the environment. Then when you have the speaking foundation, you can learn how to read and write very quickly because reading and writing is based on top of speaking and understanding. You know, most people when they read, they hear a voice talking in their head. But if you don't have that voice there in the first place, what are you gonna do? You see what I'm saying?

So yeah, literacy comes very quickly if you already have the foundation, it's not really a concern. And the reason why people do literacy first is because it's just easier to manage. You know, like, it's scary. It doesn't mean... The hardest part of learning languages is getting over the fear of speaking to people, right? Especially if you have anxiety about speaking to people in general, you know, going and speaking a foreign language and you're gonna say something stupid, right? You're gonna say something wrong. So just knowing that makes people very nervous. They don't wanna actually engage the conversation and it's much easier to go home and, like, play with a smartphone application or, you know, write some textbooks. But it's just not the direct path towards your real goal.

Katie: Got it. That totally makes sense when you say it that way, that if you're trying to see the English word in your head and sort of then translate it, then you're going to get stuck, especially if you're just learning. And I think of when I learned how to speed read, that was the thing we had to guard against, was if you were trying to read the words in your head individually, you were never gonna be able to speed up because you have a limit of how much you can do that.

Idahosa: Exactly.

Katie: So, similar to...the brain already has a pattern for that. I've also heard it said that if you don't learn a language before age five, any given language, it's much harder to ever become, like to really feel like a native sounding speaker because your mouth can't learn to move in the correct way to make the sounds, or especially with things like Chinese that you'll always have an accent. And I'm curious, does this method kind of

make it easier to get closer to sounding like a native speaker because you're focusing on the sound first? Does it guard against that a little bit?

Idahosa: Yeah, that's the whole point. So, my whole thing is you only get the accent right first. And, you know, I learned Chinese when I was 20-something. You know, I spoke Chinese well enough in China that people thought I was Chinese on the phone. Didn't work in person. But yeah, I would call people up to go, like, see apartments and they would think I was Chinese because it's just sound effects and movements. So, really, there's two advantages children have over adults when it comes to learning a foreign language. One's technical, one's psychological. So the kind of technical or maybe physiological thing is they don't have as many reps in terms of making those mouth movements, right? So, you know, if you actually listen to kids, they speak slower. Often the more complicated phonemes or sounds, they don't learn at first. So, you know, kids, a lot of kids will speak without the R sound. They'll be like, "This is the door," you know, like that kind of thing because the R is like a harder sound to pronounce.

So what's going on is that they're working from a blank slate in terms of making sound effects with their mouth. So when you're an adult and, you know, let's say you're 20 years old or something or 30 or 40, you're now no longer working with a blank slate. So when you're coming into the new language, you have to kind of unlearn some unconscious-speaking habits. But they can be unlearned like anything else. It's just a learning process. The reason why people couldn't get accent stuff before is because prior to my system, really, there wasn't any real methodic way for people to train their pronunciation. So you had the world of phonetics and how the mouth actually creates sounds, but it's a very academic kind of world.

So I went and I learned a bunch of that stuff. And then you had the actual pedagogy side and they weren't really crossing paths. So people focus on the easy stuff like teach you how to memorize grammar rules because people know how to memorize stuff because we do that in school. But teaching people how to, like, place their tongue to like roll their R's and stuff is not, you know, no one really had anything very precise to say about that. So that was a kind of hole in the market that I wanted to fill. So now that that's there and I've seen people who, you know, people who are retired who do our programs and they started off not being able to say things and then by the end of it, they sound way more authentic and way closer to a native speaker than when they began. So it's really just a question of, you know, just doing the right training and training the right pathways.

