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# 3. Not as ‘Foreign’ as You Think

## Creating Bridges of Understanding across Languages

*Martin Maiden, Chiara Cappellaro  
and Aditi Lahiri*

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We’re more multilingual than we think

One of the authors of this chapter grew up in the south of England in the 1960s. Just about the only language he could ever hear spoken was the one he, too, spoke all the time — English. Foreign languages were just that, ‘foreign’. They were ‘foreign’ in the sense that they were spoken by ‘foreigners’, people who were not British and lived outside Britain. You heard foreign languages if you went abroad, say, on holiday. Those languages were also ‘foreign’ in the sense that they all seemed quite alien, impossible to understand, at best strange speech-sounds to which no meaning could be attached. Indeed, so difficult and strange were they that some of them, such as French or German, were formidable subjects on the school timetable, alongside, for example, maths or biology. Another of the authors grew up in the north-east of Italy, speaking Italian. But Italian was not the only language she heard. Older members of her family spoke a different language, Friulian, the traditional heritage language of the region, and one that was fairly remote from Italian. She understood it, but nobody ever expected her to speak it. And if she went a few kilometres from her native town, she could hear yet another, far more different, language, Slovenian — today the national language of the Republic of Slovenia, which shares a border with Italy.

The third author grew up in Kolkata (India), where it was normal to hear and actively speak two or three languages, such as Bengali, Hindi and English.

Now the real 'oddity' here is the author who grew up in England. Most human beings who have ever lived have grown up in a world where 'other' languages are not 'foreign' languages, where it is simply normal to hear other languages spoken around you — and normal to understand and speak some of those languages. There is a widespread tendency to assume, by the way, that there is a natural, one-to-one match between a country and a language. In fact, this is true only in the rarest of cases (Iceland might be an example, where the entire native population speaks Icelandic — but is nowadays almost entirely competent in a foreign language, namely English). Virtually all national states are multilingual. India, for example, is estimated to have over 700 languages; even the United Kingdom, despite the predominance of English, nowadays also has, in addition to languages which are native to Britain, such as Welsh, Scots Gaelic, or Ulster Scots, numerous immigrant languages such as Bengali, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi or Romanian — yet in the United Kingdom it has often been possible to be confined to an entirely English-speaking world, in which other languages may seem to be bizarre intrusions from outside.

Those of us who have grown up in this way are in fact missing a golden opportunity for contact with another language and possibly with another culture, and often we do not realize that we are much closer to that apparently impenetrable other language than we think. Indeed, if one has grown up in a 'monoglot' world (i.e. one where only one language is used), exposure to other languages — actually the normal situation for most human beings — can even become awkward, or uncomfortable, or downright threatening. At its worst, exposure to multilingualism can be perceived as menacing and make members of monoglot societies feel isolated and hostile towards speakers of those other languages. Such feelings of alienation can be alleviated if societies are aware that 'foreign' languages are not inaccessible barriers to comprehension, that many doors into other languages are already open, and that what seems alien may be much more familiar than might at first appear. The impression of alienation can turn into something much worse: real alienation and exclusion. To the extent that we do not know some language, we are indeed 'locked out' of the societies and

the cultures that express themselves through that language, indeed we might very well claim that people have a *right* to be introduced to other languages, and that any properly functioning education system has a *duty* to assist children to gain access to those languages. There is a crudely statistical way of representing this fact, taking as an example the place of English and German in Europe: at a conservative estimate there are in Europe 70 million native speakers of English and about 95 million native speakers of German. It follows that if you speak *both* languages you have the potential to understand and/or communicate directly with 165 million people on our continent; if you only speak English you have less than half that capacity. The monoglot is simply less 'free', less 'powerful', than the person who has even a small command of another language. For centuries, whole lives are and have been lived in, for instance, German (or countless other languages), with the entire range of human activities — cultural, routine, commercial — conducted in German. If we have no access to the language, then the only way that we can ever have access to the world expressed in it is through the kind indulgence of German-speakers (for example) who have taken the trouble to learn English. We are reduced to mere dependency on the linguistic skill of others.

