

Parrot Time

The Thinking of Speaking

Issue #14 March / April 2015

Are Language Classes Worth the Money?

Guest writer **Olly Richards** shares his views

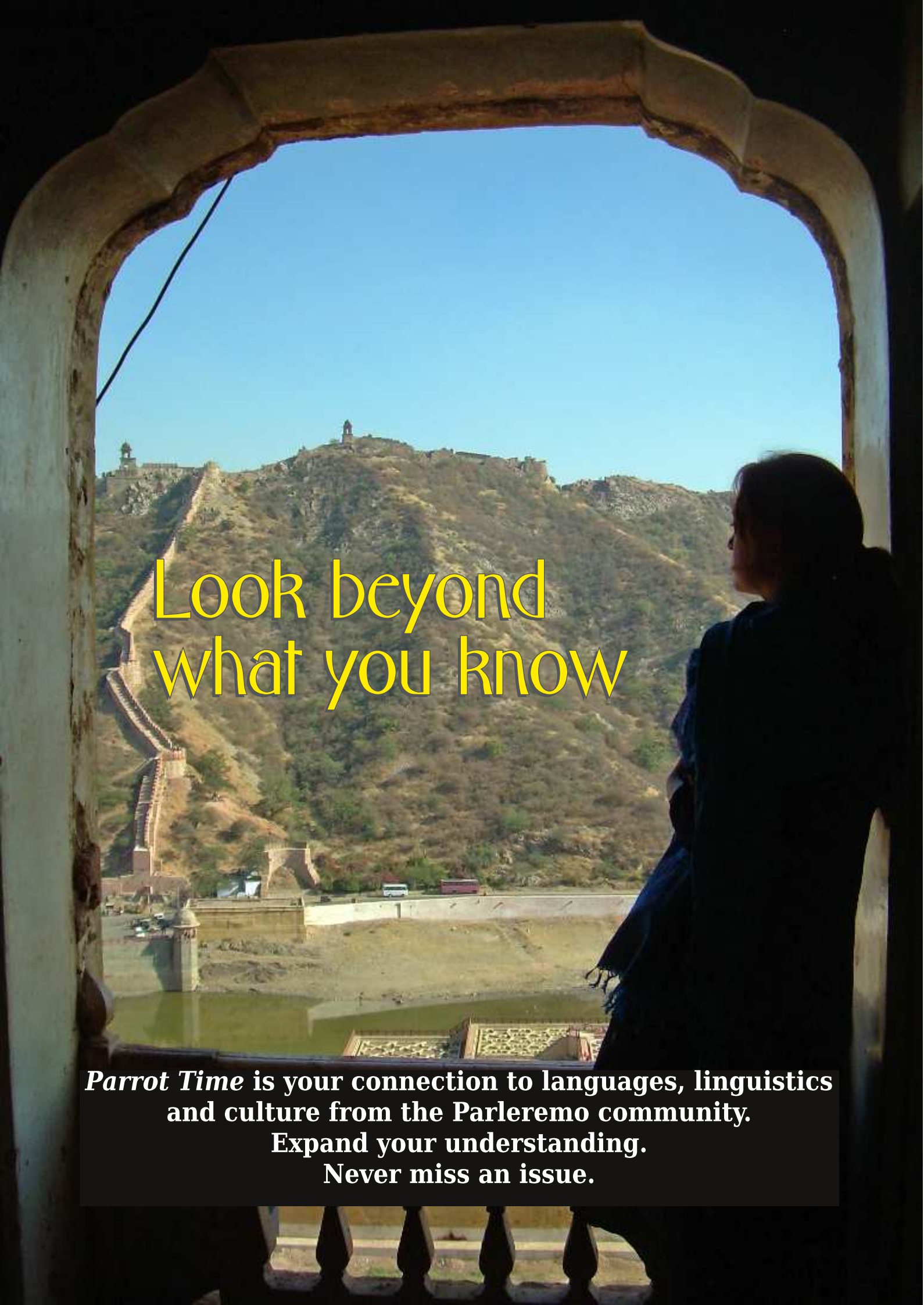
Chatting in Languages Online - Voice Chats

Second part of our article on using online chats for learning

Why English is different than any other language

Guest author **Agnieszka Karch** writes about learning languages and English

DECEBALUS REX
DRAGAN FECIT

A woman in a blue sari is seen from the side, looking out from an arched window. The view outside shows a hillside with a fort on top, a long wall leading up the hill, and a dry well in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

Look beyond
what you know

***Parrot Time* is your connection to languages, linguistics
and culture from the Parleremo community.
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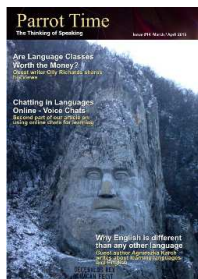
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Cover: The rock sculpture of Decebalus is a 40m high carving in rock of the face of Decebalus, the last king of Dacia, who fought against the Roman emperors Domitian and Trajan to preserve the independence of his country, modern Romania.

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Parlez-vous français?

*Learn a language,
Make friends,
Have fun!*

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Breaking with Tradition

When we study a language and a culture, we learn about new customs and traditions. These can be very strange but also very interesting.

For example, every year in Buñol, Spain, there is “La Tomatina”, which is a tomato throwing festival.

Meanwhile, each May in Gloucester, England, an enormous wheel of Double Gloucester cheese is rolled down a hill while people try to race it to the bottom.

In Catalan homes at the Feast of the Immaculate Conception every December, the little Tió de Nadal (“Christmas Log”) is brought out. It is a log with legs, a face, and a little red hat, and kids leave out food out for it each night, hoping it will poop out presents.

Over time, new traditions are born and old ones die. Sometimes, losing them is sad, but sometimes it is also required to move on to better times.

The tribes in the Nilgiri Hills of India have several traditional trades, such as pottery and leather working, dating back thousands of years. However, in order to survive better in the modern world, they have been learning new trades. If they don’t, their people and language may not survive. You can read about them in “The Tribes of Tamil-Kannada” in this issue.

We have traditions with learning languages as well. Probably the oldest is to take classes to reach our fluency goals. But is that really the best way any more? Guest author Olly Richards asks the question and gives us his views in “Are You Wasting Your Money on Language Classes?”


And as we change these traditions, we must make new ones. We can find new ways of learning, like using internet resources to talk with people around the world in many languages using voice chats. Be sure to learn about that in our article “Chatting in Languages Online - Voice Chats”.

Traditions are good, and a vital part of our lives, but sometimes, we must break with our traditions to find a path to the future.



Erik Zidowecki

ERIK ZIDOWECKI
EDITOR IN CHIEF

An anime-style illustration of a classroom. A female teacher with short purple hair stands at the front near a green chalkboard. She is wearing a red and white outfit. Several students are seated at wooden desks, facing the teacher. The room has fluorescent lights on the ceiling and a speaker. The text is overlaid on the scene.

Te voy a enseñar
una lengua

¿Está desperdiciando
su dinero en las
clases de idiomas?



Are you wasting your money

on language classes?

by Olly Richards

This article was published by Olly Richards in his blog "I Will Teach You a Language" in January, 2015 and is reprinted with his permission. The original post can be found here: <http://www.iwillteachyoualanguage.com/wasting-money-on-language-classes/>

If you want to learn a new language, you've probably thought about taking language classes.

But is this the best way to go? Are language classes really **worthy of your hard-earned cash?**

In an industry said to be worth around US\$200 billion, it's a question that we're entitled to ask, and I'm going to explore it here.

You may disagree with what I have to say, and that's fine. But please read to the end of the article in order to hear my argument in full.

Let's get into it.

Do language classes help?

Meet Rebecca. She's learning Spanish.

Olly, do you think taking classes in a language helps?

Of course classes can help. Lots of things help you to learn a language. Language classes, textbooks, visiting the country, making friends with native speakers...they all help.

Great! So I made the right decision signing up for this Spanish class then!

Not so fast! I said classes can help. I didn't say you should necessarily sign up.

OK, now I'm confused. But you just said it was good! The school I found is well-known and they hire professional teachers. I'll learn Spanish in no time!

Rebecca's just fallen into the same trap that thousands of language learners around the world fall into every day.

I call it the "pay a professional" trap.

And it has to stop.

Are You Wasting Your Money on Language Classes?

What do you really want?

A trap? Don't be ridiculous! I suppose you think you've got a better method?

Look, what I'm going to take issue with right away is the **foregone conclusion** that paying for "professional language tuition" is a good thing.

Now, in certain conditions, **language tuition can indeed be a great thing**, and if you find the right teacher it can be **life-changing**.

But it's a big "if".

Rebecca, you're going to class in order to learn Spanish. So let me ask you this – why not just learn with a textbook at home? I'm not saying you should, but just humour me.

Because textbooks are boring. Taking a class will make me study and I'll make much more progress!

Right. So your problem is that you're **not motivated enough** to learn by yourself?

No! I am motivated!

Ok, so I ask you again: Why not just learn with a textbook? What are you **paying money** for in the classroom that you **couldn't get on your own**?

Well, for one thing, in the lesson I'll get to speak Spanish with a native speaker! You can't get that from a textbook. That's why taking classes is so good!

How many students are there in the class? And how much of the time are you talking to your teacher?

Well, there are 10 of us in the class, and we spend lots of time speaking in groups. So it's great – I'm speaking lots of Spanish during the class!

Yes, I see. And how good is the other students' Spanish?

Well, we're all beginners, so of course our Spanish is not very good yet! We all make quite a few mistakes!

So then, how much time are you **actually speaking with a native Spanish speaker in class**?



Hmm. Well, not much, I guess. And to be honest, the teacher actually explains things in English half the time. Look, I know I could – I should – probably study by myself. It's just much better to join this Spanish class. It's near my house, and quite convenient to get to.

All right. That makes sense. But since we've already established that you **don't spend any time speaking** in class with a native speaker, what exactly are you paying for? I mean, I'm guessing it's not cheap.

Sure, it's not cheap (actually, it costs a lot), but it means I do actually go, I do learn things each week, and I do go off and do the homework that the teacher gives me.

So taking classes is **a way to get started** basically? That's great, and well done for taking the plunge!

Knowledge or experience?

Ok, Olly, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that I could just do this by myself and don't need to pay for classes. But I'm OK with paying for classes. If I didn't take classes I wouldn't know what to do. It's better than just muddling along by myself and not getting anywhere.

I understand. You want to learn Spanish, but you **don't know how**. You want to take classes because you want some direction. And that's absolutely fine! I mean, language learning is nothing if not hard!

Yes, that's it. I'm really committed to learning to speak Spanish fluently, and I'm really not a talented language learner. That's why I'm investing in classes.

I love your ambition!

Now, forgive me, but I'm going to dig a little deeper on this point. Just now, you said that taking classes is an alternative to learning by yourself, one that you're happy to pay for because it's motivating and it makes you study.

But what you're implying is that **taking classes is just as beneficial as learning independently** (with the added benefit of accountability).

But I question if these two things are in fact equally beneficial, and therefore whether you're making an informed choice.

Let me ask you this. If you believe that you yourself are not a talented language learner, and you wouldn't be able to learn **on your own**, then what makes you so sure that you'll be successful **with your new teacher?**

She's a Spanish teacher, of course she'll help me learn Spanish!

Ok, but what makes you so sure?

Look, Olly, she's a native Spanish speaker and a qualified teacher. Are you really going to tell me that she's no good? You haven't even met her!

Let's be very clear here, because a lot depends on this point. **This is not about how good your teacher is**, or even where she's from. What this is really about is a question of **fundamental beliefs** about how languages are learnt or taught.

