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4. CLA Elections
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[REDACTED]
CLArion Editor

(Editor's Note: This will be the last issue for a few weeks--vacation and teaching are my priorities until then. Thank you for your continued patronage)

1. Presidential Language Trivia

"Sic Semper Tyrannis" ("thus, ever (or always) to tyrants"), shouted by John Wilkes Booth when he shot Abraham Lincoln (16th President, 1861-1865), was also (and still is) the state motto for:

- A. Maryland
- B. Alabama
- C. Massachusetts
- D. Connecticut
- E. Virginia

Answer at the end of the issue

2. GCHQ Speaker Program

Members and friends of the CLA:

Please join us for this interesting opportunity to learn more about our GCHQ counterparts!

Register at:

[REDACTED]
imum 50 participants)

Date: 16 September 2008

Time: 1330-1430

Derived From: NSA/CSSM 1-52

Dated: 20070108

Declassify On: 20320108

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~~CONFIDENTIAL//REL TO USA, FVEY//20220108~~**Description:**

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~~(C//REL TO USA, FVEY)~~ Ever wonder what your language analyst counterparts are doing? Join us for a presentation by three language professionals from

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~~(U//FOUO)~~ Our colleagues will discuss a "day in the life" of linguist team leader, the structure and responsibilities of language career stream. They will also be available for your questions. This is a great opportunity to "compare notes" with our colleagues!

CLA Member-at-Large

3. NML Arabic Calligraphy Program

The National Museum of Language presents "ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY" by Dr. Khaled Mohamed on Saturday 23 August in the museum's main exhibit room at 1400-1500. This is open to the public (free admission) but reservations (301-864-7071 or events@languageuseum.org) are needed by 21 August because of limited seating. Some of you know Dr. Mohamed because he has taught at DLI. A graduate of Alazhar University in Cairo, Egypt, he is the author of "ARABIC IDIOMS" and has been practicing calligraphy for 15+ years.

National Museum of Language
7100 Baltimore Avenue-Suite 202
College Park, MD, 20740
www.languageuseum.org

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4. CLA Elections

CLA is holding elections 8-19 September for deputy chairman, secretary and member-at-large. We are especially in need of candidates for the first two.

If you are interested, please send your biography (maximum of two paragraphs) to our election coordinators- [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The said bio will appear on the ballot.

5. Speaking in Tongues

(Item courtesy of [REDACTED])

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Source: IND -

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The Independent (London) (Full Coverage, Daily) Aug 10 23:08

Byline: Michael Church

Section: Extra - Extra

Extra | More Britons are travelling abroad, and yet entries for GCSE languages are in freefall. Will we ever manage anything other than "Dos cervezas, por favor"? Michael Church explores the world of Russian verbs, French phrases and Spanish grammar - and says we don't know what we're missing

We learn to speak, as fish learn to swim, and birds to fly, because language is in our blood. The way two-year-olds negotiate complex linguistic structures is one of the miracles of nature; the way five-year-olds master two languages - when it's one for home, and another for school - is just as miraculous.

They learn their school language in order to survive; and it's the survival instinct that impels all migrants to learn a second, third or fourth language, as they make their peregrinations round the globe.

Some people acquire a language for political reasons, as a badge of ethnic resistance. The Welsh have turned an apparently dying language into a brilliantly effective political weapon, making its acquisition a duty for broadcasters and teachers. They took their cue from the Jewish activists who, by an astonishing act of will, replaced Yiddish with what had been a "dead" language, used only in religious ritual. Hebrew is now the mother-tongue of millions and is stuffed with imported or invented words for all the things not dreamt of by its Old Testament users: bicycle, ice-cream, telephone, rifle.

But for those not impelled by political motives, learning a language can be problematic. It's sometimes said that we only really learn one if we have to work in it, or love in it. At

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Grant and Cutler's language bookshop in Soho, the manager points to groaning shelves of Eastern European books - reflecting both the needs of businessmen, and the desire of young Brits to converse with their Polish or Lithuanian lovers. If you just want to ask the way, hire a deckchair or buy a coffee, however, a phrase book will do; since English is now the lingua franca for most of the world, you can lazily rely on foreigners to do the hard work for you.

