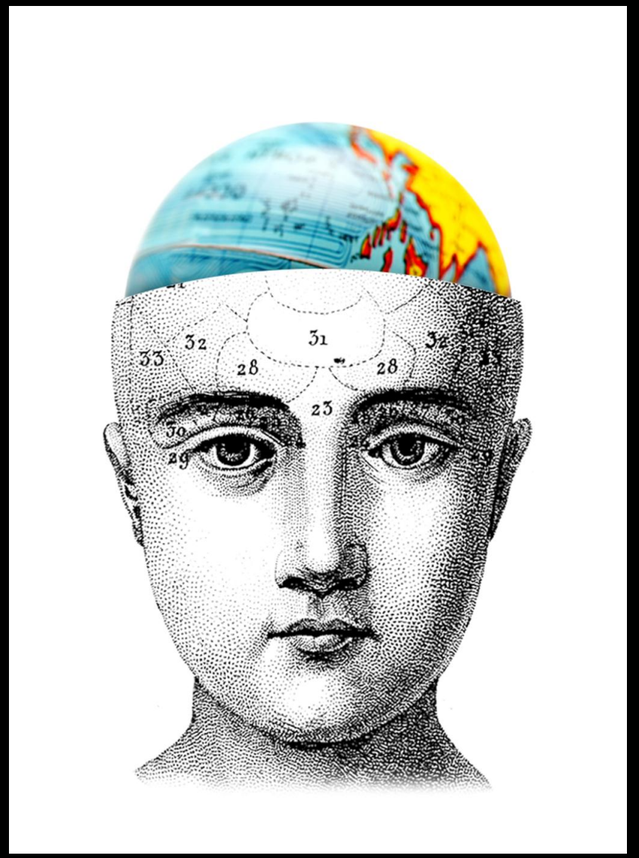
Myths and Realities of High Intensity Language Learners

Michael Erard



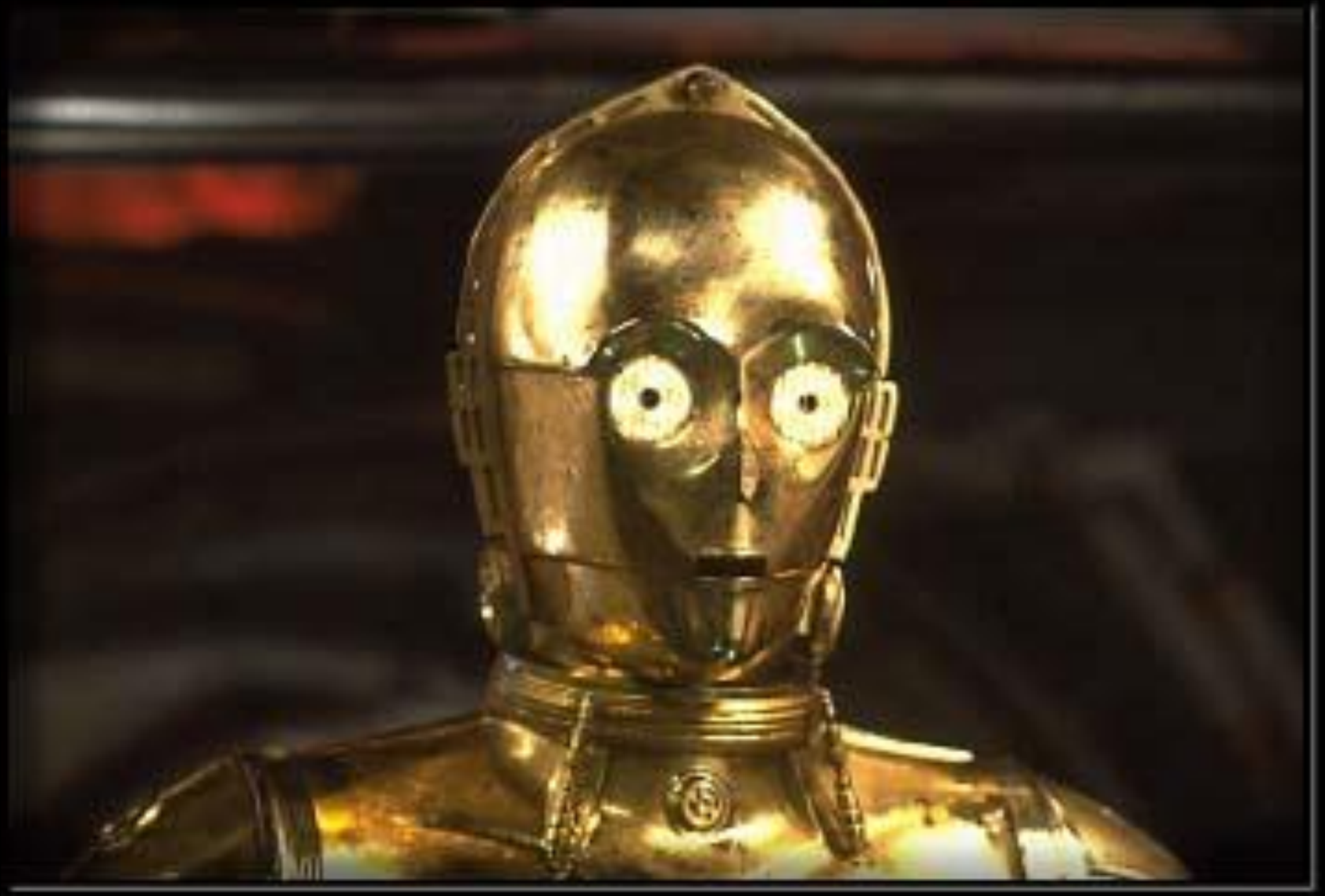
Hyperpolyglots represent a certain type of language learning success.