Specifically, I believe that a language cannot be **taught**, it can only be **learnt**. Consequently, however talented your teacher, however enlightening your classes, what I'm saying is that your dream of becoming fluent in Spanish will happen **as a result of your own initiative and self-directed learning**, not because of what you may be **taught**.

So, yes, language classes can help support you in your journey of becoming fluent, but they are absolutely **not a replacement or a solution** in and of themselves.

You're going to have to explain a bit more about why classes alone aren't going to work.

Of course. Let's get more specific.

Are You Wasting Your Money on Language Classes?

If you were to walk into a random Spanish class somewhere in the world, here's what you will probably see: The teacher will select a certain grammar point, teach you about it, and (hopefully) create some opportunities for you to practise it with others in the class. This is a generalisation, to be sure, but a pretty accurate one (I know, because I've observed hundreds of teachers in different countries).

In other words, by attending language classes, you will learn about some of the unique elements of Spanish. But the fact that the teacher has chosen to teach something does not mean that it's either useful or possible for you to learn it right now.

My point is that systematically learning about the Spanish language is not directly addressing the actual issue of **learning to speak** it.

You can go through all the textbooks under the sun, become a genuine expert in Spanish, **but not actually be able to speak it** naturally in conversation with a native speaker.

Learning the language and learning to use the language are not the same.

Now, compare this to an **organic process** of learning whereby you read books, listen to music, go out there and speak, **decide for yourself** what you need to learn next (based on evidence), and then **learn it**... and you hopefully start to see where I'm coming from in my critique of relying on language classes.

So, when I ask you whether your Spanish teacher can really help you, I'm not questioning **her ability to teach you all about Spanish** and how it works. I'm sure she's great at that.

She can choose appropriate exercises from the textbook, ask you to complete them, and correct them. She can also get you to try out your Spanish with your non-Spanish-speaking classmates.

But here's my question:

How exactly are your classes benefiting you that justifies the **high cost** and your **faith that you will learn** to speak Spanish by attending them?

You wouldn't expect to learn to speak fluently by using a textbook. So is it rational to expect the same outcome from your classes?

Whose responsibility is it anyway?

Right, I suppose I see what you're saying. You mean that there's more to learning Spanish than just following a textbook...whether you're learning by yourself or from a teacher. You're saying that you need to direct your own learning, and the only way of doing that is by actually using the language out in the real world – reading, speaking, whatever – and that a language class is not the right place to do that.

Exactly! And now we're getting into an area that is often misunderstood, and yet gets to the core of what I think it means to learn a language successfully or not.

Look, you can learn a language bit by bit over time, enjoy the process, have it as a hobby, and that's absolutely fine.

But I think what you really want is something different – and do tell me if I'm wrong.

I think what you really want is to learn to **speak Spanish**. Not just a passing appreciation or general understanding of the language. You want to be able to use it for real purposes and with real people. And you want to do it quickly – you don't want to still be a beginner one year from now.

For you to learn Spanish well, you need to take responsibility for the process yourself. You need to direct your own learning, explore the language by yourself, at your own speed, noticing things that interest you along the way.



You need to read, learn, listen, speak, all the time noticing what your strengths and weaknesses are and taking steps to fix them as you go.

I'm sure your teacher is great. But she's no substitute for **you**.

Abdicating responsibility for learning

This is quite difficult to say, but it needs to be said.

The biggest danger in taking language classes is that you're **abdicating responsibility for your learning**... whether you know it or not.

Earlier, I mentioned the “pay a professional” trap.

Well, here it is, right here.

With many things in life you can “pay a professional” for a **solution to your problems** (lawyers, cosmetic surgeons, interior designers). There's therefore a huge temptation for us language learners to think: “Time to get serious, I'll pay a professional to teach me Spanish for once and for all!”, especially if it's something we haven't done before or know how to do ourselves.

How you learn languages

What's the “language learning solution?”

As I said earlier, our common sense tells us that first we need to study the language, and this will then translate into an ability to speak it.

But it's not that simple. Your proficiency in a language is a result of practical knowledge acquired as a result of the experience of using

Are You Wasting Your Money on Language Classes?

it, not of being taught how it works in theory.

Again, languages cannot be taught. They can only be learnt.

Einstein understood this, which is why he said: “I never teach my students, only create the conditions in which they can learn.”

This is the fundamental difference between teaching and learning.

It doesn't matter one bit what is taught, only what is learnt.

So go! Attend your class, read your textbook. Learn about the language.

But you will never know how meaningful any of what you learn is until you've gone out there, tried it out for yourself and seen if you sink or swim.

And in order to establish all of this, you need to be putting yourself out there and speaking Spanish a lot. Not once or twice. Not from time to time, or whenever the opportunity arises.

A lot. And it's this necessity to be spending large amounts of time in the company of native speakers that is exceedingly difficult for the language class environment to replicate by itself.

What is a truly great teacher?

OK, Olly. I see what you're saying. But there must be good teachers out there. How do you know if you've found one?

Well, here is the challenge that faces language teachers the world over – the challenge a teacher needs to overcome if they are to be considered truly great.

A great teacher needs to create the conditions in which learners can learn for themselves.

A great teacher needs to encourage the student to behave in ways that they would not otherwise. And it's got little to do with teaching.



A great teacher often needs to resist the temptation to actually teach.

That's what Einstein knew.

I believe that what you really need from a teacher is not their “teaching” but their ability to help you **reflect on your own learning**, what's been working for you and what hasn't, and how you can improve faster than you currently are.

If your teacher is great, she would **discuss interesting elements** of the Spanish language with you, help you solve problems, or answer questions that you bring to the table.

Most valuably, she would pay close attention to your use of Spanish, and help guide you towards **noticing new features** of the language that you might not have been aware of.

At the same time she would probably act as a counsellor of sorts – reminding you that the various language anxieties that you have are not as catastrophic as they may seem, and what is far more important is your ability to press on with your study in spite of your difficulties.

She would have far more characteristics of a “coach” than a “teacher”.

And this relationship between “coach” and student is probably more intimate and close-knit than with a traditional teacher-student

relationship, which is more about the imparting of knowledge than the creating of conditions for learning.

More progressive teachers might argue that they can help the learner by creating those conditions for learning during the lesson. In fact, this approach is the foundation of modern communicative language teaching methodology.

Except that it's a delusion.

A couple of hours per week in a classroom with nine other students is simply not a credible language learning solution, however enlightened the teacher.

Learning should not be seen as what happens in the lesson, but what happens outside. Therefore lessons should be focused on improving what the student can do **during the time she is not in class.**

Have you found a teacher that can do this?

A teacher that has the skills and the presence of mind to implement it in practice?

I hope you have.

But I think it's unlikely.

At the heart of my argument is that what is required to effectively teach a student to speak a foreign language well is the ability to help them **understand the true nature of the task ahead of them.**

It is not going through the motions of teaching with a textbook, handing out grammar exercises, and other "quick wins" that might fit the traditional image of "teaching" but do little to actually **improve students' competence** in the language.

Teachers need to help students **understand their own weaknesses** and how to address them by themselves outside of class... and to be there to coach them through it all.

If your teacher fits the above description, they are **worth their weight in gold.**

If not, you might want to consider whether your hard-earned money really is **best spent in this way.**

And this is the major decision you have to make.

Language learning success is yours for the taking!

Language classes can certainly help, and you will undoubtedly learn something in the process.

But you can get most of the benefit of classes by yourself, at home, with a simple textbook and a smattering of motivation.

By making language classes your primary language learning strategy, your biggest risk is abdicating responsibility for your own learning, and in-so-doing fail to learn the big lessons that come from self-directed, independent learning.

The ultimate question for you, as a passionate, aspiring language learner, even if you can justify the cost of lessons, is: Am I really justified in placing the success of my language learning ambitions in the hands of another?

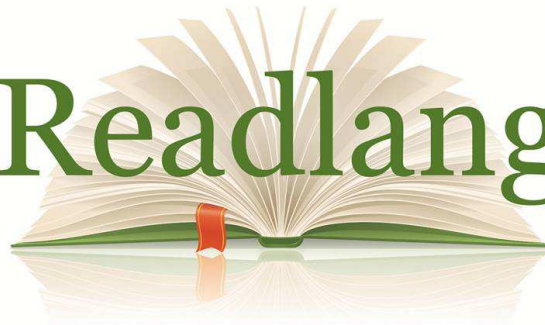
Do you think that language classes are a waste of money? Or do they have a place in your learning strategy?

Olly Richards, originally from the UK now lives in Cairo, Egypt. He speaks 8 languages and runs the "[I Will Teach You A Language](#)" blog where he teaches people the strategies they need to learn another language.

Parrot Time is always looking for guest writers, so if you are interested in writing for us or donating something you have written for your own blog, please contact us at editor@parrottime.com.

