

[The Many Languages of Ziad Fazah](https://thelinguistblogger.wordpress.com/2008/05/25/the-many-languages-of-ziad-fazah/)

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About a year ago I began to become acquainted with the online language community. Since that time I have found no [hyperpolyglot](#) more inspiring or controversial than Ziad Youssef Fazah. Over the past twenty years, he has been featured many times showcasing his talents on television programs in several European and South American countries including Greece, Argentina, Spain and Brazil. In the early 1990's, Ziad was approached by the Guinness Book of World Records and asked if it would be all right for him to appear in the 1993 UK edition as the "world's greatest linguist." Mr. Fazah's abilities have inspired, awed and educated, however, they have also been criticized, understandably doubted and unfairly defamed.

Getting to Know Ziad Fazah

Although Ziad does not seek the spotlight he doesn't hide from it either and, looking here and there, I was able to find his email address. After corresponding briefly through emails he and I started talking on the phone. I too was skeptical and spoke to him in English, Spanish, Portuguese and even a little in Mandarin Chinese. Ziad responded confidently in every one of these languages. When my wife and I visited Brazil last year, he graciously entertained us at his home in Rio de Janeiro and showed us his scrapbook of magazine and newspaper articles that have been written about him. Since there have been so many things said about him, for good and bad, I decided that it might be good for me write what I know from personal experience. To that end, I called him on the telephone today to make sure I had my facts straight and, with his permission, have decided to write this post.

What Kind of a Name is Ziad Fazah?

Ziad's parents were Lebanese, though his father was born in Colombia. In 1953 Ziad's father had moved his family to [Liberia](#), for work reasons, when Ziad made the newest addition to their family. A few months later the Fazahs moved to Lebanon where Ziad was raised. Arabic was the language at home but in school he was also taught French and English. Many Armenian families were living in Lebanon at the time and Ziad became curious enough to learn their language. At age fourteen he decided to learn "all of the world's languages" and started buying cassette courses and books to first learn German and then every other major language of the world. Lebanon was a fairly peaceful and cosmopolitan place back then so he was able to practice speaking the vast majority of the languages that he was studying. Although you will find written that he speaks 56, 57 or 58 languages, he himself gave me the list below which includes 59 languages/dialects:

[Albanian](#), [Amharic](#), [Arabic](#), [Armenian](#), [Azeri](#), [Bengali](#), [Bulgarian](#), [Burmese](#), [Cambodian](#), [Cantonese](#), [Czech](#), [Cypriot](#), [Danish](#), [Dutch](#), [Dzongkha](#), [English](#), [Fijian](#), [Finnish](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Greek](#), [Hebrew](#), [Hindi](#), [Hungarian](#), [Icelandic](#), [Indonesian](#), [Italian](#), [Japanese](#), [Korean](#), [Kyrgyz](#), [Lao](#), [Malagasy](#), [Malay](#), [Maltese](#), [Mandarin](#), [Mongolian](#), [Nepali](#), [Norwegian](#), [Papiamentu](#), [Pashto](#), [Persian](#), [Polish](#), [Portuguese](#), [Romanian](#), [Russian](#), [Serbo-Croatian](#), [Singapore Colloquial](#), [English](#), [Sinhalese](#), [Spanish](#), [Swahili](#), [Swedish](#), [Tajik](#), [Thai](#), [Tibetan](#), [Turkish](#), [Urdu](#), [Uzbek](#), [Vietnamese](#) and [Wu Chinese](#).

Fleeing to Brazil from Lebanon

He studied philology for four years at the American University at Beirut and had plans to become an interpreter for the UN. Fate had other plans. Lebanon became a scary place so, like thousands of other Lebanese people, the entire Fazah family immigrated to Brazil. Ironically, Portuguese wasn't one of the languages that Ziad had studied at that time. This is somewhat surprising since Ziad's Portuguese now sounds absolutely native. Soon after settling in Brazil, Ziad started offering his services as a tutor and has taught many languages to many people. His students are usually young people trying to learn English in preparation for studying in the USA, Australia or Great Britain but he also finds himself teaching languages like Arabic, Farsi, French, German and Mandarin Chinese.

Ziad Fazah's Methodology

Ziad says that everyone should build up his or her own methodology but that there are three basic steps to follow that he has used and finds very effective.

1. Listen to the target language for at least half an hour a day. In a week you should be very familiar with the sound system of the language.
2. Study the language (written form) for another half an hour a day. In two weeks you should have a good grasp on it.
3. Ziad wanted me to emphasize this step. Shadow or recite the language out loud for at least fifteen minutes a day. What you recite isn't nearly as important as doing it out loud for at least fifteen minutes a day.

According to Ziad, if you follow these steps, you will be speaking the language well in three to six months, depending on the language and the capabilities of the learner. These steps seem remarkably similar to [Dr. Alexander Arguelles](#)' who is also an accomplished self taught language learner. The remarkable thing is that Dr. Arguelles and Mr. Fazah came to similar conclusions independently through personal study.