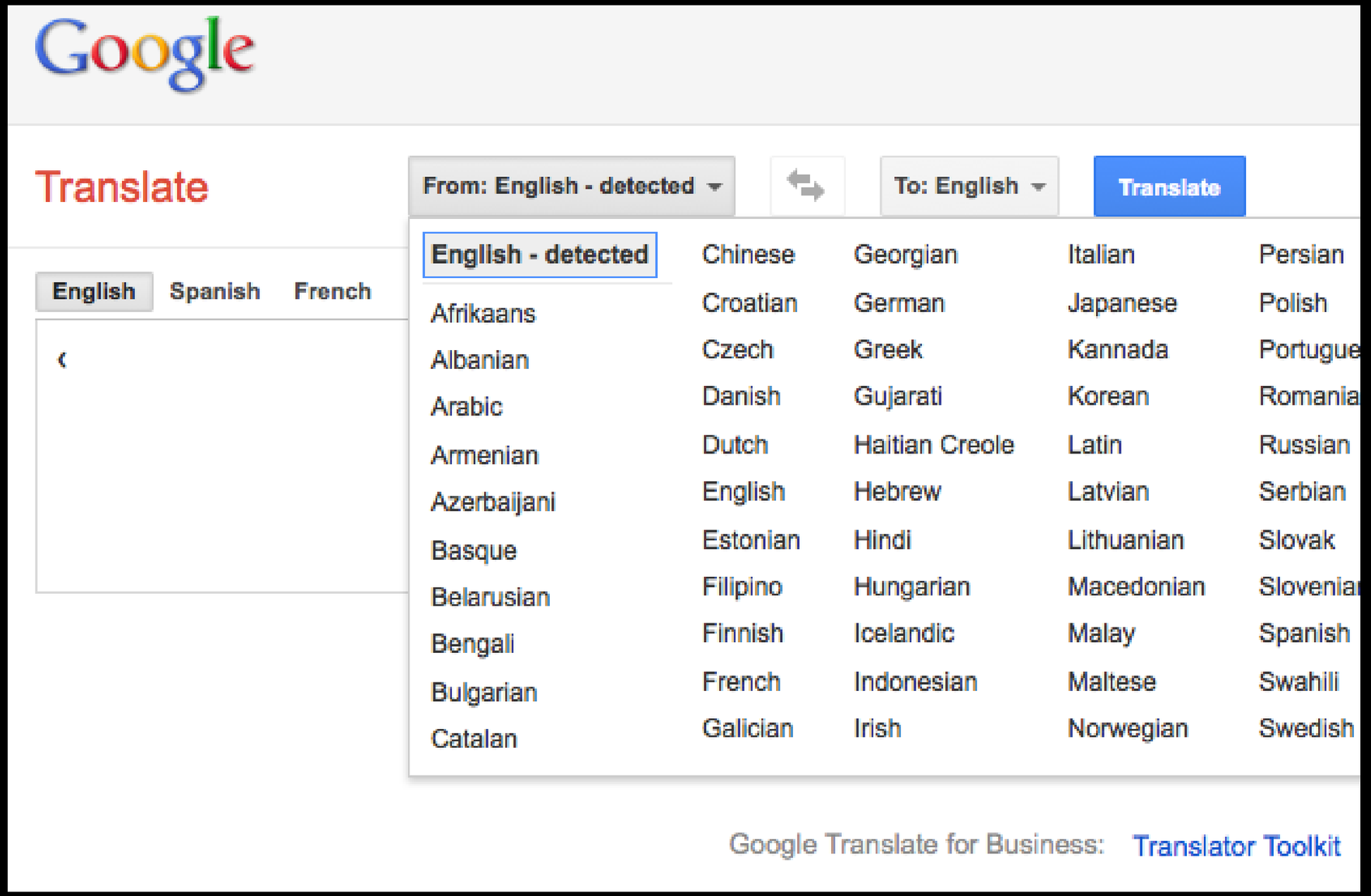
Institutional operational categories (over-)determine theoretical categories in SLA.

Working memory (and working memory trainability) have limits.

The search continues for measures of the complexity of an individual’s linguistic system and the potential to build complexity.

The stories around FL learning, both successful and not, need to be reframed.