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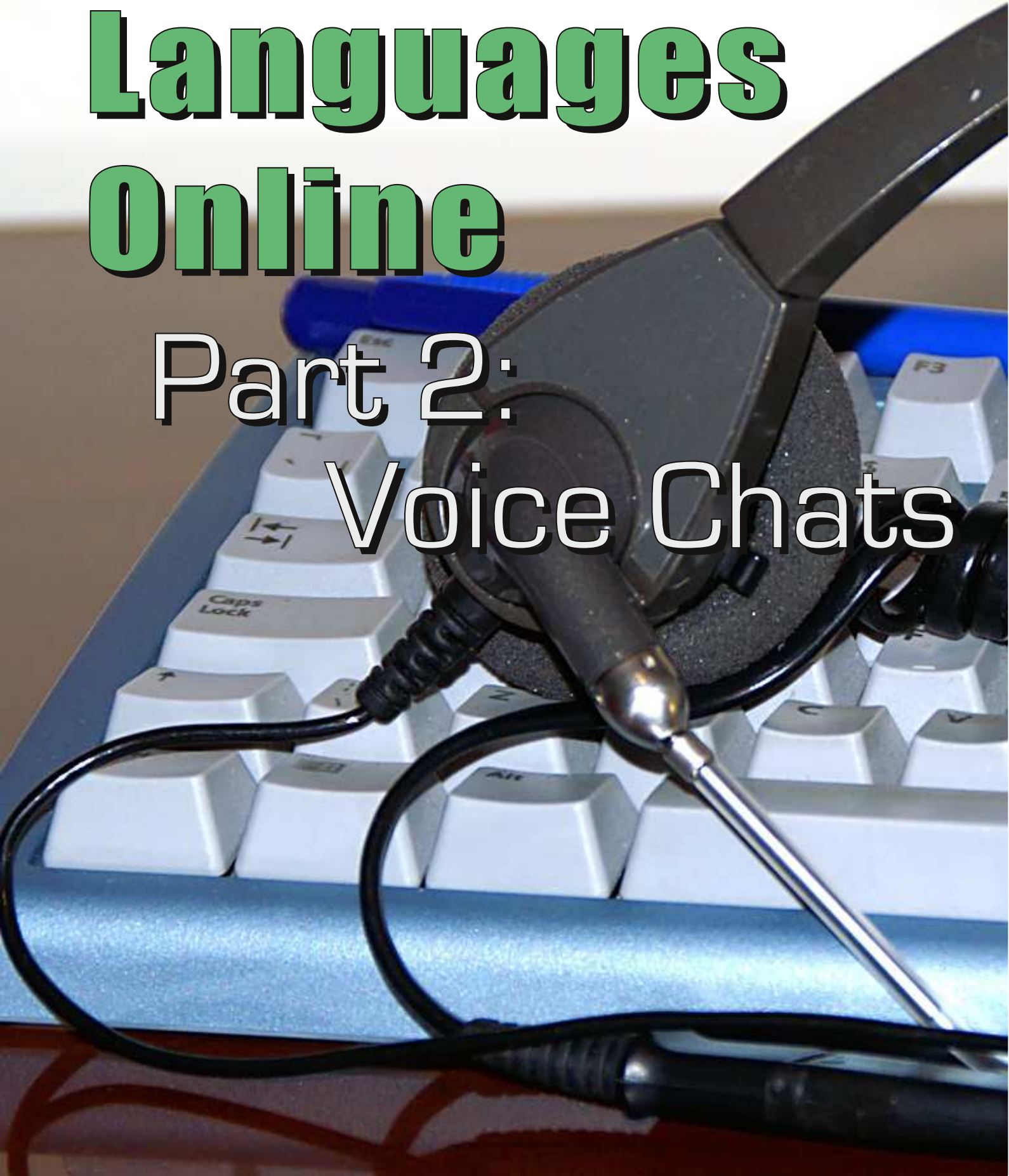
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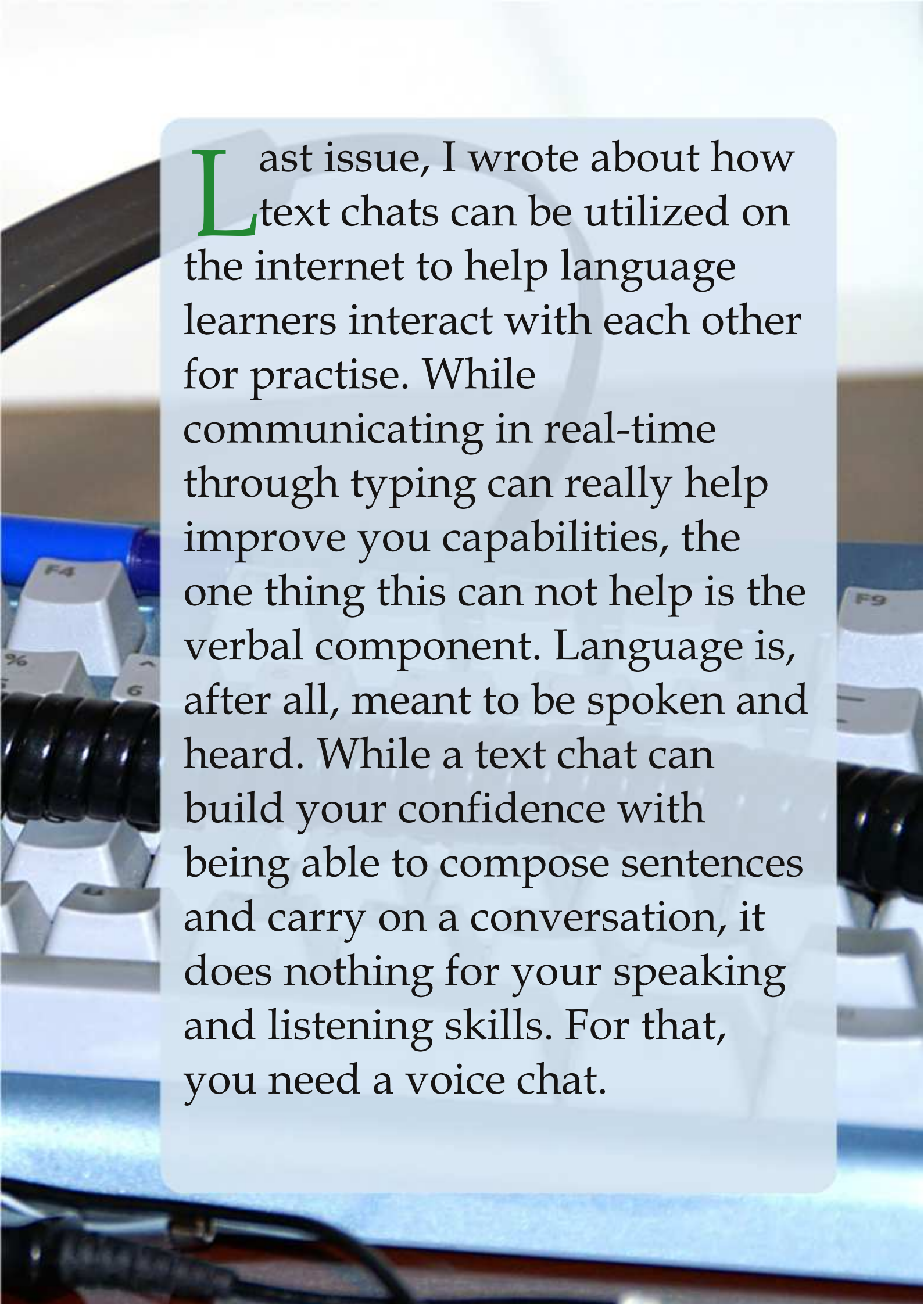
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Chatting in Languages Online

Part 2: Voice Chats





Last issue, I wrote about how text chats can be utilized on the internet to help language learners interact with each other for practise. While communicating in real-time through typing can really help improve your capabilities, the one thing this can not help is the verbal component. Language is, after all, meant to be spoken and heard. While a text chat can build your confidence with being able to compose sentences and carry on a conversation, it does nothing for your speaking and listening skills. For that, you need a voice chat.

Simply put, a voice chat uses a setup like a text chat, with a server that handles the interactions and client programs that each person has on their own computer to connect to the server. When connected, people can talk to each other, utilizing a microphone and possibly headphones. There are specific headsets, which are a combination of microphone and headphones, designed for this activity.

Team Speak

There are a number of programs to use for this. The one that I am most familiar with for using on a website is Team Speak. It is free for use with non-profit groups. Once

installed on a website server, those wanting to practise can join it and talk to others also currently joined. Multiple areas, also called channels, can be created for specific reasons, like focusing on certain languages. All for free!

What an amazing tool to have available! You can imagine that language lovers would have dozens if not hundreds of these set up all over the internet and be using them around the clock. How could they *not*?

Well, the reality is that no matter how much a person studies and practises a language, there is always a fear of how they will sound when they attempt to speak it. They worry about their pronounci-

ation as well as their accents. Listening is also a concern, because while they may understand what they see in writing, they probably have not developed their comprehension skills as much for audio. This leads to the odd paradox of many people talking about voice chats and wanting them created, yet then being fearful to use them. Even those that are bold enough to try are attempting to convince others to join will usually find themselves met with many excuses, ranging from the ever popular "I do not have a microphone" to the blunt "I do not like voice chats".

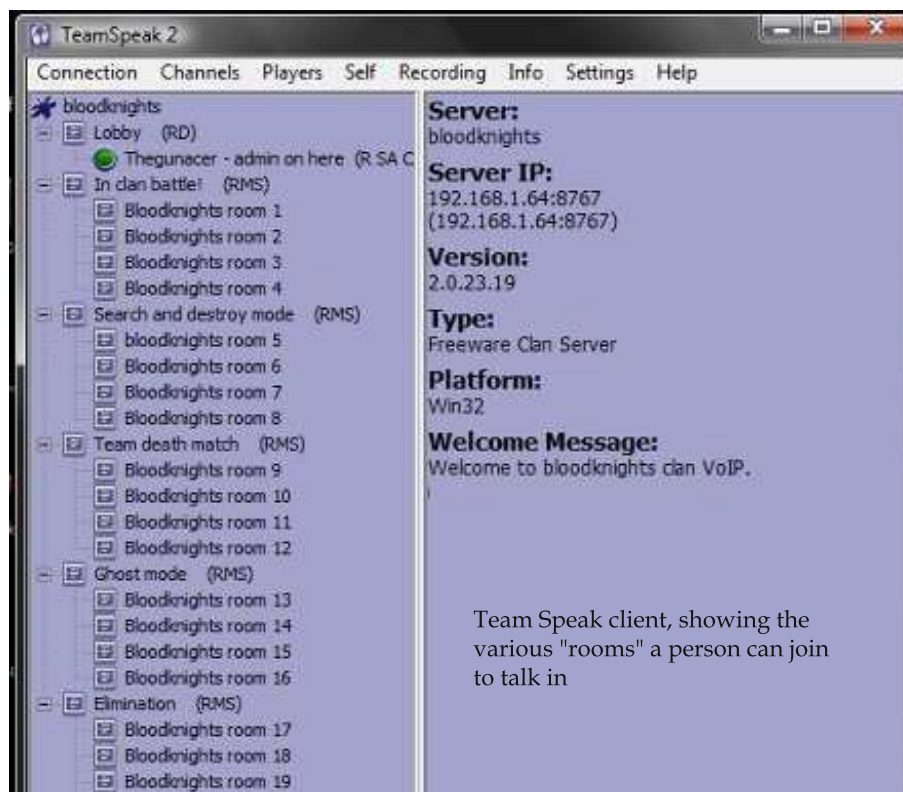
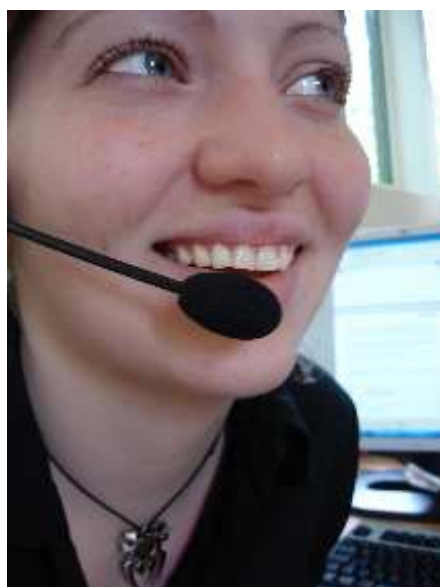


Young girl using a voice chat to talk to someone online

Fear of Speaking

This fear is not limited to voice chats. Learners will often also love to have a resource in which they can hear the vocabulary they are studying pronounced, but will rarely ever want to make such recordings themselves for others to use. Some will record themselves for a larger, singular text, but not for multiple words.

In UniLang, we created a section called “Sondios del Mundo”. Here, people recorded themselves in their native languages reading a specific translated paragraph. This was to help people hear the way a language sounded. Over the years, we were able to build this up to a large collection, with a few dozen recordings. Considering that there were a several thousand members, though, there should have been a lot more additions. At the time, it was rather unique, but now, with the rise of YouTube and other sites having audio components, it seems a bit outdated.



Team Speak client, showing the various "rooms" a person can join to talk in

Skype

While many may have feared using Team Speak or recording themselves for others to hear, another piece of software rose to widespread usage and snuck into usage among polyglots, seemingly without the same amount of trepidation.

Skype is a program that differs in a few major ways from Team Speak. First, there is no server to be set up. You download the software and create an account. This allows you to talk to anyone else around the world that is also on Skype. It is also not advertised as being a voice chat system, but instead, as a way of placing calls to family and friends.

Conventional phones used to be limited to a series of wires connecting houses throughout cities and countries. The cost of making these calls would increase for

longer distances, making it very impractical to use them as a means of talking to someone in another country. I used to talk to people in Italy this way at a rate of around \$65 an hour. Phone bills easily rose into the *thousands*.

Then the internet changed that. After people could talk to people using email and text chats, the technology eventually improved to the point that high quality audio could be sent through the same computer networks. When this became fast enough to appear instant, a replacement for phone lines was born. This new technology was called “Voice Over Internet Protocol”, or VOIP.