The other thing, like I said, the other thing that children have an advantage is they also have a blank slate in terms of a social identity, so to speak. So people get self-conscious when they're, you know, "This is Idahosa, my American English voice," right? And then if I go to China and I started sounding like (speaks Chinese) it's like a different person, right? So that could be difficult for someone with a fully-formed personality to leave that personality structure and kind of sound like a completely different person. Whereas a child, like I love playing with children, and you go to a child and, like, say any language phrase and like, "Hey, mimic me," it never even crosses their mind to be embarrassed about it. Like, they just do it because it's fun. So, they actually have the impetus to do the practice and do the repetitions and learn. So that's probably the main difference between children. If you can overcome those advantages, I mean, adults are smarter than children. Otherwise, society wouldn't function that well. So, you know, the languages I learned, I learned way faster than a five-year-old placed in the same situation or a five-year-old version of myself because I also had, you know, discipline and all these other things that are the advantages of being an adult.

Katie: Yeah. I love that. And I think you're so right. We can learn so much from children. Obviously, it's wonderful that we gain skills and intelligence as we age that we can then use more efficiently. But I have said that before in writing of just, we learn about movement from kids and how much they move more naturally or they're not afraid to fail because they don't consider it failure. Like, there's so many lessons there. It's also really interesting what you said about the pronunciation first. And I had never really thought about this, but my mom actually learned four languages in college and then worked abroad for years, and to this day, she's still can sound like a native French speaker. And I think actually something that worked in her favor there, both of my parents are hearing-impaired. And so because of that, she was always very, very conscious to, like, pay very close attention to the native speaker's mouth and to imitate the way that they moved and the way that they said things because she was afraid she wasn't always necessarily hearing it the perfect way. So she's highly tuned in. And you mentioned that as well, that you're paying attention to where the tongue is and how the lips move and all of that. So I wonder if that's why she was able to pick up those languages and sound like a native speaker. It's so fascinating that you said that.

Idahosa: Yeah, that's a great story and it really drives home my point where, really, the key word there is "paying attention." And like I said in my story, when I first discovered this in Mexico, I was paying attention to the conjugation charts and the vocabulary and, "Was I spelling things correctly?" because that's what the teachers in my high school directed me to pay attention to. It never occurred to me to do anything else. And then for whatever reason, just for the fun of it, I decided to pay attention to the way it sounded. And by paying attention, you know, where you pay attention, all your focus goes to. So then also if you keep paying attention, you start to notice details you never noticed before. And then when you start to imitate those details, you notice even more details and you go deeper and deeper and close that gap. And it turns out that when you pay attention to the foundation, the fundamentals of what language is, then everything else starts to emerge from there. So in the case of your...was it your mother or your grandmother?

Katie: My mom.

Idahosa: Yeah. In the case of your mother, you know, with her hearing impairment, that kind of pushed her to pay attention to what happened to coincidentally be the right things to pay attention to when learning a language. So despite being hearing impaired, she can end up with a much better accent than, than someone who's not hearing impaired simply because even though she had a limited range of acoustic attention to pay because of the hearing impairment, it was still enough to outperform everybody else because she was paying attention to the right things. That's even more, it goes to show just how important it is to do the right things in order to get the right results.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. And I'm gonna actually do your program probably for several languages because despite years of high school Spanish, I can still not roll my R's and every time I went like, "Please teach me," they'd be like, "Here, just do this." And then they would just do it. And I'm like, "I can't do that." So I'm gonna take it, but I'm curious, how long does it take to, like for a person who is actually willing to put in the time and be consistent to actually start being somewhat conversational in a language with your system?

Idahosa: Yeah. So it's difficult because what we do, the answer to that time question, because what we do is we kind of give you what you need to go out there and learn. So we train you on the fundamentals of you listen and to mimic. Our new program's coming out in June. Has some more elements of, like, how do you actually learn what stuff means? How do you practice and develop your ability to speak and express yourself? But ultimately, no one can teach you, no program can teach you a language. You have to learn it from the native speakers and mimicking them. So in our program, within three to six weeks, depending on your ability, you'll be able to close that gap, that sound gap in terms of being able to hear and to pronounce the sounds properly.

