“Does Rosetta Stone Work”?

by Gillian Lord

The Rosetta Stone program proclaims itself to be the “fastest way to learn a language… guaranteed,” although many language educators laugh off these seemingly ridiculous claims. We of course know that there is no ‘fast’ way to learn a language and that there are certainly no guarantees when it comes to teaching or learning languages. Nonetheless, as schools are increasingly asked to cut costs, some are tempted by Rosetta Stone’s powerful marketing assertions, and stories of the Rosetta Stone program replacing faculty are, unfortunately, emerging. It is surprising, then, that there is virtually no empirical evidence to support or refute the claims made by Rosetta Stone. To that end, this presentation provides an objective, data-based assessment of the Rosetta Stone Spanish program and its potential to enhance or even replace classroom-based language instruction. I explore both the pedagogical and the empirical perspectives to evaluate the program's strengths and weaknesses as a language-teaching tool.