We can create solutions to this kind of disadvantage, and we can do this particularly via children of school age who are naturally endowed with the kind of linguistic flexibility which, if properly cultivated, can make them veritable linguistic 'acrobats', able to jump with fluent ease from one language to another. It is *never* too late to learn a foreign language, even in late old age, but our children are those best equipped to do it, and our schools have a responsibility to show that bridges into other languages can be built in ways that are perhaps not expected. A very useful starting point is to make children realize that they may already be able to *understand* more of a foreign language than they suspect, and that they can build on that understanding to understand — and eventually to express — even more.

### Finding Long-Lost Relatives

All human beings have relatives. Some may be close, like sisters, brothers, mothers or fathers. Others can be more distant, such as cousins, or cousins once removed, or any number of times removed. Sometimes,

even distant relatives look familiar simply because they have a common ancestor with us, and it can be a pleasant surprise to discover that we have

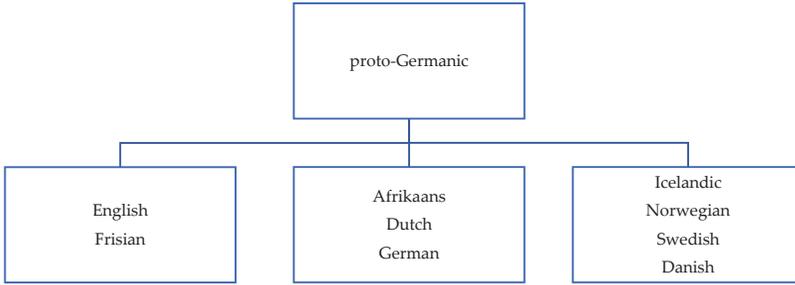


Fig. 1 Félix Gallet, 'Arbre généalogique des langues mortes et vivantes [...] ('Genealogical tree of dead and living languages [...]') (Paris, c. 1800). Bibliothèque nationale de France. Public Domain, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8546015>

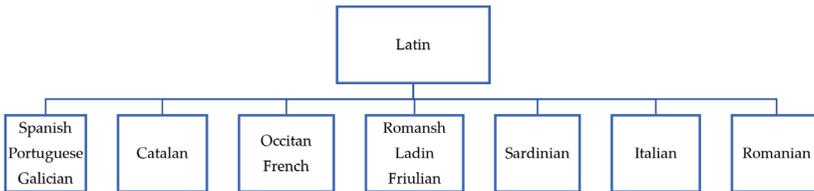
something in common with them. Languages are not so very different, and genetic relationships across languages — as with families — have often been visualized as trees (for one of the first examples of such an idealization, see Fig. 1, produced in France around 1800, and for a more schematic representation see Chapter 8 in this volume).

Other languages that are apparently 'foreign' to us may turn out to have more in common with a language we already speak than we ever suspected. They may actually contain hidden links that we can use to create bridges between our own language and them. They may turn out to be less 'foreign' after all.

If you are British, you probably think of Dutch, German, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish or Icelandic as truly 'foreign' languages. One of these, German, used to be widely taught as a 'foreign language' in British schools. It is surprising that it no longer is so commonly studied, because, as we have seen, it has a good claim to being the 'biggest' language in Europe, having the largest number of native speakers. If one's starting point is English, German certainly sounds foreign. Yet English and German, and all the other languages mentioned above (plus numerous, lesser-known, languages such as Frisian, or Faroese, or Afrikaans) all have a common *ancestor* language, labelled 'proto-Germanic'. And these languages are related to other 'families' of languages such as 'Romance languages' (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Romanian and others) or 'Slavonic languages' (e.g., Russian, Polish, Bulgarian) or 'Indo-Aryan languages' (e.g., Punjabi, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali). These families in turn have a common ancestor, called 'proto-Indo-European', spoken five to six thousand years ago in an area of Europe around Ukraine and neighbouring regions in the Caucasus and southern Russia. Speakers of this language and their descendants gradually spread out over large areas of northern Europe. As these communities drifted apart, their speech gradually changed, so that over the centuries there emerged different languages, and speakers of one would have found it increasingly difficult to understand the speech of the other. In fact, it is estimated that just under half of the modern population of the earth speaks an 'Indo-European' language. Exactly how closely related different languages are to each other is often unclear and controversial, but the relationship for the modern Germanic family goes something like this:



There is a similar story for another group of Indo-European languages widely spoken in Europe, the so-called *Romance* languages, which get their name because they all descend from the Latin spoken by ordinary people in the *Roman* Empire, nearly two thousand years ago. All of Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French, Italian, Romanian and many other languages that are probably less well-known (such as Occitan, Romansh, Sardinian, Ladin, Friulian), have a common origin in Latin. Their relationship is something like this:



If we take some basic everyday notions, for example names of body parts, the ‘family’ resemblance between these languages becomes apparent pretty fast (especially if we see the words in writing, but also when we hear them spoken). In each case, the resemblance is a consequence of these languages having inherited words from a common ancestor:

Table 1 Germanic languages

English	Dutch	German	Icelandic	Norwegian	Swedish	Danish
<i>hand</i>	<i>hand</i>	<i>Hand</i>	<i>hönd</i>	<i>hånd</i>	<i>hand</i>	<i>hånd</i>
<i>finger</i>	<i>vinger</i>	<i>Finger</i>	<i>finger</i>	<i>finger</i>	<i>finger</i>	<i>finger</i>
<i>nail</i>	<i>nagel</i>	<i>Nagel</i>	<i>nagli</i>	<i>negl</i>	<i>nagel</i>	<i>negl</i>
<i>leg</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>Bein</i>	<i>fótur</i>	<i>bein</i>	<i>ben</i>	<i>ben</i>
<i>knee</i>	<i>knie</i>	<i>Knie</i>	<i>hné</i>	<i>kne</i>	<i>knä</i>	<i>knæ</i>
<i>foot</i>	<i>voet</i>	<i>Fuß</i>	<i>fótur</i>	<i>fot</i>	<i>fot</i>	<i>fod</i>
<i>tooth</i>	<i>tand</i>	<i>Zahn</i>	<i>tönn</i>	<i>tann</i>	<i>tand</i>	<i>tand</i>
<i>eye</i>	<i>oog</i>	<i>Auge</i>	<i>auga</i>	<i>øye</i>	<i>öga</i>	<i>øje</i>

Table 2 Romance languages

Portuguese	Spanish	Catalan	French	Italian	Romanian	
<i>mão</i>	<i>mano</i>	<i>má</i>	<i>main</i>	<i>mano</i>	<i>mână</i>	hand
<i>dedo</i>	<i>dedo</i>	<i>dit</i>	<i>doigt</i>	<i>dito</i>	<i>deget</i>	finger
<i>unha</i>	<i>uña</i>	<i>ungla</i>	<i>ongle</i>	<i>unghia</i>	<i>unghie</i>	nail
<i>perna</i>	<i>pierna</i>	<i>cama</i>	<i>jambe</i>	<i>gamba</i>	<i>picior</i>	leg
<i>joelho</i>	<i>rodilla</i>	<i>genoll</i>	<i>genou</i>	<i>ginocchio</i>	<i>genunchi</i>	knee
<i>pé</i>	<i>pie</i>	<i>peu</i>	<i>ped</i>	<i>piede</i>	<i>picior</i>	foot
<i>dente</i>	<i>diente</i>	<i>dent</i>	<i>dent</i>	<i>dente</i>	<i>dinte</i>	tooth
<i>olho</i>	<i>ojo</i>	<i>ull</i>	<i>œil</i>	<i>occhio</i>	<i>ochi</i>	eye

It is clear, of course, that not all the languages listed have always inherited the same word. With the word for 'leg' in Portuguese and Spanish, versus the word in Catalan, French and Italian, versus the Romanian word, we are clearly dealing with a different word altogether. The same is true of the word for 'leg' in English versus Icelandic versus the other Germanic languages. In such cases we simply have to make the effort to learn the word and its meaning. But some of the differences between languages are actually *predictable*, if one knows certain 'tricks'.