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Translate
From: English - detected
To: English
Translate
English
Spanish
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English - detected
Afrikaans
Albanian
Arabic
Armenian
Azerbaijani
Basque
Belarusian
Bengali
Bulgarian
Catalan
Chinese
Croatian
Czech
Danish
Dutch
English
Estonian
Filipino
Finnish
French
Galician
Georgian
German
Greek
Gujarati
Haitian Creole
Hebrew
Hindi
Hungarian
Icelandic
Indonesian
Irish
Italian
Japanese
Kannada
Korean
Latin
Latvian
Lithuanian
Macedonian
Malay
Maltese
Norwegian
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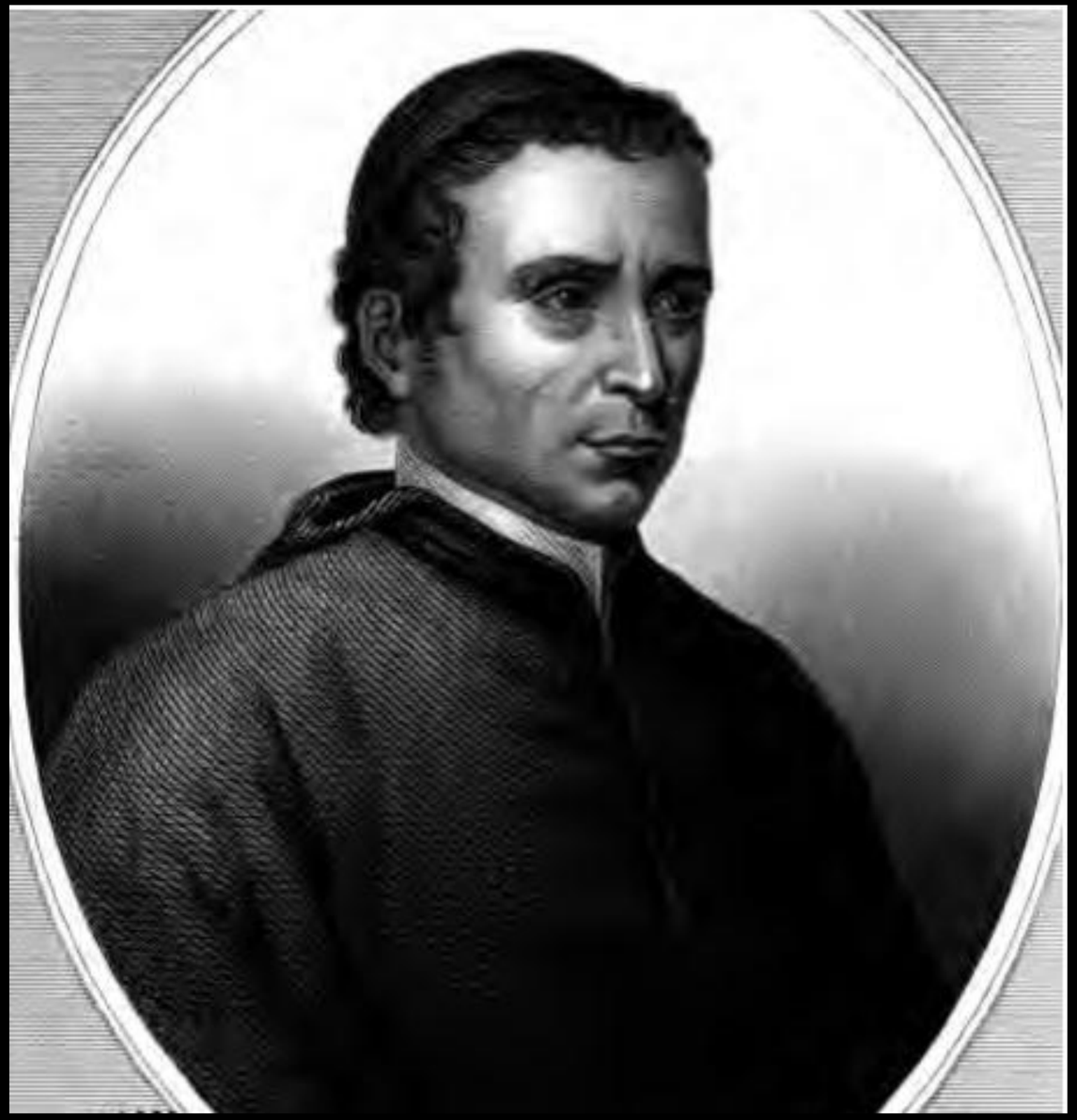
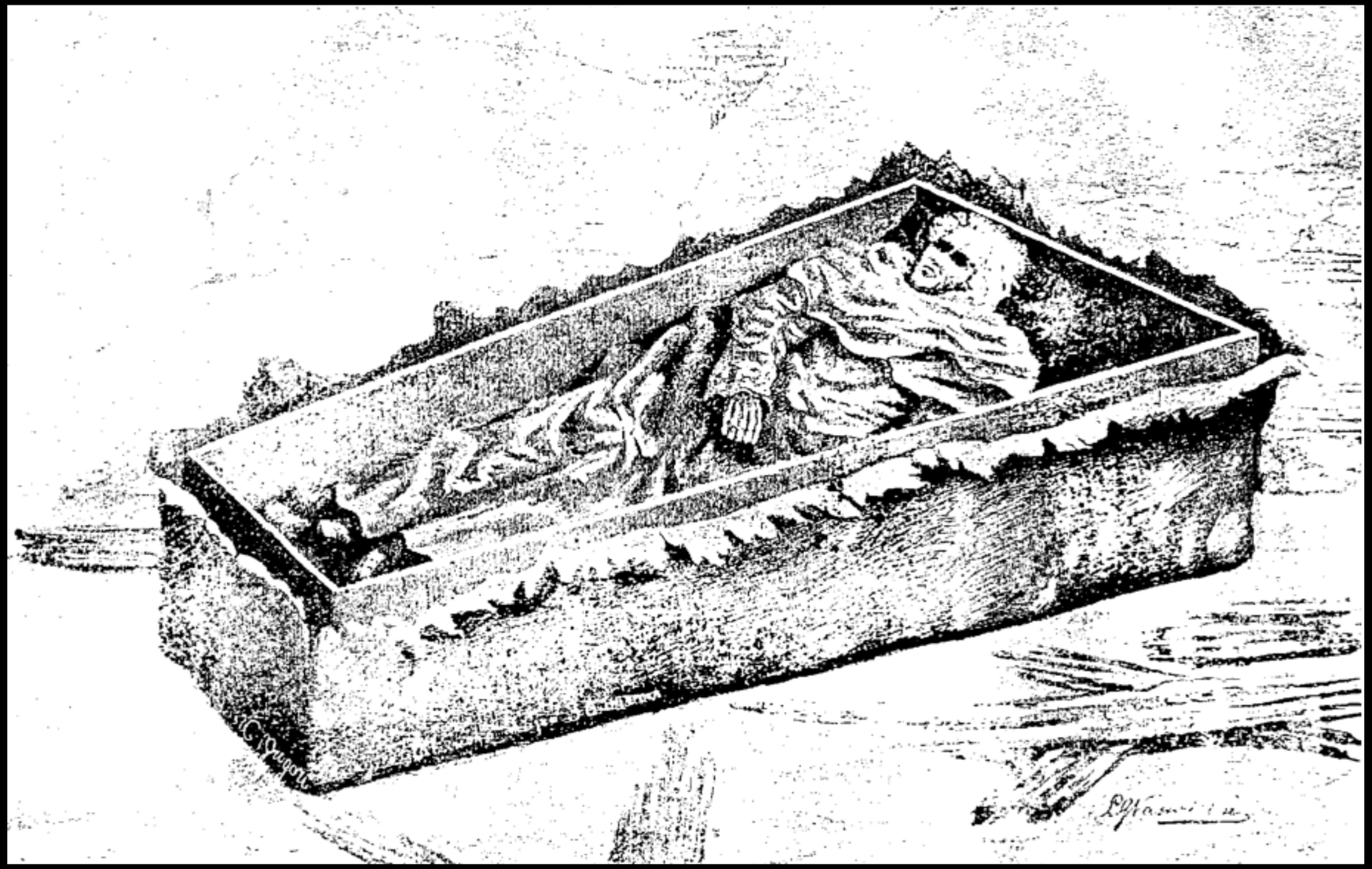
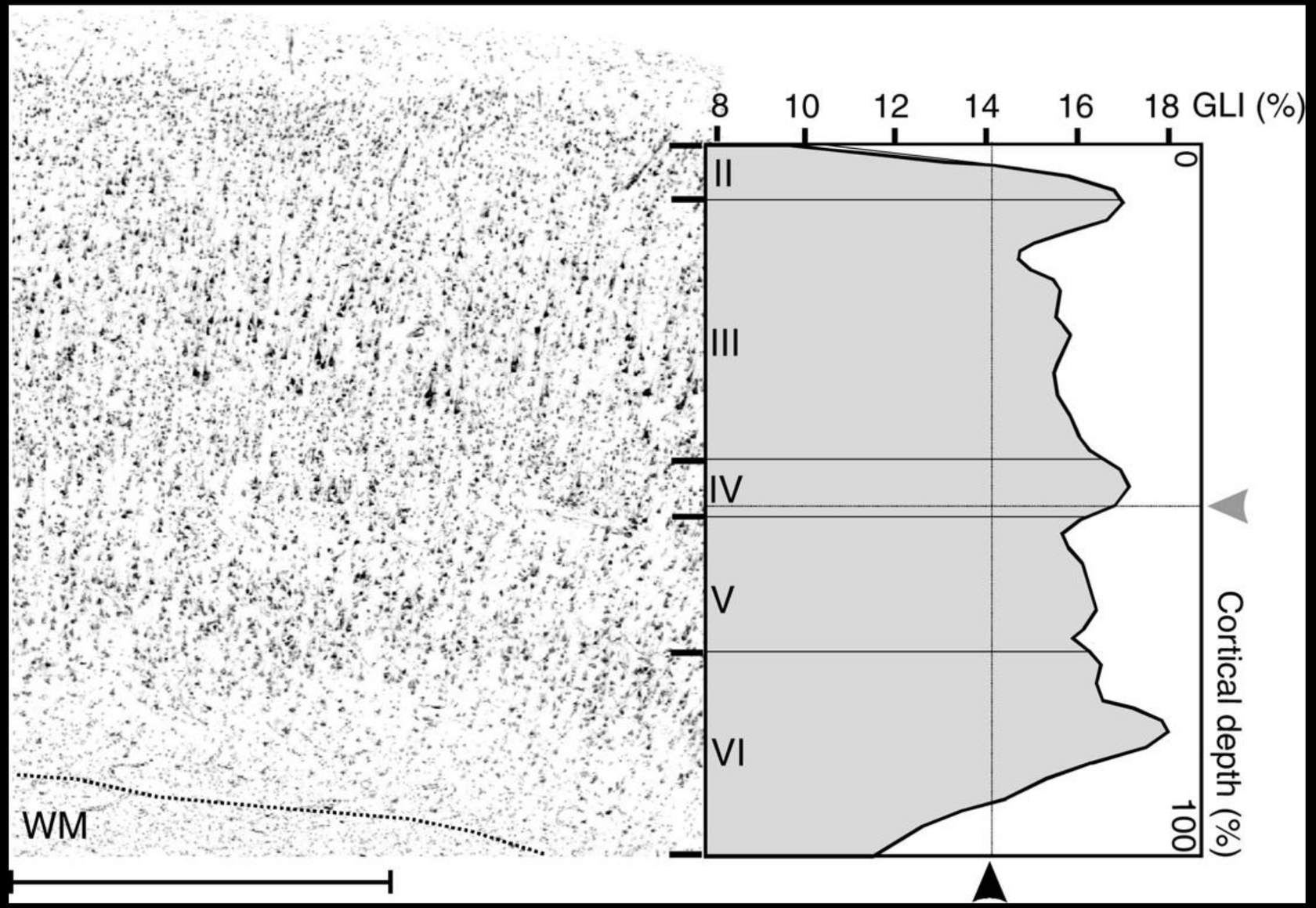
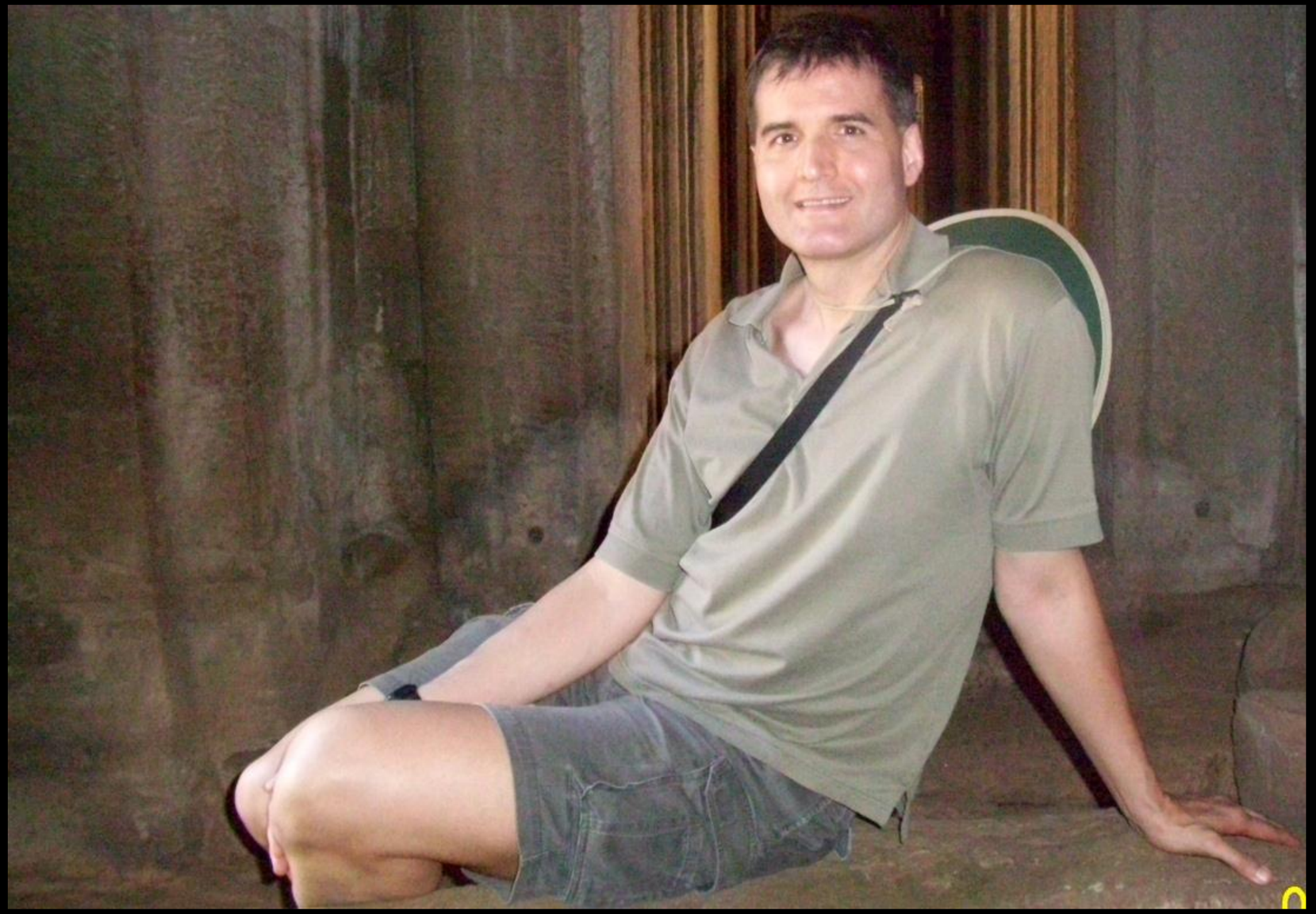
Swahili
Swedish
Google Translate for Business:
Translator Toolkit