So you've cleared out your ears and you've cleared out your mouth, but then it's up to the person to really put in the time in terms of having conversations, and even when you're in the conversation, pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone. So it's always really hard to come up with any specific time. People have different schedules and different things, but roughly speaking, someone for the first time, they're doing all the right things, you can get to, like, a really basic conversational level. And to be clear, what I mean by that, you're going to be saying things that are grammatically wrong. Maybe using awkward word choice, but you're able to self-express effectively in a way that people will know what you mean. And then when they talk to you, you'll know what they mean and you'll understand it enough to keep the conversation going. So that's the point we truly try to push people to. And with really intense study and focus and doing the right things of conversation and paying attention, you can get there on a language like Spanish in a matter of, like, three to six months. But if you're, you know, I live a bit more casual schedule but if you're consistent and you stick with it, you can start seeing really good breakthroughs within a year.

Katie: Got it. And then I would guess actually immersing in the language and spending time there would greatly speed up that process. Is it quicker if you... Like for you, you lived in Mexico. So if, for instance, I have a trip, a research trip later this year to blue zones and one of them's in Italy. So if I, like, practice and make sure I put in the time now, but then I'm spending several weeks there, will that speed up the process just because I'm immersed in it?

Idahosa: Absolutely. Like the way I do it myself in a situation like you just said, where there's a place I'm gonna be immersed for a period of time, I'll make sure I've cleared my ears and my mouth before I get there so I can hear everything and pronounce everything. And really, the first goal I try to get to is if I hear an Italian person say a phrase, like an eight-syllable phrase, I should be able to hear it and then repeat it like an echo, like a recording device, with a perfect accent. Exactly how that person said it. Because with that ability, the only question you need to ask is what does this mean? Right? And if you keep mimicking and asking, "What does this mean?" and paying attention to the context, and then you're in a situation where you really need to communicate with people and you can't rely on translators and other people, you can get conversational within a couple of weeks of really intense life situations. So yeah, it's really, your learning speed is really based on the intensity of your human interaction that you have there. So yeah, you can expect to do really good if you commit yourself to getting the most out of a country visit.

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and flattening the stomach (especially after all of my pregnancies). I get them in black and grey so they can go with tank tops for working out or cute tops when things need to be a little less casual. I've even worn these with boots and sweaters or cardigans for more dressy events! Right now, you can get 2 pairs of their leggings, like my favorite power hold ones, for just \$24 at fabletics.com/wellnessmama on your first order as a VIP. There's never a commitment to order and always free shipping on orders over \$49. Another quick tip: take their 60-second style quiz to get an idea of the best styles and fits for your body type and sign up for their emails to get access to secret deals and styles before they are released!

This podcast is brought to you by Four Sigmatic, a Finnish company bringing the everyday magic of mushrooms to our daily lives. If you visited my home, you'd notice my homemade coffee/tea bar in my kitchen. Above it hangs 8 wooden cups, called kuksas... one for each member of my family. These have become part of our family tradition as we often sip mushroom coffee or superfood elixirs from them at breakfast or after dinner during family time. Wooden cup or not, I highly recommend all of the four stigmatic products and you'd also find every single one of them in my kitchen! Here's how I incorporate them into my day: in the morning I will drink one of their mushroom coffee blends, the matcha, the coffee latte or mushroom mocha with chaga. Throughout the day I sip their chaga, cordyceps or lions mane elixirs on their own since these are all caffeine free but have a host of benefits due including a major boost of antioxidants. Nighttime means their calming turmeric tea or Reishi elixir with a splash of macadamia milk. Mom tip: I also always keep their activated charcoal lemonade on hand for the first sign for a stomach bug... my kids love it and charcoal always seems to help. As a listener of this podcast, you can save 15% with the code wellness mama at foursigmatic.com/wellnessmama.

Katie: Awesome. And for any parents listening, I think of my kids...are close to high school age which is hard to believe. But, you know, a lot of kids take languages in high school. So for parents who are listening, you've said it's better to focus on this side, the verbal and the pronunciation first. So if they know their child, for instance, is going to take Spanish in high school, is it better to do this side first and then to learn the written side? Like, would you recommend this for a child for the year, for instance, before they're gonna be taking a language?