## Some ‘Detective’ Tricks: How Different Sounds May Hide the Same Word

In the history of languages, what was originally the same word can split into different forms which may end up losing their apparent connection. That can come about because sounds change, not randomly but in quite regular and systematic ways. This makes it possible for the learner to ‘play detective’, to realize that replacing a sound in one language with a sound in another may suddenly make an unfamiliar word familiar. Note the German word for ‘tooth’ in Table 1. Where English (and all the other sister languages) has ‘t’, German has ‘z’ (pronounced ‘ts’). This pattern of difference occurs again and again across the two languages. There are other patterns too, such as English ‘th’ tending to correspond to German ‘d’, or English ‘d’ tending to correspond to German ‘t’. These sound resemblances do not always work, and the details are rather more complex than we have made them appear here, but it is striking how often they do work. Given this knowledge, it is not difficult to guess the meaning of the following German words:

- *zwei* (a number); *zehn* (a number); *Zunge* (a part of the body); *Herz* (a part of the body); *sitzen* (opposite of ‘stand’); *Zweig* (part of a tree).
- *drei* (a number); *Ding* (an object); *dünn* (physical appearance); *dick* (opposite of *dünn*); *danke* (what you say when someone gives you something); *denken* (verb for a mental activity).
- *tief* (an adjective that might be used when talking about water); *trinken* (something you might do with water); *Tropfen* (also involves water); *tot* (the opposite of alive); *Tür* (an entrance); *rot* (a colour).

To take some similar examples from Romance languages, it is very often the case that words that in Italian have ‘p’, ‘t’, ‘c’ (where ‘c’ is pronounced ‘k’) between two vowels have ‘b’, ‘d’, and ‘g’ in Spanish. We see an example of this in Table 2 (Italian *dito* ‘finger’ versus Spanish *dedo*). So, if we know Italian *sapere* ‘know’, *potere* ‘be able’, *dico* ‘I say’ we can easily recognize the meanings of Spanish *saber*, *poder*, or *digo* (and vice versa). Another example of a systematic correspondence across languages applies to certain consonants followed by *l*: French *clé* ‘key’, Spanish *llave*

'key', Italian *chiave* 'key'. Given this, if one knows, say, French *pleuvoir* 'rain', *plein* 'full', *flamme* 'flame', one can easily recognize the meaning of Spanish *llover*, *lleno*, *llama* and Italian *piovere*, *pieno*, *fiamma*.

### Hidden Resemblances between Unrelated Languages

It is possible that all human languages are ultimately related, and that they descend from one common ancestor language. This question is much argued over by linguists, but what is certain is that even if all languages are related, many of them are so distant from each other now that the kind of 'family resemblances' we mentioned earlier are lost. While we know that languages such as English and German, French and Portuguese, Russian and Czech, Welsh and Irish, Hindi and Bengali, Greek or Albanian, all descend from a common Indo-European ancestor language, there are other major language 'families' which are not related to Indo-European or to each other. Japanese, for example, is not obviously related to any other language, Arabic and Hebrew are related to each other and to a number of other languages of western Asia and northern Africa, but these groups are not obviously connected with Indo-European, or with Japanese, or with anything else — and so forth.