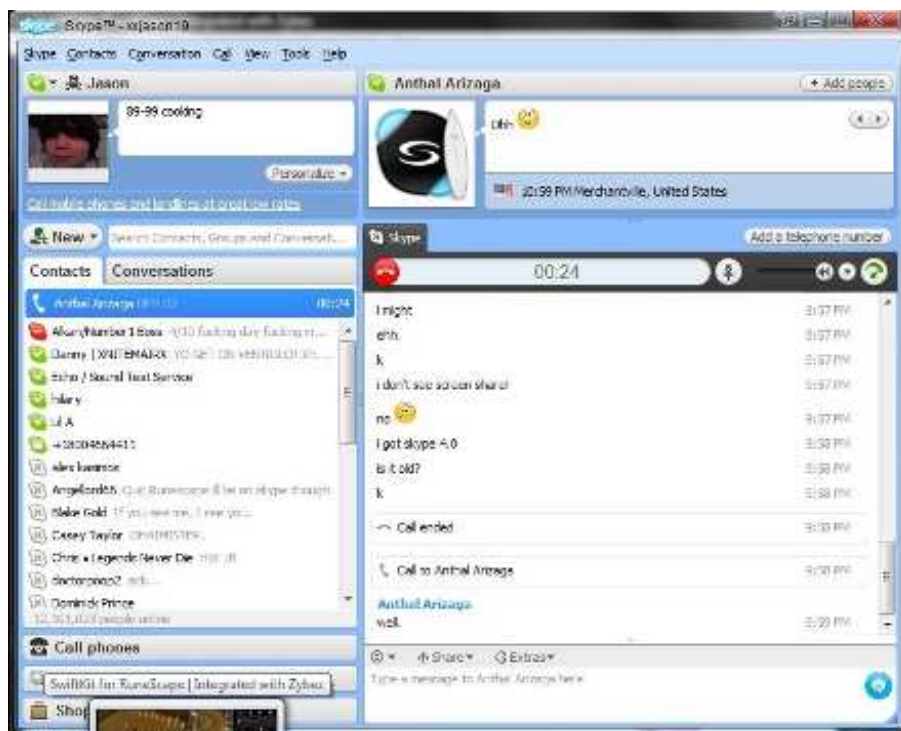
Skype utilizes this VOIP, allowing two people with a computer to talk instantly to anyone around the world for free (well, at the cost of their internet bill). Even if the re-

ceiver did not have a phone, the Skype call could be sent to a standard phone connection.

The appeal of this to a much larger population quickly made Skype a global phenomenon. It was then that the people started using it to practise their language skills.

A drawback to this approach is that Skype is really designed as a way for two people to connect, and so the means that to set up a single channel for others to use is very limited. While a group might be created, getting access to it might not always work, at least in my experience. Unless a person with certain permission is not in the channel, anyone who has not already joined can not do so without help from another person.

A Skype group still suffers from the same issues as a Team Speak server, in that people will be shy about talking. People also need to create a global Skype account to use it, while Team Speak merely needs a person to know the address of the server and any password the



A Skype window showing a conversation being typed along with people speaking

owner may have placed on it.

For those who are truly daring, however, Skype does have video capabilities as well, so anyone with a computer camera (called a “cam”) can broadcast their lovely faces, and whatever else they want, to someone along with their voices. Some will love this while some will find it even more intimidating than speaking.

Text and Voice

Both Team Speak and Skype recognize that people may not always want to speak, so both systems have limited text capabilities. Both systems have basic profile capabilities, so people can give details about themselves, including pictures.

Last Word

When using the internet as a language learning tool, a voice chat system is probably the most powerful resources for interactive speaking and listening. However, it can also be one of the most difficult to fully utilize for the reasons I mentioned. Nevertheless, I encourage you to take advantage of these systems whenever you get a chance, as they can help you improve your new language incredibly! And don't be afraid to speak. That is the reason you are learning the language, is it not? **PT**

Benny Lewis created a musical video with other polyglots about using Skype



Language Boat

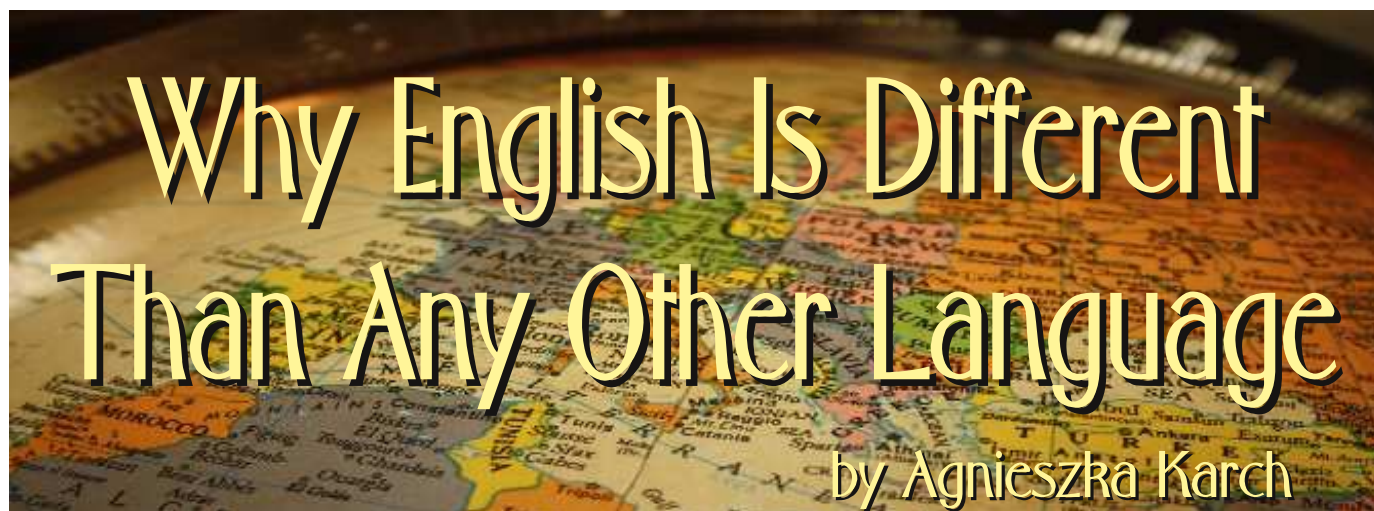
immersion language learning

Language Boat is a blog about language learning in natural environments. Here you will find personal narratives about language learning experiences, in addition to tips, ideas, technical stuff like grammar, pronunciation, etc., cultural observations, and language resources.

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When I first started learning English as a child, my motivation was always linked to wanting to have a tool that would enable me to communicate and make friends with people from other countries. Back then, I didn't realise that this goal was completely different from the goals I would set myself for all the other foreign languages I would learn as an adult.

The ultimate international language

When I was 11 years old, I began to take my language learning seriously. At that point, my understanding of the world was that there were other people in other countries who spoke other languages, and that the most straightforward way to connect with those people was to learn English – the ultimate international language.

I started attending a language school two evenings per week. It was around that time (mid 90s) that the internet started to make more of an appearance. One of the things we did in our English classes was using IRC (if you're old enough, you'll know what I mean) to chat to people from other countries. In English. Of course we chatted in English – this was an implicit rule that nobody even had to explain.

This was one of the things that confirmed my understanding of English as a language that didn't belong to anyone. English was floating in a void and filled every corner of this world at the same time. It didn't matter what country you were from and what language you spoke at home – you had English so you could talk to anyone and everyone.

My first encounter with another foreign language

It wasn't until I was 15 that I came to realise that I could actually learn one of those 'other' languages spoken by the people I had so far only communicated in English with.

As I started college, I had to choose another foreign language that I was going to learn (this was compulsory at my school). I asked myself the following questions to help me choose my second foreign language:

- Which language do I like the sound of the most in foreign films and music?
- Which culture do I find the most intriguing in terms of film, literature, food and history?
- Which country would I like to visit, get to know its people and be able to communicate with them in a language other than English?

And that's how I picked French.

I did exactly the same thing with the next two foreign languages I took up later on - Spanish and German. With languages such as Swedish and Arabic, later in my adult life, my questions were slightly different but still in the same vein:

- Which language do I know absolutely nothing about?
- Which language would provide me with a sufficient level of challenge and a feeling of accomplishment once I've reached a basic level of fluency and comprehension?
- Which language is spoken in countries whose cultures I find fascinating?

Choosing English versus choosing another language

As you can see, my choice of my second and subsequent foreign languages was very conscious and deliberate. I based it on a very specific set of criteria.

The point I'm trying to make here is that this wasn't the case with English at all.

When I first started learning English, I wasn't necessarily interested in getting to know British, American or Australian people. If they happened to be among the 'international' people I wanted to connect with, that's fine. However, learning about the culture, food or customs of the English-speaking world was initially never my priority. Even when I went to study in the UK as an international student, the main appeal for me was to meet 'international' people (British included), rather than just English/British people.

Why does this matter?

It matters if you're a language learner or a language teacher. Understanding your own or your students' motivation for learning a language is one of the main factors that determine your/their chances of success.

If you're learning English as a foreign language, it may well be that you're motivated by the prospect of reading American literature in the original or watching Hollywood films without subtitles. It may be that you're really interested in British politics or how English is used by speakers in the former British colonies.



However, you should also bear in mind that your motivation might simply be about 'needing to' learn English – either because that's what you need for your job, because you're going to study abroad, or because you want to travel the world without having to learn the languages of the countries you want to visit.

What's your motivation for learning a language?

Does my theory of motivation ring true for you? If you're a non-native English speaker, what was your primary motivation when learning English? What about the other languages you can speak – what pushed you towards them? Join the discussion in the [5-Minute Language Facebook group](#). **PT**

Agnieszka Karch is the creator of [5-Minute Language](#), a website with language learning tips and resources.



Competition. It drives people to do better. In sports, we want to beat the other team. In business, we want more people buying our products or services. Online, we want more people visiting our web sites and blogs. Competition makes everyone else your opponent.

Most people consider competition to be a good thing, because it makes us work harder and pushes us to be better. However, it can also have a negative effect, for we try to hide our strategies from others and push them out of the arena so that only we are seen. We end up isolated and paranoid.

This negative aspect can be most detrimental to people that are still trying to learn how to do something. In the case of a shared experience, such as learning languages, we sometimes need to set aside the competitive ideology and work together to help each other.

Sharing Knowledge

Some people create and build things to help others, with their end goal being something that benefits others, rather than just themselves. In languages, we almost naturally need this, because the more people that we can get speaking other languages, the more people we have to potentially talk to.

People that write blogs about languages and learning them are taking what they have learned and giving it to others. That is a generous action, and not one done easily, for building a blog, or any website, takes a lot more effort than most people are willing to give. It is far more than just writing about

what you know; you need to learn software and marketing techniques, engage in interactive feedback, worry about copyright practices, and a bunch of other little technical things that make a blog successful. Even ignoring competition, you still need to make a good product for it to be useful to others.

I started my own blog, *View From the Town*, blog several months ago, and am still learning so many things about how to make it better. I have been fortunate to have Brian Powers, who runs the Languages Around the Globe blog, as a friend and advisor. We have spent countless hours talking about blogging, advertising, languages, and community issues, and I have learned so much.

One day, while talking, we struck upon the idea of creating a group on Facebook where other bloggers and website owners could come together. Rather than hiding what they knew, they would be able to share their experience and expertise with others. After asking some people if they would be interested in such a group (from which we got several excited responses), we created The Digital Language Collective.

The activity and number of people joining was amazing! Instantly, we met many people we never knew before and heard about their fantastic projects. So many new blogs and writers! Immediate topics were people announcing their blogs and what platforms they used for them, policies for guest posts, what monetization practices (if any) was best, and using Twitter as a promotional tool.