Idahosa: Yeah, so when it comes to school, there's two goals, right? There's the goal of learning the language and then there's the goal of, well, you know, passing the class. And unfortunately, the way most Spanish courses or language courses are set up now in high schools and universities is they're focusing on the wrong things, right? Which means if you wanna pass the grade, you have to learn the wrong things unfortunately. But if you do the right things alongside of it, it's kind of like, imagine you're sending your kid to school and, like, they're teaching the kid all kinds of weird stuff that you don't agree with, but they have to go to school because it's the law. So when they come home, you know, you have a conversation about them like, "Hey, listen, this is not really what's going on."

So it's a similar thing. Like if I had a kid who's going to Spanish class, you know, our program or, you know, what I recommend kids do really is focus on music. So really, because you really wanna push the curiosity buttons and discovery buttons. People don't learn things they don't actually care about, right? So if you're forcing people to take Spanish, like no one learned Spanish from high school Spanish, right? And part of the reason is because no one, most people don't wanna do it. So if I was trying to really encourage language learning in my kids at that age, you know, get whatever you need to do to get the grades, then I'd be focusing

them on, like, "Hey," like, try to find a song and, you know... Spanish songs are getting really popular right now in the US, for example, like reggaeton and stuff and it's like, "Hey, see if you can understand what the lyrics mean, see if you can sing it exactly the way the artist does." You know, record yourself, listen to your recording, compare it to Shakira or, you know, Don Omar or whatever and say, "Oh, he sounds this way. I sound this way. How am I off?" And that process, when you can actually cultivate that, is actually super fun once you get into that game. So if I had a child, I would just try to get them into the game where they find it fun and then trust that they can, you know, figure out the rest on their own.

Katie: Gotcha. And for, like, for instance, homeschooling parents who are listening who have the freedom to teach languages any way they want, this could actually become part of a homeschool curriculum, in essence, of teaching the language and then, especially if it could be paired with a trip to a place where it was native speaking, that would seem like it would really, like, anchor it at the end of the year. Is that something that you think...and if so, what ages can kids start doing this? I would guess young, because it's kind of based on their natural patterns.

Idahosa: Yeah. You know, so I've actually thought about creating a kids' program in the future. The program I have is presented with concepts and stuff that only really a, someone maybe, you know, 13, 12 and above, you know, like a really smart kid but like a, you know, a smaller kid, not so much. If I'm working with a...so yeah, if I'm working with a smart kid, you know, anywhere 12 or above, yeah, our programs kind of break all that kind of stuff down and I try to make it interesting for people. For a younger kid, I wouldn't focus so much on the meaning as much as the musicality and the sounds. So finding songs, playing those songs over and over again, you know, encouraging the kid to try to sing along, the kid will just pick it up like a sponge because that's what kids do.

And yeah, my thinking around children's language learning is the way it should be done is, like I said earlier in the interview, our mouths are more plastic, so to speak, they're more adaptable when we're younger. We haven't learned the motor, we haven't kind of ingrained the motor habits yet. So a 10-year-old or an 8-year-old or a 5-year-old can mimic any foreign language sound or word or phrase way easier in way less friction than an older person can. So, but then what happens is they start to specialize to their native language environment. So what I would do is expose the kid just to a repertoire of music and have them be exposed to all the sounds of the world, really. Which you can do, because it's not that many sounds, you know, only a small repertoire of songs, you know, but we'll just keep it to Spanish for now. Give them, you know, a couple of songs, have them sing along and have them dance to it, have them really get into it.

And if you keep that a permanent fixture of their life moving forward, a time will come when they're like, "Hey, I'm actually old enough now to go off to Mexico on my own," or to travel, whatnot, you now would have done a huge advantage for them because we talked about earlier how some people can just, they pick up language just much easier somehow. What you're doing is you're kind of pre-creating that environment for them. So when they're 20, the degree to which they've been exposed to the sounds of that language when they were younger is going to influence how much easier they can pick it up later when they actually have a real motivation to do so because they are really fascinated by a culture, or they made a friend, they wanna get to know the friend more in that language. So yeah, for me, I'd focus more, for the younger kids, just seeding the ground as much as possible and then whatever plants grow from that when they're older will have a much more higher chance of success.