One might think that this means that if we speak a language of a different 'family', we do not have the kind of 'foot in the door' that we have been illustrating for more closely related groups of languages. This is not necessarily true, although the 'foot in the door' may be of a different kind, because when speakers of different languages come into contact, they also tend to *converge* linguistically. In effect, those people 'create bridges' between languages by 'borrowing' words (and some grammatical structures) from one language into another. This is especially true when speakers of one language bring to speakers of another language the names for things which simply do not exist in the culture of the latter group, such as foodstuffs or beverages originally peculiar to a particular part of the world which have then become spread by trade and other forms of contact across the world. We cannot go into the history of such terms here (although they are often fascinating stories), but the kind of effects we are talking about can be seen, for example, across German and Swedish, Spanish and Romanian, Russian and Bulgarian, modern Arabic or Japanese, etc. These are all

Table 3 Borrowing

German	Swedish	Spanish	Romanian	Russian	Bulgarian	Arabic	Japanese
Tomate	tomat	tomate	roşie	помидор (pomidor)	домат (domat)	طماطة (tamāta)	トマト (to ma to)
Tee	te	té	ceai	чай (chai)	чай (chai)	شاي (shay)	お茶 (o cha)
Schokolade	choklad	chocolate	ciocolată	шоколад (shokolad)	шоколад (shokolad)	شوكولاتة (shukulata)	チョコレート (cho ko rē to)
Avocado	avokado	aguacate	avocado	авокадо (avokado)	авокадо (avokado)	أفوكاتو (afukatu)	アボカド (a bo ka do)
Kartoffel	potatis	patata	cartof	картошка (kartoshka)	картоф (kartof)	بطاطس (batatis)	じゃがいも (ja ga i mo)
Kaffee	kaffe	café	cafea	кофе (kofe)	кафе (kafe)	قهوة (qahwa)	コーヒー (kō hī)

clearly different languages that are more, or less, closely related (Arabic and Japanese are not related to any of the other languages listed, for example), but all or some of them often share what is recognizably the 'same word' for certain culturally diffused objects and concepts. Thus Table 3:

If your native language is English and you read the table from left to right, you can probably guess the meanings already from the first column (which happens to be German); in the case of the fifth row, you may have to wait until the second and third columns (Swedish and Spanish) to discern the meaning 'potato'. Some of the words may not be recognizable to English-speakers, but we will notice that they are shared across a number of languages which are not necessarily related or directly in contact with each other (for example, words beginning 'kart-' for 'potato'), or the Romanian, Russian, Bulgarian, Arabic and Japanese words for 'tea', all of which share a common origin. Compare also the now old-fashioned English 'a cup of *cha*', of the same origin. Ultimately, in fact, both the 'tea' type and the 'cha' type share a common origin, and reflect original dialectal variants of the same word in Chinese: for more about this point, see Dahl (2005). Sometimes, of course, there really are 'local' words with no obvious point of contact with other languages, such as the Japanese word for 'potato', or the Romanian for 'tomato'. It is worth saying that even here we can create paths to understanding; for example, the Romanian word *roşie* means 'red', so in the context of talking about vegetables you might still be able to guess that it means 'tomato' (and from there you might guess that a vegetable called a *vânătă* — literally, a 'purple' — is an 'aubergine!'). And sometimes, just a little knowledge of the sound system of the language may still help us to recognize old friends. Arabic does not have the sound 'p', and tends to replace it in foreign words with 'b' (which makes *batatis* 'potato' becomes a bit more familiar): so which European capital city is Arabic 'Baris'? Japanese systematically replaces 'f' with 'h' before the vowel sound 'i', so we can tell that *kōhī* is borrowed from English *coffee*. Japanese does not have the sound 'l', and usually replaces 'l' before a consonant in foreign words with 'ru'. Now that we know that, what is a フィルム (pronounced *hirumu*)?<sup>1</sup> Finally, the more languages one knows, the easier it can get to spot 'familiar faces': Russian ПОМИДОР

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1 A 'film'.

(pomidor) ‘tomato’ looks quite isolated on our list, but it is not originally a Russian word, and if we were to include Italian in the list we would immediately recognize a loanword from the Italian *pomodoro* ‘tomatoes’ (more commonly *pomodori* in modern Italian), which literally means ‘fruits (*pomi*) of (*d’*) gold (*oro*)’.