But the discussion was more than technical issues. Members now had a new resource in the form of others they could find guest posters, promoters, and reviewers. People with web sites and products had a list of people that could help them advance their creations and bloggers had new material they could write about. I even got a new topic for a blog post in this article!

The group is not incredibly large, with just under 100 members at the time of this writ-

ing, and will never be very large, since it is aimed at people that are writing and creating language advice and resources. Sadly, we never seem to have enough of those, but this group will hopefully inspire others to start their own.

If you run a language blog, have a language website, or have created language software, please think about joining us on Facebook. United we rise! **PT**

Be sure to visit the Digital Language Collective on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/digilang>

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Viva La Libertà
94 min
Comedy / Drama
14 February 2013 (Italy)

Country: Italy
Language: Italian / French / German

The irony is not lost on the fact that it takes a "mad man" to show how crazy the situation has become.

You don't need to understand the world of Italian politics to appreciate the film *Viva La Libertà* (Long Live Freedom). Enrico Oliveri is an experienced politician, working as a senator and party leader of the center-left. Things are not going well, as his party is in decline and will probably be defeated in the upcoming elections, and so the members want to drop him.

Enrico starts suffering from depression and exhaustion, and finally decides to leave for a while, with only a letter to his trusted friend and advisor, Andrea Bottini, of what he has done.

He takes refuge in Paris, France, at the home of his once lover, Danielle. She is now married to a famous film director and has a daughter, Hélène.

Bottini tells the other members of the party and the media that Enrico is just away for health reasons, and there is nothing wrong, but he is unsure if Enrico will return, so he comes up with a desperate plan. He tracks down Enrico's twin brother, who is a writer, philosopher, and self-medicated former mental health care patient. The plan is to present Oliveri as Enrico, at least until Enrico returns.

This actually goes much better than planned. First, it turns out that the brothers used to fool people all the time as children,

pretending to be the other, so Oliveri easily plays the part. However, while Enrico is very somber and sad, Oliveri is very charming, outgoing, and philosophical. He is also very unpredictable, and tends to wander away from important meetings, reciting poetry, and dancing with important political figures. He also likes to start humming a particular tune at odd times.

Meanwhile, Enrico is finding himself becoming revitalized while in hiding as he becomes more involved in Danielle's life and her friends. He bonds with Hélène and watches his brother portraying him back home in Italy.

Enrico and Oliveri are played by the same actor, Toni Servillo, which works wonderfully as he is able to show both the brothers as being completely unique while still having similar aspects. We wonder what happened that made the two personalities diverge so completely.

While the backdrop of the film is the political scene, most of that is done in an abstract enough way



Oliveri and Bottini, meeting for the first time

to not only be applicable to politics in other countries but it also doesn't detract from the charm and real message of the film.

Oliveri, in his straightforward while philosophical way, manages to make the people see that the political system itself, as well as the people, are to be blamed for the situation, for they thrive on catastrophes and conflict. Everything is bound up in fear of the other party, in losing position, and in losing faith. His message isn't so much about rising up to defeat an enemy (the opposing parties) but in simply not being bound up in fear.

The irony is not lost on the fact that it takes a "mad man" to show how crazy the situation has become.

His speeches and easy manner, taking questions from reporters and turning them into insightful and sometimes cryptic monologues, inspire not only his party and its members, but even Bottini. In one touching scene, Bottini even confesses to Oliveri that he would vote for him, and that he actually fears Enrico's return.

But the charade can only go on for so long. Oliveri receives a call from Enrico, thanking him, after which he disappears from the beach house where he is staying with Enrico's wife. Meanwhile, Enrico says his good-byes to Danielle's family and says it is time he returns. While Bottini searches frantically for Oliveri, we see both brothers as they are travelling, presumably back to where they belong.

After spending the night in his car after an exhausting hunt for the lost brother, Bottini returns to the offices, only to find the Senator calmly sitting in office. He is unsure what to think now, since the party is set to win the election. Can it continue on this path with Enrico back in place?



Oliveri talking to the press after his "return"



Enrico and Danielle, reunited after many years

As he leaves the office, he looks back and sees Enrico smiling. Then the Senator starts humming a certain tune...

Critics of the film say it does not go far enough with the political message or with the humour of having a mentally unstable man in charge. I actually liked the softer tone it set, since I can easily see political preaching and slap-stick comedies any time I want.

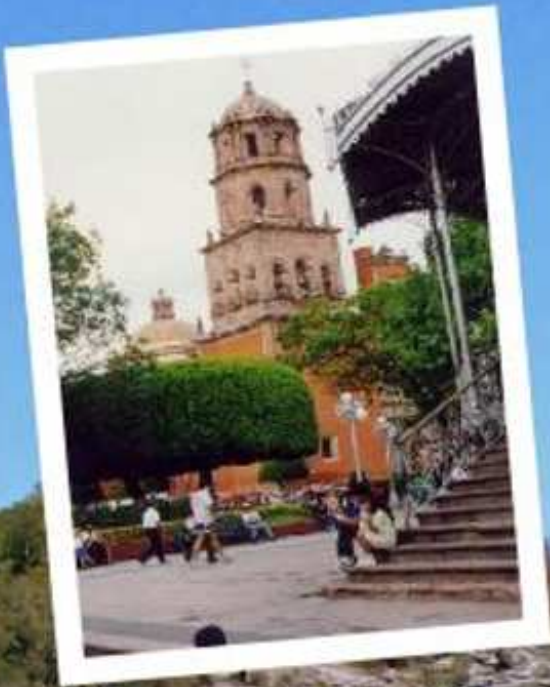
For me, the film was more uplifting, telling us that we create so much of our own problems by giving into fear and being concerned with what everyone else thinks. Both brothers seem to gain from the experience, even though we never see the two of them really interact with each other.

For those who want the language aspect of the film, it is done in both Italian and French, taking place in both Italy and France. There is some mild nudity as well, so if that offends you, just close your eyes at the appropriate places.

I enjoyed *Viva La Libertà* immensely for its humour and heart, and I would definitely encourage anyone to see it, if for no other reason then to see the superb dual performance by Servillo. **PT**



Oliveri, giving a speech to a huge crowd



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Languages in Peril

The Tribes of the Tamil-Kannada

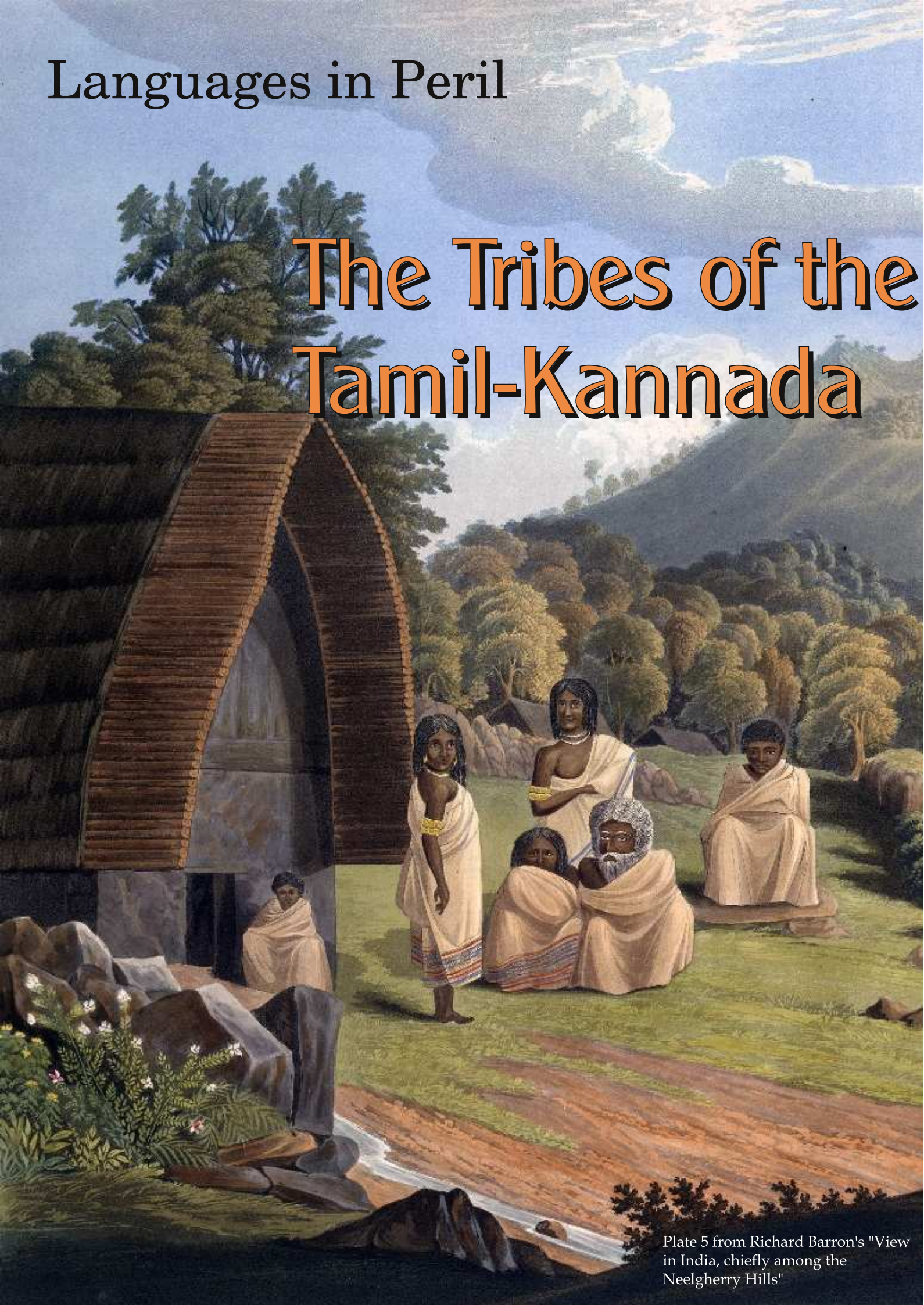
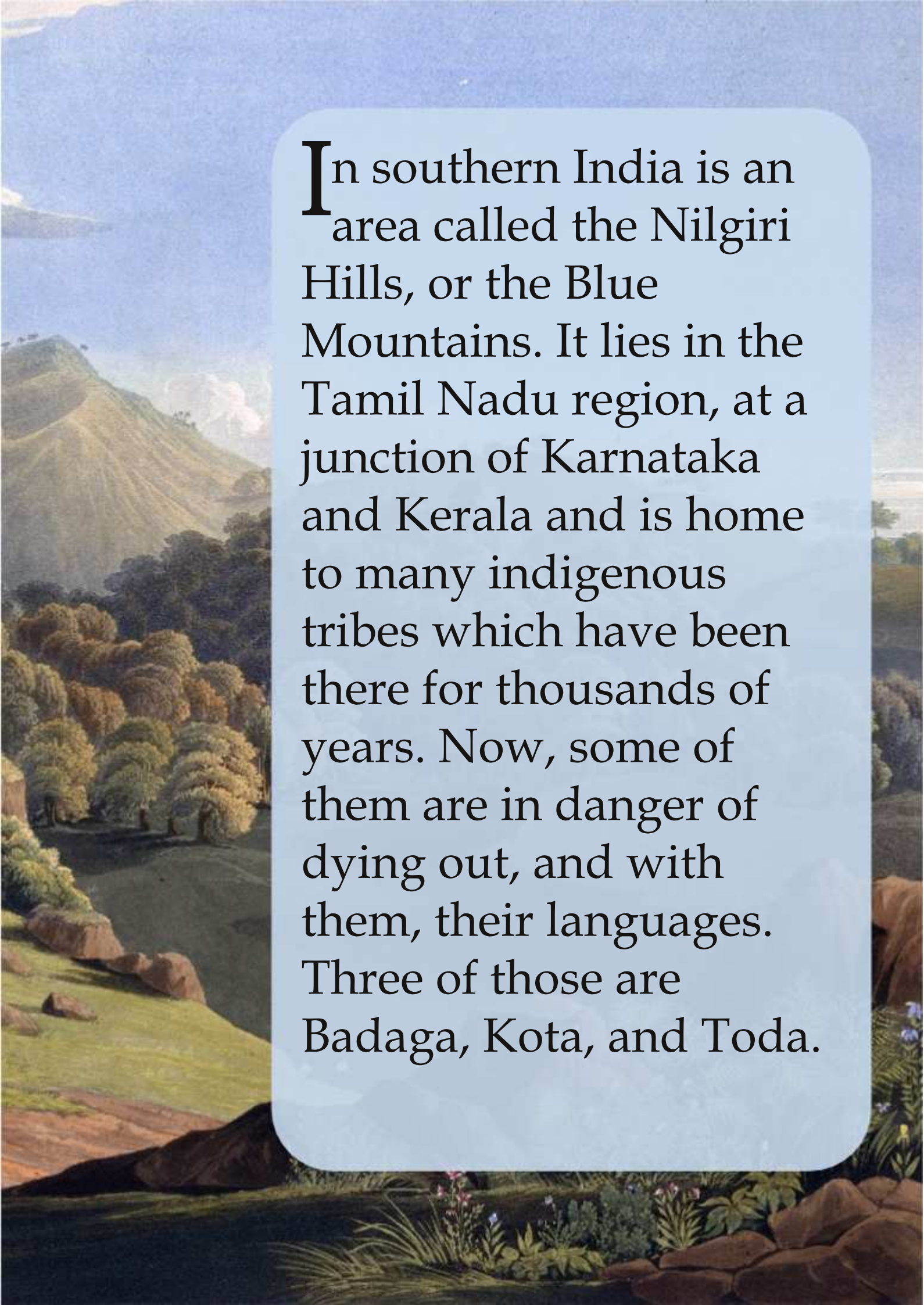