Katie: Got it. That makes sense. What languages do you have available at The Mimic Method right now?

Idahosa: Yeah, so we have our Elemental Sounds courses in English, Spanish, French, German, European Portuguese, Brazilian Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Italian and Russian. Those 10 languages. And then our new kind of suite of programs for Spanish comes out in June. And also there's a free course coming out in June as well, or June, July. So check out the site, we have some free resources as well. Stay in the list. We're making a bunch of new stuff right now. So if you stay on the list, it sends email, kind of figure out what's the most appropriate for you, we can get you back-end support. But those are the languages we have content for right now.

Katie: I love it. Are there plans to do more languages in the future?

Idahosa: Yeah, I mean the plan is... Once again, this is a very different way of learning. My general plan is to, you know, try to open source this stuff as much as possible and once people see the benefits of it, just have as many people learning this way as possible because once again, it really is the natural way. I always say, "I didn't invent The Mimic Method, you did because everyone learned their first language by mimicking. So, if it worked for you the first time, you know, why change it up?" So, just kind of making it easier for people to learn languages the natural way.

Katie: I love it. I definitely, like I said, I'm gonna be testing out some of the courses and applying them so that I can hopefully, like you said, connect and be conversational and really have relationships with people when I travel this year. One question I love to ask a little bit on an unrelated note toward the end..

Idahosa: Sure.

Katie: ...is if there's a book or a certain number of books that have really impacted your life, if so, what they are and why?

Idahosa: Oh, man, so many. What came to mind was this book, "Just Listen." And, you know what? The author escapes me, I'll look it up. But it's basically a book about listening to people and the power of that. So I read it when I was, I think, 22 or something or 23, and I remember I was with my girlfriend at the time in Montreal and she was, like, upset about something and I'm listening to her and then I'm like, "Oh, we'll solve the problem, blah, blah, blah." Like typical kind of man trying to solve the problem type thing. And then I read this book and it goes really deep into the psychology of people and how everyone just really wants to be empathized with and listened to. And I read this section on what to do in the exact situation I found myself with my girlfriend like a couple nights earlier. I'm like, "Huh." And then it explained what I should have been doing and, you know, how to do it better.

And then like a week or two later, that same situation had presented itself, and then I did what the guy told me to do in the book and then, worked perfectly. Everyone was super happy and then I've incorporated all those lessons since. And yeah. So that book was super influential for me because, you know, what my real passion is now is kind of the mechanics of human communication and how to make them more efficient and how to make them better and, you know, how to make people feel better. But, you know, obviously some people can intuitively do that, but other people can't. So, me personally, I just love learning and creating ways to connect more fluidly and deeply with other people because I think from that, when you have richer and more productive relationships with people, everything else in life kind of emerges from that. So "Just Listen" was like the first book I read that had that effect on me. Because before that, I was reading more like sci-fi and like, you know, more technical kind of books. So yeah, that's the one that I always kind of think of as the... Let me see if I can find the author real quick. Okay, here it is. Mark Goulston, G-O-U-L-S-T-O-N, "Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anybody."

Katie: I love that. And that's a new recommendation, so I'll make sure that's linked in the show notes as well as your website and all of your courses. Like I said, I'm gonna definitely be trying them out and I will report back to you guys who are listening. But thank you so much for your time today. I am so fascinated by this approach and I love what you're doing and I really appreciate you sharing with us.

Idahosa: Sure. And I'll tell you one thing, too. If you search, like, Google "how to roll your R's," "quick Spanish tutorial," I can send you the link, people have been reporting breaking through on the trilled R's, which you mentioned earlier in the call, while watching this video. So it's a video from me explaining how to do that. So that you can put that in the show notes, too, and try yourself, let me know if it works.

Katie: I will. Absolutely. Thank you so much.

And thanks for the time and thanks to all of you for listening and for joining me. And I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of "The Wellness Mama Podcast."

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