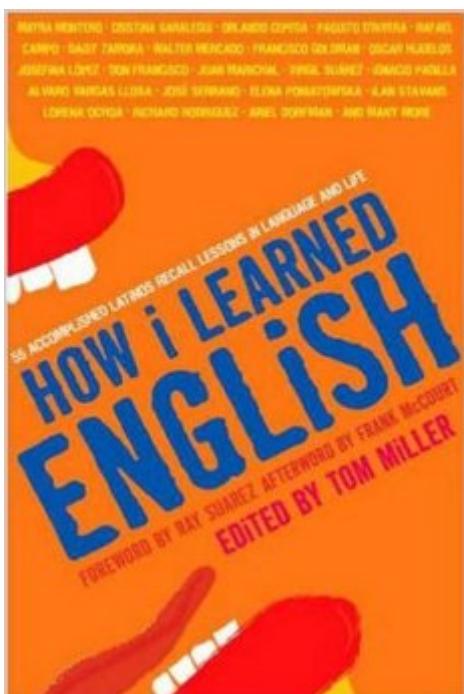


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# How I Learned English: 55 Accomplished Latinos Recall Lessons In Language And Life



## Synopsis

All over the world there are people struggling to master the quirks and challenges of English. In today's America, many millions of them are Latino; and in this eloquent collection, nearly 60 of the best known contribute fascinating, revealing, often touching essays on the very personal process each went through to achieve this common end. Their successes are inspiring. Their pieces, engaging and entertaining all, express the whole range of emotions that learning any new language entails. Congressman José Serrano, for example, describes learning English from Frank Sinatra records. Cuban-American author Oscar Hijuelos picked it up as a sick little boy in an American hospital bed. Many find it a daunting ordeal; for others English came easily. But from TV personality Cristina Saralegui to Hall of Fame baseball player Orlando Cepeda, every last one remembers what it felt like to do battle with bizarre idioms, irregular verbs, and all the other incomprehensible intricacies that tangle the tongue. And of course, every new English-speaker has a tale to tell: an immigrant yearning to assimilate and achieve, or a political exile suddenly far from home and alone, or a child who just wants to fit in. Their fears and triumphs will resonate with everyone who has shared this exasperating, exhilarating experience, whether last year or a lifetime ago. This wonderful, eclectic, inviting collection speaks to; and for; all of them, and goes directly to the heart of the national debate on language and immigration.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Aside from teaching 'new words,' the process of learning a new language teaches empathy--so

sorely lacking in today's 'me-first' and 'sucks-to-be-you' world...EVERYONE who only speaks one language should be required to read this book--everyone needs to gain insight into what it means to find oneself in a parallel linguistic universe. Better yet, everyone should study a second (and third, and fourth) language! In today's increasingly charged immigration/language-debate, this book is essential. The essays and anecdotes speak volumes about human communication, separation, cruelty, kindness, understanding, and desires--all in a non-partisan, readable way. All people who work with the public--whether it be in customer service or education--should read this book. Just because a person can't 'say what s/he means' does not mean the person is stupid--linguistically challenged does not equal mentally disabled! Although the book deals only with the specific experiences of those whose native language is Spanish or Portuguese, those experiences translate into any language. Whether people want to remember or not, this IS a nation of immigrants, and so many of its citizens come from families who, at some point in the past, were the 'language-outsiders.' May we not forget...

I purchased both the English and Spanish version of this book for my son. He loves both of them! It gave him a better understanding of the struggles person who are learning English as a second language goes through.

For a change of pace, consider this new collection of essays, "How I Learned English: 55 Accomplished Latinos Recall Lessons in Language and Life" (National Geographic Society, \$16.95 paperback), edited by Tom Miller. The contributors include politicians, authors, scientists, athletes, educators, and others. One of my favorite essays is "The Learning Curve" by journalist Rubén Martínez. He recounts that "long before the debates over bilingual education or English Only or whether a hyphenated American was a real America," his parents decided that he, "their first child and American citizen by birth, would speak Spanish before English." This book will enlighten and, perhaps, lower the volume on the often incendiary debate over bilingualism in this country. [The full review first appeared in the El Paso Times.]

I confess (embarrassedly) that along with many Americans, I am not bilingual. But I know more than enough Spanish to get by and I get the basics of the struggle to understand or be understood in a foreign language, having lived in Japan for several years. The "Lessons in Language and Life" of How I Learned English are probably best enjoyed by bilingual native Spanish speakers, who have the ability to empathize with and appreciate the writings of the "55 Accomplished Latinos" whose

words are included in the book. The contents of their stories fall into a few basic categories: how to improve ones chances of learning English, examples of ridicule suffered by English learners due to teachers and students equating lack of language proficiency with stupidity, joyfulness at their bilingual ability in general or the English language in particular, specific activities or incidents which facilitated their ability or desire to learn, and (my favorite) funny or embarrassing anecdotes about language-related mistakes or misunderstandings. How I Learned English is a good book for bilingual Spanish-English speakers, but can be appreciated by anyone who has ever tried to learn a foreign language.

As an ESL teacher, I'm enjoying this book and I use it with some students. I wish there were more books with contributions from people who speak languages other than Spanish.

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