Sometimes, languages borrow in more subtle ways, so that at first sight the resemblance is not obvious. What can happen is that word-like expressions from one language can be translated into another: if you know the meaning of the words that make up the expression, you may suddenly be able to recognize the meaning from your knowledge of another language in such cases of ‘loan translation’ (also known as ‘calquing’) (see previous page).

Table 4 Calques

Spanish	French	Italian	Romanian	Dutch	German	Swedish
<i>luna de miel</i>	<i>lune de miel</i>	<i>luna di miele</i>	<i>lună de miere</i>	—	—	—
<i>gratacielos</i>	<i>gratte-ciel</i>	<i>gratta-cielo</i>	<i>zgârie-nori</i>	<i>wolken-krabber</i>	<i>Wolken-kratzer</i>	<i>skyskrapa</i>
<i>ferrocarril</i>	<i>chemin de fer</i>	<i>ferrovia</i>	<i>cale ferată</i>	<i>spoorveg</i>	<i>Eisenbahn</i>	<i>järnväg</i>
OVNI	OVNI	—	OZN	—	—	—

To work out what these mean, one needs to have already learnt the following words:

<i>luna/lune/lună</i> = moon; <i>de/di</i> = of; <i>miel/miele/miere</i> = honey
<i>grata/gratte/gratta</i> , <i>zgârie</i> , <i>skrapa</i> = scrape; <i>krabber/Kratzer</i> = scraper; <i>ciel(o)</i> = sky; <i>Wolken</i> , <i>nori</i> = clouds
<i>ferro/fer</i> = iron; <i>ferată</i> = made of iron; <i>Eisen/järn</i> = iron; <i>carril</i> , <i>spoor</i> , <i>Bahn</i> = track; <i>chemin</i> , <i>cale</i> , <i>via</i> , <i>veg</i> , <i>väg</i> = way, road, track
O = <i>objeto / objet / oggetto / obiect</i> = object; N = <i>no / non</i> = not, un-; N = <i>neidentificat</i> unidentified; I = <i>identificado / identifié / identificato</i> = identified; V = <i>volador / volant</i> , Z = <i>zburător</i> = flying

Sometimes *parts* of words may look very different across languages, but they may occur over and over again in such a way that we can readily

recognize them once we know they are equivalent. Take, for example, the word for 'electricity' in the following European languages:

Table 5 The word for 'electricity' across  
some European languages

<b>Portuguese</b>	<b>Spanish</b>	<b>Catalan</b>	<b>French</b>
<i>electricidade</i>	<i>electricidad</i>	<i>electricitat</i>	<i>électricité</i>
<b>Italian</b>	<b>Romanian</b>	<b>Dutch</b>	<b>German</b>
<i>elettricit�</i>	<i>electricitate</i>	<i>elektriciteit</i>	<i>Elektrizit�t</i>

Given this pattern, we will have no trouble in recognizing — indeed we should actually be able to create — some words: what are Portuguese *sociedade*, French *soci t *, Italian *societ *, Romanian *societate*? With this knowledge, you can actually create on your own the Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, French, Italian, Romanian, Dutch and German words for 'university', and you can probably make a useful guess about the form of many other words whose English equivalent ends in *-ty*.

Another lesson that some of the examples in Table 3 have to teach us is about *writing*. A foreign language will appear more foreign when the writing system is unfamiliar. French and German appear to English speakers to be more easily accessible than Greek or Russian, simply because the visual symbols are unlike one's own. But most of the world's writing systems represent speech sounds, so that if we can hear what the written form represents, then we may be able to recognize a familiar term. If we see the Russian, Bulgarian or Arabic words for 'chocolate' written down, and we cannot read the alphabets, we have no idea what they mean, but if we heard them spoken we might recognize them.