Plate 5 from Richard Barron's "View
in India, chiefly among the
Neelgherry Hills"



In southern India is an area called the Nilgiri Hills, or the Blue Mountains. It lies in the Tamil Nadu region, at a junction of Karnataka and Kerala and is home to many indigenous tribes which have been there for thousands of years. Now, some of them are in danger of dying out, and with them, their languages. Three of those are Badaga, Kota, and Toda.

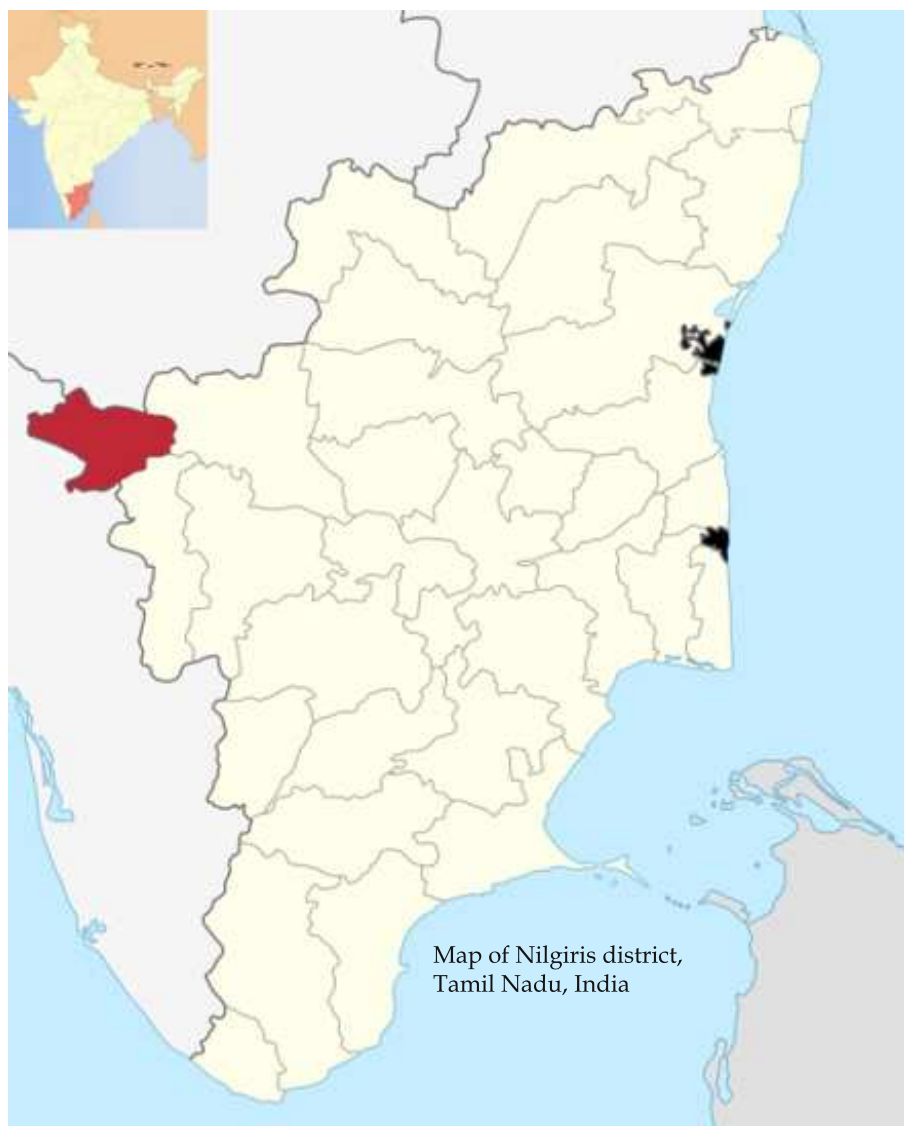
The major languages of the region belong to the Tamil-Kannada branch, which includes Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. Those three are recognized among the official languages of India, as well as being officially recognized as classical languages by the Government of India. Our three are not so fortunate, although they are probably as old.

Badaga

Badaga is one of the southern Dravidian languages and is spoken by around 400,000 people in the Nilgiri Hills. It was once considered a dialect of Kannada, and while it has many similarities with its Kannada language neighbours, it is now recognized as an independent language. The word *Badaga* itself refers to both the language and the people that speak it. They are split into almost 440 separate villages, called *hattis*, and they have inhabited the land for thousands of years, going back at least as far as 8000 BC.

As far as it is known, Badaga has not had a writing system for most of its existence. Over the past century, a few different methods for writing Badaga were created, using a mix of the Latin and Kannada alphabets, with the earliest of these dates back to 1890. More recently, Anandhan Raju created a new alphabet, this one based on Tamil, in 2009. and the most recent was published in 2009 by Anandhan Raju.

As was common with many indigenous people, the Badagas were visited by missionaries, attempting to con-

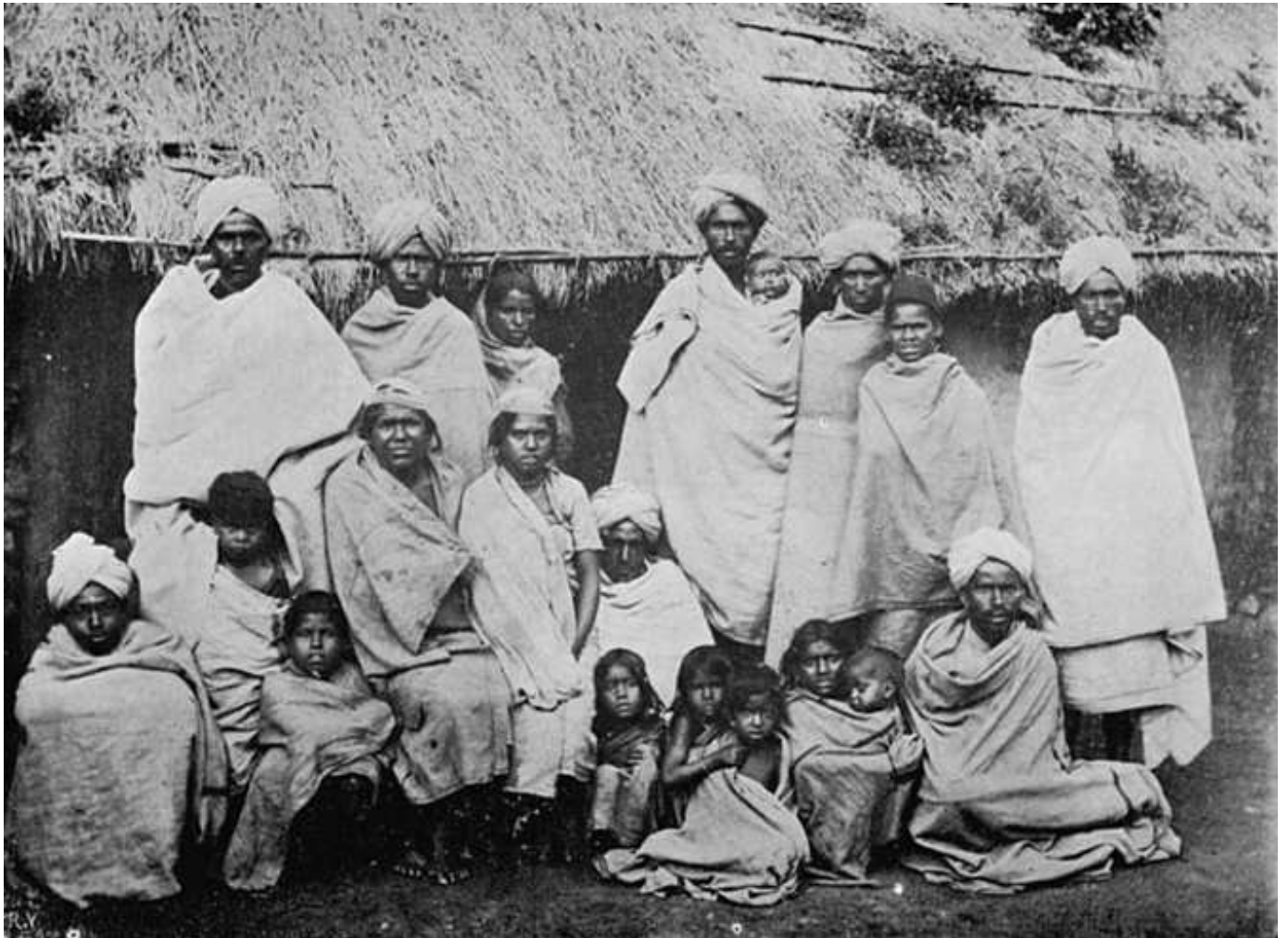


vert them. During the Mauryan Empire (322 – 185 BCE), Buddhist monks came to Nilgiris to spread Buddhism among the Badagas, although they probably failed to have much of an impact. However, the various missionary attempts did allow for the languages to be well studied, leading to several English-Badaga dictionaries being published.

A Badaga king named Kalaraja was ruling the people in 1116 AD, but he was killed during a war with the Kannada speaking Hoysala empire (1026 - 1343), bringing the Badagas

under the rule of King Vishnuvarthana. It later came under the rule of the Vijayanagar empire (1336 - 1646), then the British.