Amunts & Zilles, 2004





What hyperpolyglots are like

They’ve learned how to learn

They’ve discovered methods that fit them

They like -- and crave -- repetition

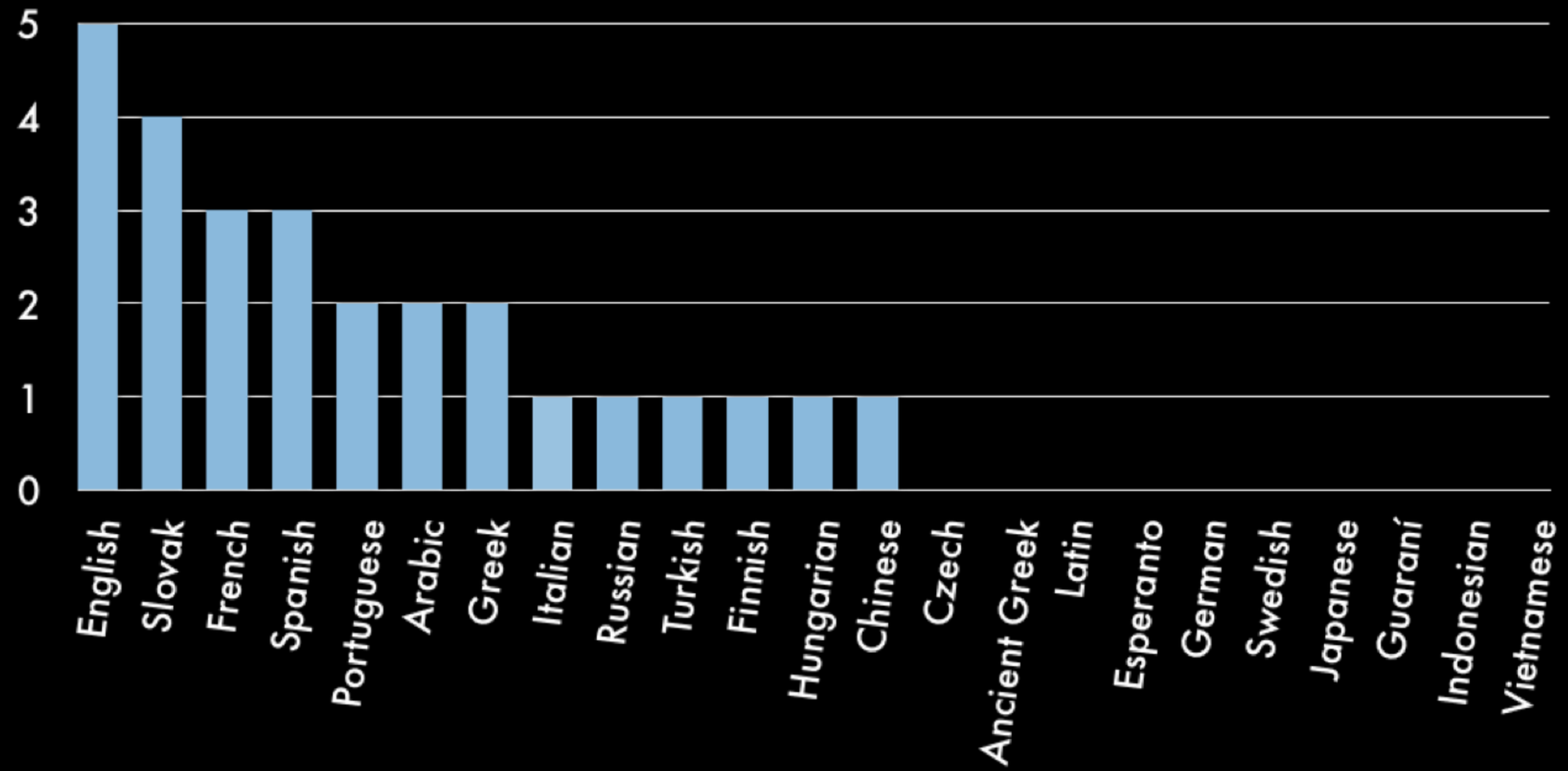
They remember what they learn

They have a feel for language

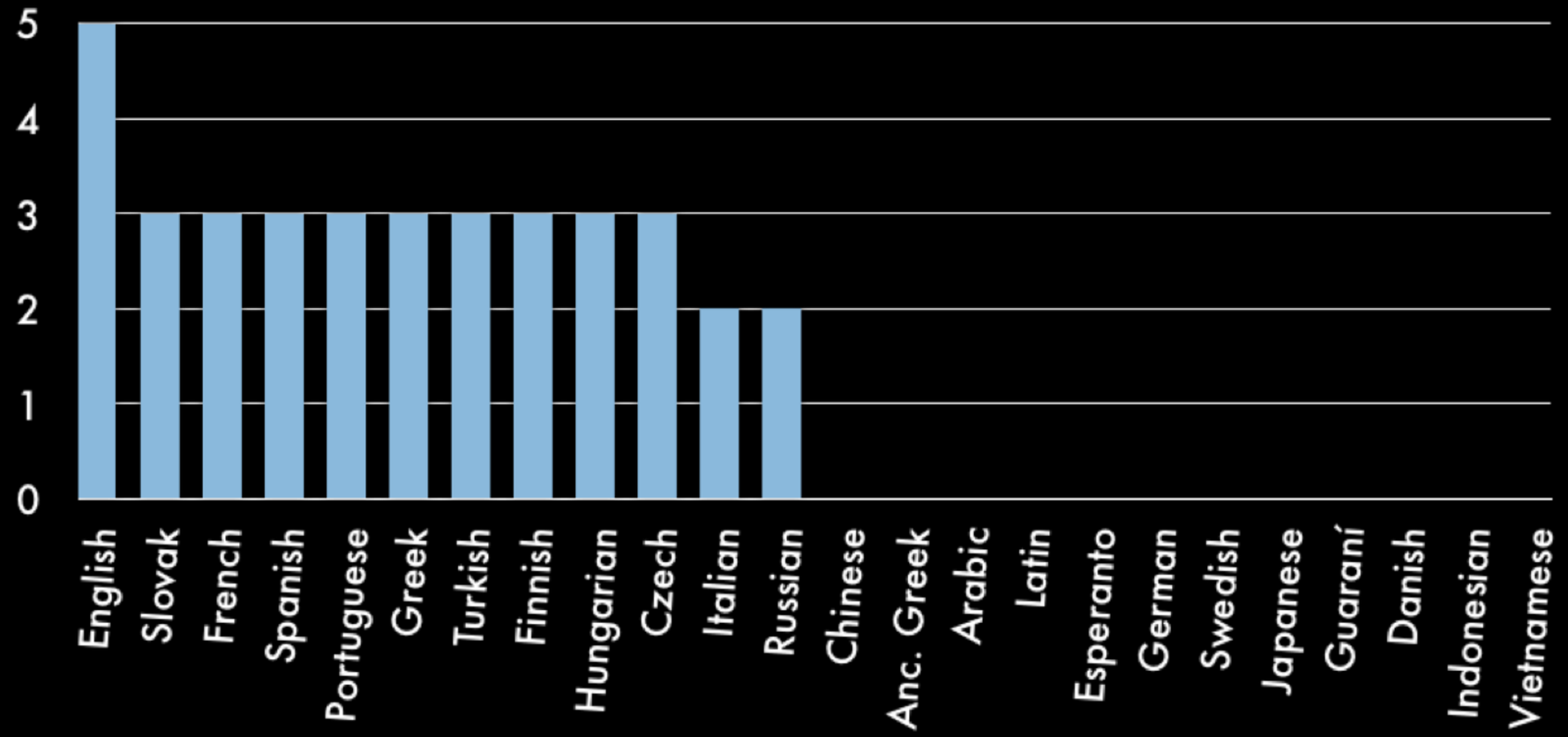
They find, or make a niche

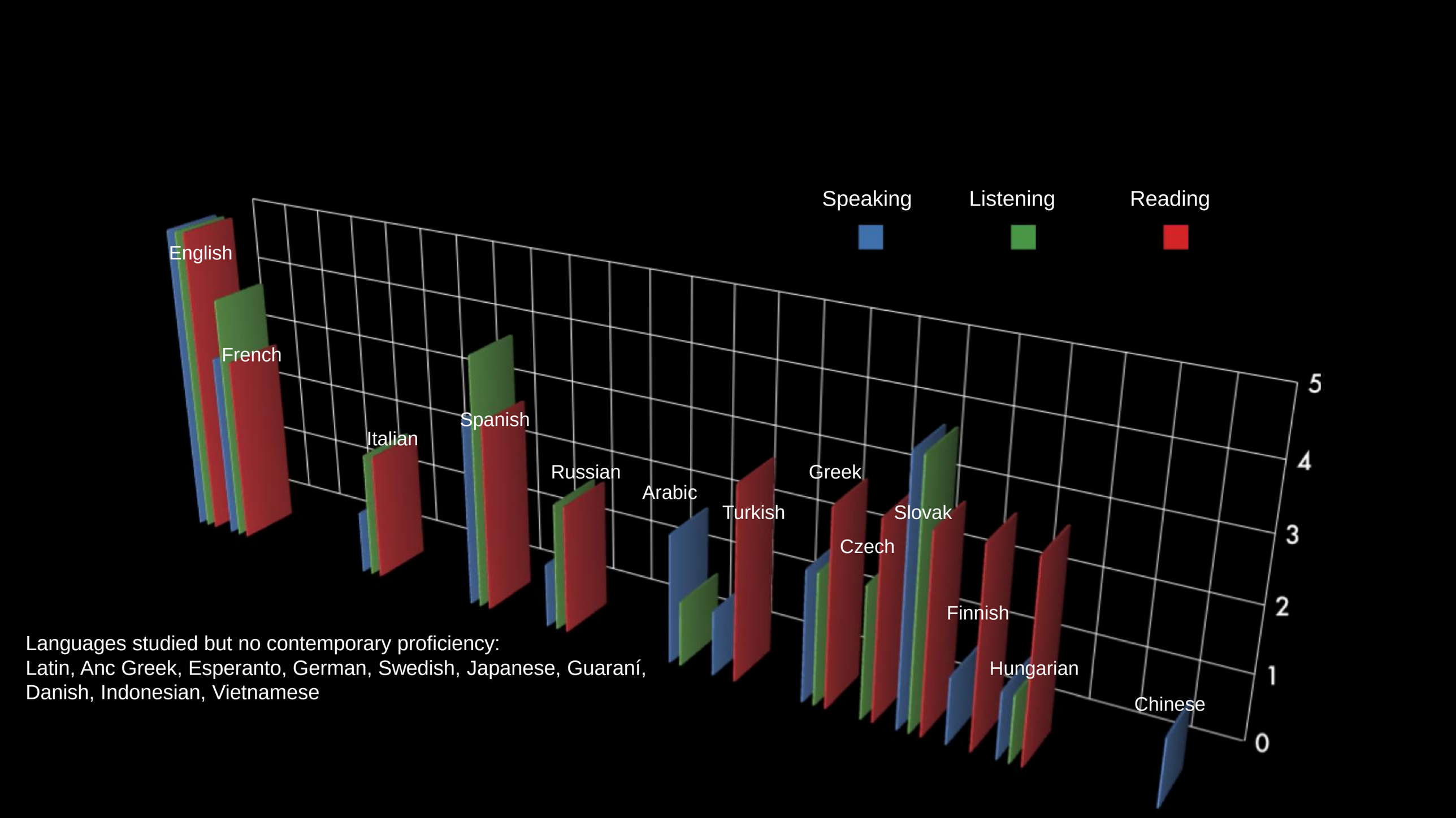
They assert the right to not speak English