Yet some people bust a gut to acquire new languages, and, indeed, find the process addictive: the idea is so seductive, and the achievement so satisfying when you get one under your skin. And everyone's journey is different. Mine has been a convoluted catalogue of take-offs, crashes and unexpected flights.

My current foray into Russian is cracking my brain but, like a junkie, I always go back for more.

My linguistic odyssey began with grammar-school French, as mediated by a textbook based on the doings of a prissy bourgeois family: the pen is on the table, Jean and Marie eat the cake. As time went on, I got drawn in to the sheer pleasure of this language, with its logical, graceful cadences. Latin was inflicted on us next; we graduated from *amo-amas-amat*, via a Gradgrindish little book called Kennedy's Shorter Latin Primer, to Caesar's Civil Wars - surprisingly easy to penetrate, once you'd learnt the phrases for "collect prisoners", "hold a meeting" and "strike camp". But my lifelong reverence for Latin dates from the moment when five words were chalked on the blackboard: "*Quaesivit arcana poli, videt dei*", which was the inscription over the door of the Scott Polar Research Institute. This translated as: "He sought the secrets of the Pole, but sees the secrets of God." It wasn't just the fact that 13 English words could reduce to five in Latin, it was the beauty of the brevity that fired me, and still does when I encounter it on monuments. In common with everyone else who learns Latin, I'm perennially fascinated to see where our language - not to mention the Romance ones - comes from.

A year's teaching in Toulouse finally sorted out my French, but before I could enter university I had to acquire German quickly from scratch. Four months'

labour in a Bavarian sawmill was the - in retrospect, odd - prescription. The vocabulary I learnt there was specialised: Nazi marching songs (to taunt "der Engländer"), plus endless variations on trunk, beam, board, plank and kindling. On studying the incomplete digits of my colleagues, I also realised that sentences such as "I have accidentally sawn off my finger" might come in, er, handy. But when it came to German's seemingly arbitrary genders, I found myself in vigorous agreement with Mark Twain's remarks in his essay, "The Horrors of the German Language". "A tree is male, its buds are female, its leaves are neuter," he wrote. "Horses are sexless, gods are male, cats are female - tomcats included."

I also liked his translation of a conversation in a German Sunday-school book: "Gretchen: 'Wilhelm, where is the turnip?' Wilhelm: 'She has gone to the kitchen.' Gretchen: 'Where is the accomplished and beautiful English maiden?' Wilhelm: 'It has gone to the opera.'" Yes, madness indeed. But my months of total linguistic immersion in that sawmill burnt German - and even the Schwäbisch dialect - permanently into my brain, and, though I don't often use my German, it's still there after four decades. Learn a language young, and you'll never forget it.

Next, I tried Spanish, with the aid of sundry grammar books and CDs. This wasn't a satisfactory exercise, despite the relative simplicity of the language.

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The turning point came when I started to read El Pais: not for the fine writing of its features, but the nitty-gritty of the news. The beauty of this was that one always knew the story, and once one had mastered the basic vocabulary for diplomacy and war - announced, confirmed, denied, attacked, defended

- a dictionary was hardly necessary. After reading the paper daily for six months, my Spanish was operational, though I still couldn't comfortably speak it. But when I tried to repeat the process with Portuguese, something untoward happened: though sounding different, and looking fairly different on the page, these two languages began to fight in my brain, to a point where I kept slipping from one to the other. They simply weren't different enough. It now takes an effort of will to keep them apart.

Working in Georgia a few years ago, and realising that Georgian would be about as useful outside its native land as Welsh is, I decided to teach myself Russian, since that would get me round the whole post-Soviet world. Friends warned me that it wouldn't be easy: one veteran offered the cheering thought that the first 10 years would be the worst, while another averred that it was impossible to get the seemingly arbitrary stresses in the right place, "even by accident".

I began learning the grammar with two standard courses in parallel, hoping thus to double my chances of penetrating its mysteries. And since Russian is daunting from the start - outlandish orthography, multiple verb forms, a plethora of cases - the tutor's prime duty is to prevent the student giving up in confusion and despair.

In this respect, Hodder's Teach Yourself Russian and Hugo's Russian in Three Months were chalk and cheese. While Hodder plunged me into Russian conversation, Hugo's gambit was to ease me into pronunciation, then clarify that key grammatical quirk, the omission of the verb "to be" in "Where [is] Boris?" I felt instantly comfortable with Hugo's format - explanation, illustration, exercises, vocabulary, dialogue; each new point emerged with perfect clarity. Hugo led me carefully by the hand: Hodder tried to make me run before I could walk.