Now, not all of this information is without some debate. There are some that claim the Badaga people are not actually natives of the region, but rather migrated to there from central and eastern Europe. According to this idea, they arrived in southern India then moved into the Nilgiris Hills when they were under the Vijayanagara Empire, and the people had to adopt the dialect of Kannada. They did not accept the writ-



Badaga caste of Nilgiri Hills, from "Castes and Tribes of Southern India" (1909)

ing system, however, which is why they did not have one when later people found them. This initial group was probably very small, only around 30 people, but a later, larger group migrated as well later.

There is no real evidence to confirm this theory, however, while there are clues to validate the idea that they have been there since ancient times. First, according to philology (the study of language in written historical sources), beginning languages didn't have scripts and only develop scripts later on, supporting the idea that the language is very old. Also, before the Badagas converted to Hinduism, they were

nature worships, like ancient Greeks and Egyptians, again supporting the idea that they have been around for much longer. Even now, worshipping stones is a central aspect of their lives in the Nilgiris.

While their origins might be in question, it doesn't appear their future is. While there is no oppressing force trying to wipe out the language or the people, the Badagas as a people are in decline, and are thus on the endangered list.

Kota

The second language found in the region is Kota. The people of the Kota tribe have a much smaller population than the

Badagas, with only around 900 native speakers still living. This number wasn't much larger in the 1800s, with just 1,100 speakers. Although Kota is closely related to neighbouring Toda, it was identified as an independent Dravidian language by Robert Caldwell in the 1870s and probably broke off from the common south Dravidian languages a few thousand years ago. The Kota tribe became isolated, allowing for the language some unique characteristics.

Similar to the Badagas, there are a few theories about the Kota people's origins. It is believed that their ancestors arrived in the region a few centuries ago, when the Bad-

agas were already there.

They did not remain isolated forever, as they eventually established a relationship with the Todas people, leading to the trading of buffalo milk, hides, and meat. They also set up trade with local Kurumba and Irula tribes, who were farmers and hunters. This went on for a long time, until the British moved in during the start of the 19th century.

Unlike the Badaga and Kota, who adopted Hinduism to varying extents, the Toda people have a religion which mainly centers around the buffalo.

After that, missionaries, anthropologists, and linguists, from both India and western countries, spent a huge amount of time studying the tribal groups. One of these was a German missionary, F. Metz, who speculated that, according to some of their traditions, the Kota people came from what is now Karnataka in south west India.

The Kotas have for the last 150 years been a small group, no larger than 1,500 individuals spread over seven villages. They have worked in many trades as everything from

Kota women wearing their traditional dress and ornaments



potters, agriculturalist, and leather workers to carpenters, and black smiths. After the British arrived, they used some of the educational opportunities given to them to improve their socio-economic status, and are thus no longer so dependent on their traditional trades.

Unlike the Badaga who adopted

Hinduism long ago, the Kota believed in non-anthropomorphic (which means they weren't given human characteristics) male deities and a female deity. Some Hindu deities have been added since the 1940s, and have had Tamil style temples built for them as well as having groups of priests assigned to keep the Kota people in favour with them.

Today, most Kota children study in Tamil at schools and are bilingual in both Kota and Tamil, yet the language is still becoming less popular, so it is listed as "critically endangered".

Toda

I have already mentioned the third language, Toda, and the people's interaction with the Kota tribe. As of 2001, there was an estimated 1600 native Toda speakers, living on the Nilgiri plateau. They have existed there with the other Kota and Kuruba tribes in a peaceful community until the 18th century, after which they fell under the heavy scrutiny of missionaries and anthropologist, along with the rest.

The Toda people probably migrated to the area at about the same time as the Kota, but they also isolated themselves for centuries. The language has a disproportionately high number of syntactic and morphological rules which are not found in other south Dravidian



Photograph of two Toda men and a woman, taken by an unknown photographer from the Madras School of Arts circa 1871-72



Toda people in front of their hut in the Nilgiri Hills

languages.

The Toda people not only live rather isolated from other tribes, but even separate themselves from each other, living in settlements of three to seven small thatched houses, built in the shape of half-barrels and spread out on the slopes of the plateau. Toda temples are similarly built in a circular pit while is lined with stones.

Unlike the Badaga and Kota, who adopted Hinduism to varying extents, the Toda people have a religion which mainly centers around the buffalo. Sacred places are associated with dairy temples and buffalo herds, and they have traditions and rituals to match them. For example,

the Toda religion forbids people from walking across bridges, as rivers must be crossed on foot or by swimming. No shoes may be worn.

Toda legend tells how the goddess Teikirshy and her brother first created the sacred buffalo, then the first Toda man. Similar to the Christian story, the first Toda woman was created from the right rib of the first Toda man.

Some Toda pasture land was during the end of 20th century to outsiders and the government, threatening the culture and the buffalo herds. To counteract this, UNSECO has intervened, and the Toda lands are now a part of The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The

people and language remain critically endangered, however.

Conclusion

Often, indigenous languages die because they are oppressed by an occupying force and forbidden, or the native speakers start switching to a more dominant language. While these three languages are certainly feeling some pressure from outside forces, it seems they are simple dwindling in population, as tribes are likely to do in the modern age. Even with the efforts of UNESCO, the languages of these people are likely to be completely gone within the next few decades.

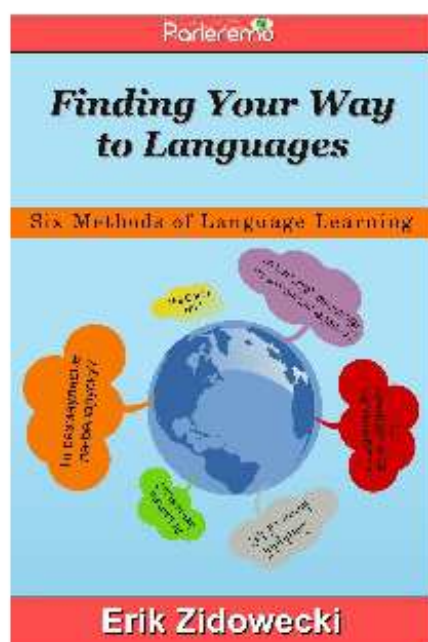
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A photograph of a farmer standing in a rice paddy field. The farmer is wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, a short-sleeved plaid shirt, and plaid shorts. He is holding a large bundle of harvested rice stalks in front of him. The field is filled with water, and there are some young rice plants growing in the foreground. The background shows a dirt bank with some vegetation and a thatched roof structure. The overall scene is a typical rural agricultural setting in Thailand.

A farmer on a rice plantation in Chiang Mai, Thailand, shows some a handful of stalks he has gathered. Rice is the staple food of most Asian countries and an important part of the diet in many western countries as well.

Words in Your Mouth

Rice

The etymology of rice is rather clear, but its origins are a little grainy.

The Britannica definition of rice is “an edible starchy cereal grain and the annual grass that produces it.” Its scientific name is *oryza sativa*, family Poaceae, or Gramineae. However, I am sure that neither explanation is needed for this seemingly globally eaten food. I am equally sure that most if not all our readers have had rice at some point in their lives, either as a separate side dish or as part of another dish.

Approximately one-half of the world’s population, including practically all of East and Southeast Asia, has rice as its primary staple-food. It was first cultivated in India over four thousand years ago. It is grown in flooded fields, called “paddies”, along rivers of tropical and temperate regions. It grows to a height of 4 feet (1.2 m), and has long, flattened leaves. From these plants, brown and white rice

is harvested, depending on which part of the plant it is taken.

Because of its ancient origins, the etymology is fairly standard. The Latin word for rice is “oryza” or “oriza”, which comes from the Greek “ὀρυζα”. From these, many other language families have gotten their basis for “rice”.

Among the Italic languages, we have Catalan (*ar-ròs*), French (*riz*), and Italian (*riso*).

The Slavic languages are also very similar, with Polish (*ryż*), Russian (*puc [ris]*), and Bulgarian (*opuz [oriz]*).

Then Germanic languages, along with the English “rice”, have Dutch (*rijst*), German (*Reis*), and Yiddish (*רײַז [rayz]*).

Even the Celtic languages fall in with this heritage with the Irish (*ris*), the Welsh (*reis*), and others.



A bowl of fried rice, pickles, and shallots (a type of onion)



A dish of sushi (raw fish and rice wrapped together) and sashimi, (a delicacy consisting of very fresh raw fish sliced into thin pieces) in a Japanese restaurant

However, this is only the way in which the word found its way into the “western” regions. It can be traced back even further into the Arabic رز [ruzz]. From here, some languages, like Spanish (arroz) and Portuguese (arroz) seemed to have adopted it directly from the Arabic, even including the article (أرز = “ar-ruzz”).

Going even further back, we can find its roots in the Sanskrit word “vrihi-s”. Yet, this historically refers to wheat, barley, and rice. In India, the word for rice, “arici”, which came from Malaysia, is used in many languages of the region. It is not yet understood why some regions adopted one word over the other, but it is speculated the the reason is closely related to which cultures adopted wheat as a staple, instead of rice.

Slang

While there are many foods

that incorporate rice, such as Pilau, Paëlla Valenciana, and Risotto, I cannot think of many ways in which references to rice have entered into English slang. Since it isn’t viewed as much as a staple in Western countries as it is in the East, it has also not affected our views and ideas as much.

There is one slang idiom

in English, “like white on rice”, which means “very closely”. It would be used like “She was so afraid, she stuck to him like white on rice”.

Perhaps unsurprising, we do have idioms involving rice coming from Asian countries, where rice is a primary staple of the diet.

The first comes from Japanese: 冷や飯を食う (ひやめしをくう) (hiyameshi o kuu) which is translated as “eating cold rice”. This can mean someone who is less fortunate or someone who has done something stupid and now has to deal with the consequences of their actions. The second usage is similar to the English “in the doghouse”.

The other idiom comes from Chinese: 生米煮成熟饭 (shēng mǐ zhǔ chéng shú fàn) which means “the rice is cooked”. The meaning behind it is “what is done cannot be undone”, or that it is too late to change things, like when rice is cooked, you can’t uncook it.



Paella, a traditional dish of Spain, containing shrimp, fish and rice

Postcards, shirts, cups, bags, mousepads, clocks and more from 150 beautiful locations around the Faroe Islands!



Historic

The linguistic references in ancient texts have been used to try to pinpoint the very first cultivation of rice. In several regional languages, the word for rice and food, or for rice and agriculture, are synonymous. But this is not the case in other parts of the world. Looking at religious writings, many references are made to rice in both Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, and both religions use rice as a major offering to the gods. However, in Jewish scriptures, there are no corresponding early references to rice. Nor are there any references in early Egyptian records.

Conclusion

The actual origins of rice has been debated for a long time,



Tiered rice fields in Yen Bai, Vietnam

but the rice plant is so old historically that the exact time and place of its first true cultivation may never be known. It is certain, though, that the domestication of rice is one of the most important

developments in history, for it has fed more people over a long period of time than has any other crop, and will continue to do so in the future.

PT

Other pictures related to rice

Indonesian meal of grilled chicken, white rice, and cucumbers; A worker sprays herbicides and pesticides on a rice field in Suriname; Rice being cooked in an electric rice cooker; Cans of traditional rice wine, called sake, stacked in Itsukushima Japan; Bags of organic rice on sale in a market in Thailand; Mexican dish of rice, tacos, beans, and salsa.