Speaking

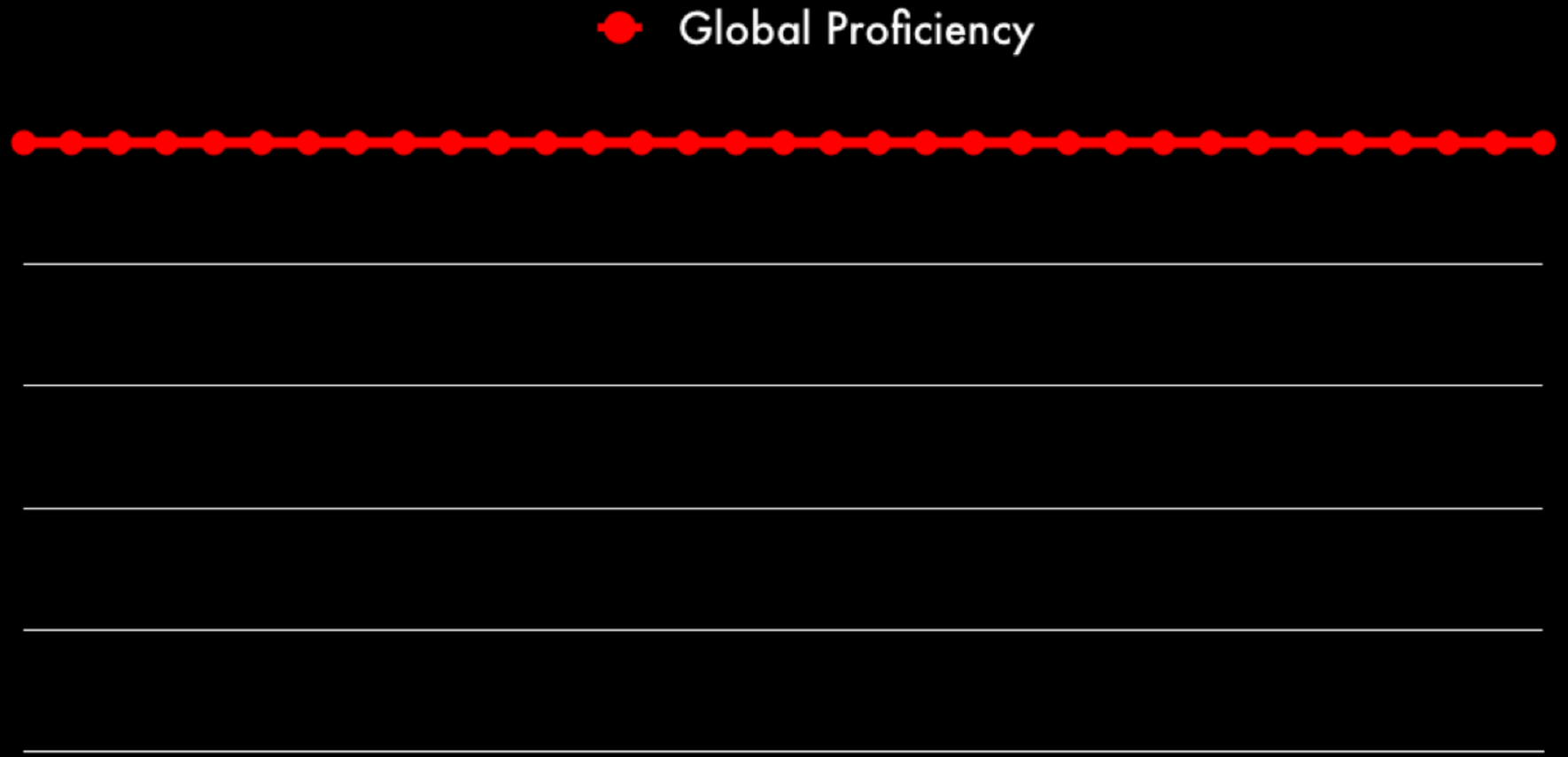

5
4
3
2
1
0
English
Slovak
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Arabic
Greek
Italian
Russian
Turkish
Finnish
Hungarian
Chinese
Czech
Ancient Greek
Latin
Esperanto
German
Swedish
Japanese
Guaraní
Indonesian
Vietnamese