Actually, one's native orthography may also be relatively opaque — think of the unpredictable pronunciations of 'ough' in English 'tough', 'bough', 'through' and 'cough' — but we tend to forget this when faced with a 'frightening' foreign script. But any writing system can be put to use to write any language. Arabic is generally written in the Arabic alphabet, yet Maltese (actually a dialect of Arabic) is written using the Latin alphabet, while the Arabic alphabet is used to write Persian, which is unrelated to Arabic. To tell the truth, no language is necessarily any more easy or difficult than any other, either in its sound system or in its

orthography. So even making the effort merely to learn a new writing system is a creative tool for insight into another language.

There is more. Sometimes, knowing about orthography can come in handy for more sophisticated linguistic ‘detective work’. Underlying linguistic contrasts as well as the orthography provide cues to different loan adaptation preferences. The letter <t> is not articulated in the same way in English and Portuguese and this difference is captured by Bengali speakers who have two different <t> sounds — a front ‘dental’ [t̪] <ত> (as in French) and one pronounced further back in the mouth, a ‘retroflex’ [ɖ] <ট>, closer to that of the English sound.<sup>2</sup> This is manifested in the orthography when adapting the loans. The words *taxi* and *towel* are both borrowed in Bengali; although both words are written in the Latinized orthography with the letter <t>, they differ in the Bengali script. The reason for the difference in spelling is due to the original pronunciations of the loanwords: *taxi* is borrowed with the back consonant more appropriate to the alveolar <t> sound in English, while *towel* is from Portuguese with a more fronted dental ‘t’. Thus, the adaptations are dependent on the original pronunciations and the Bengali writing system reflects the difference: words borrowed from English like *taxi* are written with a retroflex ট্যাক্সি, while the Portuguese *toalha* is written with the front dental <t> as তোয়ালে.

## The Climb towards Understanding

People very often view the process of learning a language as being like climbing a mountain. You cannot say that you have ‘climbed Everest’ until you have actually reached the top. But what is the ‘top’ in understanding (and in speaking) another language? One could say that the ‘summit’ had been reached when you were as good doing those things as a native speaker of the language, when you understand not only the ‘gist’ of what was being said, but immediately grasp every last nuance of what a native speaker was saying. This is a really excellent aim to have, but very few people ever make it all the way, and it is undoubtedly hard work,

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2 Sounds are represented in writing by using the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols standardized by the International Phonetic Association. Further information and a full IPA chart can be found at <http://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/content/ipa-chart>

requiring a lot of time spent with native speakers, and true discipline and attention not only to vocabulary and pronunciation but, of course, to grammatical structure as well. In fact, even native speakers of a language often stumble, failing to create understanding between themselves and others. Actually, none of us understand, or speak, a language perfectly. Yet, everyone possesses the capacity to get somewhere in understanding a foreign language and, more often than we realize, the first steps are already carved out for us, because there may be hidden and helpful similarities between languages that we know and others that we don't know. Young people, in particular, are capable of remarkable plasticity and flexibility in acquiring other languages, well into their teens, and the kind of 'footholds' in new languages that we have pointed out can act as encouragement to embark on learning other languages at school.

Our thinking here is certainly not original, and there exist sophisticated and carefully worked models for the general approach we indicate, drawing on the discovery of patterns of 'family relationship' between languages as a creative means of gaining understanding of multiple foreign languages. An impressive model of this kind is the so-called 'Seven Sieves' series of manuals (aimed at adults rather than schoolchildren, however), which take Germanic languages (e.g. Hufeisen and Marx 2014) or Romance languages (McCann et al. 2003; Peris et al. 2005) and teach learners through a series of stages (e.g. obviously cognate words, sound and orthographical correspondences, techniques of word-formation) how the apparently unfamiliar can be transformed into the familiar.

Whatever means they use to do it, it is our belief that those shaping policy in foreign language learning in our schools should be trying to stimulate interest in and enthusiasm for foreign languages by showing how students can use what they already know, their capacity to exploit patterns of correspondence, to create bridges of understanding into other languages.

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