However, going through Hugo from cover to cover (twice) was only the beginning, even though it showed me how this sweetly logical language works. Knowing German was helpful - both grammatically, and because of numerous German loan-words. I'm continuing to fight my battle with the aid of anything that comes to hand: a grotty little Soviet primer I picked up in Tbilisi's flea-market - full of silly drawings and stupid jokes - proved useful. I am now ploughing through a "parallel" reader - Russian and English on facing pages - of Russian short stories, graded according to difficulty, and what bliss to find that Pushkin and Tolstoy are the easiest. I do my Russian at dawn, having discovered that what seems opaque at midnight is often crystal-clear the next morning.

But after four years I still come up against sentences like brick walls, and I still have to search painfully for words before uttering them aloud.

At such moments I console myself with a story from one of America's most eminent professors of Russian. Studying in Moscow, and ready to give up in despair, he found himself watching a keeper feeding a hippo in the zoo. "Otkroi!" shouted the worker, whereupon the beast opened its jaws. "Goddammit," thought the professor, "if a hippo can learn Russian, I can, too."

But there's an ecological dimension to all this, in that the world's wonderful proliferation of languages are under threat as never before. One can get too romantic about this, as people were doing a century ago over the Eskimo language, Inuktitut. One observer

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noticed that they had two words for snow, another claimed to notice six, which then got inflated to 60 - but this was really just a myth. Yet Inuktitut has many words doing the job of the English "know" - which French differentiates into savoir (as in knowing a fact) and connaître (as in knowing a person). Inuktitut has words to distinguish between knowing from experience, knowing how to do something, knowing about something, not being ignorant of something and no longer being unaware of something, plus several other kinds of knowing. Inuktitut is very subtle.

But it may not last much longer. Like other languages of the Canadian Arctic, Inuktitut is now mostly spoken by the elderly, and the danger signal for any language comes when children stop speaking it. Never have children had more incentive to immerse themselves in the aggressor language of New York and Hollywood

- the language of money, power, and, crucially, teen pop culture.

About 6,700 languages are spoken today, but only a handful account for most of the human race. Mandarin Chinese has 1,000 million speakers - one-sixth of humanity - while English and Spanish are spoken as a first language by roughly 300 million each; Hindi (holding firm), and Russian (slipping) come in just below 200 million. But the lower end of the chart is saddening: more than half the world's languages have fewer than 5,000 speakers, and 1,000 have fewer than a dozen - which means they're about to die. It's estimated that by the end of the century 60 per cent of those 6,700 languages will no longer exist, but it could be 90 per cent.

Does this matter? Yes, emphatically. Languages, like plants, need their ecosystems to thrive, and the loss of a language is comparable to the loss of a biological species; each is a unique product of evolution, and once it has gone, it cannot be recreated. And this destruction hurts the soul. As the linguist Michael Krauss says, "Any language is a supreme achievement of a uniquely human collective genius, as divine and endless a mystery as a living organism."

Each language represents a particular kind of society, and a particular way of feeling and thinking. For those who speak it, it's the sum of human intelligence.

We should all take note, and cherish our little grammar books.

INTERVIEWS BY JAMIE MERRILL AND SIMON USBORNE

Lost for words? Language facts

Two million adults in the UK are currently learning a foreign language

One in three Britons wants to learn another language but the number of adults learning languages at local authority and further education college classes is declining.

Spanish is the most popular foreign language among adult learners, followed by Italian.

More than one in four adults regret dropping a language at school.

Most learners use a cassette or CD (36 per cent), a book (19 per cent) or get a friend to teach them (11 per cent).

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Ten per cent of Britons speak a second language, while in other European Union countries 56 per cent speak two languages and 28 per cent speak three.



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6. CLArion Contest

Since CLArion may not be the best name for this newsletter, we are open to suggestions. Let us know what you think. In fact, we are taking name suggestions for the rest of the month. What the winner (his/her entry) shall receive is being determined. Submissions go to me 

FYI--we have had some REAL INTERESTING ONES submitted so far but I believe that a winner is still out there

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