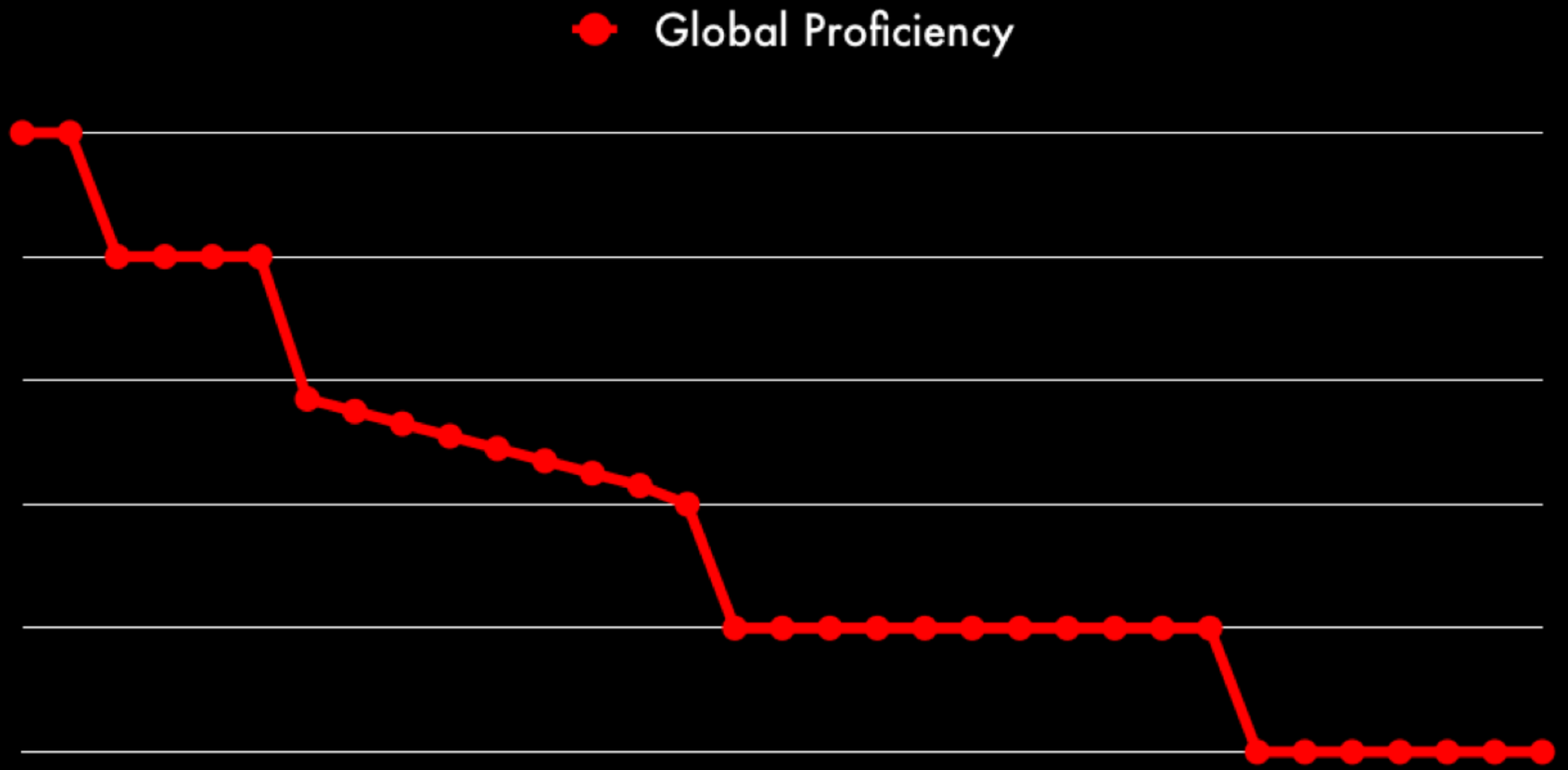
Reading

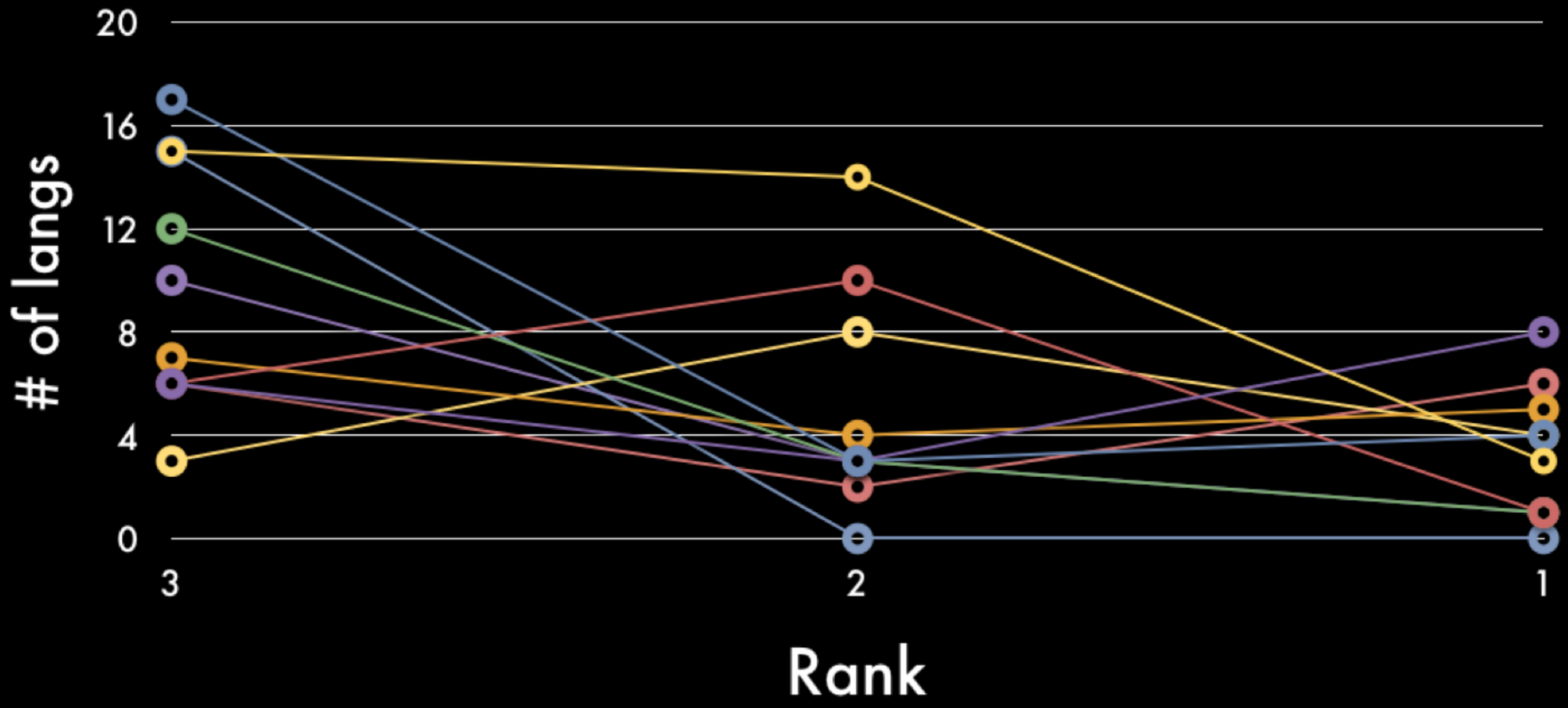

5
4
3
2
1
0
English
Slovak
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Greek
Turkish
Finnish
Hungarian
Czech
Italian
Russian
Chinese
Anc. Greek
Arabic
Latin
Esperanto
German
Swedish
Japanese
Guaraní
Danish
Indonesian
Vietnamese

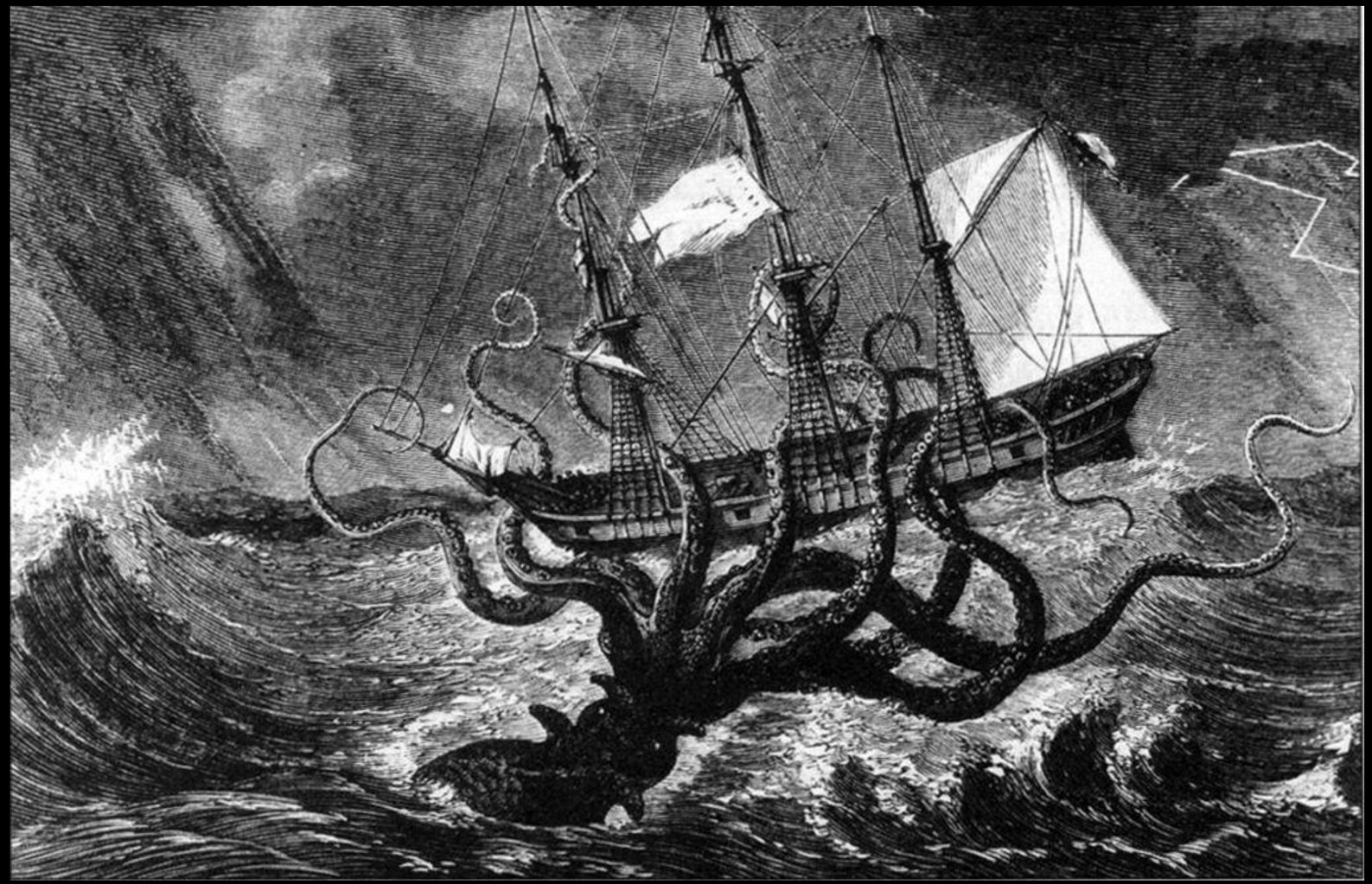


Languages studied but no contemporary proficiency:
Latin, Anc Greek, Esperanto, German, Swedish, Japanese, Guaraní, Danish, Indonesian, Vietnamese


Global Proficiency


Global Proficiency


20
16
12
8
4
0
# of langs
3
2
1
Rank



What are the upper limits of the ability to learn, speak, and use languages?