GERMANIC

Western

Afrikaans:	rys
Dutch:	rijst
English:	rice
Flemish:	rijst
Frisian:	rys
German:	Reis
Limburgian:	ries
Luxembourgish:	Räis
Swiss German:	Riis
Yiddish:	רײַז [rayz]
<i>Northern</i>	
Dalecarlian:	rís(-grjón) [rai:s(-griuo:n)]
Danish:	ris [ri:s]
Faroese:	rís(grýn) [rUi:s(grUin)]
Gutnish:	rís(-griaun) [räi:s(-grau:n)]
Icelandic:	hrísgrjón
Jamtlandic:	rís(-grjœn) [ri:s(-grö:n)]
Norwegian:	ris
Swedish:	ris / risgryn

SLAVIC

Western

Czech:	rýže
Polish:	ryż
Slovak:	ryža
<i>Eastern</i>	
Byelorussian:	рыс [rys]
Russian:	рис [ris]
Ukrainian:	рис [ris]
<i>Southern</i>	
Bulgarian:	ориз [oriz]
Croatian:	riža / pirinač
Macedonian:	ориз [oriz]
Serbian:	пиринач [pirinač]
Slovenian:	riž

ITALIC

Asturian:	arroz
Caló:	corpiche / arcopichó
Catalan:	arròs
French:	riz
Galician:	arroz
Italian:	riso
Judeo-Spanish:	arros
Ladino:	rije
Latin:	Oryza sativa / oryza
Neapolitan:	riso
Occitan:	ris
Portuguese:	arroz
Romanian:	orez
Romansh:	ris

Spanish:	arroz
Valencian:	arros
Wallon:	riz

ITALIAN DIALECTS

Bergamasco:	ris
Bolognese:	rîs
Bresciano:	rís
Calabrese:	risu
Friulian:	rîs
Leonese:	arroz
Lingala:	loso
Lombardo	
Occidentale:	ris
Mantuan:	ris
Mudnés:	ris
Parmigiano:	ris
Piemontese:	ris
Reggiano:	ris
Romagnolo:	rîs
Sardinian:	rosu
Sardinian	
Campidanesu:	arrosu / arrisu
Sardinian	
Logudoresu:	rosu
Triestino:	risi
Venetian:	riso
Viestano:	ris'
Zeneize:	riso

CELTIC

Goidelic

Irish:	rís
<i>Brythonic</i>	
Breton:	riz
Cornish:	rys
Manx:	reise
Welsh:	reis

ALBANIAN

Albanian:	oriz
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GREEK

Greek:	ρύζι [rízi]
Old Greek:	γέλως [gélōs] / ὀρυζα [óryza]

INDO-IRANIAN

Hindi:	चावल
Kurdish Kurmanji:	birinc / riz
Kurdish Sorani:	بەرنج
Persian:	بەرنج [berenj]

OTHER INDO-EUROPEAN

Sanskrit: ताण्डुल [tāṇḍula]

INDIAN LANGUAGES

Bengali; Bangla: ভাত

Gujarati: ચોખા

Konkani: भात

Marathi: भात

Punjabi: ਚਾਵਲ

ALTAIC

Korean: 쌀 [ssal] (raw) /
밥 [bap], 쌀밥
[ssalbap] (cooked)

Mongolian: тутрага [tutraɣa] /
цагаан будаа
[tsagaan будаа]

TURKIC

Azeri (Latin Script): düyü

Turkish: pirinç

INDEPENDENT

Basque: arroz / irris

Japanese: 米 [kome] /

稲 [ine] (plant) /

飯 [han], ご飯

روز [gohan] (cooked)

FINNO-UGRIC

Estonian: riis

Finnish: riisi

Hungarian: rizs

Saami: risenat

CAUCASIAN

Chechen: duga

MALAYO-POLYNESIAN

Indonesian: padi (seed), beras
(harvested, uncooked), nasi (cooked)

Malagasy: vary

Malay: padi / beras / nasi

Tagalog: palay / bigas / kanin

POLYNESIAN

Māori: raihi

Samoan: alaisa

Hawaiian: laiki

MESO-PHILIPPINE

Tagalog: palay

SEMITIC

Arabic: روز [ruzz]

Hebrew: אורז [orez]

SINO-TIBETAN

Chinese
(simplified): 米 / 米 [mi3],
"cooked rice": 饭 /
飯 [fan4]

KADAI

Thai: ข้าว [khao]

NATIVE AMERICAN

Blackfoot: issssiinainikimm

Cheyenne: he'éhesono

Ojibwe: manoomin|an (WO) /
waabanoomin|ag (NO)

NIGER-KHORDOFANIAN

Gbari: cewyi

Shona: mupunga

Swahili: mchele

Wollof: ceeb

Zulu: ilayisi

ANDEAN-EQUATORIAL

Quechua: arrus

TUPI

Guarani: aro

OTHER

Maasai: emuhele

Mokshan: ris

CREOLES

Haitian Creole: diri

Papiamentu: aros

Tok Pisin: rais

MON-KHMER

Vietnamese: cơm

CONSTRUCTED

Canis: riso

Esperanto: rizo

Interlingua: ris

Lingua Franca Nova: ris

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LATG is also dedicated to promoting awareness for endangered languages around the world and the cultures they embody. A language loses its last speaker every two weeks. Without proper documentation the knowledge and history contained within these words will be lost forever.

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Where Are You?

This capital city is the second-largest metropolitan area in South America. It is one of the three Latin American “alpha cities” and has the third best quality of life of all the Latin American cities. It is also one of the largest and most important capitals of the region, often referred to as the “Paris of South America”. Not surprisingly then, it is a top tourist destination, with its European-style architecture and rich cultural life.

The original name for the city came from the Spanish sailors that settled there, attributing their arrival to a blessing from “the Holy Virgin Mary of the Good Winds”. The first city was not established until many years later, due to fighting with the native tribes. It was abandoned in 1542 after more attacks, but a second settlement was built in 1580, and this became permanent. The city became an important port of trade and, after centuries of politics and fighting, was finally declared an open port in the 18th century. However, British forces moved into the region, attacked this and other ports, and eventually capturing the city, after which it fell briefly under British rule. The British were eventually defeated and driven out by an army from Montevideo.

During the 19th century, this city was blockaded twice by naval forces, first the French (1838 - 1840) and then by an Anglo-French expedition (1845 - 1848). These blockades failed to subdue the city, and the forces eventually stopped. As the wealth of the city increased, many improvements were made. Railroad development helped bring in more raw materials into factories. Immigrants from Europe, particularly Italy and Spain, contributed to making this a multicultural city that ranked with the major European capitals.

It became the regional capital of radio, television, cinema, and theatre and it got the first underground train system in South America. After an agreement in 1993, the country’s constitution was amended to give this city autonomy and in 1996, voters elected their first mayor.

Can you name this location and country?

Last month's answer: Shanghai, China



Book Look

Berlitz Phrasebooks

Language: multiple

Item Rating: ★★★★★

The Berlitz Phrasebooks have been around for decades, and are often described as the “world's best phrasebooks.” I have a few dozen myself. These small books are normally around 10 x 14.5cm (4” x 5.75”) in size, making them ideal for tucking into a small bag or pocket. They are also relatively cheap, costing around £3.50 (\$7 USD) each, though they can often be found at book sales or used bookstores for far less.

In the modern form, the books are divided into various sections, which are also colour coded. The sections include “basic expressions,” “hotel,” arrival,” “eating out,” “shopping,” “sightseeing,” “travelling around,” “making friends,” and “doctor.” Each section contains various phrases, translations, and basic pronunciation guides. Besides phrases, word lists are also included in most sections. For example, in the “doctor” section, a person can find a list of body parts.

In most of these phrasebooks, a small dictionary is also included. Each also includes a reference section for counting, time telling, and (in the US versions) a chart for converting between imperial and metric systems. Many also contain a few pages of basic grammar.

I love these books because they are small, colourful, and packed with information. However, they are not perfect. One of the biggest problems is the pronunciation guides. Since we all have learned different ways to represent sounds (and in many cases, a sound in one language may not even properly exist in another), trying to

represent sounds by spelling is tricky at best. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was created to help this, but even for people studying languages, it can be quite difficult to understand. The Berlitz books do their best to represent the pronunciations as closely as they can to the native spelling (in my case, English).

However, since the books also give a basic pronunciation guide for the letters and diphthongs at the start, I have often come across discrepancies between the way the two sections describe the pronunciations. Sometimes, the descriptions are also just completely wrong. When I have discussed this with others, their normal reaction is something like, “those horrible pronunciation guides.”

Another problem is the “dictionary” many of them promise. If you are looking for a dictionary, pick up another book entirely (Berlitz also has a line of pocket dictionaries). The dictionaries in these phrasebooks are normally simply a compilation of the word lists found elsewhere in the book. They are also only in the native language, which is fine if you want to figure out the word for something you know, but useless if you read or hear something you don't understand. Sometimes, there is a very small dictionary included (if something of just over 100 words can be called a dictionary), but it is so limited, it



seems the publishers just stuck it in to add a few pages.

The last problem is inherent in most phrasebooks: the lack of responses. One of the common visual jokes is for some lost traveller holding up his phrasebook and painstakingly attempting to pronounce his simple question to a native. After happily getting it out and seeing his recipient nodding happily in understanding, his face quickly drops to total confusion as the native proceeds to answer him in a long, rapid-fire speech, using several gestures and facial expressions. A phrasebook can only give a very limited idea of what might be given in response. Just because you can ask where the local restroom is doesn't mean you will be able to understand the directions.

It's this last point that makes many people entirely reject the idea of a phrasebook, arguing that they give you a false sense of knowledge. Since their pronunciations might be off and their scope of responses is so limited, it would be better to take a crash course in a language before embarking on a trip into foreign territory.

However, since people don't always have the time or opportunity to take a course, the Berlitz line of phrasebooks are still among my favourites. They are especially good when you can't pick up an extensive book on a language, and need to pick up just the basics of a language to get by. **PT**

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Letter From the Editor

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

Images:

Toniher: Tió de Nadal

Are You Wasting Your Money on Language Classes?

Writer: Olly Richards

Images:

Automatic_PWNage: Classroom (PDF title)

neo0031: Two in the Classroom

Angelschatedral99: classroom couple

matsunaa: Anime Girl studying

sonamy_4evah: Anime Girl writing

Sources:

- "Are you wasting your money on language classes?" Olly Richards, "I Will Teach You a Language" <<http://www.iwillteachyoualanguage.com/wasting-money-on-language-classes/>>

Chatting in Languages Online - Voice Chats

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

Images:

stylesr1: headset and keyboard

hathuhoan_2008: girl at keyboard

len-k-a: Woman with headset

thegunacer: Teamspeak

Benny Lewis: Skype me maybe

killshot165: Skype

Why English Is Different Than Any Other Language

Writer: Agnieszka Karch

Images:

Mark Doliner: Globe

Berklee Valencia Campus: Classroom

The Digital Language Collective

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

At The Cinema - Viva La Libertà

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

Sources:

- "Long Live Freedom" Internet Movie Database <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2523600/>>

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Languages in Peril - The Tribes of the Tamil-Kannada

Writer: Lucille Martin

Images:

Copperchloride: Map of Nilgiris district

Petey: Richard Barron's 'View in India' (title); Badaga caste; Toda men & women; Kota women; Toda people in front of their hut

Sources:

- "Badaga language" Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badaga_language>
- "Badagas" Wikipedia <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badagas>>
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- "Kotas" Wikipedia <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotas>>
- "Toda language" Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toda_language>
- "Toda people" Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toda_people>

Words in Your Mouth - Rice

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

Images:

Petey: Glass of milk; Young sheep; Dairy farm; Shelves of milk; Cup of coffee; Kitten drinking milk; Drop of milk splashing; Slices of cheese; Ice-cream; Bars of milk chocolate

Where Are You?

Writer: Sonja Krüger

Images:

Petey: Mystery image

Book Look

Writer: Erik Zidowecki

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