We need them!

Migration is rising

Tourism is increasing

Media is more multilingual

English isn’t enough

New sorts of multilingualism

New conditions for multilingualism

Neural tribe

Neural tribe

Neural hypertrophy for language learning

Neural tribe

Neural hypertrophy for language learning

Environmental selection

Neural tribe

Neural hypertrophy for language learning

Environmental selection

Sense of identity

Neural tribe

Neural hypertrophy for language learning

Environmental selection

Sense of identity

Personal mission

Neural tribe

Neural hypertrophy for language learning

Environmental selection

Sense of identity

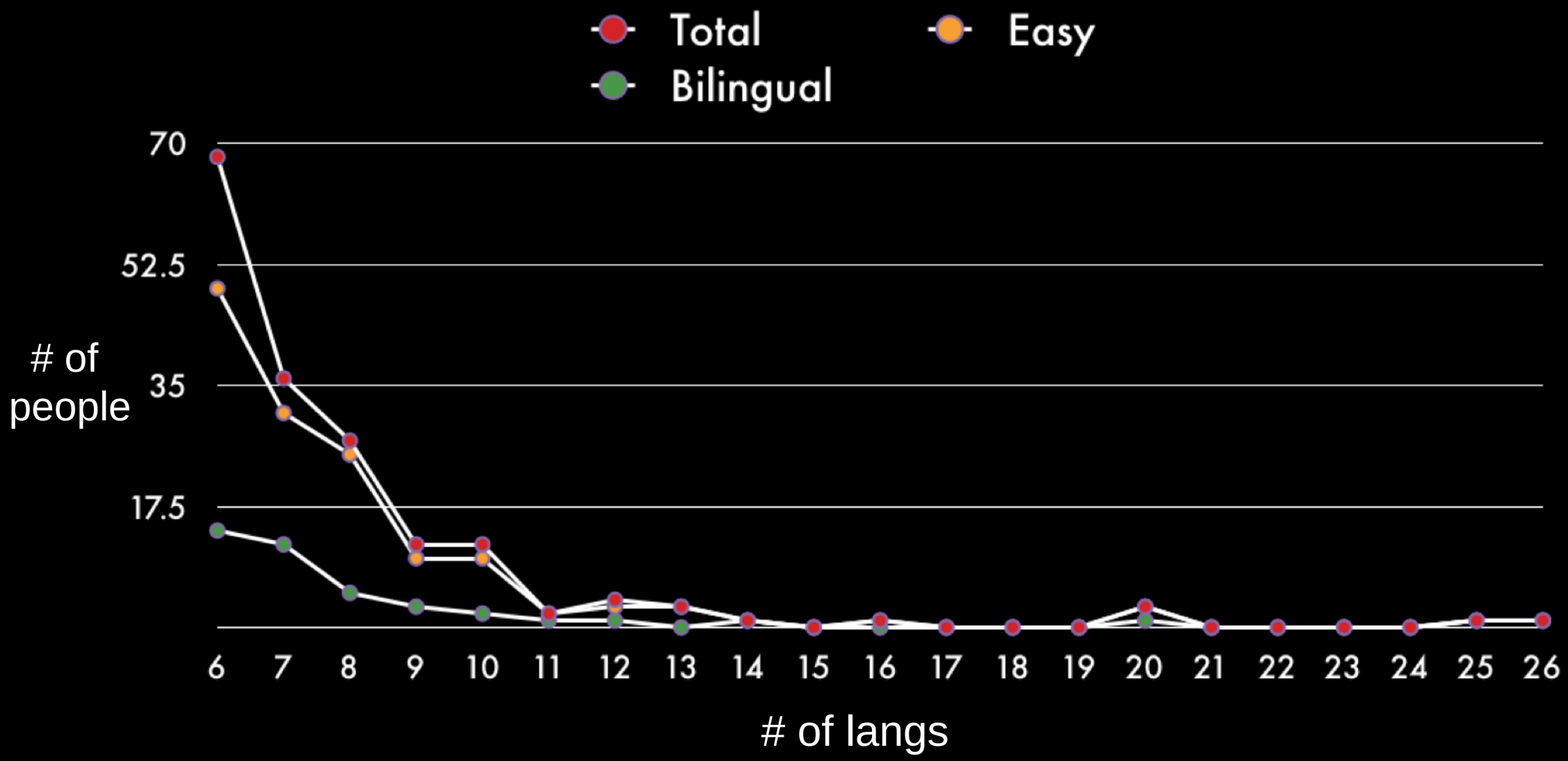
Personal mission

Sub-national/extra-institutional status

Corporate governance consulting

What are hyperpolyglots like?

	I know >6 langs (n=172)	Learning langs is easier for me (n = 289)
Male	69.2%	65.6%
Age	44.8% 25 to 40	41.7% 25 to 40
>1 Mother tongues	43	53
English as mother tongue	84	162
IQ >140	45.7%	35.3%
Origins	1 from South Africa, China, Australia; 2 from India; 167 from Europe, the US, Canada, South America	1 from Vietnam, Pakistan, Singapore, China, and India; 2 from Philippines; 3 from South Africa; 279 from Europe, US, Canada, South America.


Total
Easy
Bilingual
70
52.5
35
17.5
# of people
6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26
# of langs

	I know >11 langs (n=17)
Male	82.4%
Age	35.3% 25 to 40
>1 Mother tongues	6
English as mother tongue	12
IQ >140	28.6%
Origins	4 from US; 2 from Canada (1 Quebec); 2 from Germany; 5 from UK; 1 each from India, Denmark, Netherlands, Latvia
Mobility	62.5% live in same country as birthplace

People with >6 langs who say learning is easier (n=145)

I have an innate talent	53.1%
I’m more intelligent	20%
I work harder	44.8%
I’m more motivated	61.4%
It’s part of my background	29%
I had a good education	33.1%
I like languages	93.1%
My parents are good language learners	15.9%

Geschwind-Galaburda Traits

	Know >11 langs	Know 6 -10 langs
Left-handed/ambi	0%	20.6%
Twin	0%	1.5%
Twins in family	25%	19.9%
Immune disease	37.5%	26.1%
Immune disease in family	56.3%	31.6%
Homosexual ID, behavior, orient	31.3%	25.2%

- Profile yourself
- Improve higher-order cognitive skills
- Psychoemotional preparation
- Manage dopamine (ie., neuromodulate)
- Build community
- Study >1 language

- How do people get access to resources to build their learner profile?
- How do people get guidance in matching their profile to effective strategies?
- How do you build community among people with varying levels of proficiency?
- How do you sustain individual purpose in the community given varying motivations?

What would FL pedagogy look like if the goal were to produce hyperpolyglots?

What would linguistic theory look like if the hyperpolyglot, not the monolingual, had been the foundational language user/learner?

How to measure the complexity of a person’s linguistic system without using # of languages as the sole metric?

Spiritualist

Materialist

Mentalist

Spiritualist
Materialist
Mentalist

The hyperpolyglot makes visible
the multiple speaks only one language or many.